

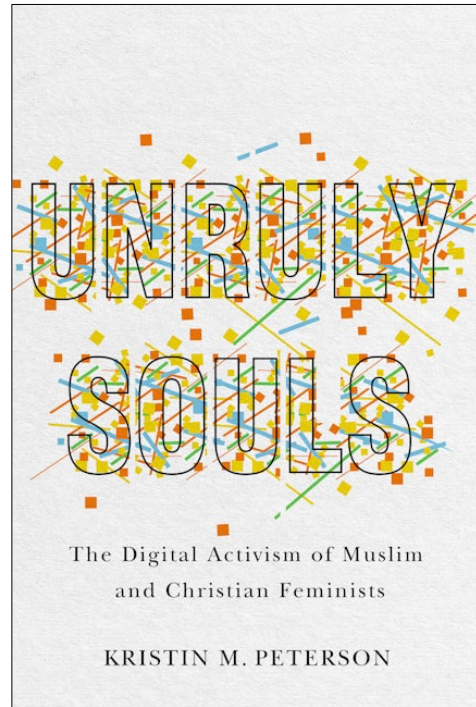
Kristin M. Peterson, **Unruly Souls: The Digital Activism of Muslim and Christian Feminists**, Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2022, 192 pp., \$120.00 (hardcover), \$29.95 (softcover).

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In her book, ***Unruly Souls: The Digital Activism of Muslim and Christian Feminists***, Kristin M. Peterson takes her readers on an exciting and refreshing, yet challenging and thought-provoking, tour into the little known and largely understudied world of Muslim and Christian digital feminists. The book draws a rich picture depicting the myriad forms of expression that young women digital activists belonging to these faith traditions engage in on a regular basis, using a number of artistic modes of expression, ranging from hip-hop music videos to memes and podcasts, to resist dominant patriarchal power structures within their religious circles of influence and social power networks.

The book is certainly bold, daring, and unconventional in terms of the topic it chooses to tackle, as well as the examples it includes to make its arguments. By including examples of both Muslim and Christian women who decided to draw outside of the lines and to cross taboo zones and boundaries in their own unique ways, when it comes to expressing their gendered identities and their varying brands of religiosity, spirituality, and sexuality, the author does not shy away from taking readers outside of their conventional comfort zones to help them see the myriad experiences of these “unruly” digital activists and come close to understanding their subjectivities and their individualized modes of knowing, being, and doing.

The voices that are loudly, and unapologetically, heard throughout this book are those of women who feel that they are not perfectly “fitting into” traditionally expected norms of conventional womanhood that are dictated by patriarchal power structures within their faith communities, based on their race, ethnicity, sexuality, beliefs, or even body size and image. Instead of giving into these norms and struggling to fit into these preconceived notions and expectations, these women decided to engage in a different struggle to defy and challenge these norms, using equally daring modes of digital expression, such as hip-hop music videos, Twitter hashtags, podcasts, memes, and Instagram selfies. The justification behind their reliance on these digital platforms is best captured in this quote from Peterson’s book: “Traditional religious spaces rarely welcome criticism from the margins, so digital spaces like Twitter, Instagram, podcasts, and digital videos offer creative outlets for these significant critiques” (p. 93).



In that sense, it could be said that the concept of “unruliness” that Peterson focuses on in this important book is not just about activism, or even resistance; rather, it could very well be seen as an act of *rebellion*. Throughout the five chapters in the book, Peterson provides examples of varying forms of rebellious actions and activities that these young women digital activists take part in to make their oftentimes silenced voices heard and to shed light on their marginalized identities and their invisible lived realities, needs, dreams, and aspirations.

In chapter 1, Peterson unpacks the intersecting power structures of racial, religious, and gender oppression in American society. In chapter 2, she explores the digital activism of Christian women who used Twitter hashtags and Facebook posts to recover from what the author describes as *religious trauma*, and she explains how their relentless efforts gave birth to the #ChurchToo movement, which helped expose abusers and remove them from their positions of power. In chapter 3, she sheds light on the digital activism of Muslim women influencers who used their mediated platforms to resist the gender stereotyping and misrepresentations of Muslim women. In chapter 4, she offers examples illustrating how Black Christian women have been relying on podcasts to offer an alternative view of what *womanhood* is all about. Finally, in chapter 5, she examines the reliance on unconventional modes of expression, such as rap and hip-hop music videos, by Muslim feminists to defy patriarchy, misogyny, and stereotyping.

Throughout the book, Peterson problematizes our understanding of the notions of identity, feminism, religiosity, sexuality, and resistance as hybrid, shifting, and controversial concepts in an equally shifting and rapidly changing modern world. She skillfully illustrates how these Muslim and Christian feminist activists are simultaneously engaging in multiple layers of resistance and pushback against stereotyping, profiling, and misrepresentation, as well as misogyny, patriarchy, and male-dominated interpretations of religious texts. She explains how, by doing so, they are constantly oscillating between the secular and the religious, the traditional and the modern, the old and the new, and the online and the offline. In unpacking these complex phenomena, Peterson explains how these hybrid identities are giving birth to equally hybrid modes of digital expression, with all their complexities, nuances, and ambivalences.

The book is innovative and groundbreaking in a number of meaningful and significant ways that contribute to the existing bodies of literature in feminist studies, queer studies, digital media studies, and religious studies, among others. First, instead of focusing on the digital activism exercised by the members of one particular faith community, this book simultaneously explores the digital activism of two unlikely bed fellows, namely Muslim and Evangelical Christian women, and shows how, despite their differences and discrepancies, they have shared commonalities, such as the strong need for distinct self-expression and unique identity formation using newly invented and innovative digital platforms and modes of artistic expression.

Second, in a perfect fit with the eclectic voices and identities that are unpacked in this book, Peterson relies on equally eclectic theoretical frameworks, including intersectional, feminist, Black feminist, de-colonial, and queer theoretical perspectives, which allow her to delve into a deep and nuanced examination of diverse feminist and religious identities and to offer a savvy and sophisticated explanation of the multiple ways through which the women in her study boldly break conventional norms and push for social change.

Third, the book succeeds in illustrating the complexities within, and between, these groups of feminist activists. In other words, it does not fall into the trap of a "one size fits all" type of feminism. Rather, it acknowledges the diversities, distinctions, and even uniqueness of each group. It also illustrates how the communities that these women belong to have been "excluding" the perceived "Other." For example, she explains in chapter 1 how White evangelicals typically excluded "Blacks" and "women" from their networks and spaces, both online and offline, and how they largely perceived the Muslim people, in general, and Muslim women, in particular, as in need of saving. This last point refers to a phenomenon largely known as the "save the Muslim woman syndrome," which is based on the ethnocentric assumption that Muslim women constantly need help and support from the more advanced and developed Western world in order to save them, a notion that the Muslim digital activists in this book push back against.

Fourth, although the book relies on analyzing digitally-mediated content through mediums such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, it does not fall into the trap of "technological determinism," which privileges the tools over the actors through over crediting them with paving the way for change and enacting reform. Rather, the author is keen to pay special attention to the *actors* themselves, through analyzing the numerous ways through which they amplify their voices and break their self-identified chains in defiance to any form of perceived repression and domination, both socially and religiously.

Fifth, in achieving the above goals, Peterson is sensitive to providing lively examples, using a qualitative, ethnographic, and culture-centered research approach, to make the women who are covered in her research study as close to the readers' hearts and minds as possible. In doing so, she includes their moments of joy and playfulness when taking a selfie, making a joke, or posting a meme online to help us capture their real humanity and everyday lived realities that transcend the realms of resistance and struggle. Peterson acknowledges the ethical considerations that are involved in conducting this type of Internet-based research, and she fully explains her efforts to circumvent them.

The fact that the book is multidisciplinary and cross-cuts various fields of knowledge, in addition to the academically sophisticated yet widely accessible and easy to understand language with which it is written, and its inclusion of visually impactful and attractive content certainly broadens its appeal to a wide spectrum of academic and nonacademic audiences alike. It is highly recommended reading for scholars, researchers, and students in the fields of media studies, digital studies, feminist studies, religious studies, and beyond.