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The Working Conditions of Feminist Media Activists From the Global
South to the Global North



As Condições de Trabalho das Ativistas Feministas dos Mídia do Sul
Global ao Norte Global

Las Condiciones de Trabajo de las Activistas Feministas de los Medios
de Comunicación del Sur al Norte Global

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Abstract: The article aims to discuss, from a transnational perspective, the working and employment conditions of content producers and support staff at digital feminist publications. The goal is to understand the financial returns and individual economic survival strategies; the concerns and frustrations surrounding professional choices; and the emotional strain caused by the media activist experience. The research focuses on analyzing three Brazilian publications (*AzMina*, *Lado M*, and *Think Olga*) and three French ones (*Georgette Sand*, *Les Glorieuses*, and *Madmoizelle*). The global North-South category is mobilized to propose a dialogue between feminist journalism practices in Brazil and France, considering both countries for their relevance on the international geopolitical stage. I use theories of gender studies and feminism as bibliographical support and draw on the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism correlated with social worlds from a Beckerian perspective to trace conventions and forms of cooperation, interaction, and negotiations constructed by the journalists and collaborators of these publications. The methodology is based on in-depth interviews with actors who participate to different degrees in the composition of the world - content producers, support teams, and audiences - to enable multisite comparison and provide evidence of how digital feminist media work. The results show that the practice comes from a context of information production in which technological innovations tend to reduce staff and make working conditions more precarious. At the same time, the environment is a space that generates opportunities to drive transitions in the careers and personal lives of the people involved.

Keywords: Media Activism, Feminisms, Engaged Journalism, Professional Precariousness.

Resumo: O artigo tem como objetivo discutir, a partir de uma perspectiva transnacional, as condições de trabalho e emprego de produtoras(es) de conteúdo e da equipe de apoio em publicações feministas digitais. Pretende-se entender os retornos financeiros e as estratégias individuais de sobrevivência econômica; as preocupações e frustrações em torno das escolhas profissionais; e a tensão emocional causada pela experiência de ativismo na mídia. A pesquisa se concentra na análise de três publicações brasileiras (*AzMina*, *Lado M. ThinkOlga*) e três francesas (*Georgette Sand*, *Les Glorieuses. Madmoizelle*). A categoria Norte-Sul global é mobilizada para propor um diálogo entre as práticas de jornalismo feminista no Brasil e na França, recorrendo-se aos dois países por serem representações de relevo no cenário geopolítico internacional. Utilizo as teorias sobre estudos de gênero e feminismos como apoio bibliográfico e recorro ao arcabouço teórico do interacionismo simbólico correlacionado aos mundos sociais da perspectiva beckeriana para traçar convenções e formas de cooperação, de interação e as negociações construídas pelas jornalistas e colaboradoras dessas publicações. A metodologia apoia-se em entrevistas em profundidade com atores que participam em diferentes graus da composição do mundo para possibilitar a comparação multissítio e dar indícios das formas de funcionamento das mídias feministas digitais. Os resultados apontam que a prática estudada advém de um contexto de produção de informação em que as inovações tecnológicas tendem a reduzir quadros funcionais e a precarizar condições de trabalho dos profissionais. Ao mesmo tempo, o ambiente é também um espaço gerador de oportunidades para impulsionar transições na carreira e na vida pessoal dos atores.

Palavras-chave: Midiativismo, Feminismos, Jornalismo Engajado, Precarização Profissional.

Resumen: El artículo pretende debatir las condiciones de trabajo y empleo de las productoras y productores de contenidos y el personal de apoyo en las publicaciones feministas digitales. El objetivo es comprender los rendimientos financieros y las estrategias individuales de supervivencia económica; las preocupaciones y frustraciones en torno a las opciones profesionales; y la tensión emocional causada por la experiencia de activismo en los medios de comunicación. La investigación se centra en el análisis de tres publicaciones brasileñas y tres francesas. Se moviliza la categoría global Norte-Sur para proponer un diálogo entre las prácticas periodísticas feministas en Brasil (*AzMina*, *Lado M*, y *Think Olga*) y Francia (*Georgette Sand*, *Les Glorieuses*, y *Madmoizelle*), considerando ambos países por su relevancia en el escenario geopolítico internacional. Utilizo como soporte bibliográfico teorías de los estudios de género y del feminismo y el marco teórico del interacionismo simbólico correlacionado con los mundos sociales desde para rastrear convenciones y formas de cooperación, interacción y

negociación construidas por las periodistas y colaboradoras de estas publicaciones. La metodología se basa en entrevistas en profundidad con actores que participan en distinto grado en la composición del mundo para permitir la comparación multisitio y aportar evidencias sobre las formas de trabajo de los medios feministas digitales. Los resultados muestran que la práctica procede de un contexto de producción de información en el que las innovaciones tecnológicas tienden a reducir el personal y a precarizar las condiciones de trabajo. Al mismo tiempo, el medio es un espacio que genera oportunidades para impulsar transiciones en las carreras y vidas personales de las personas implicadas.

Palabras clave: Activismo Mediático, Feminismos, Periodismo Comprometido, Precariedad Profesional.

1. Introduction

In this article, I analyze a segment of digital journalism, feminist media activism, which, in short, is the process in which feminist activists use socio-technical devices to build new forms of creation and writing on the web using digital technology, online platforms, social media and the appropriation of journalistic techniques. This is a new digital practice, that has been gaining momentum since 2015, in which feminist collectives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and publications share information on the internet that covers the gender debate and the rights of women and feminized groups. Although these are projects with different statuses (NGOs, collectives, women's magazines, feminist magazines, and websites), they share the central aim of producing quality feminist information based on journalistic investigation and precepts of form and writing derived from standard reporting.

Media activist content has a collaborative, intersectional, and activist character and is concerned with extending the narrative to defend certain causes, involving the public and pluralizing the debate, in the case of feminist media activism, on gender (Santos & Miguel, 2019). They therefore use digital activism strategies to democratize knowledge and pluralize sources and information (Bentes, 2015). Media activism is, therefore, a phenomenon that predates the internet and interactions on digital networks but it is growing stronger in a scenario of mutations that are transforming the medium and altering processes of production, reception, and circulation of content. However, the movement is by no means limited to the online environment and extends to street actions (Braithigh & Câmara, 2018). It is a practice that is built up as it also goes through the stories and intimacies of the actors who make up the medium and who insert themselves into events in such a way as to ensure that media activism goes beyond the simple fusion of the notions of media and activism. It is a concept that is expressed not only through words and techniques but above all through people.

Feminist media also find support in networked productions, tracing new forms of creation and writing using technology (Lemos, 2009). Appropriating new media is more than an instrumental process, it is also a cultural and social movement (Manovich, 2005), a way for minority groups to make themselves socially visible, giving rise to a new way of politically exercising their rights (Martín-Barbero, 2014, p. 108). Publications such as magazines, websites, NGOs, and feminist collectives have begun to share information in the digital environment related to the gender debate and the rights of women and feminized groups[1], giving rise to the notion of digital feminist media activism. Without neglecting the techniques and professional ethics (Sousa, 2017), media activism absorbs resources characteristic of network communication to get closer to the public. For example, it uses hashtags, terms associated with information that have a high potential for organizing and distributing content (Hollanda, 2019).

At the same time, in a context in which socio-historical research themes such as economic development, industrial policy, racial and ethnical relations, national identities, the emergence of democratic and authoritarian governments, and gender and women's rights have gained prominence (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). In this context, drawing a parallel between the cases of Brazil and France, as representative of the global South and North, seems to contribute to the analysis of a transnational perspective of the world of digital feminist media activism, permeated by the context of engagement based on the use of socio-technical devices.

The notion of transnationality is mobilized through transformations linked to the globalization of economic flows and cultural, social, and organizational changes in journalism (Le Cam & Pereira, 2022). Thus, starting from different locations, ages, socio-economic circumstances and crossed by a process of transnationalization of media activist and feminist practices, the group of collaborators in the projects studied try to create, through the production of digital feminist information, “an inclusive, unifying and legitimizing narrative that is effective in combining spontaneity and organization, antiquity and novelty, experience and amateurism, local and international scale, fragmentation and unity” (Guevara, 2015, p. 55).

Elements of national identity and habits of using technology or even militant and activist tools make the observation of these two cases more dynamic as the field unfolds and analysis emerges. Factors such as digital immersion, for example, make Brazilian militant movements stand out in activism on the networks, launching new techniques of militancy and engaged action online, as happened with feminist media initiatives in Brazil from 2015, long before MeToo and its developments in France.

The interdependence of phenomena between different places is linked to factors such as globalization, reciprocal influences, the increased transversality of public policies, and the growing role of international actors in terms of public actions (Hassenteufel, 2014). It is this context that leads me to conduct transnational research into a recent socio-political phenomenon that is unfolding not only in Brazil and France, but around the world.

2. A Practice That Crosses the World From North to South

The analysis of the materials collected throughout this research makes it possible to perceive a transnational movement of feminism, which is common to the two countries where the fieldwork was carried out directly (Brazil and France), and which also appears in the experiences of media activists working in other locations (Argentina, Australia, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom) and the audiences through which the feminist products studied circulate (which also include Belgium and Switzerland).

Strongly connected by digital activism mobilizations and driven by feminist collectives and personalities committed to the cause, feminist ideals move between different countries, feeding local and regional versions of the movement, to dialogue with the socio-economic, historical, and cultural realities of the populations, but with a shared desire for gender equality as the common thread. There is an involvement and a sense of belonging and commitment both to the causes the media activists defend and to the practices they develop and the people involved in these activities. They also engage with the way of life created by the group around the publications in which they work, developing bonds of friendship and making the living space a component of their daily lives.

In developing a multi-site analysis of the transnational circulation of the phenomenon of digital feminist media activism, I turn to Brazil and France — as countries that are economically, politically, and culturally representative, respectively, of the geopolitical scenarios of the global South and North — to try to understand feminist engaged action aimed at producing information. It was the singularities of the Brazilian and French societies and their discrepancies with each other that instigated me to explore the world of feminist media in each of them. But I also ended up identifying a series of correspondences and similarities between the processes of producing activist and journalistic content in the two countries, allowing me to trace the characteristics and dynamics of the social world in a multi-situated way.

The political, social, and historical differences between Brazil and France indicate that the development of the feminist movement did not take place in parallel in these countries. In Brazil, at the beginning of the 1970s, there was an ongoing military dictatorship at its height, while in France feminists were winning important rights in terms of gender politics, such as access to legal and safe abortion for all. These

mismatches in the activist scene and the progress made on equality agendas are still reflected today in the way feminist activism is organized in each country and in the way the social world of feminist media is constructed from North to South. The experiences and trajectories of people who make up this world are equally affected by historical and political events.

Later, socio-historical research themes, such as economic development, industrial policy, race, and ethnic relations, national identities, the emergence of democratic and authoritarian governments, and gender and women's rights, have gained prominence (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Factors of national identity and habits of using technology such as digital immersion, for example, mean that Brazilian militant movements stand out in activism on the networks, launching new techniques of militancy and engaged action online, as happened with feminist media initiatives in Brazil from 2015, long before MeToo and its developments in France. This phenomenon's transversality leads me to conduct transnational research into a recent socio-political phenomenon that is unfolding not only in Brazil and France but around the world.

3. Methodological Paths

Based on the analysis of field experiences and 63 in-depth interviews with actors who make up the space of feminist media activism in Brazil and France, this paper starts from this initial comparison between two countries representative of the global South and North to make a transactional reading of the observed phenomenon, based on ethnography as a methodology to understand the construction of the social world of feminist media activism and its ways of functioning[2]. In total, 30 interviews were conducted in France and 33 in Brazil, with different participants in the social world (reporters and editors, columnists, readers, accounting and fundraising teams, etc.), between October 2020 and November 2022[3]. The relevance of the work is that it proposes to listen to in-depth accounts of the trajectories of the members of this space and to monitor, through field research, the forms of cooperation and negotiation of the group to oppose anti-feminist agendas.

In Brazil, through the *Agência Pública* project, which mapped independent journalism in the country, it was possible to identify 18 proposals of feminist media that fall within this scope. In France, I found 14 such publications based on bibliographical readings and studies that map gender activism and journalism in the country over the last few decades (Bard & Chaperon, 2017; Blandin, 2017; Hache-Bissette, 2017; Olivesi, 2017; Jouët, 2022). Based on the profiles, interactions (measured by engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments), and the number of followers of these initiatives on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, I selected projects that stand out for their relevance in the so-called Feminist Spring[4] (Alves, 2017). In Brazil, they are the NGO *Think Olga*, the magazine *AzMina*, and the website *Lado M*. In France, they are the *Georgette Sand Collective*, the newsletter *Les Glorieuses*, and the magazine *Madmoizelle*.

The in-depth interviews have a semi-structured format, based on scripts of questions prepared in advance, but which allowed me some freedom to go down paths that were not initially planned. The interview scripts were divided into three types: the first focused on feminist media content producers (reporters, columnists, editors), the second focused on the support team (with more specific questions about what kind of work they do and what their roles and influences are within the group), and the third was designed to be applied to audiences. The interviews mainly cover the professional and personal trajectories of the feminist media activists and their readers. From there, I also delve into the group's experiences in terms of careers, journalism, and political activism. Interactions with other members of the social world and how the practices of producing or consuming engaged and feminist journalism are organized are discussed.

About ethical concerns[5], I chose not to anonymize the media activists interviewed since these actors are publicly engaged in journalistic and/or activist activities and they agreed to participate in the research as representatives of the publications for which they collaborate, agreeing to the disclosure of the content of our conversations and the materials gathered via ethnography during the field experiences in the newsrooms. About audiences, however, some of the interviewees indicated that they would prefer only their first names — but not their last names — to be disclosed. I therefore decided to use only the names of female readers. For the group as a whole, in cases where I believe it is important to preserve personal information and avoid identifying characters linked to reports that may contain intimate stories or descriptions of episodes that could in some way compromise the physical and/or emotional integrity of the interviewees, I cover the testimonies without naming anyone.

The interviews with both contributors and readers of the publications studied were systematized based on general observations, which cut across the conversations with each of these groups, and I organized the information employing demographic, educational and career, militant, and feminist media engagement elements. The elements of analysis were divided into sub-groups of data: age groups and socio-demographic profile; education and professions; conceptions of feminisms; histories of ancestry and descent; forms of violence and strategies of resistance; and trajectories of activism and digital activism. In the case of the media activists, we also separated the parts of the interviews that relate to work routines and ways of negotiating interactions in the social world. With the readers, the information consumption habits of feminist media activist were retraced. The interpretation of the material is structured using the research objectives and the theoretical-methodological concepts mobilized in the research as a foundation.

4. Results

4.1. Financial Returns and Economic Survival Strategies

In terms of funding, an established social world (such as traditional journalism) usually has the means to maintain its working structure. A new world, on the other hand, on breaking away from its world of origin, usually needs to formulate its subsistence strategies, considering the difficulties of being a space that is probably less known and recognized than the previously existing groups with which it dialogues, and with often limited resources (Becker, 1982).

In these situations, teams need to put extra effort into obtaining material resources. Instead of dedicating themselves to doing the end activity, a group of actors needs to spend time and energy making or obtaining materials to make the activity possible. Feminist media activists have to dedicate part of their teams to developing fundraising strategies to sustain their projects. These people are partly or wholly committed to obtaining funding and other ways of economically sustaining their publications, to the detriment of producing content. But despite the constraints caused by the monetary economy, the lack of money is not fatal to the existence of derivations of social worlds.

The financial experience of feminist media activists is usually linked to three categories of representations: (a) the feeling that the profession of journalist is suffering from generalized precariousness — which is not, therefore, a scenario that only affects the world of media activism; (b) the feeling of luck and gratitude for being part of an engaged media environment capable of offering them a set of labor rights; and/or (c) the critical perception of the emotional cost of embarking on media activism careers. How each actor fits into this categorization varies, with some individuals describing that they identify with more than one of these dimensions.

As with the media activists interviewed by Ferron (2016), when the author observes the world of free media, there are recurring reports of precariousness and instability in careers in the speeches of the people interviewed, especially journalists. There is, however, the difference that some of these projects (*AzMina*, *Madmoizelle*, and *Think Olga*) seem to have managed to establish internal management dynamics that allow them to provide employees with situations of stability and/or income that they cannot find in other sectors of journalism.

In general, media activists who are paid by feminist media outlets usually point out that they earn a fair amount for the work they do. They point out that, unlike in other environments where they have worked, they are currently in positions where they do not feel financially exploited. These interviewees reinforce the satisfaction that being part of these publications gives them in terms of working conditions. Sophie (interview, September 1, 2022), who is responsible for brand content at *Madmoizelle*, mentions that, from a financial perspective, she considers herself lucky to have a fixed-term contract.

Anthony and Océane, members of the same publication, also emphasize their sense of relief at the possibility of having a permanent position at the magazine. According to Océane, even though the salary isn't high, the publication has a habit of quickly hiring people on indefinite contracts: "the good thing is that, unlike many media, the contracts are stable. The magazine hires people on permanent contracts very quickly, and having a permanent contract when you're a journalist is very rare" (Océane, *Madmoizelle* journalist, interview, September 2, 2022).

Since these actors are part of a professional logic in which journalists often work as freelancers (Ferron, 2016), the media offering the possibility of fixed positions in their newsrooms gives the team some level of security and comfort. Anthony (*Madmoizelle*, interview, July 20, 2022) admits that although freelance life is more dynamic, having a fixed position in a newsroom is, according to him, more comfortable. It was this feeling of tranquillity that made the fashion reporter, who worked as a freelancer in different media from 2017 to 2021, relieved to be approached by *Madmoizelle* to join the magazine's team permanently.

There are professional circumstances and structures linked to the configuration of the labor market in journalism that interfere with how contributors to engaged publications relate to their careers as media activists — I am paying particular attention to the interviewees who come from the journalistic world since these reports tended to highlight the profession's salary dynamics more often. In the two countries studied it can be seen that, although smaller, engaged media tend to pay less, the general perception of the actors in the social world studied is that larger media also pay poorly and, therefore, the interviewees believe that it is more worthwhile, from the point of view of professional satisfaction, to work in line with a cause they believe in (feminism, anti-racism and/or LGBTI+ rights).

The status of the journalism profession in the country of work and labor legislation are also factors that influence how the interviewees relate to their career choices. Megan (*Les Glorieuses*, interview, July 22, 2022), who is a British-Australian journalist who has chosen to live in France, reports that, at the newsletter where she works three times a week, she is faced with the best working conditions she has ever had in her life. However, the freelance routine, which she still must maintain, remains difficult and exhausting:

they're probably the best working conditions I've ever had. And I think one of the things about not being French and coming to France to work is that the working conditions are very protected, they're better than in London, where I was before, where there was certainly a huge overwork, and in Australia, where I worked long hours. So that's the good, manageable side. The freelance side is terrible. It's working weekends, evenings, all of that.

In Brazil, it was found that although the legislative gaps surrounding the non-regulation of the profession of journalist weaken the category in general, in the context of engaged media, situations were observed that are the opposite of the French reality, with media-activist publications paying better salaries and guaranteeing their teams better working conditions than traditional media. Marília (interview, August 18, 2021), the current operational and technology director of *AzMina* magazine, says that she used to be a reporter for renowned newspapers in the hegemonic media of Salvador (Bahia), covering mainly culture, but also politics and cities. However, she was poorly paid, earning just over one Brazilian minimum wage^[6] — which, in August 2023, is equivalent to R\$1,320 or €243.31.

According to the journalist, joining *AzMina* was a milestone that "transformed the family nucleus" (Marília, interview, August 18, 2021), because it is the best-paid job she has ever had. From the moment she joined the magazine, even though it is still not a job that fully guarantees her labor rights — she is an individual micro-entrepreneur^[7], a way of hiring collaborators in which labor guarantees are reduced and there is no formal contract, a situation that the publication is still looking for the financial means to reverse — the journalist now has a salary that she calls decent.

AzMina has something very symbolic. As soon as I joined, at the end of last year, they told us that we would get a massage session. All you had to do was ask for a refund. It would be an end-of-year present. It was the first time I'd ever had a massage. I thought: "I'll pay for my mother and sister too. I'll give this as a Christmas present. It'll be a massage session for the three of us". It was my mother's first time too, and she's 57. She was very moved and said: "I've never been touched like this". My mother was a woman who had always worked, all her life. She's a nurse, she also graduated from the Federal University of Bahia. She's a woman who's about to retire, but with unemployment in her 50s, she hasn't completed her time of service. She worked all her life, lived for her family, and had her own money. She didn't have underemployment. They were higher-level jobs. But she had never been able to afford this, due to a series of structural issues too, including where this money goes, and what you work for. You work to grow up, for your family, to serve your home, and to look after yourself, at most, to do your nails, to do your hair, to look presentable for work. But not for you. So *AzMina*'s experience was metaphorical, of how a job can trigger so many other things in a person's life. And I'm talking about something symbolic, without even thinking about income, about supporting the household. I support my household. I'm much better paid than any other job I'd have here in Salvador. (Marília, interview, August 18, 2021)

The salary advantages that media activist publications can offer compared to other media activities in Brazil, however, do not eliminate the interviewees' feelings of discomfort regarding the lack of career stability linked to the country's political and economic instability. Even so, in general, in both countries, alternative media journalists, once confronted with economic and organizational mechanisms, seek to base their professionalization on a structure that is convergent with their political principles (Hubé, 2010). Despite the financial costs, the choice of media activism tends to be worthwhile for most of the people interviewed, due to the personal satisfaction that militant action and collective action bring to the group's routine.

In short, the experiences of media activists reinforce the idea that journalism follows the business logic of a utilitarian press, marked by the demands of economic activity (Neveu, 2019), while engaged media try to break free from these ties. The leadership and support staff of the publications, however, end up recognizing that their content is impacted by the competitive context and by economic contingents related to the institutions as media companies (Le Champion, 2015). From the cases of abandonment of the social world studied, it can also be seen that the personal satisfaction and collective belonging found in feminist activist action, while acting as driving forces for engagement, are limited by financial issues and the increasing precariousness of the profession. Media activists try to balance salary expectations, professional investment, and militant desire, in efforts that usually generate more satisfaction than disappointment for the interviewees.

4.2. Concerns and Frustrations About Career Choices

The methodology of this research implies the risk that, as people who still work in the media studied and depend on them to receive their salaries at the end of the month, some of the interviewees were simply not comfortable enough to mention, in an academic interview, constraints in terms of remuneration that they experience or have experienced within the social world. On the other hand, people who had already left these spaces spoke more openly about their perceptions of the employment and financial relationship they had with publications, such as journalist Océane (*Madmoizelle*) and anthropologist Bárbara (*Think Olga*).

Océane, who worked as a multimedia journalist at *Madmoizelle* and gave me an interview at a time when she no longer had a job with the magazine (on September 2, 2022), considers that she was underpaid and lists some problems linked to the financial aspects of her work in the media. She says that, as her salary was low and the cost of living in Paris was quite high, she ended up having to move away. The young woman believes that paying employees less was a choice made by the publication, which, from her point of view, had the organizational and economic conditions that would allow it to make efforts to grant its staff higher and, according to the interviewee, fairer salaries.

I received a minimum wage. That's not enough to live on with a child, for example. It's complicated to live properly on minimum wage if you must have an apartment in Paris. I couldn't afford a place to live in the city, which meant I had to travel 3 hours a day, and that made things complicated. Yes, because not only was the work demanding, but I also didn't have a quality of life that allowed me to rest properly outside of work. (Océane, interview, September 2, 2022)

The concept of precariousness in journalism is a constant in the speeches of the interviewees. This precariousness is reflected in the professional trajectory of a portion of the group, leading some of the members to do more than one job or to combine media activism with their “day job” (Becker, 1982) — which pays them and guarantees their livelihoods. For those who have more than one job, tiredness appears in the emotional speeches of these interviewees interspersed with a sense of conformism, of reaffirmation of the stereotype of the multifunctional journalist, at the same time as they reveal that they are aware of the market dynamics linked to neoliberalism that require them to accumulate functions to support themselves.

Amanda, *AzMina's* sports columnist — a volunteer position she holds alongside her work as a fact-checker for the satirical journalism program *Greg News* and as a writer for the *podcast Revista Maré* — says that “journalists always have several professions, several jobs” (interview, August 27, 2021). The same perception appears in the speeches of other media activists, regardless of the country, nationality, or place of work of the professional.

Megan (*Les Glorieuses*, interview, July 22, 2022), for example, who was a reporter and still freelances for British, Australian, American, and French publications, points out that “journalism is not a financially smart choice”. The interviewee insists on this statement when she reveals that her husband is also a journalist, which she considers to be doubly bad for the family's health since they are both pursuing a career marked by precariousness.

My partner is also a journalist, so that's a doubly bad option. Deciding to work exclusively on feminist journalism has affected my salary greatly. I could be earning much more if I was doing any other type of journalism. Freelance rates are terrible anyway, so the freelancing side does not pay well and many journalists supplement their reporting with content writing or anything like that. I don't do that. I only do reporting, which is very poorly paid. Okay, but it's three days a week. And, you know, the social charges in France are very high. So, no, financially, this is not a good career path for me, but I make enough to continue. (Megan, interview, July 22, 2022)

The salary factor and the stress generated by maintaining personal and family finances, as well as the excessive workload, lead a proportion of media activists — around 10% of those interviewed — to give up the profession. This is what happened, for example, with Marguerite (*Georgette Sand*). She chose to leave journalism because of the insecurity and instability she faced in her career. But she hasn't stopped working hard. She became a *community manager* and aims to create a feminist education company. To support herself financially, she works in the communications department of a company dedicated to social engagement activities which develops actions aimed at solving the problem of menstrual precariousness.

Some of the feminist project collaborators interviewed — 16 people — carry out paid activities and volunteer work for engaged publications in parallel. Most of the volunteer media activists (12 of them) are journalists, and they work for other engaged media, hegemonic media — where they seek to cover gender issues — or work in the communications field as press officers. They keep volunteering because activism gives them personal satisfaction and professional recognition, as they gain visibility in the media by being part of feminist project teams. This group tends to maintain discourses that mix feelings of guilt and shame due to the feeling that they don't do enough for feminist publishing. They report that they wish they had more time to contribute more regularly to the production of content, but the routine of reconciling voluntary activity with other work doesn't allow them to write as much as they would like.

I'm ashamed to say it, I haven't written for AzMina in seven months. I'm finding it very difficult. I think it's very sad for me. I blame myself a lot. I'm ashamed! (...) But it's down to my schedule that I haven't found the time to write. (Amanda, AzMina columnist, interview, August 27, 2021)

Although the financial factor runs through their routines and speeches, media activists seem reluctant to admit, sometimes even to themselves, the relevance of this element in their lives. Such attitudes reinforce the stereotype that activism should be an activity motivated essentially by passion — with no remunerative returns (Souza, 2016). That's why Bárbara (*Think Olga*, interview, July 30, 2021), who worked as an administrative assistant at *Think Olga*, was somewhat surprisingly honest about what gave her the most satisfaction at work: "in every job, at the end of the day, what we want to see is a paycheck. Working with a cause is no different. It's a job, like any other".

4.3. Emotional Damage Caused by the Media Activist Experience

If, on the one hand, actors in the social world analyzed are looking for alternatives to conventional logics of professional activity — whether in journalism or in other areas — in which professionals are encouraged to work without allowing themselves to feel, causing problems for the physical and mental health of the worker (Jeantet, 2021), on the other hand, being part of engaged media, even if it allows emotions to be exposed, also brings emotional and material damage — resulting from contact with sources, audiences, haters, and stories of violence against women and minority groups.

The affective expressions that appear most frequently in the interviewees' statements are a set of emotions that lead to feminist engagement or distance interviewees from it. In this way, affections explain the link with the world analyzed. Media activists tend to use anger, as a form of reaction to one or more adversities, experienced in confrontation with situations of sexism, misogyny, and gender violence, as a driving force for engagement. The experience of activism generates exhaustion — as a drive or impulse in the face of working and/or activist conditions and in the face of the limits of engaged action concerning everyday activities - and frustration — a reflex emotion that appears over time and in the face of stagnation or socio-political setbacks in the face of the agendas for gender equality and the expansion of women's rights demanded by the group.

However, feelings of pleasure tend to predominate — a state of mind that actors find through immersion in the social world, linked to the execution of the activist practice itself and especially to contact with other people whose ideals are compatible with their own — and solidarity — a reflexive emotion towards other members of the social world, whether they are media activists or members of the public. It arises from the formation of bonds and the empathy that individuals develop between themselves.

The founder of the *Les Glorieuses* newsletter, Rebecca (interview, September 22, 2022), is thinking of quitting writing and working on feminist issues because she is tired of living in "permanent stress", an expression she uses to describe her state of emotional health over the last few months. The desire to give up that emerges in the speeches of some team leaders is linked to their perception that engagement is a factor that weighs too heavily on their careers. The co-founder of the *Georgette Sand Collective*, Marguerite, who has been working voluntarily as a feminist activist for a decade, says that the time and commitment invested in this work has diverted her attention from professional possibilities that could provide her with a more financially stable life:

the problem is that activism consumed my working time, my energy, and my career. In the end, a part of my career where I could have done something else could have put my energy elsewhere, I put most of it into activism. Which is also great because activism is great. But at the same time, it consumes a large part of your life. (interview, July 27, 2022)

Tiredness — associated with feelings of annoyance, discouragement, sadness, and anguish — is an intrinsic component of the professional daily lives of the media activists interviewed, as a factor that appears linked to the activism and work routines and political actions of these women — and the two men — in the world of digital feminist media activism, but which is also related to other spaces in which they circulate, generating situations of stress and anguish for members of the publications. It should also be noted that stress is strongly associated with the routine of journalism and information production, where the pace is fast and unforeseen events are a constant in the flow of events for these professionals (Neveu, 2019). This stress even comes through in the voices of some of the interviewees, especially those who hold senior positions within the publications, such as Carolina (*AzMina*), Marguerite (*Georgette Sand*), and Rebecca (*Les Glorieuses*), whose social roles in the groups mean that they accumulate more tasks than the other media activists.

AzMina columnist Amanda (interview, August 27, 2021) resorts to memes and internet language references to explain that exhaustion runs through the routine of those who work in engaged journalism: "I'm a tired activist," she says, adding that she wants to buy a cap with the words "Exhausted Feminist"[8]. However, for several actors in the social world, exhaustion can lead to physical and psychological disorders. An example of this is the statement by *Lado M* reporter Malu (interview, July 19, 2021), who describes feeling the consequences of regularly dealing with topics related to gender violence through body aches, nervousness, stress, and frequent discouragement. The interviewees learn to manage these inconveniences and discomforts because, in general, they consider that the satisfaction caused by activist action is more rewarding than the harmful aspects of this engagement.

The dynamics of media activism and political-ideological engagement generate fatigue and self-reflection on whether or not these individuals need to be constantly involved with the issue of feminism, for example, by posting positions and analyzing current affairs related to gender on social media. Regarding her position as a digital activist and the interventions she makes on the internet, journalist Amanda (*AzMina*, interview, August 27, 2021) wonders to what extent activism is a practice she does for the sake of her ideals or to maintain the social role she occupies in her social circles: "is it to fulfill an image that I've already created and that I need to maintain in that environment, as a militant and feminist?".

The journalist's reflection refers to the notion of the "personal façade" (Goffman, 1999), in which actors assume expressive frameworks that characterize them and must follow them throughout their daily interactions. Applying this idea to the digital environment, profiles, posts and positions on social media become structural apparatuses in the personal and professional representation that media activists make of themselves. However, they are also a source of stress and fatigue as they demand content updates and periodic interactions with other individuals, causing interviewees to accumulate extra activities that are, at the same time, relevant to maintaining their images in front of audiences and colleagues inserted in the intersections of worlds through which the group circulates.

Immersion in the practice of digital feminist media activism, therefore, brings psychological and physical consequences associated with the emotional exhaustion generated by activist action, in which the actors challenge relations of force and power in which they often occupy positions of dominance. The fatigue is also related to the market logic that the group must adapt to maintain its publications, in terms of the search for funding and the production of content. At times of exhaustion and/or discouragement, the reaffirmation of the activist identity is called into question. The daily lives of these individuals are marked by regular reflections on the extent to which the personal and professional rewards and the satisfaction generated by the work compensate for the exhaustion that accompanies committed action.

4.4. Forms of Organization and What Explains Engagement

The influences on the interviewees' professional careers caused by feminist mobilization go beyond financial gains and tend to involve the creation of contact networks and opportunities to give visibility to activists' productions and CVs. The architect and illustrator Magali (reader of *Georgette Sand*, interview, August 13, 2022), whose age was not mentioned, points out that she was invited by different activist groups to draw illustrations to publicize the cause and to play the accordion at feminist events. She also had the opportunity to contribute by writing articles for activist collectives, such as the publication *Georgette Sand*, in dynamics that allowed her to disseminate and make her artistic work visible.

In other words, professional spaces can become a tool to support the spread of gender reflections, as is the case with 46-year-old psychologist Patrícia (*Think Olga* reader, interview, July 8, 2022), who contributes voluntarily as a columnist for a local newspaper in the city where she lives (in southern Brazil), and seeks to use the media as a resource to raise awareness about gender inequities among readers. Patrícia also works voluntarily to provide psychological assistance to women who have experienced gender-based violence assisted by a collective of feminist lawyers.

Even so, it is financial relationships that tend to determine how contributors participate and engage with publications. Half of the media activists interviewed work for pay, which makes them regular actors or even leaders in the social world. The other half join the publications to do voluntary work, so they perform the tasks of less recurring actors within the publications.

Volunteering is concentrated in publications that do not receive regular or direct funding, such as the *Lado M* portal and the *Georgette Sand Collective*, which do not aim to monetize their projects. All the contributors to these initiatives are volunteers. The other interviewees who contribute unpaid to a feminist media outlet are the *AzMina* columnists — who constitute the channel's floating members. The professional relationship between this group and the magazine is based on the granting of space on the site in exchange for the creation of content — generally not regular and without deadline demands — which, although it doesn't involve financial benefits, generates prestige and visibility for both parties. *AzMina*'s permanent staff, as well as those of the other three media outlets (*Les Glorieuses*, *Madmoizelle*, and *Think Olga*), are only hired on a paid basis.

How media activists participate in publications refers to new organizational arrangements for work and financial support, in which companies, associations, individual micro-entrepreneurships, and other formats make news production possible. More than just a legal form of employment relationship, these arrangements have become alternative spaces for the survival of journalistic activity and converge in the search for creative ways to carry out news production, although these organizations often do not offer paid work (Figaro & Marques, 2020).

There has been a flexibilization in the formats of professional insertion and permanence in engaged media, brought about by configurations of contemporary capitalism, linked to the expansion of the use of the internet, with loose employment ties, freelance contracts, without a formal contract or with fixed-term contracts, at the same time as there is the possibility of working remotely or hybrid and combining more than one paid activity. On the one hand, the precariousness of a journalist's career accentuates the financial fragility of the interviewees, while on the other hand, digital activism and socio-technical devices expand the possibilities of gaining visibility and professional recognition for actors in the world surveyed.

Eleven people report that they don't need to simultaneously work at a feminist publication since they are employed as full-time members of the engaged media. This group is spread across two Brazilian publications and one French one: *AzMina* magazine (Carolina, Marília, and Verena), except Rayana, who is also a fellow at the NGO *Youth Climate Leaders*, which focuses on solutions to climate crises; *Madmoizelle* magazine (Emilie, Mathis, Océane and Sophie), except Anthony, a fashion and culture journalist who, when he has the opportunity, still produces content as a freelancer; and the NGO *Think Olga* (Bárbara, Marjana and Paula), except Nana, who contributes occasionally to the magazine by investing in specific projects — but not as part of the permanent team. The other person who dedicates herself exclusively to the feminist media activism channel is Rebecca, creator of the *Les Glorieuses newsletter*. Megan (*Les Glorieuses*), although a permanent member of the newsletter, is dedicated to it three times a week and works as a freelance journalist on the other days.

In addition to Anthony (*Madmoizelle*), Megan (*Les Glorieuses*), and Rayana (*AzMina*), who are permanent members of their respective publications, the other people who have alternative jobs to their work as feminist media activists are the 20 interviewees who are not permanent members of the media outlets studied. Most of them are journalists (14 people), who combine more than one occupation: freelancer; regular journalist for another media outlet; communications consultant; writer; and creator of their own feminist publication. The others are professionals in other areas: teachers (school teachers and university professors) and financial auditors.

How interviewees participate in feminist publications and the new configurations of production routines within journalism are influenced by the deepening of capitalism's flexible mode of accumulation, with the concentration of large, global monopolies, the migration of advertising resources to the internet environment, the purchase of data according to new advertising logics and the role of journalism in contemporary society (Figaro & Marques, 2020) — as a practice that offers socio-cultural clippings of current events supported by socio-technical devices, commonly representing political and economic powers.

These restructurings of professional dynamics are reflected in the world studied through the insertion, modes of participation, and permanence of media activists in the social world, which are intersected by the transit of these people through other worlds — digital activism, political activism, the arts, and literature. The experience of media activism is marked by financial precariousness as opposed to the constitution of professional and cooperative networks of action, enhanced by the circulation of information through the digital space.

5. Conclusions

The forms of engagement of the actors in the social world are multiple, but they are based on the new digital media, which allows the group to create cultural codes that support their practices. The interviewees experience feminist media activism in cross-cutting experiences between online and offline environments, without distinguishing between them (Hine, 2017). The relationships, conversations, and connections between the teams are managed via the internet, causing new conventions regarding how to interact and how to conduct media activist practice at a distance to be improvised and implemented — such as the need for periodic meetings to discuss personal life and emotional health, without addressing work issues. The space, however, is immersed in a neoliberal context of information production in which technological innovations tend to reduce staff and make working conditions more precarious for journalism professionals — and engaged media.

In short, concerning the gears of formation and access to the social world analyzed, the intersections between the space of feminist media activism and journalism indicate that, as a social practice, it is marked by processes of permanent reinvention (Ringoot & Utard, 2005). The team uses the publications as laboratory spaces, where it is possible to develop creative exercises and experiment with new content, allowing us to infer that the writing and editing practices of feminist publications are based on conventional journalistic standards, but go beyond them. Media activists also appropriate the precepts of media activism as a social and political phenomenon, constituting a laboratory for innovation and experimentation with media and social models capable of creating forms of self-management of communication (Pasquinelli, 2002).

Far from being uniform, these media adopt approaches and tones that vary depending on the readership targeted by each publication (Breda, 2022). Even so, and despite the diversity of their statutes, the publications are inserted in a context of dynamism and the building of support networks, making the social world a space for creative experimentation and personal and professional support for dissident members who migrate from other worlds to that of feminist media activism.

The distinguishing feature of a social world like feminist media activism is that the individuals who get involved in this collaborative network by carrying out support work are seen by insiders and regulars as an integral part of the success of the project (Becker, 1982). In other words, they are actors who are seen by others as essential for carrying out the activity and producing the final product. This system makes the work of support staff less interchangeable in the context of engaged publications compared to other worlds of journalism.

The formation of the feminist media community and the building of its support networks takes place, at first, through the dissidence of members from a conventional social world (such as journalism) to an alternative world (such as media activism). When we look from different theoretical perspectives at the transformations in journalistic activity, the identity of the professionals who work in the production of this type of information, and the institutionalization of social definitions of this practice, we can see that the world of journalism has actors who can be considered dominant, marginal or deviant depending on the point of view of the social space in which they are located (Becker, 1982; Pereira, 2011). In the field of feminist journalism, the support teams and, above all, the professionals responsible for raising money for the publications, assume prominent positions within the groups where they work.

Feminist media activism is also established as an environment that generates opportunities to drive transitions in the careers and personal lives of the actors. How media activists and their audiences manage their militant stances and positions in this space and the different contexts of interaction in their daily lives show that the theme of feminism is a constant in their daily lives, crossing and filling them.

This paper finds limits in mobilizing authors whose research has not necessarily delved into gender studies and feminisms to explain the social processes analyzed in this study, such as the Beckerian and Bourdieusian approaches. Getting around the descriptive tone assumed in the presentation of the trajectories was also a challenge — not completely overcome — which required constant evaluation of what to address, amid the quantity and richness of the materials collected — from the more than 60 in-depth interviews and field experiences — and what would fall outside the scope. The possible ramifications of this research are to be found in the world of digital feminist media activism itself, which, during the preparation of the work, had already been trying to define itself, understand itself, and get to know its members — through the creation of questionnaires, groups on social networks and surveys led by professionals who work in journalism from a gender perspective. With this material in hand, I believe the group will find some of the answers it is looking for.

The main contribution of this article to the field of communication and information and gender studies is to present the world of digital feminist media activism, fundamentally constituted from 2015 onwards, from the perspective of the actors who make it up. The research is also a place for welcoming and listening, where information producers, support teams, and audiences can show themselves, express themselves, and share what they experience when engaging with feminist content. The functioning and participation processes of individuals in this practice are based on forms of cooperation whose permanence is linked to emotional expressions of euphoria, pleasure, solidarity, and hope that are socialized among the group and sustain the maintenance of the space.

Contacts, dialogues, and socializing with other people — both offline: with family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances; and online: in interactions via social media with circles of acquaintances and strangers, media publications, and other informative content — are guided by the ideals of intersectional feminism. The group's interactions across the internet, as an "incorporated, embodied and everyday phenomenon" (Hine, 2017, p. 17), breaking and merging boundaries between the material and the virtual and making these media intersect and resonate with each other (Batista & Souza, 2020). The interviewees seek to exercise their political-ideological activism in their social groups and in the various spaces in which they usually operate, making digital feminist media activism more than just a job, a hobby, or a means of seeking information. For them, the social world is a collective network with transformative potential.

Biographical Note

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NOTES

- 1 I use the idea of feminized bodies to refer not only to women but to all people who are placed in a feminine position in the social context (Schurr, 2012; Santos & Bussinguer, 2017) and who, as a result, face gender-based violence.
- 2 In general, the interviews were conducted remotely, via conventional phone calls, audio calls via WhatsApp, or video calls via Zoom or Instagram, depending on the preference of each interviewee. Face-to-face interviews were only conducted with French media activists — since the period of interviews in Brazil took place during the pandemic — and only with those who accepted or preferred to meet me face-to-face. The interviews were recorded using an audio recording application.
- 3 To choose the media activists interviewed, I checked the "Who we are" tab or equivalent on the websites of each selected project for the corpus. When the names were not listed on the websites, I turned to the publications' LinkedIn to locate the participants. Some names were also located via social media. With readers, I used the strategy of identifying profiles on social networks (Facebook and Instagram) that interact through comments with the publications studied.
- 4 A series of protests that culminated in 2015 with calls for feminist actions and mobilizations on social media.
- 5 I contacted the Ethics Committee for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (CEP/CHS) at the University of Brasilia to request an ethical review of the research project before starting the interview stage, to continue with the interviews. The study's data collection instruments, i.e. the interview scripts to be used for the conversations with the social world collaborators, were sent to the committee. To carry out the analysis, however, the organization requested that I attach written and duly signed acceptance documents from each future interviewee for the research. Given that the proposal was to build the research dynamically over the years, and that at the time I had already anticipated that the interviewees would emerge as the object was being shaped, it wasn't possible to fulfill the CEP/CHS request, as this would have delayed the research as a whole.
- 6 According to the country's Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos, n.d.), Brazil's minimum wage is five times less than the amount needed to provide food, housing, health, education, clothing, hygiene, transportation, leisure, and social security for a family of four.
- 7 In Brazil, it is the person who works as a small business owner on an individual basis and who is protected by legislation that gives them rules, benefits, and the formality of professional activity.
- 8 The mention refers to the cap created and sold by The Feminist Tea Store, which became popular within the Brazilian feminist movement after being worn by celebrities and feminist personalities in the country.



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Mariana Fagundes-Ausani

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the Global South to the Global North**

As Condições de Trabalho das Ativistas Feministas dos Mídia
do Sul Global ao Norte Global

Las Condiciones de Trabajo de las Activistas Feministas de
los Medios de Comunicación del Sur al Norte Global

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