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Title: *New Brazilian feminisms and online networks: cyberfeminism, protest and the female "Arab Spring"*

Introduction

New information and communication technologies have emerged as spaces for both local and global struggles in the last decades. Cyberspace has provided previously excluded and marginalised non-political actors with the possibilities of engaging in the political scene in a way which contrasts to the difficulties encountered offline and in everyday life (Sassen, 2002). Young women and other third wave feminist throughout the world having increasingly restored to the web to express political views, engage in civic action and mobilize against their oppression. Research has focused on how online platforms can assist in political and feminist campaigns, as well as in the struggle against patriarchy and other conventions and in favour of women's rights.

The debates around the ways in which women use new technologies for social change, amid the paradox of the "masculine" character of ICTs and the exploitation of much of the labour force which works with it, have been grouped around a series of theoretical perspectives known as *cyberfeminism,* which have developed into an important research area for feminist and scholars working in the social sciences (i.e. Haraway, 1991; Plant, 1995; Wajcman, 1991; Everett, 2004; Harcourt, 2000; Sandoval, 2000; Sunden, 2001; Sutton and Pollock, 2000; Wakeford, 2000). These theories have also inspired many discussions on the relationship between women and technologies throughout the world.

The article is an attempt of theorizing cyberfeminism, engaging with how women make use of new technologies for *empowerment* from a particular local context, mainly the new contemporary feminist movements in Brazil who have emerged with greater strength in the last

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years. As I have argued elsewhere (Matos, 2017; Martinez, Lago and Lago, 2015), research in the field of gender and the media in Brazil is still growing slowly and has been produced sporadically, with most of the work on gender coming from the fields of political science and sociology. Women and technologies nonetheless has attracted more interest from scholars in Brazil in the last years, with a series of studies (i.e. Natansohn et al, 2013; Ferreira, 2015; Gomes and Sorj, 2014) examining contemporary Brazilian feminisms and the phenomenon which Alvarez (2014 in Ferreira, 2015) has called the "return to the streets" of feminist groups. Since mainly 2011, in the context of the explosion of the *Slut Marches* in Brazil, a variety of feminist groups have actively restored to new technologies to mobilise protests and articulate discourses in favour of gender equality.

Many Brazilian women, who do not feel well represented in the mainstream media and who struggle to have a voice in the Brazilian public sphere, have increasingly made use of new technologies for self-expression. The gap between women and men's use of the Internet has decreased significantly, with the 2009 census data in Brazil underlining that 37.5% of women and 38% of men had accessed the web, whilst the 2013 *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostras de Domicilio* (National Household Sampling Research – PNAD) underscored how the use of the Internet by the population grew from 49.2% in 2012 to 50.1% the following year (Ferreira, 2015, 206-207). Feminists blogs such as *Blogueiras Feministas* and the *NGO Think Olga,* and the Brazilian version of the *Slut Walks,* are providing spaces for debate for various groups of Brazilian women, who have the opportunity to publish online and debate political issues which overwhelmed the public agenda in the last years, from political representation, to changes in the abortion law and sexual harassment. The everyday activities of these feminist groups, that in principle many would classify as being either *banal* or *trivial,* I believe are actually under-researched and theorised within

feminist media studies in overall (Sarikakis, 2014), and are slowly beginning to be the focus of sporadic research in Brazil.

I aim to examine mainly these two important portals here for online feminism praxis in Brazil. Are women constructing new identities and empowering themselves in these spaces? What are the discourses that are being articulated here? This chapter aims to offer an initial contribution to the research on women and new technologies by situating the local struggle within transnational feminisms, and amid the context of the debates on a supposedly "end of feminism" (i.e. Gill, 2012; McRobbie, 2009), in order to argue that such vibrant local struggles can help revive the feminist movement globally, offering new pathways for transnational feminisms, at a moment when in the West feminism has become more associated with women's lifestyles and liberty to shop.

Gender equality is an important component of the democratization project in Brazil. The increase of studies on contemporary Brazilian feminisms, and the ways in which these groups make use of the media in a highly fragmented environment, can contribute to strengthen the gradual growth of work in the field of feminist media studies in Brazil (Matos, 2017; Martinez et al, 2015). It can serve to raise more awareness of such struggles, offering contributions to the growing debates on how gender interacts with race (Daniels, 2009), as well as with ethnicity and nationality, within the *blogosphere*, albeit a few classic studies in the field which have sought to articulate the feminist *cyborg* with an attention to difference and to Third World US feminisms (i.e. Haraway, 1991). The year of 2015 was chosen here as the focus of the investigations because it was particularly relevant in the contemporary political history of Brazil, firstly for having been a year of intense offline and online mobilizations, with protests against the attempts of conservative sectors of criminalizing the abortion law, as well as having been the year when the pressures for the impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff were intensified amid a highly misogynist

conservative campaign. The blogs and interviews referred to here in this article are part of a wider research project on gender, globalization and the media in Brazil (Matos, 2017).

As I make evident here, the Brazilian case, it is not possible to talk yet about a post-modern, post-feminist sensibility, or dominance of feminism within the media (Gill, 2012), within a reality that mingles elements of the "pre" with the "post" and where the "new Brazilian (career) woman" has slowly gained space within Brazilian society in the re-democratisation phase but who nonetheless still struggles to be fully accepted within the mainstream. Online networks thus emerge as a breath of fresh air, a place of *hope* and refugee from the hardships and marginalization of the offline environment, offering possibilities for the strengthening of avenues of transnational global feminisms of solidarity and cooperation around the advancement of women's rights.

Cyberfeminism and online activism: an assessment

The potential of the Internet for active citizenship and the strengthening of multiple *virtual public spheres* of debate, wider political engagement and resistance against offline oppressions has attracted the attention of many scholars. Various debates have examined the capacity of online activism to have a genuine impact and reach the "real" political world and make a difference. Various perspectives have looked at the relationship between both offline and online political activities as well as the capacity of the web to enhance political participation (i.e. Livingstone et al, 2005; Lance Bennett, 2007 in Schuster, 2013, 10). Making reference to Howard (2011), Khamis (in Carter et al, 2015) has defined *cyber-activism* as the use made of new technologies to push forward a political cause that encounters resistance offline.

The internet can arguably provide spaces for alternative content as well as offer possibilities for mobilization and *empowerment* of less privileged groups. Writing about the

challenges posed to sociology by the complexities and ambiguities of new technologies in a highly commercialised environment, Sassen (2002, 382) stressed how cyberspace could be seen as being a "far more concrete space for social struggles than that of the national political system", further stating how it could "facilitate the emergence of new types of political subjects" which lie outside of the formal political system. As Kahn and Kellner (2004) note, a lot of what we define as being part of an Internet subculture consists in personal or political blogging as well as social media activism on platforms such as *Facebook*. Blogs have particularly emerged as networks for debate and dialogue, alternative information, democratic self-expression and political criticism of issues such as globalization and anti-war resistance (Kahn and Kellner, 2004). Della Porta (in Loader and Mercea, 2012, 49) has also contended that new technologies has boosted the communication confidence of social movements, who have mainly utilised them to engage in forms of mobilization.

Women have increasingly made use of the internet for political purposes, attracting a variety of research on the contradictions between the "masculine" and exploitative labour conditions attached to the computer environment and technologies and their potential for liberation and emancipation from gender oppression (i.e. Sutton and Pollok, 2000; Schuster, 2013; Daniels, 2009; Haraway, 1991; Plant, 1995). Plant has defined cyberspace as being "global webs of data and nets of communication" (Plant, 1995, 467 in Wakeford, 2000, 353). These electronic networks have significantly shaped our lives, from online shopping, to professional and personal networking and political engagement. It is naive though to overemphasize the role of new technologies in social change, but it is more appropriate to conceive of *cyberfeminism* as being something which is fraught with contradictions within the reality of societies' offline structural inequalities. Particularly in the case of developing countries and other semi-authoritarian national contexts, where online networks, however

constrained by problems of access, can in fact offer real spaces and possibilities for oppressed groups to build new democratic narratives. They provide the opportunity for the articulation of ideas, for networking with other feminists in order to mobilize around agendas that can influence the public sphere around gender equality.

Cyberfeminism began to emerge in the decade of the 1990's, although discussions date back to 1970's and the radical criticism of science and technologies due to the domination of men in these fields, with the technological culture seen as being inherently masculine and exclusive of the feminine (Wajcman, 1991, 2000). Cyberfeminism thus be understood as being a range of theories on the relationship between gender and digital culture (i.e. Flanagan and Booth, 2002 in Daniels, 2009). In her evaluation of cyberfeminisms, Daniels (2009) underpinned the contradictions here, stressing the limits of the "subversive" potential of the web due to the material reality of the global political economy of new technologies, such as the digital divide in computer use and access between men and women as well as between the North and the South, including the generally exploitative labour conditions of those who work with these technologies. There is also a distinction which can be made between the "old" cyberfeminism, seen as supported on a version of a "postcorporeal woman corrupting patriarchy", against a newer framework, which is "about confronting the top-down from the bottom-up" (Fernandez, Wilding and Wright, 2003 in Daniels, 2009, 102).

Quoting Gill (2005) and underlining the limitations of online activism in the North due to commercialization, Daniels (2009, 102-103) argues that these views fail to fully acknowledge how women *can* make use of digital technologies in innovative ways, and how the web can facilitate race and gender equality. Khamis (in Carter et al, 2015) also makes use of Daniels (2009) to define cyber-feminism as the ways in which women use new technologies to raise awareness about women's issues, seeking to overcome their experiences of exclusion by

including themselves within these online platforms and making interconnections with global feminism. Harcourt (2000) has also underlined the important role that ICTs can have as political tools for women, although acknowledging the fact that online networks can also be negative and provide spaces for pornography. Like Plant, Harcourt (2000, 693) is enthusiastic about the Internet, even providing a personal account on how the web shaped her everyday activities, providing her the opportunity to work more closely with women who are part of her personal space or "glocality" (a concept used to describe a politics based on place-based needs, where "the global is closely mapped onto the local").

Cyberfeminism has been closely associated with third wave feminism, and the ways in which young women and feminist groups have stressed diversity and taken on board the criticisms from post-colonial feminists theorists regarding the limitations of second wave feminism, thus restoring in different ways to popular culture and online networks to advocate for women's rights (Matos, 2017). Studies have also attempted to map out the characteristics of these online activities in terms of *gendered* (or genderless) spaces (i.e. Westfall, 2000). If Haraway sees the activities in cyberspace as "networking", Plant sees the web as intrinsically feminine, talking about the process of "weaving", an activity traditionally associated with femininity. Seen as a leading figure in popularising cyberfeminism, Wajcman (1991, 2000) has argued that Plant's excessive optimism about women in cyberspace is a reaction to previous depictions of technology as inherently masculine (in Daniels, 2009). Daniels (2009, 104) also states that her writing is characteristic of the field, which has provided, albeit exceptions, still little discussion of the intersection of gender with race.

Concerns over the persistence of the digital divide throughout the world, and especially in developing countries, where groups of less privileged women, the old and the unemployed are the ones who still have less access to online communications, are among the reasons stated for

the limits of online networks in influencing politics. Various studies have been concerned with social inclusion within the technological environment (Shade, 2001, 2015). Research has examined the correlation between digital rights with those of women's rights, as well as feminist perspectives on political economy and demands for policy to be gender-sensitive (Gallagher, 2011 in Shade, 2015, 225). The Fourth World conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 underlined the importance of the Internet for women's equality (Shade, 2015, 223). Quoting Morahan-Martin, Sutton and Pollock (2000, 700) reminds us women's access to ICTs has essential economic, educational and social benefits, having been included in the section 239 of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (PFA).[i]

Transnational feminist movements, which operate through networks that link local, national and international groups together, are adopting new forms of civic action and making use of the Internet for networking, mobilizing politically and creating awareness around themes such as gender violence (i.e. Desai, 2009; Harcourt, 2013). Arguably, transnational activism is seen as a core political development in global politics, with transnational feminist action operating in three fronts: in international UN forums; transnational grassroots activism and transnational activism around global justice (Desai, 2009). The second level, which interests me most here, is what Harcourt (2013) has defined as transnational networking across regional and national borders in support for community demands around issues such as reproductive rights and education. Online networks thus emerge as political tools that can assist in pushing forward these demands, contributing to shape global and local practices.

There is an amount of evidence to proof that the Internet has been positive for various groups of women throughout the world. In Nigeria, as Harcourt (2000, 695) noted, the regional coordinator of DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) for Anglophone Africa, restored to the web to gather international support for young girls taking action against

female genital mutilation. Harcourt (2013, 4) has further examined the case of AWID (Association for Women's Rights in Development), which provides a space for transnational feminist networking in the struggle for women's agency in political and economic processes and is active online.

Women groups also got together to create global awareness of the repressive Taliban regime through the website of the *Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan* (www.rawa.org) (Daniels, 2009, 108). Wakeford (2000, 2002, 354) has also examined various electronic networks of support for women's groups, underlining global initiatives set up alongside the United Nations Fourth Conference on Women, including the World's Women Online, an electronic art networking project. In the case of Brazil, online websites, activism and civic engagement from various groups across the political spectrum has expanded rapidly. Since the decade of the 1990's, the Brazilian blogosphere has emerged as a pluralist and also alternative space of debate for various groups. Various women and feminist movements have made use wide of these communication and new technologies in their struggles against discrimination and for advancement of women's rights, issues examined next.

Contemporary Brazilian feminisms and the year of the country's female "Arab Spring": a case study

Feminism debates and perspectives have seen a significant revival in the last five to ten years in Brazil, particularly throughout the year of 2015, which was seen as vital for cyberfeminism and for online (as well as offline) feminist political activism. This can be understood in the light of the re-democratization process of Brazil of the last 30 years, which saw

the entry of the country within globalization and the expansion of social welfare programmes, followed by the slow inclusion of a series of social movements and other groups in Brazilian society, albeit with serious setbacks in 2016 with the impeachment of the president Dilma Rousseff. Since the decade of the 1990's, Brazil has seen the growth of critical news commentary websites and online networks, from political partisan blogs to journalistic and academic ones, as well as blogs from social movements and civil society pressure groups (Guedes Bailey and Marques in Siapara and Beglis, 2012, 396).

As Khamis (Carter et al, 2015) has argued, thousands of women throughout the region played a visible role in the 2011 Arab Spring, having taken to the streets to call for an end to the dictatorship, demanding freedom and defying traditional gender roles, thus appearing in "the frontline of resistance and risking their lives" (in Carter et al, 2015, 565). In the Brazilian case, the political mobilization of women has slowly grown in the last years, including various *Slut Marches* throughout Brazil in 2011 (Ferreira, 2015) and other demonstrations during the 2013 June protests. The year of 2015 was particularly exceptional in the strong offline and online feminist activity, in a context of resistance of feminist groups against the criminalization of the abortion law and the stereotyping of women in the media and of female politicians. The 2013 Unesco report on broadband and gender, *Doubling Digital Opportunities,* underlined how new technologies have had an impact in countries like Brazil in the fight against gender violence.[ii]

Women appear as significant users of online technologies. Studies have shown that women from the lower classes are the main group which are mostly connected, using the web for shopping and other activities, as well as to seek entertainment. As Gomes and Sorj (2014) has argued, the new face of feminism in Brazil is again mixing the personal with the political. Brazilian feminists and academics have started to research more the ways in which women are using new technologies. Recent studies such as Natansohn's (2013) and other academic's comparative work

between Brazil, Argentina and Spain have provided important pathways for initial debate and research in the field. Alvarez (2014 in Ferreira, 2015, 208) for one has preferred to talk about *discursive fields of action* instead of feminist movements, underlining three moments in the history of contemporary feminism, the first during the dictatorship of the 1970's, which was responsible for the creation of the feminist movement; the second during the re-democratization years, which paved the way towards the pluralization of feminism and the third starts the beginning of the 21st century, marking a more "horizontal flow of discourses", with plural feminist practices which have culminated in a further multiplication of feminist fields.

It is this highly fragmented and contradictory contemporary period of Brazilian feminisms that is of interest to me here. Many Brazilian feminists have managed to have some influence, however contradictory, in the struggle against the reactions of more conservative sectors of Brazilian society to the advancement of gender equality and attempts of criminalising abortion by approving a law (5069/2013) which made it more difficult for health professionals in the country's national health service (SUS) to assist women in need of abortion.[iii]Feminists reacted angrily to the changes pushed forward by the then president of the lower house of Congress, Eduardo Cunha, and which consisted in the demand for medical examination for victims.[iv]

Among the popular blogs and Facebook home pages are *Blogueiras Negras*, *Geledes*, *Escreva Lola Escreva*, *Blogueiras Feministas, Think Olga* and *Nao me Kahl*, *Ventre Feminista*, *Arquivos Feminista*, respectively (see figure 1). The *Escritorio Feminista* ("Feminist Office") is a blog included in section of the magazine *Carta Capital*, and functions as a space where professional Brazilian women gather to debate gender issues.[v] This is a quintessential example of the political use of the web by many groups of disempowered women, and evidence of the ways in which cyberspace in Brazil is becoming increasingly *feminized* and as a space for social networking across regional and even class differences (i.e. Harcourt, 2000; Haraway, 1991). Many

of these websites include various personal stories and testimonials, providing spaces for self-expression and liberation for women outside the everyday hierarchies of Brazilian society. Different groups of Brazil women from different classes and social background, with ages ranging from 18 to over the 40's, are increasingly making use of these online networks, blogs and Facebook pages.

Figure 1 – Think Olga

The *Escreva Lola Escreva*, created by professor Lola Aronovich in 2008, paved the way for many young girls to get acquainted with feminism for the first time. As of 2014, it has had approximately 250.000 visits per month and is being considered one of the most popular in the field, together with *Blogueiras Feministas*. One of the key aims of the site is to break down stereotypes, including alerting to the fact that feminism should not be understood as the opposite of chauvinism. Feminist blogs like *Blogueiras Feministas* and the new NGO *Think Olga* are articulating many debates on women's issues that are yet to be fully included in mainstream Brazilian society and the media. The *Blogueiras Feministas* has over 37.000 followers, and is situated in the capital Brasilia, counting with a series of collaborators throughout the country. They have demanded from the government the construction of nurseries and shelters for the victims of violence, among others.

One of the strengths of the *Blogueiras Feministas* has been precisely its list of discussion in the forum section, an initiative of Cynthia Semiramis, but which has also migrated to the social media platform, Facebook. According to Bia Cardoso, the main purpose of the blog, a grassroots initiative run by eight people but which also participates in institutional events, is to encourage debate and stimulate Internet activism within an editorial policy that favours intersectional feminism. The front page of *Blogueiras Feministas* highlights the main themes of the blog, including the women's body, reproduction and abortion rights, and laws such as the *Maria da Penha* one. It also discusses issues of intersectionality, emphasising how patterns of gender oppression are interlinked with other forms of constraint (i.e. race and class). The blog states how its aim is to achieve a more just and equal society and has as its main objective to discuss feminism, adding that its focus is on the articulation of critiques of institutions and structures in order to combat prejudices.

The text stressed the fluidity of feminism, signalling towards the inclusion of multiple identities on what it means to be a feminist in Brazil: "We do not believe in stereotypes, in absolute truths, our feminism is political and is always in constant construction", stated the text. It thus acknowledged the fact that the discussions that take place in such spaces are not totally immune from the prejudices which exist within Brazilian society. Cardoso underscored a growth in the debate on feminism and gender inequality, stating nonetheless that the process has occurred slowly:

"The representation of women is still very limited not only in the mainstream media, but in other contexts. It is difficult for people to think beyond the box and the tendency is to reinforce stereotypes, be it of the women mother….. The debate on gender is happening but change has been slow. It is also not just a question of electing more women, as the ones who are elected are

committed to conservative agendas. To see more expressions of diversity would require not only changes in the companies, but also in the consumer…. I also believe that there is resistance in showing the diversity of the Brazilian women.…To keep women in the same social roles is always interesting…..”

The most read stories on the blog included those which focused on the body, and the stress placed on women's own control of it, such as "Our support for women, prostitutes, feminists and trans-feminists from the *Marcha das Vadias* of Rio de Janeiro"; "Anatomy of pleasure: clitoris and orgasm", although themes also included the oppressions of race and gender, feminist thought and sexual harassment. These included "The conquests of the black population and the value of their identity"; "Simone de Beauvoir: what is it to be a woman?"; "The dictatorship of the ideal body and the hidden prejudice" and "How to approach women without being filthy." Other links also provided a connection to the *Think Olga* sexual harassment campaign, and to others with a focus on how to denounce domestic violence.

The *Blogueiras Feministas* has given support to the Brazilian version of the *Slut Walks*, the "Marcha das Vadias", which has been seen by some academics as a symbol of the new articulations around women's issues in the country (i.e. Ferreira, 2015). *Blogueiras Feministas* has encouraged attention to the images and styles of the demonstration being played out during the marches, as well as stimulating debate. A strong component of the action of the *Marcha das Vadias* movement has undoubtedly been their appeal to imagery, to the visual and the body. During the year of 2015, the series of protests held by the *Marcha das Vadias*, alongside other feminist groups, continued to restore to play and strong visual images. These were used in the posters with an aim to mobilize other women, calling them to participate.

The many posters for the *Marcha das Vadias* have played with language and words using irony, play and provocativeness, subverting the use of the word "slut" (see figure 2). The *Marcha das Vadias* has regional versions which are held in twenty five states, from Sao Paulo, to Brasilia and Belo Horizonte. These also post on home pages and on social media. Each region has their own blog and they organise their own meetings, with different grassroots feminist groups in each state adopting various types of provocative slogans for each protest. Much of the focus of the *Marcha das Vadias'* different regional pages on Facebook and on Wordpress have been on discussions of feminism, ranging from the importance of women taking control over their body to the liberty that women can give to it, from protest to pleasure. This is one of the reasons that women protesters are encouraged to appear topless during the demonstrations. They also play on the word "slut", stating that the term is used in a pejorative way to shed light to the "patriarchal" character of Brazilian society, thus emphasising some of the traditional social norms and codes which exist, and which condemn some women to be merely "slept with" from those who are "for marrying".

Figure 2 – "Marcha das Vadias" poster

One of the posters for their third march, which took place in Fortaleza during the year 2013,

ahead of the World Cup in 2014, adopted a slogan which stressed the right that women should have over their own bodies. This could be read as being either an allusion to abortion rights or sexual pleasure. The slog was: "O meu corpo e meu. Nem da Copa, nem da igreja e muito menos seu!" (My body is mine. It is neither of the World Cup, or the Church or yours!"). The tone here made less political connections and strived to influence party politics or state feminism from a policy perspective, similarly to the case of other feminist movements, and emphasised more individual freedom, subversion from the established order and emancipation.

Other posters included phrases such as "Cansei! - Se ser livre e ser vadia, entao somos todas vadias" (I am tired - If to be free is to be a slut, then we are all sluts!") – "Venha para a Marcha Nacional das Vadias – 26 de Maio" (Com to the national march on the 26th of May). Here the pejorative word "slut" was taken on its head and used as synonymous with "freedom" and "liberty" from oppression. The use of the term here can be seen as inclusive of women and their multiple identities. The reference to the expression "Cansei! (I am tired) can be read as an indication of the exhaustion in trying to conform to rigid identity roles or stereotypes assigned by society to women, denying them their own true individuality and creative expression beyond the limited permissions assigned by the traditional conventional codes of Brazilian society.

Another feminist movement which has proven to be successful in making inroads into the mainstream, and influencing public debate on women's rights across a variety of platforms, has been the NGO *Think Olga*. In its examination of the year 2015, *Think Olga* in January 2016 underlined it as being the year of the "never ending spring" for women, in a direct reference to the Arab Spring of 2011. It published the story "Mulheres em 2015 ocupam as redes para exigir direitos e pedir o fim do assedio sexual e da intolerancia" (Women in 2015 took to online networks to demand rights and ask for the end of sexual harassment and intolerance). It went on further to

argue that the year of 2015 was the year when "feminism" ceased to be a "dirty word", having managed to be incorporated into the mainstream.

In a text published on its website on the 18th of December 2015, "Uma primavera sem fim" (A Spring without end), Luise Bello of *Think Olga* affirmed how 2015 was the year of online feminism. As she noted, between January 2014 and October 2015, the web search for the words "feminism" and "female empowerment" grew from 86.7% to 354.5%, respectively. The former reached 90.500 in October 2015 and the latter 3.600 in the same period. Among popular campaigns and hashtags throughout the year where "lei do feminicidio" (femicide law) in February 2015, which received 12.822 hits, the protest movement *Marcha das Margaridas* (March of the Daisies), with 28.633 in August, the realization of the Enem exam (with the controversy surrounding Simone de Beauvior) and the sexual harassment campaign #PrimeiroAssedio (First Harassment), with 252.101.

Similarly to *Blogueiras Feministas*, *Think Olga* is also interested in stories on intersectionality, and likes to publish personal testimonials about women and their everyday life experiences of oppression and harassment. The website affirms that it aims to promote the achievements of women within Brazilian society, including a link for the public to access women experts ("Entreviste uma Mulher" (Interview a Woman)). The story "Claudete Alves e a solidao que nao e so dela" (Claudete Alves and the loneliness of the black women, 14/12/2015) was an interesting piece which examined the rejection by black men of black women, underpinning the double oppression that the latter encounter.

Given the focus on similar topics, including discourses on feminism, representations of women in the media, discussions of everyday sexism and the body, as well as the concern with violence against women and legislations such as the Maria da Penha law, it is possible to see both *Blogueiras Feministas* and *Think Olga* as being quintessential examples of what Brazilian new

contemporary third wave feminism is all about. These feminist blogs frequently reference each other, including images from other blogs, such as the *Marcha das Vadias* posters in the *Blogueira Feministas* blog. *Think Olga* also has links which encourages women to report abuse and violence against them, such as the "Manda Prints" section (send your prints), which refers to online sexual harassment. One of its key aims is to boost the skills of women entrepreneurs, including a link called *Olga Mentoring*, where women can sign up and take on weekly courses on business training. It also includes information and updated journalistic stories on current national and international conferences on women's rights.

Feminists groups have also restored widely to Facebook, and particularly to Twitter, to criticise sexism in Brazilian society and gender inequality. The NGO *Think Olga* has managed to engage in a creative manner with Twitter through the successful *Chega de Fiu Fui* ("Enough of Whistling") campaign. Launched in July 2013, it was set up to tackle sexual harassment in public spaces. It was initially met with a lot of resistance, but afterwards managed to engage various people. The campaign was also supported by research findings conducted by the journalist Karin Hueck, who interviewed 8.000 people to discuss sexual harassment in public spaces. The results showed that 98% of them suffered from some form of sexual harassment, with 83% not agreeing with it and another 90% deciding to change clothes before leaving the house to avoid problems.

The campaign on *Twitter* started after a young 12 year old girl, who appeared on the Brazilian television programme *Master Chef Junior*, suffered later from sexual harassment comments on social media. This lead to the launch of the campaign #PrimeiroAssedio: voce nao esta mais so (First Sexual Harassment: you are not alone anymore) by Juliana de Faria, founder of *Think Olga*. The hashtag had 82.000 mentions. The main reasoning behind the campaign was to provide women victims of harassment as a child a voice to speak of their experiences. This was a ground breaking moment in Brazilian history, as for the first time various groups of women took to

Twitter to talk. Women were invited to speak about personal issues such as their first sexual harassment experience, of which there is little discussion in the public sphere. The hashtag would be retweeted more than 100.000 times, culminating in 11 million searches and being the highlight of Google in 2015. An important link was made here between the existence of sexual harassment with the high statistics on rape and violence against women. According to the NGO *Forum Brasileiro de Seguranca Publica* (FPSB, Brazilian Forum for Public Security), which conducts research on statistics of violence, a women in every 11 minutes is raped in Brazil.

The NGO *Think Olga* also found out, through an analysis of 3.111 tweets, that the average age of the first sexual harassment experience was 9.7 years old. Juliana de Faria's quote below, which expressed her own personal experience in sexual harassment as a young girl, is evidence of the *naturalisation* of the practice in Brazilian society, and its acceptability by many women of an older generation, who have been brought up to see these attitudes as being part of society's norms and conventions. As she stated:

"The first time I was harassed I was 11 years old. I was returning from the bakery, and a car passed next to me and started to swear loudly. I did not understand it and I started to cry. An old women stopped me in the street and said: "do not be silly, accept it as a form of praise".

Another influential Twitter campaign was *#AgoraeQueSaoElas* (Now it is Them! (Her), which took place in the end of October, start of November 2015. This campaign saw mainly male columnists ceding their space in the mainstream media for women. The hashtag received a total of 5.000 mentions. Idealised by Manoela Miklos, the hashtag proved to be widely successful already in the second day (2/11/2015). Many texts by women of different backgrounds where published in the mainstream newspapers across the country, such as the philosopher Djamila Ribeiro in the

Blog of Sakamoto (on the UOL website, of the Folha group). These dealt with a variety of issues relating to gender inequality in Brazil. The campaign had the main purpose of highlighting women's exclusion from debate. It also provided women with more visibility at the same time that it shed light to the lack of voice and few opportunities that women have in the newsroom and their overall lack of representation in the mainstream media.

The Brazilian mainstream media is controlled by less than ten families, including the Marinho's of *Globo Organisations*, who detain a total of 80% of the nation's media content. Despite the growth of professionalism and balance in the newsroom since the decade of the 1990's in the context of the re-democratisation, the Brazilian media, represented mainly by the newspapers *O Globo*, *Folha de Sao Paulo*, the magazines *Veja* and *Isto E*, and *TV Globo*, still struggles with partisanship practices and are not sufficiently plural (Matos, 2017). Thus the recent political mobilization, offline and online, of the Brazilian feminist "Arab Spring" has been crucial in highlighting the need to attend to the interests of multiple groups of women who do not see themselves included in the political public sphere and within the Brazilian mainstream media and society.

The importance of new communication technologies (ICTS) for gender and development in such a context has thus become all the more relevant. A crucial factor in this debate is not only the problem of granting more access to online communications to diverse groups of women, but to have them participate and design and be encouraged to be *technological entrepreneurs*, as well as to learn to better make use of these communication platforms for political mobilization. Unfortunately, it is the case that many of these websites operate within a highly fragmented public space. Alvarez (quoted in Vargas, 2010, 321) has argued that these strategies have however become more diverse and, to a certain extent, more democratic. She has classified these as being: "a broad, heterogeneous, polycentric, multifaceted and *polysemic* field of discourse and action."

Lucia Hanmer, lead economist in gender and development at the World Bank Group (WB), has also underpinned the need to increase the use of ICTs for the advancement of women's rights in developing countries. She sees an important role for governments in promoting some of these measures, in possible alliance with the private sector: "Developing countries can take steps to ensure women's participation in political and other institutions in society, including promoting measures to ensure their equal representation in parliament and other legislative measures at the national and local levels. Developing country governments can invest in programs that have specifically designed components to support women and girls acquire new skills, information and training that enable them to take up new economic opportunities….," she has stated.

Governments do have an important role to play here, something which I discuss elsewhere (Matos, 2017), however feminist activism needs to come above all from the grassroots and be guided by *bottom-up* processes, as the ones discussed here. If on one hand we need to acknowledge the limits of online networks, avoid the hype, we must also recognise the significance that web technologies can have in stimulating debate within the public sphere, shaping elites' perceptions and attitudes towards women's rights and social inclusion. Moreover, despite differences, most of the discourses which circulated in these blogs were similar in scope and tone, with many focusing on either stimulating protests and mobilizations, or criticising violence towards women and the practice of sexual harassment. Debate on issues of political representation, sexism in political campaigning, the Dilma impeachment process and the treatment of a women politician in contrast to the man, the vulnerability of women in the workplace and gender stereotyping were also issues widely discussed in many of the texts.

The intensity of these offline and online feminist protests has also been the subject of attention of the international press, contributing to a revival of energy for contemporary Brazilian

feminism and making it look out again to the international sphere. Since the year 2000, there has been a shift within Brazilian feminism away from transnational engagement beyond the UN and governmental spheres, but there are also increasing signs of new *possibilities of dialogue* that can be forged between these new Brazilian feminist and diverse groups of grassroots women activists, with other scholars, NGOs and policy groups, both nationally and internationally.

There is much more scope to expand on these themes, as they have not yet taken on a wider discussion within the country's public sphere. Here I have provided a brief sketch of some of the debates that are occurring within the Brazilian feminist *blogosphere*, which are pressuring for gender justice and both *recognition* (i.e. cultural values and representations) and as well as wider redistribution of resources (Fraser, 2013), thus contributing to bring these concerns to the mainstream, albeit slowly and within a scenario of setbacks and enormous challenges.

Conclusion

Since the creation of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, women in Brazil have managed to secure rights and occupy more positions in the marketplace, government, businesses and the media. In the last three decades, Brazilian women have slowly become more empowered. Contemporary Brazilian feminists are slowly beginning to benefit from the opportunities offered by *cyberspace* (i.e. Plant, 1995; Harcourt, 2000). Despite the limitations imposed on the capacity of the web to increase democratisation, the fact is that the web *is* offering opportunities, however contradictory, for different groups to engage in critical debate, to articulate counter-hegemonic discourses which go against traditional representations of gender, as well as demand a wider voice in Brazilian society. This is taking place in a context which has seen a rise of conservative forces within Brazilian society, and a backlash against minority and women rights, culminating in

Dilma's impeachment in 2016. Feminist groups *Blogueiras Feministas* and *Think Olga* have been influential in bringing to public debate important discussions such as sexual harassment.

New technologies in themselves cannot do all the work in turns of paving the way for more progressive change, but they can have an important role in helping shape debate depending on how theses online platforms are put to use. To grant another *equality in worth* requires changes in perceptions and attitudes in relation to particular social groups, culminating in improvements in their material conditions (Fraser, 2013). This however cannot depend on legislations alone, and needs to be secured through continuous questioning of traditionally ingrained power structures. For it is within the cultural and social sphere that ideas around the inferiority of women are upheld and reinforced.

It is fundamental to recognise that the media needs to make a greater contribution to the advancement of women's rights (Matos, 2017), and in this absence of wider commitments, it is new communication technologies that emerge as powerful platforms which can contribute to give women a stronger voice, particularly in developing countries, thus empowering different perspectives form the mainstream, assisting in the building of transnational feminist networks and bringing together local and global quests for gender justice, which are destined to become more pressing issues for concern in the years to come.

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[i] See Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, platform for action, section J: Media, Beijing, China (http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/). The section states: "Encourage and recognize women's media networks, including electronic networks and other new technologies of communication, as a means for the dissemination of information and exchange views, including at the international level, and support women's groups active in all media work….."

[ii] See full report, Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2013. Doubling Digital Opportunities: Enhancing the Inclusion of Women and Girls in the Information Society. A Report by the Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender. Geneva/Paris: ITU/UNESCO.

[iii] The law was approved in the Chamber of Deputies in October 2015, with 37 votes in favour and 14 against. The text stated that sexual violence could only be considered as such with visible physical symptoms of rape, as well as criminalising the health professionals who assist women in an abortion.

[iv] It would be only with the Federal Constitution of 1988 that women's rights in Brazil would start to be acknowledged. The threats to the continuity of these rights has become a daily struggle of diverse groups of women in

Brazil. Brazil has one of the lowest rates of political representation in the world, with a rate of less than 10% of women present in legislative bodies.

ᵛ Similar to the case of other countries, there have also been a growth in the "anti-feminist" campaign, with websites such as "Mulheres Contra of Feminismo" (*Women Against Feminism*, https://mulherescontraofeminismo.wordpress.com/), having emerged. Another website dedicated to men's issues has been "Papo de Homen" (Men's Talk - https://papodehomem.com.br/), created in 2006 and which addressed men between the ages of 20-35 (Ferreira, 2015).