Feminism Misread: The Ideological Distortions Behind the Hostile Perceptions of a Good Cause

Suman MOHANTY[††††††]
https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2152-0134
KIIT School of Law, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, India

Adaora OSONDU-OTI[‡‡‡‡‡‡]
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1178-6339
Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Sankalp SUNDARAY[§§§§§§]
KIIT School of Law, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, India.

Abstract

Hostile readings of feminism recast a movement for gender equality as a threat to cultural order. This article theorises ideological distortion as the systematic appropriation of feminist language while neutralising its transformative content. Using a comparative lens on Nigeria and India, it identifies three recurrent mechanisms: reframing (religious hermeneutics that substitute equality with complementarity), co-optation (state, public-health, and educational bureaucracies that deploy feminist vocabulary to extend surveillance and control), and filtration (platform, curricular, and media systems that permit circulation only when discourse aligns with dominant ideology). Empirically, Nigerian opposition concentrates among younger, educated urban men facing status anxiety who mobilise customary law and Islamic jurisprudence to delegitimise feminist demands, whereas Indian resistance is diffuse and institutional—Hindu-nationalist and bureaucratic actors accommodate feminist slogans while constraining embodied autonomy, especially around reproduction and maternal health. Across both sites, gender stereotypes, nationalist narratives,

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[††††††] Suman Mohanty is a PhD Scholar at the KIIT School of Law, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, India.

[‡‡‡‡‡‡] Adaora Osondu-Oti is a Professor of International Relations and Diplomacy at Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.

[§§§§§§] Sankalp Sundaray is a PhD Scholar at the KIIT School of Law, KIIT Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, India

and religious authority operate as discursive gatekeepers that render feminism visible yet toothless. We propose a transferable analytic matrix - defence mechanisms, ideological justifications, institutional manifestations, public discourse effects, and impacts on women's agency to explain how meaning itself becomes the battleground between liberation and control. The study links threat perception and hegemonic maintenance to sociotechnical infrastructures of discourse, clarifying why distortions persist despite expanded digital visibility. Normatively, it argues for counter-hermeneutics grounded in indigenous and subaltern epistemologies, intersectional coalition-building that resists competitive victimhood, and accountability frameworks that audit state and platform practices for "appropriative compliance" (the use of feminist language to entrench patriarchy). By mapping how feminist claims are recoded within religious, nationalist, and bureaucratic grammars, the article reframes "feminism misread" as a predictable product of power rather than a misunderstanding and delineates strategic pathways to re-secure semantic autonomy, institutional leverage, and material gains for gender justice.

Keywords: *Feminism, Misread, Ideology, Distortion, Hostile, Perception, Good Cause, Gender Inequality, Hegemony, Misrepresentation, Patriarchy, Gender-Politics.*

Introduction

Feminism, at its core, constitutes a multifaceted social movement aimed at achieving gender equality and dismantling patriarchal systems that concentrate power and authority exclusively in male hands (Mouafo, 2024). In African patriarchal societies such as Nigeria, this ideology seeks to establish more equitable relations between the sexes, which fundamentally challenges the existing hierarchical order and contests male domination. However, the advancement of feminist goals in non-Western contexts frequently encounters systematic distortion and hostile appropriation. The phenomenon of misrepresenting feminist rhetoric manifests particularly sharply in patriarchal contexts where feminist claims for equality are reframed through hostile interpretive lenses (Blom, 2024).

Such hostile appropriation demonstrates how feminist messaging and symbols—intended to advance liberation—become weaponized

by opposing forces to undermine the very movements they originally served, illustrating the vulnerability of feminist discourse to co-optation and manipulation.

Beyond interpersonal antagonism, structural forces significantly constrain how feminism is articulated and understood in societies experiencing state-sponsored ideological dominance.

In India's context, state-sponsored ideologies, nationalist narratives, and traditional cultural frameworks substantially distort feminist messaging and constrain women's agency in negotiating the concept of feminism itself (Nakahara & Cai, 2025). Hindu nationalist frameworks, for instance, have instrumentalized gender discourse to advance political agendas, creating spaces where feminist expressions gain traction only insofar as they align with state-endorsed ideological slogans and national identity constructs.

Similarly, in Nigeria, patriarchal ideologies interact with religious interpretations, cultural traditions, and political interests to shape how feminism is perceived, contested, and often rejected. These broader ideological configurations—encompassing religious institutions, political elites, and cultural gatekeepers—collectively function as filters through which feminist claims are selectively appropriated, distorted, or rejected based on their perceived compatibility with existing power structures. Understanding these distortions requires analyzing how patriarchal societies defend male hegemony not merely through overt resistance but through sophisticated reinterpretations that simultaneously appropriate feminist language while neutralizing its transformative potential, thereby rendering feminism a contested terrain where meaning itself becomes a battleground between liberation and control.

Contextual Frameworks: Patriarchy and Defense Mechanisms in Nigeria and India

Patriarchal systems in African and South Asian contexts function as oppressive, authoritarian structures that regulate gender relations and determine acceptable feminine behavior, establishing hierarchical arrangements that concentrate authority in male hands (Mouafo, 2024). In Nigeria, patriarchal norms are institutionalized through

customary legal frameworks that explicitly legitimize male authority; Section 282 of the Nigerian Penal Code, for instance, permits male discipline of wives, reflecting how patriarchal ideology permeates formal legal structures and normalizes domestic violence as a family matter rather than a violation of human rights (AD et al., 2023).

In India, patriarchal structures similarly intertwine with caste hierarchies and capitalist relations, creating what scholars term Brahminical patriarchy, where marriage functions as an institution reproducing not only gender subordination but also caste and class relations (Srivastava & Willoughby, 2022). Both contexts demonstrate how patriarchal systems extend beyond individual attitudes to embed themselves in legal codes, kinship structures, and economic arrangements, rendering feminism fundamentally threatening to existing power configurations.

Men's perception of threatened male hegemony activates compensatory defense strategies designed to preserve traditional power structures and reject feminist critiques (Rivera-Rodriguez et al., 2021). This threat perception operates through multiple mechanisms: when men perceive declining social value of traditional masculinity, status anxiety emerges, motivating opposition to feminist movements and demands for gender equality (Rivera-Rodriguez et al., 2021).

In patriarchal societies like Nigeria and India, where male authority historically remained unquestioned, feminist assertions trigger what researchers identify as realistic and symbolic threats to male ingroup status, generating defensive ideological positions that simultaneously appropriate feminist language while neutralizing its transformative content. These defense mechanisms manifest through hostile reinterpretations of feminism, religious reframing of gender relations, and nationalist narratives that co-opt feminist concerns into patriarchal frameworks, thereby containing feminism's liberatory potential.

Sociodemographic characteristics, adherence to patriarchal values, and feelings of status threat intersect to shape representations of feminism and defensive ideological positions (Mouafo, 2024). Research demonstrates that men's age, education level, economic status, and degree of identification with patriarchal systems function as moderating variables that determine whether perceived threats to male hegemony translate into overt opposition or subtle ideological

resistance (Mouafo, 2024).

In both Nigerian and Indian contexts, younger men with higher patriarchal identification express stronger defensive reactions against feminist discourse, while individuals experiencing acute downward mobility exhibit intensified threat perception. These intersecting factors create differentiated landscapes of feminist resistance: in India, upper-caste Hindu nationalist masculinities deploy state-ideological frameworks to redefine feminism as anti-national, while in Nigeria, religious interpretations combined with patriarchal cultural traditions similarly reconstruct feminist claims as Western impositions threatening indigenous values. The convergence of demographic positioning, ideological commitment to patriarchy, and perceived status decline thus explains why feminism encounters hostile appropriation across diverse patriarchal contexts, as defending male hegemony becomes psychologically and socially urgent for men experiencing multiple forms of structural instability.

State Ideology and Platform Dynamics: Constraints on Feminist Discourse in Nigeria and India

State-sponsored ideological apparatus functions as a critical mediating force that shapes how feminism can be articulated and circulated within patriarchal societies. In contexts characterized by state ideological dominance, digital platforms and educational institutions operate as dual-function spaces that simultaneously facilitate communication while constraining the boundaries of acceptable discourse. The case of China's BiliBili platform demonstrates this mechanism with striking clarity: feminism gains visibility and virality only insofar as it remains aligned with state-sponsored ideological slogans and nationalist narratives (Nakahara & Cai, 2025).

This sociotechnical constraint reveals a broader pattern whereby platforms function as conduits for state propaganda while maintaining the veneer of participatory spaces for user-generated content. Women's agency in negotiating feminist concepts becomes fundamentally constrained by the requirement that feminist discourse not contradict state-endorsed notions of national identity (Nakahara & Cai, 2025). These platform dynamics create what scholars identify as ideological filtering mechanisms that enable feminist language to circulate while

neutralizing its transformative potential, thereby containing feminism within patriarchal and nationalist parameters.

This pattern extends beyond digital platforms into institutional and educational settings where ideological culture is systematically cultivated. In China's educational system, research demonstrates that traditional frameworks such as Confucianism are privileged as the most productive ideology for shaping citizens' worldviews and values (Liu & Li, 2023). Similar patterns operate in India, where Hindu nationalist frameworks have been deliberately incorporated into textbook content and educational policy to define national identity through majoritarian religious categories (Anand & Lall, 2022). Educational institutions function as sites where feminism itself becomes subject to ideological appropriation: feminist concerns are reframed to align with state-nationalist agendas rather than serving as platforms for liberatory struggle. This institutional filtering occurs through multiple channels—curriculum design, textbook content selection, and pedagogical frameworks—that collectively establish parameters restricting how feminism can be conceptualized and transmitted to subsequent generations. In both Nigerian and Indian contexts, state-affiliated institutions similarly work to privilege patriarchal and nationalist interpretations of gender relations, ensuring that feminist discourse remains subordinate to state ideological objectives and that women's capacity to articulate autonomous feminist visions becomes structurally limited.

Gender Stereotypes and Hostile Appropriation of Feminist Concepts

Gender stereotyping operates as a fundamental mechanism through which feminist claims for equality are systematically undermined and rendered illegitimate. Persistent gender stereotypes characterize women as passive and subordinate, while men are portrayed as dominant and competitive, thereby constructing cognitive schemas that resist feminist assertions of gender equality (Leon & Aizpurua, 2023). These stereotypical perceptions about men and women reinforce gender inequality and discrimination by establishing normative behavioral expectations tied to biological sex.

In both Nigerian and Indian contexts, gender stereotyping functions

as an institutionalized practice: in Nigeria, naming conventions deliberately perpetuate stereotyped gender roles and patriarchy, using traditions as weapons against girl-children to align them with existing sexist norms and hierarchies (Mensah, 2022).

Similarly, in India, educational systems incorporate gender stereotypes into curriculum design and pedagogical frameworks, where traditional feminine roles are privileged, and women's leadership potential is devalued through societal perspectives rooted in cultural traditions (Wolle, 2024). These stereotypical frameworks create cognitive barriers that predispose individuals to perceive feminist equality claims as threatening rather than liberatory, as they directly contradict deeply internalized gender expectations cultivated across institutional and familial sites.

Feminist cultural memory and protest slogans become particularly vulnerable to weaponization by opposing movements seeking to neutralize feminist critiques while appropriating their rhetorical power. Iconic feminist slogans such as 'my body my choice,' which function as carriers of feminist cultural memory concerning reproductive autonomy and bodily integrity, have been hostilely appropriated by movements characterized by nationalist and conservative ideologies (Blom, 2024).

This hostile mnemonic appropriation reveals how feminist discourse can be strategically reframed by ideologically opposed forces: anti-vaccine movements transnationally coordinated with far-right and pro-life factions repurposed reproductive rights rhetoric to oppose pandemic health measures, thereby maintaining the appearance of claiming bodily autonomy while inverting its original liberatory meaning. In both Nigerian and Indian contexts, nationalist and religious movements similarly engage in hostile appropriation of feminist language and symbols, instrumentalizing gender discourse to advance patriarchal and state-sponsored agendas while appearing to acknowledge women's concerns. This process demonstrates that feminist slogans become contested terrain where competing movements battle to establish meaning, rendering feminist discourse vulnerable to co-optation by forces fundamentally opposed to gender liberation.

Negative stereotypes about feminists and feminism operate as structural barriers that reduce women's willingness to identify with feminist movements and participate in collective action, particularly among heterosexual women who face heightened social sanctions. Exposure to negative stereotypes about feminists significantly reduces women's self-identification with feminism and weakens their participation in collective action, with this effect being mediated through reduced feminist identification (Moore & Stathi, 2019). Heterosexual women demonstrate particular vulnerability to stereotype threat from negative portrayals of feminists, whereas sexual minority women maintain stronger feminist identification and collective action commitments despite exposure to hostile stereotypes.

In patriarchal societies like Nigeria and India, these mechanisms are intensified through institutional and cultural mechanisms that frame feminist women as deviant, Western-influenced, or threatening to national identity and religious values. Educational institutions in both contexts amplify negative feminist stereotypes by portraying feminism as incompatible with indigenous cultural traditions or national ideological projects, thereby creating powerful disincentives for women's feminist self-identification. The convergence of gender stereotyping, nationalist ideological filtering, and hostile feminist stereotyping thus creates a complex landscape where women's capacity to articulate autonomous feminist consciousness becomes structurally constrained through multiple reinforcing mechanisms that simultaneously naturalize gender inequality while delegitimizing feminist resistance.

Comparative Analysis: Nigeria and India: Divergent Manifestations of Feminist Misreading.

The defensive strategies men employ against feminism manifest distinctly across Nigeria and India, shaped by differential demographic positioning, institutional configurations, and ideological frameworks. In Nigeria, male opposition to feminist claims concentrates disproportionately among younger, more educated urban males who perceive acute threats to their socioeconomic status and hegemonic positioning (Mouafo, 2024). These demographics employ patriarchal rhetoric and religious interpretations to delegitimize feminist demands for gender equity, framing gender equality as incompatible with

customary law, Islamic teachings, and traditional family structures. The concentration of anti-feminist opposition among educated younger men reflects status anxiety arising from educational access that fails to translate into commensurate economic advantage, creating psychological investment in preserving traditional gender hierarchies as compensatory sources of social authority.

Conversely, India's manifestation of feminist misreading operates through state-sanctioned institutional mechanisms that appropriate feminist rhetoric while maintaining patriarchal control over women's reproductive autonomy. Breastfeeding and maternal health interventions demonstrate this co-optive pattern: public health programs invoke feminist language emphasizing women's agency and choice while simultaneously constraining women's embodied autonomy through surveillance, normalization of prescribed maternal practices, and erasure of women's decision-making authority regarding their bodies and reproductive decisions (S. S, 2023). This institutional appropriation renders feminism a tool for reinforcing patriarchal governance rather than challenging male hegemony, as health bureaucracies instrumentalize feminist discourse to expand their administrative reach over women's intimate embodied practices.

Both contexts exhibit how religious and cultural frameworks function as primary mechanisms for reframing feminist activism into domesticated forms compatible with traditional power structures. In Nigeria, Islamic theological interpretations redefine feminist demands for equality through religious hermeneutics that emphasize complementarity rather than equality, thereby preserving male authority while appearing to acknowledge women's concerns (Azam, 2018). Similarly, in India, Hindu nationalist frameworks appropriate gender discourse to advance communalized political agendas, wherein feminist expressions gain circulation only insofar as they align with Hindu nationalist constructions of national identity and majoritarian cultural values (D.S. & G, 2014).

These religious reframings reveal sophisticated ideological strategies whereby feminism becomes colonized from within, its language retained while its liberatory content is systematically neutralized through theological reinterpretation and nationalist incorporation. The strategic deployment of Hindu nationalist gender discourse in

India constructs Hindu women as embodiments of national pride and cultural authenticity, thereby constraining feminist autonomy within boundaries determined by male-dominated nationalist movements, whereas Islamic theological reframing in Nigeria similarly channels feminist concerns into frameworks that preserve male authority within religious jurisprudence.

Table 1: Manifestations of Feminist Misreading: Nigeria and India Compared

S/N	Dimension	Nigeria	India
1	Primary Defense Mechanism	Patriarchal rhetorical delegitimation; religious reframing; institutional co-optation; feminist discourse appropriation	State bureaucracies; Hindu nationalist movements; educated urban elites; rhetorical delegitimation through cultural–nationalist framing
2	Target Demographics	Younger, educated urban males; status-threatened males.	State bureaucracies, Hindu nationalist movements, and educated urban elites.
3	Ideological Justification	Islamic theology; customary law; family tradition.	Hindu nationalism; state ideology; maternal essentialism
4	Gender Hegemony Preservation	Male authority anchored in religious jurisprudence and customary legal structures	Male authority is maintained through reproductive surveillance and state institutional control.
5	Institutional Manifestation	Religious institutions, Political Institutions, family, patrilineal kinship systems, and school	Public health systems, educational policy, and nationalist media apparatus
6	Feminist Reframing Strategy	Religious hermeneutics emphasizing complementarity over equality	State-sponsored maternal health initiatives that appropriate feminist language while constraining autonomy.
7	Manifestation in Public Discourse	Feminist claims are portrayed as Western impositions threatening indigenous values and religious purity.	Feminist expressions channeled into nationalist frameworks, serving state legitimacy.
8	Impact on Women's Agency	Limited feminist consciousness formation; pressure toward religious conformity; Career progression	Constrained embodied autonomy; instrumental appropriation of feminist identity for state objectives.
9	Demographic Pattern of Opposition	Concentrated among younger, educated males experiencing status anxiety	Diffused across institutional structures; bureaucratic rather than individual resistance

The comparative analysis above (see Table 1) reveals that while Nigerian male opposition operates through direct rhetorical delegitimation concentrated among threatened status groups, Indian institutional appropriation functions through more diffuse mechanisms that appear to accommodate feminist concerns while operationally reinforcing patriarchal control. Nigeria's strategy emphasizes explicit ideological contestation wherein educated males articulate counterarguments grounded in religious and customary authority, whereas India's mechanism operates through institutional infrastructure that absorbs feminist language into state apparatuses designed to regulate women's behavior.

Both contexts demonstrate how feminist claims encounter systematic distortion not through simple rejection but through sophisticated reinterpretation—whether through religious hermeneutics in Nigeria or institutional co-optation in India—that renders feminism simultaneously visible and neutered, appropriated yet stripped of transformative potential. These divergent manifestations underscore that feminist misreading operates contextually, adapting to available ideological resources and institutional configurations while maintaining the shared objective of preserving male hegemony against challenges to gender equality.

Mechanisms of Ideological Distortion: Reframing Feminist Goals

Feminist discourse becomes systematically distorted through metaphorical framing that shapes how movements are cognitively apprehended and politically mobilized. The WAR metaphor and JOURNEY metaphor represent two dominant but ideologically distinct frameworks through which feminism is publicly conceptualized (Chen et al., 2025). The WAR metaphor emphasizes immediate struggle, combat, and confrontation with gender discrimination, lexicalized through terms such as campaign, fight, and attacks, thereby highlighting women's active resistance and the plight of gender inequality.

Conversely, the JOURNEY metaphor emphasizes continuity, individual progress, and linear developmental trajectories toward equality, articulated through the vocabulary of ways, course, and

progress. This metaphorical divergence creates crucial ideological consequences: while WAR metaphors mobilize collective action and emphasize systemic opposition, JOURNEY metaphors individualize feminist advancement and obscure structural change requirements by reframing liberation as personal developmental progress rather than collective transformation (Hart, 2023).

In both Nigerian and Indian contexts, nationalist and patriarchal forces strategically privilege JOURNEY metaphors in state-controlled discourse and media, thereby neutralizing feminism's radical potential by naturalizing gradual individual advancement within existing hierarchies rather than demanding systemic restructuring of patriarchal institutions. Educational curricula and public health bureaucracies in India particularly deploy JOURNEY framings to present maternal health interventions and women's education as progressive developments compatible with nationalist agendas, thereby obscuring how these initiatives simultaneously constrain women's embodied autonomy and reinforce patriarchal control. Competing feminist sub-groups weaponize victimization discourses to delegitimize alternative feminist positions while constructing competitive rather than solidaristic frameworks for women's liberation (C et al., 2024).

These internal feminist conflicts manifest through distinct rhetorical strategies: pro-inclusion feminist groups construct shared victimhood repertoires emphasizing collective solidarity across difference, whereas anti-inclusion groups deploy competitive victimhood framings that position certain women's interests as antagonistic to others. This competitive victimization discourse fundamentally undermines feminist coalition-building by pitting women's liberation struggles against one another, creating fractures that patriarchal forces exploit to delegitimize feminist claims collectively.

In Nigeria, patriarchal actors instrumentalize intramovement feminist conflicts by amplifying disagreements between religious feminists and secular feminists, between wealthy urban feminists and rural peasant women, thereby fragmenting feminist consciousness and positioning feminism as internally incoherent. Similarly, in India, Hindu nationalist movements weaponize divisions between upper-caste feminists and Dalit feminist critiques of Brahminical patriarchy, constructing competitive victimhood narratives that present Hindu

women's interests as fundamentally opposed to Muslim women's liberation, thereby transforming feminist struggle into communalized conflict serving nationalist rather than liberatory objectives. Progressive ideological orientations—including environmental values and leftist political positioning—demonstrate selective and context-dependent associations with feminist support, enabling their instrumentalization to reinforce conservative gender norms when ideologically convenient (Fernndez-Torres et al., 2025).

Research demonstrates that while progressive values correlate broadly with feminist identification, these correlations diverge significantly between men and women: among men, progressive environmental orientation coexists with marginal social identification but does not consistently predict feminist alignment. This decoupling enables opportunistic actors to appropriate progressive rhetoric while maintaining patriarchal commitments, creating what scholars identify as ideological inconsistency masquerading as principled positions. In both Nigeria and India, state institutions and nationalist movements exploit this malleability by selectively invoking progressive language regarding women's education and health while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal authority through religious reinterpretation and nationalist appeals to cultural authenticity.

Indian public health bureaucracies exemplify this mechanism by invoking progressive environmental and health values to justify expanding state surveillance of women's reproductive practices, thereby appropriating progressive ideological language while reinforcing patriarchal control. Nigerian political actors similarly deploy progressive rhetoric concerning women's economic participation while grounding such participation within religious and customary frameworks that preserve male authority over household resources and reproductive decisions, demonstrating how ideological progressivism becomes strategically mobilized to legitimate conservative gender outcomes.

Reproduction of Distortions Through Education and Institutional Gatekeeping

Educational institutions function as primary sites where gender stereotypes and patriarchal ideologies become systematized and transmitted across generations, effectively naturalizing the ideological

distortions that undermine feminist consciousness. Gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes persist within educational settings through interconnected mechanisms: teacher attitudes shape normative expectations regarding gender roles, peer influence reinforces stereotypical behavioral norms among students, and broader cultural norms embedded in curricula constrain how students conceptualize gender relations (F et al., 2025). In Indian primary education textbooks, gender patriarchy manifests through visual imagery that systematically underrepresents women while confining them to domestic and menial labor, whereas men are predominantly depicted in outdoor, professional, and leadership roles (Nandi et al., 2024).

These representational patterns establish cognitive schemas that naturalize gender hierarchy long before students encounter explicit feminist discourse, predisposing them to perceive gender equality claims as violations of normal social order rather than corrections of injustice. In Nigeria's educational context, similar mechanisms operate through curriculum design and pedagogical frameworks that privilege patriarchal interpretations of gender relations, ensuring that students internalize male authority as both natural and inevitable (Omojemite, 2024). The institutional gatekeeping functions as a filter that determines not merely what knowledge circulates but how that knowledge is framed—rendering feminism simultaneously present in discourse while substantively neutralized through pedagogical presentation that emphasizes individual advancement within existing hierarchies rather than systemic transformation demanding institutional restructuring.

Religious textual interpretation functions as a specialized mechanism through which feminist critiques of patriarchal doctrine become systematically delegitimized within contexts where religious authority maintains institutional power. Quranic exegesis in contexts such as Malaysia demonstrates how misinterpretations of sacred texts deliberately distort feminist claims by characterizing feminism as incompatible with Islamic teaching, thereby constraining women's religious agency and rendering feminist consciousness illegitimate within communities where religious identity structures social belonging (Abdullah et al., 2025).

These hermeneutical distortions employ sophisticated theological arguments that appropriate feminist language while inverting its

meaning: religious scholars acknowledge women's concerns regarding inequality while simultaneously reframing equality demands through complementarity discourse that preserves male authority within religious jurisprudence.

Similar mechanisms operate across Nigeria and India, where Islamic theological interpretation and Hindu nationalist appropriation of sacred texts, respectively, transform feminist demands into frameworks that reinforce rather than challenge patriarchal control. Religious gatekeeping functions as institutional legitimation for distorting feminist discourse, as women's autonomous feminist consciousness becomes constructed as religious deviance rather than legitimate resistance to gender oppression. The capacity of religious institutions to mediate how feminism circulates demonstrates that institutional gatekeeping operates not merely through explicit prohibition but through reinterpretation strategies that neutralize feminism's transformative potential while maintaining the appearance of accommodation.

The systematic exclusion of the 'other women'—those lacking university credentials or originating from marginalized communities—from official feminist discourse represents a critical mechanism through which institutional gatekeeping reproduces ideological distortions. Despite substantive contributions to educational and social transformation, women without formal academic credentials remain excluded from feminist theory production and public intellectual discourse, rendering their grassroots feminist work invisible within academic frameworks that determine legitimate feminist knowledge (L et al., 2024).

In both Nigerian and Indian contexts, this exclusion intensifies through institutional mechanisms that privilege English-language academic discourse and university-based feminist production, thereby marginalizing indigenous women's movements and grassroots feminist consciousness developed through lived experience rather than academic training. Women's organizations operating outside institutional frameworks—addressing gender violence prevention, democratic community education, and collective consciousness-raising—generate transformative social change while remaining unrecognized within official feminist historiography and institutional discourse.

This gatekeeping mechanism reproduces distortion by fragmenting feminist movements into university-credentialed intellectuals whose work becomes subject to institutional appropriation and regulation, versus grassroots women whose transformative practice remains invisible and thus vulnerable to co-optation by patriarchal forces seeking to contain feminism within manageable intellectual parameters. The strategic institutional invisibility of grassroots feminist contributions thereby permits patriarchal actors to present feminism as external, elitist, and disconnected from communities' actual liberation struggles, enabling hostile characterizations of feminism as Western impositions threatening authentic cultural values while simultaneously erasing the substantial feminist consciousness and organizing capacity existing among marginalized women whose work receives no institutional recognition.

Resistance and Alternative Feminist Framings

Alternative feminist frameworks emerge as critical counterforces to ideological distortions by prioritizing marginalized women's agency, lived experiences, and autonomous knowledge production outside elite academic gatekeeping. Dialogic feminism and intersectional approaches fundamentally challenge singular, elite-defined feminist narratives by centering the contributions of women without university credentials whose grassroots organizing generates transformative social change (L et al., 2024). These women's work addressing gender violence prevention, democratic community education, and collective consciousness-raising remains substantively invisible within official feminist historiography and institutional discourse, yet constitutes the material foundation upon which feminist liberation movements operate. In Nigeria, indigenous women leaders and grassroots peace-builders operate through non-violent activism rooted in collective leadership frameworks that prioritize community interactions over individualized empowerment models (Ari, 2024).

Simultaneously, Yoruba feminist scholarship challenges the false universalism of Western feminism by recovering pre-colonial Yoruba gender systems that were gender-neutral and recognized women's complementary authority rather than subordination (Muraina & Ajmtanraj, 2023). In India, Dalit feminist praxis explicitly interrogates upper-caste domination within feminist spaces themselves,

demonstrating how marginalized women develop autonomous feminist consciousness that simultaneously resists patriarchy and caste oppression (P et al., 2022). These intersectional approaches expose how mainstream feminism, by failing to address caste, class, and religious identities, reproduces hierarchies that render certain women's experiences continuously subordinate within feminist movements themselves. Grassroots women's organizations in India working on maternal health accountability and informal payment elimination exemplify how marginalized women—low-caste, Muslim, and tribal women—develop knowledge resources and agency to assert their entitlements as citizens (Schaaf & Dasgupta, 2019). These alternative framings reject victimization discourses that infantilize marginalized women while simultaneously asserting their capacity to negotiate complex institutional systems and demand structural accountability.

Islamic feminism demonstrates how feminist critique can be articulated authentically within religious frameworks by distinguishing rigorously between theological principles and patriarchal institutional practices, thereby reclaiming religious tradition as a site of emancipatory struggle rather than accepting patriarchal reinterpretation as inevitable (Azam, 2018). Rather than accepting the false binary between religious identity and feminist consciousness, Islamic feminists develop fluid, context-responsive approaches that deploy feminist analysis where substantively necessary while drawing upon religious cultural resources to establish moral authority within communities where secular feminist discourse lacks legitimacy.

This dynamic engagement proves particularly liberating in environments of Islamophobic hostility where feminist scholars must simultaneously critique internal patriarchal practices while preventing hostile misappropriation by anti-Muslim forces seeking to instrumentalize feminist language for exclusionary nationalist agendas. In Indian contexts, similar multiplicities emerge through Dalit theological rereading that interrogates brahminical patriarchy while asserting indigenous religious knowledge systems as resources for feminist liberation (Patil, 2023).

Muslim women activists at Shaheen Bagh in India developed complex feminist resistance to the Citizenship Amendment Act that articulated gender justice concerns through religious and communal frameworks

while simultaneously deploying Dalit and Ambedkarite political analysis, thereby refusing Western liberal feminist categories in favor of intersectional political resistance grounded in lived experience (Ali, 2024). These religious feminist framings operate as sophisticated epistemological and political strategies that retain authentic moral grounding within communities while maintaining transformative feminist commitments, rendering religion not inevitably patriarchal but rather a contested terrain where women's interpretive authority can be collectively asserted.

Invisible activism and everyday embodied acts of communal care by queer and marginalized communities represent sustainable forms of resistance that operate outside conventional rights-based frameworks that assume state receptivity and legal accessibility (A et al., 2024). Rather than mounting visibility campaigns vulnerable to state repression and hostile appropriation, invisible activism constitutes quiet, implicit, and daily practices of communal care that simultaneously sustain marginalized communities while embodying resistance to hegemonic governance structures. These practices prove particularly vital in contexts where state-sponsored queer necropolitics renders certain communities legally invisible while simultaneously subjecting them to excessive surveillance and moral condemnation, creating impossible conditions for conventional advocacy.

In India, rural women's Self-Help Groups constitute similar embodied collective practices wherein marginalized women build social capital and develop shared consciousness around environmental justice, climate adaptation, and economic self-sufficiency through household and community-level actions rather than through formal institutional channels (Dhal, 2024).

Women's everyday organizing in Indian healthcare settings—navigating state bureaucracies, demanding accountability from providers, and building knowledge among community members regarding health entitlements—manifests as sustainable resistance embedded within daily life rather than episodic campaigns vulnerable to state co-optation. These alternative resistance modalities prove more durable than conventional feminist activism precisely because they emerge organically from marginalized communities' specific survival needs rather than being imposed through external organizational frameworks

that can be easily delegitimized as foreign impositions or elite agendas threatening cultural authenticity.

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