Re-thinking feminism and democratic politics:

the potential of online networks for social change and gender equality in Brazil

Repensando o feminismo e a política democrática: o potencial das redes online para a mudança social e igualdade de género no Brasil

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Abstract

This article provides a critical summary of feminist theoretical perspectives on the potential of online communications for women's rights, further sketching a brief case study of contemporary Brazilian feminism and the mobilization around women's rights, particularly in the year 2015. This is done through a discussion of the discursive online practices of websites like *Blogueiras Feministas* and the NGO *Think Olga*, part of a wider project (Matos, 2017). Questions asked include how the media can better contribute to assist in gender development, and how online platforms can make a difference. I argue that despite constraints and setbacks, the seeds of a wider transformative influence in the offline world are slowly being planted in a highly fragmented, heterogeneous and erratic blogosphere.

Keywords: *cyberfeminism*; gender equality; media; Third World feminism; Brazil.

Resumo

Este artigo fornece um resumo crítico das perspetivas teóricas feministas sobre o potencial das comunicações online para os direitos das mulheres, esboçando um breve estudo de caso do feminismo brasileiro contemporâneo e a mobilização em torno dos direitos das mulheres, particularmente no ano de 2015. Isso é feito através da discussão das práticas discursivas online de sites como o *Blogueiras Feministas* e a ONG *Think Olga*, parte de um projeto mais amplo (Matos, 2017). As questões colocadas incluem as de saber como os *media* podem melhor contribuir para ajudar no desenvolvimento do género e como as plataformas online podem fazer a diferença. Argumento que, apesar das restrições e retrocessos, as sementes de uma influência transformadora mais ampla no mundo offline estão sendo lentamente plantadas em uma blogosfera altamente fragmentada, heterogénea e errática.

Palavras-chave: *ciberfeminismo*; igualdade de género; feminismo do Terceiro Mundo; Brasil.

Introduction

Contemporary Brazilian feminist movements have seen a revival in the last years amid the paradoxes of the country's democratization process. The year 2015 was one in which feminism had appeared to have invaded the mainstream of the political sphere as well as within online spaces. After expanding significantly in the country since the decade of the 1990s, online communication platforms and other social media networks have became prominent tools by which civil society players, social movements and feminist groups make use of in their struggle for the advancement of women's rights and other advocacy causes. Feminist groups have slowly managed to gain inroads in mainstream society and politics, experiencing both the contradictions of gaining visibility in online spaces whilst also suffering from the vulnerability of the processes of exclusion and the oppression exercised by conservative groups of the status quo both online and offline.

Gender politics has began to take full hold of cyberspace in the 21st century, both in the developed and developing world. Digital access and

rights are important are the means by which women worldwide seek empowerment and advancement outside of the constraints of institutional structures. The UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2003, in article 47, for one had already underlined the centrality of the participation and access of women to information and communication technologies, and use of these for their empowerment. The relationship between women and new technologies has thus developed as an important area of research for feminists and other scholars working in the social science (i.e. Haraway, 1991; Wajcman, 1991; Plant, 1995; Harcourt, 2000; Sandoval, 2000; Sutton and Pollock, 2000; Wakeford, 2000). Research has underscored how women are heavy users of social media, even more so than men, with an expanding body of international scholarship growing considerably in the last decades, including some emerging important research in Brazil (i.e. Natansohn, 2013; Ferreira, 2015; Matos, 2017).

A lot of the theoretical debates and empirical research within gender and cultural studies and feminist theory has in the last decades focused more

on the potential offered by online communication networks and social media, and how these can assist in feminist campaigns, advocacy and political mobilization around issues such as political representation, patriarchy, gender stereotyping in the media as well as discrimination in the workplace and the gender pay gap (i.e. Budgeon, 2011; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Gill, 2012; Gallagher, 2014).

My interest here is in the relationship between feminism and new technologies in terms of the ways in which these vehicles can be made meaningful for women in everyday life, and how these can function as tools for gender development in localised contexts within globalization. I am interested in examining what other authors have started to do, as McNeil (2013) indicates, which is to explore the discursive practices and opportunities opened up by cyberculture, looking at what is happening on the ground. These everyday activities, that many would classify as being banal, are for one under-researched within feminist media studies, as pointed out by scholars (Sarikasis, 2014). It is my view that this deserves more attention.

The engagement with the discursive communication practices and online interactions of these groups is a first step in granting them a voice and providing them with cultural recognition, closely tied to economic resources (Fraser, 2014), as well as contributing to insert their struggles within a wider international agenda of global gender justice.

In a highly commercially concentrated media environment, where the political avenues are largely dominated by big business and wealthy sponsors, online spaces provide opportunities for citizens, grassroots and social movements to push for social change. Particularly in the case of Brazil, new technologies have even a stronger possibility of influencing the *political sphere*, sectors of the public opinion and the offline sphere, constituting forms of political engagement and articulation of subject positions, identities and discourses beyond the confines of traditional governmental and media institutions. For starters, there is sufficient evidence of cases when heated discussions on social media provoke certain changes in governmental decisions and reactions.

These theoretical perspectives are thus discussed through the critical examination of a series of feminist blogs, such as the popular *Blogueiras Feministas*[1] and the NGO *Think Olga*[2], which are a part of a wider media and critical discourse analysis of contemporary online feminist websites in contrast to gender representations of femininity in advertising and commercials conducted elsewhere (Matos, 2017). Many of these feminist organizations and movements are part of a heterogeneous and multifaceted environment, operating within a fragmented online space which in many ways is more democratic but at the same time more contradictory, erratic and vulnerable. (i.e. Alvarez *apud* Vargas, 2010, p. 321; Matos, 2017).

Theorizing *cyberfeminism* and online activism

The term "cyberfeminism" is largely used to refer to a range of theories on the relationship between

gender and digital culture (i.e. Flanagan & Booth *apud* Daniels, 2009). *Cyberfeminism* began to grown in the decade of the 1990's. Discussions have dated as far back as the 1970's, amid the radical criticism of science and technology and the domination of men in these fields. Technological culture was seen as being inherently masculine, excluding the feminine (i.e. Wajcman, 1991, 2000; Plant, 1995). In her evaluation of what is meant by *cyberfeminisms*, Daniels (2009) has underpinned the contradictions, stressing the limits of the "subversive" potential of the web due to the material reality of the global political economy of new technologies. This includes the current digital divide in computer use and access in terms of gender, as well as between countries in the North and the South, and the generally exploitative labour conditions experienced by a majority of technology workers.

Quoting Gill (2005) and underlining the limitations of online activism in the North due to commercialization, Daniels (2009, p. 102-103) has argued that these views fail to acknowledge how women can make use

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1 http://blogueirasfeministas.com/.

2 https://thinkolga.com/.

of digital technologies in innovative ways, including how the web can facilitate race and gender equality. As Plant (1995) argues in her poetic text *The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics*, the convergence of women with the machine has been one of the key preoccupations of cbyernetic feminism. Here Plant engaged in an intriguing comparison between the computer's history of weaving with the work done by women, proclaiming that computing was a female sphere and that cyberspace was a feminine domain, providing freedom from the patriarchal order (*apud* McNeil, 2013, p. 43).

Similarly to Plant, and even Haraway, Harcourt (2000, p. 693) has also been enthusiastic about the potential of the web for women's rights, giving a personal account on how the Internet shaped her everyday activities and granting 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"). Cyberspace has thus provided previously marginalised non-political actors with the possibilities of engaging in the political scene in ways which contrasts to the difficulties encountered offline and in everyday life (Sassen, 2002). Young women and other third wave feminist throughout the world have been restoring to the web to engage in civic action and mobilize against their oppression. To research their voices and take their activities seriously is the first step towards the recognition (Fraser, 2014) of the need to provide solutions to the persistence of gender inequality the world today.

Methodology

The feminist websites that I have examined here are part of a wider project on gender, development and the media, for which I collected a variety of discourses, images and representations in both the Brazilian mainstream media and in online platforms on various types of *discourses* on women's rights and issues, ranging from the traditional and regressive to the empowering, contradictory and ambiguous (Matos, 2017). The intention here was to examine two opposing and contradictory scenarios: one was connected to sectors of the mainstream media, such as advertising and female magazines, which are still influenced by stereotypical representations and idealisations on what the "Brazilian women" should be, and the other is a growing online activism which is providing opportunities for resistance, contradiction a s well as reaffirmation.

The feminist groups and websites that were analysed managed to contribute in a vibrant way, however sporadically and in a limited manner within specific moments in time, to either mobilize and organise protests, assist in public policy debate and decision making as well as striving to create awareness within wider Brazilian society on women's rights. These blogs have also functioned in a highly fragmented cyberspace, where mobilizations, protests and debates occur with more or less intensity during particular periods, and in the context of issues which are being debated within the political sphere, from the chauvinism expressed during Dilma's campaign to the relevance

of the *Maria da Penha law*[3] and the abortion debate. I have chosen here to focus on discursive practices, and by *discourse* I mean a set of communication practices that challenge, reaffirm as well as *subvert* a set of ideas and views expressed through language and images on a particular subject. As Fairclough (1998) has argued, discourse is a form of power and is closely connected to ideological positions whilst it is presented as "natural" and "common sense.

There are evidently many active women's movements and feminist groups engaging online, which would be impossible to examine all. I have included, among my original data, in this chapter a selection of popular feminist websites, including *Bloguei-ras Feministas* and *Think Olga*. I further discussed the Twitter campaigns of *#Primeiro Assedio* (First Sexual

Harassment), alongside posters from the country's version of the SlutWalk (*Marcha das Vadias*)[4]. In this article I thus provide a brief sketch of some of these everyday practices and discourses which circulated online in an attempt to influence offline avenues. A key feature of these websites is the diversity and heterogeneity of the causes and forms of advocacy of the feminist groups, including a variety of political themes, ranging from depictions of sexism in everyday Brazilian society, to cases of violence against women, rape and sexual harassment, alongside political representation demands and other forms of discrimination.

Issues such as gender stereotyping in the media, the lack of diversity of women's identities, and the presence of Afro-Brazilian women on television, were among some discourses articulated alongside criticisms of the authoritarian legacy of Brazilian society and its struggle with difference, refusing to extend citizenship rights to diverse groups of people. This is happening at a moment when the role of ICTs

(new information and communication technologies) in social and economic development is receiving renewed attention by international bodies and governments, as well as within the debates on gender and development articulated through the GAD approach (Gajjala & Mamidipudi, 1999), among others.

ICTs for development: the limits and the potential of the Internet for democratic politics

Debates on the potential of the internet have been cast in what many authors have claimed as two opposite camps (i.e. Chadwick, 2006; Curran & Seaton, 2010), the more utopian perspective, of those who have tended to endorse a technological determinism mindset, including here the work of Castells (2007), or the so-called sceptics. The first group has seen new technologies in them a potential to revolutionise our structures and ways of life, while the other scholars claim that these are insufficient in their capacity to correct structural inequalities, however opening up

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3 The Maria da Penha law was sanctioned in 2006 during the Lula government to combat domestic violence and create harsher penalties, including temporary imprisonment, for husbands denounced for psychical abuse against their wives. It was named on a real life women called Maria da Penha, who suffered domestic abuse in the hands of her husband for over 20 years and struggled in court to obtain justice to her cause.

4 See the website https://marchadas-vadiascwb.wordpress.com/conheca-a-marcha/porquevadias/.

spaces for participation and democratization (i.e. Iosifidis, 2011; Dahlgren, 2012). Social movement scholars have attempted to examine the nature of such practices, examining how using the web relates to levels of participation or civic engagement (i.e. Della Porta, 2012).

If on one hand online technologies can offer opportunities for wider political participation, as well as permitting institutions to become more transparent and to engage in direct contact with the public, they can also suffer from the same problems as other media sectors, such as excessive commercialization and concentration (i.e. Chadwick, 2006). In Guedes Bailey and Marques' (*apud* Siapara & Veglis, 2012) discussion of the arguments on the potential of online communications, I stress the one that they highlight as being the more appropriate in its understanding of the potential of social media (as well as online communications): namely that social media is neither positive or negative, and that ICTs can be both "socially shaped by the uses people define for them and society shaping" (Guedes Bailey & Marques, 2012, p. 396).

Arguably, third wave feminists have been particularly attracted to the Internet (Budgeon *apud* Gill & Scharff, 2011, 2013), interacting intelligently with these spaces in their quests to appropriate previously pejorative terms, such as words like "slut" and "bitch", to combat gender inequality, in attempts to revert sexist images and language and articulate counter-hegemonic discourses. However, the mere access to online networks and the competency in computer skills is not enough. This would be to merely embrace technological determinism, or to view the access to technologies within the framework of modernization theory. The latter saw an economic role for the media in contributing to speed up development and make countries "catch up" with the West (i.e. Schramm, 1964), and which largely argued that mere connectivity was needed (Asiedu *apud* Shade, 2015, p. 227).

Access to new technologies is important in terms of communication rights, and in developing countries more so in a context where sectors of the population do not have access to such networks and find

themselves excluded. However, of equal importance here or more so are the ways in which these online communication networks can be appropriated as a sphere of influence, mobilization and political activity. The Internet has been expanding rapidly in Latin America and is also reaching different groups across classes. According to a 2014 report from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Cepal), around 58% of Brazilians have access to the Internet, a significant improvement from the 30% registered in 2006.

The 2013 report by the *Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender, Doubling Digital Opportunities: Enhancing the Inclusion of Women and Girls in the Information Society*, published by Unesco[5], stated also how the sustainable development agenda can be advanced through the promotion of new technologies in support of gender equality. As the 2013 report stated,

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5 The full report can be accessed at http://www.broadbandcommission.org/documents/working-groups/bb-doubling-digital-2013.pdf.

after more than twenty years, there are still two-thirds of the planet's population who do not have access to the web. Most of these are women. Studies have shown that women from the lower classes are the group which are mostly connected, and who use the web for shopping and other activities, seeking entertainment and news. The 2013 Broadband report further spotted the uses that ICTs have had in countries like Brazil in the fight against gender violence, pointing out the large use of mobile technology and computers in the country's shanty-towns.

Another crucial factor in this debate however is not only the problem of granting more access to online communications to diverse groups of women, but to have them participate in the online sphere as *equal* subjects, and as influential as other more privileged groups in discussion and policy-making, thus being encouraged to make better use of communication platforms for self-expression and politics. Thus the acknowledgement of the transformative role that these new technologies can, and have already had, for gender

development, however limited and contradictory, is a nod to the theories that state that communications do have an essential part to play in development, and need further investigation and debate.

The evaluation of the impact that communication technologies can have for the causes of these movements thus needs to be time and context-specific, taking into consideration the political particularities of the given moment. Judging by the impact of these new technologies in events such as the *Arab Spring in 2011*, the *Occupy movement* and the protests of the *Indignados* in Spain, it can be argued that these platforms can have a short-term collective local or global effect within a specific time period, nonetheless laying the roots for further mobilization and expansion of the cause. Thus the fact that these initiatives are fragmented and mostly short-lived should not be a reason to be dismissive. Rather these need to be seen as stepping stones in the building of pathways towards greater gender equality and social inclusion, deepening democratization.

Contemporary Brazilian feminisms in the digital age: a case study

Feminism theoretical debates as well as mobilization have seen a significant revival in the last ten years in Brazil, particularly throughout the year of 2015 and 2016, which were seen as vital for online and offline feminist political activism. This can be understood in the light of the re-democratization process of Brazil of the last 30 years following from the end of the dictatorship in the mid-1980s, and which saw an expansion of liberal democracy in the country as well as its insertion within the global economy. Political liberalization also saw the gradual expansion of a welfare state and the wider inclusion of social movements and other groups in the political mainstream, albeit with serious setbacks from the year 2016 onwards following from the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff.

Many Brazilian feminists since the decade of the 1960s, when they fought against the dictatorship, have managed to exercise influence in the shaping of policies and debates on gender, including reactions to attempts

of criminalising abortion in the country. Progress has thus been slow and many causes continue to be fought in what is still a highly fragmented political space (i.e. Matos, 2017). Tracing the development of feminism in the country, Alvarez (*apud* Ferreira, 2015, 208) has focused on the phrase *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 starting in the beginning of the 21st century, having marked a more "horizontal flow of discourses".

Recent studies such as Natansohn's (2013) and other comparative work done on Brazil, Argentina and Spain have provided important research insights for debate in the field on the use of new technologies for the advancement of gender equality. Research though on the uses made by feminist groups of the Internet is still expanding and there is scope for further development (i.e. Natansohn, 2013; Ferreira, 2015; Matos, 2017). It is thus possible to draw some parallels between the "Brazilian uprising" with the mobilization of women during the Arab Spring. As Khamis (*apud* Carter *et al.*, 2015, p. 565) 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, appearing in "the frontline of resistance and risking their lives".

In the Brazilian case, the political mobilization of women did not occur within the same context and was not directed towards a dictatorship, but nonetheless had the same vibrancy and political immediacy. These were protests that had been ongoing in the last years, and which included various Slut Marches held throughout the country in 2011 (Ferreira, 2015). The new face of Brazilian feminism thus was refreshing the traditional mixing of the personal with the political (Gomes & Sorj, 2014). Among some of the popular websites in the Brazilian blogosphere and *Facebook* home pages are *Blogueiras Negras*, *Geledes*, *Escreva Lola Escreva*, *Blogueiras Feministas*, *Think Olga* and *Não me Kahlo*, *Ventre Feminista* and *Arquivos Feministas*[6]. Many of these websites include various personal stories and testimonials, providing spaces for self-expression and liberation from everyday hierarchies, with different groups of Brazilian women across classes and social background, ranging from 18 to 40 years old, articulating a variety of discourses and making use of these networks for their own purposes.

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, alongside *Blogueiras Feministas*. The latter has over 37.000 followers, and is situated in the capital Brasilia, counting with

6 The websites can be access at http://blogueirasnegras.org/; https://www.geledes.org.br/; http://escrevalolaescreva.blogspot.com/;http://www.naomekahlo.com/; https://www.facebook.com/ventrefeminista/; https://www.facebook.com/arquivosfeministas, respectively.

a series of collaborators. One of its key aims is to break down stereotypes, including stating that feminism should not be understood as the opposite of chauvinism. Feminist blogs like *Blogueiras Feministas* and the new NGO *Think Olga* nonetheless are articulating many debates on women's issues that are yet to be fully included in mainstream Brazilian society and the media. The process is slow and contradictory, including occasional reinforcements of stereotypes in these websites themselves as well as backlashes from conservative sectors both online and offline.

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. 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, having as its main objective the discussion of feminism. It further adds that its focus is on the articulation of critiques of institutions and structures in order to combat prejudices. The text further stressed the fluidity of feminism, signaling towards the inclusion of multiple feminist identities.

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" and "Anatomy of pleasure: clitoris and orgasm". Other themes included the combined oppressions of race and gender, as well as feminist thought and sexual harassment. Links were provided with connections to the *Think Olga* sexual harassment campaign, and to others

with a focus on how to denounce domestic violence.

The *Blogueiras Feministas* website has also 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, which are played out during the marches. 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. 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", and stating that the term is used in a pejorative way, in an attempt to shed light to the "patriarchal" character of Brazilian society. It emphasizes some traditional social norms and codes, and which serve to condemn some women to be merely "slept with" from those who are "for marrying". The "Marcha das Vadias" has regional versions which are held

in twenty five states, from Sao Paulo, to Brasilia and Belo Horizonte, with each region having their own blog and organising their own meetings, further adopting various types of provocative slogans for each protest.

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 that women should have the right to owe their own bodies. This could be read as being either an allusion to abortion rights or sexual pleasure. The slog was: "O meu corpo é 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, striving to influence party politics from a policy perspective and emphasizing more individual freedom as well as subversion from the established order.

Other posters included phrases such as "Cansei! – Se ser livre é ser vadia, então somos todas vadias" (I am tired – If to be free is to be a slut, then we are all sluts!") and "Venha para a Marcha Nacional das Vadias – 26 de Maio" (Come 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, signalling towards the need for the inclusive of women and their multiple identities. The reference to the expression "Cansei! (I am tired) here can also be read as an indication of the exhaustion in trying to conform to rigid gender identity roles or stereotypes which deny women in Brazilian society their own individuality and creative expression.

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, inviting comparisons to the 2011 Arab Spring. It published the story "Mulheres em 2015 ocupam as redes para exigir direitos e pedir o fim do assédio sexual e da intolerância" (Women in 2015 took to online networks to demand rights and ask for the end of sexual harassment and intolerance), further underlining that the year of 2015 was the year when "feminism" ceased to be a "dirty word".

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 were "lei do feminicídio" (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, and another 252.101 with the sexual harassment campaign *#PrimeiroAssedio* (First Harassment).

Similarly to *Blogueiras Feministas*, *Think Olga* is also interested in stories on intersectionality, having published personal testimonials on women and their everyday life experiences of harassment. It states as an aim

the promotion of the achievements of women, including a link for the public to access women experts ("Entreviste uma Mulher" (Interview a Woman). Given the focus on similar topics, including discourses on feminism, representations of women in the media, discussions of everyday sexism and concerns with violence against women, it is possible to see both *Blogueiras Feministas* and *Think Olga* as being quintessential examples of Brazilian new contemporary third wave feminisms. These feminist blogs frequently reference each other, including images from other blogs, such as the "Marcha das Vadias" posters in the *Blogueiras 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.

Feminists groups have also restored widely to Facebook, and particularly to Twitter, to criticise sexism in Brazilian society. The NGO *Think Olga* engaged creatively 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 and was initially met with a lot of resistance, however managing 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 women 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 program *Master Chef Junior*, suffered later from sexual harassment comments on social media. This lead to the launch of the campaign *#PrimeiroAssedio: você não está mais só* (First Sexual Harassment: you are not alone anymore) by Juliana de Faria, founder of *Think Olga*, with the hashtag having 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. 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 in the country.

Brazilian feminists are thus slowly beginning to benefit from the opportunities opened by new technologies. The last years has shown in particular a revival of feminist movements and women's groups, many which are gradually contributing to create new forms of transnational activism and global civil society engagement, capable in the mid to long term of strengthening democratic processes in the country (i.e. Alvarez, 1990; Vargas, 2010; Matos, 2017).

Conclusion
Despite the limitations on the capacity of the web to increase

democratisation due to the digital divide and commercialization, the web nonetheless is offering opportunities and spaces, however contradictory, chaotic and limited, to a diversity of groups to engage in debate and mobilize politically in a way which compensates for the offline constraints (Matos, 2017). In the brief sketch of the feminist blogs and websites discussed here, most of the discourses which circulated in these blogs shared similarities in the themes covered, ranging from mobilizing other political actors for protests, to criticising domestic violence and cases of sexual harassment. Debates explored the terrains of sexism in political campaigning, including criticisms towards the Dilma impeachment process, and the overall treatment of women as politicians, alongside discussions on workplace discrimination and gender stereotyping in the media.

New technologies in themselves thus 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, influencing and creating awareness. This evidently depends on how theses online platforms are used, for what purpose, with what effect and what consequences. An important aspect that needs to be emphasised is the role that communication platforms are having for democratic politics in developing countries like Brazil, despite criticisms which state that online engagement leads to low political participation. In a context where Brazil is seeing significant social and political regressions in the last years in the aftermath of the Dilma impeachment in 2016, causing disillusionment and a sense of hopelessness, it is these communication networks that are managing to influence thinking and public opinion, signalling to the wider importance that these will have in the near future in the contribution to the advancement of gender equality and the wider democratization process.

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