Feminism, politics and democracy: state feminism and use of online networks for gender equality in Brazil

Introduction

Democracy throughout many regions of the Latin America continent is still very fragile and in many ways still in their infancy. Problems with the impoverishment of the political public sphere of debate in the country are a result of a complex legacy of slavery, political, cultural and social authoritarianism, as well as the fact of the existence in the country of a highly concentrated and monopolistic media structure, where very few families control the many communication vehicles (Matos, 2012). There are thus various problems when it comes to debating policy proposals and ideas in the public sphere in favour of the advancement of particular groups, from LGBT and gay rights, to indigenous and rural workers, women and other minorities, in a more sophisticated and rational manner. This is particularly the case with crucial issues which are the cornerstone of any advanced democracy, such as human rights, civil and political rights, as well as the wider inclusion of groups that see themselves as increasingly disenfranchised, such as the working-classes throughout the world as well as poorer segments of Brazilian society.

In the last decades, countries throughout Latin America have experienced a series of changes affecting the whole continent since the collapse of military dictatorships, from economic reforms and demands for social inclusion and wider equality to media reform and the changing role of women in the continent. Another important feature that united various Latin American countries in the aftermath of the end of the dictatorship regimes of the 1970s was the rise of female politicians and leaders throughout the continent, following from the slow and gradual re-democratisation of the 1990s. Panama elected a woman president in 2003, Mireya Moscoso (1999-2004) (Buvinic and Roza, 2004, 1); soon afterwards, Chile and Argentina followed suit by electing the former
president Michelle Bachelet (2006-2010) and Cristina Kirchner (2007), wife of the previous president Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007), with Brazil electing and re-electing Dilma Rousseff in 2010 and 2014. However, by 2016, Michelle Bachelet was the only female president in the continent (in Chile).

I examine here the historical roots of women’s exclusion from the public sphere and from citizenship. This is to contextualise this discussion as to the reasons why the state, as well as other political avenues, matter so much in the fight against gender equality, in a combination with the strategies that can be adopted by the media. For the latter alone cannot correct such deeply embedded structural injustices. However, it can have a role in articulating new forms of discourses, challenging deeply ingrained stereotypes and ways of looking that have served particular groups and contributed to the maintenance of the status quo. And here the role that new technologies and ICTs can have in contributing to reduce gender inequality and empowering women cannot be dismissed. This is discussed through the critical examination and analysis of a series of blogs, such as the popular Blogueiras Feministas, as well as campaigns which gained international recognition, such as Think Olga’s sexual harassment campaign.

Before moving to the analysis of online communication networks, it is important to look at the theoretical perspectives provided by feminist political theory in its examination of the historical exclusion of women from citizenship, investigating further the relationship between feminism, democracy and the state. Making reference to Philips’ (1999) examination of the paradox between political and economic equality, I argue here that political and civil rights cannot be taken for granted, and that more than ever both are at the centre of any debate on gender equality.

Following from Fraser’s, Carter’s and other feminist’s criticism of mainstream feminism’s role in advocating an agenda that has largely favoured white, upper-class women to the detriment of a wider and more inclusive approach to gender justice, discussed in previous chapters of this
book, I further underscore the centrality of the political sphere in contributing for advancements in gender equality, and which has seen the implementation of legislation against gender violence and other forms of discrimination against women in Brazil. Moving on from the debates examined earlier in the previous chapters, I further stress how gender equality is interwoven with the democratic fabric of any society and which, in both developed and developing countries alike, stands today as one of the key elements for economic growth and for the construction of a better and more fulfilling world.

*Gender, political philosophy and democracy*

Ahead of the International Women’s day celebrated on the 8th of March 2015, the United Nations released a report where it highlighted that, taking into consideration the slow pace that the world has been seeing when it comes to tackling gender inequality, it will take another 81 years to achieve full gender equity. The report that was released was an evaluation of the application of the norms adopted by the 189 countries which signed Beijing’s *Platform for Action* in China twenty years ago. The overall assessment was that, despite progresses in aspects such as the fall in maternal mortality, increase of women in the labour market and wider access to primary education, the leaders of the respective nations had not done enough to advance the agenda of global gender justice. This sentiment of frustration shared by many feminists, academics and practioners is understandable, if we look at what has been achieved so far in the last decades, taking into consideration the long historical road of struggle that many feminist movements undertook throughout Europe from as earl as the 17th century, and especially from the 19th century onwards, and how they have managed to contribute to the very formation of European democracies and the welfare state, as discussed previously in this book.
The strive for political equality arguably started to emerge in the 17th century as a challenge to the established power of hereditary monarchs. Feminists struggles have had an important role in the consolidation of the democracies of post-industrialised nations, from the early calls for women’s suffrage to alliances with the labour movements in the awake of the Industrial Revolution during the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as in their participation in campaigns for the abolition of slavery, including the case of the struggles pursued by feminist throughout Latin America. Ideas concerning the “inferiority” of women have throughout the history of mankind shaped and defined their very exclusion from citizenship, and from obtaining equal rights with men within the structures of the state. These ideas went largely unchallenged until the late 18th century, in the wake of the French Revolution which advocated egalitarian citizenship status to all (Einhorn, in Evans and Williams, 2013, 29). Women were thus seen as being both psychically as well as intellectually inferior to men.

Since the 1980s and 1990s particularly within the West, feminist political theory has criticised the universalism of the notion of the “citizen” and citizenship (i.e. Phillips, 1999; Maynard, 1998) within Western thought, underlining as problematic its automatic association with “the male” to the detriment of the exclusion of women. Feminist critiques thus managed to successful apply a powerful critique of knowledge itself, as having been ultimately constructed within the male dominant perspective (Maynard, 1998). An early version of this critique came from Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (1972), which stated how men made the world and went on to represent it from their own perspective, leading to the formation of universal and absolute truths. Knowledge thus began to be seen as “sexist” and “biased” (Maynard, 1998, 248).

The notion that women are somehow “different” to men has been very much part of the tradition of Western political philosophy. The idea of women as inferior can be traced back to ancient Greece. For Aristotle, women were nothing but an “impotent man”. In the first chapter to
her book, *Women, Political Philosophy and Politics*, Sperling (2001,5) argued that the common feature in the development of political philosophy has been the “superficial” treatment of women. From the Social Sciences to many classic Western authors and other Enlightenment writers, the manifestation of negative views of women was quite common. During the 17th century, Descartes emphasised also the separation of emotion from reason, which further lead to women being linked to the former, to values such as intuition as well as impulsiveness, whereas men were associated with rationality.

Authors such as the acclaimed Jean Jacques Rousseau in *Emile* (1763) portraying the cultivation of reason as an important educational tool for boys, but not girls (Tong, 1989), and philosophers like the German Arthur Schopenhauer in *On Women* (1851) classifying them as “childish” and incapable of ever being judges due their lack of a sense of justice in comparison to men. These philosophers were very much a product of their time and particular circumstances. Despite the problems with their understanding of the role of women, the awareness of the sorry state of human nature, and the problems of human suffering, must be retained and have widely influenced political theory on inequality and philosophy.

Although written in the 18th century, the discussion of equality, exclusion, suffering and the treatment of others perhaps remains the core dilemma encountered by mankind still at the turn of the 21st century. Contrary to what Philips (1999) has argued, the debates on how to reduce economic inequalities in our society have not disappeared and have in fact come back to the mainstream and are seen as equally, or perhaps more important, than civil and political rights, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic recession. These have become defining and pressing debates across the political spectrum, on both the right and the left, throughout many countries in the world, and especially in more developed countries. Moreover, the exclusion of women from public life during the 18th century, and well up until the early 19th century, is not only part of the history of women’s struggles in Europe and the West but it also sheds light on both
what has been achieved until now and underlines the continuity still of persistent forms of exclusion and discrimination, remodelled in “modern packages”, different forms and settings within globalization.

Feminist political theorists have underlined how the liberal democratic tradition placed emphasis on values such as freedom or equality, creating a relation between the citizen with the male gender where an assumption on neutrality resulted in preferential treatment to men (Philips, 1999, 25). A key debate within feminist political theory has thus been how to reconcile citizenship, seen as a concept constructed with an universal, homogenous and uniform male citizen in mind, with feminism and notions of difference (i.e. Philips, 1992; Fraser, 1995, Yuval-Davis, 1997), as I mentioned in previous chapters.

If our aim is to construct a better, and more sustainable world in the long run, where we can live in as decent human beings who are cooperative and who have compassion towards each other, then we must seriously engage with the notion of “equality”, what we mean by this and how best to live up to one of our key democratic ideals. Is it thus possible to achieve such a thing in an increasingly complex world where inequalities between the rich and the poor, different groups both within and between nations, either persist or retreat at a very slow pace? The reality is that restrictions to women’s access to the highest positions in political and economic organisations persist and, despite the “formal right to equal treatment” (Sperling, 2001, 3), in overall women’s rights within a state, and their contributions, are still less than equal (i.e. Lister, 1997; Philips, 1999, UN 1991 in Sperling, 2001, 3). A question that we need to continue to pursue is the extent to which the state can make a difference, and how this can have an impact within wider institutional settings, from the market to the media industries.
In our current globalized and digital age, where the market has entered into all spheres of society, both in the private and public sectors, is there still room for politics, and can politics actually pressure for further change? How can we conceive of the “political”, and can it contribute to reduce gender inequality? Can we still envision a relationship between the state and feminism? These are some of the questions that interest me here. We have seen how gender inequality is still a problem for various countries across the world, from developing to developed countries albeit their cultural and historical differences.

Walby (1997, 146) has defined gender politics as “forms of political practice which seek to change gender relations for or against women’s interests”. Political representation is thus seen as a strong component of gender equality, with the Scandinavian countries for instance having a greater participation of women in governance (i.e. Lovenduski and Norris, 1993). Lovenduski (1993) has underlined how during the 1960s and 1970s many second wave feminists were cynical about electoral politics, but by the early 1980s women already had become to enter politics and become active members of parties. Greater support grew in various countries in the West, such as Australia, the UK, France, Germany, Norway and Sweden, for women to participate in politics whilst gender also started to be an issue for political parties (Lovenduski, 1993). Lovenduski (1993, 2) notes how Norwegian feminists were pioneers in their attempts to include women into party structures. Political representation increased significantly from below 10% of elected representatives in the 1960s to 35% by the early 1980s and the equality agenda also advanced considerably (Lovenduski, 1993).

The demands for equality in women’s representation in Britain for instance came later and more in the early 1980s. By the 1990s, women comprised fewer than 10% of the members of the House of Commons (Lovenduski, 1993). Progress in female political representation has
nonetheless been very slow. As Walby (1997, 137) notes, women in Britain after the 1987 election made only 6.6% of the House of Commons, and after that in 1992 were still less than 10%. It would be only in the UK 2015 general elections that a more significant number would materialise, with 190 women being elected. This has meant that 30% of all MPs are women, representing a rise up from 23% (there were 148 out of a total of 650) from the last legislature.

Since the 1980s mainly, parties throughout the world have been asked to implement policies to attract women and create campaigns to recruit women members, as well as promote them within the party ranks. Lovenduski (1993) has further stated that political representation in democratic societies has had two core dimensions: the first includes the presence of members of an interest group in decision-making avenues or when their interests are being taken into consideration. The second dimension implies that it is enough for an assembly to take into account the interests of all its electors.

The presence of women in party politics has been important as a means of challenging ingrained sexist attitudes, creating awareness in relation to the difficulties suffered by women, and culminating in a series of demands, among others the implementation of sex equality legislation in the workplace (i.e. the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts and the balancing of work and family life, including childcare (Lovenduski, and Norris, 1993; Walby, 1997, 137). Other successes that women managed to achieve in various countries included the inclusion of women’s issues in party programmes and the establishment of new structures of government, such as ministries for women (Lovenduski, 1993).

As I have started to examine in previous chapters, the concept of “equality” is complex and seems to presume at first the denial of the possibility of difference, and of articulating some form of reconciliation. There is though a very close relationship of affinity between equality and difference. In her discussion of feminism and democracy, Philips (1999, 17) has examined what she claims is a perceived clash between political democracy and rights with economic equality,
understood as the unequal distribution of life chances, income and wealth. The structures into which people are born into, such as to rich parents or poor, can shape their very future lives. Philips (1999) is critical of the idea that equality necessarily means treating everyone the same, which can be seen as an “inequitable” assimilation policy which can culminate in the imposition of the values of one group (usually the dominant one) on those who have been subordinated (Philips, 1999). The idea that equality means treating everyone the same, as well as the view that it should be promoted by eliminating differences, continues to be relevant.

The author (1999) has further argued that contemporary industrialised societies have seen a shift away from the preoccupation with economic equality, very much tied to the disillusionment with socialism after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, towards a concern with political equality and difference in an age of increasing globalization and proximity between people of diverse cultures. If it is impossible realistically to eliminate fully economic inequality, political democracies nevertheless should create the means for wider social mobility, and the granting of further opportunities for citizens regardless of their background, group membership or race based on the principle that they are of equal worth (Philips, 1999, 78). Similarly to Habermas, Young (1990) has advocated in favour of special rights for oppressed groups to guarantee political inclusion, fairer representation and participation for the disadvantaged and less powerful groups in the political public sphere. Quotas can and have been used to address the under-representation of women in politics or other forms of incentive, such as positive discrimination or measures that can boost inclusion and strengthen diversity.

Liberal democracies, in principle, are assigned the function of granting the means for women to strive for equality of representation through the opportunities offered by the state and by parties (Lovenduski, 1993, 3). Women’s issues and interests however began to be more fully addressed when women started to enter electoral politics (e.g. Lovenduski and Norris, 1993). The pressures for the increase in women’s political representation for instance have thus occurred in a
context where the struggle for political and civic rights began to be seen as already something which was taken for granted and a thing of the past, at the same time that the achievement of wider economic equality started to be abandoned and perceived as unattainable.

The quality of democratic decision-making depends on sustained conditions of dialogue, deliberation and talk (Habermas, 1989, 1992; Blaug and Schwarzmantel, 1988). Scholars such as Fraser (2013) have further criticised what she claims to be the “gender-blindness” of Habermas’ conceptualization of the public sphere. Nevertheless, the expansion of political equality, embedded within the democratic struggle per se, is above all about expanding the space for the inclusion of a wider citizen body, avoiding exclusions based on property, gender, race or ethnicity and other deeply rooted assumptions which seem to imply that some people count more than others. Many people of certain groups or race do not reach more prominent positions not only due to discrimination but also due to the fact that some are allocated to roles that make it harder for them to engage in political activity. The granting of more equal forms of participation means that public debate should better reflect the points of view of those who are disadvantaged (Romm 2002 in Coetzee et al).

In her discussion of the “cultural turn” in feminism and the wider emphasis placed on identity and representation, Fraser (2013, 160) has argued that it is insufficient to focus only on recognition, and that this must be combined with a commitment to redistribution. Fraser (2013, 160) applauds the stress on recognition, stating that gender justice is no longer restricted to questions of distribution, and that it also encompasses issues of representation, identity and difference. She (2013, 161) further noted how struggles for recognition have increased throughout the world, including as examples of this the debates on multiculturalism and human rights. However, she claims that a broader, richer paradigm has not developed, and that there has been “stalled progress in the axis of distribution”. As I argued before, the strive for wider gender equality today has become much more complex and is encompassing various spheres, from issues
of distributive justice, as Fraser (2013) notes, and which is reflected in the pressures for the gender unequal pay gap, among others, to other issues such as the maintenance of social welfare programmes and benefits for women and other initiatives to combat female poverty, including also, of equal importance, questions of representation and identity, and the reproduction of ideology regarding gender roles through cultural and the media channels (i.e. sexism).

In her chapter “Critical theory and development”, where she examines Habermas and our communicative capacities as a means of creating a “better society”, Romm (2002, 141 in Coetzee et al) argues that a redefinition of humanity is necessary, one which allows people to be assessed by what they are rather than by what they possess. Various authors (i.e. Mouffe, 2000) have been critical of Habermas’ understanding of people engaging in debate to reach a consensual understanding. Habermas has responded by referring to the literature on pluralism, which suggests that participants should seek to tolerate their differences without necessarily attempting an agreement (Romm, 2002 in Coetzee et al, 150).

Making reference to the work of Habermas as well as to Gidden’s articulation of the “third way”, Mouffe (2000) criticised in her book The Democratic Paradox deliberative democracy and the realization of the “rational consensus” as well as the idea that the left/right dichotomy has somehow ceased to be relevant, and that politics must be constructed through the “third way” avenue (Giddens, 1998). Mouffe (2000, 7-8) is herself critical of the “consensus model”, arguing that it is “jeopardises the future of democracy.”

In her critique of the logics of liberal democracies and of the necessity of distinguishing between the liberal and democratic order when we speak of “equality”, Mouffe (2000, 8) is skeptical that through deliberation the overcoming of confrontations, such as what she calls “individual rights”, “liberties” and the demands for participation and equality, can take place. Although acknowledging the limits of our liberal democracies, and recognising that the search for consensus can prove futile, it is important to state that inclusive dialogue and participation can still
occur within these premises and should be continuously sought after and not abandoned. On the other point Mouffe (2000) is correct in underlyi

ng that the left/right dichotomy is far from over, and that it is still played out in the political public sphere, but that despite this there is still a strive towards consensus-building, and that this is equally important for both emerging democracies like Brazil as well as more advanced democracies, who in different ways also experience problems related to the disillu

sionment with the whole democratic process.

This seems to be the only realistic case, when the opposite scenario points to increasing polarisation and conflict, with the potential of leading to violence and disruption and to the weakening of the very democratic institutions to which we are seeking to improve and strengthen in the first place. It is precisely what lead to the overthrow of the first female presidency in the country in May 2016, and its replacement by a semi-democratic and weaker government that saw conflict and antagonism exacerbated to an unprecedented level, with risks to a return to a semi-autocratic regime where elections are seen as worthless and popular particular is low and largely excluded from mainstream decision-making, reinforcing an elitist and plutocratic form of democratic governance.

It thus seems unrealistic in this day and age to suggest that antagonistic politics should be sought after more to the detriment of rational politics and consensus-building, as this can culminate in the strengthening even more of powerful or authoritarian groups, and of their capacity to be more oppressive and disadvantage those already at a disadvantage. This is precisely what started to occur in the last years in Brazil, where the strength of the mobilization of ultraconservative sectors led to the development of a series of threats to women’s rights, culminating in protests which took place throughout the year of 2015, as I discuss in the next section. Inclusion need not necessarily breed antagonism, and this can occur through various means, from state policies to lobbying, as well as the actions of other pressure groups to participate in the public sphere.iii
This takes us back to the timidity of the political representation of women in politics across the world, from the parliamentary level to the presidency. The case of Brazil is very different from either Norway or Britain. Following from what I discussed in the previous chapter, the re-democratization years after the collapse of military dictatorship regimes of the 1970s did not see women occupying as much more space in the public sphere and in decision-making positions as would have been expected. It would be only with the Federal Constitution of 1988 that women’s rights in Brazil would begin to start to be acknowledged, but even so, the threats to the continuity of these rights as well as their advancement has become a contemporary reality of the last years to which many women and feminist groups, as well as other minority groups, are standing up against.

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. The 2014 presidential elections, which also included elections for the senate and chamber of deputies, saw a total of 25,919 candidates run, according to the TSE (Supreme Electoral Court). Of these, only 30.7% were women (16.5% white and 14.2% black). The final result was the election of 13 female senators of a total of 81 vacancies, representing 16%, and another 51 female deputies, of a total of 513 MPs. Brazil further lags behind other Latin America countries, with Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Venezuela, Panama, Peru and Colombia having more female deputies, whilst the number of women that have managed to reach the higher ranks in businesses throughout Latin American countries is extremely low.\textsuperscript{iv}

Nadine Gasman of UN Women pointed out how female political participation has reached 25% in the world, whereas in Brazil MPs take up a total of 11% of the seats in Congress and are below the minimum of 30% stipulated by the 4\textsuperscript{th} World Conference on Women. Gasman emphasised the complexities of the struggle for women’s rights in Brazil, which includes the different struggles and forms of (historical) exclusion suffered by various groups of women in the country. “Since colonization, indigenous women and blacks have had to confront a system of violence whose real effects of inequality have persisted after nearly 150 years. Currently,
indigenous women are the victims of violence against their territories… and black women confront the perverse combination of racism and sexism, culminating in low political representation, precarious inclusion in the marketplace, super exposure to urban violence among others.”

In a country of a multi-party system with weak institutions and highly political fragmentation – there are, to start with, a total of 28 parties in Brazil –, the difficulties of reaching consensus has been extremely difficult. Various groups within civil society and social movements do not agree with each other and can be competitors. In many ways the “pact” formed by the former government of president Lula between employers and workers, and which guaranteed the success of this administrations from 2003 until 2012, was dissolved in the awake of the economic recession and mainly from 2013 onwards. Various authors have also talked about a divided civil society, mainly between left wing and progressive groups and ultra conservative right wing factions but also amongst various smaller, fragmented and fringe groups from across the political spectrum. Divisions within the women’s movement for instance have always existed: there have been particular problems with the inclusion of black female Brazilians within the wider feminist movement in the country. As Caldwell (in Maier and Lebon, 2010, 176) has noted, both the women’s and black movements emerged during the 1970s. The “Manifesto of Black Women”, which was presented during the Congresso de Mulheres Brasileiras in July 1975, highlighted the racial divisions with the women’s movement, acknowledging for the first time the ways in which race and gender intersected in the oppression and sexual exploitation of black women.

An important avenue to combat unequal gender representation in politics has been the debate on the implementation of quotas for women in political parties and Congress. A Brazilian law of 1997 obliges political parties to reserve 30% of their vacancies to women candidates, although this has been having more effect on paper than in actual practice. Critics (i.e. Fraser, 2013) have correctly argued that quotas and the numerical presence of women in itself does not solve the problem. This seems a clear point to make. If we consider that firstly it was the wider presence of
women in politics which helped to advance the women’s agenda, from childcare to the prohibition of sex discrimination in the workplace, it seems evident that the mere presence of women and other minority groups in particular institutions and spheres of life is a step forward to say the least.\textsuperscript{vi}

Contrary to what pure market frameworks and rhetoric might suggest, the fact is that the state still has a crucial role to play in implementing policies, as well as creating conditions for equitable gender citizenship (i.e. Einhorn in Evans and Williams, 2013, 34-35; Norris, 1993). Thus the series of legislations discussed in the previous chapter which aims to combat gender violence, such as the 	extit{Maria da Penha} law, are but indications of the importance of state policies in reducing gender equality, creating the conditions for women to compete better with men as well as strengthen their overall status in society.

As Macaulay (in Maier and Lebon, 2010) noted in her critical overview of contemporary feminist movements in Brazil and their relationship to political parties and the state, since the early 1980s these activist groups have sought to create the means for gender equity policies through state mechanisms. The \textit{Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Mulher} (CNDM) was one of the earliest units within the federal government dedicated to women’s issues, implemented soon after the return to democracy in late 1980s and after the fall of the military regime (1964-1985). The women’s movement managed to seize the opportunity and use its political capital, accumulated during the struggle against the dictatorship, to pressure for the establishment of the ministry, whereas the opposition party PMDB was eager to propagate its progressive credentials (Macaulay, 2010). Other gender-friendly policies included the creation of women-only police stations to deal with cases of domestic violence.

Similarly to other countries, feminism also had an ambiguous and complex relationship to party politics in Brazil. The CNDM’s, whose work against the discrimination of woman was based on the principles of the CEDAW, put forward a series of proposals during the Constitutional
Assembly (1987-1988) and managed to successfully incorporate 80% of its demands into the final text of the 1988 Constitution (Macaulay, 2010). The PMDB’s weak support for the CNDM lead to its disintegration and reduction to a smaller unit during the late 1980s and 1990s. In September 2002, ahead of the presidential elections and close to the end of this term, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, whose government had initially been reluctant to advance the women agenda, issued a decree that created the Secretaria de Estado dos Direitos da Mulher (Secretary of State on the Rights of Women), which was later transformed into the Sectary for Policy for Women (SPM) in 2003 after the election of Lula (Macaulay, 2010).

After the dismantling of CNDM during the 1990’s, the feminist movement and concerns would emerge again in a ministerial status only through the creation of the Secretary of Policies for Women in 2003, during the second mandate of Lula. This was later incorporated into the Ministry for Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights in 2015 and further dismantled by the Temer government in early 2016, with a special sectary on women’s issues joining the newly merged Ministry of Justice and Citizenship. In 2015, the online website of the Secretary stated that it’s aim was to assist the presidency, introducing polices sensitive to women’s issues from across the ministries, working in partnership with both public as well as private bodies as well as developing educational national campaigns.

Feminists groups would thus seek to influence more the Worker’s Party (PT) at the turn of the century in Brazil. The Lula government also launched, after a nation-wide consultation, the Plano Nacional de Politicas para Mulheres (National Plan of Policies for Women), which was considered the most comprehensive document on gender equality produced in Brazil (Macaulay, 2010), and which had a particular focus on non-sexist education, women’s health, discrimination in the workplace and violence towards women. The document was later revised in 2007 in the context of the 2nd National Conference for the Policies for Women, including issues such as
women’s access to the workplace, anti-poverty and inequality measures, social security, reproductive rights and violence (Macaulay, 2010, 277-278).

It is thus vital to acknowledge that political parties in Brazil, and governments, have had a crucial role in responding to women’s demands and in attempting to push the equality agenda forward, however slowly. Norris (1993) for one has argued that centre left wing parties in Europe, from Germany to the UK, have been more responsive to the demands made by women, although as I have argued before, the consensus around the need to advance women’s rights has expended across the political spectrum in Europe, and particularly so in some countries more than others, such as in the UK. However in the case of Brazil, it has been the PMDB, and largely the Worker’s Party (PT), which has managed to launch the key female politicians of Brazilian politics. This has included the president Dilma Rousseff to the other presidential candidates of the 2010 and 2014 elections, such as Marina Silva and Heloisa Helena (in the newly founded party Rede) and Luciana Genro (PSOL), although with the exception of Dilma none are affiliated to the party any longer.

The former adjunct secretary of institutional articulation and thematic action of SPM, Linda Goulart, has stated that the secretary has worked in projects with the aim of combatting what she sees as a patriarchal culture, which still exists in the country: “We have worked to revert the situation, supporting campaigns like “Que mama abraca” (Those who love hug), directed to middle and high school students, among others, as well as specific programmes, such as the “Construindo a Igualdade de Genero” (Constructing Gender Equality). We have also done TV and radio campaigns talking about zero tolerance to violence against women, specific campaigns for big events, such as the World Cup (2014) and the Olympics (2016)”, she stated. The former SPM ministry also works closely with ONU Women in Brazil in areas such as education, work, political participation, health and the combat of violence against women.
Nadine Gasman from UN Women in Brazil also defended the action of other spheres of society in the struggle for gender equality, beyond state structures and including also the media. As she argued:

“...to combat violence against women is the responsibility of the states, companies and of society. Beyond the investments in public services that attend to the victims, it is important to allocate resources to prevent violence. Companies also need to play their part, supporting and financing actions from the community, articulating initiatives with their collaborators to end violence. Society and the media (my emphasis) also need to embrace the cause of eliminating violence against women, so that violence can be repressed and the guilty punished. Impunity is still the main challenge in the fight against violence.”

State feminism has its limits and can be dependent on resources, the will and political commitment of the parties in power. Welfare programmes and other state benefits are usually the first hit in times of economic crisis, as was the case of the structural adjustment programmes of the 1990s (Lebon, 2010) and the contemporary context of economic recession in Brazil, where powerful extreme right wing forces seek to dismantle the already very weak Brazilian welfare state. Despite economic difficulties and the lack of sufficient resources, at the very least the presence of such secretaries at governmental level can contribute to exercise a symbolic role in society by creating the necessary awareness amongst larger groups of people who do not question gender power relations of the problems suffered by various groups of women. They can thus influence the political public sphere, boosting public debate in society on the topic, creating links with the private sector and other firms, as well as opening avenues and opportunities for feminist activists and pressure groups to talk to the government and to have their concerns heard.

Politics is thus definitely a space where gender equality can be achieved, but this should not be limited only to the governmental sphere. As we have seen, Fraser (2013) has argued that gender justice needs to address two core dimensions: that of redistribution (i.e. poverty alleviation, in other words, the economic sphere) and of recognition (i.e. status subordination, in other words, the sphere of cultural values). It is insufficient to attempt to tackle gender injustice also through one sphere, such as the state, for it is important to note that one dimension impacts on the other and
vice-versa (Fraser, 2013). Women who are subject to economic inequalities in society are more vulnerable to unemployment and struggle to rise above low paid jobs due to the injustices of recognition which are grounded on the cultural perceptions in society and attitudes that still claim (even within the level of the unconscious, my emphasis) that women are either inferior to men, have less value or are in a hierarchical category where they are placed in a subordinated status to them.

The relative success of state and other party policies incentives in countries like Germany, the UK and Norway (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993) as we have seen, indicate that the state can and still has an important role in contributing to combat gender inequality. As Craske (1999) has stated, the political environment in which feminist organisations work is crucial for them in order to be able to further their objectives. “The Latin American experience illustrates how political institutions can be useful as structures of empowerment for women…”, stated Craske (1999). Thus the openness of the state, its capacity to dialogue with civil society and various groups, can be seen as an essential element in this process of strengthening of the democratic project. As I have shown here, the role of the state in Brazil, and its recognition of the demands of social movements and feminist groups, has grown since the late period of the 1990’s (Craske, 1999), and especially since 2003.

The development of feminism over the course of the last decades in Brazil and throughout Latin America has not been in a linear progressive line and has suffered from enormous challenges and setbacks. An important space where politics meets feminism has been the Internet world. Despite the limits imposed by the digital divide and the difficulties that less privileged sectors of society have still to access digital platforms, there is some reasons to be cheerful and find hope in social media and online networks which, as I have argued before, have become quite crucial throughout many Latin American countries. In Brazil such platforms are having a role in undermining stereotypical representations in the media, and articulating counter-discourses and
ICTS for development: cyberfeminism, blogging and the Internet

The year 2015 in Brazil has been seen as the year when feminism invaded the mainstream of Brazilian society. After expanding significantly in the country since the decade of the 1990s, online media outlets and other social media communication networks became prominent in serving feminists groups in their struggle against discrimination and in favour of the advancement of women’s rights. I have discussed elsewhere (Matos, 2012) how political campaigning in the country has largely made use of online platforms to mobilize voters, being able to provide alternative readings from the mainstream media, as well as connect better with the electorate without the mediation of journalists. Female politician candidates have largely used the web, as well as feminist activists and other movements concerned with women’s rights. But can the Internet really have a positive impact for feminism? Do we risk falling into the trap of sounding too utopian, idealistic or even naive if we overemphasize the role of new technologies in social change and protest?

As Jensen (2010 in Shade, Carter et al, 2015, 225) has stated, it is important to go beyond the celebrations of the empowerment potential of social media, and engage more in “political economic analyses to critique and intervene in economic and governance structures.” Before focusing on the analysis of the activism of key influential feminist blogs however, it is important to address some of the debates on the potential of new technologies for change and gender development. This includes examining the emerging global trend of blogging and, in particular, the
new found relationship that feminists have encountered with these online platforms, which has received the name of cyberfeminism.

Various authors have shown us the limits of the Internet for democratic politics, and we need to be realistic and acknowledge these critiques. Many scholars who have discussed online communications have done so in terms of strengths and limits (i.e. Curran and Seaton, 2010), and rightly so, they have moved away from the more technically deterministic or euphoric understandings of the potential of the Internet more associated to its early years and predominant during the 1990s (i.e. Chadwick, 2006; Castells, 2007; Hesmondhalgh, 2002). The latter years tended to overemphasis the capacity of the web to promote revolutionary change in society and diminish structural inequalities. If on one hand online technologies can offer opportunities for wider political participation and mobilization, as well as assisting governments and institutions in becoming more transparent and engaging in direct contact with the public and voters without the mediation of journalists and experts, they can also suffer from the same problems as other media sectors, such as excessive commercialization and concentration and undermining or pushing grassroots mobilization to the margins (i.e. Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Chadwick, 2006).

There has been a growth in the body of scholarship on gender and the Internet in the last years, which I do not have time to assess here (i.e. Shade in Carter et al, 2015). The Fourth World conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 for instance recognised the importance of the then emerging Internet for women’s equality (Shade, 2015, 223). Women are also constantly pointed out as heavy users of social media, even more than men. Some issues which are examined here in this discussion between gender and the Internet thus include 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 gender divide which exists in terms of access to the web is also an important focus of both academic studies and policy concerns. Various studies for instance have been concerned with
social inclusion within the technological environment (Shade, 2001, 2015). I have written elsewhere about the digital divide in Brazil, and the programmes which aim to bridge this gap (Matos, 2014). Moreover, Gallagher (2011, in Shade, 2015) has defended the centrality of policy interventions which are capable of identifying points that need to be tackled, including the need to create “gender sensitive policy”. Karikakis (2012; 364 in Shade, 2015) also argued that gender is absent from public policy, defending the need for a “human centred policy scholarship”, interrogating gendered social relations of the policy regulatory process.

Gender has thus began to loom strongly in cyberspace in the 21st century (McNeil in Evans and Williams, 2013). This has been particularly the case since the decade of the 1990s, and has been defined as being “a set of aesthetic-political-communication strategies oriented towards electronic culture” (Ferreira, 2015, 201). Cyberfeminism for one has been celebrated by many authors and academics, with Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” (1991, 1985) being seen as one of the most influential cyberfeminist texts which tries to dissect the nature of the relationship which exists between gender and new technologies.

As McNeil (2013, 42) has also noted, Haraway offered a generally optimistic look at the prospects for cyberfeminism, whilst authors like Plant (1998) having provided a celebrated vision for women in the digital culture. She went as far as proclaiming that computing was a female sphere, having identified cyberspace as a feminine domain, a place of freedom and disruption of the patriarchal order (McNeil, 2013, 43). 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 cybernetic feminism, with this particular text having engaged in an intriguing comparison between the computer’s history of weaving with the work done by women.

The field of feminism and cyberspace has culminated in research in a variety of areas, including computer gaming, social networking and media and pornography (McNeil, 2013). My
interest here is in the relationship established 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 they can function as tools for gender development and justice in localised contexts. Moreover, a lot of research and debate within feminism 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 (Harcourt, 1999 in McNeil, 2013). I am interested here however in engaging in what other authors have started to do, as McNeil (2013) indicates, which is to explore the opportunities opened up by *cyberculture*, and particularly examining what is happening on the ground and on an everyday basis. These everyday activities, that many would argue that are banal or trivial, are actually under-researched within feminist media studies, as pointed out by many scholars (Karikasis, 2014). I also believe, and particularly in the case of Brazil, that they are strongly connected to the *political sphere*, constituting another form of political engagement beyond the avenues of state feminism, political representation or even the mainstream media.

Third wave feminists have been particularly attracted to the Internet (Budgeon in Gill and Scharff, 2011, 2013), interacting intelligently with these spaces in their quests to appropriate previously pejorative terms, such as “slut” and “bitch”, in a renewed energy to combat gender inequality. In previous chapters of this book, I underlined how new research trends in the gender field, as well as the concerns of diverse groups of third wave feminists, have focused on the role of new technologies in the struggle for gender equity. These have included debates on how online networks can offer spaces to undermine “sexist images” and articulate counter-hegemonic discourses to the ways in which ICTs (information and communication technologies) can assist in gender and development. This is not to mention the opportunities created for women’s inclusion in the digital world.

Despite the obvious acknowledgement that these can contribute for female empowerment and entrepreneurship, through the mere access to online networks and the further competency in
computer literacy skills, this alone is not enough. Thus the limits to women’s rights to access technologies, a demand which can be seen as merely replicating modernization discourses on the need to “catch up”, and which argued that mere connectivity was needed (Asiedu, 2012 in Shade, 2015, 227), is important to acknowledge but is not the only focus of our concern. As I have examined in the first chapter in relation to the debate on the feminization of poverty, and the development of theoretical perspectives on what constitutes poverty, to struggle for mere access, or a certain level of income, is not enough if one does not have political participation or is properly included in the community and has access to decent welfare and resources, as Sen would say.

Access to new technologies is thus obviously important in terms of information and communication rights, particularly so in developing countries, where sectors of the population do not have access to these networks amid a context that is seeing an increase in connectivity. However, the uses made of these networks, and the ways in which online communications are being appropriated throughout Latin America as a crucial sphere of influence and political activity, are equally as important to discuss and research.

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 do not have access to online communications, are among some of the key reasons stated among others for the limits of online networks in political influence, mobilization and in its capacity to boost democratic politics (i.e. Nederveen Pieterse, 2010; Curran and Seaton, 2010; Matos, 2012).

The 2013 report by the Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender, published by Unesco, underlined how the sustainable development agenda can be advanced through the promotion of new technologies in support of gender equality. As the 2013 report stated, after more than twenty years since the emergence of the Internet, there are still two-thirds of the planet’s population who do not have access to the world wide web and of these, most are
women. The report further noted that there are some 200 million fewer women online compared with men, and that women are coming online later than men. “Digital gender gaps reflect gender inequalities throughout societies and economies – a range of socio-economic and political factors affect gender divides, with attitudes and cultural beliefs likely to be self-reinforcing”, stated the report.

Most significantly, it is online networks which are actually offering the tools for many women in their struggle against gender inequality. 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 percentage however is less than in other Latin American countries like Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, with the former reaching as high as 70%. The report also highlighted the impact of new technologies on economic growth, stating that between 2005-2010, the web represented between 0.5% to 5.4% of the GDP in developing countries. Women also appear as significant users of online technologies, and are 53% of the users in the country.

Studies show that women from the lower classes are the group which are mostly connected and who use the web for shopping and other activities, such as to seek entertainment and. read news. The 2013 Broadband report also underlined the uses that new technologies 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 favelas, or shanty-towns. It stressed how on International Women’s Day in March 2013, UN Women, UNICEF and Un-Habitat launched a website, which also worked as a smartphone, with the intention of bringing together information on support services for women who were being the victims of violence.

A few authors have began to look at the possibilities offered by the alternative media, and also the blogsphere, for the boosting of political diversity and pluralism and also strengthening the
process of the democratization of the media in the country (i.e. Matos, 2012; Guedes Bailey and Marques, in Siapara and Veglis, 2012). Guedes Bailey and Marques (in Siapara and Veglis, 2012, 396) examined the possibilities offered by digital media and blogs in Brazil in terms of the ways in which these can offer people opportunities to become more active agents in the communication process (and I would add the political process as well).

Debates on the potential of the internet have been cast in what many authors have claimed as two opposite camps (i.e. Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Chadwick, 2006; Curran and Seaton, 2010), the more utopians or the sceptics. The first group has been seen as being more enthusiastic about new communication technologies, and seeing in them a potential to revolutionise our structures and ways of life, while the latter claiming that they an insufficient in their capacity to correct structural inequalities and to improve the world. In Guedes Bailey and Marques (in Siapara and Veglis, 2012) discussion of the arguments on the potential of online communications, I stress the one that they highlight which is more appropriate and realistic in its understanding of the potential of social media (as well as online communications more generally): 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 and Marques, 2012, 396).

In Brazil as in most parts of the world, blogs are being used both by the mainstream media as well as by independent journalists and other social movements and activist groups. In previous research I have examined the debate on digital inclusion in the country and the growth of blogging during political campaigns and the importance that they had for people to obtain more information, knowledge and critical debate, especially during the 2006 and 2010 presidential elections (Matos, 2014, 2012). Despite the fact that newspaper and media blogs are still the ones most accessed, such as the Blog do Noblat of O Globo newspaper, mentioned by Guedes Bailey and Marques (2012), non-mainstream blogs financed by local, regional or federal governments, or private individuals, have had a significant level of connection with various sectors of the Brazilian
population, stimulating debate with different sectors of civil society and across the political spectrum.

Guedes Bailey and Marques (2012) have further stated also how there was a lot of optimism when blogs emerged regarding their capacity to change journalism and the media logic, such as how they would offer opinions on topics relevant to local communities, providing perspective which were relatively absent from the mainstream media. This has occurred in a context where the members of the public are actively seeking a diversity of news sources and perspective on politics, current affairs and social issues beyond the discourses provided by the mainstream media only (i.e. Guedes Bailey and Marques, 2012, 399).

Many have argued that, due to the lack of commitment to media reform in the country and the insistence of partisanship practices in the newsroom, the mainstream media has seen a decline in its professional standards and commitments to objectivity and impartiality in the last years, following from its attempt of strengthening professionalism in the 1990s (Matos, 2008). The 2016 Reporters Without Borders report put the country in the 104th position, a fall from the 58th position given in 2010, due to the risk posed on journalists lives in the country, including policy brutality during protests, as well as the lack of professionalism of the mainstream media and its encouragement of the population to overthrow the president Dilma Rousseff, as mentioned before. All this has opened up new possibilities in the blogosphere.

In the last decades, the Brazilian blogosphere has undoubtedly seen a vibrant and dynamic growth of critical news commentary websites and others more politically partisan blogs and websites, and which include portals such as Pragmatismo Político, Revista Forum, Carta Maior, O Antagonista and Brasil 247, to journalistic and academic ones such as Observatorio da Imprensa and Portal Comunique-se, among others, as well as blogs from social movements and civil society pressure groups. An important independent media group is undoubtedly Midia Ninja, a movement formed by amateur journalists and bloggers which has been extremely influential in the last years
due to its reporting among others of acts of police violence in protests, and whom I have discussed elsewhere (2012, 2014). These websites have contributed significantly to boost debate in the mediated public sphere, strengthening political diversity as well as providing different perspectives and angles on issues that are seen as sensitive and which do not yet receive as much in depth and quality critical coverage in the mainstream media, including topics such as inequality, social inclusion, worker’s rights and women and minority rights.

The main Brazilian mainstream journalistic blogs include Miriam Leitao’s, Blog do Juca, Josias de Souza, Balaio do Kotscho, among others, and many belong to key media groups, including five from the 16 key news blogs, which belong to the Abril group (i.e. Guedes Bailey and Marques, 2012). Some of these mainstream blogs are quite opinionated and differ from the practices of objectivity and professionalism of traditional journalism, such as O Globo’s Blog do Noblat and Cora Ronai’s. The boundaries between traditional journalism, and more interpretative, partisan or militant and opinionated forms, however have become increasingly blurred, with mainstream journalism for one having been profoundly shaped by the language of the blogosphere, thus acquiring a much more personal, interpretative and commentary tone, which at times also is less professional and objective, leaning towards partisanship and more ideological tones.

I do not wish to examine further the theoretical aspects of the debate on the extent to which the mainstream has appropriated alternative online spaces, as well as the question if we can still call such spaces as “alternative”, a discussion that is pursued by various researchers elsewhere (i.e. Castells, 2007; Couldry and Curran, 2013). As mentioned above, my concern here is with the articulation of these feminists discourses in the blogosphere, and the ways in which they stand in opposition to, as well as complement in contradictory ways, the images and representations within the media, such as in the case of advertising and magazines. They also stand as a positive indicator
of the media’s role still in development, and are important sites to research for anyone interested in the use of ICTs for gender, economic development and equality.

Although politics is not the core activity of those who access online networks, the popularity and intensity of the use of feminist blogs in Brazil, although evidently less popular than the mainstream media and journalistic blogs mentioned above, cannot be ignored. Feminism debates and perspectives have also seen a significant revival in the last five to ten years in the country, particularly the year of 2015, which was seen as vital for cyberfeminism and for online (as well as offline) feminist activism, as we shall see.

*Female political representation and gender politics in Brazil*

Feminist politics and other women movements have encountered many difficulties in the post-dictatorship phase in their attempts to construct avenues of dialogue with governments and the state to have their cases heard, and to influence the formulation of gender-sensitive policies as well as to have a stronger role in Brazilian society in the same level as men. The re-democratization phase since the end of the 1980’s nonetheless produced a paradoxical scenario: a rise of gender politics in the country, in line with the process of the feminization of politics encountered throughout Latin America, which saw the rise of political female leaders throughout the continent on one side as well as a continuation of the subordination of the “ordinary Brazilian woman” on the other. As scholar Miriam Grossi, concluded, “the elections of Dilma, Bachelet or Cristina Kirchner were important elements of political transformation in Latin America, but have not automatically guaranteed changes in gender representations, or inclusion of public policies for women in the three countries.”

The last two presidential campaigns in Brazil of the years 2010 and 2014 saw various high profile female politicians run for the presidency, from Heloisa Helena, Luciana Genro, Marina da
Silva to Dilma Rousseff, with the latter being elected the first female president in 2010. The 2010 and 2014 campaigns for the presidential elections of these candidates lacked a more nuanced focus on women’s issues and rights, particularly in the case of the 2014 dispute, despite the presence of high profile female politicians like Marina and Dilma. In many ways there is still a dissonance between the debates on women’s issues that are taking place within Brazilian society, both online and off, and the discourses on women included in the campaigns of the candidates, which are relatively minor or still somewhat marginal, despite the existence of secretaries for women in government, as we have seen. The year of 2014 was the same year that the blog Blogueiras Feministas, which will be discussed here, was created, in an attempt to discuss chauvinism in political campaigning and within wider Brazilian society, culture and politics.

The presidential elections of 2014 nonetheless saw a significant growth in the participation of female candidates of 46.5% in contrast to the previous 2010 dispute, according to the former Secretary of Policies for Women. Despite the presence of high profile female candidates in the 2010 elections, according to the Supreme Electoral Court of Justice (TSE), a total of 79% of men (15,780) ran for various political positions (governor, Senator and MP) against only 20% of women candidates, or 4,058.xiOf a total of 25,000 thousand candidates in Brazil during the 2014 dispute, 7,407 were female, or a total of 29.73%.xii Nonetheless, the three female candidates who run for presidency in 2014 were also among the main four in the first round, reaching a total of 67 million votes, or 64.5% of the total (Dilma Rousseff, Marina Silva and Luciana Genro, respectively).xiii This was a contrast with the number of women who were actually elected.

Vera Soares, the coordinator of the study, which was conducted by the secretary of institutional articulation and thematic action of SPM, underlined that, despite the growth of female candidates for MPs in 88%, from 935 in 2010 to 1755 in 2014, as well as in the Senate, from 29 in 2010 to 33 in 2014, this was not reflected in the actual numbers elected. As of May 2016, the data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union placed Brazil in the 155th place, out of a total of 193
nations, in terms of percentage of women in the lower and single house, with 9.90% for the former and 16% for the latter. The country appeared ahead of Myanmar and Botswana, and after Ghana, Armenia, Jordan and Sierra Leone.

It is argued that ingrained gender stereotypes shared by many in traditionally chauvinistic countries tend to work strongly against women presidents (Santos and Jalazai, 2014). The authors (2014, 169) affirm that women presidents in Latin America share a common characteristic, which is family ties with established political leaders, and in this case of Dilma, this has proven to be the exception to the rule, as she was among the few female Latin American executives who later entered politics. Santos and Jalazai (2014)’s argument is that the few women who do reach top positions within government do so less due to female politics, or the recognition of their talents and capacity, and more due to their political connections with influential politicians. This has been the case of Michele Bachelet, who took office in Chile in 2006, and who is the daughter of a Pinochet opponent, the Air Force General Bachelet Martinez. The underlying result of this is that such female top leaders tend to be taken less seriously than would be the case if they were a man.

Making reference to other authors, Santos and Jalazai (2014) underlined how Dilma Rousseff’s election in 2010 was considered noteworthy in a context were the political system is heavily male dominated at all levels of government. Many politicians, academics and even feminists have argued that her representation has been symbolic above anything else, although it paved the way for a gradual strengthening of governmental politics on women’s rights, and indirectly also encouraged wider online (and offline) feminist activism in Brazil society, which particularly started to see a renewal in the last years with the realisation of a series of protests from women’s groups throughout the country. The country’s low political representation, and the lack of presence of women in politics, was constantly alluded to in various online texts of feminist websites, such as the Blogueiras Feministas.
Bia Cardoso, one of the coordinators of the Blogueiras Feministas, which will be examined more in the next section, underlined that the blog sought not to defend any candidate during the presidential election campaigns. Cardoso underlined the difficulties of debating gender politics in the public sphere in Brazil:

“We want to have a position of not supporting any candidate….but we have had many texts criticising the chauvinism and sexism that surrounds female politicians, like a recent one on jokes made to Dilma Rousseff….We also have some texts about the topic (the relationship between gender and politics), but unfortunately this is a debate that encounters a lot of resistance. The proposal of quotas for women as candidates in parties was rejected recently in the Federal Chamber, but approved in the Senate. However, we know that the parties do not commit to this requirement in many ways. The proposals for political and electoral reform hardly discuss this. On our website we publish texts that reflect this….. We have though more young Brazilian women interested, and society has positioned itself in a positive manner in relation to the issue of violence against women. However, you can still find a lot of resistance to put in practice actions that can really change the scenario of gender inequality. The good news is that there are more Brazilian women are acting and talking about this….” she stated.

Although political campaigning in the re-democratization phase has not emphasised or discussed in greater depth women’s issues, there have been some underlying nuances of gender politics that are slowly entering public debate. The feminist dimension of Dilma’s campaign was present to some extent during the 2010 presidential campaign, when marketers of the Worker’s Party created the image of the “mother of Brazil” to voters and linked this to that of her mentor Lula, who had been a former president (Santos and Jalazai, 2014). To many, this was a more determinant factor in her victory than feminist politics or her capacity to take on the role. During the 2010 campaign however the issue of the right to abortion was used by her political opponent, Jose Serra, to his advantage and, despite Rousseff having won the election, the issues was played down within government and the debate did not advance in the public sphere.

Fashion and appearance were constantly evoked in the media during Dilma’s first presidential campaign in 2010. These ranged from discussions regarding her use of a wig, after having gone through chemotherapy treatment, to the PT’s aim in showing a more “feminine” side
(Santos and Jalazai, 2014) to stand in contrast to what was perceived as a more “masculine” persona. The ambiguity around Dilm’a masculine tough persona, which led her to receive the nickname of Brazil’s *Iron Lady*, a reference to the UK’s Margaret Thatcher, during mainly her first mandate, was also mingled with other traditional notions of femininity, from being portrayed as being the “mother” or “grandmother” of the country, especially through advertising and political campaigning during the 2010 bid, to also having suffered pressures to exercise surveillance over her body. This led her to losing 15 kilos during the 2014 presidential dispute.

The 2014 elections were seen as having given less concern to women’s empowerment and capacity of leadership than would be the case in 2010. The “mother of Brazil” image thus did not reach the 2014 re-election due to various reasons, ranging from the weakness of the entry of the women’s agenda within Brazilian mainstream politics, society and culture to the difficulties that the president encountered with managing the economy following from the start of the recession in 2014, as well as the accusations of corruption made against officials of the federal administration and others involved in the *Petrobras* oil company scandal. The 25 page political manifesto of the Worker’s Party candidate for instance included only one paragraph on the topic. The political campaign of 2014 was also a tightly competitive one, between the core opponents Dilma, Marina and the candidate Aecio Neves, from the main opposition party of the centre right, the PSDB, who flirted with the extreme right and engaged in heavy attack campaigning against Dilma, something which was seen as highly chauvinistic and which persisted after the elections and during the course of 2015.

During the campaign nonetheless some of her previous political projects, such the implementation of the programme *Mulher: Viver sem Violencia* (Women: Live Without Violence), received some attention. Polls also showed during the 2010 campaign that voter’s intentions among women grew in favour of Dilma after the image of the “Mother of Brazil” turned into a key political campaign strategy (Santos and Jalazai, 2014). It is possible to argue that the image of the
“mother of Brazil” is not necessarily a progressive take on women’s issues, on feminism or on the role of women in Brazilian society, and is rather an image that taps into a more conservative and old fashioned vision of women, albeit with a slight but timid signal towards a notion of women’s empowerment and independence. This symbolises Dilma’s position in Brazilian society also having been a successful self-made business women.

The timidity and the constraints of the discussion of gender issues within Brazilian politics, and during the political presidential campaigns, stood in sharp contrast to the growing and intense media and political activism that started to take place online by various feminist and women’s groups. It is also important to recognise the limits of social media, and not to blindly endorse its emancipatory potential. Social media can be a place for thorough and in depth political debate, as well as a space for chaos and manifestation of prejudices – which are disguised offline on a daily practice. Social media has not only been used by Brazilian feminist movements in order to advance their mains. It was also heavily used during the 2014 campaign, and afterwards for chauvinistic attacks in a context of increasing social unrest and growing economic recession. This campaign would later repeat itself as a strong feature behind the impeachment process in 2016, and would manifest itself symbolically with the posters with the phrase “Bye, Dear” during the session in the lower chamber of deputies which voted for her suspension.xvi

The sexist attacks, which started mainly during the 2014 campaign, culminated in a range of sympathy expressed by other feminists and condemnation of a series of offensive stickers which were being sold online ridiculing Rousseff with misogynist language. Some of the grotesque images which circulated online included car stickers which fitted around the gas tank and showed Rousseff with her legs open, inviting drivers to penetrate her until they fill up. Another blogger posted an image of her covered on mud, with the title “The LyingProstitutef of the Planalto”, in a reference to the practices of Brazilian Congressmen of hiring prostitutes.xviiiIn July 2015, a PT
senator launched a campaign in favour of restoring female dignity and amid the persistence of the attacks also after the end of the 2014 bid.

The campaign *E Pela Dignidade Feminina*” (For Feminine dignity, or It is for the dignity of women) had the image of Dilma hugging a small indigenous girl. The image signalled to the values of inclusiveness and diversity in the representation of what a Brazilian women is, establishing a connection between two very different women of different ages, socio-economic background and ethnicity, implying that respect must be equally granted to both through the hug that Dilma gives the young indigenous child. This image can also be read from another aspect, as an image that reinforces the the myth of Brazil’s “multi-racial” democracy. The campaign has also its Facebook page, with 16.079 likes, including journalists and academics as followers.\textsuperscript{viii}

An important story published in the weekly *Veja* magazine, known to be excessively conservative and extremely partisan (Matos, 2008), was the story on the first lady Marcela Temer, the vice-president’s wife, in the aftermath of Dilma’s suspension by Parliament, called “Beautiful, restrained and from the home”, and published on the 18\textsuperscript{th} of April.\textsuperscript{xii}Here a young, blonde women in her early 30s, married to a man who is 40 years her senior, is presented as the ideal version of Brazilian femininity, and appears in contrast to the harsher treatment afforded to Dilma, a former left wing leader during the dictatorship, turned executive and governmental official during the re-democratization phase before becoming president. The start of the story is excessively sentimental and almost a fantasy over the past and an idealization of a long last epoch of entrenched elitism, restraint and table manners. “Marcela Temer is a woman of luck. Michel Temer, her husband of 13 years, continues to give her prove that passion does not die down with time, and not even with the political turmoil that the country went through….”, began the story. For many who took on to social media to protest against the story, the image of Marcela Remer was implicitly contrasted to that of Dilma, perceived as the short haired, masculine, career women and former left wing fighter,
against the well behaved, naivety, passivity, submissiveness and beauty of Marcela, or what the ideal Brazilian women should be like.

The hashtag #Belarecatadaedolar circulated intensively on Twitter on the day that the story was published, and until mid-June was still stimulating a lot of discussion and debate. What mattered here for many was less the fact of criticising a politician, a citizen and political right, but the highly gendered aspect which supported the criticism and the articulation of a vision of femininity which is in contrast to the growing empowerment of women in the country in the last decades. For many it also contributed to undermine or marginalise the identities of women similar to Dilma, in other words, women who were “empowered” or active in public life, and who are also aging. The result was a series of criticisms by many on social media, through Facebook as well as Twitter. The tone of the story was thus considered enormously revealing for its reinforcement of the perception among public opinion that the campaign against the president had strong sexist undertones, and that gender was a major component in the undermining of the president and the attacks that she received, when before this had been denied. It was thus not only limited to a self-righteous anger with economic woes and corruption.

Political campaigning and online mobilization thus increased significantly in Brazil in the last years, particularly since the 2006 and 2010 presidential campaigns (Matos, 2012). Since the demonstrations of June 2013 however, the use of the Internet politically and as a means of mobilization and of advancing democracy has received a boost in a context of growing social unrest due to a combination of factors, from the initial signs of the beginning of an economic stagnation to dissatisfaction with local as well as national governments, including demands for quality public services and better investments. Della Porta (in Loader and Mercea, 2012, 49), has argued that new technologies has boosted the communication confidence of social movements, who have mainly utilised them to engage in forms of mobilization as well as resistance to mainstream media discourses and representations, as I have been examining here. It is to the ways
in which feminist movements within the blogosphere are responding better to various political and social challenges regarding gender politics and women’s rights to that I turn to next.

*Online media activism and new feminist websites: from “Think Olga” to “Blogueiras Feministas”*

Various social movements and feminist groups have began to constantly mobilize, with the year of 2015 being seen as crucial in feminist political mobilization both online and offline. Social media is providing an important space not only for political campaigning, but to criticise politicians, to denounce hypocrisies, to push debate and more controversial issues on women’s rights which are not well explored by the media, or within public debate. Many Brazilian feminists have also been very influential in the struggle against the reactions of more conservative sectors of the Brazilian right to the advancement of women’s rights and attempts of criminalising abortion by approving a law (5069/13) which makes it difficult for health professionals in the country’s national health service (SUS) to assist women in need of abortion. The scale of the Brazilian feminist opposition to the possibility of a return to a more repressive state for instance was clearly manifested in the protests held throughout the country during the year of 2015 regarding the changes to this law, which was pushed forward by the president of the lower house of Congress, Eduardo Cunha, and which consisted in the demand for medical examination for victims.

The feminist groups and their websites that I examine here are managing to contribute, however sporadically and in a limited manner, to either mobilize and organise protests, assist in public policy debate and decision making as well as creating greater awareness within public opinion over the relevance of certain topics. These blogs also function in a highly fragmented cyber space where mobilizations, protests and debates are discussed and occur with more or less intensity during particular periods, and in the context of the issues which are being debated within
the political sphere, from the chauvinism expressed during Dilma’s campaign to the *Maria da Penha* law. Issues that are discussed thus range from sexism in Brazilian society, to violence against women and rape, sexual harassment to political representation and discrimination in the workplace. Further criticisms are also made towards media stereotyping and the increasing intolerance and authoritarianism of conservative sectors of Brazilian society in their denial of difference and refusal to recognise the extension of citizenship rights to diverse groups of the population.

The Internet in Brazil and throughout Latin American is expanding and slowly becoming less elitist. Mobile phones are already widely used by everyone and have been since the late 1990’s. However, access to the web is restricted by economic factors, as well as race, geographical location and generational differences. According to the data from the 2014 *PNAD - Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicilio* (National Research per Household Sample), 54.4% use the web while 45.6% of the population do not. The regions of the North and the Northeast of the Brazil are also were the lowest levels of connectivity are, 55% and as high as 58%, respectively, whereas the South East, the richest region of the country, has 38%. When it comes to race, 60.5% of blacks are disconnected against 38.5% of whites and among those who earn less than two minimum wages, the number of disconnected surpasses those that are connected (Nassif, 2016).

Authors like Harcourt (in Bhavnani et al, 2016, 180) have argued over the important role that ICTs can have as political tools for women, although at the same time acknowledging the fact that online networks can also be negative and provide spaces for pornography and cyber-stalking. Without endorsing the hype, it is essential to recognise that even the small activism that is taking place within online networks in Brazil, from across the political spectrum, including many social movements and diverse civil society groups, is having an impact on mainstream Brazilian society and even the media. It is also important to conduct further research into this, as these movements and their use of online networks are in expansion, having become more influential in the last few
years in defining and shaping public debate offline, with many even having claimed that social media and online networks exercised a critical role in Dilma’s re-election in 2014, in a way which would not have been possible in the past.

There are thus many active women’s movements and feminist groups, which would be impossible to do justice and examine all of them. I intend here to conduct an analysis of the discourses which are circulating among a series of influential feminist blogs, including mainly Blogueiras Feministas and the new NGO Think Olga, as well as images of protests from Brazil’s Marcha da Vadias movement (the national equivalent to the SlutWalk). The hashtag campaigns #AgoraeQueSaoElas (Now it is them (or her in plural) and #PrimeiroAssedio are examined also. Different groups of women are taking part in these new forms of contemporary feminism in Brazil, and which include both working and lower middle class women as well as some from the middle classes, ranging from the age of 18 to early 40’s. The Marcha Mundial das Mulheres and Marcha das Vadias for instance, which takes place throughout different states in Brazil, as we shall see, includes the participation of many young working class feminists from the periphery as well as others from the middle classes. Other feminist protests who marched during 2015 against Cunha for instance included a broader range of groups and movements from the middle classes.

Important pressure groups which have assisted in policy-making have included also the Geledes Instituto da Mulher Negra, the Agencia Patrícia Galvao and CFEMEA (Centro Feminista de Estudos e Assessoria). These groups serve different purposes, and not all of them have necessarily as their main aim to stimulate debate, working more as centres on policy formulation and discussion, such as CFEMEA. The later has had impact in the area of human rights and race equality, having taken part in national and international feminist networks, whereas the Articulacao das Mulheres Brasileiras, founded in 1994, had the purpose of coordinating actions and developing agendas for the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, also had its role in pushing for change (Macaulay, 2010).
The Geledes Instituto da Mulher Negra has had an important role in the debate on intersectionality in Brazil and bringing awareness to this concept and what it means, emphasising the need to acknowledge more the double discrimination that can be implicated in the combination of race with gender. The Agencia Patrícia Galvão- Midia e Direitos, created in 2009, has a news agency specialised in providing information on women’s rights, and has also worked in partnership with the government, publishing studies which provide various analyses, such as the 2011 report Imprensa e Agenda de Direitos das Mulheres - Uma análise das tendências da cobertura jornalística (Press and Agenda of Women’s Rights – An analysis of the trends of the journalistic coverage). Other personal blogs that are also popular include Escreva Lola Escreva (Write Lola, write, in a reference to the German film, Run Lola, run) and Blogueiras Negras (Black Bloggers).

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, and as of 2014 it has had approximately 250,000 visits per month and is considered one of the most popular in the area, 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. One of the most popular feminist discussion blogs in the country nonetheless is, Blogueiras Feministas, website for one has 37,000 followers and which is situated in Brasilia, the capital, counting with a series of collaborators throughout the country. They demand from the government the construction of nurseries and shelters for the victims of violence, among others.

As Sorj (2014) has argued, the new face of feminism in Brazil is again mixing the personal with the political, with many of these websites including personal stories and testimonials and a variety of different emotions. Arguably, one of the strengths of the Blogueiras Feministas website for instance 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 very much grassroots initiative which is run by eight
people, is to encourage debate on feminism and stimulate Internet activism within an editorial policy that favours intersectional feminism.

The front page of Blogueiras Feministas highlights as the main themes of the blog issues such as the women’s body, reproduction and abortion rights, including legislation and laws such as the Maria da Penha one, as well as issues of intersectionality and the emphasis on the awareness of how patterns of gender oppression are interlinked with other forms of constraint, such as race and class. Moreover, the editorial line of the blog emphasises how its aim is, through debate, discussion and awareness, to achieve a more just and equal society. The editorial of the blog further stated that its main objective is to discuss feminism, adding that its focus is on the articulation of critiques of institutions and structures, combatting prejudices, which it admits are even present in some of its material.

The text also stresses the fluidity of feminism, and signals towards the inclusion of multiple identities and understandings on what it means to be a feminist in Brazil: “We do not believe in stereotypes, in absolute truths, our feminism is political and it always in constant construction”, states the text. It thus acknowledges the fact that the discussions that take place in this space are not totally immune from the influences of the prejudices which exist within what it calls as being a “patriarchal society”.

It is possible to situate the editorial as being preoccupied with discussions on what feminism is, and the examination of particular thematic issues which are deemed important in Brazilian society, which are part of the second and third categories that I mentioned earlier. Cardoso acknowledged a growth in the debate on feminism and gender inequality in the country, but emphasised that the process has occurred extremely 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 or the women that engages in multitasking….. 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, who needs to start rejecting these limited representations. I also believe that there is resistance in showing the diversity of the Brazilian women. Because there is no interest in women seeing themselves as stronger and more independent, owners of their own destiny...To keep women in the same social roles is always interesting....”

Moreover, the most read stories of 2015 were the celebration of the 5 years of the existence of the blog; a piece on the recent creation of the Partido da Mulher Brasileira (Brazilian Women’s Party), which is accused of not representing women; a story on Dilma and the impeachment proceedings; another text on the Occupy student protests, which took place in Sao Paulo in 2015, as well as a text on the representation of women in the media. This included a piece on the Netflix series Jessica Jones and another on the representation of domestic workers in Brazilian soap operas. The topics that were most sought after included abortion and reproduction rights, intersectional feminism, law Maria da Penha, feminist movements and indigenous women. Topics on violence against women were core issues which occupy the first page of the blog, with stories that date from late 2015 until early 2016.

The most read stories on the blog though included those focused on the body, and the emphasis 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”; “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.” It also has a section for women seeking help with cases of violence, attacks and abortion, including links where women can download information on the ethical aspects of legal abortion for women in Brazil, including reproduction rights and abortion in cases of violence and when the women’s health is at risk. Other links include a connection to the Think Olga sexual harassment campaign, as well as others on
how to denounce cases of domestic violence, and information on the numbers to call for assistance in case of attacks.

Similarly to women’s magazines, as I discussed in the previous chapter, there is a lot of stories which focus on discourses around the body and what it means to be a women. However, the emphasis given here is different in tone, language and scope: there is an emphasis on female emancipation and on encouraging women to gain control over their own bodies, and not adapt themselves to images of perfection offered to them by ads and commercials. There is thus a strive towards emancipation, and a retreat away from the values of restraint, emphasised in stories such as Veja’s on Marcela Temer one, as well as an acknowledgement of past feminist struggles – the story on Beauvoir appears in the fourth place – and an attempt to make other Brazilian aware of it. The ignorance towards Simone de Beauvoir in Brazilian society is widespread, and was manifested in the conservative backlash to the inclusion of her name in a national exam on violence against women for high school students. There is also an attempt to target men and make them more aware of their own socialization into sexism, with one story highlighting how women should be approached when courted, without disrespect and rudeness.

The Blogueiras Feministas gives support to the Brazilian version of the Slutwalks, the Marcha das Vadias, which has also met with some degree of success, from stimulating attention to the images and styles of demonstration during the marches to encouraging debate in the blogosphere. They have also been the subject of recent research by academics and others. A strong component of the action of the Marcha das Vadias movement in Brazil has been their appeal to imagery, to the visual and the body. The series of protests of the Marcha das Vadias, which took place in Brazil during 2015, constantly restored to strong visual images. These were used in the posters with an aim to mobilize other women, calling them to participate in the demonstrations.

In line with the aims of third wave feminists, and sharing similar concerns regarding the body as Blogueiras Feministas, the many posters for the Marcha das Vadias in Brazil have played
with language and words using irony, play and provocativeness, subverting the use of the word “slut”. The *Marcha das Vadias* has regional versions, which include twenty five states in Brazil, such as Sao Paulo, Brasilia and Belo Horizonte, and have their pages on the social media platform, *Facebook*. Each region has their own blog and organise their own meetings and the different grassroots feminist groups in each state like to adopt provocative slogans for each protest.

Much of the focus of the *Marcha das Vadias’* different regional pages on *Facebook* and on *Wordpress* are have been on discussions of feminism, ranging from the importance of women taking control over their own body and the uses 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 within Brazilian patriarchal society as a means of emphasising a separation between women who are condemned to be merely “slept with” from those who are “for marrying”.

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 on their posters which stressed the right that women should have over their own bodies, in what can be read as an allusion to both abortion rights as well as 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 makes less political connections and strives to influence party politics or state feminism from a policy perspective, as the other feminist movements do, and emphasises much more individual freedom, subversion from the established order, liberty, freedom and emancipation.

Other posters have 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” is taken on its head and used as synonymous with “freedom” and
“liberty” from all forms of oppression. Here the use of the term can be seen as all inclusive of all types of women and their multiple identities. The use of the expression “Cansei! (I am tired) can be seen 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 and conventional codes of Brazilian society, and what is expected for the ideal Brazilian woman. From a philosophical perspective, it can also be understood as going beyond feminism itself, signalling towards the necessity of including all humans as deserving freedom from oppression (everyone is a slut in the end of the day!).

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 internationally recognised NGO Think Olga. The movement perceived clearly the intensification of the various feminist protests and the pressures towards social change of the last years. 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 was also argued that 2015 was the year when “feminism” ceased to be a “dirty word”, being incorporated into mainstream Brazilian society. 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 emphasised how 2015 was the year of feminism on the internet. As she noted, between the period of January 2014 until 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 Beauvoir) and the sexual harassment campaign #PrimeiroAssedio (First Harassment), with 252,101, and *Marcha das Mulheres Negras* (March of Black Women) and #MeuAmigoSecreto (My Secret Friend), with 221,736 in November.

Similarly to *Blogueiras Feministas*, it is also interested in stories on intersectionality, and likes to publish also personal testimonials and stories about women and their everyday life experiences of oppression and sexual 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 solidão que não é só dela” (Claudete Alves and the loneliness of the black women, 14/12/2015) examined the rejection of black men by black women. The categories emphasised by the site included arts; the campaign *Chega de Fiu Fiu* (*Enough of Fiu Fiu*, which is the whistle made by men when they see a sexy women in the street); “Girl Power”, “inspirations”, “perceptions” and “reflections”. These were included alongside the tags such as “abortion”, “acceptance”, “arts”, “sexual harassment”, “beauty”, “courage”, “body”, “education”, “entrepreneurship”, “rape”, “heroines”, “chauvinism”, “inspiring women”, “advertising”, “TV”, “racism”, “sex”, “technologies” and “violence against women”.

Given the focus on similar topics, including discourses on feminism, representations of women in the media, discussions of everyday sexism, harassment and the body, as well as thematic 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 very much quintessential examples of what Brazilian new contemporary feminism is and can be seen as inserted within third wave feminism. These feminist blogs frequently reference each other, including images from other
blogs, such as the posters for the *Marcha das Vadias* protests 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), and which refers to online sexual bullying and harassment. It also includes numbers of the police. The NGO also has the aim of boost the skills and training of women entrepreneurs, including a link called *Olga Mentoring*, where women can sign up and take on weekly courses and learn business skills. It also includes information and updated journalistic stories on current national and international conferences on women’s rights. It further has a link called *Girl Power*, which includes the activities of the members of the NGO.

Feminists groups have also restored widely to Facebook, and particularly to Twitter, to protest, criticise sexism in Brazilian society and mobilise in the last years. The NGO *Think Olga* for example has managed to engage in a creative manner with Twitter. The successful *Chega de Fiu Fui* campaign, launched in July 2013, 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 findings of a research conducted by the journalist Karin Hueck, which interviewed 8,000 people to discuss sexual harassment in public spaces. The results showed that 98% of them suffered some form of sexual harassment, with 83% not agreeing with it and another 90% deciding to change clothes before leaving the house to avoid harassment.

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 about their concerns. Women were invited at the time to talk about their first sexual
harassment case. 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 the social ill of sexual harassment in Brazilian society with the high statistics on rape and violence against women. Another topic which was also discussed was the law against feminicide, which has turned into a horrendous crime the killing of women due to their gender. According to Think Olga, of those who engaged in these discussions, 55% where men.

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, which expressed her own personal experience in sexual harassment as a young girl, is also 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 “normal”:

“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”.

The #Primeiroassedio sexual harassment campaign continued to be popular even after 2015, including international tweets, such as the ones below. Among some of the examples of quite active political engagement on Twitter also, in the wake of the protests against Cunha in November 2015, were the hashtag #MulheresContraCunha (Women Against Cunha). Below are some examples:

“Lugar de mulher e onde ela quiser #MulheresContraCunha #EmpurraQueCunhaCai (Push Cunha and he will fall) (8.29 pm, 25/11/15, Brasilia, Brazil)

“As mulheres apoiando a democracia (Women supporting democracy) #ToComDilma #GolpeNuncaMais #GolpeNao#Dilma Fica (12.08 pm – 7/12/15)
“No Women Ever #primeiroassedio” – Women tell their harassment stories online across #social media (with the BBC News story “No Women ever turned down a barking guy. Right?” being shared, 11.40 am - 21/06/16)

The *Marcha das Mulheres Negras* was also another protest which occurred in the end of 2015, with approximately 10,000 women uniting in Brasilia to call attention to the battle against discrimination and prejudice and, despite the police repression and the clashes with other conservative groups, culminated in another discussion on Twitter of over 33,000 tweets. Other successful campaigns were the #MulherescontraCunha (Women against Cunha), with the hashtag being mentioned 40,000 times.

Another influential Twitter campaign was #AgoraeQueSaoElas, which took place in the end of October, start of November, saw mainly male columnists ceding their space in the mainstream media for women, with the hashtag receiving 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 and the role of women in Brazil. The campaign had the purpose of highlighting in overall women’s exclusion from debate within the public sphere, giving women more visibility at the same time that it shed light on to the fewer spaces that women have in the newsroom and within the mainstream Brazilian media, as I discussed in the previous section.

Afterwards the UOL portal from the *Folha de Sao Paulo* media group included a page dedicated to the hashtag “#AgoraeQueSaoElas – um espaco para mulheres em movimento” (Now it is them – a space for women in movement). This was presented as a tribute for feminist and women voices. Coordinated by Alessandra Orofino, Ana Carolina Evangelista, Antonio Pellegrino and Manoela Miklos, the blog appears as evidence of the slow inroads that women’s issues are
having in the mainstream media. However, the page is not active and the discussions are very timid in contrast to the other feminist blogs examined here. One of the last major texts that is included in the very front of the webpage is actress’ Fernanda Torres controversial article called “Mulher” (22/02/16), where she acknowledged women’s hardships in life but made reference to her mulata nanny who did not feel undermined by men’s whistling but empowered, while also ending the text by stating that women should stop assuming the role of victims and not blame the man, which could be read as a diminishing of men’s role in oppression as well as the constraints posed by societal structures. There was an implying tendency here to point to individual factors as solely responsible – such as issues of self confidence and working to show merit.

In the space of two days the article caused a lot of controversy amongst feminists in Brazil, which led to Fernanda Torres - who is seen as a liberal actress and part of the more progressive sectors of Brazilian society - having gone through a process of sincere reflection which lead her to publish another article on the blog called “Mea culpa” (I am sorry). Here she humbly recognised that she spoke from the position of privilege and as a white upper class Brazilian women who had not been subject to any form of constraint during her upbringing and life, further acknowledging that by this she had ignored the experiences and suffering of millions of women who correctly needed to make use of collective struggles in order to push for change and to advance their rights. xxii This is a very good example of how there is still a lot of lack of information, misconceptions and stereotyping around feminism and women’s issues within the debate that is currently taking place in Brazilian mainstream society and it is, at worse, excessively timid, fragmented and heavily infused still with certain traditional values and common sense assumptions about the role of Brazilian men and women in both public and private life. There has been even some criticisms on the Twitter campaign #Agoraequesaoelas on the absence of wider public debate in the blog.
“Uma pena que o blog da Folha #Agoraequesaoelas se negue ao dialogo em sua plataforma (“It is a pity that the Folha blog #Agoraequesaoelas denies dialogue in its platform”, 21/06/16)

Nonetheless, there have been some occasional in depth features about the new feminist groups in Brazil and the demands for women’s rights. The mainstream media thus began to provide more in depth features of the activism of Brazil’s new contemporary movements, with some occasional stories like “A Primavera das Mulheres – Uma nova geracao toma as ruas e as redes” (The Women’s Spring – A new generation takes to the streets and social networks), 07/11/2015), a debate which is seen by many as still being quite absent from television. All these initiatives are proving very fruitful, if anything, to give an opportunity for women to have more voice. As Natasha Mosley, one teenage girl interviewed for the story said:

“A person who does not know me does not have the right to say certain things against me. I have an urge to react, to say that I do not want to hear this, but I get afraid. If a boy from a school chats me up, I can say to him that that does not suit me because we are in equal conditions. But in the street, from an unknown person, I cannot say anything. That oppresses me.”

Brazilian feminists are thus also slowly beginning to benefit from the opportunities opened by globalization and the expansion of new technologies in the country, and there is a sense among many that women are slowly being empowered in the last years mainly in the context of the increasing protests and demands. There is also great potential also for an enhancement of the previous transnational activism of earlier years, thus embarking on a path towards the strengthening of democratic processes through regional and global civil society spaces (Vargas, 2010). Nonetheless, scholars such as Alvarez (quoted in Vargas, 2010, 321) have underlined how these strategies and spaces have become more diverse: “a broad, heterogeneous, polycentric, multifaceted and polysemic field of discourse field of discourse and action.” Thus a downside of these multifaceted feminist global and local spaces is the increasing danger of fragmentation of
strategies and the enhancement of divisions, largely due also to an emphasis on difference that tends to undermine connections and links of solidarity between different groups of women both within localities as well as globally. As I mentioned in previous chapters, 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 groups of grassroots women activists, as well as other Brazilian scholars, journalists, NGOs and policy groups, with transnational activists, researchers and organizations.

Despite the limitations imposed on the capacity of the web to increase democratisation, stimulate diversity and engage sectors of the population in mobilization around political issues due to the lack of access that some still have to these new technologies, it is important to acknowledge the fact that the web is offering opportunities for many different groups to engage in critical debate, to articulate counter-hegemonic discourses which go against traditional and old fashioned representations of gender roles, such as the ones explored in advertising and commercials discussed in previous chapters, as well as to organise demonstrations in a way that they would not be able to do so in the avenues offered by the traditional mainstream media.

Moreover, the evaluation of the impact of new technologies on society needs to be time and context-specific, taking into consideration national specificities. Judging by the impact of these new technologies in events such as the Arab Spring in 2011, it can be argued that these platforms can have in developing countries more positive benefits than would be the case in more advanced democracies, despite the limitations imposed by lack of access. This on the other hand needs to be tackled urgently to permit wider participation and inclusion within these expanding networks of debate and democratization.

In this sense we need to avoid the hype, while at the same time recognising the significance that it can have in stimulating debate within elites and other important segments of public opinion.
and decision-making segments. The ways in which the Internet can assist in the struggle for gender equality alongside the political and social sphere has been emphasised by various experts and policy-makers, such as Linda Goulart, of the former SPM:

“The interactivity of the internet and the ways in which it can be accessed by a vast majority of the population puts them in contact with various discussions on the situation of women in the country. There are many institutions, NGOs, blogs, agencies and research which seek to address issues related to the images of women, body rights, sexuality and health. These (in contrast to the mainstream media) are in fact spaces of information and discussion which can clarify, mobilise, create campaigns and initiate educational processes, reaching a relevant public”, she stated.

Cardoso from the Blogueiras Feministas is also quite positive about cyber-feminism in Brazil, and the ways in which it can have a far reaching political role:

“New technologies are essential in the dissemination of information and communication. And today the Internet is a vast space for political action and it is important that women use it more and more, because there is a wider democratization of the use of media space through the web. Our website seeks to be a reference in the field of feminism without forgetting that we do not have all the answers, but we are in constant process of elaboration and reflection, seeking new paths as the world presents to us new demands.”

Gender representations, images, discourses and ideas on the role of women as subordinated and inferior are strongly connected to the patterns of structural inequalities of any society. Thus the material reality of the redistributive injustice suffered by many women in Brazil, from their overrepresentation in low paid jobs to their vulnerability to unemployment, is a reflection of, and a consequence of, the persistence of the playing out of gender stereotypes and old fashioned values through wider cultural and social networks within societies, and which find their expression in the mainstream media. Attacks hurt psychically and are against human dignity. But other forms of symbolic or subtle violence, such as misconceptions, stereotypes and the trivialization of women (and young girls) in society, with assumptions on what they should be like, can be equally
damaging and have strong and lasting psychological consequences on women. This can range from cases such as sexual harassment attacks during the early years, which can contribute to their sense of low self esteem and difficulty in gaining confidence in everyday life, to other forms of harassment later in life in education and the workplace, where they constantly see themselves having to fight battles for dignity and respect during different periods of their lives.

Most of the discourses which circulated in these blogs were quite similar in scope and tone, with many focusing on either encouraging and stimulating protests and mobilizations, criticising violence towards women and rape and the practice of sexual harassment, among others. 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 raised and discussed in many of the texts posted on these websites to some extent, although there is much more scope to expand on these themes and they have not yet taken on a wider discussion within the country’s public sphere and in the mainstream media.

New technologies in themselves thus cannot do all the work in terms 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 these online platforms are used, either in developing countries or industrialised societies, for what purpose, with what effect and what consequences. I have here attempted to examine part of some of these debates that are taking place within the Brazilian blogosphere. Equality thus requires above all change in perceptions, attitudes and mentality in relation to social groups and a continuous questioning of power structures of society, which must not be taken for granted, and alone cannot depend on legislations and governmental intentions alone. This all leads me back to the initial questions articulated at the start of this book: what, after all, can be done? It is fundamental to recognise that, more than ever, the
media needs to make a greater contribution to the advancement of gender equality and to women’s rights more generally.

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Bio of interviewees

1) Randi Davis – Director of the Gender Team, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

2) Miriam Grossi – Professor of Anthropology and coordinator of the unit on Identities, Gender and Subjectivities at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC)

3) Nadine Gasman – Representative of the Office of ONU Mulheres in Brazil

4) Bia Cardoso – Brazilian feminist activist and coordinator of the web portal, Blogueiras Feministas

5) Lucia C. Hanmer – Lead economist in Gender and Development at the World Bank Group.

6) Ashleigh Kate Slingsby – Guest editor of the Protagonist Women, Policy in Focus report, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

7) Paul Healey – Head of Profession Social Development for the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID)

8) Linda Goulart – Former executive-secretary of the Secretaria de Politicas da Mulher (SPM)

9) Marta Suplicy – A former psychologist and minister of Culture, Marta Suplicy is a senator of the PMDB party.

10) Boris Utria - General coordinator of operations of the World Bank in Brazil.
Philips is not the only author who has noted the problem of equal worth, and the current zeitgeist of our times which creates a culture of disdain and disrespect for the poor, seen as envious of the rich, in contrast to an exaggerated respect (and even uncritical) respect for the rich and successful. In his acclaimed book, Injustice: why social inequality still persists, which I have discussed more elsewhere (2012), Daniel Dorling talked about what he claimed to be the five tenets of injustice, or beliefs and attitudes, that perpetuate inequality, such as elitism and the fatalism with prejudice, examining those most affected by these beliefs. In The Spirit Level: why more equal societies almost always do better, which I also discussed elsewhere (Matos, 2012), Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) examined the social ills brought by inequality, including the lack of respect granted to the poorer and less advantaged sectors of society, causing various problems which range from low self-esteem to mental health issues, such as depression. What also becomes evident here, similarly to what Philips (1999) had already argued through her reference to David Miller, is that social inequality appears to be more damaging than economic equality, given that people are not really interested if the rich have finer cars, but are more worried about the judgements made towards them of their equal worth (and the lack of opportunities that comes with this assumption). The sharp differences between people in terms of income also reinforces in group thinking, with the tendency of the members of more privileged groups of only socialising and relating to others similar to them.

The lack of consensus-building amid the growth of ideological polarisation between the main parties in Brazil during 2014 and 2015 culminated in a search for consensus through the judicial system. This was largely due to the refusal of the opposition party to Dilma and the Worker’s Party (PT) to compromise and engage in talks, taking political advantage of the economic recession and of corruption scandals, which also marked the administration of previous Brazilian presidents. Rather the choice taken was to undermine the government in power, leading to the overthrow of the government and the installation of an authoritarian administration.

Women represent only 6.4% of the directorships of the biggest 100 firms in Latin America, according to the Corporate Women Directors International (CWDI), and which was launched by the Global Summit of Women in 2014. Nearly half (47) of these firms do not have one women in their administrative council. Latin America is behind North America with 19.2%, Europe 20% and the Asian Pacific, 9.4%. Among the Latin American countries, Colombia appears as leader, with 13.4% of the seats in the council of their biggest firms occupied by woman, which represents more than double the average of the region. Brazil, whose companies compose nearly half of the biggest firms on the list, the average is merely 6.3%.

See the story “Partidos que não cumpriram cotas de mulheres poderão ser punidos” (Parties that do not compromise with the quotas for women can be punished” in Jornal do Brasil, 17/03/2009).

Senator Marta Suplicy is emphatic in her defence of the implementation of further quotas to increase the participation of women in politics: “...the current state of inequality that we have in politics is a mere reflection of what we face as a society. The election of the first female president signalled at first to be something that would give impulse, but we still need to go a longer way. When we launched the legislation on quotas for the parties, the requirement was of 7%. We know that we cannot advance more with this. If the quota for the parties had actually punished those who had not compromised with it, we could be in a better situation today. But the parties systematically twisted the legislation until, from 2009 onwards, with the 12.034 law, there was an alteration to the 9.504 bill. This changed the scenario, and made the parties act in order to uphold the minimum number of 30%, in other words, it forced the adherence to the law. That is why we are trying to approve quotas in Congress. Our priority is to approve quotas for women in the legislative powers (of 10%, 12% and 16%) in the next elections. If we keep the cu...”

Macaulay’s article “Trickling Up, Down and Sideways: Gender Policy and Political Opportunity in Brazil” gives further details and knowledge on the relationship between state structures, party politics and feminist movements and groups in Brazil. As she notes, the CNDM collaborated with the Ministry of Education on non-sexist school books and with the Ministry of Health to promote information on reproduction and contraception, including the implementation of the Programa de Assistencia Integral ‘a Saude da Mulher (Macaulay, 2010, 275). In the context of the re-democratization phase, it was also responsible for a series of important measures, including among others the creation of

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i See “ONU estima em 81 anos o prazo para se atingir a equidade de genero” (UN estimates in 81 years the time needed in order to reach gender parity”; in Agencia Brasil, 07/03/15).

ii See the story “Partidos que nao cumprirem cotas de mulheres poderao ser punidos” (Parties that do not compromise with the quotas for women can be punished” in Jornal do Brasil, 17/03/2009).

vii Macaulay’s article “Trickling Up, Down and Sideways: Gender Policy and Political Opportunity in Brazil” gives further details and knowledge on the relationship between state structures, party politics and feminist movements and groups in Brazil. As she notes, the CNDM collaborated with the Ministry of Education on non-sexist school books and with the Ministry of Health to promote information on reproduction and contraception, including the implementation of the Programa de Assistencia Integral ‘a Saude da Mulher (Macaulay, 2010, 275). In the context of the re-democratization phase, it was also responsible for a series of important measures, including among others the creation of
a Committee for black women, the application of institutional sanctions against businesses that violated labour laws and the establishment of women’s right to have land titles.

Goulart stated that the main aims of the secretary until 2018 were to include the national implementation of the law Maria da Penha as well as the construction of twenty seven houses for the Brazilian women. Other measures included the stimulus for the economic independence of women in rural and urban areas and the incentive for female entrepreneurship, and the reduction in inequality of opportunities in the workplace through the Pro-Equity Race and Gender programme. The latter includes the participation of 83 private and public companies, and the creation of gender committees in all ministries to guarantee that policies contemplate the interests of women. The technical norms of the Secretary of Policies for Women (SPM) included a chapter on integrated mechanisms for prevention, including the articles on the prohibition of stereotypical roles that legitimate domestic violence in accordance with the Constitution; the promotion of educational campaigns to prevent domestic violence against women; the promotion of educational programmes which disseminate ethical values of respect to human dignity as well as the emphasis in school curriculums to human right issues, gender and race equality and the problem of domestic violence towards women (Moreno, 2012, 49).

For further information, see “Quase 60% da populacao brasileira tem acesso a Internet, aponta relatorio da Cepal” in Nacoes Unidas (“Nearly 60% of the population have access to the Internet, highlights Cepal report”) and “Mulheres representam 53% dos internautas no Brasil, diz pesquisa” in O Globo (“Women represent 53% of the internet users in Brazil, says research”). According to the latter, 66.09% of the users are among the lower middle classes and 31.64% are represented by the middle and upper classes.

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