

## Writings of the self, Parrhesia and Feminism in Brazil<sup>1</sup>

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In *Le Courage de la Verité, Le Gouvernement de Soi e des Autres*, vol. II (2009), Michel Foucault makes surprising reflections on the way of life of the cynics, highlighting the “choice of life as a scandal of the truth”, the “living truly”, the making of one's own life a testimony of an artistic life, bare and free (FOUCAULT, 2009: 169). He hears in many passages the echoes of that radical bet on the critical, fighting life, close to primitive animality in the following centuries. He observes how strongly these concepts crossed the history of the West, affecting the practices of revolutionary militancy, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, most definitely in that which defines a break with the established, with social values and habits, with a search for a singular way of life and with the courage of the truth (FOUCAULT, 2009: 261).

If Foucault emphasizes three aspects of revolutionary militancy: the secret society, the visible, organized institution, and, the construction of a lifestyle, it is this third one that most closely interests him: the one that seeks to build a style of being, assuring a testimony for life itself. He is interested in the choice of a revolutionary life as a scandal of the truth, a choice of life in which the courage to struggle radically for the truth is paramount, risking death when necessary, that is, involving *parrhesia* as a political practice and ethical constitution. He adds:

“This life style proper to revolutionary militancy, the one that assures the testimony for life, is the break with the conventions, habits and values of society. And it should be manifested directly, in a visible form, by constant practice and immediate existence, the concrete possibility and evident value of another life, a life that is the true one” (FOUCAULT, 2009:170).

Frédéric Gros, in the thrilled summary he presents at the end of the book, marked by the admiration produced by Foucault's philosophical word, overlaps Foucault and Socrates, or discovers Socrates in Foucault, uniting the ends of the two threads that seem to make up the “imaginary genealogy” (TELLES, 1997) and bringing to a close a historical cycle and opening at the same time for the possibility of an intervention in the present and for the construction of a future (GROS, 2009:319). Gros brings them together generously at this moment of a final farewell, quoting the last words of the last course of Foucault, a few months before his death, as he had tried, in his classes in 1984, to solve the mystery of the last message of the Greek *parrhesia* practitioner. Once the enigma of giving a rooster to Asclepius was solved, with the help of Dumézil, both join in the same direction, in a different way of conceiving politics, a way that emphasizes the care of self as a care for the other and for the city.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is part of a broader research on “Espaços Autobiográficos e Invenções de Si nos Feminismos Brasileiros” supported by CNPq - Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico, since 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Socrates says: “Crito, we owe a rooster to Asclepius, do not forget the payment of this debt (*apud* FOUCAULT 2009:102). And Foucault explains: “all these threads come together one last time in the sacrifice of the rooster. It is this mission, concerned with the care of self, that leads Socrates to death. It is the principle of the care of the self that he bestows to the others, beyond his death. And it is to the gods, beneficial for this care of self, that he directs this last teaching” (2009:105). See also Gros, 2009: 320.

In a fold of a different kind, the reflections of Foucault on Cynicism and their echoes on the construction of new lifestyles in the revolutionary movements since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century lead me to ask about the present day practices of *subjectivization* or the *technologies of the self* developed by Brazilian feminisms in the last four decades. Foucault contrasts *modes of subjectivization* to *modes of subjection* by showing that even though they should be considered as intertwined, *subjectivization* refers to “the intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meet certain stylistic criteria” (FOUCAULT, 1986:10). Even though his main concern is not women or feminisms, I argue that his concepts are useful to interpret feminist practices in a new perspective.<sup>3</sup>

Especially provocative here are the considerations of the French philosopher when he asserts that the philosophical tradition has forgotten Cynicism and that it embodies several of the previously existing themes, with a radical innovation in the importance given to the philosophical life as one other possibility and demand of life. “*Of little importance in the history of the doctrines. Of considerable importance in the arts of living and in the history of philosophy as a way of life*” (FOUCAULT, 2009: 289). This construction of a different life, says Foucault going back to Epictetus, has, as the condition for its possibility, not the liberation of the body or the exercise of power but “the constitution by each individual of a relationship of care for the self” (2009:289). The principle of a true life should be looked for in the self and not out of it.

The care of self, subjectivity and social transformation, these bridges are built to approach the feminisms of nowadays. In order to do that I focus on the life stories of some of the historical feminists, produced both in books and in recent interviews, in which they recall experiences of rupture that were both traumatic and dramatic, experiences of struggle and rebellion in the construction of different ways of living. It is not excessive to note the silence on the autobiographical production of women, a still recent field, seeing that the theory of autobiographies focused only on men, from the *Confessions* of Augustine to *Essays* of Montaigne, to the *Confessions* of Rousseau to Roland Barthes (SMITH, 1998; MCLAREN, 2002: 151). New reflections on the subversion of this literary genre to include a focus on women come slowly as women, in their narrations, blur the boundaries of the public and the private, between fiction and fact, intimacy and politics, between world and self, being experts in the art of transgression and not identification with the mechanisms of subjection and control. Women, with their feminist viewpoints, begin to deconstruct the narratives that controlled their lives and seek to produce new cartographies of existence.

These narratives in themselves, distant from confessional accounts, do not seek a revelation of something hidden in a guilty consciousness, do not seek the deciphering of a self supposedly lodged in the heart in the confessional style nor their own heroic self valuation; rather, they question the force and ways of socially and culturally established language, a language that has the white male as its norm and reference. I concentrate then on these autobiographical accounts as “writings of the self” in the analytic key given by Foucault as openings to the other, as intersubjective spaces where the constitution of ethical subjectivities and social transformations are sought.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of the “writing of the self” is extended by that of *parrhesia* as practices

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<sup>3</sup> Also see MCLAREN, TAYLOR, McWHORTER on the fruitful connections between Foucault’s reflections on self-writings as practices opposed to confession, and feminists’ non-confessional autobiographies (TAYLOR, C., 2009: 233).

<sup>4</sup> Foucault analyses the “writings of the self” (“l’écriture de soi”) in the context of the “arts of living” (esthétiques de l’existence) created and practiced by ancient Greeks, in many of his books and articles. See: “L’écriture de soi”, “Esthétique de l’existence”, in *Dits et Écrits*. vol. IV. Paris: Gallimard, 1994.

constitutive of the “arts of living” (FOUCAULT, 1986) and they are fundamental for the understanding of how the women here presented dare to dive into the intimate depths of their lived experiences and re-interpret them, in the same way in which they question the marks of power and violence engraved in their bodies and refusing the supposedly biological destiny imposed on them and to build themselves autonomously in their singularity. Settled in new territories, these women point to exposition of life stories in need of being written, spoken and made clear as an attitude critical to moral values and established truths, pointing both to a work on the self and to a political fight in the defense of social justice, dignity and ethics. To write themselves is to mark their own temporality and assert their difference in the present.

Starobinski says that an autobiography supposes a subjective break, it supposes a shift of the present self in relation to this self in the past for *il s'agit de retracer la g nese de la situation actuelle, les ant cedents du moment a partir du quel se tient le “discours” present. La cha ne d’  pisodes vecus trace un chemin, une voie (parfois sinueuse) qui aboutit a l’  tat actuel de connaissance r capitulative*” (STAROBINSKI, 1970: 261). Gusdorf, another important theoretician of autobiography, says in his turn that the decision to write expresses in itself a wish to question existence under the force of an inner necessity, of a disagreement of the subject with her own life (GUSDORF 1991). It expresses as well a need for a sudden stop, to re-think her own course and assess her actions and question if they were worthwhile, if time was not lost in useless things, anxiety and anxiousness giving rise to a need for a revision, with the latent desire for justification.

In the texts here analyzed if I notice a critical distance in connection to a previous manner of being, the rereading of the past also shows a wish for internal renewal and an affirmation of the freedom of existing differently in the present. If as the cultural critic Leonor Arfuch observes *“the narration of a life does not come to ‘represent’ something already in existence but imposes its form (and meaning) on life itself”*(ARFUCH 2002:30), the writing of the self imposes itself as a necessity of attribution of new meanings to one’s personal past and also to the collective past from a different perspective, as they come in a dramatic moment of Brazilian history, the period of the military dictatorship and the decades following.

Contrary to the need for the purification through writing that unfolds the picture of life in the classical male autobiographical writings, aiming at canceling the past and relieving the soul, the purpose of these feminine narratives is to break female isolation in the experience of pain and for that stress the dimension of testimony, pointing to the denunciation of the violence suffered through the terrorism of state, through the authoritarianism of the political parties, the Church and social prejudices. Differently from a *mea culpa* they assert the need for the breaks carried out and seek to legitimate them, despite the differences that characterize their outlooks and how they re-draw their personal courses.

#### – the feminine courage of truth

Foucault says that *parrhesia*, differently from rhetoric (2009:15) may be defined as truth telling, the frank speech to no matter whom, but that is not about just any speaking of the truth, but about that that involves a risk. The practitioner of *parrhesia* is neither a professor, nor a sage or a prophet.

“For *parrhesia* to be it is necessary that in telling the truth there be an established, open, faced risk of hurting the other, of annoying him, of making him angry, of giving rise on his part to a number of behaviors

that could lead to the most extreme violence” (FOUCAULT, 2009:12).<sup>5</sup>

It is impossible not to remember Ivone, Amelinha, Criméia and Gabriela. In the nineties the Catholic theologian and feminist philosopher Ivone Gebara is sent from Recife to Belgium by the Archdiocese for speaking too much. In an interview to the Brazilian magazine *Veja Magazine*, held in 1994, she takes the position of favoring the decriminalization of abortion. She was already well known for her political militancy by then, having worked for 17 years beside Dom Helder Camara, in the Recife Institute of Theology, closed in 1989. But it is her feminism that denounces the patriarchal power and hierarchy in the religious institutions and that questions the ominous power of tradition in the interpretations of the Bible, and the existence of God, that must be silenced. Prevented from teaching and from public declarations she is appointed to go abroad to extend her knowledge of theology. She says:

“I was given a choice of either leaving the congregation or undergoing a process of reeducation and I chose this. I still today belong to the Sisters of Our Lady Canons of St. Augustine. There I stayed a year, I liked Belgium, I had been there before. I say the first two months were bad, for I was forced to leave my work and I then did not know what I was going to do, I had no wish to go back to the seats at college, it was a bad time” (GEBARA, 2008).

In the beginning of the decade of the seventies Maria Amelia de Almeida Teles and Criméia Alice Schmidt de Almeida were in the cells of the military dictatorship for their political militancy in the PCdoB – Communist Party of Brazil<sup>6</sup>. Arrested when they were producing subversive political texts and pamphlets, in a clandestine typography in São Paulo, Amelinha and her partner Cesar were silenced by the barbarian methods of police violence. As to Criméia, if she was able to escape extermination of the Araguaia Guerrilla<sup>7</sup>, in the state of Pará, by the army, differently from 69 of her companions, women and men, her own partner André Grabois among them, she was forced into silence in the cells of OBAN<sup>8</sup>, in São Paulo, where she was thrown pregnant, during the harsh years of 1972 and 1973.

It had not been easy either to be a militant in a leftist group that was markedly male. In her autobiographical discourse, which is also a form of testimony, she criticizes the demands of the revolutionary party to which she belonged for many years, where women

<sup>5</sup> MCLAREN asserts: “The practice of *parrhesia* is necessary to a democracy and telling the truth to one’s friend is necessary if one is to provide true moral guidance. *Parrhesia* has both a moral and a political aspect. Morally, the *parrhesiast* speaks the truth, regardless of the consequences. Politically, *parrhesiasts* are concerned with the affairs of the city, and the practice of truth telling is indispensable to a democracy” (2002:153).

<sup>6</sup> PCdoB – the Communist Party of Brazil was founded in 1962, it split off from the PC – the Communist Party, that was created in 1922. For the history of leftist movements and groups in Brazil, see RIDENTI and REIS FILHO, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> The “Araguaia Guerrilla” was a revolutionary movement held in the states of Pará, Goiás and Maranhão of Brazil, between 1966 and 1972, by the maoist PCdoB. After violent struggles and torture in this rural area, the army murdered with a high level of atrocity around 70 male and female activists, in general, very young people. See: GORENDER, Jacob. *Combate nas Trevas. A esquerda brasileira: das ilusões perdidas à luta armada*. 2<sup>a</sup>.ed. São Paulo: Ática, 1987; MORAIS, T.; SILVA, E. *Operação Araguaia. Os arquivos secretos da guerrilha*. (2<sup>a</sup>.ed) São Paulo: Geração Editorial, 2005; MOURA, C. (Org.) *Diário da guerrilha do Araguaia*. São Paulo: Alfa-Omega. 1979; POMAR, W. *Araguaia: o Partido e a guerrilha. Documentos Inéditos*. São Paulo: Editora Brasil Debates, 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Operação Bandeirante (OBAN) was an information center of torture of the army created in São Paulo in 1969. It coordinated actions of the military and police organs that fought against armed leftist organizations that were designed to confront the military regime that existed in Brazil since 1964. See FICO, 2001.

were given secondary positions and had to struggle to prove their capacity to fight. Having had an active participation in the revolutionary struggle in the Araguaia, where she went in 1969, she affirms:

“I started noticing that it was much more complicated being a woman a long time before becoming a feminist. For when I went to the Araguaia João Amazonas<sup>9</sup> turned to me and said this: 'it will all depend on you if other women will come'... for I was the first.(...) Then it will depend on you”. The comrades think that a guerrilla fighter has to be a man, for women can't cope, why I don't know...'it will depend on you'. This is what I said then: 'Look here, I can't accept that, for I may succeed or I may not, and that doesn't mean that women can work out or not, right? I don't represent women, I am a woman” (ALMEIDA, 2009).

In the same sense it is also striking the deposition of feminist sociologist Eleonora Menicucci de Oliveira, herself also a former political prisoner, when she examines past experiences:

“We women were present in the protest marches in the streets and in writing on the walls in the same number men were. But some time afterward, on reflecting on the shows of courage we were capable of, I can see how significant it is, when speaking on the courage of the women, that they were the ones that, bearing weapons, watched for the security of the clandestine meetings of those organizations, besides external and internal actions” (OLIVEIRA, 2009).

The struggle goes on at the time of the “political opening” process (“abertura política”) in Brazil. Having founded the feminist association *União das Mulheres de São Paulo* in the beginning of the eighties, Amelinha and Criméia break definitely with the militancy in the PCdoB for facing and irritating the leaders when asserting their feminist truths, the fight for the decriminalization of abortion and domestic violence among them. Amelinha, referring to the authoritarianism of the party, says:

“When we spoke about the decriminalization of abortion, the Party used to say that that was not the time, not that they were against it(...) they were against the legalization of abortion, they were at the time under a strong influence of the Catholic Church. There were a lot of former seminarians, a lot of fathers and nuns too that's why we look like nuns, we caught that from those times... That's where we say the hurdle, the metal workers were on strike at that time and we worked a lot in the south part of the city, and I gathered a lot of women to discuss abortion, for the Congress of Women was coming. Look what we had to worry about, a man came to look at our meeting and next day I was called by the direction of the party and asked 'what is this business of getting women together to discuss abortion? The working classes are fighting capitalism, they are on strike and you are discussing abortion!', I mean, women were dying of abortion, there was one woman who was in bad condition and that didn't worry them

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<sup>9</sup>João Amazonas (1912-2002) was a Marxist theorist, political revolutionary, leader of the Communist Party of Brazil, he was involved with the communist movement since 1935.

at all” (TELES, 2006).

Gabriela da Silva Leite, from São Paulo, placed in another space of protest, she is the present leader of the movement of the prostitutes, founded by her in 1987, was sent away from home and city from the moment in which she broke with the normative codes of female sexuality, at the end of the sixties. She examines and denounces, in her two published autobiographies – *Eu, Mulher da Vida (I, A Prostitute)*, of 1992, and *Filha, Mãe, Avó e Puta (Daughter, Mother, Grandmother and Whore)*, of 2009 - the forms of exclusion and stigmatization she has suffered for saying loud and clear that she is a whore.

Gabriela fixes in her writing the moments of rupture that marked the tortuous course of her life. In her first book, that was published by the famous feminist publishing house *Rosa dos Ventos*, she maps the moment of her life crisis at the end of the sixties, highlighting the part in which Otília, a Sociology student in the University of São Paulo, makes a choice for radical change, seeing that in her life there was no more space for “timecards or love affairs of the 'good morning honey kind'” (LEITE, 1992: 9).

In this context of a lack of self satisfaction she meets a sensual and attractive feminine figure with whom she immediately identifies, and whom she associates with the literary image of the Jorge Amado novel of 1958 *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela*. Otília leaves the scene little by little, replaced by Gabriela. In the change of name is the symbolic act of liberation of her identity as a Woman, built by the Victorian discourses of Church, Medicine and Law from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and trying out a ‘new hypothesis of life’ (TELLES, 1997: 2). Gabriela inverts the sense of the traditional narrative of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century novel, breaking with the male canons in which the prostitute at the end is regenerated, becoming a ‘good mother – good wife – good homemaker’, when she doesn’t die. Marking out her own multiplicity and inaugurating her own internal reconciliation, she puts down at the very beginning of her autobiography:

“This book is a gift of love from Gabriela to Otília. A duel of life between the two. An incoherent bridge, a stubborn passport to cross the customs of my thought. A non-authorized biography of 'my mes'(sic)” (LEITE, 1992: 11).

Starobinski, when he discusses the ‘autobiographical style’, explains that in this narrative it is necessary to differentiate the self of the past from the present day self, that can assert itself fully and re-read the past of that other that was, this refused self. Not only what happened at that other time will be told, but above all how that other that she was became herself (1970, 261). It is also a question of contrasting the images that power imposes on the individual with another image of the self, the one by which she wants to be seen.

In the same manner that Gabriela feels the need to re-read and publicize her interpretation of the past, the result of the forced exile of Ivone is a register of herself, in the form of a thesis under the suggestive name of *Le Mal au Féminin - Réflexions Théologiques a partir du Féminisme* (GEBARA 1999). In this book, translated as *Rompendo o silêncio. Uma fenomenologia feminista do mal (Breaking the Silence. A Feminist Phenomenology of Evil)*, Ivone establishes a difference in the meaning of ‘evil’ for men, considered as a ‘doing’, something that may be undone, from the meaning attributed to women, a constitutive part of their being.

“Being a woman is an evil already, or at least a boundary. In this sense the evil that they do is due to their evil being, a being considered responsible for the Fall or the disobedience of the human to God. There is, therefore, a basic anthropological question revealing

a conflict in the very understanding of the human being” (GEBARA, 2000: 31).

Ivone observes that in the Holy Scriptures but also in the social imagination the female word is always a scandal, the male blood being the only one that 'rescues and restores life', at the same time that the female blood is seen as dirty, impure and dangerous. Though the book is devoted to the examination of female experiences of pain and suffering in daily life, allowing a space for the discourses of many women, the philosopher also puts herself explicitly into the text, with the understanding that on reflecting on her own experience of evil is a form of 'solidarity with marginalized women'(GEBARA, 2000: 84). Relationships come to the fore in the women's writing of the self to the loss of privilege of the unitary subject:

“My word about 'my evil' is then a word to be searched for in the midst of memories and interpretations. When I express myself, I at the same time reveal and hide myself. I show some things and hide so many others! I do not have a total control over the events I write about and over my analysis” (GEBARA, 2000: 85).

In its autobiographical dimension the book shows us the regard about herself constructed by the narrator, starting from a distance in which she is able to reassess the hard moments in the struggle to assert what is elementary, her own existence as a woman. The devaluation of the female is shown in the first pages that assess the presence of evil in the lives of women in general and in her own life in particular, making visible the biopolitical marks of the production of the identity and of the stigmas:

“Men, yes, they are valued for what they are, for their effort towards autonomy (...) I, not being a man, was in search of my own worth, that is, I wanted to be valued for what I was. That was the cause of my being many times accused of rebellion and criticized for losing my time with books and lectures, things utterly useless for women. Becoming myself, making myself valued for what I was, this was a form of pride and of pleasure, a challenge and an adventure, but also a hard cross to bear, for it was upstream all the time” (GEBARA, 2000:87).

In 2005, Ivone publishes an autobiography entitled *Waters from my Well (As águas do meu poço)*, in which she makes an assessment of her course, marking and justifying the moments of radical rupture.

“I believe that the meeting with feminism as the criticism of a history and of dogmatic masculine thought opened the doors for me to think about my life in a another manner. I dare to leave, not unafraid, the admirable perfection of the masculine philosophical and theological dogmatism where I was formed. I dare leave the definitions I need to adapt myself, for, as they say, they constitute the order of the world, of the correct world, of the world wished by God. I dare doubt what was proclaimed as truth and freedom. (...) I feel myself a trailblazer” (GEBARA, 2005: 26).

The abandonment of previous references, of the old models of constructing the subjectivity and of action are also made evident in her text: “*I feel now in 'end of model'*

*prospect* leaving behind me the codes of behavior coming from outside and that were imposed by some recognized authority.” This is the context where the feeling of being a stranger in transgression also gains strength.

“I had learned so well that thinking was a prerogative of men that I sometimes felt myself a stranger in my condition of woman philosopher. But this feeling never lasted long.(...) I liked uncommon people, people outside the norms recognized by society” (GEBARA, 2005:30).

Ivone is seen as a protester, a transgressor and a radical, most of all inside the Church, as until the eighties there were very few female *parrhesia* practitioners who dared to publicly speak and subvert the regime of religious truths. The fight being fought there is one of the most extraordinary, as it questions directly the divine figure and its authority and criticizes strikingly the traditional ways, masculine and authoritarian, of religious institutions.

“I criticize that that makes of religion a space for the domestication and domination of women. I felt in the flesh the exclusion from freedom that was due to my condition of a woman who chose to think about life, for it is dangerous to think in this hierarchical world in which we are asked only to obey” (GEBARA, 2005: 68).

In the last moments of his 1984 course, Foucault briefly examines the passage from the pagan *parrhesia* to the Christian one, emphasizing how from a frank speech in a condition of risk, in Christianity we pass to a negative pole, of anti- *parrhesia* in which the relationship with the truth cannot be established without a fearful obedience and a reverence for divine truth. He says: “where there is obedience there cannot be *parrhesia*. We meet that which we said a moment ago, that the problem of obedience is at the heart of this inversion of the values of *parrhesia*” (FOUCAULT, 2009, 307). I would like to suggest here that, if Ivone challenges patriarchal power it is because she cannot believe in a mode of knowledge of the self founded on fear and on submission to divine will. As a feminist she questions even that which founds, in the words of Foucault, the disqualification of the old *parrhesia*, daring to defend the constitution of a new way of experiencing the self and the world, brave, daring and ethical.

This is a far-reaching criticism in its denunciation of “*the complicity of religions in the production of violence, especially against women and nature*” and its obedience to the logic of the system and its betrayal of the foundations that were the base of her organization (GEBARA 1997,90). The criticism extends also to Liberation Theology, that according to her, had on one hand the merit of “recovering the condition of the poor as a fundamental theological question and from that feed a spirituality of freedom from different oppressions, on the other hand failed to break with the androcentrism of traditional theology, Thomistic and Aristotelian (1997, 55), responsible for the identification of the universal with the masculine and hence for the exclusion of women.

“the fear of their force, of their bodies, and their vital capacities was a contribution to different forms of domination, of reprisal, of control and of making them inferior. It is enough to remember how much Christian morality emphasized the fact the women are more subject to sin than men, defending their (the men’s) spiritual superiority” (GEBARA, 1997, 84).



In an interview held in 2008 she asserts, emphasizing her challenging positions:

“For the socialism of the Church has never criticized the masculine images; it criticized property but not masculine property; all theologies have spoken of liberation but failed to criticize the enslavement of women by a male image of God Almighty that was reproduced in the family, in marriage and in the control of the body” (GEBARA, 2008)

– **care of self, care of the world**

The life course of these women, though following singular paths come together in the struggle to break the isolation of the women’s expression of pain and in the common context of the political and social questions that are marked by gender violence. The military dictatorship puts them on the side of the resistance movements at the same time that their difficulties in finding venues for public expression leads them to open their own territories. Thus it is in breaking with the political groups on the left, that were not open to the demands of women, that they created other fronts for the resistance to the dictatorial regime, most especially in the feminist struggles that went on at the period of redemocratization.

Amelinha began her political militancy early, a thing partly inherited from life with her father and then, later, when joining the feminist movement. On leaving prison in 1973 she engaged in political work with women in the periphery of São Paulo, still with the P.C. Do B. at the time but soon the lack of satisfaction with the authoritarian positions of the party grew more radical. The creation of their own political, feminist space, separated from the party is posited.

“The Union was founded in 1981. In 1980, for the first time in its history, São Paulo created a municipal network of day care centers. We had this group of people in this discussion on day care centers and we thought we needed a group for the discussion of our problems, for in the street movement for day care centers the discussion existed about them, where to implant them, a committee for the follow-up of the implantation, of the setting up of the criteria by which children would go to them, what is the relationship with the mothers to be. For when the father came, he came with a gun, they came to fight, to kill. The discussion turned very much about the children and the day care center and we said “What about us, women?” we formed then these groups, we women are going to discuss our sexuality, the matter of abortion, the matter of violence, we formed the groups and it was a very hard thing, like giving birth, for the party wanted to own the Union of Women” (TELES, 2006).

While Ivone and Gabriela wrote autobiographies that mark the moment of their subjective rupture, trying for an internal reconciliation and the possession of their own selves, Amelinha and Criméia produced testimonies with their interviews and depositions, for in this act of writing of the self they aimed to denounce the political trauma, the violence lived, and the pain and suffering caused by the terrorism of state and torture to a whole social group. To re-write the past, to reconstruct their own history acquired therefore a vital political meaning. As Foucault reminds us, the writing of the self not only has the purpose of guaranteeing an inner tranquility through a reconciliation with the self, but also is a political task. And as Gagnebin explains: *“recollection also means a precise attention to the present, for it is not only a question of not forgetting the past but also a question of*

*acting on the present*"(GAGNEBIN, 2006: 55).

The remembrance of what was lived and the construction of a personal archive are modes of subjectivization that make possible the finding of a place in the present, a shelter where to settle and organize one's own life, especially in the case of traumatic experiences such as that of prison and life in the underground. They allow for the affirmation of one's identity, most of all for those who fought for the right to their own name, like Criméia and Amelinha, who were forced to hide, but also for Gabriela who chose to change her name.

To recollect the past, a traumatic past particularly, and translate it into words for the other, is a way of processing the experience, of re-living mourning, of giving the events new dimensions and new meanings, organizing what seems unclear, chaotic and yet insists in being remembered. In the course of Criméia's life this excruciating experience is reinforced by the unfavorable conditions of maternity in prison and the childhood of her son, but it is so also in the case of Amelinha, separated from her children Edson and Janaína and from her partner, Cesar, who was to stay in prison for five more years.

Foucault teaches however, that the care of self is not a solitary practice, but also is a care of the other. Amelinha, Criméia, Ivone and Gabriela seek, by way of mapping their own selves, to remake the bridges that cross between their personal experiences and that which Stern calls 'emblematic memory', referring to a collective past that becomes a reference point for the population (STERN, 2000). In the case of Amelinha and Criméia, the rereading of the past is transformed into a gesture of fighting for the right to memory and to the truth, most particularly in connection to tragic events about which the state would like a definitive silence, as in the case of the "Araguaia Guerrilla". On this Criméia affirms:

"The first stories (on the Araguaia guerrilla) come out in 1978,1979, but they go like this: what is the size of this guerrilla, who are those who went missing? I don't know, I didn't know the names. They were Zézinho, Piauí, Joca and Juca. But what is this? Is this history? This only comes together as you meet the people in the families of Joca, the families of Piauí, or Juca, you begin then to know that these people have a name, have a history" (ALMEIDA, 2008).

She undertakes detective work with the other militants and their families to reconstruct the history of those dead and missing, starting from small clues left by the army and information from families and friends. In the eighties she is a member of the caravan of the *Committee on the Dead and Politically Missing*, that for ten days searches for the remains of the silenced stories in the south of Pará. They search, in the municipalities of Marabá, of São João do Araguaia, of Conceição do Araguaia, for the testimony of the inhabitants who witnessed or heard of the events. The links to past are rebuilt in pain

In the Instituto Médico Legal, of the University of São Paulo, the Committee finds the photographs of bodies shot and torn, police registers, strange scribbles on these people who were brutally eliminated and called "members of the Terror". A collective and personal fight is waged in which the remaking of the course of other lives leads immediately to their own history, to personal recollection and to an emotional strengthening. Thus Criméia assesses this political, subjective and ethical work in which are mixed the feelings of indignation and rage and a hunger for justice:

"The factors are many: on one hand you build again your own memory, that is pieces. On the other hand this is how I always put it to myself, I could be one of the missing, I know more about them than

anyone, for these at least I have a responsibility with the reconstitution of this history, it is not mine alone, it is theirs who have lost the right to speak. I think then that there are many things, all connected with one another, and that is memory. What is after all, the memory of a country? This is it, only, shall we say, the story I tell is very dramatic, it is a story of a lot of pain and loss, a lot of suffering, but this is the history of Brazil, the history of the world is that” (ALMEIDA, 2008).

The stories in this case are personal and collective stories threatened with disappearance, stories the military would like to silence and for which it is necessary to fight, to prevent them from being forgotten.

“It is necessary first to remember, that among all the virtues, justice is the one that by its constitution and its excellence is turned to the other (...) the duty of memory is the duty of doing justice, by remembrance, to another not yourself.(...) The duty of memory is not limited to the keeping of material remains, written or otherwise, of the finished facts but it considers the feeling of duty to others that are no more, but that were” (RICOEUR, 2008:101).

Thus it is that while Criméia devotes her time to the fight for truth to be told and written, that the transmission of the past be granted to the new generations – the second edition of the book *O Direito à Verdade: mortos e desaparecidos políticos (The Right to Truth: The Politically Missing and Dead)* (2009) – Amelinha affirms her fight for the rights of women, devoting herself in the UMSP, among other things, to the project of “Popular Legal Prosecutors” (RICOLDI 2005). In this project the poor women in the periphery of São Paulo are taught how to take care of themselves and others, how to defend themselves from marital and domestic violence, how to perceive that they are deserving of much more and that it is possible for them to speak and act in a world that doesn't much welcome women.

Gabriela, in her turn, devotes herself to the fight for the rights of prostitutes, poor women most of whom lived until then in conditions of total social abandonment. The NGO *DaVida*, founded in 1992 has become a respected venue for the fight and demands of their rights. She publishes the newspaper *Beijo da Rua* (Street Kiss), directed by the journalist Flavio Lenz and has recently created the brand DASPU – an ironical reference to the haute couture designer clothes DASLU, that has been denounced for corruption. And so it is that prostitutes are taken to model clothes on the stages of the *Bienal de São Paulo*, in television novellas with high audience ratings, and in *fashion shows*, providing them with an opening for a different perception of themselves, given the understanding that they can also engage in different activities, as prostitution is not some essence lodged in the genitals, derived from the size of hips, from the shape of foreheads or of fingers, as asserted by scientists of the past.

Ivone herself does not fear making her own striking declarations and criticisms, part of her daily exercise of freedom and enviable autonomy:

“All this heavy living leads to think or dream another thing: what if God were not powerful but simply pleasurable? What if pleasure were the fundamental constitution of our being? What if we were in this world to enjoy existence? Weren't we all in paradise in the beginning, according to the myth told in Genesis? Wouldn't paradise and happiness be constitutive of our origin? (...) and aren't we endowed with a nostalgia for this lost paradise? (GEBARA, 2005:185)

– **in conclusion**

In Foucault's last class, given on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May of 1984, the focus of his analysis points to a passage of great investment in the construction of the ethical subjectivity in Cynicism to Christian ascetism, that in condemning the courage of the truth in favor of the mistrust of the self, it asserts a fearful relationship to God and the idea of obedience to the other. From Epictetus, this matrix of Cynicism that refers to the idea of a form of life that is both the reformation of the individual and the world, Foucault registers an inflection through which we come to the principle of obedience to the other, in Christianity, as condition of access to the other life, the true one (FOUCAULT, 2009: 293).<sup>10</sup> This is a capital point in the loss of autonomy and in the destruction of the philosophical tradition.

Foucault ponders that the transfiguration of the world, according to the philosophical matrix of Cynicism, will not come about if the world does not again find its own truth, a movement that goes through the care for the self and through the complete change of the relationship of the person with herself. "It is in this return of herself to herself, it is in this care of the self that is found the principle of passage from this world to that other promised by cynicism (FOUCAULT, 2009:289).

Thus if he promises to root Cynicism in the philosophical tradition, returning it to the honorable position it deserves, it is my aim to root our feminist practices in an "anarchist" tradition, one capable of rethinking the political and of undoing the crystallized knots that perpetuate the naturalization of gender violence on feminine bodies. When Foucault analyzes the philosophical militancy of the cynics, he affirms that for them the true political activity is not found in the discussion of subjects such as war and peace, taxes, rates and revenues of the city, but in the consideration of essential themes such as "happiness and unhappiness, good and bad fortune, servitude and freedom", in the care of the other, finally (FOUCAULT, 2009:277). As I see it, in our times, the feminists are those who take up this work in their own hands, for feminisms go beyond the boundaries set between the public and the private, between body and soul, reason and emotion, essence and accident, center and periphery, the futile and the important, limits unfortunately respected by the left. Hence the fact that militant men could never see the care of the self as a political action, and still less that this could mean to watch for the peace of the home, as says Foucault on cynical political militancy (2009: 277). Foucault affirms, paraphrasing Epictetus:

"universal guardian, it is for him to care for all, for all who are married, for all who have children. He should observe those who treat their women well and those who treat them badly, to see those people who have disagreements among them, to see the homes that enjoy peace and those that don't" (FOUCAULT, 2009: 277).

How not to admire the enormous courage of those women that speak the discourses of truth proper to them and that came at such a cost, at the risk of loss of not only their own lives but that of their children? How not to see the care they give to other women and to men too, a care that is at the same time a care of the self and a great love for the world, in the effort to build another life, as Foucault wishes, in a permanent criticism of the world? In our days the missionary of truth, the benefactor, physician to all the world, universal caretaker, may well be translated into the feminine.

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<sup>10</sup> For Cynism, see ONFRAY, 1990.

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