

Promoting Intersectional Development Research

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Outcomes and Challenges in Adopting Intersectionality as a Method at InternetLab: Considerations for Research and Practice

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Executive summary

This paper explores InternetLab's incorporation of intersectionality into the methods and praxis of the #Recognise-Resist-Remedy project. The project was carried out in partnership with IT for Change, from 2019 to 2023, and supported by funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). This research project is situated in the broader context of Brazil, a country experiencing significant digital transformation amid economic disparities, a history of censorship, and social, racial and gender divides. This paper highlights the evolving focus of InternetLab, a think tank in São Paulo which has increasingly emphasised intersectionality and addressing online gender-based violence. The paper unpacks the project's objective of tackling online hate speech against women, a pressing issue in Brazil, and contributes to advancing intersectional feminism in both academic discourse and practical application. The first section underscores the changing landscape of digital discussions in Brazil, recognising that social markers such as gender, race, economic class and sexuality are integral to the digital debate. However, we contend that achieving a genuinely intersectional approach to digital discussions remains a work in progress. We also situate the project within a volatile political context marked by the impeachment of the first female Brazilian president, Dilma Rousseff, the assassination of a prominent black bisexual politician, Marielle Franco, and the election of Jair Bolsonaro.

The paper's second section outlines the rationale, the research questions and the evolving research path of the #Recognise-Resist-Remedy project, initiated in 2019. This project aimed to investigate the complex concept of misogynist and sexist speech in online spaces, emphasising its legal and social dimensions. It sought to shed light on the specificities of Brazil and India – both large global South economies – considering how misogyny intersects with various factors such as race, class and sexuality in Brazil, while in India, class, sexuality and caste played more significant roles in women's online experiences. However, the project had to continually adapt to a rapidly changing social and political landscape, including the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to new inquiries and adjustments in methodologies. The paper focuses primarily on Brazilian research because circumstances between 2020 and 2022 hindered parts of the collaboration between InternetLab and IT for Change.

The project's research questions evolved over time, with our growing understanding that contextualising the concept of hate speech within Brazil was necessary due to its increasing use, especially in the online context, but a shared understanding and legislative framework were absent. Brazilian legislation lacked specific provisions against misogynistic speech, and the shifting Brazilian social and political context required adaptation, for example, to encompass discussions around gender-based political violence. This shift maintained the core research questions while adding complexity.


In the third section of the paper, we situate our adoption of an intersectional approach within the #Recognise-Resist-Remedy project in InternetLab's history of gender research, which began in 2014 with a focus on non-

consensual dissemination of intimate images. We describe how this initial research showed us that many aspects of non-consensual dissemination of intimate images were not addressed in the legal system, primarily due to a procedural barrier that required victims to initiate legal action independently. This issue revealed intersectional questions since economically disadvantaged women were often excluded from legal recourse, highlighting the interconnected challenges related to social class, race, geographic regions and sexism.

The need for intersectional perspectives became even more apparent when the project investigated the “Top Ten” case study, focusing on derogatory lists created by teenagers evaluating the sexual behaviour of young women. This case involved marginalised communities in São Paulo and revealed that conflictual relationships with the police, cultural factors, and issues of religious family dynamics discouraged victims from seeking legal solutions. We discuss how this experience prompted the organisation to engage more deeply in understanding intersectional theory, which led to an internal study group that drew from foundational texts such as the Combahee River Collective’s statement and the works of Lélia Gonzalez, a prominent Brazilian scholar and activist who emphasised intersectionality long before it became widely recognised. We also committed to studying contemporary accounts and critiques of intersectionality, recognising its potential as an analytical tool while acknowledging the challenges of its popularisation, including the risk of reducing all differences to equivalence and promoting an overly additive view of oppressions – which proved instrumental to our later critique of the all-encompassing term “hate speech”.

In the fourth section, we emphasise the significance of intersectionality in framing a research project on hate speech against women that considers the unique internal inequalities prevalent in Brazil as a post-colonial nation of the global South. We explore the terminology used to describe online misogyny, initially framed as misogynistic and sexist speech but often referred to as “hate speech” in social media governance and internet policy discussions, and show how our research led us toward categorising misogynistic speech separately from hate speech to maintain specificity, explanatory power and potential for transformation in addressing misogyny within the context of intersectionality, while acknowledging the strategic importance of framing it as hate speech in specific policy contexts.

In the fifth section, we outline our comprehensive methodological approach and key findings, focusing on three (legal research, in-depth interviews and social media monitoring) in unravelling intersectional aspects of online misogyny. The legal research component revealed the challenges of addressing misogyny within the Brazilian justice system, especially when it intersected with other social markers, shedding light on how the legal system disregards misogyny and intersectionality. In-depth interviews provided valuable insights into how various groups, including journalists and feminist activists, perceived and dealt with online misogyny, emphasising the importance of naming specific forms of discrimination and recognising intersectionality within discussions of hate speech. Our social network monitoring efforts spanned two editions of the MonitorA project, where we analysed online political violence and misogyny. These analyses demonstrated that attacks against women candidates often intersected with attacks based on other social markers,



showcasing the complex dynamics at play. By refining our lexicon of violent terms, we captured these nuances better and highlighted intersectional dynamics. Delving into concrete results, we present findings that, while women candidates were predominantly targeted due to their gender, male candidates usually were targeted with their professional doings – except for men from historically marginalised groups, who faced distinct forms of attack related to their social markers. We present examples of our lexicon and analyses showing how intersectionality plays out quantitatively and qualitatively in online violence.

In the sixth section, we emphasise our efforts to disseminate the research findings and actively participate in public discussions. We highlight the intricacies of platform governance and regulation, underscoring the need to move beyond the term “hate speech” to consider nuances, intersectional forms of online violence and discrimination from an intersectional perspective. Additionally, we highlight the limitations of standardized policies that fail to account for localized nuances and call for a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse forms of discrimination that exist.

We also delve into ongoing legislative discussions concerning online misogyny and the intersectional paradoxes presented by the Brazilian justice system when formulating solutions to combat it. Finally, we emphasise the importance of raising public awareness and continually prioritising intersectional considerations throughout these efforts.

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Introduction

This paper describes and analyses the outcomes of the #Recognise-Resist-Remedy project, carried out by InternetLab in partnership with IT for Change from 2019 to 2023, and funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The project's trajectory is closely linked to the evolution of InternetLab, a think tank based in São Paulo, Brazil. InternetLab was founded in 2014 as a non-profit organisation to produce critical and evidence-based analyses to back up a rights-oriented internet policy in the country. The project's specific focus – online hate speech against women, a pressing issue in Brazil – also reflects InternetLab's engagement in discussions surrounding the construction of intersectional feminism in Brazil, in academic discourse and praxis.

The #Recognise-Resist-Remedy project was developed against the backdrop of intense adoption of digital technologies in Brazil, a country marked by deep economic inequalities, a heavy legacy of censorship and authoritarianism, and large social, racial and gender divides. The Internet and discussions around it are integral to the most pressing current political, social, economic and environmental challenges, which express themselves in the political realm (legislative and policy discussions) and the media, education and everyday life. It has become more widely accepted, and was integral to InternetLab's vision from its outset, that discussions on internet policy and governance intertwine with the country's structural challenges and agendas.

Over time, InternetLab has brought intersectional concerns into the core of its work. Since its foundation in 2014, online gender based violence has been one of the organisation's priorities. Our work revolved around better understanding and validating the importance of adopting a gender perspective in the Brazilian academic and activist field of digital rights, emphasising the different ways of being women, how that appears in field research, and the consequences for policy discussions. Gradually, we deepened the intersectional perspective we had as inspiration from the start, and although gender has continued to be central to the organisation's concerns and expertise, other social markers and their specific intersections with gender became more prominent, and the connections more sophisticated. Such developments were influenced by research results deriving from intersectional methodologies and contextual transformations in Brazil's intersectional debate over the past decade. That led us to make efforts to incorporate intersectionality transversally across the organisation's fields of study that include disinformation, privacy and surveillance, and freedom of expression, which in turn fed into the research on gender inequalities online.

Almost a decade later, an understanding that bodies are part of digital experiences and that social markers such as gender, economic and social class, race and sexuality are integral to the digital debate has evolved in the Brazilian context. Moreover, gender, race and digital policy have gained more attention in digital rights and public debates. In our view, however, the complex connections between the social markers, constituting a truly intersectional debate, still require sustained work and engagement to become more mainstream.

The “#Recognise-Resist-Remedy” project was carried out amid these internal and external developments during years of significant social and political change in Brazil, which we needed to grasp in our own research. It started a few years after the impeachment of the first female Brazilian president, Dilma Roussef, right after the landmark assassination of a Rio de Janeiro city councillor, the black bisexual politician Marielle Franco, and the election of Jair Bolsonaro (in office from 2019 to 2022), whose presidency cantered discourses against egalitarian struggles. The project is, therefore, a good representation of the challenging questions we faced as researchers and as an organisation in conducting this research and disseminating it and in realising policy change.

This paper has five parts. In the first, we provide a more detailed account of the objectives of the project. In the second, we elaborate on how intersectional feminist theory and practice progressively gained more space in InternetLab’s research and practice, to set a context for the project and how and why it was proposed. In the third part, we discuss how intersectional methodologies were integrated into the project, and a few of the challenges we faced. The fourth part discusses the intersectional challenges we faced in engagement and political advocacy following the research development. The fifth section evaluates the project and offers some final considerations. We expect that this analysis, integrating internal methodological decisions in a context of political extremism in a highly unequal society, will add to broader global South efforts in intersectional research beyond our field.

Rationale, research questions and research path

The “Recognise-Resist-Remedy” project, initiated in 2019, proposed to examine the concept, development of and policy on hate speech against women in online spaces. In its conceptualisation, InternetLab and IT for Change jointly identified two key aspects to work together on: the complexity of the legal and social concept of hate speech and its application when it comes to women and misogyny, and the importance of centring empirical evidence and legal discussions on large economies in the global South, such as India and Brazil, to influence internet policy discussions. We also anticipated gaining insights into intersectionality, considering the different lines of inequality in Brazil and India. While misogyny intersects with race, class and sexuality in Brazil, women’s online experiences in India are mostly influenced by class, sexuality and caste.

Over the course of four years (2019-2023), the project evolved and adapted in an extremely insecure social and political context (including the Covid-19 global pandemic), leading to the emergence of new inquiries and the adoption of methodologies that went beyond the original plan. Collaboration between InternetLab and IT for Change was less extensive than anticipated, as we were unable to meet between 2020 and 2022. Although we engaged in dialogues and comparisons and collaborated on various initiatives, this paper will primarily focus on the Brazilian side of the research.

Our initial aim was to understand the specifics of online hate speech against women and how it affected different groups of women, and evaluate the responses available – in both the legal system and internet platform policies. The initial plan was to analyse legislation and case law and develop case studies, but as we embarked on our research journey, it became apparent that in order to fully grasp the phenomenon, we needed to better contextualise the concept of hate speech within the Brazilian context. At the very beginning of the project, in an exploratory meeting with hate speech experts, we came to understand that the absence of a common public and academic understanding of hate speech – as well as the absence of this concept in legislation – made it challenging to operationalise it in courts and in the public discourse. Additionally, similarly to many legislations and international instruments, the Brazilian legislation provided instruments against racist, religion-intolerant and LGBT-phobic, but not misogynist, speech.

The second reason for the project's constant reframing stemmed from the evolving political landscape in Brazil. As previously mentioned, our research evolved in tandem with escalating political conflict in the country, where issues involving gender, race, sexuality and social class were central to the conflict. The assassination of Councilwoman Marielle Franco in 2018 was a landmark for how far violence – which also expresses itself online – can go, and President Bolsonaro's agenda was openly anti-feminist, anti-LGBT and against black and indigenous rights, fuelling conflict and violence in the public arena. These considerations, along with the necessity for ongoing adaptation, underscore the concerns raised by theorists emphasising the importance of context – and shifting contexts – in intersectional analyses (Misra et al., 2021). Furthermore, they align with the local intersectional theorists' insights into the specificities of the Brazilian context, which we will discuss later in this paper.

Concretely, in 2020, we decided to adapt the initial idea of developing case studies on online hate speech against women to build a full observatory for political violence called MonitorA¹, partnering with a feminist media outlet called *AzMina* and a data journalism organisation called Núcleo Jornalismo. The category of political violence (against women particularly) was gaining momentum, and we realised we needed to grasp the phenomenon and the discussion, and understand how to integrate it into the other concept also in use, specifically hate speech against women, as well as how they both were manifesting in the online-offline continuum.

We did not drop our initial questions (How are activists, the judiciary and scholars in Brazil engaging with the notion of hate speech? What have been the results? Do feminist, LGBTQIAP+ and black activists make use of this category? Has the growth of digital platforms' presence in Brazil led to a growth in the use of the concept because of their terms of service?), but added layers of complexity according to a challenging and changing context.

¹ Website: <https://monitora.org.br/monitora-english-version/monitora/>.

We will further dwell on the methodologies we used and provide a detailed account of how we set out to answer the initial and developing questions. Before that, we will discuss how we embraced intersectionality from the outset.

Intersectionality: how did it evolve for us?

Background and first steps

The intersectional approach we adopted in this project is deeply rooted in InternetLab's history of gender research. One of our three initial research projects, when the organisation was launched in 2014, focused on the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images. The research, funded by the Ford Foundation, aimed to understand how courts addressed this gendered form of violence. Its success led to the publication of an influential book (Valente, 2016) that shaped public debates and influenced subsequent legislation to address the issue.

As we delved into case law, several key insights emerged. First, very few actual cases of non-consensual dissemination of intimate images reached the courts. Instead, we discovered numerous instances of threats and extortion based on the possession of women's and girls' private images, with exceptions granted for cases involving adolescents. Second, although the case law expanded our understanding of the development of such cases beyond what the media reported, it became evident that many forms of non-consensual dissemination of intimate images and related violence were not being addressed within the legal system.

Through interviews with legal experts, we uncovered a legal-procedural barrier as the primary reason. Under the prevailing laws at the time, victims of non-consensual dissemination of intimate images could only pursue criminal charges for libel and slander. These crimes are typically considered to be of interest to the victim rather than the state. Consequently, unlike most public criminal cases, where prosecution is conducted by the Public Prosecutor's Office to address society's interest in investigation and punishment, victims of these "defamation crimes" were required to take legal action on their own, engaging a lawyer if necessary. An intersectional issue was at hand: economically disadvantaged women were simply excluded from such a solution. Discussing marginalised women in Brazil entails addressing themes related to social class, racial identity, geographic regions and sexism simultaneously.

However, that was not the case when the targets were teenagers, for which there is a special legal provision – and the crime is for public criminal procedure. When we saw in the media, while conducting the project, that non-consensual intimate images (NCII) was a big issue in São Paulo peripheries, we decided to conduct a case study on a situation that was happening in the outskirts of the city of São Paulo, called "Top 10".

The “Top 10” refers to derogatory lists created by teenagers, evaluating the sexual behaviour of young women in their schools and neighbourhoods. These lists circulated on social networks and messaging apps, leading to news coverage after two attempted suicides in low-income neighbourhoods primarily inhabited by a black population. The lists, initially online, escalated to public displays of derogatory messages near schools. The impact extended beyond the digital realm, causing integration difficulties, depression and attempted suicides among affected adolescents. The media reported on two cases of attempted suicides in low-income neighbourhoods of the city of São Paulo. Resistance efforts emerged, such as graffiti displays with feminist messages and educational initiatives on women’s media representation by activist groups such as Mulheres na Luta (Women in the Fight) and Sementeiras de Direitos (Seeders of Rights). It did not seem that the victims, however, were resorting to legal solutions or reporting the cases to authorities, and we aimed to understand the reasons.

When interviewing the activists who were involved with assisting the victims and developing the resistance strategies, as well as attending some of their events and activities, it was clear that the conflictive relationship with the police in those territories was a huge factor leading to underreporting (and non-accountability). They did not see the police as being capable of dealing with the conflicts, especially when they mostly involved teenagers. It was also clear that for some of the teenage girls, bringing the problem to authorities or even to families would mean revictimising, as many of them belonged to religious families who might not support them and could even punish them further. The activists and educators we talked to in those territories saw much more potential in actions in the field of education and community health, and refused to treat the problem as a criminal problem.²

Although as a research team we already had contact with literature that placed suspicion on solving social issues through the law, particularly criminal law, especially for black populations in Brazil, this case study was central for us, as an organisation, to understand that class, territory, race and age must always be taken into account from the beginning, in our efforts to describe social problems and to develop recommendations. Some of the most vocal public demands of that time were for creating a particular criminal offense against NCII (which eventually happened). It was clear to us that this was no solution for the girls and women in Parelheiros and Grajaú. We will come back later to the necessary critical perspectives on the strategy of criminalising social problems, often the first of the solutions presented for a social problem.

Moving further – deepening intersectional lenses

When the research cycle on NCII came to an end, we shifted our focus from examining the formations and impacts on bodies in the online-offline continuum to delving deeper into the realm of speech. Recognising

² We wrote about this in Valente et al., 2015.

that the perception of bodies is shaped and influenced by discourse, we embarked on the project #Recognise-Resist-Remedy. In this new effort, we were motivated to systematically understand how the intersections of gender, sexuality, race and social class were constitutive of the issues we were analysing. While many of our previous analyses encompassed explanations that invoked various social markers of difference, we took on the challenge to address them from the outset and incorporate intersectionality into the readings, data collection and analysis we would undertake in the project.

Although the discussions and constructions around the intersections of gender, race, social class and sexuality had been emphasised by Brazilian authors since the 1980s (Gonzales, 1984; Saffioti, 1976), the intersectional approach to feminist issues gained strength, particularly at the beginning of the 2000s (Rios & Sotero, 2019), coinciding with the dissemination of feminist content through the internet. An initial movement to translate African American authors, alongside the rediscovery of black Brazilian authors, solidified the recognition of intersectionality as a way to observe, analyse and face social problems (Akotirene, 2019; Alvarez, 2014; Biroli & Miguel, 2015; Carneiro, 2003a, 2017; Hirata, 2014; Medeiros, 2019; Moutinho, 2014; Ribeiro, 2019; Rios & Maciel, 2017, 2021; Rodrigues, 2013; Rodrigues & Prado, 2010). This approach to social issues gained even more momentum in the second half of the 2000s, when young feminists, particularly young Black feminists, began using this notion not only as a feminist methodology but also as a way to identify themselves as intersectional feminists.

Identifying the need to deepen our understanding of intersectional theories and approaches for our research as a whole, researchers at InternetLab proposed the creation of an internal reading group. We committed ourselves to reading seminal texts to understand the origins of the intersectionality concept and its application in both activism and the academia in Brazil in particular. The whole organisation was invited, and about half of the members attended, including individuals who were not directly working on gender and race. The year was 2019, and every two weeks, we had a meeting to discuss readings as summarised in Table 1:³

Table 1: Reading program

<i>The Combahee River Collective Statement</i> , Combahee River Collective <i>A perspectiva interseccional de Lélia Gonzalez</i> (The intersectional perspective of Lélia Gonzalez), Flávia Rios e Alex Rats
Selected readings from Lélia Gonzalez
<i>Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color</i> , Kimberly Crenshaw
<i>O que é Interseccionalidade?</i> (What is intersectionality?), Carla Akotirene
<i>Intersectionality and Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas</i> , Patricia Hill Collins

³ The readings were selected mostly by Natalia Neris, a researcher who, at the time, coordinated the area Inequalities and Identities and who has studied feminism and antiracism for more than a decade.

Everything is intersectional? Ina Kerner
Lost in translation, Patricia Hill Collins

Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities, Cho and Ferrer
Intersectionality and Public Policy: Some Lessons from Existing Models, Olena Hankivsky and Renee Cormier

Re-Thinking Intersectionality, Jennifer Nash
Disappearing Acts: Reclaiming Intersectionality in the Social Sciences in a Post-Black Feminist Era, Nikol Floyd

We started with the Combahee River Collective's manifesto (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977) as a tribute to the fact that the idea of intersectionality was formulated in social movements, particularly by women in the antiracist movements, long before it was framed as such in academia. The Combahee River Collective, which gathered black women from 1974 in the United States, formulated the idea that power structures condition different experiences of oppression and that Black women were neither completely represented by the Black movement nor by a feminism where race was not contemplated.

We then set ourselves to read classical North American and Brazilian references, centring particularly on the notable Lélia Gonzalez, the Brazilian professor and anthropologist who, in the 1970s and 1980s, participated actively in the Brazilian black antiracist movement during the military dictatorship and who, in her activism and writings, began to theorise about the role of black women in the black movement and inside Brazilian's culture and society, also articulating it with class (Gonzalez, 2020; Rios, 2016). She insisted that the local experience of resistance – for instance in the Quilombos during the slavery period – and how African elements made their path into culture makes the Brazilian experience quite different and unique in comparison to the United States (or to African countries), which is why she created the category of *Amefricanidade* (Gonzalez, 1988).

Lélia Gonzalez is yet to receive broader recognition as an original thinker of locally rooted intersectionality – for example, her 1984 paper *Racism and Sexism in the Brazilian Society* (Gonzales, 1984) – even if she did not use that term. During a visit to Brazil in 2019, which drew significant public attention, Angela Davis, the North American black feminist, made a poignant statement:

I feel strange when I feel that I am being chosen to represent Black Feminism. And why here in Brazil do you need to look for this reference in the United States? I think I learn more from Lélia Gonzales than you could ever learn from me. (*Brasil de Fato*, 2019)

After reading what is considered to be the first work to use the term intersectionality – *Mapping the Margins* (Crenshaw, 1991) – we moved to more contemporary accounts, foreign and Brazilian, and to discussions and criticism on the use of the term. According to the Brazilian authors Carla Akotirene, in *Intersectionality*

(Akotirene, 2019), and Flavia Rios and Edilza Sotero in “Gender in intersectional perspective” (Rios and Sotero, 2019), despite the articulation amongst gender, race and social class being considered in the works of Brazilian black women authors since the 1980s, as mentioned earlier, the notion of “intersectionality” was only introduced more widely into the Brazilian debate in the decade of 2000, and was appropriated differently in anthropology, sociology and a little later in political science, but perhaps irreversibly.

The cost of popularisation, however, has been that the concept has been emptied of meaning and has become difficult to operationalise, as authors Jennifer Nash, Ina Kerner and Patricia Hill Collins recognise in the readings we selected (Collins, 2015; Kerner, 2012; Nash, 2008). All these works recognise, nevertheless, the potential of the concept. Patricia Hill Collins, particularly, advocates for its use as an analytical tool (Collins, 2019).

One of the critical perspectives we discussed, which significantly influenced the development of our project on online hate speech against women, was that a superficial discourse on intersectionality was creating two different problems. The first was that all differences are equivalent – which is a particularly interesting concern given that the term “hate speech” seemed to us to produce exactly that. Second, instead of providing lenses for observing the particular position, for example, of black Brazilian women or Lesbian black women, some accounts were taking oppressions to be “additive”, which is quite a mechanical approach to social relations.

Reading and discussing these papers provided the analytical tools against which #Recognise-Resist-Remedy was conceived and reframed over time. Throughout the project, we went back to those references and added more according to the needs and development of our findings. For example, an extremely important reference that we mobilised further in the project was Gloria Anzaldúa’s (Anzaldúa, 2012). Anzaldúa helped us understand that truly engaging with work that employs an intersectional perspective involves considering not only the subjects involved in our research but also the researchers responsible for conducting the research. The concept of a borderland body or a bridge body introduced by the author was crucial in realising that black and marginalised persons carry their own marks and experiences when they occupy positions (in this case, as researchers) – just as white researchers and those from more privileged social classes do, and those differences add extra layers of understanding to the work. We have been working on increasing internal diversity at InternetLab and in our different research areas and projects as a permanent effort for many years now. Across the project, we also mobilised other Brazilian (Carneiro, 2003b; Gregori, 2008; Moutinho, 2014; Nascimento, 2021) and foreign feminist and intersectional theorists (Brah, 1996, 2022; hooks, 2000; McClintock, 1995), as well as Brazilian academics who were not theorising intersectionality per se, but were taking intersectional views, for example on how the judiciary rules in Brazil or on politics (Adorno, 2002; Almeida, 2019; Biroli, 2020; De Hollanda, 2019; De Paula Trindade, 2018; Guimarães, 1999; Machado et al., 2016).

Intersectionality in the Framing of the Research Problem

The main objective of proposing a collaborative project on online misogyny between a Brazilian and an Indian organisation was to examine how online misogyny functions in these two significant economies of the global South, and understand the variations influenced by their unique internal inequalities. We recognised that the experiences of women in our countries couldn't be directly compared to those in global North nations, as they share characteristics of marginalisation common in unequal, post-colonial nations – which speaks directly to another of Misra's intersectional tenets, *comparison* (Misra et al., 2021).⁴ For example, for historical reasons, economic inequalities are deeply intertwined with gender and race in a country such as Brazil – black women are the social group with the lowest income (IBGE, 2019, 2021). Evidently, consequences are to be felt in political representation and redress capabilities, to name a few.

Interestingly, terminology became an issue from the outset, and it was permeated with intersectional questions. Although we framed the issue initially as misogynistic and sexist speech,⁵ we had to grapple with the terminology prevalent in social media governance and local and international internet policy discussions, primarily using “hate speech” to describe the problem encompassing women, black individuals, religious minorities and others. The use of that term sometimes helped bridge discussions and bring attention to misogynist speech, but it also became a subject of investigation: should we embrace hate speech terminology, and what are the reasons for doing so or not?

We examined this question deeply through extensive interviews with activists, detailed in the section that follows, and pondered over it for four years, considering the diverse empirical research findings and intersectional issues from various project aspects. Should we categorise misogynist speech as hate speech, comparing it to other more acknowledged forms of speech (legally and within tech company policies), or does this categorisation lead to a loss of specificity, explanatory power and potential for transformation? As we will elucidate, we leaned towards the latter – while recognising the strategic importance of framing misogynist speech as hate speech in certain policy contexts. The primary rationale is that treating everything uniformly contradicts the essence of an intersectional project; it overlooks significant distinctions between forms of oppression and obscures crucial variations in approaching misogyny.

⁴ Our focus on misogyny acknowledged from the start that the experience of misogyny isn't uniform, and we proposed exploring the specifics of misogyny and how it manifests differently depending on an individual's positioning in terms of various social factors (and, in comparison to India, national cultural and historical differences).

⁵ Our initial research problem was framed as: “In Brazil and India, the project will identify the main shortcomings that need to be addressed through legal reform, and harness the window of opportunity created by women speaking out in these environments to tackle the proliferation of sexist/misogynistic speech online. It aims to provide specific recommendations [for] emerging policy processes, intermediary liability regimes, and online content governance frameworks. The project will also work with young people to shift internalised gender scripts and attitudes to demonstrate how deep change is possible in mainstream communication cultures on the internet”.

Methodological Practice and Results

To deepen our understanding of this intricate landscape, we engaged in fifteen distinct research approaches over the course of four years, employing six primary methodologies: literature review, action research, legal research, interviews, social media monitoring and online ethnography. These methodologies were continuously honed and applied either in combination or individually. We will dwell particularly on a few we consider more fruitful for intersectional considerations: legal research (web-scraping of legal decisions), in-depth interviews and social media monitoring. The methods helped us integrate findings: for example, our literature review, encompassing an extensive search on Brazilian academic databases, was useful in showing a lack of consensus around the term “hate speech” and how misogyny was rarely addressed; our action-research with young people from peripheral neighbourhoods of São Paulo also made it evident that socially, the term is disputed (Valente, 2023). These findings were in an evidently dialectic relationship with the results we obtained in our legal research, which we address next.

Legal research

Between 2020 and 2021, we carried out extensive case law research to gain insights into judicial handling of online misogyny cases in Brazil to understand how intersectional aspects might be handled by the courts. Through this, we came to realise that in Brazil, unlike in other countries, hate speech is not inherently linked to freedom of expression debates within the judiciary. We also identified paradoxes in the Brazilian justice system in addressing cases of violence against women in online spaces, particularly when they involve perpetrators who have had previous intimate or sexual relationships with the victims; the act of violence is then easily framed as domestic violence, and the public face of the problem (how women are being depicted and the consequences of speech when made in public) is easily ignored. Besides, in a few cases where courts were faced with speech that was at the same time misogynistic and racist, the misogynist part was ignored, probably out of lack of legal provision (and social grammar).

Our first challenge was locating the cases. Given the absence of specific legal provisions addressing misogyny and the lack of explicit references to the term in court decisions, we faced notable challenges. We therefore used an extensive array of keywords to identify cases that aligned with the definition of misogyny. We wanted to single out misogyny and understand the intersectional aspects by careful qualitative analysis of the decisions, which were categorised in spreadsheets according to pre-defined typologies (which we reviewed over time according to the cases). One of the classifiers was whether other social markers were mentioned and how.

The cases we wanted to find were those in which the perpetrator employed misogynistic language in “public” spaces or platforms that were accessible to an audience wider than the aggressor and the victim. By focusing on such cases, we sought to satisfy the “incitement” criterion, which constitutes a fundamental aspect of the

most accepted hate speech concept. In essence, our analysis encompassed posts shared in feeds, groups, pages, tweets, stories and similar platforms.

It is important to note that we deliberately excluded many cases involving private attacks characterised by explicit misogyny, as our aim was to isolate and comprehend the Judiciary's treatment of incidents taking place within the public sphere. However, establishing a clear demarcation between what is considered public and private on the internet is not always straightforward, given the dynamic dissemination of content across various platforms, ranging from messaging applications to social networks and vice versa, thereby blurring the boundaries. Furthermore, as stated, the legal system itself contributes to this blurring effect, as many cases transpiring in public spaces are often interpreted and categorised as instances of domestic violence, provided they involve the current or former partners of the victims. Consequently, the public dimension of violence and the mobilisation of a collective understanding regarding the perception and treatment of women become obscured.

To collect our dataset, we employed web scraping techniques to retrieve information from six distinct courts of justice in Brazil: the states of Bahia, Distrito Federal, Pará, Minas Gerais, Santa Catarina and São Paulo. We used the R programming language and keywords including "misogyny," "misogynist," "misogyny and discourse", "feminism", "feminist", "violence against women", "sexism," "sexist", "machismo" and "machista". Each keyword was separately combined with related terms such as "internet", "social network", "Facebook", "WhatsApp", "Twitter" and "YouTube".

Due to the broad nature of these keywords leading to an enormous proportion of false positives, we developed an additional algorithm to refine our dataset,⁶ which singled out judgments that displayed a higher likelihood of relevance based on the repetition and frequency of the aforementioned keywords (thereby excluding cases in which the work may appear incidentally). This approach enabled us to obtain a more targeted and meaningful dataset for our analysis. We came up with about 1980 rulings and, after a manual separation, ended up with 340 that matched our criteria for qualitative analysis.

Studying freedom of expression in the Brazilian judiciary is not an easy task because there is not exactly what one might call a free speech case law. The criteria for restricting or weighing it against other rights are usually applied in very different ways. Added to the lack of provisions for misogyny in Brazilian law, and that decisions do not mention the term either, we had a methodologically challenging task and were unable to arrive at statistically relevant conclusions. Our findings, however, gave us clues about which cases reach the judicial system and the ways in which they are being handled. One of the things we found was that many cases involved a reading of women's lives and morals, and they fit within a typology that we also find in the literature (Zanello, 2008; Zanello & Romero, 2012). We classified eight types of cases: hypersexualisation, the

⁶ Thanks to the work of the InternetLab researcher and technologist Alessandra Gomes.

association of women with prostitution (understood as degrading), questioning a woman's performance regarding maternity, articulations between gender prejudice and other social markers of difference (race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on), questioning professional capacity (such as the association of professional success with sexual favours), threats, image-based abuse and, finally, pointing out "moral defects", such as suggestions of betrayal, cheating and character defects.

In some instances, it was particularly apparent that misogyny was not recognised. For example, there was a case heard by the Court of Justice of Minas Gerais that involved the funk music group UDR. They were convicted for lyrics they posted on the internet, which they claimed were satirical. And despite the deplorable content of the songs, there seems to be a lot of selectivity in the decision (Brazilian funk is considered and persecuted as a marginal music style). The content involved racism, religious intolerance, transphobia and misogyny – some verses were odes to rape (as in the song *Bonde da Mutilação*). The complaint, however, was for the crimes of racism and religious intolerance (as well as incitement to crime), and misogyny and transphobia were not even mentioned in the decision. Decisions such as this provided important insights into how intersectionality is (not) considered in courts, and particularly into how misogyny is erased in conflicts brought to the legal sphere. The reason appears to be rooted less in finding legal expression and more in the absence of vocabulary and recognition in the socio-cultural sphere. As a follow-up to the study on hate speech against women, and in collaboration with the Center for Racial Justice and Law at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, we analysed cases of racial violence occurring on the internet and compared these to offline cases. This study resulted in the publication of a report titled (in Portuguese) *Safety of the Brazilian Black Population: How the Justice System Responds to Individual and Institutional Episodes of Racial Violence* (Machado et al., 2022). The database consisted of 77 court judgments, 52 focusing on criminal cases and 27 on civil cases. Of course, the limited number of cases restricted generalisability and comparability. Findings indicated, however, that social markers such as race and gender were often absent in case descriptions. The majority of criminal judgments resulted in convictions (60% of cases), while in the civil sphere, 46% of cases favoured compensation claims. Judges often emphasise the amplification of harmful effects when racist content reaches a larger audience online. This study provided insights that helped us compare the handling of online racism and misogyny in the absence of a legal framework for the latter, and informed discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of criminalising misogyny and its potential impacts on the judicial system, which we will address shortly.

In-depth interviews

The use of qualitative research methods played a crucial role in our study, facilitating the exploration of novel insights, a deeper understanding of the data, and the illumination of intricate aspects pertaining to the research domain. As stated, confronted with challenges in comprehending the concept of hate speech in

Brazil, both within activist circles and the judicial system, the in-depth interviews emerged as a pivotal juncture in our research endeavour.

We conducted the interviews with various publics. Because journalists have increasingly become targets of attacks, particularly from sectors closely associated with the now-former president, Jair Bolsonaro, we made a concentrated effort to interview female professionals, particularly those belonging to marginalised groups such as black and LGBTQIA+, to delve into the lived experiences, perspectives and challenges faced by them. Our aim was to better understand how attacks evolved, therefore adding to the social media monitoring in which we engaged (discussed below). Another public was feminist activists from diverse backgrounds (black, white, female and non-binary, from different regions), who had an organised understanding of the relations between activism and violence, to find out more about how they saw the problem of misogyny and the power of concepts in tackling it. Our interview guides did not inquire about hate speech or misogyny at first, leaving space for the interviewees own elaboration; we would ask about the appropriateness of the concept of hate speech in the Brazilian context at the end, and about its use for the problem of misogynist speech. This part of the interviews was instrumental, especially in interpreting the literature and the case law, as well as inquiring further into the appropriateness of developing a legal framework specifically for misogyny. The interviews confirmed that “hate speech” has been treated by social movements as a problem that requires regulation, but in other terms: racism, homophobia, misogyny and even discrimination⁷.

In an interview given to InternetLab in 2021, the journalist and member of the Communicators Collective of the World March of Women, Fabiana Benedito, expressed an interesting concern with the everyday uses of the word hate, which does not distinguish between discriminations that are deeply constitutive of the history of Brazil:

We resort to a feeling, to hatred, but it is not hatred of just anyone; it is not hatred like any other feeling. It is a hatred directed mainly at women, black people, and LGBT people, and hatred of women has a name, and hatred of black people and LGBT people also have names. Naming is an important exercise: saying it's sexism, it's racism, is an important move. (Fabiana interview, 2021)⁸

⁷ For example, in the book *What is Discrimination?* Adilson José Moreira (2017) argues that discourses are discriminatory practices – which for him are a form of conduct, not an expression – feeding stigmas that affirm the essential inferiority of historically marginalised groups, and corroborating the perception that all members of minoritised groups are inferior, which can ultimately lead to violence. Discourse, Moreira asserts, produces effects in the world, on a cultural and material level; the focus on effects takes into account the concrete experiences of the people affected by it (Moreira, 2017).

⁸ Interview with Benedito, Fabiana, "Hatred of women has a name, hatred of black people and LGBT people also has names." InternetLab in 2021.

Social media monitoring

Throughout the course of our four-year research endeavour, the automated monitoring (and manual, qualitative analysis) of violent discourse on social media emerged as a vital methodological strategy employed at various stages of investigation. It played a pivotal role in the analysis of the Mari Ferrer case (InternetLab & Revista AzMina, 2023; Revista AzMina & InternetLab, 2021),⁹ both editions of the MonitorA (InternetLab et al., 2023; Revista AzMina & InternetLab, 2021), inquiries into violence against journalists (InternetLab et al., 2022), and the examination of political violence targeting the north eastern electorate.¹⁰ Undertaking such work entailed the use of APIs, scraping algorithms, developing and improving lexicons to filter posts, qualitative analysis and coding and data visualisation, which the InternetLab team accomplished by making use of academic and media partnerships. Over time, we have continually refined and evolved the techniques employed in collecting and analysing social media monitoring data, sometimes leading to quantitative results, other times to case studies.

As already noted, in 2020 we started exploring another category that intersected with the notion of hate speech against women: political violence. We had already experimented with social media monitoring in cases of violence against women (the Mari Ferrer case) and xenophobic attacks against Northeasterners in the elections. We made such monitoring more robust and systematic in the two editions of the MonitorA (2020 and 2022 elections), in which we collected data from profiles, channels and pages of a diverse set of candidates from YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. This analysis of online political violence against candidates confirmed our previous notions of tensions between the public and private spheres when violence happens online. The categories of insults directed at women were very representative of the categories we found when analysing case law, which started to confirm both patterns and specificities of misogyny, as well as differences in the experiences of different groups of women, crossed by different social markers.

It is also important to highlight that we improved our methodologies from one edition to the other. In the second edition of the MonitorA, run in 2022, we expanded and refined the lexicon of violent terms we used to filter relevant posts and, drawing from the literature, differentiated between attacks (hostility directed at

⁹ Mari Ferrer is a young influencer who was a victim of rape in 2018. During the trial in 2021, Ferrer was subjected to violent comments by the defence attorney representing the accused, who was acquitted. The recording circulated on the internet, generating significant impact and provoking a public discussion about the treatment given to women victims of sexual violence in Brazilian justice. To learn more about the topic, visit <https://internetlab.org.br/pt/noticias/caso-mari-ferrer-menos-de-1-dos-tuites-sobre-julgamento-foram-a-favor-da-sentenca/>

¹⁰ This is due to regional inequalities in the country. The dry climate and migration to the São Paulo region during the twentieth century were some of the factors that led to the construction of stigmas associated with Northeasterners, which are occasionally brought up during elections. Due to left-leaning political tendencies in the region, it is common for individuals from other regions of the country to argue that Northeasterners don't know how to vote and justify this view through discriminatory comments. To learn more about the topic, visit <https://internetlab.org.br/pt/noticias/embate-entre-quem-defendia-e-ofendia-nordestinos-abriu-espacos-para-alegacoes-de-fraudes-das-eleicoes-no-twitter/>

historically marginalised groups, encompassing racism, misogyny, dehumanisation or revulsion) and insults (comments specifically directed at a candidate without invoking protected groups). The idea was to refine not only the analysis but also policy recommendations. While distinguishing between these aspects was difficult at times, this differentiation did allow for closer alignment with the categories employed by social media companies fostering critical dialogues, particularly during the project’s final phase which was marked by intense debates about platform regulation in Brazil.

The MonitorA analyses helped us understand intersectional dynamics at play. For example, it became clear that attacks against Black women often involved comparison to animals, which is a form of dehumanisation, and expressions of revulsion (such as “you are disgusting”) that were less frequently used against white women. Quantitatively, intersectional issues also appeared: Erika Hilton, then a candidate and currently a member of parliament, who is black and transsexual, received the highest proportion of attacks of all the more than a hundred candidacies we monitored: at a certain point, eight out of every 100 comments she got contained slurs (Revista AzMina & InternetLab, 2021).

In Table 2, we provide five examples of attacks and how we classified them into subcategories, considerations regarding the groups these terms are directed at, and the relationships among different social markers.

Table 2: Examples of attacks from the lexicon and its classification.

Term in Portuguese	Term in English	Attack or insult?	Attack classification	Contextual and intersectional considerations
<i>Abortista</i>	Abortionist	Attack	Political ideology	“Abortionist” is a term commonly used against feminist candidates. In these cases, they are not portrayed as defenders of women’s rights but rather as immoral advocates of murdering babies.
Aberração	Aberration	Attack	Inferiorisation	“Aberration” is a term used against individuals belonging to different historically marginalised groups. In the case of transgender people, for example, it directly refers to their gender non-conforming bodies. In the case of individuals with disabilities, it directly references their physical or psychiatric

				<p>condition. However, there are moments when these social markers intersect, and a person who is both LGBTQIA+ and black, for instance, may be inferiorised based on both of these markers. The same can occur for a person who is both disabled and a feminist, where being a feminist becomes a political marker that is also challenged and delegitimised by conservative groups.</p>
<i>Vaca</i>	Cow	Attack	Dehumanisation	<p>“<i>Vaca</i>” is a term commonly directed at women. The meaning varies depending on the context. Here, we see a movement of dehumanisation that also aligns with misogyny and, as we have distinguished in our methodology, with offensive and sexually harassing behaviours. In Brazil, women are often referred to as <i>vacas</i> (cows) when they are being targeted by attacks that tend to hypersexualise them, particularly when it comes to black women, to discredit their participation in public spaces. In either case, we encounter once again the desire to subordinate and dehumanise female bodies.</p>
<i>Frutinha</i>	Little fruit	Attack	Homophobia	<p>“<i>Frutinha</i>” is a term used to insult men who have romantic or sexual relationships with other men. Associating men with fruits implies that, because of their sexual orientation, these men are not masculine enough. Here, as in other forms of offensive language towards gay</p>

				<p>or bisexual men (or heterosexual men, through inferiorising gay or bisexual), there is an association between non-conforming masculinities and the subordination of these individuals. It is interesting to note that, even though this type of attack is specifically targeted at men, there is a connection to femininity. “<i>Frutinhas</i>” are perceived as being closer to femininity and, therefore, become targets of violent discourse.</p>
<p><i>Tenho nojo de você/ repugnante</i></p>	<p>Disgusting/nasty</p>	<p>Attack</p>	<p>Disgust</p>	<p>Disgust was present in relation to all types of attacks we classified. In some cases, it was directed at women for simply being women and aspiring to occupy institutional political spaces. In other cases, it targeted black individuals who advocated for a political stance that supposedly did not align with their race – such as the case of a black candidate, Fernando Holiday, who faced attacks for being both black and conservative. Additionally, it was specifically directed at female candidates who did not support the re-election of Bolsonaro as the president.</p>

Examples of insults not included above are *mentiroso* (liar), *desonesto* (dishonest), *corrupto* (corrupt), *fodase* (fuck off) and *merda* (shit). As mentioned, these terms are commonly used against people of any gender and any ethnic or racial background. None of them directly aligned with the so-called protected groups, so we did not create subcategories to classify them. However, context and volume may differ according to social markers.

In addition to the changes in the analysis and classification of insults and attacks, in 2022 we also focused on ensuring representation by including at least 50% of profiles of black female candidates from different regions of the country. This approach resulted in a reduction in the number of male candidates monitored, going from twenty to ten. However, even regarding male candidates, we made careful selections to ensure representation of different ethnic groups, ideologies, sexual orientations and regions of the country. This strategy allowed us to obtain comparable qualitative data in relation to women, who were also grouped into different profiles based on social markers of difference.

In both the inaugural edition of the project in 2020, and the subsequent iteration in 2022, women candidates encountered a pervasively hostile environment on social media solely due to their gender. Their physical appearance, personal lives, attire, past experiences, body weight and maternal capabilities were subject to incessant criticism and targeted attacks. Conversely, male candidates, except those who identified as gay, transgender, black or indigenous, predominantly faced scrutiny pertaining to their political engagement and activities. Men who are not white, cisgender or heterosexual, conversely, also got more “personal” attacks referring to social markers. Because we analysed all these different social markers in the very selection of the profiles we monitored, two things were evident to us: first, that the nature of misogyny changes according to other social markers; second, that men are also targeted in a different way when they belong to historically marginalised groups.

A final consideration concerning social media monitoring was that, in partnership with INCT.DD, DFRLab, Instituto Vero, AzMina magazine, and Volt Data Lab, we adapted and used the MonitorA infrastructure to also analyse social markers as weapons against journalists on Twitter.¹¹ This study showed that the dynamics of online violence follow similar patterns. Women were more often targeted: as much as 17% of the tweets directed at women journalists constituted personal attacks, while only 8% of those targeting male journalists were found to be hostile. Commonly used terms against women included “ridiculous”, “scumbag”, “nuts” and “wuss”, often implying a lack of competence in interpreting texts or understanding political scenarios. Assertions of intellectual inferiority played a major role against women. We were also able to clearly identify that influential figures, including authorities (and regrettably even the former president, Jair Bolsonaro, and his family), played a significant role in amplifying misogynistic and racist attacks against journalists online (InternetLab et al., 2022).

From a methodological perspective, it is also interesting that we had an extra challenge identifying the social markers. Given the particular Brazilian complexities in the attribution and self-definition of race and

¹¹ Monitoring 200 profiles of Brazilian journalists, we employed a lexicon of offensive, misogynistic, sexist, racist, anti-lesbian, anti-transgender and homophobic terms. This resulted in the collection of 7.1 million tweets which potentially contained offensive content, directed at 133 women journalists and 67 men journalists. Through detailed analysis, we identified over 8300 tweets with significant engagement that constituted direct attacks on the journalists.

ethnicity,¹² defining someone's race is not an easy task. When it comes to sexuality or other markers, it can be all the more challenging. In the case of politicians, classifying and defining is easier: once they decide to run, they must declare racial information and other social markers are frequently brought forth by themselves in their campaigns – and start being used against them as well. In the case of journalists, we decided to take responsibility as researchers, especially in the definitions of ethnic-racial belonging, assuming that we might incur mistakes. Making mistakes seemed less severe than foregoing consideration of a marker as important as race in the Brazilian context. Up to the time of writing this report, no misclassifications had been pointed out to us.

Intersectionality in Praxis: Research Engagement and Dissemination

Through the research project, we actively engaged in disseminating our findings and participating in public debates. This included collaborations with various stakeholders and using various platforms to ensure our work reached a wide audience. For example, we submitted contributions to the UN¹³ and to Facebook's Oversight Board¹⁴, and presented our findings at international¹⁴ events within the field, thereby influencing the public discussion about these issues. The MonitorA, especially because of our partnership with *AzMina* magazine (a feminist news media organisation), resulted in articles published in renowned Brazilian newspapers, such as *Folha de São Paulo*, *UOL*, and *Terra*. The impact of MonitorA extended beyond media coverage and resonated with the candidates themselves, providing them with a sense of safety and empowering them to take action based on our findings.¹⁵ We presented the results and recommendations

¹² The discussion of ethnic-racial identity in Brazil is deeply rooted in a history of efforts to whiten the population. Some viewpoints advocate for collective recognition of “*pretas*” (black) and “*pardas*” (brown) as black, while a more recent perspective highlights that “*pardos*” (browns) can also have indigenous ancestry. Recently, individuals have begun identifying as black or indigenous upon gaining social consciousness. However, wrongly categorising a person based on race/ethnicity can be offensive and impactful. This discourse has been further enriched by the significant conversation around self-definitions and the misuse of these self-affirmations to secure opportunities designated for “*pardos*”, “*pretos*” and indigenous individuals. See, for example, Guimarães (1999, 2012).

¹³ Joint submission made by IT for Change and InternetLab to the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression for the UNGA Report on Gender Justice. See <https://itforchange.net/sites/default/files/1738/ITforChangeInternetLab-SubmissionToGARReportGenderJustice-June2021.pdf>

¹⁴ Our contribution to the Oversight Board on Meta's nudity policies was an opportunity for us to influence Meta's policies directly, based on the knowledge we accumulated about online misogyny during this project. To this end, we partnered with Lux Ferreira, who holds a PhD in social anthropology from the University of São Paulo, to write a contribution on Meta's nudity policy. Our contribution was cited among the arguments brought by the Oversight Board's decision. We pointed out that we were able to identify successive cases of removal of trans and non-binary photos based on Meta's nudity policy. At the same time, similar images of cis bodies were not removed. Thus, these cases may indicate a tendency towards the sexualisation of non-cisgender bodies. Given the relevance of the issue at hand, working on this case was an opportunity to dig deeper into the subject and contribute to an essential discussion. See InternetLab's contribution to the Oversight Board's decision here: <https://www.oversightboard.com/news/1214820616135890-oversight-board-overturns-meta-s-original-decisions-in-the-gender-identity-and-nudity-cases/>

¹⁵ For example, member of parliament, Erika Hilton, prosecuted aggressors based on our findings, and she and Manuela D'Ávila mentioned the results in interviews and debates.

directly to platforms, with concrete results: one of the major companies decided to take forward a process to change a policy that provided less protection to candidates (including women, black and LGBT+) because they are “public figures”, and another incorporated our lexicon as a resource. On the public sector side, MonitorA’s research was cited during the approval process of the Political Violence Law in 2021.¹⁶

These are some of the efforts that we, as a policy-oriented research organisation, undertook to make sure that the rich research results resonated and produced an effective change in culture and policy regarding online misogyny from an intersectional perspective. On the more substantive side of things, a few considerations are important.

First, we started the project understanding that it was important to investigate how online misogyny and sexism operated, how they affected different groups of women differently, and which solutions would be needed. The years when the project was conducted coincided with a period of intense discussion surrounding platform governance, regulation and the potential criminalisation of misogyny.

Regarding platform governance and regulation, our research allowed us to engage with platforms and illuminate contextual aspects of misogyny and other forms of violence and discrimination. This engagement also brought insights into our research. Over time, it became evident that the term “hate speech”, widely promoted internationally by social media platforms, ends up externalising a US-based concept that does not resonate with local discussions, simplifies forms of violence which require more careful intersectional analysis, and takes certain localised forms of discrimination as universal.

For example, in a meeting with social media policy officers, an employee kept asking questions about religious intolerance of Muslims while ignoring intolerance of African-Brazilian religions. Additionally, standardised policies, under a broad umbrella of hate speech, tended to overlook the nuances of how certain words are used to dehumanise individuals (for example, comparing black women to animals). On the platform regulation side, the legislative debate on these forms of violence is still largely taken for granted, and if different social markers are mentioned, they are mentioned as separate forms of violence. As we affirmed at the beginning of this paper, there is still a long way to go before policy discussions fully incorporate intersectionality. Incorporating an intersectional perspective in the legislative arena is important, but we recognise the ongoing importance of advancing public awareness through an alliance of research and media outreach.

The advances and limits of incorporating intersectionality within legislative discussions on misogyny is exemplified by two situations that occurred during the research period. The first related to the Political Violence Against Women Law, approved in 2021. The first election during which the new law was in effect was 2022’s. While it is generally understood as an important landmark (with our research already identifying

¹⁶ During the Bill’s passage through congress, the Bill’s rapporteur, Congresswoman Angela Amin (PP/SC), mentioned the MonitorA in her report. https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/prop_mostrarintegra?codteor=1949005&filename=PRLP+1+%3D%3E+PL+349/2015

enforcement shortcomings),¹⁷ it addresses *sex*, not *gender*, which might limit its scope. On the other hand, the law addresses racial discrimination against women, which is an important intersectional result. The second situation was an important discussion raised by feminists in 2023 about precisely the issue we had been studying: the lack of criminal provisions against misogyny. Many misogynistic practices are criminalised (for example, threats or defamation). However, misogynistic speech per se is not a criminal offense, while other forms of discrimination, such as racism, religious intolerance, and homophobia, are. We dedicated efforts to understand why, and one of our conclusions was that misogyny is naturalised in a different way, due to the biologisation of gender differences (see Fávero, 2011; Sarti, 2011). However, we could not simply side with the campaign for criminalisation, due to our understanding of intersectional considerations. Another part of the Brazilian feminist debate, particularly conducted by black feminist theorists (Borges, 2019; Flauzina, 2006, 2015; Pires, 2016), advocates for less criminal-based solutions (or even against the prison system as a whole) because of how it disproportionately affects the Black populations in Brazil, who are severely more likely to be incarcerated and also less protected by the system (particularly black women). Therefore, while we actively advocated for the use of the concept of misogyny (instead of hate speech), and did not position ourselves against criminalising it (since we believe it could provide solutions to very specific situations), we did not join forces for promoting it. Instead, we decided to prioritise raising awareness, engaging with political actors that propose educational and administrative solutions, and platform governance, as well as consistently incorporating intersectional considerations in all our actions and interventions. We recognise that promoting internal diversity and advocating for more diversity in our fields of action is integral to this effort.

Final considerations

In this paper, we aimed to articulate the intersectional conceptions, methods and praxis we adopted in the #Recognise-Resist-Remedy project. To do so, we laid out the nearly decade-long trajectory of InternetLab's research on online gender-based violence and the shifting and intense political context in Brazil during the project's development. This is a project that changed over time due to external circumstances, internal evaluations of the need to encompass new analyses – such as conceptual divergences or inconsistencies in the use of the term “hate speech” and its adequateness to addressing the problem of misogyny – and opportunities to work in new partnerships and enter dialogue with the emergence of new debates, such as that of political violence.

The adoption of an intersectional lens inside the organisation was gradual and had to do with increasing social awareness in Brazil, internal change and staff diversification, and with both individual and combined efforts to deepen and transversalise understandings of intersectionality at InternetLab. The #Recognise-Resist-Remedy project is a rich example of these efforts and the importance of framing intersectionality from a

¹⁷ See discussion on Valente (2023).

project's outset, while remaining flexible and adaptable. The project also illustrates very concrete challenges for adopting intersectional methodologies – for example, in finding relevant cases in the judiciary, getting information about social markers from the judicial documents, or asserting a person's race when doing social media analysis in a country that historically tried to invisibilise the reality of racial differences.

Our research path in this project also provided us with deep learning about the importance of context. For example, although we were aware of inconsistencies in the use of the term “hate speech” in the Brazilian context, we were not fully conscious of how foreign the concept was to the historical discussions on discrimination in the country, which we learned through a combination of literature review, case law and in-depth interviews. In that respect, one of the main conclusions we can draw from this paper, reasoning with one of the points Misra et al. (2021) make in their paper on methods of intersectional research, is that although much can be learned from transnational experiences and literature in terms of comparison and insights, a local, context-first approach should be the starting point for intersectional analysis.

Although there is growing awareness and debate around issues of gender, race, sexuality and social class, there remains a pressing need to further develop intersectional understandings, which translates into the difficulty of crafting genuinely intersectional policies. In the Brazilian context, there is a clear trend towards resorting to criminal-law solutions for various problems, including gender violence. This approach stifles institutional creativity, narrows the scope of potential solutions and strengthens a public security policy that disproportionately targets poor black communities. In the context of our project, we conclude that to effectively combat discursive and symbolic violence against women and other vulnerable groups, it is crucial to adopt an intersectional approach. This approach entails recognising and addressing the structural forms of violence that are prevalent in Brazilian society, such as misogyny, racism, homophobia, ableism and more, under their names. Our experience has also made us strong believers in the power of bringing research into the public debate to advance intersectional understanding, change cultural norms, and ultimately expand the possibilities of policies to address these issues by considering the complexity an intersectional lens brings up.

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