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Situating #MeToo: A comparative analysis of the movement in Catalonia and Portugal

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Situating #MeToo: A comparative analysis of the movement in Catalonia and Portugal

Abstract

Since its re-emergence in 2017, the #MeToo movement has been adopted across the globe. #MeToo has a transnational dimension, transcending its initial US context and placing international issues alongside national concerns. This article aims to contextualize and situate #MeToo, providing a critical review of the movement in two local contexts – Catalonia (Spain) and Portugal. The analysis is grounded on empirical observations on social media, drawing as well on previous scholarship on the topic produced both internationally and in the contexts of study, and on the engagement with relevant national media sources. By focusing on national expressions of #MeToo in Portugal and Catalonia, this article explores how #MeToo took shape in (and was shaped by) the local contexts and existing feminist practices. It presents the different temporalities and dynamics of the movement in these two contexts, exploring the roles of both social media and traditional press in the local developments of #MeToo, and also briefly exploring the local legislative implications of the movement. This article thus presents #MeToo as common and easily recognisable frame used in local contexts to approach different issues of sexual and gendered violence, yet flexible enough to allow for national specificities.

Keywords

Catalonia, comparative analysis, feminist activisms, media, MeToo, Portugal, transnational

Situating #MeToo: A comparative analysis of the movement in Catalonia and Portugal

#MeToo has had a global symbolic impact, helping to engage millions of people world wide with issues of sexual harassment and assault, mainstreaming feminist discussions and developing feminist consciousness and solidarity (Mendes et al., 2018; Rottenberg, 2019).

The movement has also highlighted the role media and social media play in an ambivalent experience of globalization – juxtaposing different contexts and allowing for the intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness (Giddens, 1991: 23–27). The events that triggered #MeToo in the US became common knowledge in contexts as physically distant as Portugal or Spain, presented alongside and interrelated with local events and debates. In this context, issues like misogyny or sexual assault become shared globalized concerns, with political causes circulating beyond its points of origin, and often being adapted to the realities of new local contexts (Sorce and Dumitrica, 2022). In response, practices of digital activism can gain transnational dimensions, enabling cross cultural coalitions and cooperation (Sorce and Dumitrica, 2022: 158).

Despite its global scale, research on #MeToo has privileged a UScentric perspective (QuanHaase et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to remain critical of overlyoptimistic claims of ‘global feminism’, which risk becoming universalizing and reductive, often reinforcing existing power differentials that centre issues relevant to the Global North (Sorce and Dumitrica, 2022: 159).

For instance, anglophone scholarship is rife with debates on the potential of online feminism to push the implementation of institutional changes (ClarkParsons, 2022). This concern is partly motivated by the hegemony of neoliberal feminism, which acknowledges gender inequality while ignoring its underlying socioeconomic and cultural causes (BanetWeiser et al., 2020), equating feminist freedom with individual choices and empowerment within the capitalist marketplace (Baer, 2016; Saraswati, 2021). Similarly, popular feminism – understood as practices accessible to a broad public, such as hashtag or commodity activism (BanetWeiser et al., 2020) – brings forward spectacular, mediafriendly expressions like celebrity or corporate feminisms. These expressions coexist with collective struggles to tackle intersectional and systemic oppressions, as exemplified by the historical struggle of women’s groups in Latin American countries like Argentina (BanetWeiser et al., 2020; MasonDeese, 2018). These distinct dynamics can coexist within movements like #MeToo, with local practices foregrounding existing differences and tensions.

The present article seeks to expand this scholarship by using a crosscultural analysis that explores how the movement has developed in different spaces (QuanHaase et al., 2021: 1700), exploring the interaction between traditional and social media practices. The virality and widespread use of the hashtag #MeToo has led to the general framing of the movement as hashtag activism (Jackson et al., 2020). While this partially accounts for the dynamics underlying the movement, #MeToo also relied heavily on traditional media for its amplification and legitimation (Farrow, 2017; Kantor and Twohey, 2017; Tufekci, 2013: 856). Traditional media can motivate the creation of hashtags, while the mass adoption of these hashtags can highlight the importance of a topic, thus leading to more media coverage. In this way, hashtags like #MeToo can have

an agendasetting function in relation to traditional media – directing attention to issues and placing them on a public agenda (Carter Olson, 2016).

Methodology

The article starts from the question: how did #MeToo took shape in (and was shaped by) the local contexts and existing feminist practices of Catalonia and Portugal? This is addressed through a feminist crosscultural analysis (e.g. Adler, 1997; Reinharz, 1992) that interrogates universalizing narratives and highlights sociocultural specificities. Facilitated by the collaboration between authors who originate from each context studied, this article offers a holistic and critical review of #MeToo in two distinct local contexts in the 5 years since its popular 2017 reemergence.

This article is grounded on direct unstructured observations (Given, 2008: 907–908) on the social media platforms most used in #MeToo in these national contexts: Instagram and Twitter. It also engages with relevant media sources, mostly newspapers and news magazines. Data collection was conducted between September and December 2022, but the collection extended diachronically reaching back to content created since the emergence of the #MeToo movement. These observations offer a situated perspective on the movement, recognizing the transnational specificities that complexify, and at times disrupt, widely known US #MeToo narratives (Ghadery, 2019). #MeToo thus serves as a starting point, a common topic and temporal frame to discuss issues of sexual harassment and gendered violence, although the hashtag #MeToo was not always necessarily used in the studied contexts.

The collected data was critically interpreted, writing analytic memos with emerging reflections and interpretations (Maxwell and Chmiel, 2014), to create an interplay between data, emerging interpretations and concepts and debates from prior scholarship produced both internationally and in the contexts of study. Drawing on a feminist media studies perspective (van Zoonen, 1994), this article foregrounds the intersections between media practices and gendered power dynamics.

Following this introduction, this text lays the grounds for comparing the Catalan and Portuguese cases through a brief historical contextualization. It then presents the development of #MeToo in each context, exploring the roles played by social media and traditional press, as well as briefly exploring the local policy and community implications of the movement. These two contexts are brought together in the conclusion.

Catalonia and Portugal: a comparison

Despite sharing a Catholic, Southern European background, Catalonia and Portugal are not homogeneous contexts (Santos and Pieri, 2020: 196). Catalonia is an autonomous region in the Northeast of Spain, being a nation with its own language, culture and political history. According to the Catalan Institute of Statistics, in January 2022 it had 7,747,709 inhabitants. This is roughly comparable to the population size of Portugal, which according to the 2021 national census, had 10,344,802 inhabitants.

Both contexts have been under dictatorial regimes in similar time periods – with Catalonia, due to its political belonging to Spain, being under Franco's rule between

1939 and 1975, and Portugal under the *Estado Novo* regime between 1933 and 1974. The Catholic fundamentalist underpinnings of both dictatorships relegated women to the roles of mothers, daughters and wives, rendering them economically dependent on their husbands or fathers, barring them from exercising any form of political participation, as well as negating their rights to contraception and bodily autonomy (Arriaza Ibarra and Berumen, 2019; Melo, 2017; Nash, 2013; Tavares, 2008).

After the fall of the dictatorships, Spain and Portugal implemented various legislative measures pushing for gender equality (Melo, 2017: 262–263). There was also a rise in feminist campaigns on issues like abortion rights, protection against domestic violence and equal marriage and LGBTIQ+ rights (Arriaza Ibarra and Berumen, 2019; Melo, 2017; Nash, 2013; Tavares, 2008).

Catalan and Portuguese institutions created their own forms of ‘state feminism’. In 1989, the Catalan government founded the Catalan Institute of Women, the main institution overseeing the implementation of feminist policies on a governmental level, until the creation of the Catalan Ministry of Equality and Feminisms in 2021. Institutional feminism has coexisted (and at times conflicted) with a lively array of feminist activism that addresses issues like racism, ableism, or LGBTIQ+ rights (Palomares Arenas and Garcia Grezner, 2012; Willem and Tortajada, 2021).

More recently, feminist activism became connected with protests reacting to the 2008 economic crisis that hit Southern European countries. In 2014, the Catalan feminist network #VagadeTotes organized a strike to call attention to the domestic labour performed by women, who have been affected by pro-austerity cuts on welfare state provisions. In the same year, Catalan and Spanish feminists also successfully prevented the passing of a conservative reform that would restrict abortion rights (Castaño, 2019; Ideograma et al., 2019). Feminist networks with strong online presence also organized the massive Women’s Marches held in Catalonia in 2018 and 2019 (Florés, 2021).

Catalan and Spanish feminisms were influenced by international actions, such as the Argentinian campaigns for legalizing abortion, and their #NiUnaMenos movement against femicides (Ideograma et al., 2019; Villaverde, 2022). Catalan activists also created alliances with feminist groups from neighbouring country Andorra, establishing a network to help Andorran women circumvent the abortion prohibition in their country by travelling to Catalan hospitals (Sanz, 2019).

In Portugal, institutional feminism has been the major moving force for the implementation of important legislative changes, in part incentivized by international pressure due to the integration in the European Union, rather than emerging from grassroots movements and bottom-up mobilizations (Santos and Pieri, 2020). As such, legislative changes were not necessarily accompanied by cultural change, and feminist issues can still be received with significant resistance today (Simões and Silveirinha, 2022: 2). During the early 2000s, while anti-austerity protests and feminist protests, such as Women’s Marches or Slutwalk protests, also took place in Portugal, these had a somewhat limited adhesion – as did many hashtag campaigns in this period (e.g. Babo & Silva, 2017; Cerqueira, 2021; Garraio et al., 2020). However, like in Catalonia, the arrival of #MeToo in Portugal coincided with a moment when issues of sexual

harassment and sexual violence rose to public consciousness, in light of protests contesting judicial decisions of sexual violence cases (Flor, 2017).

#MeToo in Catalonia

In Catalonia, several sexual harassment cases involving public figures, as well as ordinary men, were reported by either ordinary women – on online social media – or journalists – in the mass media. Cases regarding the arenas of theatre and politics ignited heated public discussions about the management of sexual harassment cases by institutions. While these cases build on local histories of feminist mobilizations and were not necessarily framed as a Catalan expression of #MeToo, their temporalities and dynamics nevertheless create parallels to those observed in the US movement and were partially influenced by it. At times these references to #MeToo became explicit, as in the Instagram and Twitter account @MeTooUAB, devoted to unveiling sexual harassment cases at the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

In July 2018, actress Andrea Ros published a post on Facebook explaining that Lluís Pasqual, director of the prestigious Barcelona theatre Teatre Lliure, had mistreated her during the rehearsals of *King Lear*. The situation led to Pasqual's resignation and sparked the creation of the hashtag #SerActriuÉs (*Being an actress means*), where Catalan actresses reflected on the sexism endured at the workplace (Redacció UPF, 2018).

In February 2021, newspaper *Ara* reported that twelve teachers at the Catalan Institute of Theatre (IT), one of the most important acting schools of the country, had been engaging in practices of abuse of power against students (Llimós and Juanico, 2021). One of the teachers was renowned theatre director Joan Ollé. The accusations led to a cascade of resignations of several top executives of the IT (RAC1, 2021). The institution barred Ollé from teaching and initiated an investigation to shed light on the accusations. The inquiry concluded that, despite deeming his conduct as 'inappropriate', no further disciplinary measures against him could be adopted, because Ollé had already cut ties with the institution at the time the results were published. The IT transferred the case, along with the ones of the other eleven teachers, to public prosecution instances for their consideration (Tot Barcelona, 2022).

The journalists who uncovered the case, Albert Llimós and Núria Juanico, were already referents in the reporting of sexual harassment cases in Catalonia. Not only in the theatre sector, but also in sports, universities, the Church or high schools. They have often faced backlash from some of the men accused (Consell de la Informació de Catalunya, 2022a, 2022b).

The denouncement of sexual misconduct reached the field of politics when, at the end of February 2020, the Catalan influencer Juliana Canet started the hashtag #MatxisEI, to expose the sexual harassment perpetrated by men of the pro Catalonia's independence and anticapitalist left (CCMA, 2020). The tweets accusing the mayor of Argentona village, Eudald Calvo, of sexual harassment prompted his resignation from his position (Puig i Sedano, 2020). Calvo was a member of the main political formation of the independentist, anticapitalist left, Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP). In August 2022, the twitter account @AlcaldeAgressor (Aggressor Mayor), warned that Calvo had

the intention to run for mayor of Argentona in May 2023, this time with the centreright, independentist party Junts per Catalunya (JxC) (NoAlcaldeAgressor, 2022). Another relevant case that affected CUP was the exit of Mireia Boya, former member of the Catalan Parliament and of the party's national board, in protest for the party's handling of the harassment she had experienced at the hands of another member of the board (Ara, 2022).

In March 2020, *Ara* newspaper published that Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, an independentist party that in that time was ruling Catalonia in coalition with JxC, had fired the number two of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Carles Garcias, due to sexual harassment allegations by workers of the ministry (Llimós et al., 2020). *Ara* added that the minister himself, Alfred Bosch, had tried to place Garcias on another post. The revelation prompted the resignation of Bosch.

In 2020, Junts per Catalunya expelled its spokesperson in the Catalan Parliament, Eduard Pujol, after two women, one of them a party member, reported him to JxC for sexual harassment. Pujol sued them for slander and threats, and by the time of writing this article the trial is yet to be celebrated. The allegations of the two women led two journalists, Ana Polo and Núria Casas, to publicly denounce that Pujol had sexually harassed them while he was the director of the radio broadcaster RAC1. In 2022, newspaper *El Periódico* published the stories of the four women, as well as of two other ones who also accused Pujol of harassment (Sánchez, 2022). Currently, Pujol hosts a Saturday night show on the TV channel 8tv.

In July 2022, digital medium *Nació Digital* published that the vicepresident of JxC and member of the Catalan Parliament, Francesc de Dalmases, had intimidated the deputy director of the public broadcaster's television show *FAQS*, a woman, because he felt the interview to the then president of the Parliament, Laura Borràs, had not been fair (González, 2022a). Three months later, Dalmases resigned from his post as vicepresident after the report commissioned by his party concluded that he did act in a manner that made the deputy director feel intimidated (ACN, 2022). The Catalan Parliament punished Dalmases with a 600euros fine for the intimidation (Mascaró, 2022). In November 2022, *El Periódico* published the stories of five women who accused him of either mobbing, sexual harassment, or abuse of power (González, 2022b). Neither the party nor the Catalan parliament took any measures regarding that issue. The journalist who uncovered the story, Sara González, suffered a massive online backlash from JxC supporters. Considering the events, the Catalan Ministry of Feminisms offered psychological and legal assistance to the women harassed by Dalmases, and the Catalan Association of Journalists opened a 'purple spot service' to assist women journalists who had suffered harassment of any kind.

Expanding the frame of hashtag activism in Catalonia

The starting point of the #MeToo movement in Catalonia was the popular uproar generated by the gangrape of a young woman during the celebration of the San Fermes festivities in Nafarroa's region city of Iruñea in 2016 (Ideograma et al., 2019; Villaverde, 2022), a case popularly known as *La Manada* (The WolfPack). As Abrisketa and Abrisketa (2021) explain, on 17 November 2017, feminist groups convened massive demonstrations in all the major Spanish cities to support the victim. In April 2018, they

took the streets again to protest the sentences imposed on the rapists, which escaped the penalty for sexual assault because most of the court members considered that physical violence had not been used against the victim (Abrisketa and Abrisketa, 2021).

La Manada case encouraged public discussions regarding sexual violence and the notion of consent in sexual relationships. As Villaverde (2022) recalls, mass media were key in that discussion. On the one hand, the survivor of the gangrape found in media a safe space to tell her story. On the other, the media coverage of the demonstrations provided the framework for explaining the demands of their participants, giving voice to feminist experts that shed light on the structural nature of sexual violence. Media coverage of *La Manada* contrasted, thus, with the one of the US #MeToo, framed by relevant Spanish newspapers like *El País* and *Abc* as sexual harassment cases suffered by Hollywood celebrities (Portela and Sosa Sánchez, 2022).

After the issuing of the sentence to *La Manada*, journalist Cristina Fallarás created the Twitter hashtag #Cuéntalo (Tell it) to compile genderbased violence stories disseminated online – a dynamic that echoes that of #MeToo. #Cuéntalo (2017) gathered more than 160,000 stories from women worldwide, with most tweets issued from Spain (38%) and Argentina (30%) (Villaverde, 2022). In the following years, concentrations in Catalonia and Spain were held to support survivors of cases like the gangrape of a teenager in the Catalan town of Manresa or the rape of a young woman in the town of Igualada, as well as to protest the ongoing sexual and labour abuse endured by Moroccan women who worked in Andalusian strawberry fields (El Periódico, 2019; Público, 2018; Público, 2021).

The other main expression of feminist, online mobilizations were the massive Women Marches celebrated on 8 March of 2018 and 2019, which gathered millions of people on the streets of the main Spanish cities (Abrisketa and Abrisketa, 2021). Online mobilization was key for the success of the marches (Florés, 2021; Ideograma et al., 2019). Catalan Women's Marches were organized by Coordinadora 8M Catalunya, a platform that, drawing from the #VagaDeTotes network, gathered feminist collectives and activists.

Women journalists were one of the most active collectives in 2018 and 2019 marches. Assembled in online groups like the Spanish Las Periodistas Paramos or its Catalan version, Les Periodistes ens Aturem (in both cases, 'Feminist journalists stop'), they demanded equal working conditions by issuing their own manifestos, sparking the hashtags #LesPeriodistesParem, #LesPeriodistesEnsAturem and #LesPeriodistesFemVaga, as well as organising strikes that altered the regular emission of TV and radio shows and left some journal pages blank (BernalTriviño and Sanz-Martos, 2020; Florés, 2021).

Policy and community implications of #MeToo in Catalonia

In the 5year period studied, Catalonia and Spain saw a growth in feminist action aimed at dismantling structural gender inequalities. Even though some hashtag initiatives were spearheaded by journalists and influencers, anonymous women also organized in their own feminist online spaces – like in the case of @MeTooUAB and @AlcaldeAgressor – and the Women's marches of 2018 and 2019 were organized by

feminist collectives with a solid activist tradition. This collective and structural oriented feminism can be attributed to the history of feminisms in Catalonia and Spain after the fall of the Francoist dictatorship, which has been shaped by the tensions between socialdemocratic institutional feminism and grassroots feminisms very critical of capitalism and neoliberalism (Gago Gelado, 2019; Vila, 2018).

Despite institutional resistances to address sexual violence as a structural problem and the backlash of some of the men accused, feminist mobilizations crystallized in institutional measures. In 2020, the Catalan Parliament amended the Law on the right of women to eradicate sexist violence (Act 5/2008), to include the tackling of more types of violence against women. One year later, the Catalan government created the Ministry of Equality and Feminisms. In 2021 the Spanish government established its Ministry of Equality, which spearheaded the creation of the Law of comprehensive guarantee of sexual freedom (Act 10/2022).

Finally, the convergence of feminist activism with the action of feminist media and press agencies forced media outlets to rethink how to mainstream a gender perspective in their coverage of current affairs. In certain cases, this led to either the creation of gender editors or the training of journalists in feminist issues (IranzoCabrera et al., 2023; Villaverde, 2022).

#MeToo in Portugal

The development of #MeToo in Portugal can be roughly framed around two distinct moments: the first, between 2017 and 2018, which covered the movement mainly as an international issue; and a moment of resurgence of #MeToo in 2021, marked by a wave of accusations of harassment in Portugal.

Initial coverage of #MeToo in Portuguese media focused mostly on international cases like those of Harvey Weinstein, Brett Kavanaugh, and other high profile figures (e.g. Almeida, 2019; Freitas, 2020; Garraio et al., 2020; Prata, 2021; Silveirinha et al., 2020). At the time, few Portuguese public figures came forward with their experiences of sexual harassment, without naming their aggressors (Freitas, 2020: 147, 150), unlike the waves of public accusations observed in other international contexts.

During this first moment, only two cases centred #MeToo around Portuguese issues: a polemic judicial decision regarding a rape case in Vila Nova de Gaia; and football player Cristiano Ronaldo's rape accusations (Prata, 2021: 41).

In 2016, two men who worked in a nightclub in Vila Nova de Gaia, in the north of Portugal, raped an unconscious woman. In 2018 the judicial decision was announced: although the men were deemed guilty, the judge gave them a suspended sentence with no jail time, arguing that their guilt was attenuated by the intoxication of the victim, and that the club was an 'environment of mutual seduction'. This decision elicited public indignation and protests across the country, being seen as a reflection of the systemic misogyny of the Portuguese judicial system (Prata, 2021: 46–48). The case was frequently framed by news media in light of #MeToo, however, protests also drew inspiration from feminisms in other national contexts, for example making references to the *La Manada* case, with slogans like 'Manada à portuguesa, não de certeza!' (roughly translated as: Portuguesestyle *La Manada*, surely not!) (Prata, 2021: 48).

The peak of national engagement with #MeToo happened in 2018, with the rape allegations against Cristiano Ronaldo (Garraio et al., 2020; Silveirinha et al., 2020). This case was extensively covered in traditional media, pushing the visibility of the debate on sexual violence. While the accusations against Ronaldo predate #MeToo, the case resurfaced in 2018 with a reportage in the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*. The accuser – Kathryn Mayorga, an American model – framed #MeToo as motivating her to speak out (Garraio et al., 2020: 3–4). However, national public opinion largely sided with Ronaldo, dismissing or trivializing the allegations, and questioning the believability of the victim (Garraio, 2020; Silveirinha et al., 2020). There was a shift in the perception of #MeToo in Portugal, that went from largely positive (when it pertained to international cases) to seeing it as having gone too far (Silveirinha et al., 2020: 217). The backlash and popular misogyny that rose in light of the popular feminist visibility of #MeToo (BanetWeiser, 2018), might have contributed to a lack of further accusations (Garraio et al., 2020).

The #MeToo debate was reignited in 2021 by a wave of accusations of sexual harassment led by Portuguese actresses and celebrities (Pereira et al., 2022; Ropio et al., 2021), thus echoing the original US dynamics. This resurgence was triggered by Sofia Arruda, an actress who shared her experience of sexual harassment on national television in a primetime confessional-style interview. Arruda disclosed that earlier in her career a high executive from a national TV network (not explicitly named) harassed her and attempted to coerce her into dates. Following her refusal, Arruda was blacklisted and prevented from working in the entertainment industry for years. Arruda's case was widely debated in both news outlets and in publications dedicated to fashion, lifestyle and celebrity content.

The case was seen as exemplary of the issues felt in the national cultural and entertainment industries – the small dimension of the industry can prevent victims from speaking out, for fear of professional repercussions (e.g. Cardoso, 2021), and national television networks largely lacked established harassment policies (Peralta, 2021). Following Arruda's declarations, other entertainment public figures, such as Cristina Ferreira or Catarina Furtado, also shared their experiences of workplace sexual harassment. Their remarks highlighted the difficulties of denouncing attackers, emphasizing fears of not being believed or being met by inaction or resistances by the legal system or being countersued for defamation (Mendonça, 2021).

However, echoing criticisms that were pointed at #MeToo in the US, the celebrity focus of this resurgence of #MeToo in Portugal raises questions on the implications of framing feminist issues through a celebrity and entertainment lens (Rottenberg, 2019). While this popular feminism framing allows for media visibility (BanetWeiser, 2018), it risks potentially limiting the scope of experiences who get heard and valued, obscuring those most vulnerable to sexual violence, like low-income workers or women of colour (Rottenberg, 2019: 44–45).

Since 2021, other cases of sexual harassment came to light in Portugal – including cases in various Portuguese universities (e.g. Lusa, 2021; Lusa and P3, 2021) and accusations against the coach of a female football team (e.g. Curado, 2022). These stories were often commented by traditional media using the common frame of #MeToo to situate them in a larger cultural moment, despite not being online-driven cases.

Expanding the frame of hashtag activism in Portugal

Unlike the local hashtag movements and adaptations of the #MeToo dynamics noted in Catalonia – and in other contexts like Spain or France which created local translations of the hashtag, such as #YoTambién or #BalanceTonPorc (Lindgren, 2019: 420–421) – there were no widely used local adaptations of #MeToo in Portugal (Garraio et al., 2020: 1–2). Hashtags that specifically refer to the national context, like #MeTooPortugal or #MeTooPT, count (at the time of writing) with less than 50 posts each. Attempts to start national hashtags were also lacklustre, with the hashtag #EuTambem (a literal translation of #MeToo) being largely filled with posts coming from Brazil, while the hashtag #EuFuiAssediada (I Was Harassed) returns under 20 posts, combined across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The national dimension of the use of the original #MeToo hashtag also remains hard to assess, seemingly having little public expression (Garraio et al., 2020). The large scale of the hashtag #MeToo, with millions of posts, makes it hard to estimate the contributions coming from Portugal, and even Portuguese language posts can often come from other Portuguese speaking contexts, most noticeably Brazil.

During the 2021 resurgence of #MeToo in Portugal, much of the social media response to the case took place directly on Sofia Arruda's Instagram account, in response to her posts promoting the televised interview – rather than in more public-facing hashtags. While Arruda's account was already quite popular, with over 500k followers at the time of writing, these posts received increased levels of engagement. Her post sharing a clip from the TV interview was viewed over 250 thousand times and received over 750 comments, while her subsequent post reacting to the public support received was liked over 30 thousand times – significant numbers for the Portuguese social media sphere. The comments left on these publications were largely supportive – with heart and clapping emojis, expressions of love and belief, comments thanking her for speaking out, or complimenting her bravery. Some comments also shared stories of harassment, stating 'it also happened to me', and we could also find comments from other actresses drawing parallels with their experiences, with one speculating that they were 'almost sure that the same person did the same to me'.

However, within these social media comments we could also note the emergence of backlash doubting the believability of Sofia Arruda's testimony – with commenters questioning why she took so long to come forward, complaining about her decision to not name her aggressor, or misogynistic comments implying that she did it for the attention or that women enjoy being harassed. These discrediting narratives were also echoed in some opinion pieces published in traditional media (e.g. Raposo, 2021), thus highlighting the contentious politics of believability that surround women who speak out about sexual assault (BanetWeiser and Higgins, 2023).

In this way, the analysis of the national manifestations of #MeToo in Portugal makes clear the need to expand our understanding of the movement beyond the frame of hashtag activism (Jackson et al., 2020) that it is often contained within. #MeToo in Portugal exists within a wider media ecology, largely dependent on mainstream traditional media to disseminate the discussions underlying the movement (Tufekci, 2013: 856), rather than relying on hashtag communication as a means of feminist

action. As the scholarship on the first moment of #MeToo in Portugal (e.g. Almeida, 2019; Freitas, 2020; Garraio et al., 2020; Prata, 2021; Silveirinha et al., 2020) shows, the national discourse on #MeToo was conducted on and dominated by traditional news media. Despite the large media debate created by #MeToo, the discourse on the movement was seen as having an ‘elitist character’, being dominated by established public figures and opinion makers, rather than by feminist activists or ‘ordinary’ people coming forward with their own experiences of harassment (Prata, 2021: 43).

In 2021, in response to Arruda’s case, the news magazine *Visão* attempted to expand the scope of the movement by launching a call for people to share their stories of harassment with the magazine – via email and social media. As a result, 17 women (both public figures and anonymous women) were featured in an article recounting their experiences of sexual harassment, in both personal and work-related contexts. This effort is reminiscent of the dynamics of the #MeToo movement in the US, with news organizations such as CNN giving a platform for survivors to share their personal accounts (Pruchniewska, 2019: 193). *Visão* also attempted to create the national hashtag #EuFuiAssediada (I Was Harassed) to allow for extended participation, although, as was seen earlier, this failed to take hold.

In these ways, the Portuguese manifestations of #MeToo highlight the enmeshment of the movement with traditional media systems and existing celebrity cultures, thus precluding the understanding of #MeToo in Portugal as a purely online hashtag movement (Silveirinha et al., 2020: 210).

Policy and community implications of #MeToo in Portugal

Unlike the institutional measures observed in Catalonia, the impacts of #MeToo in Portugal have been diffuse and mostly understood at a symbolic level, raising consciousness and enabling dialogue on the topic of sexual harassment. Despite the increase of mediatic visibility on the topic, in the years since #MeToo the numbers of complaints of sexual or moral harassment received by CITE (Portuguese Commission for Equality on Work and Employment) have remained extremely low.

The movement did not lead to the direct creation of new legislation (Prata, 2021:41), as sexual harassment and sexual violence were already criminalized in Portugal. However, the rise of #MeToo has led to the emergence of articles offering accessible education about the legal framing of harassment within the Portuguese Penal Code and Labour Code, and actionable information on how to proceed in cases of harassment or assault (e.g. Marques, 2018; Oliveira et al., 2021). The movement highlighted the fragilities and limitations of existing legislation – for example, in Portugal victims of sexual assault can only press charges during the short period of six months following the incident, and the crime prescribes after 5 years (ten in cases of rape). The attention given to these issues has the potential to create pressure for legislative change. Different law proposals were taken up for discussion to the Portuguese Parliament – including proposals to make sexual abuse a public crime, and to extend the complaint periods for victims (Coelho and Lima, 2021; Lopes, 2021) – although the proposals remain to be approved by parliamentary vote.

Conclusions

#MeToo arrived in both Catalonia and Portugal at a time when the two countries were reckoning with debates on issues of sexual violence, caused by cases like *La Manada* or the Vila Nova de Gaia rape. These local histories helped to shape how #MeToo was translated from its initial US context unto different national expressions, transforming #MeToo into a common and easily recognisable frame used in local contexts to approach different issues of sexual and gendered violence.

While there is consolidated scholarship on hashtag activism, as the works cited in this paper show, this article expands these scholarly discussions by foregrounding the Catalan expressions and ramifications of the #MeToo movement, an area still underdeveloped. Similarly, it advances the scholarship of #MeToo in Portugal by considering the recent developments on the movement still absent in the available literature. Furthermore, the comparison between these contexts highlights how a shared movement can develop in distinct yet complementary ways.

#MeToo is generally understood as a hashtag movement (Jackson et al., 2020), how ever in both Catalonia and Portugal traditional journalistic media has played a pivotal role in unveiling stories of sexual harassment, and in amplifying and legitimising the movement. #MeToo thus had an agendasetting function in traditional media (Carter Olson, 2016), pushing attention for issues of sexual violence. Moreover, in Catalonia and Spain, this shift towards feminist media coverage has allowed some outlets to start the process of rethinking sexist dynamics in their newsrooms.

Catalonia and Spain generated a diverse ecosystem of hashtags that engaged with the issue of sexual harassment in different contexts, being used by both anonymous women and public figures. These online engagements also foregrounded other transnational relationships, with Catalan feminists drawing on Latin American and Andorran connections, while Portuguese hashtag engagements were often overshadowed by Brazilian online mobilisations. In contrast, while #MeToo in Portugal had different moments, the movement became largely associated with celebrity cultures, firstly with the rape accusations and public defence of football player Cristiano Ronaldo, and later with the wave of testimonials triggered by actress Sofia Arruda. Grassroots hashtag activism was limited, with Portuguese #MeToo hashtags failing to gain traction and online engagement often taking place in less public-facing arenas, like comments in celebrities' posts.

#MeToo-related hashtag activism flourished in Catalonia in part due to the political climate of the time, with feminist activist groups being quite active, diverse and politically influential. This was accompanied by massive public protests in relation to polemic cases or to mark protest days. In Portugal, while the movement was widely covered by traditional media, public protests were more modest, in part due to the national reliance on institutional rather than bottom-up feminism.

In Catalonia, media and popular pressure led to the resignation of some men involved in sexual harassment cases. In addition, Catalan and Spanish governments adopted legislative and executive initiatives to tackle sexual violence. These cases exemplify forms of popular feminist activism that were able to push for change in public policies and mass media practices. Drawing from local social-democrat and anti-

capitalist traditions, these practices move from seeking individual empowerment within a neoliberal system, to a focus on the collective as well as the structural.

In Portugal the impact of the movement was more on the level of public discussion, with the movement setting the path for the discussion of further legislative measures. Bringing renewed political visibility to issues of gendered violence and inequality, the dialogues enabled by #MeToo in Portugal can thus contribute to lessen the taboo surrounding the topic and create an awareness that can ground future mobilisations.

However, it is important to acknowledge that these contributions do not go unchallenged, as both contexts saw moments of online backlash against some of the women involved in the cases – including the journalists who covered their stories – and few measures have been adopted for dismantling structural conditions for sexual violence.

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