

Moya Bailey. *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*.

New York: New York University Press, 2021.

SHANIA PERERA

Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey's excellent collection of essays *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* provides important insight into how black women utilize digital media to amplify their voices amid vitriol from a white, cisgender, and heteronormative majority. Coined by Bailey in 2008, the term *misogynoir* refers to "the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience, particularly in US visual and digital culture." (1). It describes "the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization." (1). Bailey's text is ripe with examples of misogynoir in popular media that justify the necessity of digital resistance in online spaces. This resistance, as Bailey claims, has the potential to transform into tangible collective action. She states that digital alchemy redefines everyday digital media into "social justice media" (24) which then represents women of color, Black women, and Black non-binary, agender, and gender-variant folks in an affirmative and positive light. Bailey provides various instances of the defensive and generative digital alchemy which serves as a mode of resistance against misogynoir. As she contends, the transformation of mis-

ogynoir aims to lessen the online and offline violence against Black women, and, in effect, women of color, Black non-binary, agender, and gender-variant people.

I was introduced to Bailey's work in a Feminist Media Studies graduate seminar where we read the first chapter of *Misogynoir Transformed*, titled "Misogynoir is a Drag." The insight in this section provides the groundwork for the analyses offered in the remainder of the book, which are as interesting as they are heartbreaking. Here Bailey delves into the politics behind the filming of and subsequent virality of the physical assault of black women and girls at the hands of police and other authorities. These abuses of power are apparent in the cases of Dajerria Becton, a girl known as "Shakara," and Niya Kenny, all of which are considered in Bailey's analysis of the various instances in which Black women and girls encounter misogynoir in modern media, online spaces, and reality. The term "drag" is used in this chapter to demonstrate its various connotations: drag queen culture, Black vernacular English which implies humiliation, and the verb of physically "dragging." These contemporary understandings resonate throughout the text, which consistently read with ease and contained an admirable intersectional approach.

For instance, Bailey always makes reference to “women of color, Black women, Black non-binary, agender, and gender-variant folks” as those who are most often marginalized in digital spaces and modern society (20). The inclusion of this spectrum speaks to her astute analysis of the various ways these groups encounter misogynoir, as “there are masculine-of-center, agender, and nonbinary people who experience the deleterious effects of misogynoir and who may not identify as women or femmes.” (20).

In line with this brilliant point, Bailey’s insights are often quite nuanced, such as her claim that Black women and Black Feminists are not synonymous since “misogynoir is deployed because of social beliefs about Black women, and those...who are read as Black women...get caught in the crosshairs.” (20). Indeed, marginalized people, under patriarchy and white supremacy, can marginalize their own. Internalized racism and misogyny do exist amongst women and women of colour, often appearing in various social contexts. Demonstrating her awareness of this fact, Bailey uses the examples of queer women in the media, such as musical artist Syd joking about hitting women amongst her male colleagues and comedian Lena Waithe writing the viral YouTube video “Shit Black Girls Say” which appeals to masses that tend to perpetuate misogynoir. Bailey’s bold observation is essential to understanding that misogynoir can and has been articulated beyond the scope of the white majority. Next, the chapter “Transforming Misogynoir Through Trans Advocacy” provides instances of trans advocacy through the discussion of viral

hashtags on Twitter such as #Girls-LikeUs, a source of online upliftment and validation amongst trans women; #TWOC (trans women of color); and #FreeCeCe, an organizational effort to mobilize support for a trans woman (Cece McDonald) imprisoned for defending herself against Neo-Nazis. As Bailey argues, “Black women are repurposing the capitalist tools of social media into tools that allow them to grow community, share resources, and even advocate for each other’s safety and health” highlighting the significance of social media platforms in the mobilization of the marginalized (71). This has been most prevalent through the actions of writer and trans advocate Janet Mock, as well as trans actress Laverne Cox, who have both facilitated and participated in these hashtags as a mode of resistance to redefine the “realness” of womanhood. Chapter 3, titled “Web Show Worldbuilding Mitigates Misogynoir,” contains close readings of relevant Black queer women’s web series, including *Skye’s the Limit* (2013), *Between Women* (2011–) and *195 Lewis* (2017). Bailey claims that these shows “both trouble and perpetuate misogynoir,” offering insights into the complicated and oftentimes nuanced worldbuilding of queer Black women (105). Her critiques of the works of renowned Black filmmaker Tyler Perry and the plethora of anti-Black media that are often promoted as humorous is essential to understanding the proliferation of misogynoir in entertainment. Stereotypical figures such as the “Jezebel,” “Mammy,” and “Sapphire” are referenced as damaging portrayals of Black women in film and television that ought to be challenged by viewers. Further, her critical analysis of the so-

cial repercussions of the YouTube video “Shit Black Girls Say” is memorable, as there is certainly a facet of online culture that mocks and utilizes the figure of the Black woman as a means of relatability for those who are not Black. This persists in online spaces even today, and it is essential to question why this is the case. The comparisons made between a viral piece of media such as “Shit Black Girls Say” and the lesser-known web-shows *Skye’s the Limit* and *Between Women* (2011–2015) are intriguing, as there seems to be more of a gravitation towards the damaging portrayals of Black women over those that battle misogynoir through honest representation of the very real challenges Black women, Black non-binary, agender, and gender-variant folks face. Bailey successfully asks audiences to rethink their consumption of certain media so that they may not continue to contribute to a culture that makes light of these groups instead of uplifting them.

The final chapter of *Misogynoir Transformed*, titled “Alchemists in Action Against Misogynoir” highlights the platform of Tumblr, a blogging site, as a space of digital resistance. As it was most popular in the mid 2010s, it seems to be commonly agreed upon that Tumblr is an irrelevant online space in today’s digital milieu. This is an observation that Bailey chooses to disregard in her analysis. With the rise of more prevalent social media platforms, particularly TikTok, that have grown adjacent to the publication of *Misogynoir Transformed*, there is certainly more to be said in Bailey’s discussion of online safe spaces and discourse. Nevertheless, she significantly notes the role of Tumblr in the history of preliminary

online community-building. After all, the website “kick-started many teenagers’ interest in social justice, an interest that pushed many into more meaningful political battles on more mainstream platforms.” (Eloise). Bailey is cognizant of the fact that social media plays a large role in digital alchemy, as evidenced by the defensive hashtags on Twitter and the online spaces offered by blogging sites such as Tumblr. She states that, “Twitter and Tumblr are two social media platforms that have facilitated organizing and exchange for Black trans women who might not otherwise be able to connect.” (Bailey 102). Her book does not suggest, however, that these platforms are inherently positive, as misogyny is significantly perpetuated throughout the very spaces in which Black women attempt to find solace. Indeed, “Tumblr is a tool, a platform that is helpful until it is not... it can also lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings that make continued use of the platform unsustainable.” (167). It is notable that the concept of the ‘Tumblr Social Justice Warrior’ emerged as backlash against those who attempted to spread awareness of social justice issues on the platform. The people who tend to support this concept also perpetuate ideas that pertain to misogynoir (Eloise). Alternatively, Bailey’s discussion with nonbinary femme Danielle “Strugg” Cole includes a section on the “ideal social media platform,” which Cole describes as a space of accountability for those who may wander into racist, sexist, and otherwise offensive territory online (Bailey 157). According to Bailey the concept of “calling in” (154) as opposed to calling out these behaviors contributes to a form of trans-

formative justice that radically teaches those who may not understand the extent of social justice issues. Here Bailey and Cole offer a surface level, yet effective, solution to encounters of injustice and misogynoir both online and offline. While Tumblr may not have been successful in its potential for positive collectivity, there seems to be more productive work being proliferated through new platforms.

Bailey successfully provides a captivating glance into Black women's digital and offline resistance in the wake of an array of relevant social justice movements. The book demonstrates that the transformation of misogynoir into collective and effective action is an ongoing process that we can attend to in solidarity with women of color, Black women, and Black

non-binary, agender and gender-variant people. The most significant lesson offered by *Misogynoir Transformed* is its insistence that we acknowledge the groundwork laid out by these marginalized groups, who have and continue to set the precedent for digital and offline resistance against hatred.

References

- Bailey, Moya. *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. New York: New York University Press, 2021.
- Eloise, Marianne. "Rise and Fall of the Reblog: 10 Years of Tumblr," *Paper Magazine*, December 26, 2019, <https://www.papermag.com/ten-years-of-tumblr-2010s-2641949795.html?rebellitem=26#rebellitem26>.