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From shame to visibility: Hashtag Feminism and Sexual Violence in Brazil

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Abstract: This work reflects on Internet and social network campaigns against sexual harassment and sexual violence, from the moment they first appeared in alternative media and then reached mainstream news stories. In Brazil, such discussion on media has shown this struggle for recognition since 2013. With data from alternative and the hegemonic media from 2013-2018 focusing on “No more catcalling” (*Chega de fu fu*) and “My first harassment” (*Meu primeiro assédio*) campaigns and the NGO Think Olga, the article discusses the attempts made by the feminist field to change what they call “rape culture” through images and narratives of the self, searching for voice and recognition. The hegemonic media, nevertheless, prefer to focus on crime (such as paedophilia) and dramatic stories that are best sellers, and therefore change some of the meanings in dispute.

Keywords: media, gender, sexuality, sexual rights, violence.

Da vergonha à visibilidade: Feminismo hashtag e violência sexual no Brasil

Resumo: Este trabalho reflete sobre as campanhas contra assédio sexual que tomaram primeiro a mídia alternativa (em 2013) e depois a mídia comercial hegemônica no Brasil, na forma de um debate público que demonstra uma luta por reconhecimento. Através de conteúdos coletados dessas mídias no período entre 2013 a 2018, com foco nas campanhas *Chega de Fiu Fiu* e *Meu Primeiro Assédio* vinculadas a ONG Think Olga, o artigo mostra que o campo feminista buscou transformar o que nomeavam como “cultura do estupro” através de imagens e narrativas em primeira pessoa, lutando por sua voz e pelo reconhecimento do assédio como violência. Entretanto, vê-se que a mídia hegemônica tende a enfatizar a ideia de crime (como pedofilia) e de histórias dramáticas que atraem o público, e assim modificou os significados que a demanda feminista visava promover.

Palavras chave: mídia, gênero, sexualidade, direitos sexuais, violência.

De la vergüenza a la visibilidad: Feminismo hashtag y violencia sexual en Brasil

Resumen: Este trabajo reflexiona sobre las campañas de internet y redes sociales contra el acoso y la violencia sexual, cuando llegaron primero a los medios alternativos y luego a los principales medios comerciales en Brasil. La investigación a través de medios alternativos y hegemónicos en Brasil desde 2013, demostró la lucha por el reconocimiento. Con datos de medios alternativos y hegemónicos entre 2013-2018 centrados en las campañas “No más llamadas” (*Chega de fu fu*) y “Mi primer acoso” y la ONG Think Olga, el artículo muestra que el campo feminista intentó cambiar lo que llaman como “cultura de la violación” a través de imágenes y narraciones del yo, buscando la voz y el reconocimiento. Los medios hegemónicos, sin embargo, prefieren centrarse en el crimen (como la pedofilia) y las historias dramáticas que son best sellers, y por lo tanto cambian algunos de los significados en disputa.

Palabras clave: medios, género, sexualidad, derechos sexuales, violencia.

From shame to visibility: Hashtag Feminism and Sexual Violence in Brazil

Introduction

*When I was eleven, my body betrayed me.¹
We are not hiding our stories anymore.
The criminals who have violated us should be ashamed of
#FirstHarassment, not us.²*

This article aims to understand how categories of sexual abuse are being constituted and discussed in the public arena, covering media productions, Internet and social network content and the way meanings are disputed, especially when they travel through different types of media.³ To a certain extent, this process can be understood as demands for recognition of women's rights. But there were public struggles around meanings, for the expression "sexual harassment" is relatively recent in Brazil, and the acts can be qualified as a "pass" or mere catcalling. Therefore, such campaigns were also polemic in a country well known for "sexual freedom", but also with the highest rates of violence against women.⁴ This work focuses on the Brazilian non-profit organization Think Olga, which, since 2013, has turned sexual harassment into a social issue. I analyse two campaigns, "No more catcalling" (*Chega de fu-fu*), launched in 2013 on Think Olga's website;

¹ Juliana de Faria in a roundtable organized by the public attorney's office in São Paulo, "Areas of violence against women", 2 September, 2016. I want to thank Juliana, who has authorized such mentions in this article – she has personally reviewed the first version of this text.

² Think Olga's tweet in 22 October, 2015.

³ This research was possible with research grants from CNPq (process 308659/2016-3) and FAPESP (processes n. 2017/02720-1 and 2018/10403-9). Several undergraduate students took part in the research group; I want to thank Ana Carolina Braga Azevedo, Clara de Oliveira Coelho, Débora Cajé Yamamoto, Felipe Paes Piva, Nicole Cristine Baumgarten, and Shisleni de Oliveira Macedo. Carolina Parreiras, as a post-doctoral researcher, and Beatriz Accioly Lins as a PhD Candidate were also part of the team.

⁴ On this apparent paradox in Brazil, see Simões, 2016.

and “#firstharassment” (*#primeiroassédio*), launched in 2015 on Twitter as a reaction to a TV show.⁵

Fieldwork here consists of an ethnography about forms of sexual violence and the young feminist movements in São Paulo since 2014, when I also interacted as participant (and observer) in roundtables and events, and interacted politically in the field in order to discuss issues of harassment and sexual violence at the university where I work. The analyses also rely on systematically collected data from mainstream and alternative media by a team of undergraduate students – all the stories that could be found related to those two campaigns in the period from 2013 to 2018 (data collected through the internet covering the largest media companies in Brazil), 82 mainstream news stories in total, and 500 tweets with the first harassment hashtag.⁶ I have selected only the first week of tweets about first harassment in order to grasp what types of acts were named as harassment.

I describe here a process of demanding social recognition (Honneth, 2003, Fraser, 1996) for relatively new notions of sexual harassment that have been in formation or transformation in the Brazilian public arena in recent years. Both the hegemonic media (Brazilian larger cultural industries, such as Rede Globo) and alternative media – also considered as a counter-public sphere (Fraser, 1990) – are mentioned. Nevertheless, it seems that social media has to be analysed outside the opposition alternative *versus* mainstream media (as in Curran and Couldry, 2003), for social media maintain a commercial structure but allow a wide range of production and partial circulations of meanings and images that can be seen as counter-hegemonic. Therefore, I call them “social media” (following Baym, 2015, see also Baym and boyd, 2012).⁷

In such a public arena, where sometimes it seems difficult to measure the degree of intimacy, exposure or publicness, I want to consider the struggle in the feminist discursive field of action (as Sonia Alvarez, 2014, names a social move-

⁵ This text was first presented at The London School of Economics, in the Visiting Researcher seminar series organized at the Department of Media and Communications, in March, 2019. I want to thank professors Shani Orgad and Nick Couldry for the opportunity of the visiting research period, as well as Gabriela Loureiro, who organized a presentation at University College London in the Latin American Anthropology Seminar Series.

⁶ Nicole Baumgarten’s undergraduate research was fundamental in collecting and organizing this data.

⁷ Facebook “free” accounts are a way of selling its users as data for marketing advertising – and more recently, also for political propaganda, as the Cambridge Analytic scandal reveals. The selling of publicity maintaining those social media platforms (such as facebook, twitter, instagram) keeps a capitalist corporation system in the distribution of messages. So, in order to categorize those media, and their power, scale of visibility and public legitimacy, one has to take into account its political economy as well.

ment that has many formats) for building harassment (*assédio*) as a social issue and a form of sexual abuse. I see this struggle in demanding sexual rights or sexual citizenship (Carrara, 2015) as a struggle to change the parameters of sexual moralities and even the notion of personhood for young girls.

The research has explored what seems to be a social and political change concerning the definition of violence, particularly of the association between sexuality and danger (Carole Vance, 1984).⁸ In recent years there has been a public conflict in Brazil around acts that were formerly not classified as “violence”.

Definitions of violence vary enormously culturally and historically (see, among others, Wieviorka, 1997), and even definitions of rape have a controversial history. In the classic work *A History of Rape* (Vigarello 2001), Georges Vigarello explores the social construction of rape as a criminal category alongside changes in mentalities about sexual violence. He follows the long trajectory of the category in the French legal system up to the modern definition of rape as a *crime against the person* (and not against *customs* or *family honour*), more attuned to the idea of equality of rights between men and women. Vigarello explores the changes in the conception of rape both in legal systems and its ordinary social use. As we can also see in Brazil, rape was understood in other ways in previous decades, and the victims were usually considered accomplices or even co-responsible for rape.⁹

The crime of rape was reviewed in 2009 in Brazil. As defined in the Penal Code of 1940, under the chapter of “crimes against custom”, rape was typified as “forcing a woman into sexual (vaginal) intercourse through violence or serious threat”.¹⁰ As Ganzarolli (2018) remarks, at that time there was also a category of “decent women” in the Civil Code (only reviewed in 2005), referring to a woman who (morally) deserves respect, leaving it up to the judges to decide whether a woman should be seen as “decent”. A new Constitution in 1988, international conventions, feminist movements and a case at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights have changed Brazilian laws related to gender violence. A comprehensive law on domestic violence was promulgated in 2006, and it defined many types of violence (physical, psychological, sexual, patrimonial and moral).¹¹ It gave a larger definition of sexual violence as forcing someone to practice any sexual act, allow-

⁸ For those frontiers in Brazilian literature, see Simões, 2016.

⁹ For similar remarks about Brazil in different historical periods, see Caufield (2000) and Vieira (2011).

¹⁰ On the this law and its uses in order to avoid any conviction, see Pimentel, Schritzmeyer and Pandjarjian, 1998.

¹¹ Law n. 11.340, 7th of August, 2006. Also known as the “Maria da Penha law”, promulgated under Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva’s rule.

ing rape to be mentioned even within marriage. After this, rape was redefined in the Penal Code in 2009 in order to take into consideration any sexual act committed without consent, whose victim can be woman or man, thus including anal or oral sex as rape.¹² The Chapter into which this law applies is now “Crimes against *sexual dignity*” (instead of *custom*) but nevertheless not yet a “crime against a *person*”, like the French Law described in Vigarello’s book.

The notion of harassment (*assédio*) is very recent in the Penal Code. It first appeared in 2001 associated to working situations, as “constraining someone in order to gain sexual advantage or favor”.¹³ It only applied to situations related to jobs or the workplace. It was not until 2018, after all the campaigns and other movements mentioned below, that a new law on “sexual importuning” (*importunação sexual*) took place. “Practicing against someone non-consented libidinous acts in order to satisfy their lust or that of a third party”, that was the definition which classified acts formerly named as catcalling, wolf-whistling, street hassling or other sorts of abuse, which nowadays are called sexual *harassment*. But as this article shows, victims mentioned acts that could even be classified as rape under the name of harassment.

My main point here is that the campaigns against sexual harassment initially launched on alternative and social media were part of larger struggle whose more tangible outcome is law revision. Although Think Olga and other feminist groups were fighting for *cultural changes*, a somewhat unexpected consequence of their campaigns was the production of an entirely new crime, that of *sexual importuning* (*importunação sexual*).¹⁴ Such changes in names, or in classificatory categories, express changes in sensibilities concerning notions of violence that are also at the root of processes leading to the formation of Human Rights (see Lynn Hunt 2008).

There has been a continuous circulation of the debate in the mediascape (Appadurai, 1996), from social networks to mainstream media specifically from 2013 onwards. I also want to stress that the displacement of the subject – from alternative and feminist media (such as non-commercial blogs and sites) through social media (social networks like Facebook and Twitter) and commercial internet portals, finally arriving at the Brazilian hegemonic media (such as Globo network) and mainstream newspapers (as Folha de São Paulo) also shows the transformation

¹² Law n. 12.015, 2009.

¹³ Law n. 10.224, 2001

¹⁴ As in other feminist issues, like the creation of new laws concerning femicide or domestic violence, there are often concerns about to what extent it is desirable to judicialize those political demands (Debert & Gregori 2008).

of meanings and images on sexual harassment. *Sexual harassment* (*assédio sexual*) refers to a plethora of attitudes and actions, and the meanings of such acts are also an issue of struggle in the public arena.

A new 21st century wave of young feminism is at the origin of the new campaigns. This feminism is based on new media, and it is also the result of the construction of new types of “publicness” – from web 2.0 and social networks. Before that, in the Brazilian mainstream media, in a supposedly “post-feminist” (Gill, 2007) media context, feminism was a somewhat forbidden word. But, even unmentioned, some ideas of a liberal feminism have always been present in the hegemonic media. Since the 1990’s, feminism has also been present in the Brazilian state, through official agencies, social policies and committees dealing with domestic violence, women’s health and rights. In the 21st century, under President Lula’s rule, state feminism grew. There were national conferences on public policies with the participation of civil society and support of a special ministry for Women’s and Human Rights.

Following Sonia Alvarez (2014), I consider feminism as a discursive field of action that is built around many lines of political communicative webs, guiding strategies and identities. As a discursive field of action, feminism attained media visibility in the 21st century through many ways, for example the Slut Walk,¹⁵ the underground rock scene, the black feminist and the lesbian and bisexual movements (see Facchini and França, 2011). Many of these groups were already being articulated through the Internet (orkut, blogs, mailing lists) as well, but after the arrival of web 2.0, their visibility expanded. Sexual rights have been an important issue since the 1970s, but in Brazil they only became visible in recent years (Facchini and França, 2011). The idea that “the personal is political” and that ordinary forms of violence and social inequality should be publicly contested seems to have taken on a new momentum from the year 2000 onwards, particularly after 2010.

I will focus here on more recent years, since 2013. The campaign against sexual harassment shows how web 2.0 was used to express women’s voices and their experience of violence in everyday life. I want to convey the idea that a process of exposing narratives promoted recognition of acts of violence, and shared similar feelings and experiences through the Internet. In a way, the web also promoted a feminist pedagogy of perceiving the violence against girls.

Until 2010, Brazilian commercial media was mainly composed of seven family-owned corporations – Globo (Marinho family), Grupo Folha (Frias), Grupo Estado (Mesquita), SBT (Abravanel), Record (owned by evangelical church leader,

¹⁵ For the movement in Brazil, see Gomes and Sorj, 2014.

Edir Macedo), Bandeirantes (Saad), and Abril (Civita, although now in bankruptcy). Digital media and the web 2.0 have allowed a growing network of alternative media production – from news sites to feminist blogs, email lists, but also the presence of other papers and news sources such as BBC News, El País, Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, The Guardian, Le Monde and access to international papers – a few of them, for example BBC News and El País, even in Portuguese.

If the popularization of new media has changed the *mediascape*, as Appadurai calls the media panorama, the patterns of consumption have also changed. In the country, Internet access grew particularly during the second decade of the 21st century, still in its very particular unequal shape – one-third of Internet users only have access through mobile phones. Referring to 2017, the latest statistics from the official census bureau (IBGE) from continuous series on household access to services (*PNAD Contínua*) shows that 74.9% of Brazilian households have access to the internet, and 69.8% of the population have accessed the internet in the previous three months. As in many countries, access is unequal in terms of regions and generation. The age group between 20-24 years old is the most present on the web, 88.4%.¹⁶ For working classes, though, the Internet means mostly only the use of messages through WhatsApp and maybe Facebook, through which other information is accessed (see Spyer, 2018). Urban middle and upper classes have wider experience in navigating through the web. In 2015 Brazil had more than 63 million Facebook users, and the figures have risen in the last years.

Think Olga and the sexual harassment case

Although my first experience with harassment happened in childhood, I was only able to talk about it 16 years later, at the age of 27, when I saw for the first time in my life, a friend complaining in a Facebook post about sexual harassment in public places. Then I had the strength to turn that experience into words. I decided that I would not go back to a place of silence and fear.¹⁷

¹⁶ “PNAD Contínua TIC 2017: Internet chega a três em cada quatro domicílios do país” Available at <https://agenciadenoticias.ibge.gov.br/agencia-sala-de-imprensa/2013-agencia-de-noticias/releases/23445-pnad-continua-tic-2017-internet-chega-a-tres-em-cada-quatro-domicilios-do-pais> [Accessed on 25.10.18].

¹⁷ Juliana de Faria for Think Olga website, my translation. Available at <https://thinkolga.com/2015/10/26/hashtag-transformacao-82-mil-tweets-sobre-o-primeiroassedio/> [Accessed on 15.12.18].

In 2013, triggered by a friend's post on Facebook, journalist Juliana de Faria founded a non-profit organization called Think Olga, in the city of São Paulo. Initially Think Olga was just a website and a series of posts on Facebook and defined itself as “a feminist non-profit organization (NGO) founded with the objective of empowering women through information. (...) a content hub dealing with important subjects for the female public in an accessible manner.”¹⁸ The site, with a female personal name – Olga – states that “information is power”, and wants to promote the idea that once one thinks, one realises how sexist the world we live in is. However, people (women) need information about that. Think Olga wants to fight sexism and social inequalities, bringing information to women and girls. Since 2013, many materials, like the images shown below, spread from the site to social media:



Do you think that calling a woman “hot” (gostosa) on the streets is a compliment? YOUR MOTHER DOESN’T THINK SO

“Some women like it” – You should not try Russian roulette until you find the target;

“Wow, he catcalled me, I’m his!” – said NOBODY

Walking in public spaces does not make my body public.¹⁹

¹⁸ Like the word “Think”, the word “hub” is used in English and it is not translated into Portuguese.

¹⁹ (<https://thinkolga.com/2018/01/31/chega-de-fiu-fiu/> access in 04.02.2019)

In the beginning, Juliana and most of the young journalists working at Think Olga were white, upper-middle class, graduates from some of the best Brazilian universities, in their late twenties or early thirties. Juliana did not even see herself as a feminist when the experience began. In 2012, working for the largest publishing groups in the country (as Abril and Globo), she was a free-lance journalist doing jobs for female magazines. As she acknowledged on many public occasions (feminist roundtables, debates or seminars²⁰), she was trying to “sell” the idea of sexual harassment as a plot for a story to be written in any of those mainstream magazines. But the editors did not consider it an appropriate topic for their female readers. When Think Olga posts and website became more popular among middle-class urban girls and women, and the interactions in social media grew, Juliana became quite a celebrity in those same mainstream magazines. That was when she became the interviewee.

The images from “No more catcalling” campaign started circulating on social networks. I first saw them through Facebook in 2013. Think Olga launched then two initiatives: (1) an interactive map where people could tell through first person accounts where the sexual harassment happened (first launched only for São Paulo, then for other Brazilian cities as well); (2) an online survey, conducted by a journalist, to which almost eight thousand women responded in just two weeks. Those initiatives were propelled to express both the ordinariness of sexual harassment and its violent and traumatic nature. Therefore, they were also using sexual violence and trauma as a way to promote women’s and human rights – as Fassin and Rechtman (2009) have analysed historically, showing how trauma and suffering was an important idea to convey the legitimacy of rights.

The online research showed that 99.6 per cent felt they had been harassed (they certainly answered the research online because of that, it was not a statistical sample), 98% on the street, 80% in other public spaces such as parks, shopping malls and cinemas, 77% in bars and clubs, 64% on public transport, and 33% at work. Data from the research also shows that 83% do not like catcalling; 85% have suffered from “wandering hands”; 81% avoided doing something for fear of sexual harassment; 90% changed clothes for fear of it. Juliana herself was then able to push her agenda into mainstream media. Moreover, in the word cloud formed from those posts, “fear” (*medo*) is the word most usually mentioned for street hassling, revealing the affective tone raised by the subject.²¹

²⁰ I met Juliana personally on some of those occasions. She was presenting the “No more catcalling” campaign history, and I was talking on issues of sexual violence at the university.

²¹ Available at <https://thinkolga.com/2013/09/09/chega-de-fiu-fiu-resultado-da-pesquisa/>, accessed in 09.0919.



In September 2013, Juliana declared to mainstream media how she was affected, at the age of eleven, by such male (mis)behaviour. One of her first appearances was on Globo's cable channel, in a somewhat feminist talk show led by four female interviewers.²² In those interviews and also at feminist or gender events, Juliana referred to moments of fright “after her body betrayed her”, that is to say, after she had her first period. She was still a child in her mind, but her body was visibly changing and becoming more “feminine”. Growing breasts and buttocks attracted the looks of many men. At first, for Juliana, her body was the cause of male interpellation. Her body determined her experience as if the problem was her corporality, as if the agent of the action was her body (but not herself), a physicality she could not control.

Brazil is seen by foreigners as a highly sexualized country. For Simões (2016), such an image of sexual freedom might also represent gender inequality, a particular heterosexual male bias. This is clear in terms of classifying street hassling either as a “natural” attitude in men, who are easily sexually aroused by the presence of (young) women, or a form of sexual abuse and violence.

Many women identified with Juliana's posts because that is about the age many of us experience the first situations that we now call harassment. The point is, for many years, we had no name for those scenes and feelings that have substantially affected our lives. Alternatively, the name we used – like catcalling or wolf whistling – normalised such a scene as “part of every woman's life”. This was also part of a naturalized sense of fear of being in public spaces that the campaign wanted to stress.

Juliana then remarks that for years she was ashamed of her body. Feeling afraid, she avoided the streets, and she wore clothes that covered her body. She became suspicious of known and unknown (older) men. In the way she recovers her experiences, she conveys it was a *trauma* she wanted to publicly uncover, to speak up. But at the same time her story was so familiar that many women identified with it and started completing her online map. Besides, the idea of trauma and suffering had an important appeal for readers who then identified with these nar-

²² <http://gnt.globo.com/programas/saia-justa/materias/criadora-do-chega-de-fiu-fiu-conta-como-surgiu-a-campanha.htm>, accessed in 25.01.2018.

ratives. Her talks expressed a trajectory from trauma to indignation, leading to a campaign for rights and a cultural change of men's behaviour through the spread of telling images, short female narratives, information and new definitions.

Think Olga, therefore, was able to produce a kind of counter-cartography of São Paulo, a map where recent or previous sexual harassments could be recorded and located. The site from Think Olga also gave clear definitions:

But what is harassment? Every day, women are forced to deal with comments of obscene content, looks, intimidation, unwanted touches and sexual content, importuning that come in various forms and are commonly understood as compliments, jokes or immutable characteristics of life in society ("that's the way things are...") when, in fact, none of this is normal or acceptable. (<https://thinkolga.com/2018/01/31/chega-de-fiu-fiu/>)

In November 2014, with the Women's Office of Public Defenders, Think Olga launched a folder explaining how to use existing criminal categories to make a complaint of sexual harassment – for until 2018 there was no such criminal type, except in labour law. There was, therefore, a struggle to build harassment as a subtype of sexual offence, to build the social recognition that what was once seen as normal, should be now considered as an aggression that could lead to more violent crimes, such as rape or sexual assault.

First Harassment: from shame to naming and rights

In 2015, another scale of visibility on the matter was to be reached by a story around which a new campaign – “My first harassment” – would begin. The case was triggered by a TV show – Junior Masterchef – broadcast on October 20th, 2015 by an open commercial mainstream Brazilian TV network (*Rede Bandeirantes*). Children were engaged in a cooking competition reality show, and a 12-year-old girl was the object of sexual remarks posted via tweets. Those tweets were on the trending topics on the next day, and a page on Facebook was launched (and later deleted) expressing male sexual desire for the girl, framed as a kind of fan club. Besides sexualising her body and manners (as well as the bodies and manners of other children participating in the show), some of those tweets and posts asked if a consensual sex approach could be seen as paedophilia.²³

²³ The age of sexual consent in Brazilian law is 14 years old. Any sexual activity with a person below such age is classified as statutory rape.

Once those tweets started, Think Olga reacted again and wrote the first tweet calling other women to speak up about their first harassment experiences: “We are not hiding our stories anymore. The criminals who have violated us should be ashamed of #FirstHarassment, not us.” Unlike #MeToo (Gill and Orgad, 2018), these hashtags did not mention the name of aggressors.

A second reaction came from commercial mainstream sites, such as the conservative newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, where a young male journalist that supported the feminist movement classified the Junior Masterchef episode as sexual harassment (*assédio sexual*). The father of the harassed girl tells that the family is protecting her from seeing those “shameful posts”. He never uses the term *harassment*, adopting the vocabulary of “shame” (*vergonha*). The mainstream newspapers, on the other side, stressed the notion of *paedophilia* further turning the discussion to criminal and classifications and the construction of a perverted figure away from “normal men” to be targeted.

Posts and tweets from #firstharassment started flooding my timeline on Facebook in the following days (and my classes at the university as well). For mainstream media, the impact was much higher than “No more catcalling”. According to *O Estado de São Paulo*, there were 65 thousand tweets in 2 days. In two months (up to 19/11/2015), there were 82 stories published on commercial media.²⁴ There are two ideas that I want to stress at this point: The first one is related to the fact that commercial media tended to pay more attention to those stories because they were much more dramatic or even sensational than the ones posted on the “No more catcalling” campaign. They also clearly involved two taboo categories that are usually mentioned with horror: rape and paedophilia. As in other cases, mainstream media tended to imagine women as victims of “sick paedophiles” and “perverted rapists”. On their side, the campaigners were trying to convey the idea that such acts were ordinary, resulting from gendered social inequalities, from sexism and everyday “rape culture”. They wanted to show that it was a moment to face them as a “cultural problem”. Speaking up and telling those stories in the first person would be a relief.

What first drew my attention was the fact that, considering the age of the victims and the acts described, what was being called “my first harassment”, were cases of sexual assaults, or under Brazilian law, cases of rape or attempt of rape.

These tweets express some of the recurrent patterns of the stories: the risk of family relations (the perpetrator is usually a close relative), and the danger of a place

²⁴ This is the amount our team has collected through the internet, in various types of commercial media, from newspapers, to female magazines or news portals.

that was *home* or like home (such as a grandmother's house). When searching for patterns, we²⁵ found cases of street hassling and flashing by unknown men; school bullying; sexual assault or attempted rape by a family member or an acquaintance; sexual assault or attempted rape by a stranger; and even cases of rape by a family member, an acquaintance or a stranger. Aggressors are of the same age or older, including family members (grandfather, father, stepfather, brother, cousin, uncle, godfather or someone considered as family), schoolmates, neighbours, or friends. In the cases of street hassling, most aggressors are unknown. Think Olga analyses of around 3 thousand tweets show most victims' ages vary from 6 to 13 years old (the average being 9.7 years old when the harassment took place).²⁶

Those cases also seem to match some typical cases known from previous research on sexual violence in Brazil, particularly data from rape services in the public health system (only around 10% of the cases reach police stations, even though Police Stations for Women are available in larger Brazilian cities). *Shame* and *fear* prevented women from telling those stories before, and the majority of perpetrators are men the victims already knew – relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and boyfriends.²⁷

Some of those accounts slip into other types of gender violence, including rape or attempted rape, showing the difficulty in classifying and defining gender violence, and at the same time revealing how from one category of violence other types also occur in women's everyday lives (see Kelly, 1988). They also show how difficult it is to name and express situations of violence in an explicit manner (as in Das, 2007). "I've never told anyone before" is a usual sentence in those accounts, beyond the feelings of shame and fear. The lack of a category that also expressed those acts as violence or at least some kind of aggression was part of the impossibility of talking about it.

There was a flood of narratives, and they made more women remember their own stories. *Friends* (those from one's facebook network) or *followers* (in twitter) replied to some posts and tweets saying, "I know how it feels", and "I had a similar experience", and sometimes one post or tweet generated longer exchanges of narratives but also words of support through the web. Some women stated that they were remembering facts they had already forgotten (like the definition of trauma

²⁵ I want to thank the group of students who helped me in collecting and organizing data for this article, particularly Nicole Baumgarten.

²⁶ <https://olga-project.herokuapp.com/2015/10/26/hashtag-transformacao-82-mil-tweets-sobre-o-primeiroassedio/> accessed in 15/09/2019

²⁷ "Estupro no Brasil: uma radiografia segundo os dados da Saúde", IPEA, 2014. http://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/images/stories/PDFs/nota_tecnica/140327_notatecnicadiest11.pdf.

itself – so painful that one forgets); and that they feel better about it when they are *listened* to, and other people answered and reacted with support.

The campaign was also stressing: “it is not your fault” or “THEY should be ashamed, not us”. The use of social media allowed for perceiving inequalities in everyday life, reviewing one’s own memory in face of new words. Social media operate partially as a public context, or a context of “socially mediated publicness” (Baym and boyd, 2012), defined by a technology that users couldn’t completely control (how to control personal exposition in such media is far from clear for most users, considering the fact that even when we define our posts as “public” or “restricted to friends”, that does not mean that we can control their reach). The telling of stories by some made other women tell their stories, and this created certain affective identifications between them, as mentioned in ideas like “I felt the same”, “it also happened to me”.

As with other feminist campaigns on violence (and the various forms of categorising gender violence), the idea of speaking up, even with the necessary exposure of what was earlier felt as something to be ashamed of, of what was never mentioned before, is seen as potentially liberating and empowering. The first person narrative itself seems to mean a relief, but the act of being acknowledged and the supporting comments are a source for affective ties. They produce a sense of being the same kind of people, creating somehow a feminist identity. Those narratives (even shorter narratives on Twitter) produced affective identifications (as I discussed in Almeida, 2013 and 2014), readers engaged affectively, and therefore solidarity was shown. Support from others seems to be the healing part. They feel stronger because there is a collective “us” that have suffered similar things. Acknowledging that other young women also suffered the same, that those accounts seemed so similar, they insisted on the idea of changing the “rape culture”.

Juliana stresses the idea that speaking up and breaking the silence is a way of fighting for gender justice:

The great achievement of this campaign is [raising awareness], because you can’t fight against something that you don’t believe in or deny has taken place,” she said. “A machine has been working to keep victims in silence. It isn’t operated by a super-villain, but it manifests itself every time we’re told that we’re exaggerating, that we need to forget, that ‘what has happened has happened’ ... There is something very powerful in discovering that we are victims. (The Guardian, 11/11/2015)²⁸

²⁸ https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/nov/11/brazil-explicit-tweets-junior-masterchef-star-online-campaign-against-abuse-sexual-harassment?CMP=share_btn_tw .

Therefore, “My first harassment” campaign was able to expose many situations where women were in a vulnerable situation, and shows that vulnerability can produce resistance, as Butler (2015) puts it. I am aware it is not the same as the vulnerable body protesting on the streets as in Butler’s analyses. But the exposure of situations in which young women were feeling vulnerable – and for most of their lives they were ashamed of – had unpredictably exposed them. Some of them became targets of misogynistic attacks. They generated both resistance (more women campaigning) and hate reactions and attacks. So they were emotionally vulnerable on the web, exposing themselves to criticism, to ridicule and even to attacks.

Many men were mocking the campaign and saying that acts classified as harassment are funny – “it is only sex” –, and that those puritan women were making a fuss about nothing. As Banet-Weiser (2018) reminds us, misogyny comes along with feminist ideas of empowering. If some are expressing their fears and traumas, others are mockingly responding that harassment is “delicious”, like the Brazilian rock singer and right-wing supporter Roger (vocalist in the rock band *Ultraje a Rigor*). His reaction was to tweet, using the same hashtag, how glorious harassment can be: “I think I was 10. A maid let me touch her boobs. It was fucking great.”²⁹ To which a fan replies: “I think you did not understand the tag, harassment is sexual violence, and that is not funny.” He then insists: “It is [funny]. If you were a man, you would know.”³⁰

Issues of social markers of difference are striking in this tweet – Roger reveals the position of an upper-class white boy who harassed the family’s maid, most probably a black or brown woman. It reminds us of the situation of housemaids as a mark of a country built around slavery. Being a housemaid is the most usual occupation of black working-class women in Brazil (even more so in the 1970s, when he was a boy), and his “fucking great” experience can be seen as the expression of sexual violence marked by gender, class and race inequalities. We cannot possibly know what his pleasure meant to the maid, but this dialogue reveals that the same act can mean violence for the victims or pure pleasure for the perpetrators.³¹

Right-wing politicians were mocking all those campaigns, and striking back, saying that it is not harassment it is “just sex”, and “compliments”, and that catcalling or wolf-whistles make pretty women happy. Those are supposedly “natural” men’s

²⁹ “Roger, do Ultraje, é o cacique da aldeia de Umberto Eco”, Bruno Ferrari, 23/10/2015, available in <https://epoca.globo.com/vida/experiencias-digitais/noticia/2015/10/roger-do-ultraje-rigor-e-o-cacique-da-aldeia-de-umberto-eco.html> accessed in 03.02.2019

³⁰ <https://epoca.globo.com/vida/experiencias-digitais/noticia/2015/10/roger-do-ultraje-rigor-e-o-cacique-da-aldeia-de-umberto-eco.html>

³¹ As with cases of rape, when the alleged excuse is often: it was only sex, or it was consensual.

attitudes, and women should like it. Such points of view naturalise the idea (usual in media productions as well) that male sexual drive is uncontrollable, that men are “naturally” heterosexually aroused by pretty girls, that girls are themselves “naturally” sexy from an early age. Obviously, that position does not take into account the girl’s point of view – they cannot see women as subjects of rights. This way of seeing the world is also being named by the feminist movement as “rape culture”, also following forms of naming violence in the U.S. Pop stars such as Roger, and major and minor celebrities (like one former Globo telenovela actor and porn star, nowadays a congressman, elected under Bolsonaro’s former party), alongside right-wing politicians reacted and stated publicly and loudly their sexist point of view.

Some men also reacted positively in a supportive way, some even said they should learn more about it, and change their behaviour. This reaction was also visible on Facebook and mainstream media, like Globo, but referring only to “artists, musicians and psychologists”:

“I have abused, I have harassed...”, said one musician who was then a campaign supporter, stressing that a behaviour change is possible. “All I read, it is terrorising. (...) and it is part of women’s everyday lives. (...) We are more guilty than we’d like to think (...) No more silencing. No more thinking that some of those abuses are tolerable. No more sexism. Enough of mocking the feminist movement”.³² Others expressed the feminist upbringing they had had with their mothers, and explained why they had always been feminists or pro-feminism (some of them being aware of the “risk” of stating they were feminists). Those were mainly white upper and middle-class young men, around their 20’s and 30’s – so with a similar social upbringing to Juliana herself.

Concluding remarks

Supported by many other similar campaigns, such as #myabuserprofessor, #mysecretfrien³³, #nothim (#elenão, against Bolsonaro’s presidential campaign in 2018) Think Olga’s efforts and its participation in a larger feminist environment on the web (a certain part of it, no doubt) were able to promote feminism’s visibility and to publicly discuss sexual aggression. In a way, the hashtag campaigns

³² Emiliano Urbim, Joana Dale e Thais Lobo (08.11.2015) “Tocados pelo #primeiroassedio, homens fazem meaculpa”, O Globo on line, available at <https://oglobo.globo.com/sociedade/tocados-pelo-primeiroassedio-homens-fazem-meaculpa-17975262> accessed in 03.02.2018.

³³ See Lara et al, 2016.

have also worked as a feminist pedagogy – promoting similar feelings of acknowledging types of violence, of perceiving oneself as a “victim”, and identifying affectively with other women who had similar experiences, therefore promoting a sense of identity. Campaigners – whether coming from collectives, NGOs, left political party activists, black activism or professionals in the field of journalism – were able to push such subjects to mainstream media, thus reaching a larger public than the one in certain “bubbles”, like feminist or leftist web circuits. But they have no control – nor do the young journalists working on those media – of the final format the hegemonic media will give to the subject.

“My first harassment” campaign was enmeshed in particularities of the 2015 social context – named by the hegemonic media as the Brazilian “year of the Women’s Spring”. It shows the impact on mainstream media of the growing visibility of a feminist discursive field of action, or many types of groups and movements, online and offline, acting in the country. Many young feminist initiatives – collectives in schools and universities, campaigns, blogs and sites, but also street manifestations – took place. New social media were part of the movement promoting narratives and identifications. Mainstream media chose some of those to be in the forefront.

For such media it was easier to portray Juliana de Faria and not the working class black feminists or from the outskirts that were also part of the same movement. The white middle-class demands for ending street harassment seems to commercial media less offensive than anti-capitalist, anti-racist or pro-abortion movements. Additionally, #firstharassment was more appealing because of the sensational and dramatic stories of sexual violence against children it made visible. The paedophilic tone to it also made it more dramatic – children are much more legitimate victims than teenage girls or young women. Mainstream media could only convey the idea of violence or aggression if the victims were seen as legitimate victims – that is, according to certain gender heteronormativity and sexual morality (as shown in researches on rape and domestic violence, as Sarti, 2011 e 2014; Lins, 2018. Vieira, 2011, Almeida and Maracchini, 2017). Even more, such commercial networks also prefer dramatizing graphic violent cases that allow dramatic tones to attract viewers and consumers (see Efrem, 2016; Lowenkron, 2013, Landini, 2006).

In May, 2018, Think Olga launched the crowd-funded documentary “No more catcalling” (*Chega de fiu fiu*). The film is the result of the effort of many women in Think Olga to address gender violence in an intersectional manner. The group of women contributing to Think Olga – most of them journalists – is not only white middle/upper-class anymore, and there has been a conscious process of addressing issues of race, class, sexuality, gender or regional identity. The

film is based on the life of three young women in their twenties: a white middle-class teacher living in São Paulo; a trans working-class university student from the outskirts of Brasília; and a black working-class lesbian from Bahia, living in precarious housing. According to one of the directors, Amanda Kamancheck, in an interview, the choices were consciously made in order to show diversity, and that experience of sexual harassment affects women from “all social classes, races, cis and trans women”.³⁴ She was very aware of most recent definitions of gender, for she had worked for UN Women in Brasília. The film is a documentary that explicitly shows data on violence against women. “No more catcalling” campaign data is one of the sources of information for producing the film. Again, as in “The First Harassment” campaign, in the search for people talking about their experiences of harassment, much more violence is shown in the film. Talking to the camera, one of the main characters reveals she was raped as a child by an uncle. Again rape and pain are shown movingly, revealing the patterns of gender violence in the country.

However, another unexpected outcome was the somewhat quick approval of the new law 13.718, promulgated on 24th of September, 2018. A new recent category was then introduced into the Brazilian Penal Code, that of *importunação sexual* (“sexual importuning”), which could also be translated as sexual harassment. This is a new amendment to a chapter of the Brazilian Penal Code called “On Sexual Dignity”, the session established in 2009, which has updated rape definition, and now includes the categories of *sexual importuning*, *collective rape* and *corrective rape* against lesbians. The law is particularly addressing the main dramatic cases shown on commercial mainstream media – cases of brutal rapes or sexual harassment in public transportation that were the headlines of the main daily papers in the previous years.³⁵

Such changes are now also very well explained on the Think Olga site, and have reached other colleagues in this field – feminist lawyers and attorneys are providing new explanations that should help victims have access to justice. Nevertheless, there is an enormous gap in what the law states, and how laws are used. In Brazil, it is very rare to convict someone for rape – even where there is proof of violence. People do not feel safe to tell the police, and even fewer trust the juridical system. The scale of incarcerating black and poor people is also another question related to such a juridical response, because if anyone is punished, it will certainly not be the upper class white boys who harass the housemaid that works for their family.

³⁴ I want to thank Amanda for the interview and longer conversations we had in 2018, when she was launching the film.

³⁵ As has often happened in recent feminist issues, such as laws concerning femicide and domestic violence, there are often concerns about the judicialization of those political demands (see Debert & Gregori, 2008).

Besides the Internet movement, massive feminist street manifestations were to happen from 2016 on, even larger than those in 2015, particularly in 2018, tagged as #elenão (#nohim), targeted against the candidate who eventually won the 2018 elections – an open misogynist. Reacting to this and other gains in the feminist movement, the election of a right wing, anti-women's rights and anti-gender president, pro-torture and admirer of dictators, also shows that gains in human and sexual rights are still at risk. The now president has stated publicly many types of symbolic aggression against women, LGBT groups and blacks, once shouting at a left wing congresswoman member of the Workers' Party: "You are so ugly you don't even deserve to be raped."

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