

Menstrual cyber-activism: feminism in social networks

Ciberactivismo menstrual: feminismo en las redes sociales

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the use of digital platforms by feminist communities and women who focus their work on the dissemination of the naturalization and depathologization of the female body and the menstrual cycle. This cyber-activism proposal poses among its objectives the questioning of the blood taboo in order to transform the menstrual experience of young and adult women. They promote the use of ecological technologies and propose corporal and appropriation ways through feminine representations linked to a feminized notion of the sacred, a question that characterizes the female spirituality of alternative bases and ecofeminism in its symbolic constructions. Through digital ethnography and multisite ethnography, this article analyzes the ways in which menstrual cyber-activism is configured from the social networks, the symbols, discourses and narratives that these groups and profiles use to achieve their objectives, as well as the interweaving of feminist, ecofeminist and spiritual discourses on corporal appropriation, self-knowledge and self-care.

Keywords

Cyber-activism;
menstrual activism;
digital ethnography;
feminism; corporality

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza el uso de las plataformas digitales por parte de colectivos y mujeres que centran su trabajo en la difusión de la naturalización y despatologización del cuerpo femenino y del ciclo menstrual. Esta propuesta de ciberactivismo plantea entre sus objetivos el cuestionamiento del tabú de la sangre, con el fin de transformar la vivencia menstrual de mujeres jóvenes y adultas. Promueven el uso de tecnologías ecológicas y proponen modos de apropiación corporal a través de representaciones femeninas vinculadas con una noción feminizada de lo sagrado, cuestión que caracteriza a la espiritualidad femenina de bases alternativas y al ecofeminismo en sus construcciones simbólicas. Mediante la etnografía digital y la etnografía multisituada, este artículo analiza los modos en los cuales se configura el ciberactivismo menstrual desde las redes sociales, los símbolos, discursos y narrativas que estos grupos y perfiles utilizan para lograr sus objetivos, así como el entretrejimiento de los discursos feministas, ecofeministas y espirituales sobre la apropiación corporal, el autoconocimiento y el autocuidado.

Palabras clave

Ciberactivismo;
activismo menstrual;
etnografía digital;
feminismo; corporalidad

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Introduction

Currently, social networks are means of information generation and dissemination, but they are also contact routes for millions of people around the world. Through their peak, circulation and appropriation, these networks have fueled the emergence of virtual collectives that, sometimes, are part of a continuum of offline social groups and, some others appear as “endemic” and exclusive groups of digital spaces. Digital spaces, besides allowing people coming together, have fostered the emergence of social movements that respond to specific and local issues which triggered modes of activism that take social networks and their rationales as dissemination, content creation and accompaniment spaces.

This paper aims at analyzing the use of digital platforms by collectives and women focused on the diffusion of the naturalization and depathologization of the female body and the menstrual cycle. This proposal is based on the transformation of the menstrual experience as a process distant from the biomedical vision; i.e., it presents menstruation as one of the access points far from the biomedical vision, giving importance to self-knowledge as a gateway to individual transformation and the reconfiguration of both cognitive and experience-based process of the body and hormones. Moreover, it questions and tries to revert the taboo that has accompanied menses as a contaminating fluid that was historically used to place women in a secondary position given their characteristics and bodily and reproductive processes.

This proposal is linked, in turn, to two major social processes. On the one hand, with the promotion of body autonomy promoted by feminist movements, and, on the other hand, with the construction of a sacred narrative regarding the body that has spread widely through circles and circuits of alternative-based feminine spirituality. Hence, the so-called conscious menstruation acquires a space within the feminized spirituality narratives, but it is also part of the political actions that consider the body as a space of significance and resistance through the different modes of activism in this menstrual case.

Therefore, this paper analyzes the emergence of menstrual activism that uses social networks as a space for content dissemination and creation. The configuration of menstrual cyber-activism, symbols, narratives that these groups and profiles used to achieve their objectives as well as interweave feminist, ecofeminist and spiritual discourses on the body appropriation, self-knowledge and self-care in these forms of activism from the network, is analyzed through digital ethnography (Ardèvol and Gómez, 2012) in pages of menstrual activism and multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 2001) in workshops, discussion panels and women’s circles in Mexico.

With these objectives in mind, the common thread of this paper is partly to define the meaning of cyber-activism in the framework of collective actions on digital networks.

We continue with the analysis of menstrual activism by establishing its bases and general proposals. Symbols, central narratives and links that intertwine this activist proposal with the conscious menstruation with offline women's groups, and with the conception of the sacred body and with contemporary feminist discourses are studied. Lastly, we present some contents generated by collectives and groups on the net with the purpose of providing elements to analyze the forms of diffusion and circulation of narratives regarding the proposals derived from menstrual activism.

This paper provides elements of reflection regarding the use of digital platforms by collectives and women that promote alternative ways of living bodily processes from different narratives that derive from spiritual as well as biomedical and feminists discourses for the dissemination of ideas and the connection between social and political constructs regarding bodies and the shapes they acquire in technologically mediated spaces. In turn, it emphasizes the importance of using and applying multiple methodologies to analyze social phenomena and the presence of spiritual narratives outside the ritual spaces that contain them and that are presented beyond their material supports and their specific practices.

Contemporary (Cyber)activisms

From the analyses of modernity and its effects on the ways people relate to one another, we have found a paradox. On the one hand, we note individualization exercises that are exacerbated by the productive dynamics and the use of technological tools, and, on the other hand, we notice the need to congregate and relate both online and offline with the purpose of sharing ideas, objectives, beliefs, practices and thus, building ourselves in this permanent exercise of creation a self in relation. According to Zafra (2015), solitude determines the intimate alliances between the subject and the machine, but the community is capable of leading demands that, otherwise, would not have any resonance or social significance.

Therefore, in this exercise of the creation of a self, of social relationships of verification of beliefs and collective actions, we find a particular mode of congregation known as activism. In simple terms, activism is defined as a set of actions that invites social participation and that is aimed at generating changes or reaching common goals (Oliver, 1984). Activism is related to changes and demands on rights, citizenship and establishes a particular mode of making politics from a civil partnership, but, as we will see, they are not the only frameworks that present activism.

In this context where the network and digital environments make the circulation and the sharing of ideas and individual as well as collective objectives possible, activism has found in these environments a space to express itself and to exist through the tools and scopes provided by the use of information technologies.¹

Cyber-activism is understood as “a strategy to form temporary coalitions of people that, by using network tools, generate sufficient critical mass of information and debate to transcend the blogosphere and to go out to the streets or to perceptibly modify the behavior of a great number of people” (De Ugalde, 2007 *cfr.* en Burgos, 2017). In terms of strategy, cyber-activism is considered an unconventional way of political participation that uses technology as an open field of action through different digital platforms.

In these cyber-activist strategies, we cannot overlook these two central elements: 1) the role of the subjects and 2) the potentials and social scopes of this mode of activism. Regarding the first, and following Del Hoyo, Fernández and García (2014), the cyber-activist subject is an active online as well as offline agent. This breaks with the dissociation between the “real” world and the virtual world that characterized the first analyses regarding the studies on digital networks, since these social movements and actions have a correlate both inside and outside the net (Ardèvol and Gómez, 2012). Moreover, the cyber-activism feeds on the production and circulation of contents through the net and of the reactions received by the users that share or distance themselves from the proposals of different activisms on the digital platforms.

According to Burgos (2017), cyber-activism is characterized by the empowerment, collaborative culture, free distribution and access to information, questions that allow generating strategies and forms of collective actions from the net and in offline contexts.

On the other hand, according to Zafra (2004) and Gago (2019), cyber-feminism originated in the 1990s with the emergence of the net.art (Gago, 2019, p.14). However, the works of VNS Matrix² and Sadie Plant’s analysis were the first in addressing the phenomenon from a feminist perspective. Plant (1997) pointed out that cyber-feminism as a theoretical argumentation concept where human beings and the theory of information would find new ways of building the subject and the human identity. Alongside with other research on this emerging phenomenon, Plant saw in cyber-activism “an open window to end the patriarchal system, which means ensuring new scenarios to achieve the equality of rights between men and women” (Gago, 2019, p. 12).

Galoway (1997), when analyzing Plant’s arguments, points out that this author had a clear interest in the feminine based on the approach of the computer binary system – where zero represented the feminine and one, the masculine-. One of her greater impact ideas was the use of the metaphor of the matrix to raise the importance of women in the development and use of technology, since she “compares the computing matrix of computers to the feminine matrix, arguing that computer systems have more in common with women than with men” (Gago, 2019, p. 25).

However, even with these so radical and optimistic origins, cyber-feminism is far from being a homogeneous practice, since its uses and applications in modernity refer to

projects, thoughts, movements as well as to different ideals and interests; they can be an efficient gateway to feminism and to the questioning on how spaces of interaction are being modified by technology and, in turn, be “a territory of empowerment, but also of repetition of old inequalities for women” (Zafra, 2015 *cf.* en Gago, 2019, p. 296).

Menstrual Activism

To analyze the topic of menstrual activism, it is necessary to start by establishing the bases that support this mode of activism and the proposals that emerge from this movement. First, to talk of menstruation from the cultural and social spheres more than from the biological sphere, is a relatively recent phenomenon. This statement was not accidental since talking of body fluids and more specifically of menstrual bleeding has historically been linked to the taboo of being considered a contaminating fluid.

Douglas (1980), by suggesting that the body is the microcosm of social life and one of the classifying spaces *par excellence*, developed an extensive analysis of the pure and the contaminating in different cultures, using as an example menstrual bleeding and the individual or collective actions regarding it. Douglas sustains that “our ideas of filth express symbolic systems as well as the difference between contamination behavior in different parts of the world is only a question of details” (1980, p. 54). The rules regarding modern hygiene are based on the prohibition of the contact with contaminating elements, being those body fluids that, by breaking the physical limits of the body, become one of the major sources of danger.

However, this is not the only reference that links menstrual bleeding to a fluid and a process that cannot be uttered. There is an abundance of ethnographic references where we can find clues of the negative construct of the menstrual cycle from cultural and religious practices.³ However, the secrecy and the taboo regarding blood are based on the approach of the feminine body made from the biomedical science, where the knowledge of the hormonal process was developed through the emphasis of the menstrual cycle as a key piece for human reproduction and printing a series of specific hygiene rules that are (still) striving given their concealment and pathologization.

The fact is that menstruation is a process experienced by more than half of the world population, and culturally, it has been construed as one of the biological and essential factors to classify women. “Becoming a woman” as of the first menstrual bleeding, is a sentence that, until now, is repeated to young women and indicates their reproductive potential, which adds public value before social reproduction and the species.

However, all these constructs on the taboo, concealment and even of menstruation as a pathological fact (when referring to the so-called premenstrual dysphoric disorder),⁴ have been questioned based on considering this body process from its sociocultural construct – not as a merely physiological matter – from feminist movements and groups

of women today, where the imprint of transforming the concealment and the ignorance of the feminine body – or menstruating bodies - have been raised to provide the necessary knowledge to the subjects of their own body, their biological, emotional and psychological processes and thus, revert the secrecy and the pathologization of the menstrual experience.

Second-wave feminism condemned the different forms of control over the feminine body under the slogan “my body is mine” (Felitti, 2016, p. 187). This slogan that continues to be valid in women’s mobilizations and beyond political feminisms, involved the implementation of a series of collective and individual actions that propose empowering and giving women the self-knowledge tools necessary for a subjective and experiential appropriation of their own bodies and from their own narratives.

According to Bobel (2011, p. 123), to focus on menstruation is part of a complex and long-lasting feminist project that strives to place the body from the subject, since the negative representations of the menstrual cycle reveal the way in which these discourses were internalized and reproduced also by women.

Along these lines, the same author considers that menstrual activism is a movement that has emerged and has been reproduced in different parts of the world and has the political importance that has seldom been recognized. In her book *New Blood: Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation*, Bobel (2010) develops two topics that are considered central to contemporaneous menstrual activism: 1) the relation that this activism develops regarding health and 2) the models of menstrual activism.

Regarding the first, Bobel (2010) draws a line between menstrual activism, women health movement, environmentalism and the consumption of alternative products. As part of the political position, there is a nominal distance between hygiene and health, since speaking of hygiene remits to the impure and to invisibility and, using the term health leads to discussions on public policies and rights.

In this sense, the contemporary proposals of menstrual activism are based on a story where health and the body autonomy is key to transforming the taboo, but they also aim at consuming new alternatives for the treatment of bleeding (among them, the menstrual cup or cloth compresses, that have had a representative boom⁵ and that are part of the ecological market focused on the body and its fluids).

Regarding the second topic, it is necessary to acknowledge that menstrual activism directed its actions to the naturalization of menses, but also to the acknowledgement of the importance of the body experiences through exercises of promotion of self-knowledge (González, 2016, p. 85). Therefore, Bobel, based on the analysis of the emergence of menstrual activism, points out two models: González (2016).

1. A radical menstrual activism that – according to González (2016) is situated within the framework of the so-called feminist third wave – seeks to break from the narrowness of the gender binary thought and talks about menstruating bodies more than the women that menstruate; promotes the use of alternative, ecological and reusable technologies for the treatment of bleeding: uses the media, networks, the performance and the personal productions (web pages, fanzines, illustrations, etc.) to diffuse information.
2. A spiritual activism (more related to the second-wave feminism) that is characterized in considering the menstruation as a sacred, empowering and emotionally relevant process for women’s lives. This aspect of activism focuses on the work on self-knowledge, body literacy, celebration of rituals, dance circles, conferences, gatherings or circles, and celebrates menstruation and the different phases of the hormonal and vital cycles based on the sacralization of the feminine.⁶

While this division is representative and is a compulsory reference for the analysis of menstrual activisms, the fact is that these two models of activism tend to dialogue with each other even if they have significant differences and practical, organizational and political positions. The radical activism, together with the rise of the queer theory and the questioning of the binary system in the classification of the genders, has maintained its open and inclusive position to speak of menstruating bodies and to question essentialist views regarding the meaning of being a woman and the pathological views in regard to their processes.

The networks, academic spaces, mode and art, have been privileged spaces to dialogue, share and generate contents that brings this message to more people to achieve a level of appropriation of the discourses and practice under the mark of naturalizing the menstruation beyond the determination of gender, and promoting other non-essentialist narratives surrounding bodies; question that has positioned them politically –even before contemporary feminisms– and from a theoretical, secular activist discourse.

Spiritual activism preserves and diffuses a sacralized vision of the body that relies on New Age-type alternative spiritualities, references to native religions, ecofeminism or from the feminization of the sacred (Ramírez, 2019); provides and promotes the need to create pedagogies that foster self-knowledge and the subjective relation with the corporality and the emotion through a holistic and sacred vision of the feminine body; incorporates –in some cases– the narrative of menstruating bodies, but also of those non menstruating, particularly in the case of menopause and its experience; besides using the networks, the art and the public space (circles, rituals, workshops and talks) to promote alternative and subjective forms on menstruation.

To a large extent, they do not only seek to exalt the qualities being assumed as feminine and which have been undervalued, but also – from a model of spiritual and alternative activism – to question the norms and rules that derive from the traditional religions where women’s bodies are considered dangerous, contaminating and close to sin.

Both models share the transformation of the taboo and the menstrual experience from cultural constructs different from the pathologizing vision; they also share the promotion of the use of ecological and sustainable technologies for the treatment of bleeding and even its visibility –as the case of the so-called free bleeding–⁷ in favor of its normalization. Both models are related with feminism, one with a secular basis and the other linked with alternative beliefs, but having in common the body with political space, the menstruation as a process of resistance and the activism as a model in which the political actions regarding the menstrual treatment and the body autonomy are capable of generating changes in their cultural conceptions.

Menstrual Activism from the Networks

With the increasing use of information technologies, many causes find in social networks a space to diffuse and generate contents and question social imaginaries that seem immovable. Menstrual activism is a form of activism that is carried out in offline as well as online contexts, at times promoted by groups organized in local and transnational networks, or from the individual motivation to share knowledge and experiences. Whether from the radical or the spiritual model, menstrual activism in recent years has been present and has risen from social networks and digital platforms where contents are diffused that seek questioning what “we have been told” on menses.⁸

A journey through the pages and proposals of the menstrual activism existing on the network is a difficult task due to the amount of information available and accessible through the web; particularly because since 2015, at least in the case of Latin America, menstruation and its activist correlate had mediatic visibility from importation policies that provoked a crisis in the distribution of menstrual hygiene products in the case of Argentina. Felitti (2016) reports that “tampons were lacking, and debates and accusations erupted, while many women were in the beaches and pools. This context served to generate discussion on the topic and offered an opportunity to promote other alternatives, especially the silicone cup manufactured nationally”. (p. 186)

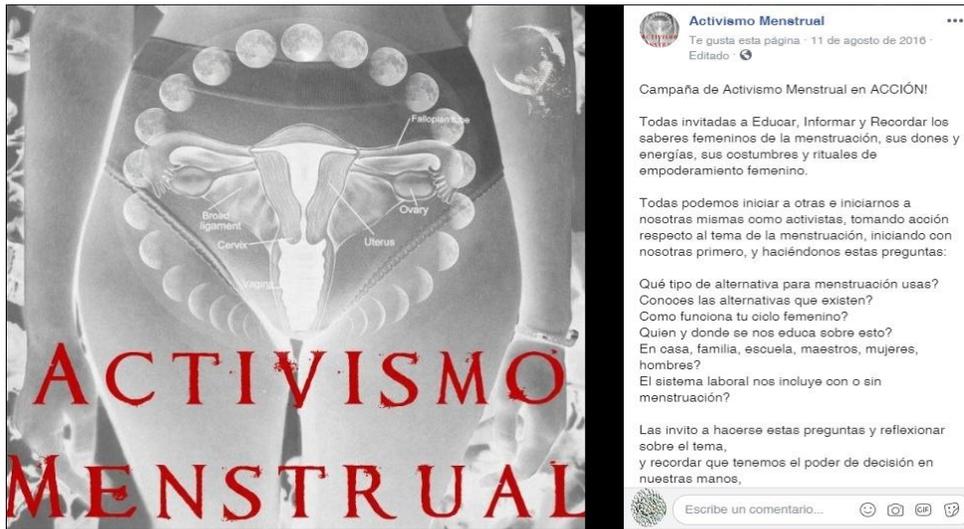
With the emergence of the topic on the distribution of menstrual hygiene products and the contamination that cause the promotion of ecological alternative, the implementation of programs and projects for the distribution of menstrual cups or the manufacturing of homemade cloth compresses (e.g., the movie *Period. End of sentence*, that won an Oscar in 2019 as the best short documentary) became increasingly more common, but collective, personal and virtual projects also gained greater visibility.

Through multi-sited ethnography in feminine spiritual circles and through digital ethnography, several pages in Spanish have been identified that address directly menstrual pedagogy, conscious menstruation and the promotion of alternative technologies to approach bleeding. These profiles highlight the promotion of an international movement in favor of menstrual visibility and the transformation of the taboo through blogs, publications, twits, Facebook pages, Instagram accounts and personal pages (see Picture 1).



Picture 1. I bleed, I stain my panties and I am not disgusted.
Stephanie Chávez [@stephanie.chavess] (2019, April 14th).

Some of these pages are recommended by the users of social networks or through feminist and spirituality circles. One of the most well-known – is blog *El camino rubí*⁹ (The Rubi Path), but we also found projects focused on menstrual pedagogy for new generations as is the case of *Princesas Menstruantes*¹⁰ (Menstruating Princesses), *Viaje al ciclo menstrual*¹¹ (Voyage to the Menstrual Cycle), and spaces of promotion of menstrual technologies and conscious menstruation, such as *Menstruación consciente SLP*¹² (SLP Conscious Menstruation), *Toalla sana*¹³ (Healthy Pads), *Jardineser*,¹⁴ *Ixchel Ecoalternativas*¹⁵ (Ecoalternative Ixchel), *La Crecida. Ecofeminismo y Menstruación Consciente*¹⁶ (The Grown One. Ecofeminism and Conscious Menstruation), *Activismo menstrual*¹⁷ (Menstrual Activism), among others (Pictures 2 and 3).



Picture 2. Menstrual Activism (August 11th, 2016).
Menstrual Activism Campaign in Action (Facebook update).



Picture 3. The Grown One. Ecofeminism and Conscious Menstruation (May 12th, 2019).

In these pages, the network users can find different materials, articles, pictures and contents that provide information on the non-pathologized menstrual experience, the importance of the emotions in the hormonal cycle, the different phases of the cycle from the biomedical and spiritual perspective, the sale and the accompaniment for the use of

alternative technological and discourses on the body, its sacrality and its importance as political space.

These pages are not only sites of concentration and production of information but also reflectors that invite those that visit these sites to change the narrative about the body and the experience from virtual spaces (through likes. Sharing a post or a picture) inviting that this affinity shown virtually be reflected in personal and collective actions from everyday spaces in an offline context.

Oftentimes, these pages are the digital version of collectives, women and projects that work on different spheres (that go from schools, prisons, health centers, government agencies, spiritual and feminist circles) and use these spaces as a way to mobilize their followers, but also promote their articles, almost always related to organic products (soaps, cloth wipes, intimate soaps), books published by other activists or themselves, and information on their workshops and gatherings.

The pages that make up the kaleidoscope of menstrual cyber-activism led the users and their creators to generate information from different routes, with the purpose of validating what is being shared in these spaces, as well as reliable information that contributes to the cause of making menstruation visible as a natural and even sacred process. An important part of this exercise has involved the professionalization of the creators and menstrual activists through academic training, courses, workshops and information that serve of reference so their contents have solid bases that provide the knowledge necessary to those who also approach or follow these pages and movements outside the network.¹⁸

In this regard, one of the main areas in which this professionalization has been given revolves around the knowledge of the menstrual cycle from its physiological dimensions. This information circulates and is shared through posts or workshops with the purpose of promoting self-knowledge, taking into consideration cultural factors and a holistic vision of the body and its processes; hence, incorporating emotions, social context and even spiritual notions about the body and its connections with the earth, the universe and the sacred (more specifically in the model of spiritual activism).

The menstrual cup as an alternative to the approach of bleeding has been a hinge product among different menstrual activisms from both outside and inside the network. The cup which was originally sold through the Internet by women instructed for its distribution. In 2016, it was jeopardized because the Federal Commission for the Protection Against Sanitary Risks (COFEPRIS, [Spanish Acronym]) in Mexico issued a health alert against its use under the argument that there was no registry that could endorse the quality of the materials used in its manufacturing.¹⁹ Regardless of the fact that this alert modified the distribution and visibility of the cup, it did not stop it from circulating; on the contrary, networks were generated among women that, thanks to

this alert and diffusion, they learned about the existence of this product that, besides being reusable, contributed to the economy of women that constitute the social base of menstrual activisms.

Menstruation and activisms that surround the cup have found in contemporary feminisms a site of manifestation and of appropriation through the networks. *Twitter* and *Instagram* have been the platforms that allow the users to tell their experiences with the cup or with the use of menstrual alternatives personally, in their own language and through visual forms with photographs, drawings, stories, illustrations, etc., without the need to assume the affiliation to a virtual or social group. Likewise, by sharing their stories, they have encouraged others to do so and have generated spontaneous accompaniment networks through direct and mediated communication through these platforms (Picture 4).



Picture 4. Enis [@nvrwin] (April 21th, 2018) How I learned how to use the infamous menstrual cup in an intent to be “greener”.

In regard to art, feminist illustrators have used menstruation, depictions of the uterus (from the most organic images to the most artistic conceptions) and the menstrual cup as symbols of fight, resistance and questioning of the regulations surrounding bodies. In addition to using it as an alternative for their own menses, the graphic representation of the cup has been used as a means to fight transnationalists from an ecologist /ecofeminist discourse and, it has also become a creative, direct and ironic way to confront patriarchy.

Along with discourses, pictures and texts about the body appropriation, artists, on their networks, often post illustrations, vignettes and drawings of menstrual cups and uterus

in different presentations, colors and actions, even giving them character and personality (Picture 5). These aesthetic forms and their creators, while not pertaining to an articulated activist movement or menstrual cyber-activism, do contribute to the visibility and normalization of menstruation, of feminine anatomy and of products that imprint a personal, different, experiential and even funny character to the menstrual experience.



Picture 5. Andonella [@Andonella] (February 22nd, 2018).
Menstrual Cup (Instagram photo).

As way of conclusion

To speak of menstruation, even in academic circles, is rare and not always welcome. Even more so when it comes to analyzing, showing and expanding this issue from the body of who experiences it and from the regulations that cross and construct these experiences as meaningful, whether positively or negatively. The cultural analysis of menstruation as also a socially constructed process, has originated from a theoretical, practical and emotional reflection that claims the body as its own, that tries to generate other ways of telling, analyzing and embodying the experiences it goes through.

Menstrual cyber-activism is far from being an articulated movement; however, it is constituted through group and individual networks that make relevant information circulate with the purpose of transforming negative cultural constructs of the body, the menstrual cycle and the concealing of the bleeding.

The means they use, beyond the bases provided by digital platforms, are based on information (from posts or workshops, courses or offline conversations), but also on

persuasion and accompaniment, particularly when linked to gynecological diseases where women seek support or when they decide to use and experiment with ecological technologies for menstrual treatment. It is frequent that women that use the cup for the first time, for example, share their experiences, difficulties and feelings, thus becoming spokespersons (willingly or not) of a greater movement from their personal networks or from specialized groups to share these experiences.

This type of individual actions opens the door to considering that perhaps the model proposed by Bobel in 2010 is being transformed ten years later thanks to the presence of social networks and technology-mediated communication, since nowadays, we do not only see the intersection of the two models (the radical and the spiritual) in manifestations, actions and narratives of menstrual activism, but the emergence of a type of experiential activism that uses experience as the driving force to communicate and have messages circulate from the net.

This type of experiential menstrual cyber-activism is not necessarily based on an allegiance or collective; it is written in the first person; it is based on testimonial and the body itself as space of manifestation also from the net. Far from thinking that individual reactions and actions on the net do not generate social resonance, on the contrary, it is based on the hypothesis of a re-significance of what is personal and the individual experience as a policy from virtual spaces since the contents (whether texts, illustrations, photos, etc.) also manifest political positions that embody or use different means to make themselves visible.

The case of menstrual activism and the contents they generate has been, until now, barely analyzed from the standpoint of social disciplines. Many of the studies are conducted by activists themselves from clear political, spiritual or formative positions; however, the rise of this type of movements both on the street and within the networks is a streak of study to understand the articulation of the movements that seek and claim the autonomy of the bodies; the generation of new knowledge and pedagogical strategies to share; the emergence of new socially relevant topics: the particularities that involves questioning the binarism of gender when speaking of and from bodies: the multiple political positions that have their correlate in the networks and, of course, the use and power this type of movements acquires with the circulation and appropriation of the tools that social networks provide to increase their scope and diffuse their contents.

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¹ Hence, cyberactivism emerged in mobilizations at international levels; the Occupy Wall Street, the 15M movement and the Arab Spring, are the most well-known and powerful until now. “ICTs and more specifically social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, provide the old audiences with the tools necessary not only to diffuse information massively but also to generate dialogue and debate” (Martínez, 2013, p. 447).

² Following Gago’s presentation (2019, pp. 21-22), the VNS Matrix emerged in Australia in 1991 and was made up of a group of women that experimented with arts and the French feminist theory, and proposed radical acts in the context of the so-called “viral agenda”, which aimed at inserting women, body fluids and politic awareness in electronic spaces. Two of the most well-known are the Cybermanifesto for the 21st century and the Mutant Vixen Manifesto, written and produced under the inspiration of the cyborg manifesto published by Haraway in the 1980s.

³ An example of this are the analyses of Buckley & Gottlieb (1988), Martin (1987 and 1988), Héri-tier (1991), Godelier (2000), Citro (2008 y 2010), and more recently those of Ramírez (2016 y 2019), Felitti and Rohatsch (2018) and Tarzibachi (2017). These studies analyze the treatment of menstruation from different social groups and symbols and meanings that have accompanied the practices associated to the concealment, secrecy and taboo that have surrounded menstrual bleeding and women.

⁴ The premenstrual dysphoric disorder, originally called the “dysphoric disorder of the late luteal phase” consists of a variety of emotional, behavioral and somatic symptoms that repeat month after month. The PMDD, English acronym, was added in 2013 to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or DSM-5, listing eleven possible symptoms, but five of these symptoms suffice to qualify having this disorder. The diagnostic as well as its medical and pharmaceutical background – fostering medicating the patient with Prozac in a pink version to make it more attractive to women (Spartos, 2000 and Caplan, 2004) has sparked debates of feminist health professional – female doctors, psychiatrists and activists of different currents, since this “disorder” condenses many of the cultural constructs regarding menses and certain capacities, behaviors and characteristics allegedly feminine (irritability, sensitivity, etc.), translating them into a pathology that requires medication to be controlled. According to Chen (2008) in his article in the NY times, women’s health activists have argued that these diagnostics have pathologized menses and have stigmatized many women by labelling them as mentally sick or unstable, and have placed them in situations of discrimination in their daily life and workplaces. In many senses, the institutionalization of this disorder has served to rooting the stigma toward women and menses from the medical and psychiatric discourse.

⁵ To further references in this regard, you can refer to Felitti’s study (2016 y 2017).

⁶ According to Davis & Craven’s classification (2016), the second wave of feminism – from the North American standpoint – is associated to the countercultural movements of the 1970s: the movements for civil rights, sexual rights and abortion, for the revindication of Native American people and sexual non-conformity (pp. xvii-xix). According to Bobel’s approaches (2006, p. 339), in the second wave of feminism, the idea of goddess and the celebration of feminine qualities such as the caring, empathy and compassion, were key elements to create groups exclusively of women since they cultivated the value of said qualities under the idea of being socially denigrated as feminine attributes. What was being sought was to imprint in these qualities a series of sacred properties to a vindicatory degree. As for the third wave, characterized by the intersectional political and critical thought and positioning toward gender – from approximately 1992 to this date (Davis & Craven, 2016, pp. xix-xxi) – does not necessarily identify with the image of women as educator or sacred being, but rather questions the categorizations of gender and of those layers of identity that point to a monolithic, defining or essential conception.

⁷ This conception emerges also as an alternative of menstrual experience that has become popular in both alternative circuits as in feminist circuits of menstrual activists. An example of this is the note posted in one of the menstrual cup portals: <https://www.copitamenstrual.com/blog/free-bleeding-sangremos-libres>

⁸ The collectives and the authors have authorized us to use the images in this paper.

⁹ <https://www.elcaminerubi.com/>

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/princesasmenstruantes/>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/Viajealbiclomenstrual/> y <http://viajealbiclomenstrual.com/>

¹² <https://www.facebook.com/MenstruaConscienteSLP/>

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/toalla.sana/>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/jardineser/>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/ixchel.alternativas/>

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/LaCrecida/>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Activismo-Menstrual-203242989867918/19>

¹⁸ It should be highlighted that the menstrual activists and facilitators of conscious menstruation circles are (mostly) middle class women who live in urban contexts and have academic backgrounds in the fields of health, sexuality, social and human sciences. Part of their professionalism comes from their academic formation, but also from the interest to know and disseminate knowledge about menses from political, academic, spiritual and cultural bases in order to share relevant and instructive information on the resignificance of the contemporary menstrual experience.

¹⁹ <https://ecoosfera.com/2016/04/por-que-cofepris-lanza-alerta-sanitaria-en-contra-de-la-copa-menstrual/> y <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2017/08/27/sociedad/030n1soc>