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MATERNAL RIGHTS DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND INTERSECTIONAL fEMINISM:

An analysis of the independent media platform "Cientista Que Virou Mãe"

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ABSTRACT - This article seeks to obtain a deepened understanding of the phenomenon of maternal rights digital activism, drawing from an analysis of Cientista Que Virou Mãe (CQVM or Scientist who became a mother, in Portuguese), a blog which became an independent media platform. By doing this, we hope to fill an important research gap as little is written on the relationships between motherhood, feminism and the media. Based on preliminary evidence, we also wish to suggest that the CQVM platform can be located within the context of digital activism, arguing that the latter has lots to benefit from incorporating the perspectives of intersectional feminism. In order to achieve this, our study has a netnographic inspiration, analyzing one particular event that was significant in the history of the CQVM platform as it echoed the voices of black mothers.
Key words: Digital activism. Maternal rights activism. Intersectional feminism. Independent media.

ATIVISMO DIGITAL MATERNO E FEMINISMO INTERSECCIONAL:
Uma análise da plataforma de mídia independente "Cientista Que Virou Mãe"

RESUMO - Neste artigo, buscamos compreender o ativismo digital materno a partir da análise de um blog que passou a operar como uma plataforma de mídia independente: o Cientista Que Virou Mãe (CQVM). Gostaríamos de apresentar os indícios que revelam que esta plataforma atua como importante iniciativa de ativismo digital materno. Tanto nos estudos feministas, como nos estudos de comunicação e mídia, este recorte, mais voltado para a análise das relações entre maternidade, feminismo e mídia, é relativamente pouco trabalhado. Após localizarmos a plataforma CQVM dentro do contexto do ativismo digital materno, destacamos que tal fenômeno pode ser beneficiado por uma maior incorporação das perspectivas do feminismo interseccional.

Para demonstrar esse ponto, adotamos uma abordagem de inspiração (n)etnográfica, analisando um evento marcante na história da plataforma, o qual trouxe à tona as vozes das mulheres e mães negras.
Palavras-chave: Ativismo digital. Ativismo materno. Feminismo interseccional. Mídia independente.

ACTIVISMO DIGITAL MATERNO Y FEMINISMO INTERSECCIONAL:
un análisis de la plataforma independiente "Cientista Que Virou Mãe"

RESUMEN - El objetivo de este artículo es conducirnos una comprensión más profunda del fenómeno del activismo digital materno, a partir de un análisis de Cientista Que Virou Mãe (CQVM, La Cientista que se Convirtió en Madre, traducido al español), un blog que se convirtió en una plataforma de medios independientes. A partir de aqui, esperamos llenar una brecha de investigación importante ya que se escribe poco sobre las relaciones entre la maternidad, el feminismo y los medios. También deseamos sugerir que la plataforma CQVM se pueda ubicar dentro del contexto del activismo digital, argumentando que este último tiene mucho que beneficiarse al incorporar las perspectivas del feminismo interseccional. Para cumplir con este propósito, nuestra investigación adopta una inspiración (n)etnográfica, analizando un evento particular que fue significativo en la historia de la plataforma CQVM ya que se manifestaron más fuertemente las voces de las madres negras.
Palavras clave: Activismo digital. Activismo materno. Feminismo interseccional. Medios independientes.

Introduction

> Why should I leave my baby daughter who is still being breastfed in a nursery so that I can work, rather than being able to rely on a social structure that is more welcoming to mothers and their children? Why should they no longer call me Lígia, treating me as a "mommy" in a patronizing way? Why is it that becoming a mother brings so many experiences of inequality and hardship in a society that ridicules women and mothers? None of the answers to these questions were satisfactory to me. On the contrary: each affirmative answer in a sense of 'because things just are the way they are' aroused my desire to change this scenario of exclusion and inequality for women who are mothers. (Sena, n.d)

In the opening text of the blog and collaborative platform Cientista que Virou Mãe (Portuguese for Scientist Who Became a Mother - www.cientistaqueviroumae.com.br), Lígia Moreiras Sena, who describes herself as a feminist, a doctor of science and Clara's mother, explains some of her main motivations for starting the blog. The author notes that although women have managed to occupy more positions in the workplace, such achievements have rarely resulted in levels of responsibility that are more equal between women and men when it

comes to raising and caring for children. Thus, with little emotional and financial support and with very high levels of expectation about their professional performance, women often find themselves in an insurmountable dilemma: they must work as if they did not have children and must have children as if they did not have a job.

In this article, we discuss the origins and the philosophy of the collaborative platform Cientista Que Virou Mãe (CQVM), presenting some of the key characteristics of the phenomenon of maternal rights activism, and situating it within a wider context of contemporary journalism and feminism debates. Here, we would also like to incorporate some of the perspectives of Intersectional Feminism (Crenshaw, 1991). Thus, drawing from an exploratory study, we would also like to demonstrate the ways in which intersectionality manifests itself as something that goes beyond an academic concept, representing both a methodological approach and a political stance.

Digital activism: context and characteristics

Several authors have focused on the role that the communication and information technologies play in connecting people that share a belief, a cause or a feeling, and how these could lead to collective action in an advanced stage. In this sense, as Leticia Abella (2016) points out, the emergence of communication technologies provided new possibilities for citizens who do not find a space in traditional corporate media. These citizens can then use such technologies as tools for social mobilization "without any approval from the powerful sectors of society" (p. 93). This allows for forms of expression that are more varied and for flows of information between the different spheres of society that are more horizontal (p. 94). Therefore, we can conclude that such changes in the media landscape have created and shaped a new scenario of social mobilizations, generated as results of network interchanges (Abella, 2016).

Here, we will provide context on a few key alternative activist (and digital) movements that have emerged in that last decades, both in Brazil and in other countries. One commonly cited example is that of the Zapatist Movement, started by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in 1994, which remains active in the present. Initially, the movement aimed to take power and to establish a socialist government in Mexico through armed struggle. However,

as Rivello and Pimenta suggest, such political stance changed over time (2008, p.1). Today, the movement is widely known for making use of computer networks to seek dialogue not only with the Mexican organized society but also with the international society. Among other causes, the movement fights for indigenous communities' self-management rights and attempts to understand the problems faced "by the Chiapas communities within a global context of deepening social exclusion caused by neoliberal policies" (Rivello & Pimenta, 2008, pp. 1-2). Additionally, the zapatistas perceive media visibility as an important tool to strengthen marginalized social groups and victims of social inequalities around the world, including LGBTQ women and groups.

Within the academic literature that focuses on the role that digital media play in the public sphere, a lot has been written on the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) Protests, which happened between 30 November and 02 December. Fábio Malini and Henrique Antoun (2013, pp. 134-135) have argued that the corporate media coverage, such as CNN's, ABC's, NBC's and, in Brazil, Globo's coverage was extremely flawed and incomplete. To cite the authors, at that time, such media outlets used two main frames to portray the protests: the mainstream media either presented them as corporativist critiques of commercial freedoms by groups that oppose global competitiveness, or as anarchic punks and similar deviant characters (p. 135). The Independent Media Center (IMC) is then born out of the necessity to confront such generalizing and aggressive narratives. In this way, having a strong online presence, the IMC quickly became the "main news outlet for the event" (p. 136). As Malini and Antoun suggest, this represents a new form of activism that was led by the survivors of the community and political experiences of the late 1960s and early 1970s, "that were heightened by the 1970s State terror, and travelled the desert towards a promised land, which manifested in exile, prison, or in the computers, networks and NGOs of the 1980s" (2013, p. 138). Therefore, by employing direct action, digital activism managed to turn computer-mediated communications (CMC) into "places of perception, affection, and activity for new virtual communities which then managed to transform the nature of the political organization of protests by adopting an anarchic way of management". (Malini & Antoun, 2013, p. 139).

In Brazil, historically, one can find several cases of mobilizations linked to organized movements, such as the Free Pass

Movement (Movimento Passe Livre - MPL), The Movement of Workers Without a Roof (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto – MTST), the World Cup Popular Committees (Comitês de Copa), the Movement for the Democratization of Information, amongst many others. Being aware of the vast diversity between these movements, Scherer-Warren (2014, p. 421) identifies a few structuring aspects that characterize the movements' struggle:

- Demographic: Refers to the population affected by new ways of segregation which result from urban concentration;
- Economic: Refers to precariousness in the workplace and also manifests in terms of living conditions, urban mobility, quality of life etc;
- Political: Refers to the lack of effective representation and citizen participation;
- Cultural: Refers to demands for recognition, freedom of choice and symbolic expressions in terms of gender, sex, race, ethnicity, generation etc.

Therefore, being situated at the very core of information society, such demands allow for important exchanges between social network actors and various civil organization entities, generating a greater level of political articulations and identity flows between them. In the Brazilian context, for instance, protesters of the so-called 2013 June Journeys (*Jornadas de Junho*) took the streets to oppose overspending with the FIFA 2014 World Cup, the poor quality of public services, and corruption, amongst other issues. Scherer-Warren analyses two incidents, which took place on 11 July and 07 September 2013, and which exemplify this. In both cases, specific popular mobilizations, organized by youth movements, women's movements, black and indigenous movements, workers' movements, among many others, have successfully gathered to create collective mobilizations (p. 422, 2014).

Indeed, in several countries, the first years of the 2010 decade were marked by a large number of global mobilizations and protests, which followed the logic of a connected networked society. Manuel Castells (2013), a widely cited author in this topic, has offered a broad overview on some of the key popular movements, such as the Tunisian Revolution, Iceland's Kitchenware Revolution, the Arab Uprisings, the Indignados in Spain and the Occupy Movements. Many critics, however, have pointed out the romantic and perhaps excessively

optimistic tone found in Castell's work as well as in the writing of other authors within the cyber culture scholarly tradition. Adopting a more pragmatic stance, such critics note that "the revolution will not be tweeted", as Christian Fuchs (2014) puts it. Indeed, it would be unrealistic and simplistic to assume that technology is fully responsible for bringing revolutions and empowering social groups. Moreover, whilst a few years ago there was a widespread belief that the networks of outrage (Castells, 2013) could bring hope to humanity, today such hope is fading. Perhaps ironically, we are now faced with a scenario marked by deep political and economic crises in Brazil and in other countries. We are also witnessing the growth and spreading of far right political parties in various parts of the world, such as in Europe, the United States, Australia, among others.

Having said that, Castell's work proves useful in terms of presenting some of the key common characteristics between different social movements with a strong presence of digital activism. According to the author, such movements can be: 1) "connected in multiple ways", which includes online, offline, as well as pre-existing networks; 2) "simultaneously local and global because they usually originate in specific contexts, but also connect to the entire world, learning from other experiences"; 3) "spontaneous in terms of their origins, usually ignited by a spark of outrage"; 4) "horizontal and multimodal", fostering a sense of companionship and favoring cooperation and solidarity; 5) "deeply self-reflexive", frequently listening to its members and questioning what their desires and achievements are"; 6) "rarely programmatic", as they show multiple demands and unlimited motivations; and 7) "predominantly focused on a change of values in society" (Castells, 2013, pp. 162-169).

We would like to demonstrate the ways in which the above characteristics apply to the emergence of a maternal rights digital movement in Brazil, particularly on social networking sites. However, first, we will provide a brief context on the movement. Created in 2002 by Juliana Sampaio and Laura Guimarães, two women who worked in advertising, the blog Mothern (mother + modern) was one of the first maternal rights digital activism well-known initiatives in the country. The researcher Adriana Braga wrote a Ph.D. dissertation about the blog, which described some of the everyday experiences of mothers as they discovered the real meaning of motherhood. In 2005, Sampaio and Guimarães also published the book *Mother: A Manual for the Modern Mother* (Mothern: Manual da Mãe Moderna),

which inspired a TV series aired by the GNT TV Channel in Brazil. Such initiatives illustrate some of the ways in which the social construction of motherhood was changing in the country. Taking advantage of technologies' stronger interactive character, these mothers started to perceive and portray themselves as specialists in raising their own children, a place that had been previously assigned to medical doctors. Thus, the mothers created their own online social dynamics, providing advice to each other, sharing their experiences and questioning authority figures such as the medical doctors and specialists, for instance. (Tomaz, 2015, p. 163).

Motherhood and feminism(s)

In the Western tradition, the debate around the relationships between motherhood and feminism intensified, particularly amongst Second-Wave Feminists, during the Post-World War II period (Beauvoir, 1970[1]; Friedan, 1963). As cities experienced greater industrial and urban developments, women started to have a larger presence in the job market and the invention of the birth control pill provided women with more control over their family planning, feminists started to question the social conditions of women who were mothers. It was in this scenario, in which one could observe significant tensions between progressive values and the values of the traditional bourgeois family, that Simone de Beauvoir published her classic book *The Second Sex*. She argued for sexual liberation and reproductive freedom, centering female issues around the need to position women as social subjects, politicizing everyday life private issues. As Lucila Scavone suggests:

> This politicization had a radical element because it related to motherhood. It opposed the interpretation that motherhood was a form of social fate for women, calling it biological determinism. Motherhood started to be understood as a social construction, which played an essential role on where women were placed in the family and in society. In other words, motherhood represented one of the main causes of domination of the female sex by the male sex (2001, p.138).

The Second-Wave Feminist Activists started to perceived motherhood as a key issue because it represented an essential condition for the oppression and domination of women by the opposite sex. This would happen because, as they became mothers, women would start to be perceived as wives, as well as the person

who is responsible for reproduction and for taking care of children. This condition, in turn, reduced women's potentials, confining them to private spaces, and excluding them from the activities and debates of the public arena. Therefore, we can infer that the debate about motherhood and feminism had three key moments: first, the feminist movement perceived motherhood as a form of natural handicap for females, rejecting motherhood as a way to fight against male domination. With the birth control pill and new ways to avoid contraception, women could simply avoid becoming mothers, seeking a broader gender identity. In a second moment, the feminist movement started to alter its discourses of motherhood, focusing on the idea that motherhood provided women with important forms of knowledge and power. Scavone states that:

> After the Feminist Movement rejected motherhood, it started to question things like 'do we as women want to have our identity defined without motherhood? And by doing that, do we just accept that part of our history is being erased from our identity as women?' This is when motherhood started to be deemed as a form of irreplaceable power, something that men envy because only women can possess it. (2001, p.141)

Here, we can also notice that the feminist line of thinking establishes a dialogue with the humanities and the social sciences, incorporating lacanian and foucauldian perspectives that recognize motherhood as a source for social power by recognizing the female-centric possibilities of conception and the forms of knowledge and wisdom involved in raising a human being. Based on these ideas, the feminist activists started to acknowledge that the reproductive biological factor was not what determined women's social position, but rather the relationships of domination, which ascribed certain social meanings to motherhood.

Finally, in a third moment, as the concept of gender evolved, the feminist activists deconstructed previous ideas of motherhood. Motherhood started to be perceived as "a historically, culturally and politically constructed symbol which resulted from power relations and the domination of one sex over the other" (Scavone, 2001, p. 143). Later, with Third-Wave Feminism, starting in the 1990s, the feminist movement became less interested in the social meanings of motherhood. The focus was shifted to issues of health policies and reproductive rights, relocating the concept of motherhood from the private to the public sphere. During this phase, the feminist movement

also tackled some of their main weaknesses, which were identified during the Second Wave. Addressed by black feminists, the main flaw was deeply linked to the fact that, up until that moment, the feminist movement had placed a much greater emphasis on the experiences of white and upper middle class women. Bell Hooks, for instance, suggested that the movement needed to engage in self-criticism:

> Most women, especially privileged white women, ceased even to consider revolutionary feminist visions, once they began to gain economic power within the existing social structure. Ironically, revolutionary feminist thinking was most accepted and embraced in academic circles. In those circles the production of revolutionary feminist theory progressed, but more often than not that theory was not made available to the public. It became and remains a privileged discourse available to those among us who are highly literate, well-educated, and usually materially privileged (2000, p. 5).

Therefore, feminist activists and thinkers recognized that the movement should urgently address the multiple layers of oppression that women face and that this should include class and race among many other aspects. It was precisely in this context that the intersectional feminism started to thrive. Although these discussions had been taking place among black feminists for many years, the Law Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited with coining the term. To cite Crenshaw:

> I consider intersectionality a provisional concept linking contemporary politics with postmodern theory. In mapping the intersections of race and gender, the concept does engage dominant assumptions that race and gender are essentially separate categories. By tracing the categories to their intersections, I hope to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable. While the primary intersections that I explore here are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color (1991, p. 1244-1245).

As the author puts it, although this initial definition perhaps overly focused on the intersections between race and gender, the intersectionality perspective reveals the multiple facets and layers of oppression that different women in distinct contexts have to struggle with. In other words, there is no such a thing as a 'one-size fits all' style of feminism so that the movement can cater for the needs of all women of the world, without taking into consideration their very different realities. Here, it is also worth noting that although this concept has been circulating within the feminist movement for

decades, it has been gaining prominence in the Brazilian blogosphere in recent years. We are particularly interested in how this concept has been circulating in cyberspace via various digital activism initiatives. However, before we employ the concept of intersectionality in our analysis of the Cientista Que Virou Mãe (Scientist Who Became a Mother) platform, in the next section, we will provide a brief context on how the platform represents relevant forms of both independent journalism and digital activism.

Maternal rights digital activism and independent journalism: cientista que virou mãe

In the second decade of the 21st century, several initiatives that deconstructed the mother figure started to thrive in Brazil. The mother starts then to be portrayed as someone who can be argumentative and somewhat empowered on blogs and social media. The YouTube Channel Hell Mother, the Facebook fan pages Mãe Solo (an expression that refers to single mothers in a non-pejorative way), Feminismo Materno (Maternal Feminism), Militância Ativa Materna (Active Militant Motherhood) and, more recently, the blog and Facebook fan page Não me Chamo Mãe (I am Not Called Mother) are examples of this phenomenon. In this context, we would like to analyze the collaborative platform Cientista Que Virou Mãe, which was created in 2009 by Lígia Moreira Sena and Nani Feuser. Currently, the platform includes a blog, a Facebook fan page, and profiles on both Instagram and Twitter.

CQVM's discourse might not be infused with a sense of social outrage, as it has been the case with other activist initiatives, such as those occurred during the popular mobilizations discussed earlier in this article. Yet, we would like to argue that this form of activism still fits within what Castells would call and "emotional form of mobilization caused by blatant injustice" (2013, p. 163). Lígia, Nani and other women who collaborate with the platform point to the urgent need to address the heavy workload and levels of oppression that women with children suffer in society, as they are a part of a consumption chain. In this way, the women are able to question to what extent the Brazilian society is prepared to shift the maternal condition from a private to a public and political domain. In what follows, we will present an overview

of some of the main themes and issues addressed by CQVM, locating them within a context of digital activism and independent journalism, and linking them to some of the conceptual contours of intersectional feminism.

If one returns to some of the texts written during the CQVM blog's first years, one can follow Lígia Moreiras Sena's personal and professional paths, from a time when she was not pregnant with her only daughter to when she gave birth and started raising her daughter Clara. The blog's main objective was to establish exchanges in a network of women who were willing to debate their visions on issues such as birth, childhood, maternal health, and women's rights. In the beginning, without an official name, the blog functioned as an intimate diary, discussing themes related to the coercive forces that affected women once they became mothers. Such themes also included women's health, as Lígia was pursuing a Master's Degree in Pharmacology at the time. Therefore, in some ways, we can establish some parallels with the concerns manifested by Second-Wave Feminist authors. Many articles focused on biological aspects of women's bodies, such as becoming pregnant, giving birth, and breastfeeding, and argued that these aspects should not be perceived as competitive disadvantages in society. The founder then named the blog as Scientist Who Became a Mother in an obvious reference to the creators' professional occupations: at the time, both of them were literally researchers who had just become mothers.

In 2015, the blog went through a radical change in terms of its format. It became an independent media platform adopting a crowdfunding model. In an interview for a YouTube Channel, Lígia stated that, at that time, the blog had already achieved over 4 thousand hits per day and mothers constituted 75% of its audience[2]. Working together with Nani Feuser, Lígia, who is also an activist who stood for humane births, developed the idea of forming a network of support, which would enable them to produce quality content for their readers and work opportunities for their writers without the interference of corporate interests. In this way, CQVM's model became very close to the model adopted by independent journalists. Here, the main concerns revolve around ideas of being committed to the truth and to self-sufficiency, creating possibilities for more freedom of expression, and opposing the capitalist system's ideological orientations. Yet, although this might seem straight forward, studies that delve into the

concept of independent journalism are still scarce. In this sense, James Bennett makes a useful contribution when he states that "For many media independence has come to mean working with freedom: from state control or interference, from monopoly, from market forces, as well as freedom to report, comment, create and document without fear of persecution" (2015, p. 1). Therefore, we can infer that independent journalism needs to be an autonomous craft carried out by journalists and non-journalists alike, without necessarily being connected to traditional media outlets, organizations, companies or political parties. Additionally, this type of journalism seeks its financial survival in the job market by adopting. Thus, there is no longer a need to be placed within a large media conglomerate in order to produce content. The basic idea is that, aided by a computer and an internet connection, it is possible to work from anywhere as a journalist.

Daniela Ramos and Egle Spinelli (2015) add that with independent journalism there is also a need to emphasize the profession's investigative principles. Thus, independent journalism represents an important alternative option for journalists who left the big media companies, for instance, particularly after the industrial press has been affected by various crises. To cite the authors:

> Many journalists have started their careers in the mainstream media sector. However, as they search for non-profit and non-partisan journalism, and for a particular reason, such as being made redundant or not identifying with the principles of a given media outlet, or simply being keen on starting their own businesses, they might end up quitting their jobs and engaging in other independent projects. (Ramos & Spinelli, 2015, p.116)

As online spaces such as the blogosphere thrived, bringing alternative funding possibilities, such as crowdfunding, many independent journalism projects started to emerge and have a prominent role in the Brazilian media scenario. Here, in this sense, it is worth mentioning a few initiatives, such as Agência Pública, Ponte, BRIO, *Think Olga* and Jota[3], as they offer a refreshing and more diverse way of working with journalism on digital platforms. As for the CQVM platform, it represents a hybrid space. Initially, it presented the narrative models of a blog, but later it became a multiplatform independent media platform. After this shift, CQVM started to employ a crowdfunding scheme. First, its authors post short summaries of their articles, as well as their short bios, on the actual blog, on their Facebook fan page (which has over 100 thousand likes, as of the

time of writing), and on their Instagram profile (which has almost 12 thousand followers, as of the time of writing). The summaries also contain a promotional blurb, which motivates readers and fans to make financial contributions with whichever amount they wish to donate. These readers can then trace the funding collection online as it develops live (for example, this article is now 40% financed, and there are 7 days left to achieve the full amount). As soon as the financial contribution reaches a minimum amount set by the CQVM platform, the author can then finalize the article. The article then goes live and becomes permanently available for CQVM's entire network of fans and followers.

The scientists who became mothers' key idea was to establish a self-sufficient platform and offer writing work to mothers, strengthening their network of support. In 2015, CQVM's founders invited 30 authors from various backgrounds in order to create a core group of women who were willing to discuss issues of motherhood in a critical manner. The team is comprised of writers, activists, journalists, and bloggers. Lígia Sena stressed that the objective is to offer an alternative to the traditional media that treat women as products and often convey an idealized version of motherhood, failing to address issues such as the exploitation and oppression that the capitalist system subject women to.

> This is an independent media platform, but, more than that, this is independent media produced by mothers who want to speak about motherhood, about the status of feminism in Brazil and who consider childhood and Human Rights as valuable issues. To put it simply, this represents an alternative to the media that treat women as products.[4]

As for the structure of the CQVM blog, once one accesses it, she can find a menu with the following tabs: "how to support us" (como apoiar); "subscribe" (assine); "finance" (financie); "writers" (escritoras); and "texts" (textos). By clicking on the "how to support us" tab, the reader will learn about how the crowdfunding scheme works and be able to finance certain texts by selecting her favorite themes (see figure 1). In this context, the reader becomes both an investor and a gatekeeper, a producer and a consumer of information. The tab "subscribe" represents an option for permanently financing the platform, and if the reader becomes a subscriber, she can collect credits that can be used for new content.

Figure 1 – Screenshot from the blog Cientista Que Virou Mãe, tab "Como Apoiar" ("How to Support Us")

Source: www.cientistaqueviroumae.com.br/como_apoiar.

The idea of having a network of women who exchange knowledge, produce specialized information, and are remunerated for it, contributes to generating a collective power, As Lígia Sena suggests, such virtual spaces represent excellent forums for tackling motherhood's social and political issues and help spread a new form of collective consciousness about the role of mothers in society. CQVM is also based on one key premise, and that is: quality information can be empowering[5]. In this way, the maternal rights movement's discourses are imbued with the ideal of mothers having the right to information as well as the perception of information as a tool to fight against inequality and for citizens' rights. In this context, activists consider the right to communicate with and for women as an extension of the right to information (Hamelink, 2005, p.145).

Moreover, as we suggested earlier, CQVM presents several elements that are characteristic of independent journalism (Bennett, 2015; Ramos & Spinelli, 2015). They are as follows:

- Many of its writers started their careers on traditional mainstream journalism and migrated to alternative journalism;
- It adopts a crowdfunding financial sustainability model;

- It emphasizes transparency in the processes of producing content, as readers are able follow closely all stages of content production.

Therefore, based on preliminary findings from our exploratory study, we would like to demonstrate the ways in which the CQVM platform presents characteristics of digital activism, even though it might not exactly sit within the realm of the so-called outrage revolutions (Castells, 2013). This manifests in the following ways:

- These digital activism initiatives **"are connected in multiple ways"**, as Castells would put it. We can see that CQVM's multiple platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and blog) frequently refer to other maternal rights digital activism initiatives or other initiatives that relate to the worlds of motherhood and childhood. One post published in the Facebook fan page @ cientistaqueviroumae on 22 October 2017, for example, mentions a meeting that gathered activists and members of the Project Childhood and Consumption (Projeto Criança e Consumo), the Alana Institute[6] and the Childhood Free of Comsumerism Project (Infância Livre de Consumismo). This also indicates that the CQVM platforms are keen on covering a significant variety of childhood and motherhood related issues.

- Digital activism is about **"simultaneously being local and global".** Indeed, the discussion about intersectional feminism, which is increasingly having more presence in the platform, illustrates this because it establishes important dialogues with a wider global activist community, as we will demonstrate in the next section.

- They manifest in **horizontal and multimodal ways**, fostering a sense of companionship, favoring cooperation and solidarity. The discourses found in the platform often stress this aspect as they focus on how mothers (in a broad interpretation of the word) can mutually support and motivate each other.

- **They make multiple demands and have unlimited motivations.** A quick analysis of the articles published between January and June 2017 reveals a vast variety of themes and issues addressed, such a sexual violence in marriage, children with disabilities, being a feminist in personal life, sexuality, childbirth, Brazilian mothers' loss of rights with the current conservative government, and the effects of racism on children (Muller, 2017).

- They tend to focus **"changing societal values"**. Perhaps this is the stronger characteristics because CQVM's collaborators propose a deep transformation in society, fighting for more rights, more equality, and more justice for women of different social classes, races, sexual orientation, among other aspects.

- They **are 'deeply self-reflexive".** We will further explore this aspect in the next section as we analyze the CQVM platform in light of Intersectional Feminism. Just as it happens with other initiatives managed by middle class women, CQVM was criticized for neglecting the perspectives and experiences of black women. As a way to respond to such criticism, the movement started to engage in a process of self-reflection, which we will address later.

However, before we do this, we will provide clarification on the methodological approaches adopted in our research. This study is predominantly inspired by netnography. As we can infer from the term, coined by Robert Kozinets (1998), netnography derives from ethnography, but it applies to internet research. This means that netnography also derives from an anthropological heritage, drawing from methodological concepts and approaches which include participant observation and "deep description" (Geertz, 1978). These allow for a deepened understanding of the peculiarities of a given culture. What distinguishes netnography from ethnography is the fact that the first focuses on virtual communities (Hine, 2005). Here, it is worth highlighting the current prevailing tendency to perceive what is "virtual" as not being detached from what is "real". As Christine Hine suggests, as mediated communication increasingly play a greater role in people's everyday lives, it becomes evident that the ethnographer will need to be part of the dynamics of mediated communication in an organic way, alongside whichever face-to-face interaction might also occur. (Hine, 2005, p. 3).

For this research, specifically, we have been conducting daily observations of posts and comments on the CQVM's blog and Facebook fan page. To achieve this, we collected screen captures on a daily basis, from 01 January 2017 to 30 June 2017 (Muller, 2017). In addition to the screen captures, we have also produced reflexive ethnographic field notes based on our observations. We have also used data collected from archives found in the blog page and interviews that the CQVM founders have given for other digital platforms, such as YouTube. These research efforts have allowed us to organize

some preliminary categories for the texts and comments, such as "female empowerment", "conscious motherhood", "attachment parenting". "pregnancy", "birth" and "postpartum". The data that we have collected provide us with some cues about how important dialogues are being established between the maternal rights activist movement, independent journalism activists and intersectional feminism supporters. However, this project will be supplemented with additional research to be carried out in April, May, and June of 2018, with in-depth interviews with CQVM's founders, writers, and other maternal rights activists.

Here, we echo Sarah Pink's (2009) train of thought by perceiving the internet as complex fieldwork environment where the online and offline worlds intimately connect and constitute themselves as meaningful places through the narratives of the ethnographer. Such emphasis on movement and on the constitution of "ethnographic places" is guided by the realization that such places do not represent delimited localities, in the most literal sense of the expression, but rather collections of localities, practices and temporalities that become deeply intertwined. Therefore, for this article, we have made the decision to leave aside the categorizations of published content on the platforms. Rather, here, we decided to allow ourselves to be guided by a remarkable event within the network of maternal rights activists, which revealed aspects of digital socialities in motion, to use Postill and Pink's expression (2012).

On 12 June 2015, Lígia Sena wrote an article about the film The Help, whose plot develops around issues of racial segregation in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. Black feminists severely criticized the article, pointing out that it neglected aspects related to the intersections between gender and race within the maternal rights debates. In the next section, we will offer more details on these debates, arguing that intersectional feminism can make a very significant contribution to the maternal rights digital activism movement. In ethnographic approaches, there is a widespread consensus on the researchers' need to be reflexive, acknowledging the ways in which their personal journey might influence the fieldwork relations and shape their interpretation of the findings. Therefore, in what follows here, we briefly engage with our own identities as researchers and authors. We can both describe ourselves as white women, mothers, feminists and

followers of the CQVM platform. This means that we are part of this digital community of maternal rights activists and mothers. At the same time, as academic researchers, just like CQVM's founders, we are also "scientists who became mothers". During the research process, we have often shifted between two roles: that of "silent researchers" (Orgadi, 2009), conducting non-obtrusive observations, and that of "insiders" (Hodkinson, 2005) as we combined self-biographical elements and pre-existing knowledge with an active participation in this community. This was the case, for instance, when we interacted with CQVM's various devices, sharing their content in our personal Facebook profiles, tagging friends and making comments on their posts.

Maternal rights digital activism:
contributions from the intersectional feminism perspective

On 12 June 2015, The CQVM blog published an opinion piece about the film The Help (2011) entitled "You are kind, you are smart, you are important: – The power of all our discourses"[7] (the Portuguese title was "Você é gentil, você é inteligente, você é importante - O Poder do Discurso de Todos Nós"). The film tells the story of a young white aspiring journalist who establishes a close relationship with two black domestic workers – the characters of Aibileen Clark and Minny Jackson - in Jackson, Mississippi, a southern US state known for its history of slave culture, in a context of civil rights struggles in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, the character of Aibileen is responsible for the lines "you are kind, you are smart, you are important" in the film. Played by the actor Viola Davis, Aibilien said that sentence to comfort a child character, a neglected little girl that she took care of.

The central idea in Ligia's piece is to demonstrate how the discourses of adults have power and possibly a negative impact (in the film's case, a positive impact) on children. Therefore, her main argument is that adults need to be very careful about their discourses directed to children, with the former employing more caring and loving words to communicate with the latter.

> You are kind, you are intelligent, you are important. Aibileen repeated that several times for Mae. So many times that the girl was able to incorporate this idea into her own self-perception. This

is an extremely important issue for me. Every single day, since I became a mother, I have tried to do exactly the same thing: to teach my daughter about the importance of knowing her own worth. I also hope that my discourses can aid her in her self-perception as a child, as a girl, as someone who will grow up to become a woman, and who will be aware of how worthy she is.

...

When we dedicate ourselves to helping our sons and daughters in becoming aware of how much we love them, we contribute to raising people who are more confident in themselves. This love can never be associated with physical, verbal, emotional or moral violence because, if we do this, we will be sending the message that violence and love can walk hand in hand. Well, they can't. But how many of us have learned this? And how many of us are now actively struggling to free ourselves from these chains... To help children love themselves and have a positive self-esteem is crucial for raising children in an empathic and respectful manner. The reason for this is simple: **yes, discourses are powerful.** From such discourses, children are able to learn and incorporate values about others and about themselves. This is how they start subscribing to bigoted values about other people. This is how they develop shortsighted beliefs, and construct their worldviews. This is how they feel like they are more... or less... (Sena, 2015)[8]

The piece was severely criticized by black feminists and, for this article, we will provide more detailed on the critiques offered by one of such women, Guaraciara Gonçalves. In a response piece, published on 02 July 2015, with the title "About the Controversy with the Blog Cientista Que Virou Mãe", Gonçalves touches upon two key problematic issues. The first relates to Lígia's choice to focus on how a black domestic worker empowers a white child with her recurrent sentence "you are kind, you are smart, you are important". By doing this, perhaps unconsciously, Ligia's text contributes to silencing the oppression suffered by the black woman. She adds that, in Ligia's piece, the historical references to a context of oppression and exploitation of black women are scarce, being summarized in a single sentence that refers to "a problematic time period in which there was an explosion of the civil rights struggles in the United States (Sena, 2015). In this way, after making a very brief mention to the film's historical context, the scientist who became a mother did not tackle any issues of race and gender whatsoever, focusing entirely on how negative and positive discourses can have an impact on children's (and, in this case, a white child's) self-esteem and identity building.

Gonçalves also criticized the way in which Lígia extracted Aibileen's speech from a film that mostly talks about racism and used it for a completely different purpose, which, in turns, removed all

traces of a very important racial debate. To quote her:

> Lígia Sena does not seem to notice that the story used in her piece is a racist one. She even reinforced some of these racist aspects by associating the domestic worker with the mammy archetype, or that woman who is almost part of the family because she has no right to have her own family [...]
> Although the scientist attempts to provide a bit of context on civil rights struggles, which is the context in which the relationship between the nanny and the child develops, she avoids the racial debate. This creates a problem in a sense that she enhances the relationship between them without recognizing its exploitative character and without reflecting on how that child who was being empowered by the black domestic worker could possibly become her oppressor in the future. The piece reproduces a very problematic stereotype, that of the mammy, which offers a caricature of black women as submissive and as people who are happy about their slave condition. This woman does not have a history, does not have a life of her own, does not have a family of her own. Her only function is to serve her masters (Gonçalves, 2015)[9]

Gonçalves correctly points to some of white feminists' inabilities which manifests on three main levels: 1) they fail to see and problematize issues of race; 2) although they are also oppressed in other ways, white women simply do not experience the same oppressive situations that black women do, and, thus, cannot empathize with them; and 3) even when these issues are brought to their attention. white women tend to avoid dealing or engaging with them. Here, Kimberle Crenshaw offers a useful contribution on the debates that revolve around identity politics:

> The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite – that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class. Moreover, ignoring difference within groups contributes to tensions among groups, another problem of identity politics that bears on efforts to politicize violence against women. Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of women of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242)

Therefore, by looking at the controversy between Guaraciara Gonçalves' blog and the CQVM platforms, we can observe that the oppression experienced by Lígia Sena, is clearly linked to her life experience as a white woman and as a mother, as she condemns the long lasting effects that the violent discourses aimed at children might have on them. Unlike Lígia,Guaraciara draws from her experience as a black mother and brings other essential issues to the fore, such as the violent exploitation and invisibility of black women who acted as domestic workers in racist contexts, such as that of the United States in the 1950s and 1960s (which is unfortunately still the case in that country and also in Brazil). After the controversy in 2015, the CQVM platform issued an apology, engaged in self-reflection, and made some re-structuring changes in order to respond to the criticisms. First, Lígia Sena published the following post-publication note, which we include here:

> Hundreds of readers clicked on this piece and showed their appreciation for it by sharing it on social media. They recognized the importance of reflecting on how affectionate discourses can impact the personality of a child and on how society treats and regards its children. However, there is another important issue which needs to be dealt this and which I neglected. The fact that I did not consider this issue can be harmful. Here, I am talking about the invisibility of black women who suffer various and serious forms of prejudice, oppression and discrimination. I spoke about the white child who finds her main source of affection in her black carer who is a domestic worker in a historical context in which violence and racism prevailed. However, by doing this, I prioritize the child and relegate the story of the black woman to a second place. This cannot happen. We need to look at issues from a different angle. Some women from the black movement contacted me and alerted me about this issue. Next week (between 22 and 26 June) we will publish on the blog a new piece written by a volunteer from the movement. I would like to apologize to all black women who felt that their views and voices were being neglected. I would also like to thank many people for the respectful contributions that they made to our blog, particularly Flávia Ribeiro, Guaraciara Gonçalves e Lu Bentia. We are in a process of constant learning. (Sena, 2015)[10]

Since 2015, it is reasonable to note that black feminism and black maternal rights activism have been achieving greater visibility on social media in Brazil. Media platforms and initiatives such as Instituto da Mulher Negra (Black Women's Institute), Geledés[11] and Nós, Mulheres da Periferia[12] (We, Peripheral Women) exemplify this. Moreover, we have seen a greater presence of black writers in the maternal blogosphere, such as Tulani da Silva who is a contributor for the Não Me Chamo Mãe[13] platform and Luciana

Bento, founder of the blog A Mãe Preta (Black Mother)[14]. As for CQVM, we were unable to find that response piece mentioned by Lígia, which should have been published between 22 and 26 June 2015. However, the incident does seem to have prompted a greater concern in terms of including black women's issues and a larger number of black writers. Articles such as the one entitled "The Impact of Your Racism on My Children and On Your Children" and "A Black Woman Shares Her History of Resistance: A Mother Who Wants to Become a Scientist", both written by Angela Medeiros, and published on CQVM's blog and on social media (on 11 April 2017 and 20 November 2016) clearly reflect this concern.

We have also noticed a certain degree of classicism in terms of their choices of themes as well as their choice of writers. Many black activists have criticized the feminist movement's adoption of English language terms, such as "mansplaining", "gaslighting" and "manterrupting" which might seem rather complicated for people with low levels of formal schooling. Similarly, the name "Scientist Who Became a Mother" shows its close connections with privileged and highly literate discourses as Bell Hooks (2000) argues. To refer back to Angela Medeiros, who is a black woman, a psychologist, a mother and who has written an article about "mothers who want to become scientists", we can see a reversal of challenges. For Angela, for example, it seemed much more difficult to become a scientist when she was already a mother than to become a mother when she was already a scientist.

Concluding thoughts

The CQVM platform presents several characteristics that sit well within the contemporary digital activism phenomenon. Being connected in a network, mothers who are community users and fans (like us – the two writers of this article) can search for important on issues such as humane births, breastfeeding, nutrition, raising children, gender inequality, as well as political issues that directly affect mothers, such as the employment reform plan being carried out by the Temer Government[15] in Brazil. In this context, CQVM's agenda focuses on issues such as the promotion on an equal and fair society, which is more respectful and welcoming to mothers. This includes issues such as the importance of not portraying a

romanticized version of motherhood; a discussion of how mother are overburdened with double (and even triple) shifts of work and domestic duties; the unequal share of responsibilities between women and men when it comes to raising children; the struggle against obstetric violence, among others. This suggests that initiatives such as CQVM have an empowering nature, as mothers can share their experiences and have their knowledge recognized (Lévy, 1998). This is meaningful because we have a history of undervaluing women's knowledge in our society, prioritizing authority figures represented by medical doctors, for instance, and other specialists. We can literally play with the words here: such initiatives are relevant because scientists can assume a broader identity as mothers and mothers can assume a broader identity as scientists, opposing reductionist representations of what it means to be a woman and a mother. We believe that this represents a welcome contribution to both studies of feminism and communication as little research on the relationships between motherhood, feminism and media has been carried out (Tomaz, 2015).

Additionally, CQVM presents many elements in common with the independent journalism approaches, searching for different dynamics for generating and sharing information that do not fit within the philosophy of mainstream hegemonic commercial media. In order to achieve this, the platform adopted a crowding model of financing – mothers who are part of the maternal rights blogosphere make a financial contribution towards the writing of the articles, without any interference from big corporations. As Lígia explains in the blog, such model offers important advantages to readers and members of the community, such as not exposing them to advertising. In this way, some mothers can act as funders of quality information for all mothers, creating a collective vision of collaboration, solidarity, and responsibility.

Nevertheless, we need to bear in mind that digital activism initiatives like CQVM are both important and imperfect, and that, indeed, this is natural. As Castells (2013) argues, having a good degree of self-reflection is perhaps the most important element here, in a sense that activists can be constantly evaluating, adjusting, and improving their practices. With the Brazilian maternal rights activist movement, it seems wise to acknowledge that the movement is still predominantly white, and that it could become more inclusive by incorporating perspectives from

intersectional feminism, for instance. Here, we should not merely interpret intersectionality as heavy bricklayers of oppression – gender, race, class, sexual orientation etc - being piled up, one on top of the other, over women's shoulders. For us, intersectional feminism means much more: it represents a methodological approach, which, in our case, has been proving productive in a sense that the maternal rights activism needs to recognize the multiple realities faced by mothers of different classes, races, sexual orientations, among so many other elements involved in being a mother. Finally, we also believe that intersectional feminism represents a political stance that we, as researchers and as white feminists must urgently take. It seems vital that we recognize our own privileges, that we listen and empathize with black mothers, and, yes, it is crucial that we join them in their struggles against oppression. By failing to do so, we will be turning a blind eye on the role that we (perhaps unwittingly) might be playing to further racially oppress women. As women, it is true to say that we are all frequently oppressed in our experiences of citizenship and motherhood, but it is just as true to acknowledge that we should never become each other's oppressors.

* English version Andrea Medrado.

NOTES

1   The original version was published in 1949.

2   Interview for the YouTube "Por quê não?" (Why Not?), in April 2016. The reader can find it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAfdacq9Lh8.

3   To find out more about these independent journalism platforms, their links are: https://apublica.org / https://ponte.org / https://briohunter.org / https://thinkolga.com / https://www.jota.info.

4   Women, Mothers, and Changes (Mulher, mãe e mudanças). Interview for the YouTubeChannel "Por quê não?" Abr/2016.

5   The think thank *Think Olga* aims to provide empowerment through information (thinkolga.com).

6   The Alana Foundation describes itself as a nonprofit civil society organization that brings together projects that ensure conditions for children to fully experience their childhoods. More information: www.alana.org.br

7   In the film, the character used the expression 'you is kind, you is smart, you is important'.

8   The full text can be found on the following adress - https://cientistaquevироумae.com.br/blog/textos/voce-e-gentil-voce-e-inteligente-voce-e-importante-o-poder-do-discurso-de-todos-nos.

9   The original piece in Portuguese can be found here - http://pretamaterna.blogspot.com.br/search?q=cientista+que+virou+m%C3%A3e. It is important to point out that the blog *Preta Materna* is no longer active. However, its founder Guaraciara Gonçalves has kindly granted us full access to it.

10 The full original piece can be found here - https://cientistaquevироумae.com.br/blog/textos/voce-e-gentil-voce-e-inteligente-voce-e-importante-o-poder-do-discurso-de-todos-nos (accessed 29 October 2017).

11 Link for the website - https://www.geledes.org.br, Facebook fan page is @geledes, with over 678 thousand likes and the Twitter profile is @geledes with over 30 thousand followers.

12 Facebook fan page is @nosmulheresdaperiferia, with over 25 thousand likes. The website can be found at www.nosmulheresdaperiferia.com.br.

13 naomechamomae.com.br/pt-BR.

14 amaepreta.com.br. The Temer Government took power in April 2006, after a constitutional coup removed Dilma Roussef, from the Workers' Party from power.

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