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Western Political Science Association
Section: Gender, Race and Intersectionality
Panel: Social Movements
Conference Paper | March 2022

From Black Lives Matter to EndSARS: Women’s Socio-political Power and the Transnational Movement for Black Lives

The relationship between Black Lives Matter (BLM) and anti-police brutality movements abroad reveals the variety of ways in which Black feminist theories of justice have taken root in public discourse. The EndSARS movement in Nigeria, Africa’s largest economy and the world’s largest Black nation, illustrates the influence of BLM transnationally and some of the continuities and discontinuities between anti-police brutality movements across contexts. This paper examines these two movements in tandem and develops a theory of political behaviour that builds on transnational Black and African feminist insights. More specifically, the paper considers how Black feminist articulations of intersectionality, personal politics, and Black liberation have informed the language and organizational praxis of two of the largest anti-police brutality movements to have taken place in the midst of a global pandemic. Here, I argue that organizers, many of whom were women, leveraged social power, in the form of embeddedness in politically active communities, to effectively organize protests and demand for justice. Through this comparative analysis, the paper contributes substantively to our understanding of how social power engenders political empowerment for individuals and communities in spite of patriarchal systems of exclusion.

Keywords: Protest, Black Feminism, EndSARS, BLM

Introduction

Women in Africa were “feminist before feminism,” that is, engaged in agentic, self-determined, and typically collective advancement of their particular interests well before the advent of a modern, self-named, and putatively overarching women’s movement (Dosekun, 2019).

On October 20, 2020, state security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters reportedly killing twenty people and injuring many others on what would later be known as the Lekki toll gate massacre and Black Tuesday in Nigeria. The publicized events of Black Tuesday catalyzed greater global awareness of the EndSARS movement taking place in the world's largest Black nation. While the movement is now primarily identified with the series of anti-police brutality protests that took place across various cities in Nigeria in the month of October 2020 just days after Independence Day, the EndSARS movement originated in response to years of harassment, extortion and extrajudicial killings by Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Ojewale 2020).

As Nigerian youth took to the streets to demand justice, police reform, and government accountability, the Black Lives Matter movement continued to gain momentum and shape public discourse in ways that propelled issues of racial inequality and state violence to the center of American politics following the publicized police murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and numerous others. Originating in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013, Black Lives Matter is a decentralized socio-political movement and global network that organizes and builds local power to "intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes" (Black Lives Matter 2021). Through its multilayered grassroots approach, the Black Lives Matter movement has successfully shifted police brutality from the margins of American politics to a much more prominent position (Freelon et al. 2018). And this effect is seen beyond the United States to various parts of the world.

Focusing on protest as a form of political dissent, this paper develops a theory of political behavior that builds on transnational Black and African feminist insights. I examine how

feminist political values of non-domination and theories of intersectionality and justice have informed the Black Lives Matter movement transnationally. More specifically, the paper considers how these theories and values have informed the language and organizational praxis of two large movements against police brutality that took place amid a global pandemic. In addition to the significance of gathering to protest in the middle of a pandemic that forced people to socially distance and stay home, a defining feature of EndSARS and Black Lives Matter is the visibility of women in organizing the backbone strategies used to mobilize and sustain nationwide engagement.

I argue that organizers leveraged social power, in the form of embeddedness in politically aware and politically active communities, to effectively organize protests and demand for justice. Social power is not limited to social capital, but encapsulates it as social capital entails trust and norms of reciprocity (Putnam 2000), while social power also accounts for social networks, which might not have norms of trust and reciprocity. Social networks simply put are “a set of defined relationships among actors in a social system” (Marks and Stys 2019). Social power is harnessed for political dissent in the form of protests within communities where political awareness is developed from experiential marginalization from the state.

People develop their political awareness and process political information through the lens of their personal experiences (Cramer and Toff 2017; Nuamah and Orgozalek 2021). Thus, the personal shapes the political in terms of how citizens understand their relative marginality or privilege in their societies and how they respond to such situatedness. Subjugated citizens of highly policed communities develop their political knowledge through lived, involuntary experiences with state officials rather than civic education (Weaver et al. 2019). Black American youth for instance are more likely to develop their political knowledge and efficacy in the

context of family and community organizations than through conventional mediums of civic education (Ginwright 2011; Littenberg-Tobias & Cohen 2016; Watts & Flanagan 2007; Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003). Consequently, conventional civic knowledge is less correlated with civic engagement for Black American youth than it is for youth of other racial backgrounds.

Spearheaded by a youthful demographic, organizers in both movements have utilized feminist insights to raise awareness about the state's role in perpetuating violence and marginalizing specific communities (youth in Nigeria and Black people in the U.S.A.). In line with Black feminist traditions of examining the personal as political, I expand the scope of political behavior to consider instances where everyday forms of political expression, adopted by disenfranchised groups of Black and African women, translates into multicultural, intergenerational, and mainstream protest behavior. Black feminism, which asserts a foundation in liberation, survival and a commitment to social justice, stems from the "political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women's lives." (Combahee River Collective 1977). Within Black feminist theorizations of justice is a critique of domineering hierarchies and a keen awareness of the necessity of centering those who are most vulnerable in efforts towards social justice.

Though the foundations of the BLM movement tackle anti-Black racism in the United States, the EndSARS movement in Nigeria adopted some of the language of BLM to further the cause of fighting police brutality and demanding for societal reform. The demands for justice and reform in both movements parallel, but the practical implications diverge as appropriate for the different contexts. The transnational impact of BLM is such that it brought to the forefront an articulation of the value and sanctity of Blackness rooted in Black feminist thought. Here, I draw on public rhetoric and activist interviews that demonstrate how key players in the two

movements conceive of feminism in their organizing and in their demands and are informed and inspired by the ideological and epistemic threads of Black and African feminism.

Black and African feminist writers and practitioners theorize about world phenomena from lived experiences and consider how social identities intersect to affect such lived experiences in the world. Social positioning and intersecting identities are integral to understanding personal experiences as sites of political education and political action. Black feminists, particularly in the U.S., popularized the notion that the "personal is political", which is an insight that can be applied to diverse studies of social movements and dissent.

In being “feminist before feminism”, African feminist writers provide seminal lenses for understanding the construction of gendered power relations across time and space, with African American feminist writers sharpening analyses of gender as it intersects with race, class, and other social categories of difference. Black and African feminism across diverse contexts in the Global South and the Global North thus brings different valences to understanding political behavior and social movements. Moreover, a US-centered articulation of Black feminism impels the geopolitical question of transnational difference in terms of articulating Blackness and feminism from varied contextual positionalities. Analyzing the diversity of ways in which power is engendered in two distinct yet overlapping anti-police brutality movements opens possibilities for further theoretical and empirical research on political behavior across time and space.

Examining public discourse on the movements from news stories, media reports and other secondary sources, the paper sets out to achieve two core objectives. One, the paper demonstrates how Black feminist theoretical insights on justice inform the BLM movement, which in turn has implications for anti-racist and anti-police brutality movements globally, including the EndSARS movement. Second, I advance a theory of protest behavior through the

lens of social power particularly as it relates to the role of women in spearheading and sustaining both movements. The women who led and supported the movements that are now transforming formal politics, policies and public discourse reportedly leveraged their social power through sustained engagement in their own personal and professional networks.

To achieve these objectives, I start by analyzing the significance of social power as a tool for protest organization and sustenance. In this first section, I discuss the gendered dynamics of political behavior as it relates to political dissent. The second and third sections then delve into the EndSARS and BLM case studies in order to reveal continuities and discontinuities across movements as situated within the different contexts. The fourth section discusses the epistemological implications of this comparative analysis grounded in transnational Black feminist knowledge. The implications are such that it broadens the scope of political behavior in ways that allow for productive research in diverse communities. Here, I highlight culturally linked forms of political engagement and pay special attention to how women in different contexts navigate personal politics in their communities and in their relationship with the state. I conclude by drawing out key lessons from the paper on the relationship between women's social power and the transnational movement for Black lives.

Tools of Protest: The Significance of Social Power

Protests serve as a necessary and healthy feature of democracies (Barber 1984). With greater public awareness of anti-Black policing, mass incarceration, and intersecting socio-political and economic inequities affecting the Black community, more citizens are developing a political consciousness that informs their political engagement. Seminal work such as Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Era of Colorblindness* for instance

has “forced policymakers, scholars, and the public to confront the problem of mass incarceration in important new ways” (Hinton and Cook 2021). As anti-Black policing and cross-cutting issues take root at the center of American politics, the protests that Black Lives Matter leads are becoming more diverse and widespread.

Constructionist theories and culturalist empirical frameworks indicate that there are a range of individual level factors that lead people to engage in protests. These include social identity, the expectancy-value of rewards, perceptions of efficacy, and feelings of anger, guilt, sympathy, empathy, moral outrage, and shame (Sweetman et al. 2019). From an efficacy standpoint, the resource mobilization explanation of protest behavior posits that beyond potential grievances, discontent or feelings of relative deprivation, protests are driven by the resources that individuals have at their disposal (Murdie and Peksen 2015). More specifically, non-violent protests require significant access to financial resources and organizational support in order to effectively reduce the cost of collective mobilization (Bell et al. 2013; Jenkins 1983; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1978). Within this resource mobilization literature is the conventional theorization that political participation correlates highly with socio-economic variables such as income, education, and trust in government (otherwise known as external political efficacy).

Intersectional approaches to understanding democratic participation, particularly for marginalized groups such as that of Farris and Holman (2014) demonstrate the power of social capital in moderating the relationship between economic class and political engagement. In their study on Black American women’s political participation, they find that social capital matters more for political participation than income and education for this subgroup. Despite gender, racial and class limitations that intersect to affect Black women’s lived experiences, as a group, Black women engage in political activities, including protests more than white women (Farmer

and Piotrowski 2009) and engage in local politics via sitting on local boards and voting for instance at higher or comparable rates to Black men.

Beyond the U.S. context, Black women are seen using their social power via their networks to engender political empowerment for themselves and their communities in spite of patriarchal systems of exclusion. Structurally, women in many developing nations as well as developed nations have lower access to monetary resources and lower levels of formal education (Lindberg 2004). Additionally, patriarchal systems of power distribution are often propelled and perpetuated by institutions that shape gender norms and culture such as churches, mosques, shrines, and other spaces of associational life (Bawa 2016; Desai and Gheda 2014; Moyo 2004; Nyhagen and Aune 2016). In Africa, these patterns of exclusion are exacerbated by women's systematic exclusion from formal politics under the colonial state as well as the post-colonial modern nation state (Agbaje 2019; Amadiume 1987).

Nigeria, the world's largest Black nation with an economy valued at \$397 billion as of 2018 (Whiting 2019), and an ever-growing population of over 200 million people, exemplifies these patterns of women's systematic exclusion from spaces of formal political leadership. Women are underrepresented in political leadership positions at the local, state and federal level across the executive, judicial and legislative branches and this has continued from independence in the 1960s up until now (Eniola 2018). To illustrate some of these patterns, the proportion of seats held by women in the National Assembly (Nigeria's legislative body) has never exceeded 3.1% and 5% for the Federal Executive Council (executive branch) (Adefemi and Agunblade 2019). Overall, women's political representation in government has stagnated at 7% since the country's return to civil rule in 1999 after many years of military dictatorships (Agbalajobi 2010).

Despite this environment of patriarchal politics, Nigerian women historically and contemporaneously have wielded social power, typically in the form of economic networks and associations, both formal and informal to effect political change for their communities. The seminal and oft-cited Aba Women's Revolt of 1929 exemplifies some of the mediums through which women, though excluded from formal political spaces of decision making, leveraged their socio-economic networks in the fight for justice and self-empowerment. The revolt consisted of a series of protests where market women in South-eastern Nigeria demonstrated against exploitative colonial taxation policies. Despite marginalizing colonial policies that reduced women's power both in political and economic spheres, women used whatever networks and resources they possessed via trade activities to protest and transform their communities. Empirical research also reveals that past protests led by women has positive effects on women's political participation in the long run (Archibong and Obikili, *forthcoming*).

As social media engagement and online activism has increased in the 21st century, women have also utilized digital social network spaces to strategize, mobilize, and disseminate information on various protest movements, including the EndSARS movement. In addition to the digital revolution, women's increased educational attainment and inclusion in the labor market via various gender equity seeking initiatives and policies also contributes to political efficacy. Women's political efficacy has increased in terms of access to the knowledge, skills and organizational structures needed to engage in protests and other forms of collective action (Murdie and Peksen 2015; Ray and Kortweg 1999).

In addition to the microlevel tools needed to engage in protest behavior, there are macro and meso level factors that influence the effectiveness of protests in terms of their ability to sustain momentum and achieve stated objectives. Some of the key ingredients that are needed in

order for protests to be successful include strong grass-roots organization that keeps pushing for the movement's goals even after the publicity wanes, strategic messaging that resonates for more people than just the core supporters, and non-violent mobilization (Mazumder 2017). Catalyzed by the persistence of anti-Black police brutality in the United States but with ripple effects of sustained demands for government accountability and societal reform, Black Lives Matter is an "organizationally enabled network" given its operation online and in the streets (Freelon et al. 2018). Beyond its impact on American publics and politics, the messaging of the BLM movement has been adopted in non-violent, anti-police brutality movements globally, including EndSARS. The movement is informed by Black feminist ideologies of intersectionality and uses a margin to center rhetoric to push for social justice (Woodly 2021). These ideologies have increasingly become a cornerstone in public discourse on inequality and justice.

In essence, whether in Nigeria or the United States of America, women build upon their social power to express and empower themselves politically even in the face of marginalizing, patriarchal and racist politics. The medium of such political expression often takes the form of protest politics given the salience of dissent and subversive politicking for marginalized groups. The correlates of mass mobilization via protests for women include gendered economic and political discrimination, the strong presence of women's organizations which serve as politically enabling social networks, and higher female population rates. Empirical cross-national analyses reveal that these variables increase the likelihood of women's protest events (Murdie and Peksen 2015), but a comparative analysis of case studies helps shed light on the relationship between social power and everyday resistance across anti-police brutality movements in different contexts.

Women's Sociopolitical Power in the EndSARS and the Black Lives Matter Movements

The Black Lives Matter movement in the United States of America and the EndSARS movement in Nigeria present potent cases for examining the relationship between women's social power and everyday resistance. Situated in different country contexts with differing historical and contemporaneous patterns of political exclusion and inequality, both cases illustrate some of the ways in which women leverage their social networks and technical expertise to organize, mobilize, and sustain the movement for Black Lives transnationally. Analyzing the public rhetoric and influence of these two movements reveals how Black women's social power translates into formalized, organized political protest that influences political discourse, politics, and policy.

The EndSARS Movement in Nigeria

Starting in Lagos, Nigeria's largest commercial hub, but later spreading across all 36 states and Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, SARS was originally created in the mid-1990s to combat armed robbery and other serious crimes. Overtime, the special unit has "been implicated in widespread human rights abuses" including but not limited to roadblocks, torture, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, unlawful detention and extortion (Malumfashi 2020). SARS is notoriously known for targeting young people, who display markers of material wealth, under the guise of fighting fraud and various forms of cybercrimes in Nigeria. Youth, and other people who display semblances of flamboyance or alternative style expressions are typically the victims of the unit. Without due process, suspects are tortured and sometimes killed.

Although SARS has garnered national and international attention, empirical research and news reports reveal that police brutality via torture as an interrogative technique and other human rights violations is a major flaw of the Nigerian Police Force (Aborisade and Obileye 2018). In

order to better understand the illustrative role of SARS in terms of the repressive and militant nature of the state, it is important to situate the special anti-robbery unit, and the greater Nigerian Police Force within Nigeria's political history. Originally formed with the intention of protecting European residents from noncompliant local rulers and to suppress anticolonial uprisings, modern policing started in 1861 in what would later become Nigeria (Aborisade and Fayemi 2015; George 2020). This legacy of using the police force to protect the governing elite over the general population continued post-independence and intensified during the military decades of 1966 to 1999.

Though SARS is a special unit within the police force, its long-term unscrupulous activities reveal wider systematic failures in terms of the Nigerian police and Nigerian government at large failing to protect its citizens and engendering violence and exclusionary politics at all levels of governance. Following years of activism and failed government promises to disband the unit in 2014, 2015, and 2017, the events of October 20, 2020 involved the shooting of protesters and many casualties (George 2020). These events further cemented general perceptions that the Nigerian police and the Nigerian government is more interested in maintaining a certain socio-political order rather than protecting its citizenry.

Demanding that the Nigerian government abolish SARS, provide justice for victims of police brutality, and activate wider systematic reforms, the governor of Lagos State submitted a 7- point agenda letter to president Buhari on behalf of EndSARS protesters (Agbakwuru 2020; Ojewale 2020). Starting off with five established demands focused specifically on police brutality and justice, the movement later expanded the demands in an open letter that consisted of seven demands that address cross-cutting issues speaking to the absence of a welfare state, poor public goods provision, and state failure. These demands include institutional reforms in the

areas of policing and security, education, health, youth affairs, public office, the cost of governance, and constitutional review (Sulaimon 2020). Many of these demands call for an urgent reassessment of budget allocations and quotas that include people under 60 years of age in the review and decision-making process. In essence, Nigerians asked for good governance and a massive “overhaul of the country’s national security infrastructure” (Aina 2020).

Nigerian youth, with the help of the nascently formed group, the Feminist Coalition, leveraged social media networks to galvanize interest and organize thousands of people in Nigeria and in the diaspora to protest against police brutality, demand better governance and a deepening of democracy in Nigeria. The Feminist Coalition is a women’s advocacy group created in July 2020 with the objective of championing “equality for women in Nigerian society with a core focus on education, financial freedom and representation in public office” (Feminist Coalition 2020). It was created by a group of fourteen women who had professional experience in tech, media, grassroots community organizing, public health, finance, gender advocacy, the non-profit sector, and other sectors.

The Feminist Coalition’s first project was to help support the EndSARS movement by crowd funding donations for peaceful EndSARS protests focusing on the provision of water, food, legal and medical aid. They leveraged their diverse areas of expertise and digital technology skills to successfully raise over 147,855,788 Nigerian naira (about 388,000 USD) between October 8th and October 22nd, 2020 (Nwankwor and Nkereuwem 2020). With threats of movement suppression and restrictions being placed on some of the organizers’ Nigerian bank accounts, members of the coalition used their comparative advantage of being a group of tech-savvy young women to decentralize payment platforms and accept donations in Bitcoin (Feminist Coalition 2020).

In doing this work, the women behind the Feminist Coalition leveraged their social power through their social and economic networks to effectively support and sustain the EndSARS protests. The principal co-founders of the group, Odunayo Eweniyi and Damilola Odufuwa were introduced to the other twelve members of the founding team via their individual activism and advocacy for gender equality. They also built community through social gatherings as part of the Wine & Whine initiative, which hosts monthly women-only events that cultivate safe spaces for discussions on gender-based violence, financial literacy and more (Okunola 2021). Elucidating how they leveraged social power, in the form of embeddedness in politically aware and politically active communities, and how they conceive of feminist theory and praxis in their organizing and in their demands, Eweniyi notes:

“I’d been thinking about what the difference between the people in power — in this case men — was and I was able to realize that the differences crystallized into two things: money and power. All the people at the top of the food chain in Nigeria have both — not one or the other, both. And because of that, women are unable to get in positions of freedom and a place where they can start to push for equality as a next step. So I decided that something needed to be done about this and thankfully Dami [co-founder Dami Odufuwa] also had the same idea. So the entire goal of Feminist Coalition is to ensure the representation of women across all stages... We approached each of these women just from seeing their work — Ayodeji Osowobi with Stand To End Rape (STER), Fakkriyyah Hashim with NorthNormal, Ozzy Etomi with her Twitter account, Jola Ayeye [and FK Abudu] through their I Said What I Said podcast. Every one of them has a really strong presence across tech, media, gender advocacy, public health, fintech. What we all have in common is that we are all feminists, and we all want the advancement of the Black woman, the Nigerian woman, so it seemed natural to bring each of them in their strength and capacity to come and work with us on this. The skills were all just so complimentary that it made complete sense to bring them on board... Lessons from Wine & Whine definitely inspired the creation of the Feminist Coalition. (Okunola 2021)

Ozzy Etomi, feminist writer, communication strategist, and one of the Feminist Coalition activists, highlighted the crucial role of women in organizing and sustaining movements of this magnitude, situating it within contemporary and historical patterns of Nigerian women’s protest power. She notes:

As historic as this is, it's not the first time Nigerian women have been at the forefront of movements like this. The women of Nigeria have been leading, organizing, and maintaining the momentum of movements since colonial Nigeria. Recent movements like the fight to return the kidnapped Chibok girls and #ArewaMeToo—a form of the global #MeToo movement which focused on Northern Nigeria and was founded by Fakhus Hashim—are just two recent examples. It's this history that made writer and communications strategist Oseyi Etomi tweet about the #ENDSARS movement just days before the protests gained significant global momentum. "There'll be some traction to the #ENDSARS movement when women organize around it," she wrote. She was right. Women—in particular feminist Nigerian women—organizing around #ENDSARS has been a significant reason the movement and protests have been sustained for as long as they have been, and why they've had such a global impact. When you look back in history, women have always been at the forefront of organizing, especially when it comes to serving the community.' (Desmond 2020)

The role of feminist-identifying women in providing the organizational and financial backbone of the movement in this moment is significant for two main reasons. One, Nigeria is a context where the word feminism still has a derogatory connotation due to sociocultural notions of what is acceptable behavior for people of certain genders and concerns of a moral decline in the form of a perceived westernization of African values. The dominant association of feminism with the West, concerns over cultural imperialism as well as debates within feminist scholarly communities on what aspects of the label are indigenous and appropriate for the African context contribute to some of the reservations people have with the term "feminism" (Dosekun 2019). Two, this movement has helped put feminism, despite its contentious connotation, at the forefront of public rhetoric in ways that not only push forward an agenda of gender equity, but also mainstages understandings of social justice rooted in transnational Black feminist theories. The strategic messaging employed by leaders of the EndSARS movement are reminiscent of the rhetoric employed in BLM. Highlighting the feminist ideological roots of protest leaders, Etomi, notes:

One thing you will see in common with, I'd say, almost all if not every woman who was at the forefront of organizing was that we are all feminist women—we have a strong sense of social justice and a desire for an equal society. An injustice to anyone is an

injustice to us all, and there is an understanding that no one is free until we are all free. (Desmond 2020)

Many of the EndSARS protesters were inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement to expand the campaign beyond demanding accountability for the atrocities of the SARS unit, to demand for full systematic reform and better governance. Drawing some of the parallels between BLM and EndSARS, Derrick Etta, a protester in Calabar, southern Nigeria noted:

Because Black Lives Matter had raised awareness about police brutality in the U.S., we knew it would be easy for the world to relate with the problems of police brutality in Nigeria. (Obaji 2020).

Black Feminism and the Black Lives Matter Movement in the United States

Inspiring anti-police brutality and anti-racist movements globally, including the EndSARS movement, the Black Lives Matter movement helped to bring Black feminist ideologies of margin to center politics to the forefront of social justice movements in the 21st century. This is demonstrated not only in terms of the demands related to justice for victims, conviction of guilty officers, and wider systemic reforms as well as policy demands, but also in the use of a specific rhetoric that ties societal liberation to the empowerment of the most vulnerable and those at the margins of society. Black feminist insights such as those of Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks, Moya Bailey, the Combahee River Collective, and countless others advance an understanding of social justice using the notion of intersectionality and interlocking oppressions.

With the objective of ending sexist oppression (hooks 1984), Black feminism draws attention to the overlapping systems of sex, race, class oppression, and other forms of marginalization. The political implications of intersectional feminist theories are such that those at the margins of power, policies and politics are centered in efforts towards social justice. Black

feminist contributions to contemporary theories of justice confront, center, and uplift the material and immaterial conditions of Black women and Black girls. As such, “[B]lack women’s situation at the juncture of interlocked oppressions has given rise to a political philosophy that understands justice as a state that can arise only from confronting the lived experience (as opposed to the abstract conditions) of those at the margins of political, social, and economic rights, concern, and privilege” (Woodly 2019, 3).

In addition to engendering a political philosophy of justice that arises from the consciousness of people rendered invisible by inequality and injustice, Black feminism pushes a praxis of restorative healing. Restorative justice in this theoretical framework moves beyond individual crime and victimhood to address the root causes of structural violence in Black lives. The Black Lives Matter movement is the largest social movement in U.S. history (Buchanan et al. 2020). Highlighting the sanctity of Black lives from the womb to the tomb, the Black Lives Matter movement has developed an organizational philosophy and praxis that seeks to “institutionalize both the recognition and treatment of racial trauma and the margin-to-center conception of justice that has long animated black women’s political thought, into a set of beliefs and practices that participants call healing justice.” (Woodly 2019, 4). Black and African feminist interpretations of the political causes and consequences of identity construction and personal experiences remains grounded in communitarian ideals of responsibility and care rather than hyper-individualism. The movement draws on Black feminist traditions of analyzing the root causes of seemingly intractable social problems from an intersectional and restorative lens. Through the Black Lives Matter movement, Black feminist ideas of justice have shaped anti-police brutality rhetoric and practice both nationally and globally.

Inspiring anti-police brutality protests across the world, the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation Inc. is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes (Black Lives Matter 2021). With operations online and in the streets, the Black Lives Matter movement was created in 2013 by three Black female organizers in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder case of Trayvon Martin. Starting out with the #BlackLivesMatter social media hashtag, the movement grew and continued to lead protests demanding for justice and accountability after the deaths of Eric Garner, Michael Brown and countless others who died at the hands of police brutality.

Characterized by its decentralized grassroots approach to mobilization in contrast to centralized charismatic leadership, the Black Lives Matter movement attempts to build its organizational structure upon a foundation of margin-to-center ethic, centering those most affected by cross-cutting issues. Grounded in narratives of Black women's lived experiences and empirical data, through the hashtag #SayHerName, the movement also helped to shed light on how racism and sexism intersect to affect the lives of Black girls and women in unique, deleterious ways as gendered and racialized experiences mutually reinforce and shape Black women's politics (Khan-Cullors and bandele 2018; Gay and Tate 1998). As a movement built on Black feminist theoretical foundations, the rhetoric, praxis, and organizational structure of the Black Lives Matter movement demonstrates how Black women in particular leverage their personal backgrounds, social networks and digital expertise to lead local, nationwide, and global change in the movement for Black lives.

The lead organizers of the BLM movement had professional backgrounds in community organizing and the nonprofit sector working on issues such as immigration, employment,

incarceration, and domestic violence. For many of them, the networks they built through their advocacy work in and out of institutions created professional and social network bases for political organizing. Demonstrating how the founding leaders of the movement used their social power and digital skills to effectively organize around BLM, co-founder of BLM, Patrisse Khan-Cullors narrates:

“Alicia, who I’d known for seven years at this point, who I’d met at a political gathering in Rhode Island where at the end of the day our goal was to dance until we couldn’t dance anymore. She and I danced with one another all night long and began a friendship that holds us together to this very day... We know we want to develop something. We know we want whatever we create to have global reach. Alicia reaches out to her friend Opal Tometi, a dedicated organizer who is running Black Alliance for Just Immigration, based in Brooklyn, New York. Opal is a master communicator and develops all the initial digital components we need... Opal pulls together the architecture for our first website and Twitter accounts, our Facebook and Tumblr. We are determined to take public this basic concept: That our lives mean something. That Black Lives Matter.” (Khan-Cullors and bandele 2018, 231).

Political consciousness and social power are engendered through politically enabling social networks that consist of personal and professional relationships of family, friends, colleagues, and experiences. People’s social and economic lives in relation to others fosters political consciousness and can translate into power in terms of the networks they lean on to materialize their political imaginations. Co-founder, Alicia Garza had worked as a community organizer for ten years before joining forces with “sister-activists”, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Khan-Cullors to create BLM (Garza 2020). Garza writes about leveraging her social media following and networks of fellow activists who also use social media and the ecosystem of various adjacent organizations, speaking to the mutually constitutive relationship between social power and social movements. People build on their preexisting networks whether online or offline and as they get involved in organized action around defined objectives, that network expands.

Beyond having political enabling social networks, personal and familial experiences with racism, poverty, and the carceral state also shape the political consciousness of many of those involved in leading the BLM movement and the organizations that are part of the global network. Organizers' socialization as children and young adults in college exposed to different experiences and perspectives shaped their feminist politics and helped them build a network of people with similar objectives. Barbara Ransby's *Making All Black Lives Matter* traces the political genealogy of the BLM movement through the personal stories of some of its leading organizers. Demonstrating the political and ideological grounding of the movement in the Black feminist tradition of theorizing from a position of intersecting lived realities, she writes:

“This generation of activists has been profoundly influenced directly and indirectly by the radical Black Feminist tradition that emerged in the 1970s, transmitted through books, poetry, images, personal relationships, and shared political spaces. This tradition, holistic, intersectional, radical, and inclusive, recognizes that the personal is political, and the political is profoundly personal...Black feminist politics, language, and sensibilities are palpable throughout BLMM/M4BL movement circles. Some of these activists were feminists well before they became part of this phase of struggle, and others were exposed to new ideas, finding old ways of thinking challenged by the processes of struggle....When asked which authors most impacted their evolving political edification, many leaders of BLMM/M4BL cited bell hooks, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Paula Giddings, Barbara Smith, Beth Richie, Cathy Cohen, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, myself (my book on Ella Baker), and finally fiction writer Toni Morrison, because of her creation of complex and self-determining female characters. These were the intellectual building blocks of their collective consciousness, augmented by their own lived experiences and the wisdom of grandmothers, mothers, and aunties, who never wrote books but whose understanding of the complicated world ensured survival and inspired critical resistance” (Ransby 2018, 106)

Earlier Black liberation activists, writers, and organizations served as antecedents of the BLM movement and paved the way for politically enabling social networks to build and grow. Black feminist analyses of politics reveal the variety of ways in which people's quotidian networks activate, animate, and sustain movements. A feminist lens necessitates an intersectional understanding of historical and contemporaneous patterns of domination, subjugation,

marginalization, and outright abuse of power. Black feminism thus elucidates how power manifests itself in diverse communities that otherwise might be mislabeled as politically disengaged or politically disempowered when examined through a narrow understanding of what counts as politics. Political consciousness and social power are cultivated in both institutionalized spaces of learning and engagement, but also in the informal, personal spaces of everyday experiences.

Discontinuities Across Movements

Although both the Black Lives Matter and EndSARS movements share similarities in terms of their female-led, decentralized structure and have advanced feminist lenses for understanding police brutality and social injustice, there are several noteworthy areas where the movements diverge. One of the key areas where they diverge is in their articulations of police funding. The Black Lives Matter movement protesters in the United States call for the defunding of the police, with some demanding for police and prison abolition altogether (Cineas 2020). On the other hand, EndSARS movement protesters call for increased police funding as an avenue to reduce corruption (Sulaimon 2020). This stark divergence in terms of demands to either increase funding or defund the police demonstrate the difference in discourse that is contextually relevant. Protesters and other activists are articulating their demands for police reform differently given the divergent historical contexts and differing investments of the state in the police force.

The US spends close to 1% of its GDP on the police and has eighteen thousand law enforcement agencies, including local, state, and federal police forces. The US police force is also associated with discriminatory policing which contributes to high rates of incarceration among minorities, with Black Americans overrepresented amongst victims of police violence.

(Cheatham and Maizland 2021). Many of the communities where citizens are overpoliced are also the same communities experiencing high rates of disenfranchisement, poor public goods provision, and generational poverty. Calls to defund the police and redirect funding to community development programs are also driven by the observance of increased police militarization in the US since the US department of defense can transfer excess military equipment to police.

Conversely, the police force in Nigeria has been challenged by insufficient funding for years, which has led to poorly trained and ill-equipped personnel (Akpede 2019). The ratio of police to population in Nigeria is 1: 540, which is below the United Nations standard of 1:450. In the last four years under the Buhari administration, the federal government has allocated a little over a trillion naira (approximately 2.5 billion USD) to the police service commission. Even with increases in federal government budget allocations to the police force over the years, the impact of the increment has not been felt by rank and file police officers, many of whom are attached to private businessmen, multinational companies, corporate organizations, and government officials, which takes away from their actual duty of preserving peace and protecting the lives of citizens (Akpede 2019). Over 80% of policemen are attached to these VIPs and unauthorized persons (Sahara Reporters 2018).

Moreover, with high rates of insecurity, Boko Haram terrorism in the North, insurgencies, kidnappings and robberies across various regions of the country, Nigerian citizens have expressed the need for greater police capacity. Lack of adequate funding for the provision of internal security and other public goods such as quality education and healthcare are major areas of contention for activists, particularly given the general perception of corrupt politics

plaguing the country. These perceptions are also especially significant in a context like Nigeria that has some of the highest paid lawmakers in the world (Kazeem 2015).

Variations in budget allocations and insecurity issues help to explain some of the idiosyncratic implications of the anti-police brutality protests in the different contexts. Similarly, variations in political histories in terms of the target demographic of police violence and levels of political efficacy also shape the protests' demands. In the United States, the focus is on anti-racism as police violence, poor public welfare and state failure is segregated profoundly across racial lines. In Nigeria, the focus is on anti-ageism as youth have been the target of many of the SARS atrocities and are systematically sidelined in politics. The focus on youth empowerment also stems from a generation of activists who have witnessed a democratic recession with the country experiencing high youth unemployment, instability with terrorism and insecurity in the North and a resurging secessionist movement in the southeast, and low trust in government overall. As an emerging economy and unconsolidated democracy with high rates of poverty, internal crisis and state fragility, articulations of police reform are vastly different in Nigeria from the US, which is a more consolidated democratic system with an advanced economy built on anti-Blackness via slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the prison-industrial complex.

Implications: Expanding Our Understanding of Political Behavior

The physical body is a site of political vulnerability and political expression (Cohen 2021). The urgency and significance of both movements are captured in the fact that in the midst of a global pandemic, people risked their lives and gathered together to demand for justice on the streets, in the halls of political power, and online. Both movements bring to the forefront the different ways in which certain groups of people, whether Black people in the United States or

youth in Nigeria, are systematically alienated, targeted, profiled, and criminalized in modern society. Transnational Black and African feminist scholars illuminate how the personal is political by unveiling patterns of vulnerable populations using whatever tools they have to express themselves politically for issues that affect them personally, often times putting their physical bodies on the line.

Beyond linking the feminist foundations of contemporary social movements to historical protests such as the Aba women's war for instance, a comparative, intersectional, and transnational feminist lens not only helps us understand the relationship between BLM in the US and similar movements abroad. It also expands our understanding of political behavior. Examining modes of political behavior outside of the dominant political science canon in varied contexts allows for productive research in diverse communities as political empowerment involves participation in politics extending beyond explicit interactions with the state to include expressions of power in social environments.

Political behavior entails individual and collective "involvement in the political process, or any activity which has political consequences in relation to government and policy" (Scott and Marshall, 2015). It is a broad term that includes both formal and informal activities and involvements that can be categorized interchangeably as political participation, political engagement and civic engagement. The conventional definition of political participation in particular includes "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or their actions." (Verba and Nie 1987). Traditional operationalizations of political behavior limit politics to the study of governments, formal institutions and political elites in ways that render women and gender invisible given the strict distinction between public affairs and private affairs (Celis et al. 2013).

Feminist scholars define politics through “power structured relationships” (Millett 1968, 23). Within the feminist tradition of bringing the personal and the private into the study of politics, Black and African feminist scholars have highlighted diverse modes of participation to include seemingly personal experiences as political expressions. An insight arising from Black and African feminist literature on women’s political empowerment is a consideration of non-conventional ways of political engagement beyond explicit interactions with the state. These include, but are not limited to organizing community protests through markets and various spaces of associational life, influencing the political decisions of male kin and friends, wearing of wax cloth or Ankara in support of political aspirants or political parties, mobilizing sociopolitical support through religious fellowships, evoking the supernatural with the aid of spiritual leaders in order to access power, hissing (to show opposition) or ululating (to show approval) at community meetings, employing naked protests to seek redress, rumor spreading and the use of song and dance in campaigning, music, theatrical performance, and using social media as well as other media to creatively affect governance (Alozie 2020; Chuku 2009; Damodaran 2016; Diabate 2020; Dosekun 2019; Hirschmann 1991; Johnson 1982; Mikell 1995).

Transnational Black and African feminisms present a framework that elucidates theoretical, experiential, and empirical knowledge on the intersectional nature of identities and power, and centers knowledge produced by indigenous African and African diasporic women. Paying close attention to diverse practices and strategies of political expression that might be employed by women with intersecting identities reveals the innovations employed by those at the margins of society to engender their own political empowerment. This is not limited to women in politics, but also applies to racial/ethnic minorities as well as other marginalized groups that have

been systematically excluded from spaces of power (Hanchard 2006; Scott 1989; Vinthagen and Johansson 2013). Empirical research suggests that marginalized groups are likely to engage in political behaviors that rely on collective action or activities that are more subversive in nature as a response to structural inequities (Akram 2014; Gray 1994; Holdo and Bengtsson 2019).

Protest as a tool for political expression and government accountability serves as “political resources” (Lipsky 1968) that under certain conditions and contexts, can prove to be effective at achieving its objectives (Gamson 1990). While protest does not always achieve substantial or complete policy successes, protests often influence public opinion and modify political behavior, particularly voting behavior (Rucht 2007). Furthermore, media evidence of state violence against protesters might lead to pressures from both domestic publics and the international community, which could lead to changes in public policy. Thus, the violent repression of protests may incite policy action due to widespread public outrage, the garnering of greater public and international support, and further mobilization of more protesters (Fu et al. 2021).

In addition to influencing public opinion and policy discussions, social movements lead to more crowd-sourced, democratized, transparent data collection and collation. Particularly in the digital age, this helps broaden the terrain of what is possible for research. People are leveraging their social networks online and offline to build politically conscious communities. Additionally, these political communities are generating and archiving data via their digital footprints that can be used to enrich our understanding of protests and social movements.

A marker of socio-political movements in the 21st century is the confluence of online activism and offline, street protests. Sudanese-Canadian artist, Mustafa Ahmed, otherwise known as Mustafa the poet, captures the zeitgeist of political dissent in the 21st century. His writing

captures the significance of developing a critical understanding of race, gender and interlocking identities in efforts to push for social justice beyond the collective digital footprint being generated at the moment:

Now that you've made your statement & reposted those stories, how will you take it further? Are these words you strung together reflective of your lifestyle offline? Who are you offline? Do you listen to the black community? Make space for them? Do you protect black women from the relentless attacks they survive in your workplace? In your neighborhood? Do you address the colourism, the microaggressions? You joined a choir of people online, echoed chants of freedom and justice. Does your voice still carry when you breakaway from this crowd? Do you still use your voice & stand by your words when you don't have a protective liberal bubble that repeats your thoughts? take it further.
(Ahmed 2020)

Conclusion

Strategically organized protests that evolve into sustained social movements shock political systems. These shocks raise awareness about deeply rooted societal problems, shape public discourse, and push for institutional reform. The Black Lives Matter movement in the US and the EndSARS protests in Nigeria exemplify the variety of ways in which Black feminist' articulations of justice inform the political values espoused in these social movements seeking to redress government failures. The implications are manifold in that these movements not only raise awareness about police brutality and demand government accountability, but they also uncover the Black feminist roots that animate the ideological and organizational strategy of the movements, thereby centering knowledge and praxis from those at the margins, in this case

Black women. In other words, these Black feminist-fueled movements make the invisible visible across time and space.

Both BLM and EndSARS represent decentralized grass-roots movements where women are not only forming the backbone of the movements but are also the representative faces of these movements' efforts, and this representation is engendering political consciousness transnationally. The influence of a transnational movement for Black Lives also works in the reverse as well in that, "black group consciousness spans across nation-state boundaries and involves African American interest in the everyday politics of black communities outside the USA." (Hayes and Greer 2013). Empirical evidence suggests that "there is a relationship between some characteristics of black social movements outside the USA and how African American institutions work to promote international black group consciousness and encourage their constituencies' everyday political participation" (Hayes and Greer 2013). As BLM influences movements abroad, transnational Black feminist synergies across time and space are also influencing the consciousness and strategies adopted by BLM activists in the US.

Beyond anti-police brutality movements in the United States and Nigeria, there has been an increased visibility of women not only supporting social movements, but also leading them as the face of such movements. We see Black women leveraging their social power to sustain protest activities as is evinced in several movements, some of which include the pro-democracy protests of 2019 in Sudan, the Rhodes Must Fall protest of 2015 in South Africa, and the Mobilization of Black Women for the Care of Life and Ancestral Territories in Colombia in 2014. In drawing out the threads of Black women's political activism across the globe, this paper does not advance a mythical trope that essentializes Black women as the strong, laboring, militant, freedom-fighting backbones of society. Rather, the paper serves to acknowledge Black

women's unique contributions to social justice movements and advance a theory of political protest behavior that builds on Black women's theoretical and practical insights.

In this study, I investigate the relationship between BLM in the US and the EndSARS movement in Nigeria while examining the significance of Black feminist knowledge in informing organizational praxis. Future studies on this subject can investigate the gendered determinants of political protest behavior within contexts of similar, yet distinct racial dynamics as is the case with Brazil, the USA, Colombia and South Africa, which allows for a comparative analysis of the continuities and discontinuities across anti-racist movements. Additionally, future research can empirically test the implications of these movements on people's political efficacy and government response. This paper serves as a starting point for these discussions. By critically interrogating the relationship between women's social power and the transnational movement for Black lives, the paper contributes substantively to our understanding of Black liberation, political behavior and social movements in the 21st century.

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