

Feminism, Visual Culture, and Television in Post-Revolutionary Portugal: The Case of *Nome Mulher*

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ES Abstract. In 1970s Portugal, new media forms such as photography, video, installation, and performance gained prominence in the artistic landscape. This article examines the first feminist series on Portuguese television, broadcast between 1974 and 1976 on public television, which was profoundly transformed by the Carnation Revolution of 25 April. It represents a cultural experience that illustrates the intersection between an emerging visual culture and a new media culture seeking to align itself with the progressive narratives of the social-democratic agenda.

Keywords: Television, Feminism, *Nome Mulher*, Visual Culture, 25 April.

ES Feminismo, cultura visual y televisión en el Portugal posrevolucionario: El caso de *Nome Mulher*

Resumen. En la década de 1970 en Portugal, nuevos medios como la fotografía, el vídeo, la instalación y la performance adquirieron protagonismo en el panorama artístico. Este artículo analiza la primera serie feminista de la televisión portuguesa, emitida entre 1974 y 1976 en la televisión pública, profundamente transformada por la Revolución del 25 de Abril. Se trata de una experiencia cultural que evidencia la intersección entre una cultura visual emergente y una nueva cultura mediática que buscaba alinearse con las narrativas progresistas del programa socialdemócrata.

Palabras clave: Televisión, Feminismo, *Nome Mulher*, Cultura Visual, 25 de Abril.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 1.1. Photography in the Visual Regimes of the 1970s in Portugal. 2. State of the Art. 2.1. The Television of the Revolution and the Memory of the Revolution. 2.2. *Nome Mulher*: the first feminist series on Portuguese television. 3. Conclusions. 4. References.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Photography in the Visual Regimes of the 1970s in Portugal

The transition from dictatorship to democracy in Portugal was matched by a change in visual culture. From the 1970s onward, new artistic languages—including photography, video, installation, and performance—began to challenge dominant narratives and representations. Paula Rego's work, for instance, confronted the conservatism of the Estado Novo, embodying a resistance that extended across multiple media. Similarly, the photographic work of Maria Lamas and the experimentalism of artists like Julião Sarmento and Helena Almeida desempenharam papéis cruciais na formação de contranarrativas visuais.

These movements foreshadowed a broader shift in Portuguese media, particularly television, which, following the Carnation Revolution, became a crucial space for reconfiguring the public sphere. This article examines how these transformations intersected with feminist narratives in the only television programme of the time that explicitly addressed gender issues: *Nome Mulher* (1974-1976).

Paula Rego's early work, such as *Salazar Vomitando a Pátria* (Salazar Vomiting the Homeland, 1960), exemplifies the subversive visual responses to the Estado Novo. Her representations of gender and power reflect a broader artistic movement that sought to disrupt the regime's dominant imagery.

The São Mamede Gallery in Lisbon exhibited the work for the first time in 1972, albeit with caution—the title was altered to *S. Vomiting the Pátria*, a manoeuvre designed to evade censorship. Art was made in defiance of fear, in a spirit akin to *Manifesto (for a Lost Cause)*, the title of another painting exhibited in Paula Rego's first solo show at the Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes [National Society of Fine Arts, 1965]. This painting was

later included in the catalogue *Dez Artistas da Galeria São Mamede [Ten Artists from the São Mamede Gallery]*, reflecting the paradoxes of the Portuguese artistic field—on the one hand, marked by the conformism and subjugation imposed by the dictatorship, yet, on the other, traversed by subversive currents aligned with international trends, and in some cases even capable of surpassing them in radicality.

Victor Musgrave, founder of the emblematic Gallery One in London, rejected this particular painting despite his admiration for the more marginal aspects of Paula Rego's work. In his view, however, the painting "had too many phalluses." Structural sexism was also present in cosmopolitan London, and the artist's biography is filled with painful episodes that confirm gender inequality as an obstacle to her artistic and personal recognition. Yet, at least there, news circulated freely, and cultural exchanges were broader.

From 1950 onwards, exile in London became a common path for a generation of Portuguese artists who, while not exactly fleeing the political police, sought a space where their "*iconography of resistance*" (Oliveira, 2019) could flow without the barriers of censorship. Paula Rego interpreted reality "*from the perspective of the underdogs*,"¹ a transversal category that includes women, the colonised, and the invisibilised. Her work is nourished both by memories and archetypes of violence and by news reports of crimes of passion, colonial atrocities, the deaths of women who fell victim to illegal abortions, infanticides committed by single mothers abandoned by patriarchal society, and a singular geography of female sexuality.

The works of exiled Portuguese artists in London—among whom the most celebrated, besides Paula Rego, were Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos, José Cutileiro, and Jorge Vieira—combined profound existentialist tension with innovative visual regimes. They created alternative narratives about the past, introducing a social imagination that broke with the nationalist vision fostered by the Estado Novo regime. Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos' paintings and engravings, for example, are populated by "characters from the past, bishops, sailors, kings, and soldiers, who appear in a grotesque and silent apparition, haunting the Portuguese who seem condemned to live in the past" (Oliveira, 2019: 189).

The 1970s in Portugal witnessed a surge of artistic experimentation that disrupted conventional understandings of art and media. New materials and techniques blurred the boundaries between disciplines, fostering a critical engagement with both the past and the rapidly evolving political landscape. Photography, video, installation, and performance played central roles in these transformations, as artists sought to inscribe alternative narratives into the visual culture of the period.

These new visual languages did not remain confined to the fine arts but also influenced the rapidly evolving media environment. Television, in particular, became a key space for negotiating the tensions between continuity and rupture, tradition and progress. Within this context, *Nome Mulher* (1974-1976) emerged as a groundbreaking attempt to use television as a medium for feminist discourse, challenging the deeply ingrained patriarchal structures of Portuguese society.

New media such as photography, video, installation, and performance gained prominence in the social and artistic landscape. The history of Portuguese photography during this period reveals the coexistence of multiple paths towards autonomy and artistic rigour. According to curator Delfim Sardo, who curated the exhibition *O Fotógrafo Accidental – Serialismo e Experimentação em Portugal [The Accidental Photographer – Serialism and Experimentation in Portugal]*, held at Culturgest in Lisbon in 2017, the 1970s disrupted "historical connections inherited from the tradition of Fine Arts."² Several artists emerging from Pop Art and Conceptualism (Ângelo de Sousa, Alberto Carneiro, Roberto Calhau, Julião Sarmento, Helena Almeida, and others) expanded the "universe of photographic" through serial approaches and experimental practices.

The intersection with other arts and media through multiple forms of contamination integrated photography into the universe of artistic languages undergoing renewal. Photography established conceptual affinities between artistic practices and served as a central medium for documenting and understanding the hybrid and convergent dynamics of an era historically marked by the transition between political regimes, social imaginaries, and visual cultures.

The Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 marked a turning point for Portuguese visual culture. The growing significance of documentary photography revitalised the role of media in shaping contemporary perspectives on social change. This shift also transformed television, which had been a tightly controlled instrument of state propaganda. In the wake of the revolution, television became a space for new narratives, engaging with the emerging feminist consciousness and broader struggles for democracy.

It was within this rapidly evolving media landscape that *Nome Mulher* was conceived. The programme not only documented women's struggles in post-revolutionary Portugal but also actively participated in the construction of a feminist counter-public sphere.

Contrary to the widespread belief that the Portuguese dictatorship neglected its visual representation, Filomena Serra's study (2021) confirms that the regime strategically invested in photographic imagery for political purposes and mass mobilisation. It capitalised on the denotative power of photography and its reception as an essentially realist medium. The Estado Novo commissioned renowned photographers and graphic artists—including Horácio and Mário Novais, Octávio Bobone, Beatriz Ferreira, Salazar Diniz, Estúdio Fotografia Alvão, Joshua Benoliel, San Payo, and Dulce Perestrelo—to visually perform the regime's values across a range of publications and other initiatives (exhibitions, campaigns). The visibility constructed through

¹ Buala, 2024. Interview with curators Catarina Alfaro and Leonor de Oliveira. See in <https://www.buala.org/pt/cara-a-cara/com-a-sua-obra-paula-rego-mostrou-que-a-democracia-nao-esta-completa-sem-incluir-os-dire>

² Público, 2017. See in <https://www.publico.pt/2017/05/19/culturaipilon/noticia/o-serial-e-o-experimental-na-fotografia-portuguesa-ate-ao-infinito-e-mais-alem-1772337>

printed photography glorified public works, the restoration of national monuments, the opening of universal exhibitions, the construction of imperial historical memories, the cult of state figures, and the ethnographic exaltation of the people transformed into regional stereotypes.

Counter-visualities, or counter-discourses, existed but remained episodic, always marginal when compared to the propagandistic use of photography. One notable example is the book *As Mulheres do Meu País* (*The Women of My Country*, 1948) by the writer and journalist Maria Lamas (1893-1983), an extensive photographic reportage on the condition of women in Portugal. The book functions almost as a printed film documentary, exposing the brutal economic and cultural deprivation of Portuguese women.

Defending Maria Lamas' photographic work, the critic Alexandre Pomar stated:

Photography does not exist merely to accompany literary and social narratives, nor is it there simply to illustrate. It is an essential element of reportage or inquiry: it describes, documents, informs, reveals, and is always accompanied by long captions, following the tradition of documentary and journalistic photography. What could perhaps be called the intensity of vision can be recognised and justified (Pomar, 2004: 1) [translated by the author].³

Another example is the exhibition by the surrealist painter and photographer Fernando Lemos, held at Casa Jalco in Lisbon (1952), which featured 55 portraits of Lisbon-based artists such as António Pedro, Gaspar Gasais Monteiro, Alexandre O'Neill, Vieira da Silva, Jorge de Sena, Cardoso Pires, and others. It was one of the last manifestations of an already late surrealist movement, and shortly afterwards, at the age of 26, Fernando Lemos emigrated to Brazil.

Art critic Augusto França (2000) highlights how the first exhibition of the Portuguese surrealist group, founded in 1949 by Mário Cesariny and Cruzeiro Seixas, marked its ideological stance against the dictatorship. The proposed cover for the exhibition catalogue was originally a campaign poster supporting Norton de Matos, the opposition candidate in the presidential elections, featuring the statement: "The Lisbon Surrealist Group/ asks/: after twenty-two years of/ Fear/ are we still capable/ of an act/ of Freedom?/ It is absolutely essential/ to vote against/ fascism." (França, 2000: 387) [translated by the author]. This cover was rejected by the Lisbon Civil Government and replaced with a more innocuous version.

The humanist photography movement that emerged after World War II also found some expression in Portugal, particularly through photographers such as Eduardo Gageiro, since the space of the city and its working-class peripheries is travelled and lived within discontinuous and ambivalent lines filtered through individual and collective memory.

One of the most striking examples of how the intuitions and artistic endeavours of Portuguese photographers, misaligned with official propaganda, only truly flourished after the Carnation Revolution, is the exhibition and photobook by Victor Palla and Costa Martins, *Lisboa, Cidade Triste e Alegre* (Lisbon, Sad and Joyful City), presented in 1958 in Lisbon and Porto. This work emerged in the same year as Robert Frank's *The Americans* (Delpire, Paris, 1958), which would serve as a blueprint for future generations. According to historian Teresa Siza:

These are not happy, intimate, or merely unexpected photographs; this is a revolutionary project, unfolding all the explored and yet-to-be-explored dimensions of photography—a way of presenting a different reality, as dynamic and mutable as life itself. It encompasses everything the eye perceives: opacity, fragmentation, incompleteness, blur—indications of the discovery that the camera can reproduce that fluid and imprecise reality seen by human eyes (Siza, 1999: 141) [translated by the author].

However, their envisioned revolution remained an isolated experience, met with indifference and misunderstanding. The book, now out of print and considered a rarity, was a commercial failure. Its pioneering significance was only recognised in the 1980s, influencing a new generation of photographers who began to benefit from the emergence or reorientation of journalism outlets with a strong focus on photography (such as the newspapers *Expresso* and *Independente**) and the expansion of exhibition circuits (new galleries and, notably, the Photography Encounters in Coimbra, Braga, Porto, and Vila Franca de Xira).

Photography became the most significant contributor to the memory and post-memory of the Portuguese Revolution. Beyond documenting the events, it defined visual protagonists, mediated and connected sequences of events that erupted simultaneously and often appeared disconnected. Many of the interpretative frameworks applied to photographs of the 25 April emerged with remarkable foresight, only later being integrated into historiography—such as the insistence on portraying the revolution as a popular movement, materialised in thousands of images placing the collective at the centre of the historical scene. It was the visual heritage accumulated by photography (and reinforced by television and cinema) that enabled a clear mapping of continuity and rupture with the past, decisively shaping 25 April not only as the defining event of Portuguese democracy but also as a prolonged phenomenon that resonated through multiple post-revolutionary episodes.

Writer Fernando Assis Pacheco captured this intense energy in *Portugal Livre: 20 fotógrafos de imprensa contam tudo sobre a Revolução das Flores* [*Portugal Free: 20 Press Photographers Tell Everything About the Revolution of Flowers*], the first photobook published after the coup in June 1974. He describes the faces of the revolution as "jubilant to the point of losing lucidity, clenched in disbelief. The most beautiful flagrant

³ Blog de Alexandre Pomar, 3/10/2024. See in https://alexandrepomar.typepad.com/alexandre_pomar/história-da-fotografia/

crime of our lives is recorded in these pages, and I do not believe that the future will look upon them absent-mindedly" (p. 12) [translated by the author].⁴

The 25 April Revolution was also a *revolution in the media*—a phrase that serves as the title of the book *A revolução nos média* by Inácia Rezola and Pedro Marques Gomes (2014)—marking the beginning of a new era for media companies, journalists, and audiences. This article explores the role of television in dismantling Estado Novo's narratives about women and in fostering a gender consciousness aligned with the concerns of feminist movements.

We focus on the only feminist television programme that emerged in the wake of the revolution: the documentary series *Nome Mulher* [Name Woman] (1974-1976), created by journalists Maria Antónia Palla and Antónia de Sousa, directed and produced by Cinequipa, a company run by filmmaker brothers Fernando and João Matos Silva. This was a groundbreaking feminist project, part of the broader construction of a new visual regime that took shape across photography, television, and cinema.

Following W.J.T. Mitchell's (2002) approach, we consider visual culture as an ongoing exercise of "showing seeing"—a framework that aims to deconstruct "not only the social construction of vision but also the visual construction of the social."

2. State of the Art

2.1. The Television of the Revolution and the Memory of the Revolution

Television is the major contributor to collective memory, the shared nature of remembering. This popular memory is more about a communal response to current controversies and the forming of a historical consciousness than an accurate report of the past.

It is important to understand how television constructed a remembered version of the Portuguese democratic transition rather than whether that account is historically correct.

Television is better understood as a discourse operating within frameworks of knowledge, a competing ground for different political and cultural meanings. Television "liveliness" guarantees a connection to shared social realities and constructs a powerful mediated reality. According to Couldry (2010:256) "liveness is a category whose use naturalises the general idea that, through the media, we achieve a shared attention to the "realities" that matter for us as a society". Raw historical events can't be transmitted by a newscast, but they can be signified, circulated and re-enter societal and symbolic structures, feeding what the Italian intellectual Umberto Eco called "the logic of culture" (Eco, 1976). Television is better understood as a discourse operating within frameworks of knowledge.

The media culture emerging from the revolutionary experience continues to activate a social imagination, a professional mission, and a collective memory. Its main characteristics are stitched with diverse materials, influences, and rhythms, navigating entangled modernities (Mihelj & Huxtable, 2018).

Media are technologies that act upon time, and in this sense, different media create different historicities—they shape how we experience history and inscribe it into memory. The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1950) highlighted that memory is collective (we rarely remember alone) and communicative, meaning that it signals belonging to identity groups and is constructed through interaction with others. This operation is evident in the collective memory of 25 April, which intertwines the memories of those who lived through it with the post-memory of those who, although they did not witness the revolution firsthand, recognise it as a memory. More than a matter of distance (whether generational or temporal to the remembered event), post-memory is defined by the social frameworks that enable the emergence of memory work.

In 1974, television rapidly became the dominant medium in a pre-digital society. While this dominance already existed during the period of Marcelo Caetano as Prime Minister (1968-1974), it was largely confined to entertainment, as television news was heavily censored. Portugal had only one television channel—technically, two existed from 1971 onwards, but the II Programa (Second Programme, as it was called) broadcasted only between 7:30 p.m. and midnight, merely reproducing the content of the I Programa (First Programme). In practice, and in terms of symbolic production, only one channel truly mattered. This early form of television was designed to construct a shared sense of time and to organise the temporality of collective experience.

Francisco Rui Cádima (2009) studied television under the dictatorship and examined how its two main "controllers"—Manuel Maria Múrias (until 1968) and Ramiro Valadao (until 1974)—carried out their roles as "political commissars" with militant dedication, directing news coverage towards the glorification of the regime's central figures (respectively, Salazar and Marcelo Caetano).

As part of the Estado Novo's communication strategy, television became the primary media device for constructing the regime's image, even though it was not contemporaneous with its establishment. Once television became available (in 1958), the investment that had previously been focused on printed photography shifted towards television. It was the most heavily censored medium and the one that served propaganda purposes most effectively.

The long 48-year dictatorship actively promoted its symbolic imaginaries, reinforced through various mechanisms, including censorship, cultural policy, and information control. António Costa Pinto (2022) argues that the appeal of Salazarism's cultural project lay in its systematic restoration of traditional values. This conservative formula of governance produced, at a political level, a nationalist and parochial state and, at the

⁴ Assis Pacheco, 1974. Portugal Livre: 20 fotografos de imprensa contam tudo sobre a Revolução das Flores. Editorial O Século. See in <https://www.publico.pt/2024/11/25/edicoes-publico/noticia/registos-belo-flagrante-delito-2113251>

symbolic level, an ethnographic art, a popular cinema, a grandiloquent press and a folklorist people. When the regime collapsed abruptly, its formula and outputs lost their appeal and were replaced by new values. RTP (the national broadcaster) became a key instrument in creating new imaginaries.

One of the immediate effects of 25 April on RTP was an instant awareness of the power of television. Managing programming now became a political concern and an object of study. Between 1974 and 1976, numerous administrative commissions were established to align television with the political objectives of the revolution. The first of these commissions was installed in May 1974, when RTP was placed under the direct control of the Junta de Salvação Nacional [National Salvation Board]. It was led by Frigate Captain Conceição Silva, Lieutenant Colonel Costa Brás, and Major Duarte Ferreira. These officials were interviewed in the studio by journalist Luís Filipe Costa, who referred to Conceição Silva as “our commander”, a telling sign of the initial sense of complicity between the revolutionary military and the journalists.

In the days following the military coup, television became a space of emotion and encounters, where the stories of people silenced for years could finally be told and celebrated. One of the most moving visual records is the report on the release of political prisoners from Caxias⁵ prison, broadcast on 27 April 1974, produced by journalist Jaime de Saint-Maurice. This report features interviews with historical figures of the anti-fascist struggle, such as Palma Inácio, Nuno Teotónio Pereira, José Manuel Tengarrinha, Manuel Serra, and others. For the first time on Portuguese television, people spoke openly about the tortures carried out by the PIDE (International Police for the Defence of the State), the harshness of sentences, and the illegality of the trials conducted by the plenary courts, where judges were complacent with agents of the regime and intimidated detainees and their defence lawyers.

These are brief yet powerful testimonies, captured amid the emotional intensity of the moment, as prisoners—some of whom had been detained for years—prepared to walk free, with their families and friends waiting outside for the long-awaited reunion. They demonstrate the profound power of television, capable of generating new social and emotional vibrations, and triggering symbolic and epistemological shifts. These fractured lines of experience would later become the foundation of Portugal’s historical narrative about its recent dictatorial past.

Television programming was rapidly transformed, shifting towards news and political programmes that reflected the country’s new social reality. A space was created for open debate on national issues and for new voices to emerge. Madalena Soares dos Reis (2008) highlighted a series of new political programmes, with emblematic titles such as *O Mundo do Trabalho* [The World of Work], *Vamos Decidir em Conjunto* [Let’s Decide Together], *A Política é de Todos* [Politics is for Everyone], *A Gente que Nós Somos* [The People We Are], and *Escrever é Lutar* [Writing is Fighting]. These programmes explicitly aimed to make television an instrument for political education and awareness.

2.2. Nome Mulher: the first feminist series on Portuguese television

One of the most groundbreaking projects of this period was *Nome Mulher*, the first feminist television series in Portugal, which aired between August 1974 and March 1976. The series consisted of 46 episodes, each lasting around 40 minutes. The majority of episodes responded to the pressing issues of the Ongoing Revolutionary Process or PREC (Revolutionary Process Undergoing), focusing on women’s struggles in factories, rural estates, and activist movements. These included demands for housing rights, divorce rights, equal pay for equal work, and fair regulation of family law. Strippoli (2024: 15) notes that the series “provides a visual representation of the process of female consciousness-raising and the organisation of female workers in the Portuguese context in the mid-1970s.”

The series’ recurring themes align with the core of a contemporary feminist agenda—one that is inclusive and fosters transnational alliances. The content highlights Portugal’s historical delays in gender equality, documenting the struggles of single mothers forced to declare their children as ‘of unknown fathers’ when paternity was not acknowledged, women subject to restrictions on mobility or financial autonomy due to legal frameworks that legitimised discrimination, and those trapped in domestic spheres marked by oppression and economic disparity. These personal narratives emerge within a deeply patriarchal structure, one that penetrates even the most intimate spheres of life—mentalities, emotions, sexuality, bodily representations, and the very ability to inscribe oneself into history. This deeper understanding is reflected in the words of the writer Maria Teresa Horta, who, in an interview with Madalena Tavares (2004), stated: “Fascism deteriorated everything: our self-esteem, our ambition, our dignity, and, above all, women. Some women fought against the regime but refused to call themselves feminists because feminism had come to be seen as something dangerous.”

Another significant aspect of the series is its contribution to recovering the memory and political inscription of feminist struggles, which had been lost between oblivion and stigma. *Nome Mulher* made feminism visible in Portugal, both in its emotional dimension and its historical reflexivity. This narrative had been virtually non-existent in the country. Feminist consciousness, as well as its perception and experience as a political stance, a philosophy, and a worldview, had been forged within friendship circles and intimate spaces, lacking institutionalisation or any form of public expression.

It is telling that the first episode of the series was dedicated to Maria Lamas, who, at the age of 74, was still considered a guiding figure and spiritual mentor for the journalists behind the series and many other women.

⁵ <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/libertacao-dos-presos-politicos/>

Maria Antónia Palla (2021) recounts how the conversations and emotional support provided by Maria Lamas allowed her to reinterpret various episodes of her own life—divorces, disconnections, acts of defiance—through a feminist lens:

Maria Lamas played a profoundly significant role in my feminist education, even though we did not always agree. She sought unity between women and men, while I was beginning to understand that women's struggle had to be autonomous because men never prioritized our issues. Only in certain circumstances could we fight a common battle (Palla, 2021, 24).

The 1970s were marked by the formation of various feminist collectives. These included the MDM or *Movimento Democrático das Mulheres* (Women's Democratic Movement, created in 1968), the MLM or *Movimento de Libertação das Mulheres* (Women's Liberation Movement, formed in 1974), and *UMAR* or *União das Mulheres Antifascistas e Revolucionárias* (*Union of Antifascist and Revolutionary Women*, initiated in 1976). Since the dismantling of earlier feminist associations, such as the *Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas* (National Council of Portuguese Women), which was banned by the regime in 1947, there had been no visible feminist struggle in the public sphere. Feminist activism had remained clandestine, underground, and marginalised, even within the most historically resistant parties against the *Estado Novo*, particularly the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP).

Relating to feminist theory, hegemonic formulations drew primarily from liberal feminism, in the tradition of the old suffragist movement advocating for women's political rights and emancipation. In Portugal, this current became incorporated into so-called "State Feminism" with the creation of the *Comissão da Condição Feminina* (Commission for the Status of Women) in 1977. However, despite its popularity, the term "State Feminism" was ultimately misleading, as the Portuguese state never truly embraced feminism.

The MLM (Women's Liberation Movement) represented a minority radical feminist movement that proposed new ways of doing politics, opening space to redefine female identities. Their struggle was meant to be waged daily, aiming to raise women's awareness of their exclusion from public life and the violence they faced simply for being women. Despite its limited organisational structure, fragile networks, and scarce resources, the MLM proved to be the most effective in connecting with emerging feminist social movements, which were beginning to develop a transnational sense of solidarity.

The trial of three Portuguese writers—Maria Velho da Costa, Maria Teresa Horta, and Maria Isabel Barreno—accused in 1972 of "offending public morality" for their co-authored book *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* (New Portuguese Letters)—became the most internationally publicised feminist case. The book, which challenged patriarchal structures, sexual oppression, and women's silencing under dictatorship, sparked global outrage, becoming a symbol of feminist resistance and strengthening Portugal's ties with the broader international feminist movement.

According to a 2014 study by Ana Luísa Amaral:

The case of 'the three Marias', as the Portuguese government's trial against the three writers became known, was widely covered by major media outlets from various countries. These included *Le Monde*, *The Times*, *The New York Times*, *Nouvel Observateur*, *L'Express*, *Libération*, *The Boston Globe*, and several American television networks. Feminist demonstrations took place outside Portuguese embassies in different cities—one notable example being in Boston, where protesters held a vigil in front of the embassy. The book received public support from prominent feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Duras, and Doris Lessing (Amaral, 2010: 19).

Outrage against the Portuguese regime spread rapidly, prompting solidarity marches in France and the United States. The case of the three Marias was debated at a National Organization for Women (NOW) conference in 1973, held at Lesley College, Cambridge (Massachusetts), where John Lennon and Yoko Ono performed, turning the case into the first major international feminist cause of the 1970s.

The MLM (Women's Liberation Movement) staged highly innovative public demonstrations—one of the most striking being a political rally performance in Lisbon in 1975, which ended with activists being attacked and pursued by opponents. In August 1977, during the IV International Art Encounters in Caldas da Rainha, far-right groups vandalised artworks and assaulted female artists whose performances and public interactions challenged traditional representations of the female body in public spaces⁶. These violent incidents are now recognised as key moments in the genealogy of feminist artistic avant-gardes in Portugal, yet at the time, they received little support in the post-revolutionary climate. They were met with incomprehension, estrangement, and even hostility, as they seemed to divert attention from the more 'essential' feminist struggles that had galvanised public support in Portugal. These were the legalisation of divorce for couples married in the Catholic Church, equal parental rights and responsibilities, eliminating the legal category of 'children of unknown fathers', and reducing wage inequalities.

These three objectives enjoyed broad consensus in Portuguese society and were backed by a media landscape aligned with post-revolutionary social progressivism. Conversely, issues concerning sexual freedom and bodily autonomy were far more destabilising, challenging deeply entrenched conceptions of womanhood, particularly the rigid association of women with motherhood. One of the key transnational feminist struggles of the time was the decriminalisation of voluntary abortion—a right that was only legally secured in Portugal in 1998.

⁶ <https://bienaldecerveira.pt/2018-2/iv-encontros-internacionais-de-arte-rememorar-o-verao-de-1977-nas-caldas-da-rainha/>

The abrupt cancellation of *Nome Mulher* reflects this discomfort with the pro-choice movement. The series was suspended in April 1976 after the airing of an episode entitled *Aborto não é um crime*⁷ [Abortion Is Not a Crime], which exposed clandestine abortion as a public health crisis and featured footage from a “popular clinic” run by activists and volunteer medical professionals. RTP’s administration succumbed to pressure from the Catholic Church and conservative factions within the VI Provisional Government, leading to the programme’s termination. Journalist Maria Antónia Palla was accused of complicity in the practice of illegal abortions but was acquitted in court in 1979.

The issues that we might define as “the political personal” (Carol Hanisch, 1969) – that vast territory connecting physical and emotional experience with political and social structures – remained confined to niches. In many central aspects of feminist struggles, Portuguese women remained deprived of public voice and existence, even in progressive contexts. It was not until 1995 that a still slow process of gender parity began to emerge in democratically elected political bodies.

The series *Nome Mulher* explicitly sought to occupy this void, weaving affectionate connections around individual behaviours that society had moralised. Some of its protagonists had committed terrible crimes—such as killing their newborn children—but their stories were presented without judgement or condemnation, using a classical journalistic approach that aimed to place their actions within a broader framework of social abandonment.

The series created a space for engaging with the diverse experiences of Portuguese women, bringing together women from all social backgrounds—factory workers, rural labourers, domestic workers, intellectuals, scientists, and politicians—through reportage and documentary formats. Each episode sought to foster a sense of fraternal listening, situating both individual and collective women’s experiences within a social context that had historically devalued and subjected them. The aim was to allow women to speak about “what hurt them”, as one interviewee put it in an episode dedicated to women’s reproductive rights, particularly abortion.

It is striking to note the discrepancy between the rhythms and formats of feminist institutionalisation in Portugal, which largely followed a more liberal trajectory, and the movement’s media visibility and international solidarity, which were more rooted in a ‘poetics of resistance’, as Ana Luísa Amaral described it. However, what became evident very early on in both contexts was the sense of being left behind in the post-revolutionary whirlwind. Perhaps because Portugal never developed a mass popular feminism, the women’s struggles that gained momentum and visibility during the revolutionary period ultimately became absorbed into broader struggles for peace, bread, and housing—the celebrated ideals of 25 April.

The body, discourse, and sexuality, the social regulation of romantic relationships, the affirmation of feminist subjectivities, and gender discourses that denounced entrenched patriarchal structures and called for a specific revolution for women—these emerged immediately, and indeed had already found expression in literature, cinema, the visual arts, fashion, and music. These struggles translated into explosive but short-lived demands, always encountering resistance and hostility.

In a 1974 feature by Regina Louro on the new feminist collectives, published in the magazine *Flama*, the headline captured the widespread perplexity and scepticism of the time: *Afinal o que querem as feministas?* [After all, what do feminists want?]⁸

One month after the first meeting of the Movimento de Libertação das Mulheres (MLM), the government ignores them, the newspapers attack them, husbands react with outrage and threaten separation, friends mock them, and even other women insult them. It is not easy to be a movement—let alone to grow—under such conditions (Louro, 1974).

Alongside the lack of social recognition, feminist groups faced barriers to accessing and operationalising their values in a political world that remained overwhelmingly male-dominated after the revolution. Some degree of institutional presence—initially within the Constituent Assembly—was necessary to carve out space for intervention, yet women’s underrepresentation remained significant. Regina Marques, one of the leaders of the MDM (Women’s Democratic Movement), shared with Manuela Tavares her frustration over the organisation’s attempts to engage in dialogue with the new leaders of the Junta de Salvação Nacional. The demands issued during the first National Meeting of the MDM in 1973 were formally submitted to the Junta on 27 April 1974, just two days after the Revolution. The first statutes of the organisation were only approved on 12 October 1975, during the second National Meeting of the MDM in Lisbon. A document from that meeting reads: “Women, gathered at the Second National Meeting of the MDM on 12 October 1975, protest against the fact that, to this day, the Constituent Assembly has not approved any measure concerning equal rights between women and men to be included in the text of the future Constitution (2.º Encontro Nacional do MDM, 1974).”

This growing sense of disenchantment also began to permeate *Nome Mulher*, a series that empathically followed the pulse of feminist struggles in society. An episode aired in October 1970 on the Sogantal Case—a French-owned textile factory occupied by female workers for several months until the company finally surrendered—documents how the initial energy and determination of the workers slowly gave way to demoralisation. Faced with a rigid wall of political and bureaucratic authority, the women’s struggle ultimately clashed with a system that was gradually reassembling the old structures of class- and gender-based domination.

⁷ See in <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/conteudos/o-aborto-nao-e-um-crime-parte-i/>

⁸ *Flama*, 4 may 1974.

3. Conclusions

The series *Nome Mulher* is a singular cultural artefact, even within the rich and experimental television programming of the PREC. Born from a close collaboration between feminist women journalists and a team of politically engaged filmmakers, the series stands out for its modernity in both visual and discursive approaches. Its thematic choices and its commitment to forging a dual relationship—between those who speak, those who are spoken about, and those who listen—create a sense of sisterhood.

There are no exoticized or stereotyped subjects in *Nome Mulher*. The gaze is ethical, intimate, and immersive. The programme reflects a clear commitment to a marginalised feminist agenda, seeking to create a safe space for speech, where women talk about their lives—violent marriages, abandonment, depression, the banality of daily life, the lack of family support, and the absurdity of certain social constraints, such as the existence of “illegitimate” children or the social stigma surrounding single mothers. It offers a space to feel and integrate all experiences: the epic struggles of factory occupations, the challenges posed to bosses and husbands, but also the bitter silence of defeat, the tears of helplessness, the solidarity among women, and the near-desperate fight for survival.

All the women portrayed are “ordinary”, yet none are conventional. The vivid fresco of female lives unfolds on screen, capturing women from shantytowns, law offices, political chambers, and factory warehouses, immersing the audience in the harsh realities of their fractured lives.

The programme proves to be emancipatory, valuing female agency and the ability to “turn weakness into strength”. Even when women live in extreme conditions of economic and cultural deprivation, or face abuse, prejudice, and violence, they are always portrayed as agents of their own lives. This capacity for action transcends social classes, and *Nome Mulher* helps to dispel the notion that struggles for liberation and emancipation are solely bourgeois causes. The programme highlights working-class women who defy traditional family models, presenting themselves as strong, self-determined figures—caregivers, fighters, and architects of their own destinies. Though the series was ultimately a limited experience, it helped to construct new images of women, ones more aligned with the ideals of shared life in a democracy.

4. References

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