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## **Feminist Media Studies across Borders: Re-visiting Studies within the Brazilian National Context**

By Carolina Matos<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Feminist media studies in the US and the UK have built a strong tradition of research, which has aimed to look at the correlation between structural gender inequalities in society and how these have been played out in the media. These range from classic studies on soap operas to debates on the sexualization of culture and the construction of forms of femininity within a post-feminist context (i.e. Gill, 2006; McNair, 2002; Ang, 1985; Tuchman at el, 1978). Research on the relationship between gender and the media has arguably become an important arena of inquiry in Latin America. Feminist media studies in countries like Brazil nonetheless is still in need of strengthening and becoming a more robust area of research, despite the emergence of some important work in the field in the last decade (i.e. Ferreira, 2015; Alvarez, 2015; Escosteguy and Messa, 2012).

The aim of this paper is to provide a brief critical sketch of some of the research in the field, examining potentialities for further work as well as avenues for theoretical engagement. As Yuval-Davis (1997, 2010) has stated, we cannot take for granted that other national contexts are embedded necessarily within post-feminism narratives and discourses, as identified in the US and Northern Europe.

In countries like Brazil, rigid and fixed categories of femininity clash with feminist and post-feminist images and discourses which proliferate in the media and throughout society, mingling discourses around the “new career women” with *pre-feminist* narratives and other forms of idealization of Brazilian femininity. This paper also looks at the strengthening of feminist public spheres on online networks through the inclusion of examples from a wider case study conducted elsewhere by the author on the ways that Brazilian feminist movements are making use of technologies for women’s empowerment and advancement of rights.

*Keywords:* Feminism Theory, Post-feminism, Post-colonialism, the Third World, Brazil

### **Introduction**

Research that problematises the relationship between gender and communication structures, from television and radio to new technologies, at both the production and reception levels, has slowly started to grow in the last decades in countries like Brazil but are in further need of theorization and expansion into a more robust research tradition (Matos, 2017; Tomazetti and

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Coruja, 2017; Martinez et al, 2015; Silva and John, 2016; Escosteguy, 2004; Minella, 2004). It has yet to be fully consolidated as an important field of inquiry along the lines of prestige and consolidation of work that has been carried out on gender studies in the fields of sociology, politics and anthropology, focusing on areas including work, reproductive health, representation of women in politics and women and social movements, among others (i.e. Biroli and Miguel, 2014; Lebon, 2010; Alvarez, 1990). Critical feminist perspectives on communications started arguably to shape intellectual debate and research in the field of gender and the media mainly from the decade of 1990's. Work has been carried out in universities across the country, coming from the top universities in the country, such Federal University of Rio (UFRJ), the University of Sao Paulo (USP), the federal one in Rio Grande do Sul and the University de Brasilia (UnB) (Escosteguy and Messa, 2006).

There have been a series of reasons given for the marginalization of this line of research, including the fact that the feminist movement in Brazil since the 1970's has tended to prioritize collective demands, such as the struggle against the dictatorship and the push for democratization, thus undermining the priority of cultural themes within feminist thinking (Escosteguy, 2012). As more recent research has shown, the articles written on gender and the media in the two main journal publications in the field dedicated to the study of gender, *Cadernos Pagu* and *Revista de Estudos Feministas*, are within a significant minority (Martinez et al, 2015; Matos, 2017). Other studies have come up with similar results. Silva and John (2016) examined how gender has been articulated in reception studies of Brazilian *telenovelas* which were developed in communication post-graduate programmes from 2000 to 2009. They stated that out from a total of 209, only four focused on gender. Tomazetti and Coruja (2017) also looked at theses and dissertations in post-graduate programmes in the country from 2010 to 2015, affirming that out of a total of 191 reception and media consumption analysed during this period, only 15 concentrated on the dynamics of gender.

The limited number still of studies on gender in research on the media is astonishing given the ways in which diverse groups of Brazilian women are active consumers of media and cultural products beyond soap operas. Thus they have in the last decade taken on to social media texts and other communication technologies to engage in political mobilization and debate as well as to provide forums for discussions of gender policies and the inequalities of the offline world (i.e. Natansohn, 2013; Ferreira, 2015; Matos, 2017). Brazil is immersed in a heavily mediated environment, where a few mainstream media vehicles, from *Globo Organizations* to magazine *Veja* and newspaper *Folha*, have traditionally occupied a central role in political, social and cultural life in the last decades following from during and after the end of the dictatorship (1964-1985), shaping political debate and interfering in political life in various important political moments in the country, from the first 1989 presidential election in the re-democratization period to the impeachment of the first women president Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Brazilian feminism in the contemporary context has seen a vibrant revival, and this has particularly been manifested in the realization of a series of protests throughout the country in the last years, from 2011 to 2015, against gender discrimination and regressive social policies and in favour of the expansion of women's rights.

Gender concerns in relation to communication studies are still in need of building a more robust body of research which can be more in tune with international theory and empirical work on feminism, ranging from debates on transnational feminist politics and social movements to the changes in the media environment due to new technologies and digitization. Tomazetti and Coruja (2017) have argued for instance that in Brazil the main vacuum in relation to gender studies is the

focus on work about homosexuality and masculinity. Most studies also concentrate more on television and on magazine journalism than any other medium (Tomazetti and Coruja, 2017, 125). We still know little about a range of issues, from how women from different socio-economic backgrounds negotiate and consume media to how female Brazilian journalists engage in everyday working practices.

Research in the field could thus benefit from more internationalization, intellectual exchange and collaboration between feminist scholars from developing and developed countries studying gender and communication processes, with further exchange of flows between the North and the South. We thus need to have more studies which examine the correlation between gender representations with inequalities in Brazilian society, and which are inserted within a wider socio-economic context and in conjunction with the current contemporary political reality, further situating these within local, national and international contexts. We need to understand better the relationship between Brazilian women, as well as men, with communication structures and technologies and with how many are responding to the retreat from rights in what is an increasingly conservative society.

The aim of this paper is thus to provide a critical summary and overview of some of the core research done on gender and communications in Brazil in the last decades, further looking at more recent empirical case studies on the uses made by feminist groups of new technologies for the advancement of gender rights. I have noted elsewhere the lack of studies on gender and communications, particularly on women and journalism. Here I develop this further by sketching a series of studies that have been produced in the last decades on gender perspectives on the media. The expansion of such research could also offer contributions to the international research on gender and development, which has developed considerably since the emergence of the WID (Women and Development) framework of the 1970's, being influenced by contributions from post-colonial feminists and scholars from the South concerning the critiques on the previous tendencies to homogenize the experiences of "Third World women", nonetheless having made little references to the study of women in Latin America (i.e. Mohanty, 1990; Marchand, 1995, 57; Matos, 2017). This article ends up assessing some possible research areas that could do with more inquiry, with the intention here of mapping a sketch of avenues for future work, theorization and intervention.

### **Feminist Media Studies across Borders: Articulating the North and the South Research Agenda**

Feminist theory from across the social science has developed robust studies which have aimed to assess the reasons for the subordination of women, with different variants of feminism (Marxism, socialist, radical, liberal) examining the roots of women's oppression, ranging from the impact of patriarchal society to capitalism, providing different political and legal solutions to tackle the problem and further influencing their societies through policy-making at the state level, as well as debate in the public sphere and through social practices and culture critique (i.e. Tuchman, 1978; Butler, 1990; Van Zoonen, 1994; Gill, 2007, Fraser, 2013). Women's inequality has also been examined by moving beyond a focus only on gender dynamics to look at the ways in which multiple layers of oppression, including class, race, ethnicity and nationality, culminate in diverse forms of experiences of subordination that different categories and groups of women suffer within particular national contexts (i.e. Mohanty, 1984, 2000; Mills, 1998; Radcliffe, 2015).

As Marchand (in Marchand and Parpart, 1995) has argued, there is need for a diversity of feminisms which can cater to the needs of diverse groups of women, and which also do not merely pay lip service to a universalizing form of Western middle class feminism, with the type of corporate, individualistic feminism that “is taken for granted” having predominated in popular culture (i.e. McRobbie, 2009, 2010). Despite the commitment to diversity and the acknowledgement of the critiques made by Third World, black and working class feminists for more inclusiveness and recognition of the multiple layers of women’s oppression (i.e. Ramazanoglu, 1989; Mohanty, 1990; Radcliffe, 2015), feminism has thus still largely remained the preserve of upper-class Western women. Scholars such as Fraser (2013) have stated that mainstream feminism has not managed to do justice to all women, benefitting few corporate professional educated women to climb up the career ladder.

Contemporary Brazilian feminism thus shares many of the concerns with Northern American and UK feminists, particularly in regard to issues such as inequalities in the workplace and the gender pay gap, the persistence of problematic representations of women in the media, domestic violence as well as other forms of sexism within society. Much of the feminist movement in Brazil has also been influenced by second wave feminism, but it has also developed within very particular local and historical contexts, from the struggles of the dictatorship to the collective pursuit of women’s rights (Hahner, 1990; Alvarez, 1990; Pitanguy, 1995). Scholars have argued that this has been one of the reasons why the relationship between gender and the media has not received sufficient attention from researchers as it should have (i.e. Escosteguy and Messa, 2008).

It seems to me that Brazilian scholarship on gender and the media could benefit much more from the knowledge, empirical work and expertise of other schools of thought, ranging from British feminist media studies to post-colonial feminist perspectives as well as engaging more with the theoretical frameworks and work which has been done on gender and development. Scholars (i.e. Tomazetti and Coruja, 2017; Silva and John, 2016) have further argued that the few studies collected on gender perspectives in the media from the last decade have been largely influenced by similar authors, including Martin-Barbero, Stuart Hall, Orozco Gomez and Canclini, as well as by authors such as Butler and Brazilian scholars Lopes Louro and Escosteguy.

As I have examined elsewhere (Matos, 2017), there is a lack of contemporary Brazilian studies on the relationship between gender inequality and communication processes, which has been under-theorised and researched and is situated largely within local and national contexts, with little internationalization and interaction with authors beyond few sources. On an international level, practices of marginalisation and lack of proper recognition of work on femininities and the relationship of gender and the media beyond the North American and Europe context are still a reality, with few studies published in books and top journals in the fields of media, gender and sociology on the experiences of women in developing countries, albeit exceptions, including specialized journals on development and others or more specific editions of the top journals which are specifically dedicated to certain geographical regions and which attempt to engage with issues of race, ethnicities, gender and nationality.

There is further need for wider dialogue between academic disciplines, such as British Cultural Studies with Latin American Studies, as well as wider intellectual exchange between knowledge from the North with the South in the pursuit of more international collaboration, expertise and dialogue. This includes the accessing to a diversity of theoretical perspectives, different feminist research methods as well as transnational feminist research and forms of activism inserted within global networks of solidarity and empathy (i.e. Escosteguy, 2004; Matos,

2017). It is to the research on gender and the media that I turn to next, first providing a critical summary of the struggle of feminist movements in Brazil in the last decades.

### **Feminism Movements and Research in Brazil: From the Past to the Present**

Since the decade of the 1970's, there has been a growing body of important literature and research from various scholars from the fields of anthropology, political science and history on feminist movements and organizations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Work has focused particularly on women's rights, sexual reproduction and abortion, political representation and the role that various women's groups and movements had in the struggle against the military dictatorships of Latin America during the 1980's (i.e. Lebon, 2010; Macaulay, 2010; Alvarez, 1990; Acosta-Belem, 1993; Abreu, 2006). Important studies have been conducted in the fields of gender and politics.

As Marchand (1995) has argued, the literature on Latin American feminist movements has contradicted "the image of the passive, voiceless and tradition-based women" that has been largely associated with women from developing countries, thus challenging feminist neo-colonial discourses which composed a significant part of the literature on development that looked at women from the countries of the South (i.e. Mohanty, 1990; Matos, 2017). Alvarez (2014 in Ferreira, 2015, 208) has preferred to refer to *discursive fields of action* instead of feminist movements, further pinpointing to three moments in the history of contemporary Brazilian feminism. The first stage occurred during the dictatorship in the 1970's, and which was responsible for the establishment of the feminist movement in the country, with the second emerging during the re-democratization years, paving the way towards the pluralization of feminism whilst the third started at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This last and current phase has been marked by what she turns as being a more "horizontal flow of discourses", with plural feminist practices and forms of engagement gaining further ground (Alvarez, 2014 in Ferreira, 2015, 208).

Pitanguy (1995, 175) has underlined the crucial role of feminism in widening women's rights in Brazil, with the year of 1975 seeing the creation of the first feminist organisation in the country, the Centre for Brazilian Woman, which paved the way for feminism to occupy a more central place in the political arena. From the 1980's onwards, in the aftermath of the fall of military regimes, women's movements began to exercise significantly more influence in the political sphere. This was the case of the articulations and pressures in favour of women's rights, which lead to the formation of the national constitutional process, with the policies implemented by Brazil's then opposition party, the PMDB, and which the creation of special police stations to combat gender violence against women (i.e. Lebon, 2010; Macaulay, 2010).

The entry of Brazilian women in the marketplace in the post-dictatorship phase occurred in a context of the emergence in the new democratic political arena of various political parties and social movements. During the period until the 1980's, feminist groups, which were part of progressive sectors of the Church, universities and other organisations, had nonetheless pressured for the implementation of equal rights, addressing the question of women's discrimination (Pitanguy, 1995). Despite the increase in women's political participation and representation, as well as entry in the workplace in the last three decades, progress has been particularly slow, suffering from significant setbacks, particularly since 2015. The last years have seen a strong reaction from conservative oligarchic and evangelical sectors of Brazilian society against social change, with minorities groups, working class, indigenous and women's movements being particularly targeted in what can be defined as the Brazilian version of the cultural war.

The struggle for the advancement of women's rights in Brazil during the 1970's and 1980's, is thus not that much different from the current battles pushed forward by feminist movements in the last few years. The 2105 Brazilian "Arab Spring" year, as it became known due to intense feminist mobilizations, took place both offline and online, with various feminist movements expressing similar concerns to their feminist counter-parts of the 1970s, including the persistence of violence against women, inequalities in the marketplace, the criminalization of abortion and the lack of diversity of gender identities in the media. Such a scope of issues provide fertile ground for more studies on how different groups of women produce, engage and interact with the mainstream media as well as grassroots communications, from *telenovelas* to community radio and ICTs, as well as how these connect with structures of inequality and socio-economic concerns.

Feminist media studies in Brazil has thus yet still to be fully established as a field, as it is in Northern Europe and the US, where its legacy has been a profound one, shaping both feminism theory as well as the study of the media since the decade of the 1970's through a rich body of work which has included the analysis of gender in advertising and female magazines, the representation of women in the mainstream media in the US and Europe and the entry of women in journalism, among others. Further studies have examined television genres and the reception of how female audiences engage with media texts, including the theorization around the sexualization of popular culture and the engagement with concepts such as "post-feminism" (i.e. Tuchman et al, 1978; Ang, 1978; Gill, 2007, 2012).

The field of gender and the media in Brazil arguably remains under-theorised (Martinez, Lago and Lago, 2015). It was only from the decade of the 1990's onwards that a tradition of feminist research into issues concerning the media would slowly start to expand in the context of the launch of the two main journals in Brazil dedicated to the topic, *Revista de Estudos Feministas* and *Cadernos Pagu*, in 1992 and 1993, respectively (Escosteguy in Silva and Kaitlynn, 2013). Traditionally, Latin American reception research has generally placed women as informants tied to the biological category of gender, without gender being sufficiently problematized (Escosteguy, 2004). Escosteguy and Messa (2008) have further underlined the enormous challenges that still exist in studying communications from a feminist perspective, underscoring the resistance that still persists in incorporating the topic in university curriculums. They (2008) have traced the development of research on gender and the media from the decade of the 1990's to the early 2000s, pointing to a slow growth in the body of work during this period. According to Escosteguy (2013), feminist media studies in Brazil has been at disadvantage for a variety of reasons, needing to compete with more traditional disciplines such as sociology and anthropology as well as space in journals. This can be seen as a direct result of the difficulties that still exist within Brazilian society, politics as well as the media, of providing a more gendered inquiry of communication structures and media texts, situating these within the country's structural gender equalities.

Feminist media studies in the US and in the UK have acknowledged the criticisms made by third world feminists on the need to become more inclusive, and to look at the diversity of the experiences of women in developing countries without homogenizing and inserting them within a "third world women" category or representing the femininities of "Others" within rigid and fixed neo-colonial discourses. Feminist media studies is still largely dominated by North American and European scholars, with space for significant more research on the experiences of other forms of femininity, although this trend within Cultural Studies has grown more in the last decades, with wider attention paid to Asian, Latina and other femininities (i.e. Van Zoonen, 1994; Gill, 2007).

Scholars like Radcliffe (2015) have argued nonetheless that representations in classic literature and canon texts of the West have been grounded in *colonial modes of thinking*, and that these still continue to have a role in the oppression of the women from the South. A similar argument is made by Mohanty (1990) in relation to the dominance of narratives that stereotyped women in developing countries in much of the earlier writing by Western feminists on gender and development. Thus within feminist perspectives on development there has been little focus on the experiences of Latin American women (i.e. Marchand, 1995; Matos, 2017).

As Escosteguy and Messa (2006) note, it would be during the decade of the 1980s that a research inquiry into reception studies was developed in Latin America, although the concern with gender would emerge only in 1998 with texts such as Dumont's *O imaginario feminino e a opcao pela literatura de romance de serie* (The female imagination and the option for romance literature). In their analyses of the dissertations on gender, from the years of 1992 to 1996, Escosteguy and Messa (2006) underlined that out of the 754 theses checked, only 12 were classified as studies on gender and communications. During this period there was a lot of work also focused on media messages, from de Souza Coutinho's *Rainha do Crime: otica feminina no romance policial* (Queen of Crime: feminine perspectives on crime romance, UFRJ), to Rios dos Santos *Minha Amiga Claudia* (My friend Claudia, UESP, 1996). The latter study showed the strength of Claudia's journalism beyond the focus on gender stereotypes to an engagement with contemporary themes. From this point onwards, research in gender and the media would start to expand, with the period of 2000-2002 seeing thirty-six texts dedicated to gender, out of which only 13 were focused on the print media (Escosteguy and Messa, 2006, 22).

It was during the decade of the 2000s that the first work on the Internet emerged, such as Lara Podesta Haje's *Esferas Publicas Feministas na Internet* (Public feminist spheres on the Internet, UNB, 2002). Minella's (2004) also examined the contribution of the Brazilian leading journal on feminism studies, the *Revista de Estudos Feministas*, of the Federal University of Santa Catarina, to the debate on gender and feminism, underlining a series of themes as being part of the 1999 and 2000 editions of the respective years of the journal. In the first 1999 edition, out of seven articles, four were dedicated to the concern with reproduction and health. Of the total of the two editions of the years of 1999 and 2000, only four articles were in the field of gender and the media. This included Natansohn's text on the representations of women as professionals (i.e. doctors) in the media and in TV Globo's *Programa Mulher* (Woman's Programme). There was also Schmidt's chapter on the production and reception of discourses on feminism in Brazil from the 1970's until the 1990's in the context of the end of the dictatorship and start of the re-democratization phase. This was done through the examination of two supplements of the newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo*, "Folhetim" and "Mais" (Minella, 2004).

As John and Silva (2016) note, the examination of theses in postgraduate communication programmes in the last decade revealed a total of 209 studies, of which 24 were dedicated to the reception of Brazilian soap-operas and from this, a further four focused on gender. Moreover, according to Tomazetti and Coruja (2017), who also analysed the work done in post-graduate communication programmes during the period between 2010-2015, a total of 376 studies were encountered on reception and from these, selected work which focused on femininities, feminism, masculinity, the body and sexualities was chosen. This was divided then into consumption and reception, and classified either as being inserted in a *socio-cultural* or *socio-discursive* framework. Out of this total, 191 reception and media consumption studies were selected, of which only 15 were seen as discussing gender relations and of these, only 12 could be identified as being

grounded on feminist media studies perspectives. This included work which examined homosexuality and the struggles of women against male dominance.

Among the key studies identified by the authors are Lirian Sifuentes' (2010) *Telenovela e a identidade feminina de jovens de classe popular* (Telenovela and the feminine identity of the working class youth) and (2014) "*Todo mundo fala mal, mas todo mundo ve: estudo comparativo do consume de telenovela por mulheres de diferentes classes* (Everyone speaks ill off, but everyone sees: a comparative study of telenovela consumption by women of different social classes) ; Renata Silva's (2011) *Feminino velado: a recepcao da telenovela por maes e filhas das classes populares* (Inhibited femininity: the reception of telenovelas by mothers And daughters of the working class); Edilma Rodrigues Santos (2011) *Estudo de recepcao em comunicacao: as representacoes do feminino no mundo do trabalho das teleoperadoras* (Reception studies in communications: representations of the feminine in the work life of telemarketing professionals); Bruna Rodrigues (2013) *Sem maneiras de conquistar seu homen: apropriacoes do discurso sobre a mulher na revista TPM* (Without manners in conquering their man: appropriations of the discourse about women in the magazine TPM); Jose Oliveira's (2014) *A construcao discursiva e a recepcao da homoafetividade na teledramaturgia brasileira: consumo, representacao e identidade homossexual* (Discursive construction and the reception of homoeroticism in Brazilian television drama: consumption, representation and homosexual identity) and Giovanna Aveiro's (2015) *Mulheres na revista TPM: analise discursiva da construcao da singularidade feminina* (Women in the TPM magazine: discursive analyse of the construction of the female singularity).

Martinez, Lago and Lago (2015, 8) have also done a similar analyse, examining journalism. The authors also researched the two top journals dedicated to gender, *Revista de Estudos Feministas* and *Cadernos Pagu*, during the period of 2013 and 2015, having underlined the scarcity of articles coming from Media Studies. They note how studies on gender and the media have been produced sporadically, something which contrasts to the work that comes from disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. A total of 251 articles were classified as being part of the field of Sociology and Political Science; with History having received a total of 161 articles; Anthropology, 155; Psychology, 142; Literature, 139 and Philosophy, 39. The category of Communications, Film and Visual Arts had a total of 22 articles, and was close to the number for the disciplines of Economics (17), Cultural Studies (13) and Interdisciplinary (18). Among some of the studies quoted by the authors were Jorge et al's (2014) on women in the newsroom and Assis et al's (2011) on media, politics and gender.

As Martinez et al (2015) further note, the total number of articles in the Communications category represents less than 10% of the ones in the field of Sociology and Political Science, which occupy first place. The also examined articles published in the year of 2014 in the archives of the *Associacao Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo* (SBPJor) (the Brazilian Association of Researchers in Journalism), the main forum in the country dedicated to the discussion of journalism, having found few studies that dealt with women's themes. The authors further applied the search word "gender" in the research menu *Sala de Pesquisa* ([www.sbpjor.org.br](http://www.sbpjor.org.br)) (Research Room), finding a total of 46 articles and afterwards having excluded studies on gender as a journalistic category. They further limited the total to only seven studies. This examination ended up revealing a lack of research within journalism on women's issues, from how women engage in journalistic practices in the newsroom to how women are accessed as news sources.

An expanding area of research which I believe is likely to produce more significant work in the years to come is the use made by women's movements and feminist groups of new technologies for political mobilization, as well as for the articulation of counter-discourses and

narratives to the stereotypical representations of femininity in the media and the overall promotion of women's rights, issues to which I turn to next.

### **Women and Online Networks: Contemporary Brazilian Feminisms and the Struggle for Rights**

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). Research on new technologies and *cyberfeminism* has started to expand in the last decades throughout the world, as well as in Brazil, with feminist scholars developing important work in the field (i.e. Ferreira, 2015; Natansohn, 2013). The relationship of women to technologies has thus began to attract more interest from Brazilian scholars, 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 chosen to call the “return to the streets” of feminist groups. In an environment where the media are heavily concentrated and skewed towards the market, online networks and the *blogosphere* are emerging as a dynamic public space of debate, with multiple feminist public spheres contributing to influence and shape online and offline discussions on a diversity of women's issues and social and political causes.

I acknowledge that the use of new technologies for political mobilization and social change must be evaluated within limits, which need to take into consideration issues of access to technologies and the digital divide, which impose constraints on the use of communication platforms to boost democratization. Although access to online networks has increased to over 30% of the population in Brazil, these numbers are still highly concentrated in the Southeast. Online platforms alone also cannot solve structural inequalities and deeply ingrained social hierarchies which exist in the offline world, particularly in countries with high levels of violence against women and where a culture of *machismo* has become normalised.

Various social movements and feminist groups nonetheless have started to mobilize significantly since mainly 2011, with the year of 2015 being seen as crucial in feminist political engagement in Brazil both in the online and offline world, being even labelled by some as the country's version of the “Arab Spring”. Many feminist movements began to restore to social media networks for self-expression and criticism towards societal structures of oppression, including pressuring governments and politicians on women's rights, making more demands on reproductive and abortion rights, including the combatting of violence against women in Brazil and the advocacy in favour of wider political participation and the inclusion of more complex media gender representations. These groups thus have started to articulate an agenda in favour of gender equality that is slowly making inroads into the mainstream.

Different groups of women from both the working class as well as middle, with diverse agendas, aims and objectives, have been taking part in these new forms of contemporary feminism. There has also been a proliferation in the last decade of a series of feminist blogs and websites on the Internet, which have included popular online platforms such as *Blogueiras Feministas*<sup>2</sup>, *Think*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://blogueirasfeministas.com/>

*Olga*<sup>3</sup>, *Escreva Lola Escreva*<sup>4</sup>, *Marcha Mundial das Mulheres (MMM)*<sup>5</sup> and *Instituto Geledes*<sup>6</sup>, among others dedicated to the discussion of research on gender and policy as well as journalistic sites dedicated to women's issues, such as *Cfemea (Centro Feminista de Estudos e Assessoria)*<sup>7</sup> and *Agencia Patricia Galvao*<sup>8</sup>. In another study, I conducted a small case study of a selection of feminist blogs and social media campaigns, including the *Blogueiras Feministas* and the NGO *Think Olga*, as well as a series of images of protests carried out by the Brazilian SlutWalk version, the *Marcha das Vadias*. Here I want to briefly sketch some of the findings on the discourse analysis of the blogs that I conducted alongside other analyses of media representations in Brazilian advertising and commercials and political campaigns.

As Gomes and Sorj (2014) has argued, the new face of feminism in Brazil is again mixing the personal with the political, with many feminist websites and communication platforms combining personal stories and testimonials and a variety of different emotions and stories of suffering and personal painful experiences, as well as information about the situation of women's rights and news on some of the latest developments, in an attempt to raise empathy and mobilize people to their cause. The editorial line of *Blogueiras Feministas* for instance emphasises how its main objective is to discuss feminism, adding that its focus is on the articulation of critiques of institutions and structures, as well as combatting prejudices in Brazilian society, going on to admit that these could even be found present in some of its own online content. The front page of *Blogueiras Feministas* also underlines the main themes of the blog, including the focus on issues such as the body, women's reproduction and abortion rights, and the importance of legislation which aims to combat domestic violence against women, such as the Maria da Penha law. *Blogueiras Feministas* also emphasises issues of *intersectionality*, stressing further the awareness of how patterns of gender oppression can be interlinked with other forms of constraint, be them either race or class.

Similarly to *Blogueiras Feministas*, the NGO *Think Olga* is also interested in reports which concern intersectionality, publishing personal testimonials and stories about women and their everyday life and personal experiences of oppression. It attempts, like *Blogueiras*, to create wider awareness of gender inequality, making use of new technologies as a tool in the struggle to shape ideas, create new values and habits, thus influencing policy both in the offline and online world. *Think Olga* for instance perceived clearly the intensification of the various feminist protests and pressures placed by social movements and civil society players for social change and the deepening of the democratization project. In its examination of the year 2015, *Think Olga* in January 2016 underlined how this was becoming to be perceived as the year of the "never ending spring" for women, in a direct reference to the Arab Spring of 2011. It was also argued that 2015 was the year when "feminism" ceased to be a "dirty word", and which had finally started to pave its way into mainstream society as well as the media.

Among popular feminist campaigns and hashtags which were used throughout the year where "Lei do Femicídio" (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

<sup>3</sup> <http://thinkolga.com>

<sup>4</sup> <http://escrevalolaescreva.blogspot.com.br>

<sup>5</sup> <https://marchamulheres.wordpress.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.geledes.org.br>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.cfemea.org.br>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.agenciapatriciagalvao.org.br>

realization of the Enem<sup>9</sup> exam (with the controversy surrounding Simone de Beauvoir) and the sexual harassment campaign #PrimeiroAssedio (First Harassment), with 252.101, among others. *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 bullying and harassment, including also numbers of the police.

Most of the discourses which circulated in these blogs were quite similar in tone, with many focusing on either encouraging or stimulating mobilizations, criticising violence towards women and rape 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 among the main issues explored in many of the texts posted on these websites.

Thus different feminist groups in Brazil are beginning to investigate the *emancipatory* possibilities offered by new technologies and other mediated and political spaces. Online networks are but one area of research inquiry though and, although I have provided just a brief summary of what is part of a wider study published elsewhere (Matos, 2017), it is important to pursue further research on how social media and online communication platforms can make a more significant difference in the outside world, actually exercising wider influence, and leading to long term change in power relations and gender roles.

### **Future Avenues for Feminist Research in Gender and the Media in Brazil: Concluding Remarks**

Brazilian women have undoubtedly obtained rights and advanced since the granting of universal suffrage in the 1930s. Since the decade of the 1990s, women started to enter the marketplace in greater numbers, with many dominating in various professions, from the newsroom (Abreu, 2006) to businesses and commerce, although many in Brazil have remained stuck at the bottom of the ladder. Recent studies on women in journalism show that the profession has become *feminized*. Women occupy the lower ranks and were placed in positions such as secretaries and administrators, being largely young and living with their parents (i.e. Jorge et al 2014, 6-7 in Martinez et al, 2015, 16; Matos, 2017).

As Pitanguy (1995, 175) has noted, it is important also to ask how feminism has managed to introduce new questions regarding the distribution of power between men and women, and to assess the extent or not to which it has been successful in influencing governmental policy-makers in taking on board women's issues and advancing their rights. In many ways, feminist movements and women's groups in Brazil are still being confronted with similar challenges to the ones they encountered during the decades of the 1970's and 1980's. Despite the advancement of rights secured during the last century, as well as in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, such as equal rights under the rule of law, women in Brazil are still treated as second class citizens (i.e. Pitanguy, 1995) and struggle against the retreat in rights and for further advancement in gender equality.

There is thus significant scope for the expansion of studies on gender perspectives and how these play out in the media. Kearney (2012, 12-13) for instance has underlined the core research areas in gender and the media since the 1990's, including the emphasis placed on masculinity studies, the focus on examining sexuality, race and ethnicity, with wider studies on Latina and East

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<sup>9</sup> The *Enem* is an exam elaborated by the Ministry of Education to check the competence and skills of students after concluding high school. It aims to assess the quality of secondary schools as well as having the function to select students for the federal universities.

Asian femininities as well as more attention paid to feminism ideology, from post-feminism to third wave feminism. In the case of Brazil, areas of research which could demand further attention include journalism practice and studies examining women as news reporters, and how these engage with sources and with news, as well as their role as journalism executives and as experts accessed by male journalists. Abreu's (2006) series of interviews with top female journalists who have influenced newsrooms from the 1990's is one of the few that aims to shed light into how women have sought to influence Brazilian journalism.

There thus needs to be more research on gender representations in the media and the multiple identities of Brazilian women in the context of various layers of oppression, such as class and race. This includes the examination of how women's issues are making it into the mainstream—and what is being left out or excluded. We also need to know more about the conditions of female labour in the media industries, both in the newsroom (i.e. Abreu, 2006; Mendonca Jorge and Leal Adghini, 2013) as well as in other sectors of the cultural industries, such as in advertising agencies (Matos, 2017).

Social media and the use of ICTs for gender development could also benefit from more studies, not to mention research on how women from different social classes are making sense of different media messages, from soap operas to journalism, TV series and film, as well as how dominant forms of Brazilian femininity are constructed through communications in a process of exclusion of other forms of gender identities. We also need more studies on how women politicians are being represented in the media, coming more from communications, journalism and sociology, and not only from political science (i.e. Biroli and Miguel, 2014).

The work on gender and the media in Brazil also need to be better suited within globalization, making wider links with other international authors beyond Hall, Butler and Martin-Barbero, and engaging in a dialogue with other disciplines, including gender and development. It also needs to make wider inroads with transnational feminism research, grassroots movements and activism. For it is in the context of one's own local struggles, inserted within national and global perspectives, and which are capable of intersecting with both the past and the challenges for the future, that one is better placed to evaluate the current dilemmas of the present that need to be overcome in order to move forward. We also need to seek out wider narratives of solidarity with other transnational feminist groups, as well as expand our intellectual dialogue with researchers and activists at a global and local level, producing more grounded, empirical and "real world" knowledge that can both benefit the academia but mostly have greater impact in the world, and which can add on to the legacy of classic feminist studies on the media which have in the last four decades shaped how we look at the relationship between communications and gender in the modern world.

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