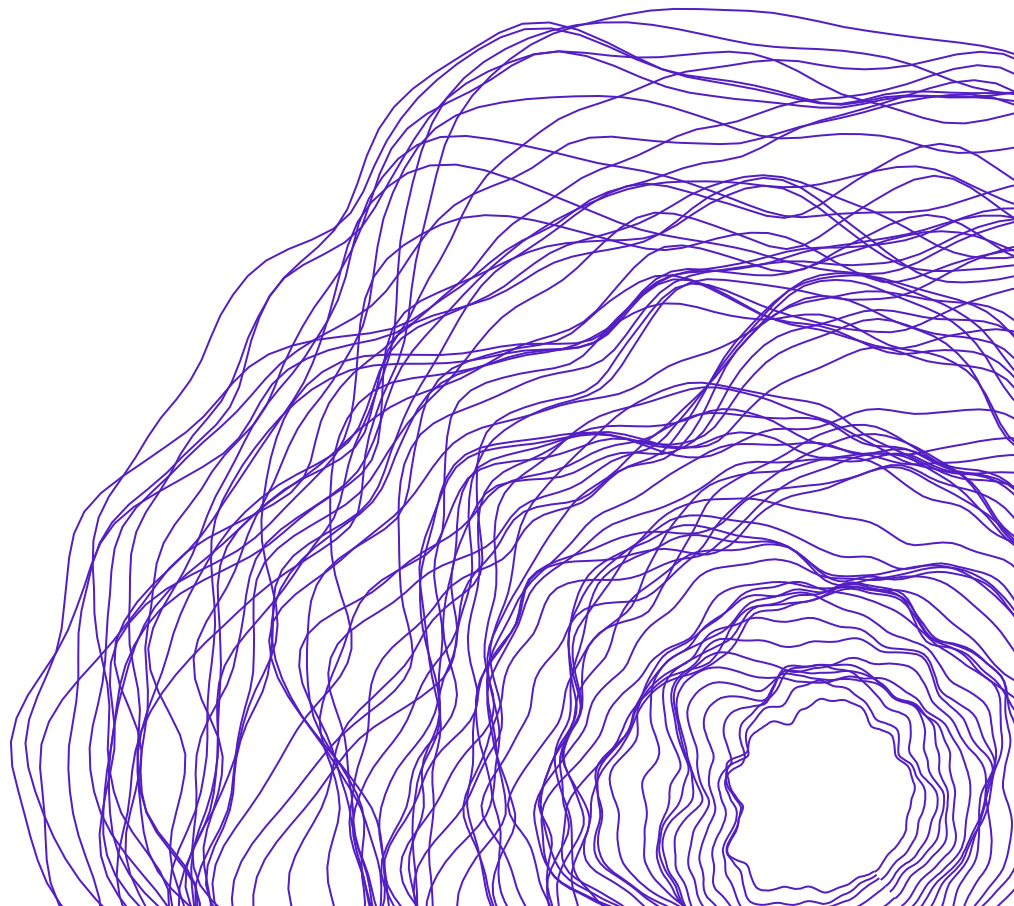# "Where My Data At?":

Imagining resistance to data processing with African feminists

Chenai Chair & Tinatswe Mhaka

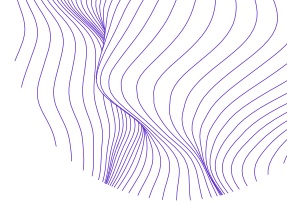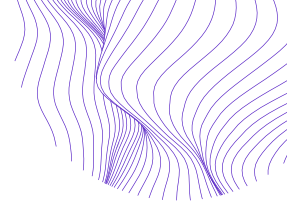**June 2022**

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Background

> "I'd like to know more about data collection and processing policies that we consent to as we share information online and at the same time identify how gender issues can be factored into these. I would really like these apps to word their data terms and conditions in a user-friendly way. App owners and developers make people consent to the use of their technology without making them read the fine print. They need to better their standards to safeguard their users" – Participant Y.[1]

Conversations around data and privacy often spark intense debate in the African context. The current global health crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore questions on data protection and privacy. The various African Governments and the private sector took unprecedented measures to contain, trace and track the spread of the novel coronavirus by turning to digital technologies and advanced analytics to collect, process and share data for effective responses to the pandemic. However, questions soon emerged on how this data was being stored and protected. The recent United States Supreme Court ruling which overturned the nearly half a century landmark Roe vs Wade[2] decision granting the constitutional right to abortion has far reaching consequences beyond the US. In Africa, this controversial decision has sparked conversations amongst African abortion rights activists and users of menstrual apps issues around privacy and data. Emerging questions include: How will information about my menstrual cycle be used? Who has this information? Does it even matter that the existing technology is not counting me as an African? These pertinent questions clamour for answers in a data-based society.

Datafication – Whether one is connected to the internet or not, the different social actions that people are involved in, within their respective communities, have now become data points that can be easily monitored, tracked and optimised. People can now choose to monitor and track themselves on platforms for ease of life i.e. menstrual period applications. However, users often have little or no knowledge of the rights they have over this data and the course of action to take when there is intrusion on their privacy and their rights violated.

These concerns with data are more pronounced at intersectional points of inequality, for example, the gender one identifies with, the class one belongs to, educational background, access to resources and sexuality. The complex nature of datafication and the few choices people have on how their data is collected and processed can be very frustrating to individuals, leaving some feeling defeated and dejected. This research hopes to respond to the discourse by imagining the African Feminist resistance to concerns in a datafied society. This work builds on prior work assessing privacy, data

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[1] Quote from a research participant in the study.
[2] Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade, ending right to abortion upheld for decades, 2022.
https://www.npr.org/2022/06/24/1102305878/supreme-court-abortion-roe-v-wade-decision-overturn
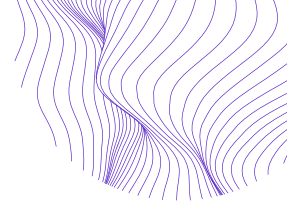
protection and Artificial Intelligence. It also looks at how data protection regulations respond to gendered realities.[3] The co-authors focus on a community of people that engage with forms of gendered inequality each day – an African feminist community formed of women, LGBTQIA people and non-binary people.

How does one build resistance to datafication with those already at the front lines of fighting gender inequality? The research took an inquisitive and flexible approach in the hope of understanding the extent to which African feminists in the region engage on issues to do with gender, privacy and data. Researchers spoke to several feminists from Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to document their experiences with data and explore ways of resistance to violation of their digital rights.

Through this research, we sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the multiple and intersecting understandings of the relationship between gender, privacy, and data by African feminists?
2. How do African feminists navigate a datafied society?
3. What are feminist centered ways of resistance in datafied societies?

Methodology: The scenic route to understanding

Professor Sylvia Tamale[4] calls on African women to critically engage on issues around harms and inequality perpetuated by technology in order to decolonize the mind. This project is a response to this call by taking on a feminist thinking to resistance of harmful data practices. The research methodology starts by conceptualizing what an African feminist internet that critically engages with a datafied society would look like. We turned to feminist principles to try to draw answers to this. The feminist principles of the internet[5] (FPIs) "support the right to privacy and to full control over personal data and information online at all levels." The Feminist Tech principles[6] on Privacy focuses on the process by highlighting agency to determine when and how data is collected, the purpose as well as length of time that the data is used, shared and saved. This is a

rejection of the ways in which States and private companies use data for their own gains and to influence behavior online. It is also about monitoring of surveillance based on digital data – dataveillance - by non-state actors and individuals. Surveillance has largely been a patriarchal practice of control and silencing gender marginalized groups. It is also about paying attention to how our data is governed,

Dataveillance: the surveillance of a person's activities by studying the data trail created by actions such as credit card purchases, mobile phone calls, and internet use.[7]

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[7] Collins Dictionary
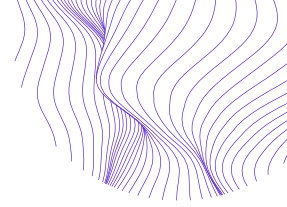
critiquing the trade-offs, particularly when one gives their data in order to access a service such as security for increased digital surveillance cameras.[8]

> "Research for activism… refers to work loosely designed to inform and support the work of feminist movements, including gender statistics, policy analyses and studies that cast light on the structures and dynamics of the oppression and subordination of women." - Amina Mama

Feminist principles help us imagine an ideal feminist internet in a datafied society. The tools of building evidence of how this might look like, were guided by our intention to use this research to support activism by African feminists. The feminist thinking and practice[9] in the design of the research helped us think of different tools of gathering knowledge that would center on the experiences of African feminist women, LGBTQIA community members, and non-binary individuals. We worked with African feminists because of their awareness of patriarchal structures, context, and the intersecting power dynamics. We also imagined feminists as being core to any action that seeks to ensure the right to privacy and control of data and the need for them to be part of existing movements concerned with data practices.

Through a multi-method approach[10], we sought to build a rich and safe space for African feminists to reflect on and collectively learn more about the connections between gender, privacy, and data. We designed this research incrementally, by first convening a conversation[11] with an expert panel of African feminists to share knowledge on privacy, gender, and data protection. We then launched a survey[12] seeking responses from African feminists. The survey was responded to by 64 self-identified African feminists who showed general levels of awareness of issues around data, privacy, and gender. Finally, we designed qualitative and participatory exercises with 10 feminists from Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe[13] to explore their individual interactions and

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[4] Professor Sylvia Tamale *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* https://darajapress.com/publication/decolonziation_and_afro-feminism. 2020

[5] The Feminist Principles of the Internet are a series of statements that offer a gender and sexual rights lens on critical internet-related rights. They were drafted at the first Imagine a Feminist Internet meeting that took place in Malaysia in April 2014. https://feministinternet.org/en/principle/privacy-data

[6] The Feminist Tech principles are a set of guidelines for tech policy-making and technology creation drafted in drafted in a collaborative process between the team at SUPERRR Lab and a group of activists, policymakers, writers, designers, technologists, researchers, and educators, that advocate for digital rights and the rights of marginalized groups. https://superrr.net/feministtech/principles/

[7] Collins Dictionary

[8] Privacy by default not Surveillance narrative by Nakeema Stefflbauer in Feminist Tech Principles https://superrr.net/feministtech/principle/privacy-by-default-instead-of-surveillance-by-default/
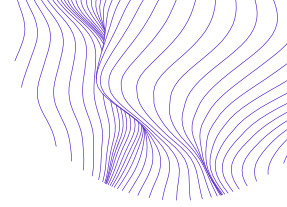
[9] Feminist Methodology - https://mydatarights.africa/feminist-methodology/

[10] A more detailed methodology of the qualitative work is included as an appendix to the work.

[11] Accept or Decline the cookies? – Gender, Privacy and Data with African feminists with Amanda Manyama, Martha Chilongoshi, Kriistophina Shilongo and Pelonomi Moiloa. https://mydatarights.africa/workshop-accept-or-decline-the-cookies/

[12] https://mydatarights.africa/my-data-rights-feminist-resistance-and-resilience-to-data-practices-survey/

[13] Our intention was to work with 4 feminists from each country and conduct a country comparative in a SADC context. However carrying out digital research over a long time period is a challenge as participants dropped out for various reasons.

experiences with personal data and online privacy. This series of qualitative exercises was conducted over two weeks. Week 1 focused on exploring personal data and privacy through three exercises. The research asked participants to document one of their days online and their detailed thoughts and reflections on their personal data and its traces through a digital diary. Participants were also asked to search for their own personal data currently existing online to investigate what they could find and what it means for their data footprint. They were also asked to take part in a reflective group discussion over WhatsApp to discuss their experiences and feelings during these exercises. In week two, we developed a responsive approach to imagining resistance with the participants. This included conversations reflecting on the first set of exercises to evaluate what they learned, and then, individually exploring actions that could be taken to respond and resist. Participants then took part in a final group discussion over the Zoom platform to discuss their overall experience and collectively agree on forms of feminist resistance to datafication. The research was guided by feminist ethics of active consent, reflexivity by the researchers, anonymity, care, transparency, and accountability.

At the end, we wanted to use evidence to inform collective action for digital rights led by African feminists or for current and future digital rights movements to work with African feminists. Collective action for us meant movements. Movements based on Feminists principles of the Internet[14] mean – "using the power of the network to build social movements, as well as participating in the shaping of the public space online and the policies that govern the internet". This is connected to resistance – resisting norms often shaped in a patriarchal context; movement building – connecting across spaces while demanding accountability and transparency and supporting feminist organizing sustainability and governance – challenging patriarchal spaces and processes and ensuring meaningful participation of gender marginalized groups in the room.

African feminists navigating datafied society for My Data rights.

This is the story of Nomalanga* Aged 30. Nomalanga is a creative, a feminist activist and works in the food industry as her 9-5 to pay her bills. Here is her journey throughout the My Data Rights qualitative research.Nomalanga* is a composite character that combines reflections from all our participants
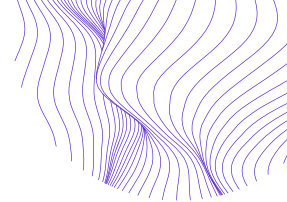
Week 1 - Activity 1 Digital Diary
Applications used: Weather checker; WhatsApp; WhatsApp business; Twitter; Adult pleasure websites; Microsoft store; Alibaba; Netflix

Morning - I check the weather forecast. Definitely picks up location data.
I indulge in self pleasure. I make use of specific websites, but they have cookies and I try to decline.

I also check social media (Twitter) to see the current trends. I also use it for entertainment & check how my internet friends are doing,

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[14] Feminist principles guiding cluster on movements https://feministinternet.org/en/movements

I log onto WhatsApp to speak with my sister and my virtual lover who is in a different time zone. I check these two out of habit, it's one of the first things I do whenever I touch my phone at any time. Both are convenient for connecting with people who are far away. Also, there are work updates on the work WhatsApp group sometimes and some of them may come in before work starts.

I send a risqué picture to my lover via WhatsApp with my face cropped out before I leave for work. This is just my safe practice when sending nude pictures.

At Work, I log in to machines with a communal password. The records of the work done are signed though, so it's still easy to keep track of who did what on the work machines. It's not a virtual signing, but my signature is on so many things. Also, we use WhatsApp to communicate with other team members about clients in real time. It's convenient but I don't know if it is safe or ethical.

Afternoon - I work on personalizing a new laptop using applications from the Microsoft store. Naturally, I reject all requests for them to access any more data than they already have. I switch off the location on the laptop even though the one on my phone is on. Connect the laptop to work Wi-Fi and log into the school website on that network. I think the IT department can access my search history through that network. I don't mind.

I communicate with suppliers online (Alibaba) & customers (WhatsApp business).

Evening - To settle down for the evening I am on Netflix, WhatsApp and Twitter. I usually have two apps open at once e.g scrolling down Twitter whilst watching a show.
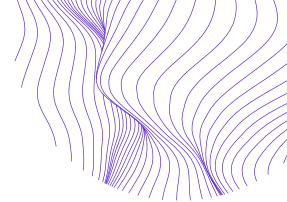
Activity 2: Checking my data traces
What I noticed first was that there is a lot of information about me online when you just search my name. I noticed I appeared in some articles that I did consent to being part of but also some that I did not consent to. This had me wondering how someone can include me in an article without getting my consent first. I also noticed that a suggested search when I typed my name was my parents' information. It made me wonder who is searching for that and why.

There were no real links to any of my social media besides Facebook. I found other links in articles I've been in or YouTube videos. When I opened the Facebook link there was not much access to my profile beside my profile picture, a very limited "about" section, access to my photos, and that was about it. This got me thinking that I haven't checked or reviewed my privacy setting on Facebook in a long time and it's like Fort Knox at this point. When I searched for my social media handle in the privacy browser it showed a lot of Instagram related posts, it also showed another website that was showing my profile in relation to Instagram. It also showed a lot of comments I had posted on other people's posts. There were a few sites that weren't Instagram but were showing my handle and connection to Instagram. These were https://lullar-com-3.appspot.com/ and http://bugmenot.com/view/gmail.com.br. When I clicked the link to my Instagram it was as it normally is when I click on my own profile in my normal browser. These all got me thinking why some websites get to use my usernames without me knowingly agreeing to it.

End of week 1 reflection:
I think I was made conscious of how much information is out there about me that I didn't know

about. It's kind of scary that people can just use the name and information without your consent. You will be seeing things you didn't agree to and that's a bit daunting considering what people might be doing with our information. One of the thoughts I had was how to protect myself and my information from leaving spaces where I share them especially as I work on safe abortion and fight for LGBTQI+ rights which is very controversial in our "Christian nation"*

*A play on the use of Christianity to respond to anything that is considered harmful to maintaining heteronormative Christian standards in some African countries.

Emerging Themes & Findings

Through the reflective, collective learning and research process, several important themes emerged around how the community of African feminists perceive gender and data politics. These include the embodied experiences of consent; feelings of forced consent; concerns around power differentials between data subject and data holder; and imaginings of forms of resistance and collective action.

The embodied experience of data and privacy

> "Our primary language for conceptualizing the data we produce is through privacy, which treats our personal information as separate from us, a piece of property that can be measured, negotiated over, sold, and reused. But data doesn't just belong to you in the way that your house or car might; it is also you"
> – Tricia Wang[15]

The perception of data as 'an extension of self'[16] is reflected throughout the research. Panelists in the convening unpacked how data is information about ourselves that we either voluntarily share or is collected without our knowledge or consent and built with different information points. Similarly, the participants in the survey also understood data as information or activities that included their personal and other forms of information based on how they interact with digital platforms. Data was also considered as pieces of people's own identities and how they interact with digital platforms rather than just a mere technical perspective - 'beyond 1s and 0s'.[17] The convening also highlighted the perceptions of data by those who collect and make use of it to shape how people experience and interact with technology. For example, an algorithm used to determine people's access to financial services may predominantly classify black women as high risk. The determination of risk is based on data collected from a historical

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[15] Tricia Wang, You are not your data but your data is still you https://deepdives.in/you-are-not-your-data-but-your-data-is-still-you-b41d2478ece2
[16] Amanda Manyame in Gender, Privacy and Data Workshop 2022. see footnote 10
[17] Kriistophina Shilongo in Gender, Privacy and Data workshop
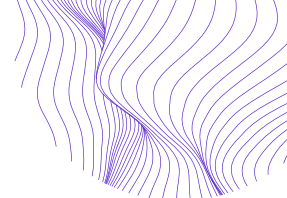
period that may have been biased against this demographic group. This may result in the particular group not being able to fairly access services it deserves to get.[18]
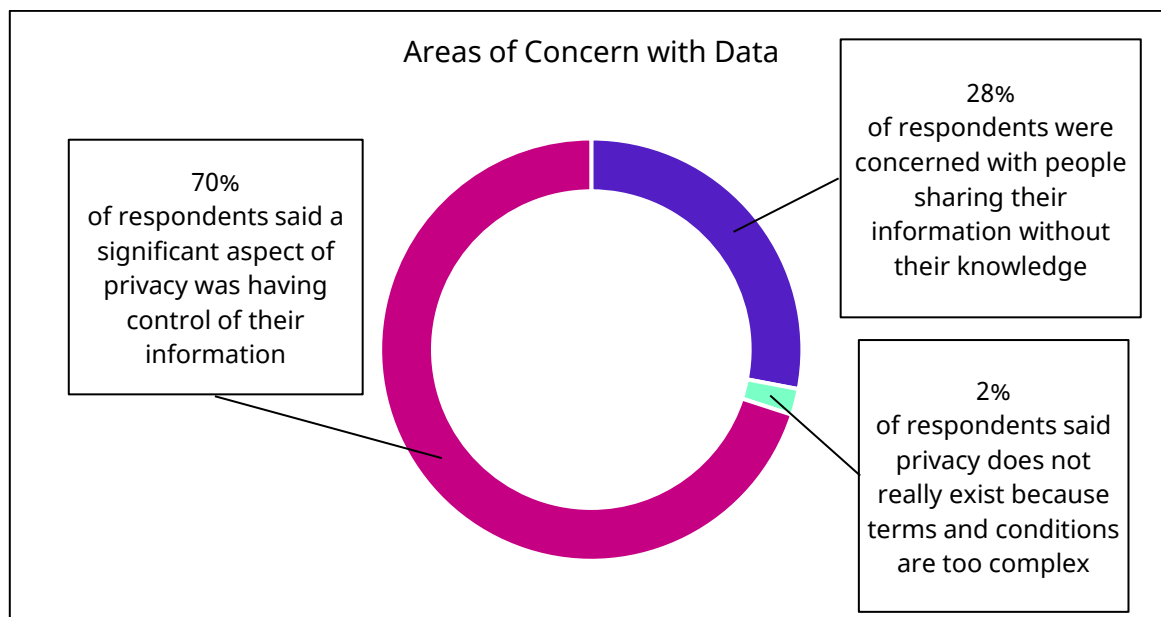

Figure 1: Participants in survey response to areas of concern with data

When it came to defining privacy, participants specifically emphasized the need for agency and control. Exercising agency and control in privacy was stated as "the right to be left alone while choosing to have control over who has access to one's information" - Amanda Manyame.[19] Privacy is then about having that determination at an individual level of when, where and with who one may share particular information. Data protection then becomes an added structural layer to ensuring safety, security, and limitations to securing individual data.
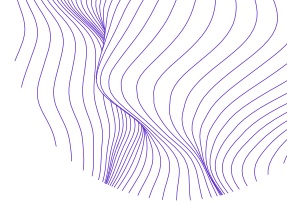
"Forced consent": Agency and control as an issue

> "It was really of concern seeing the amount of important data that the internet has and how it's easily accessible on just a simple search. Getting consent is really hectic." Participant x

However, in a datafied society, participants described how difficult it was to have control over one's online data and have agency at an individual level.   Participants from the survey were highly concerned with issues of privacy and protection of data as they navigate the digital space. Of particular interest was that 48% of the participants in the survey were concerned with how information is used while 33% were worried at who can access the information. One participant was concerned that using online platforms and

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[18] N Moosajee "Fix AI's racist, sexist bias" (2019) at https://mg.co.za/article/2019-03-14-fix-ais-racist-sexist-bias/ (accessed 18 September 2020).
[19] See footnote 10

services often feels like 'consent by force' because one does not really have an option to opt out while other users do not even understand what they would be agreeing to.

It is an enormous task to ensure that people go through all the terms and conditions of the applications before they consent to using the technology and know where their data will show up. Additionally, many of the participants rely on certain platforms and services for their work, activism, and personal lives. The participants often do not feel they have an option to 'reject' the terms and conditions and not use the platform or service. In order to understand how participants use and interact with different platforms, we asked them to keep a digital diary to document their virtual lives and the platforms and applications they interact with and use on a daily basis.
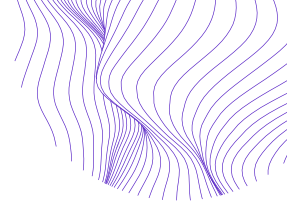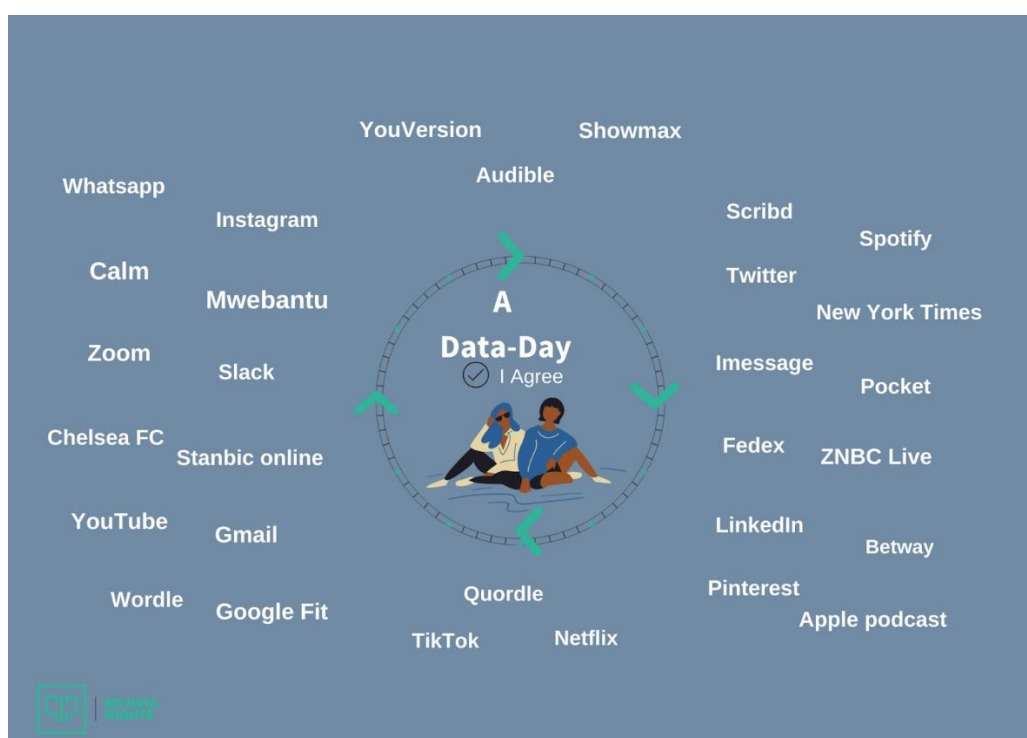

Figure 2: Collated applications and platforms from the Digital Diary exercises from qualitative research

Participants in the qualitative study revealed how strenuous it is to actually keep track of the many platforms they interact with on a daily basis. They said it was even harder to understand the data processing policies of each platform. The digital diaries provided a glimpse into the many digital tools; platforms and services that this African feminist community uses on a daily basis (see Figure 1). Using the Terms of Service - Do not Read tool,[20] the authors tried to understand the terms of service of some of the most frequently used tools but limited the scope of this analysis to a few tools. We looked into the privacy policies of specific platforms available in participants' respective countries

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[20] "Terms of Service; Didn't Read" (short: ToS;DR) is a young project started in June 2012 to help fix the "biggest lie on the web": almost no one really reads the terms of service we agree to all the time.https://tosdr.org/en/abou

such as the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC). ZNBC's privacy policy[21] states that European residents have the right to access personal information that the platform holds. European residents may ask to have this information corrected, updated or deleted. However, it is not clear whether this right is also extended to Zambian residents.

> "I used Safari to search for myself online and found everything 💀 including accounts whose passwords I no longer remember. Searching for myself and finding out just how much information is out there that I at some point I deleted (but still on Google), was such a shocker and pretty interesting to find out."
> Participant W

We also asked participants in the study to map their data online by looking themselves up using the "me and my shadow"[22] exercise developed by Tactical Technology Collective. Through this exercise, participants found information appearing in places and spaces that they never used or consented to. This was of concern to the person because it was information which the individual had not personally made available online and not relevant to their current work. This validated the point raised in the convening on the right to privacy where one must be able to determine when and how their personal data is accessed and used.

Who holds the power?

> "Power/gender relations also manifest in data practices, particularly regarding how data is generated, its travel analytics and the way it is interpreted. The creators, collectors and analyzers of data are overwhelmingly male, mainly located in the global North."[23] – S. Tamale
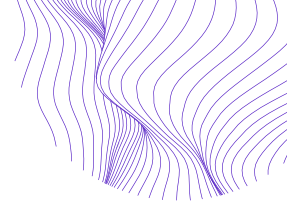
The ability to exercise agency and control over data at an individual level is a daunting task. As we imagine resistance, we need to ask who holds the power to make this possible, a point emphasized by Martha Chilongoshi.[24] We need to question and interrogate the structure of data collection, use and processing in technology to determine who really has control and benefits. Focusing on power highlights who is the most vulnerable and least likely to have influence. In the context we exist in, women who are often the most marginalized in society hold the least power despite their diversity. Without power, this group is most likely to face gender harms such as increased dataveillance; data practices that exacerbate existing gender inequalities through development of biased and discriminatory systems; and extractive data practices rooted

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[21] ZNBC Privacy policy - https://www.znbc.co.zm/privacy-policy/
[22] Tactical Technology Collective. Trace my shadow - https://myshadow.org/trace-my-shadow
[23] Professor Sylvia Tamale *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*
https://darajapress.com/publication/decolonziation_and_afro-feminism. 2020. (Page 389)
[24] see footnote 10

in patriarchal norms of society. When people make use of one particular entity or platform because it is easy to access and is popular, as Pelonomi Moiloa[25] pointed out, this means giving power to one entity to shape your experience of the online space.

> "I think I was also made conscious of how much information is out there about me that I didn't know about. It's kind of scary that people can just use your name and information without your consent. You'll be seeing things you didn't agree to and that's a bit daunting considering what people might be doing with our information." -- Participant V

Powerlessness is manifested in the manner in which people have no control over the sharing of information that is personal to them. One participant highlighted how an image of a member of the LGBTQIA was being circulated in one chat group to show hatred for the community. Such queerphobic behaviour demonstrates the powerlessness that is evident when it comes to sharing information that is repurposed in harmful ways. The circulation of this particular image also had a chilling effect on the participant who now thinks that self-censorship was the best way to go when one is not sure where information may show up in the future.

Participants described some spaces for agency, personal power, and control online. They described feeling a sense of control through the practice of intentionally curating the information that they share and the platforms they use. Some participants, reflecting on their experiences in the digital diaries exercise, paid closer attention to the platforms that had more settings respecting privacy. They felt they could make use of these safer platforms such as DuckDuckGo and Firefox browser.

Imagining resistance

> "Another question I've asked myself during this process is how these companies that have our data essentially control the information that is fed into our lives through platforms such as social media, ads and video suggestions. We are using the internet innocently, but people are being hoodwinked through services such as Google search engine. I definitely no longer take the power and danger of the internet for granted like I used to do in the past". -- Participant S

Imagining resistance starts from re-imagining how people view and make use of data. Participants described how mainstream discourse often conceive data as informational rather than emotional and cultural. Participants emphasized the need to imagine data in online practices and advocacy initiatives, as something personal rather than technical. When imagined as personal, such data can be used to advance the needs of individuals or a community. Panelists in the convening shared ways in which data can best be collected and used on platforms such as social media. Participants also spoke on the need to build a supportive environment in movements to develop resistance and resilience that engages with the current structures in place. Participants shared the
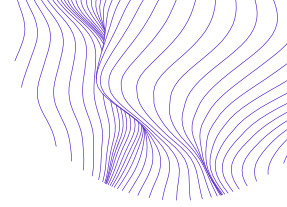
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[25] see footnote 10
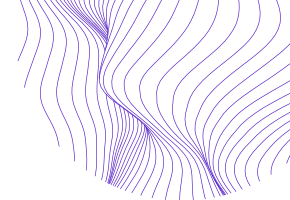
difficulties that exist when it comes to mapping ways to resisting exploitative data practices on a structural level. Firstly, the majority of participants, while having a lay understanding of data and privacy, were not equipped to challenge corporations. Participants identifying their work as activism reported that companies working in data related fields were so far removed from bigger and mainstream movements, for example, those working in feminist or queer advocacy, do not have starting points for creating transformation.

It also calls on the need to connect to the issues feminists and other activists give care to. The survey helped us scope issues of concern that people care about. Online gender-based violence particularly stood out as an issue of concern. Online gender-based violence connects to gender based violence, a social issue that people are aware of and often mobilize to address.

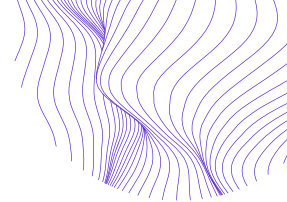| Table 1: Gendered concerns related to privacy and data % representation of participants			
	Yes – aware	Somewhat aware	No
Online gender-based violence through use of personal data to commit acts of violence such as doxing	86%	8%	6%
Dataveillance – increased surveillance by those who have access to your data	73%	20%	7%
Bias against access to services and resources based on gender and/ sexuality, such as not being able to use your voice tech system because you have a feminine voice and have a particular accent	64%	28%	8%
Discrimination to access services based on gender and sexuality, such as adequate health care that is determined using patient data	56%	30%	14%

Call to action

As we have gone through the emerging themes from this research, we share some of the actions that can be taken as our imagination of feminist resistance built off the FPI of movement. Responding to the challenges and opportunities related to navigating datafied societies requires a movement-based response. Movements allow for collective action and rely on the power of the network to build social movements, shape how people may participate in different spheres and bring in people from different communities with a shared social justice concern.

1) Governance - African feminists being present in decision making spaces to challenge patriarchal process and space as well as holding platforms to meaningfully engage with African feminists.
   a. Participation by African feminists in governance spaces to ensure a change in the way in which data practices and processes are currently thought off from the capitalist gain to centering communities for justice
   b. Designing and implement data stewardship that responds to African realities of gender inequality developed through African feminist frameworks.
   c. Developing mechanisms for accountability and transparency that document gendered harms relevant to context at regional, national and community levels. Such mechanisms may be used to hold those who hold data accountable.
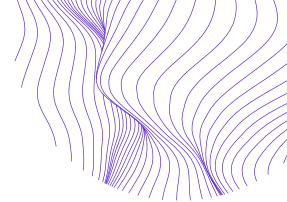
2) Movement building - connecting to different individuals through digital and analogue platforms to allow individuals to claim, construct and express themselves, genders and sexualities and building points of collaboration with diverse stakeholders,
   a. Creation of a network of African feminists, regardless of social justice area of concern, to engage with opportunities and challenges of a datafied society.
   b. Developing collective action that works towards knowledge sharing, facilitation meeting of movements and has means of collaboration that may be adapted to different contexts. This requires support from other global feminist movements to share existing resources and multidisciplinary efforts for technical, policy and community engagement work.
   c. An African Feminist Data Manifesto that may be added to existing African Feminist calls to action. It can be designed to consider intersectional concerns and provide language for advocacy and engagement by African feminists. This also serves to increase the visibility of African feminists in a way that highlights agency in the digital space.

3) Resistance - resisting the current discourse of data shaped in a patriarchal society and highlight the interconnectedness of issues in the public and private realm as well as on and offline
   a. Awareness campaigns on privacy and data protection, designed for people with varying levels of understanding on digital rights and laws in place. Campaigns could be - "Data and privacy for dummies";
   b. Documentation of opportunities and harms that highlight concerns for women and gender marginalized groups that are context specific. The documentation would need to be accessible and localized in people's different languages.
   c. Embedding different technology ways that would see innovation that draws from multiple sources of data and responsive to social needs.

Conclusion

Our inquisitive and flexible approach helped us to understand how African feminists navigate a datafied society. The research showed various ways of understanding data and privacy. We concluded that data is an extension of self and privacy is the extent of control and agency who has access and makes use of your information. However, navigating this extended self from a place of agency and control is challenging in the current datafied society. It may often leave one feeling hopeless and dejected as their data shows up in different spaces. By walking through this process with African feminists, we imagined ways of critically engaging with datafication from a place of hope and collective action. Our call to action for African Feminists means showing up in spaces of governance for more feminist framing in data and privacy discourse; movement building to connect with individuals and feminist movements on various issues; as well as resistance through rejecting the patriarchal norms and standards.

Appendix

Methodology

This research used three key approaches, which combined qualitative and quantitative data. This approach assessed the ways that data and privacy is understood by people belonging to marginalized groups disproportionately affected in the ways they interact with technology. It additionally provided context on the ways African women, LGBTQIA community members, and non-binary individuals interact with data and privacy every day and the part it plays in their daily lives. This approach builds on the research and documentation necessary to narrow down feminist principles that will play a key role in addressing gendered inequalities unique to AI.

Feminist conversation on Gender, privacy and data (March 2022)

Quantitative survey targetted towards African Feminists (March 2022)

Qualitative research with 10 African feminists from Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (April 2022)
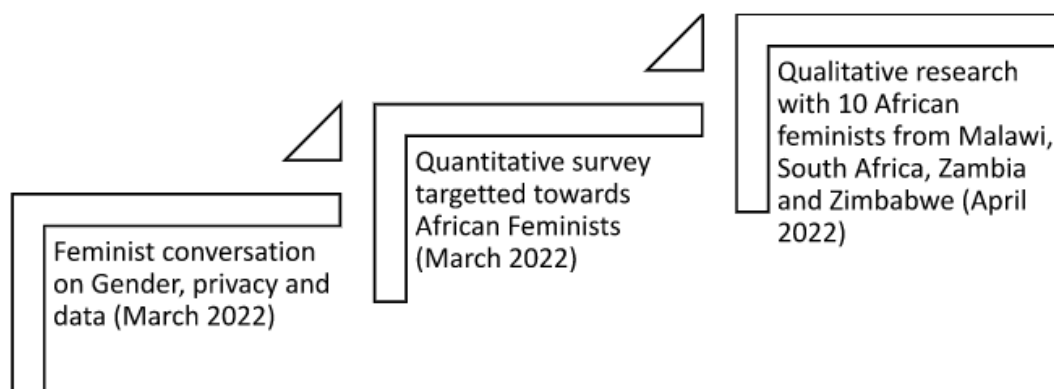
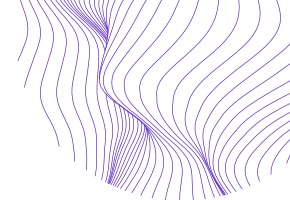Figure 3: Research Methodology tools summarized with timeline.

We sequenced the study approach to begin with a virtual discussion with purposely selected African Feminists with expertise on data, privacy, and gender to highlight why this is a feminist issue. The purpose of this workshop was to gain insight into the ways society has come to understand data and privacy, to use these insights to navigate the space mindful of potential social injustice. A survey was run for a month that was aimed at gauging awareness of African feminist on gender, privacy, and data issues. Sixty-four people from 14 countries that include diaspora engagement from the United Kingdom and US participated in the research. A majority of the respondents identified as women, two identified as non-binary and four were men. The ages of survey respondents ranged from 18 to 46+. Of the participants, 56% were aged 25-34 - this was the dominant age of participants. The survey was designed for participants to respond to close ended questions and non-identifiable information was not collected. Survey respondents opted to provide contact details to receive the final report.
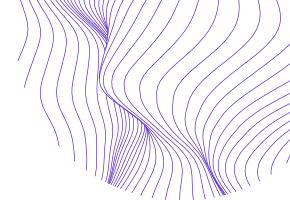
|	18 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 45	46+	Grand Total
DRC		1			1
Egypt			1		1
Gambia		2			2
Kenya	1	3	4		8
Malawi		5			5
Nigeria	1		2		3
Rwanda		1			1
Senegal		1	1		2
South Africa	1	9	7	1	18
Uganda	1	3	1		5
United Kingdom		1	1	1	3
USA		1			1
Zambia	1	3			4
Zimbabwe	2	6	2		10
Grand Total	7	36	19	2	64

We then conducted a qualitative focused study with African feminists from Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Our intention was to draw country level context analysis, which can be inferred at a regional level. This method will add to the documentation of the ways these interactions impact gender equality and lived experiences of marginalized communities. To capture the data subject focus experience, we are conducting a digital diary study where participants will reflect on their days online and assess how they think they engage with issues of data collecting and processing in their online interactions.

The participants had space to discuss their experiences navigating a day online and their reflections on data in WhatsApp groups designed for communication. Time was allocated in both week 1 and week 2 for discussion on the experiences. These discussions were guided by the researcher and created space for voice note and text-based discussions. Rules of engagement were shared with the participants to promote listening and learning, safety, curiosity and refraining from harmful language.

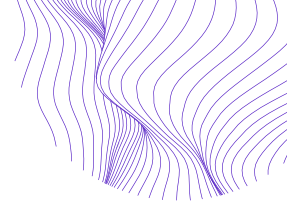| Week	Activity	Purpose
1	1. Data Day inspired by LINK 2. Exploring data traces 3. WhatsApp group discussions	1. Documentation of platforms participants interact with 2. Exploring your data traces as guided by *me and my shadow* 3. Participants will join a on the digital platform to reflect on the exercise
2	1. Day online reflection 2. Action day 3. Online group discussion via Zoom	1. In view of what you now know about your data traces and privacy concerns – what is a day online like? 2. Considering areas of concern and action points you wanted to work on, how did implementing a response activity feel like? 3. Following the exercise, what are the things that we need to do to develop resistance and resilience at community and individual levels?

Ethical considerations were reflected throughout the research process. Conversations were held on a secure platform with security measures put in place against online attacks. Rules of engagement were also shared with the community to ensure a safe space for gender marginalized groups. The survey was designed to collect the least amount of data and it asked respondents to self-identify their gender and share contact information solely for purposes of receiving the final report. The qualitative ethics in place practiced active consent with participants free to either exit the research if they no longer felt comfortable or withdraw insights already shared. Anonymity was also guaranteed throughout the project. Rules of conduct were shared with all the participants that would indicate active moderation of the digital platform and respect for information practiced ensuring a safe space. The participants also had a chance to review the final report.
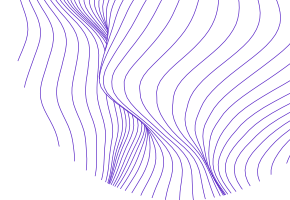
About the Author

Chenai Chair is a digital policy and gender expert with extensive experience in work that is focused on understanding the impact of technology in society in order to better public interest in policy. She has built her expertise with extensive experience in work that is focused on understanding the impact of technology in society through research and public policy assessment. Her work draws on principles of feminism in assessing digital technology. She has developed projects focused on privacy, data protection and AI as Mozilla 2019/2020 fellow - available on mydatarights.africa. Chenai is currently a senior program officer at Mozilla Foundation.

Tinatswe Mhaka (BA) (LLB) is an author, lawyer, feminist digital storyteller, and activist from Harare, Zimbabwe. Tinatswe is the founder of Feminist Voices Zimbabwe, an organization strengthening gender advocacy and access to justice through documentation and dissemination of information. Tinatswe is passionate about digital media and the mainstreaming of injustices prevalent against women in the global south. She has numerous publications related to the emancipation of women through law and policy. Tinatswe is the host of The Feminist Bar Podcast and is currently the Gender & Women's Rights Fellow at Apolitical Foundation.

Acknowledgements