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CHAPTER

29 LGBT Activism, Social Media, and the Politics of Queer Visibility in Ghana

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Abstract

This chapter explores how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and sassoi (LGBTs) Ghanaian activists use social media to mitigate the tensions around their desire for political visibility and need for personal safety. Same-sex sexual relations continue to be a criminal offense in Ghana under the carnal knowledge clause instituted by the British during colonization. Although the law does not specifically mention same-sex sexual relations, the carnal knowledge clause criminalizes all forms of nonheterosexual sexual activities, creating room for the legitimization of vigilante and state violence against LGBT persons. The criminalization of same-sex sexual relations has sparked intense debates about African subjectivity. In Ghana, such debates are largely shaped by anti-LGBT media organizations that have partnered with anti-LGBT politicians and religious fundamentalists both in Ghana and in the United States to discursively frame LGBT rights as part of Western colonial efforts. In Ghana, it is argued that LGBT rights and gay marriage will morally bankrupt the nation and further entrench Western imperialist control of Ghana's culture and resources. False arguments such as this have created a rationalization for homophobic violence and discrimination against LGBT Ghanaians. Social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow for such complex maneuvering to occur by creating room for anonymity and privacy. Nonetheless, such sites are not outside the confines of social hierarchy in face-to-face interaction. As such, these sites should be approached as spaces where desires for social justice intersect with corporate capitalist extractivist tactics and in turn complicate the efficacy of social justice efforts.

Keywords: activism, Ghana, LGBT, queer visibility, social media

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This chapter explores how lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and sasso (LGBTS) Ghanaian activists use social media to mitigate the tensions around the desire for political visibility and the need for personal safety. Sasso is a local term used by same-gender-loving people in southern Ghana to identify themselves outside of the dominant Western LGBTQI+ discourse. Therefore, we include sasso in the LGBTQI+ acronym to highlight the diverse forms of sexualities outside the dominant Western sexual categories. Same-sex sexual relations continue to be a criminal offense in Ghana under the carnal knowledge clause instituted by the British during colonization (Adjepong, 2021; Atuguba, 2019). Although the law does not specifically mention same-sex sexual relations, the carnal knowledge clause criminalizes all forms of nonheterosexual sexual activities, and it is usually used to violate the rights of sexual minorities. The broad entrenchment of heteronormativity as the basis for Ghanaian cultural and sexual citizenship has created room for the legitimization of vigilante and state violence against LGBTS persons (Asante, 2020; Otu, 2021). Simultaneously, LGBTS activists have emerged to resist their erasure from national politics. The clash in meanings on what constitutes African sexual citizenship has sparked intense debates about African subjectivity and sexual rights between religious and political leaders and the local Ghanaian LGBTS activists. Related to the topic of this chapter is the dialectical tensions that activists experience as they navigate the tenuous terrain between the need for political visibility and the necessity for security, safety, and sense of belonging.

Television, radio, and social media continue to play a significant role in framing and influencing the debates around sexual rights and queer visibility throughout the world (Altman & Symons, 2016). In Ghana, such debates are largely shaped by anti-LGBTS media organizations that have partnered with anti-LGBTS politicians and religious fundamentalists such as the Ghana Pentecostalist and Charismatic churches (GPCCs) both in Ghana and in the United States to discursively frame LGBTS rights as part of Western colonial efforts (Asante, 2020; Mohammed, 2022; Tettey, 2016). Hackett (1998) notes that the Pentecostalists were very quick to understand the implications of the liberalization of the media, which entailed a shift from state ownership and control over radio, television, and the press to privatization of these outlets. They realized that broadcasting their messages through radio and television was a perfect way to proselytize in order to attract more people to their church. Therefore, they began to buy more airtime and broadcast their activities through radio and television. Nowadays, early in the mornings, virtually all Ghanaian radio stations offer zealous sermons by Pentecostal preachers. In addition to a wide variety of Christian programs, television viewers encounter advertisements of popular churches inviting viewers to come to their crusades to receive wealth and financial success. In this regard, GPCCs have acted as moral entrepreneurs (Tettey, 2016) to falsely make the case that LGBTQ+ rights will morally bankrupt the nation and further entrench Western imperialist control of Ghana's culture and resources. The discursive framing of LGBTQ+ rights as morally bankrupt and akin to European colonization has created an atmosphere in which homophobic violence and discrimination can be rationalized as protecting African cultural values and therefore LGBTS people should be made politically voiceless.

More contemporarily, LGBTS Ghanaian activists use social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to navigate the institutional constraints presented by conventional media such as television and radio. For instance, some LGBTS activists are denied access to debunk false statements made about LGBTS people on television and radio. Furthermore, human rights activists are rarely invited to appear on radio and television programs to discuss the illegality and inhumane treatment of LGBTS persons in Ghana. The alternative option has largely been social media as a site to garner political visibility and activism (Mohammed, 2022). Bailey (2021) also notes that social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are usually represented as queer safe spaces because they allow for the complex maneuvering between visibility and invisibility to occur by creating room for anonymity and privacy. Nonetheless, its features have also restricted their ability to implement a stronger mobilization strategy against anti-LGBTS bills and movements in the country (Gore, 2018). Ultimately, activists have to navigate the dialectical

tensions between the need for visibility and invisibility, along with political solidarity, and what constitutes progress within LGBTs activism in the Ghanaian context. In this chapter, we flesh out these tensions.

In the following, we first explore the historical and political context influencing the entrenchment of political homophobia in the Ghanaian sociocultural landscape. We delve into colonial and African perspectives on LGBTs identities. Next, we examine the literature on how social media can be utilized as queer safe spaces. We join other queer and feminist geography scholars and communication scholars to challenge the monolithic construction of virtual queer spaces as liberatory and inclusive and reveal the dialectical tensions that shape activist approaches to activism.

Colonial/African Perspectives on LGBTQ+ Identities

Despite historical evidence to the contrary, same-sex relations continue to be represented as a menace and a Western import. There is ample anthropological evidence of cultural practices that nurtured gender diversity, often in sexual relational terms, among precolonial African societies.

According to Howard-Hassmann (2001), same-sex relations were not always understood as homosexuality in Africa. This means that same-sex relations have never been uncommon in African societies. They had always existed prior to the arrival of the colonialists to the continent. Many studies have shown the diverse nature of sexuality in Africa as elsewhere (Epprecht, 2010). These studies demonstrate the prevalence of same-sex relations in different African contexts in which young and older people, men and women, engaged in same-sex relations for social, cultural, and even personal reasons (Epprecht, 2010; Murray & Roscoe, 1998). Most scholars note that heterosexual relationships coexisted with same-sex sexual practices. For example, Murray and Roscoe (1998) note that in precolonial societies such as the Bafia of Cameroon, young boys engaged in sexual relations with older boys. Through their socialization process, young boys played passive roles with senior brothers, often resulting in penetrations. Although this was done in secrecy and was not known by parents, in some other communities, same-sex sexual relations had been instituted without any form of antagonism.

Among the Mossi of West Africa, Gisu of East Africa, Zande and Pahuins of Central Africa, and Senegalese and Zambians, in addition to others, same-sex sexual relations appeared more like a cultural and social institution legitimized by the norms and values of the society (Hassett, 2007; Heald, 1999; Tauxier, 2012).

p. 270 Both Heald and Hassett assert that transsexuality and homosexuality existed among the Gisu of East Africa without any contention. Attesting to homosexuality among the Zande of Central Africa Republic, Evans-Pritchard (1970) contends that same-sex marriages commanded similar respect as heterosexual marriages. Although the Pahuins in Central Africa had wives, young adults continued to have same-sex relations with young boys without facing any repudiation. Also, among the Ashanti in Cote d'Ivoire, enslaved people captured during conquests were used as concubines. This means that they became sexual partners of the men of the kingdom. In Senegal, enslaved men engaged in sexual relations with each other due to the absence of females. This was also prevalent among women in Lesotho (Kendall, 1998). According to Murray and Roscoe (1998), female husbands were known among the Sotho, Lovedu, Koni, and Zulus in South Africa. Among the Lovedu, the queen was forbidden from having a male husband and was required instead to have a wife (Murray & Roscoe, 1998). Zabus (2013) argued that female same-sex sexual practices were widespread in almost all African societies where sexual relations between women could be encountered, such as among Hausa women in northern Nigeria. Sodomy has been part of the initiatory process of people in countries such as Zambia (Murray & Roscoe, 1998).

However, beginning in 1957, as several African countries began to obtain independence, knowledge of these cultural practices has been largely grafted over by a neocolonial Christian cisheteropatriarchal narrative that maintains and asserts Africans are inherently heterosexual and, in turn, normatively gendered

(Epprecht, 2013). The gradual erasure of precolonial relational formations can be traced back to African oral traditions. Prior to colonial conquest, orality was the primary mode for many African societies to transmit their histories and cultural practices. However, sexual practices were rarely preserved through oral tradition, thus opening the way for colonial narratives of sex and gender duality and binarism to gain prominence (Epprecht et al., 2018). Moreover, colonialism introduced formal education and boarding schools that restricted, if not barred, intergenerational familial contact between grandparents, parents, and children. Taken together, precolonial knowledges about gender and sexual diversity, and the cultural systems and relational formations that made such diversity possible, largely eroded into a colonial hegemony of cisheteropatriarchy. Currently, the increasing influence of Pentecostalist Charismatic churches, proselytizing against a backdrop of support from African political elites—for whom gender and sexual diversity are equated with “primitiveness” and amorality and/or, paradoxically, viewed as a Western secular force threatening traditional African culture—play an especially hostile role in the continued demonization of gender and sexual diversity (Epprecht, 2008).

In Ghana, although the laws are not explicit on the illegalities of same-sex relations, the carnal knowledge law criminalizes all forms of nonheterosexual activities, paving the way for homophobic and violent attacks on the LGBTQ+ community (Adjepong, 2021; Asante, 2020; Otu, 2021). The LGBTQ+ community is primarily marginalized and experiences physical and psychological violence (Adjepong, 2021; Dankwa, 2021; Gyamerah et al., 2020; Quarshie et al., 2020). This violence is institutionalized in the sense that educational, religious, political, legal, and social institutions work together to entrench homophobia in the country (Mohammed, 2019). Undeniably, religion, politics, and the media are critical instigators of violence against the LGBTQ+ community in Ghana (Amoah & Gyasi, 2016; Baisley, 2015; Essien & Aderinto, 2009; Tetteh, 2016). These institutions appropriate the media space and use political power to threaten nonheterosexual and queer individuals and deprive them of their freedom of speech. Doing so creates an unwelcoming and unsafe environment for sexual minorities to thrive or exercise their right to agency (Ako, 2021; Amoah & Gyasi, 2016). Hence, there is a drive toward queer safe spaces.

Social Media as Queer Safe Spaces?

As explained above, the LGBT community in Ghana experiences targeted physical violence. As such, the open expression of same-sex sexuality and its advocacy have largely remained invisible. In this larger context, it is important to explore the overarching literature around queer safe spaces as a site for collective political becoming and activism. Carillo-Rowe (2010) emphasized “the inter of intercultural communication is a capacious site of unfolding interaction across lines of difference. It gestures toward the unknown and unknowable space between unevenly located subjects” (p. 221). Here, we can extrapolate Carillo-Rowe’s concerns about alliance building as saturated in power lines and relations to queer safe spaces as well.

Major social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have predominantly functioned as queer safe spaces where networks can be forged and advocacy efforts can be mobilized. Yet different assumptions underlie the meanings of “queer safe spaces.” Pascar et al. (2018) argue that *queer safe spaces* are characterized by (a) underscoring resistance and subversion as significant capacities required in the queer space construction; (b) formulating a space for the community and its culture; (c) constructing subjective boundaries that are known to the members of the marginalized group but do not have to be known to outsiders; and (d) establishing a new organization of temporality, which creates continuous subjective gender experiences and performances rather than producing dissociation. Nonetheless, although digital spaces have offered new opportunities for queer and LGBTQ+ people to network with each other and mobilize, they have also presented pertinent challenges for community consciousness and collective

identity production for LGBTQ+ activism and mobilization (Asante, 2017; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2019).

Cavalcante (2019) argues that queer youth have found social community and belonging on social media sites. In a way, social media sites have become new gayborhoods and gay bars for youth. As a result, he explains that LGBTQ+ youth come together on social media to perform essential sociopolitical and sociocultural functions, such as educating themselves on issues related to sexuality, digitally narrating intimate storytelling, and fostering sexual networks and encounters. Furthermore, Asante (2018) explores how social media sites, such as closed Facebook groups, offer spaces of belonging where African immigrants in the diaspora and those on the continent create transnational relations in a virtual space.

Hashtag activism, for example, has become a potent political tool for building public support through social media. It has become a means by which marginalized voices share their opinions, and it has the potential to inject new voices into public discourse and create sociopolitical changes in the real world (Goswami, 2018; Nenoff, 2020). Hashtag activism has been one of the essential tools for challenging and resisting heteronormative and homophobic norms (Freelon et al., 2018; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016; LeMaster & Johnson, 2019). Scholars such as Liao (2019) have revealed how the Chinese LGBTQ+ community on Weibo, through the hashtag #IAmGay#, countered censorship of homosexual content. Liao notes that the hashtag allowed users to engage in discursive activism through storytelling that involved personal and particular narratives. According to Liao, the posts shared generated connective actions that generated alternative discourse about LGBTQ+ rights and free speech and consequently challenged the government's hegemonic discourse. Bailey (2021) also reveals how trans women use social media through hashtag activism to counter negative stereotypes about the community. In her book *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, Bailey emphasized that Black trans women use digital platforms to create redefined representations of themselves outside the problematic lens of trans misogynoir. Through hashtags such as #GirlsLikeUs, #TWOC, and #FreeCeCe, trans women transform social media into social justice magic that advocates for their lives. These hashtags led to real-life transformations that challenged stereotypes and offered better health outcomes for Black trans women (Bailey, 2021).

In their work on hashtag activism, Jackson et al. (2020) also demonstrate how popular hashtags from 2009 to 2019 provided race and gendered counterpublics opportunities to speak back to power. The authors emphasize how the creation and use of #GirlsLikeUs by a network of transgender women, especially trans women of color, provided them the space to engage and share their experiences beyond stereotypical representations. Through hashtags, they built community, celebrated their accomplishments and visibility, and advocated for trans issues and rights through their voices and sharing of factual information about trans experiences with injustice (poverty, sexism, and racism). The hashtags thus afforded them the opportunity for counter-engagement to center trans politics and normalize trans lives. As argued by the authors, hashtags played an indispensable role in constructing an intersectional digital trans community and radically shifting the representations of and messages about trans people from outside the community (Jackson et al., 2020). Nonetheless, these forms of activism come with different risks in the Ghanaian context that activists have to continually evaluate.

As much as virtual spaces offer a protected space for collective mobilization, it also has the tendency to produce spaces infused with differential power structures (Carillo-Rowe, 2010). Queer safe spaces are defined by different expectations on what constitutes the "LGBTQ+ community," the rules of engagement and the "appropriate" ways to do activism, or what even constitutes queerness. Feminist and queer geographers have astutely observed patterns of inclusion and exclusion within digital queer spaces. Feminist geographers, in particular, have called for the shifting of studies on queer space to focus on the "mutual constitution of gendered identities and spaces" (Bondi & Rose 2003 p. 234). Hartal (2018) contends that current work by feminist geographers has opened the door for the examination of the "mutual construction of LGBT subjectivities and their experiences in space, specifically, queer space" (p. 3).

We are of the view that queer safe spaces are constitutive of the physical, discursive, rhetoric, virtual, material, emotional, and imagined capacities. Virtual queer safe spaces are not outside of, or distinct from, the identity politics engulfing face-to-face interactions. Thus, tensions emerge as community members navigate not only the potential for anti-LGBT violence but also the nuances of building solidarity and alliance within the LGBTS community in Ghana. As such, Ghana presents a particularly useful context for the exploration of queer safe spaces as sites of differential and contested belonging. Next, we explore the three key tensions that LGBTS activists experience.

Navigating Tensions in the Ghanaian Technosphere

Tensions Around Political Visibility and Invisibility

p. 273 Since many Ghanaian media organizations began to utilize social media in the 2000s to reach a wider public beyond traditional media, there has been an uptick in discussions around LGBTQ+ rights in Ghana. When social media platforms such as Facebook became very popular in Ghana around 2006 and 2007, a cross section of Ghanaians began to use them to discuss various issues occurring in the country. Conversations around sexual identity and “Ghanaianess” gained attention. Even during this time, the wide digital divide meant that these platforms were only accessible to a few Ghanaians, given the high costs of internet data and digital gadgets such as computers and smartphones. Today, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are used widely as spaces of public deliberation on essential political and social matters. ↵ As such, there is a vibrant digital public sphere that various organizations affiliated with the government, civil society, and the nonprofit sector have leveraged to reach a wider national and global audience with varying degrees of success. Despite this steady growth, it was not until 2018 that LGBTS organizations such as LGBTQ+ Rights Ghana began to make a concerted effort to utilize social media platforms to bring awareness to issues affecting queer and trans Ghanaians. Although there are other LGBTS organizations in the country, LGBTQ+ Rights Ghana is considered the foremost LGBTQ+ organization because of its large presence on social media, which tends to overshadow the other subtle and (invisible) advocacy tactics adopted by other organizations in the country. Ultimately, tensions arise between the need for political visibility via social media and the cultural expectations of sexual discretion (Dankwa, 2021).

LGBTS issues in Ghana began to gain visibility in the early 1990s. Before then, it was generally reported in both local and international media that there were no “homosexuals” or LGBTS movements in Ghana. In 1998, the silence around same-sex sexuality was ruptured when the British government funded a human rights training workshop for Ghanaian sexual minorities. Andam (2019) explains that after the training, three attendees formed the Gay and Lesbian Association of Ghana. However, the group encountered government opposition to its name and changed it to the Center for Popular Education and Human Rights Ghana. Eventually, it received funding from the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice to purchase stationery and furniture to begin its LGBTQ+ advocacy work in Ghana.

Asante (2022) notes that the establishment of the first LGBTQ+ organization in Ghana portended the establishment of numerous partnerships between Western governments, international nongovernmental organizations, and the already existent grassroots organizations. This moment also initiated the “bureaucratization” of queer social movements from a decentralized grassroots movement that focused on everyday concerns, such as increasing poverty, inadequate health care, and corruption, to the sole focus on the LGBTQ+ community, sexual rights, and visibility politics. The ensuing partnerships that emerged in the hope of advancing LGBTQ+ rights in Ghana also necessitated the desire to construct a deserving “LGBTQ+ community” to attract international donors. However, the desire to make the “LGBTQ+ Ghanaian community” visible to a predominantly international audience prompted the use of specific visibility tactics on social media that ultimately thrust the LGBTS community into international politics which do not always

serve the interests of the larger LGBTs community who do not have access to the digital affordances of social media. Eventually, dialectical tensions arose out of the need for political visibility while also being cognizant of the larger implications of such visibility work—no matter how necessary it is.

Although some LGBTs organizations have utilized the digital public sphere to bring attention to issues affecting their community, they have also utilized these platforms to build safe spaces and to strategize about building queer liberatory futures. Twitter is a vital platform on which queer politics are articulated in Ghana. Indeed, other mainstream feminist and gender advocacy organizations have utilized social media platforms to support their organizing work in the country (Mohammed, 2023). Organizations such as Rightify Ghana have utilized Twitter to draw attention to the human rights violations that the queer and trans community is perpetually subjected to. Others, such as the Young Feminist Collective, have used Instagram and Twitter to hold the current president of Ghana, President Nana Addo, accountable for his complicity in state-sanctioned violence directed at the LGBTQ+ community (Mohammed, 2022). It is within this larger context that we bring attention to the way that social media can function as a queer safe space—one in which queer and trans communities in Ghana organize around a queer digital politic, albeit not without consequences of internal strife.

p. 274 **Tensions Around Intersectional Solidarity**

While LGBTQ+ communities grapple with institutionalized violence from the state, they often have to navigate complicated relationships with mainstream feminist organizations whose praxes are often exclusionary of the queer and trans community. Mohammed (2022) indicates how mainstream organizations, in their quest to create solidarity with queer and trans people, reproduce harmful narratives that further entrench homophobic norms in the Ghanaian public sphere. Here, we draw parallels between the issues affecting queer communities and other marginalized groups in the country, highlighting the importance of solidarity and accountability in building queer and feminist liberatory futures that center the margins. Recent conversations on intersectionality in Ghanaian feminist movements have shed light on the exclusion of the LGBTQ+ community in gender advocacy in the country (Adjepong, 2021) and the need to build bridges across feminist and queer organizations and activists. These initiatives reveal the tensions within these groups and how it influences their approaches to political advocacy on social media.

LGBTs organizations are strategically positioned to disrupt the exclusionary politics that have long plagued mainstream feminist organizing in the country. For example, Rightify Ghana recently embarked on a social media campaign to provide education about LGBTs identities in Ghanaian languages. Although this campaign attempted to include languages that are often excluded in mainstream feminist organizing, the group inadvertently reproduced the marginalization of certain communities that have historically been disenfranchised. Fox and Ore (2010) argue that omitting intersectionality from the analysis of safe spaces leads to the reliance on a particular identity around which safe spaces are constructed. In this instance, the campaign focused on the Akan, Ga, Ewe, and Hausa languages, which are widely spoken in the south of the country, thus completely excluding the northern half of the country from these representations, including queer individuals. Note that the campaign was popularized by a trans woman who sought to reach the grassroots and subaltern communities, often erased from feminist organizing work. The second author, who is a Dagbana/Dagomba, and whose language and cultural identity were erased from this representation, brought attention to this erasure. Another feminist who witnessed this interaction intervened and offered to pay for the inclusion of northern Ghanaian languages in this campaign. The second author eventually worked together with Rightify Ghana to identify voice-over artists to replicate this campaign in the Waali and Gurune languages.

Stengal and Weems (2010) note that power relations constrain and enable certain ways of speaking and acting. That notwithstanding, this feminist intervention clearly demonstrates the need for accountability

systems in queer safe spaces (Russo, 2019). It also draws attention to the issue of ethnopolitics that is often pushed to the periphery in discussions around LGBTs activism. Paying attention to the ways that ethnopolitics informs queer Ghanaian identities shows how certain subject positions are imagined to inhabit the discursive boundaries of safe space in digital spaces.

Although the result of this feminist intervention was more inclusion for a systematically marginalized community in the Ghanaian national space, it is not guaranteed that this result would have been achieved if the critique were directed at a mainstream gender advocacy or feminist organization. Historically, mainstream feminist organizations whose lens of activism is limited to focusing on issues affecting straight, Christian, and southern Ghanaian women have often resisted critiques from queer communities, religious minorities, and people from marginalized ethnic groups (Mohammed, 2023). Feminist and queer solidarity and accountability were achieved in this case because although a member of this queer organization was resistant to the critique provided by the second author, she was open to working with the second author, as well as the benevolent feminist who offered to bear the costs of producing video campaigns that would include northern languages. Ultimately, LGBTs organizations have the potential to propel the feminist movement forward by embodying feminist accountability and intersectionality praxes in the work that they do. They have the potential to create the liberatory futures that are needed to undo the reproduction of marginalization that has been the norm in Ghanaian feminist spaces for a long time.

Tensions Around Progress and Backlash

Although social media has been used to garner spaces of solidarity between queer, trans, and feminist organizations, its sharing features have produced contradictory and ambivalent situations for queer communities in Ghana. On February 24, 2021, LGBTQ+ Rights Ghana posted images and videos of an LGBTs community center on various social media sites. It noted that the community center was established to act as a safe space for queer Ghanaians to mobilize and seek support. However, anti-LGBTs activists used the Instagram and Facebook posts as evidence of the entrenching reach of LGBTs rights in Ghana and mobilized the Ghana Police Service for its closure. Since this incident, several LGBTs people in the country have become targets of homophobic violence. This case speaks to how organizational activities on social media affect the lives of queer individuals outside of the digital technosphere. This incident also shows that although social media sites can be used to create awareness around important and essential political issues for queer individuals in places where same-sex relations are criminalized, such queer visibility tactics can come with risks for all LGBTs persons in the region. This exemplifies the political ramifications of the need for social progress and its larger implications beyond social media.

Social media companies have done little to protect LGBTs people in areas where same-sex sexual relations are criminalized. As such, this increases the ramifications for local social activists who have little power to challenge the increasing incendiary messages about LGBTs people. Two months after the closure of the LGBTs community center in Accra, Twitter announced that it would be establishing its regional headquarters for West Africa in Ghana—a move that could give it some leverage to monitor and regulate the content of anti-LGBTs activists in the region. However, both Twitter and Facebook have failed to moderate anti-LGBTs content and hate speech on their platforms, signaling that such a move might alienate a larger cross section of their market base. Ultimately, although social media allows for the sharing of positive LGBTs messages that signal progress, the backlash against the use of such platforms calls for a careful engagement and celebration of social media as liberatory spaces. For LGBTs people in places such as Ghana, such corporate irresponsibility creates conditions for vulnerability, exposure, and possible violence.

Conclusion

Social media will continue to be a major component of social justice initiatives on the African continent, but its influence on queer visibility politics needs further investigation, especially in the era of neoliberalism. Some scholars have called attention to the precarity of digital feminism in neoliberal contexts that confine the demands of feminist politics to narratives of individual choice and empowerment (Gill, 2007). Here, we see that many of the same material constraints faced by offline queer activists are replicated online, where the desire for the development of radical political interventions exists alongside the general commodification of resistance and the specific consumption of narratives drawn from the most marginal communities.

p. 276 As we have explained, LGBTs activists in Ghana utilize social media sites to create a queer safe space and seek solidarity with other marginalized groups. Nonetheless, the profit imperative of these sites raises concerns about the negotiations of privacy, data protection, and regulation. As we expand queer social justice efforts in the West African region, it is essential to continue to explore ways to mobilize people beyond the gratification garnered from sharing content on social media. Queer visibility politics creates a limited view of activism from which a particular form of social justice is imagined.

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