

## FOUCAULT, SUBJECTIVITY, AND SELF- WRITING IN BRAZILIAN FEMINISM<sup>1</sup>

When Michel Foucault returned to Brazil in the first half of the 1970s he soon became aware of the violence of the military regime established in the country through the military coup of 1964, which would last for twenty-one years. Indeed, he himself decided to deliver a statement of protest against the violence of the state, political persecution, and assassinations at an assembly convened by students of the School of Architecture and Urban Planning (FAU) at the University of São Paulo (USP) on October 23, 1975. It would, however, have been hard for Foucault to notice the fast and deep changes in social and cultural life and in the sensibilities, habits, and customs of the population. These changes affected us directly through the intense modernization that came from the so-called economic miracle and the development of the means of communication. Brazil was entering the global era, which also meant the emergence of new modes of conceiving experience, morals, sex, marriage, the social status of women, homosexuality, and other issues.

Even accounting for the violent political repression and censorship that directly targeted social movements as well as the silencing of the protests of workers, peasants, and students at the turn of the seventies, there were new political, artistic, musical, and theatrical groups on stage that brought new forms of expression not linked directly to the conceptions or party

lines of the traditional left, such as the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), or other dissident groups, such as the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), the Revolutionary Popular Vanguard (VPR), and Popular Action (AP), among others. The very visit of Foucault to Brazil between 1973 and 1976 at the invitation of intellectuals, including philosophers, psychiatrists, and doctors, came as result of a deep paradigm shift in the manner of thinking about social change. It followed from the verification of the “bankruptcy of the left” and the feeling that it was necessary to get in touch with other ways of thinking, with different perspectives.

This is also the context in which the American feminist Betty Friedan was invited to come to Brazil in 1971 on the occasion of the publication of her book *The Feminine Mystique*. She was received with misogynous reservations even by leftists, as in the case of the “boys” of the alternative periodical *Pasquim*. In the sixties, women began to learn about the American feminist movement and the civil rights movement. They began to get to know Angela Davis, the Black Panthers, and student movements in the United States. In 1972, the magazine *Nova*, a Brazilian version of the American magazine *Cosmopolitan*, began to publish discussions of “hot” topics previously unimaginable in the mainstream press, such as the sexual pleasure of women and education of the public about the clitoris and female orgasm.

Feminist ideas spread rapidly, mainly after the “political opening” of 1974, but the assassinations continued, as in the case of the communist journalist Vladimir Herzog on October 25, 1975. Foucault attended Herzog’s ecumenical memorial service amidst a huge crowd of outraged people. The so-called

new social movements were clandestinely organizing themselves on a piecemeal basis while a new working class was taking shape in the new processes of organization of factory work. It was clear that an old left was on the way out, whether through the effect of political repression or the failure of its own interpretations, while new battlefronts were slowly emerging. Feminists provoked astonishment by taking the stage in the second half of the seventies.

Second wave feminism burst out vigorously at that moment in Brazil. Women have occupied the public sphere since then, going into male professions and challenging cultural practices, the sexual division of labor, and hegemonic ways of acting and thinking. They have, in short, pointed to other possibilities of existence. It is not difficult to note the positive marks of the feminist presence in the public and social spheres, the “cultural feminization” of Brazilian life in the last four decades.

Foucault also produced and published his interrogations of different forms of power and freedom at the time, from his lectures in Rio in 1973 through *Discipline and Punish* and volume one of *The History of Sexuality* all the way up to his works in the 1980s on the modes of subjectivation, the aesthetics of existence, and techniques of the self in Greco-Roman antiquity. A new and more comprehensive conceptual framework made it possible to name and interpret the transformative, subversive, and critical practices that the feminist movement progressively built and experienced, as it became a mass movement in post-dictatorship Brazil. Going beyond Marxist analyses, other readings of feminist non-submissiveness and counter-conducts in Brazilian society made it clear that women were questioning

the mechanisms and rationalities of power that shaped their bodies and gender, the *dispositif* of sexuality and, in more recent decades, neoliberal governmentality. They were also engaged in producing feminist arts of living based on ethical references, the courage of truth, solidarity, and the demand for social justice.

### THREE BRAZILIAN FEMINISTS: IVONE, CRIMEIA, AND GABRIELA

I propose to focus on the experiences of the subjective constitution and political invention of three well-known Brazilian feminists who were in their twenties when Foucault returned to Brazil and the feminist movement started to reorganize itself: the feminist philosopher and Catholic nun Ivone Gebara, the former political prisoner Crimeia Alice Schmidt de Almeida and the founder of the Autonomous Movement of the Sex Workers and the NGO DaVida, Gabriela Silva Leite, who recently passed away.

Born in São Paulo in 1944, Ivone received her doctorate in both Philosophy from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo and Religious Sciences from the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. She lived in Camaragibe, a municipality of Recife in the state of Pernambuco, from 1973 until recently. She taught Philosophy and Theology for seventeen years at the Theological Institute of Recife and worked, at the request of the leftist Catholic Archbishop Dom Hélder Pessoa Câmara, in the Department of Research and Assistance, which was in charge of the formation of pastoral agents for work among poor people.<sup>2</sup> The Institute was closed in 1989 because of pres-

sure from conservative and obscurantist forces inside the Church.

Crimeia was born in a working-class family in the harbor city of Santos in 1946. She was arrested in 1972 for participating in the Araguaia Guerrilla, which was a revolutionary movement led by the PCdoB from 1966 to 1975 on the Araguaia river banks between the states of Pará, Goiás, and Maranhão. In order to establish rural guerrilla bases, the PCdoB militants moved to the rural region of Pará, which was valued for its mineral wealth by financial groups. The militants worked with local peasants, providing them with health care, technical assistance, and help in the construction of schools. At the same time, the militants trained in the jungle at night as they planned to set up a guerrilla hub in the region. The National Intelligence Service, which was created in 1964 and backed by United States, sent more than seven thousand soldiers in military campaigns to this area between 1972 and 1975. The army murdered around sixty-nine male and female activists who were, for the most part, very young.

Gabriela was born in a middle-class family in São Paulo in 1951. Still bearing her Christian name Otilia, she pursued her coursework in the social sciences at USP in 1969 after the unsettling experience of preparatory school. She would call herself Gabriela only later. That was when she decided to become a prostitute and fight for sex workers' rights. She founded the NGO Davida – Prostitution, Civil Rights, Health in 1992. She also started the fashion line Daspu and became the most important activist for the rights of prostitutes in Brazil.

At the end of the seventies, the feminist movement, consisting largely of leftist activists, former political prisoners, and exiles returning to Brazil, decided to come “out of the ghetto” and increase the range of its actions. It got into unions, into political parties, into several organizations in civil society, and it especially allied itself with the women’s movement that was organized in the periphery of some cities with the support of the Church and political groups involved in the fight against dictatorship. Although the women’s movement depended on a large number of women, its demands did not necessarily consist of feminist issues in the seventies. It called for more day care centers, urban transportation, and an improvement in the conditions of life. The women’s movement did not include subjects such as abortion, rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence in its agenda because it was highly influenced by the Church. Even the leftist wing of the Church in the form of the liberation theology movement “*criticized property but not the masculine property*,” as Ivone recalls.<sup>3</sup>

The contact between the two movements – the feminist movement and the women’s movement – was immensely rewarding for all involved. It was rewarding for the former because it was able to reach a much wider network of the female population. It was rewarding for poor women in the periphery because it confronted them with questions about conditions that they would hardly have talked about spontaneously, such as questions about sexual morals, the body, and health. They often suffered silently.

Feminists broke with the traditional model of behavior imposed on women, with the established values and moral codes, thereby bringing into question the regime of truth of

the time. They created new modes of subjectivation, according to Foucault's concept drawn from his historical investigation of the "arts of living" developed by the ancient Greeks and Romans.<sup>4</sup> Even though this concept does not refer to women and Foucault did not address gender issues, his problematization is helpful in considering the contemporary debates among feminist theorists on the production of subjectivity and the construction of what I propose to call "feminist arts of living."<sup>5</sup> In this regard, feminist theorists have investigated how to conceive of subjectivity beyond dualist terms that hierarchically oppose mind and body, the physical and the mental. Drawing directly from Foucault, feminist philosophers, such as McLaren, interpret contemporary feminist practices about ethical and political issues.<sup>6</sup> And they all agree that Foucault's interest in the subjective practices of the ancient Greeks and Romans concerned the present, *l'actualité*, rather than the past.

## SELF-WRITING AND THE FEMINIST COURAGE OF TRUTH

In this section, I will focus on the autobiographical narratives of Ivone, Crimeia, and Gabriela in their books and interviews. In these contexts, they recall experiences of rupture that were both traumatic and dramatic, experiences of struggle and rebellion in the construction of different ways of living. To use Foucault's conceptual terminology, I consider these narratives "self-writings" (*écritures de soi*), as openings to the other, as inter-subjective spaces where the constitution of ethical subjectivities and social transformations are sought.<sup>7</sup>

Foucault extends the notion of self-writing through *parresia* as a practice constitutive of the arts of living. I suggest

that these notions are useful for understanding how Ivone, Crimeia, and Gabriela dare to dive into the intimate depths of their own lived experiences and reinterpret them. These women question the marks of power and violence engraved in their bodies, refuse the biological destiny imposed on them, and build themselves autonomously in their singularities. They point to the elaboration of life stories in need of being written, spoken, and elucidated through an attitude critical of moral values and established truths. Through their life stories, Ivone, Crimeia, and Gabriela point to both a work on the self and a political fight in the defense of social justice, dignity, and ethics. Their self-writings can be seen as counter-conducts aimed at demarcating their own temporality and asserting their difference in the present.

Foucault notes that *parrhesia* may be defined as truth-telling, as frank speech that involves a risk. The practitioner of *parrhesia* is neither a professor, nor a sage, nor a prophet. As Foucault explains: “La parrèsia . . . c’est une attitude, une manière d’être qui s’apparente à la vertu, une manière de faire” (*Parrhesia* . . . is an attitude, a way of being which is akin to a virtue, a mode of action).<sup>8</sup>

In the nineties, Ivone was sent from Recife in the north-east of Brazil to Belgium by the Archdiocese for speaking too much. In an interview with the Brazilian magazine *Veja* conducted in 1994, Ivone took the position of favoring the decriminalization of abortion.<sup>9</sup> She was already well known for her political militancy by then, having worked for many years in the Theological Institute of Recife. But it was her feminist voice, which denounced patriarchal power and hierarchy in religious institutions and questioned the ominous power of

tradition in interpretations of the Bible and the existence of God, which had to be silenced. Prevented from teaching and from public declarations, she was appointed to go abroad to extend her knowledge of theology. As she recalls:

I was given a choice of either leaving the congregation or undergoing a process of reeducation and I chose this. Today I still belong to the Sisters of Our Lady (Canonesses of St. Augustine). I stayed there for a year. I liked Belgium. I had been there before. The first two months were bad as 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 my position at the college. It was a bad time.<sup>10</sup>

In the beginning of the seventies, Crimeia was imprisoned in the cells of the military dictatorship for her political militancy in the PCdoB. She could escape the extermination of the Araguaia Guerrilla by the army, unlike sixty-nine of her companions, including men and women as well as her own partner André Grabois. But she was forced into silence while pregnant in the cells of Operation Bandeirantes (OBAN) in São Paulo<sup>11</sup> during the harsh years of 1972 and 1973.<sup>12</sup>

Nor was it easy to be a militant in a leftist group that was markedly male. In her autobiographical narrative, Crimeia criticizes the demands of the revolutionary party to which she belonged for many years. Women were given secondary positions in this party and had to struggle to prove their capacity to fight. Having been an active participant in the revolutionary struggle in the Araguaia, where Crimeia went in 1969, she affirms:

Long before becoming a feminist, I started noticing that being a woman was much more complicated. When I went to the Araguaia, João Amazonas turned to me and said ‘Whether other women come will all depend on you’ . . . because I was the first. . . . The comrades think that a guerrilla fighter has to be a man since women can’t cope. I don’t know why ‘it will depend on you.’ This is what I said then: ‘Look here, I can’t accept that, because 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.’<sup>13</sup>

In another space of protest, Gabriela was sent away from her home and city from the moment in which she broke with the normative codes of female sexuality at the end of the sixties and decided to become a prostitute. In her two published autobiographies – *Eu, mulher da vida* (*I, A Prostitute*) from 1992 and *Filha, mãe, avó e puta* (*Daughter, Mother, Grandmother and Whore*) from 2009 – Gabriela examines and denounces the forms of exclusion and stigmatization she suffered for saying loud and clear that she was a whore. It is worth noting that until recently the stereotype of the prostitute as a *degeneradana* (born degenerate) from Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero’s *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman* (1893) was widely appreciated and repeated. These scientists as well as medical doctors from the nineteenth century saw prostitutes as inferior women with large hips, short foreheads, and large jaws. They saw them as talkative, irrational, and selfish women in love with extravagant perfumes, spicy

foods, strong liqueurs, cats, and showing no vocation or wish for maternity.<sup>14</sup>

In her writings, Gabriela identifies the moments of rupture that marked the tortuous course of her life. In her first book, published by the feminist publishing house Rosa dos Ventos, Gabriela maps the moment of her life crisis at the end of the sixties, highlighting the part in which Otilia, an USP sociology student, made a choice for radical change. She saw that in her life there was no more space for “timecards or love affairs of the ‘good morning honey’ kind.”<sup>15</sup>

In this context of a lack of self-satisfaction, she encountered a sensual and attractive feminine figure with whom she immediately identified and whom she associates with the literary image of Jorge Amado’s famous novel *Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon* (1958). Otilia left the scene little by little, replaced by Gabriela. She inverts the sense of the traditional narrative of the nineteenth-century novel, breaking with the male canons in which the prostitute is in the end regenerated, becoming a “good mother – good wife – good homemaker” when she does not die. Marking out her own multiplicity and inaugurating her own internal reconciliation, Gabriela opens her autobiography with the following statement:

This book is a gift of love from Gabriela to Otilia. 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*].<sup>16</sup>

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 à partir du féminisme*.<sup>17</sup> In this book, translated into Portuguese in 2000 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 and women. For the former, it is considered “doing” something that may be undone whereas for the latter it is considered a constitutive part of their being. In Ivone’s words:

Being a woman is already an evil, 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.<sup>18</sup>

Ivone observes that not only in the Holy Scriptures but also in the social imagination the very word “woman” is always provocative since male blood is seen as the only one that “rescues and restores life” whereas female blood is seen as dirty, impure, and dangerous.<sup>19</sup> Though the book is devoted to the examination of female experiences of pain and suffering in daily life, which allows a space for the discourses of many women, the philosopher also puts herself explicitly into the text with the understanding that reflecting on her own experience of evil is a form of “solidarity with marginalized women.”<sup>20</sup> She observes:

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.<sup>21</sup>

In its autobiographical dimension, the book shows us the regard for herself constructed by the narrator for herself, starting from a distance in which she is able to reassess the hard moments in the struggle to assert what is elementary, namely, 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 identity and stigmas:

Men, yes, they are valued for what they are, for their effort toward 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.<sup>22</sup>

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

I believe that this 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

another manner. I dare to leave, not unafraid, the admirable perfection of the masculine philosophical and theological dogmatism in which 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.<sup>23</sup>

The abandonment of previous references, old models of constructing subjectivity, and action are also made evident in Ivone's text. "I feel now," she writes, "in an 'end of models' perspective, leaving behind me the codes of behavior coming from outside and which were imposed by some recognized authority."<sup>24</sup> This is the context in which the feeling of being a stranger in transgression also gains strength. As Ivone explains:

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.<sup>25</sup>

Ivone has been seen as a protester, a transgressor, and a radical, above all inside the Church, since up until the eighties there were very few female practitioners of *parrhesia* 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 directly questions the divine figure and its authority, and strikingly criticizes the masculine and authoritarian traditions of religious institutions.

I criticize that which 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 as 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.<sup>26</sup>

In the final moments of his 1984 course, Foucault briefly examines the passage from pagan *parrhesia* to Christian *parrhesia*, emphasizing how we pass from frank speech in a situation of risk to a negative pole in Christianity of anti-*parrhesia* in which the relationship with the truth cannot be established without a fearful obedience and reverence for divine truth. He declares, “Where there is obedience there cannot be *parrhesia*. We find again what I was just saying to you, namely that the problem of obedience is at the heart of this reversal of the values of *parrhesia*.”<sup>27</sup> I suggest that if Ivone challenges patriarchal power it is because she cannot believe in a mode of knowledge of the self based on fear and on submission to divine will. As a feminist, she questions even that which founds, in Foucault’s words, the disqualification of the old *parrhesia*. Ivone defends the constitution of a new way of experiencing the self and the world in a brave, daring, and ethical way.

Her criticism is far-reaching in its denunciation of “the complicity of religions in the production of violence, especially against women and nature” and their obedience to the logic of the system and its betrayal of the foundations that were the base of her organization.<sup>28</sup> The criticism also extends to liberation theology. On the one hand, it had the merit of “recovering the condition of the poor as a fundamental theological question and from it fed a spirituality of freedom from different

oppressions, mainly social sins.”<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, it failed to break with the androcentrism of traditional theology in its Thomistic and Aristotelian guises, which was responsible for the identification of the universal with the masculine and, hence, with the exclusion of women.<sup>30</sup> As Ivone explains, the fear of women’s force as well as of their bodies and vital capacities contributed to different forms of power and control over them. “It suffices,” she tells us, “to remember how much Christian morality emphasized the fact that women are more subject to sin than men, defending their (the men’s) spiritual superiority.”<sup>31</sup>

In an interview conducted in 2008, Ivone highlights her own provocative position through the following statement:

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.<sup>32</sup>

These reflections provide a useful framework to think about the activists I focus on in this paper. These women were openly leftist, but they clashed with the traditional left, since they were uncomfortable inside the centralized structure of the revolutionary party. Even though out of the three only Crimeia was jailed, they were all excluded from political, cultural, and social life during those difficult years of military dictatorship when Foucault visited us. However, in their struggles inside and outside of the organized feminist movement they put into action

strategies to combat the power of men, political parties, the state, and masculine science as well as the power of the church in academic production and religion.

In the interviews I conducted with Crimeia, she reviewed her experiences of jail and torture at the peak of the repression by the authoritarian regime. Looking back at her own stories, she emphasized the growing difficulties of continuing her pregnancy at the time she was arrested, from the lack of hygiene in her tiny cell to the mounting pressures and threats of kidnapping her baby after she was transferred from São Paulo to a military hospital in Brasília. Crimeia observed suddenly, amidst many memories, “*there was a moment in jail when I forgot words, I could not set them down on paper.*”<sup>33</sup> This impossibility of writing, difficult to understand at first, can be connected with another moment of her work of memorizing, a moment that showed the difficulty of existing publicly, of having a name, a history, memoirs, which are absolutely necessary references to be in the world, to be identified. In her own words:

When I went to Araguaia I stopped being Crimeia, I was known as Alice and this implies a much deeper change than can be imagined. It can only be felt when you live through it, because you may be talking to somebody, maybe somebody you don't know, and you say ‘oh when I was a little girl I used to play this game, I lived in such a place, this is what my father did.’ This cannot happen when you are underground. This is giving information about yourself. So I never lived anywhere before, never had a father or mother, brothers, friends, never studied anything. Do you know what nothing is?<sup>34</sup>

Crimeia, Alice, and Cri were the names and code names she received during her militancy. They produced a frightening experience of personal instability through the threat of the loss of her personal identity. This is not about the subjective shifts we seek as a form of becoming autonomous in the face of constraints to be what we have not chosen, as Foucault pointed out in his reflections on the modern mechanisms of subjection promoted by the state.<sup>35</sup> It is, rather, about the struggle to guarantee one's own identity threatened by the violence of reactionary political forces that aim at destroying the individual psychically and annihilating her vital impulse.

The pain of the tortured person is twofold on account of the loneliness that comes from not sharing the experience, on account of not being part of a social group with whom she could live emotionally the pain again and reflect on the events, count the dead, and evoke those who disappeared. Crimeia captures this loneliness:

After that came the time of the 'political opening' and you do not need to invent histories anymore. You may have your own history and it is a very fantastic history. Nobody has lived it. And how many did not believe it. They thought of it as a fantasy. For at first, after the amnesty, you start seeking those who disappeared, and to look for them you need to tell the story, 'why are you looking,' 'what's your connection to this?' Then you begin. Then you talk of the guerrilla in the Araguaia, and people say 'but this never existed!'<sup>36</sup>

In the eighties, Crimeia took part in a traveling group made up of members of the Commission of Family Members

of the Persons Killed and Disappeared for Political Reasons. For ten days in October and November of 1980, this group went in search of the remains of the stories silenced in the south of Pará state. In the places where the armed struggle had happened, in the municipalities of Marabá, of Conceição do Araguaia, and of São João do Araguaia, they looked for the testimonies of the inhabitants who had witnessed or heard of the events. Links with the past were forged anew, painfully. The landscapes of the past slowly gained new configurations and new reliefs. It was so with the testimony of Maria Raimundo Veloso, fifty-year-old dweller of Metade village. As she rummaged through her memories of the contacts with militants at that time, she recalled on October 26, 1980:

They (the guerrillas) invited everybody to participate in liberation. Now, nobody understood this liberation. They talked about those problems, did a lot of charity. After they left for the jungle, they came again to my house. They explained to me that I should unite with the neighbors. If I knew how to sew, I should teach my neighbors. If I could read, I should teach my neighbors. The bread we had should be shared. Now, I did not understand this liberation thing. I came to understand it when I read the Bible. I then understood a little of this liberation.<sup>37</sup>

The work of the committee went on at the Institute of Forensics at USP. The committee was made up of Crimeia and her family, also victims of the authoritarian regime. It found photographs of shot and torn bodies, police registers, small notes, and the strange scribbling “members of the Terror” on the bodies of brutally eliminated militants. For Crimeia, it was

both a collective and personal fight, in which the remaking of the course of other lives and the reinsertion of them in the public sphere immediately led to her own history, to a personal memorization, and to an emotional strengthening. She thus evaluated this political work that was subjective and fundamentally ethical, in which feelings of rage, indignation, and a desire for justice mix:

There are many factors involved. On one hand, you reconstruct your own memory, that is, in pieces. One other hand, I have always said to myself that I could be one of those that disappeared. I know more about them than anybody and I have, at least with them, a responsibility to reconstitute this history. It is not mine alone. It belongs to those who have lost the right to speak. So I think there are many things inter-connecting one with the other, that is, memory. At bottom, what is the history of a country? This is it. Only, shall we say, the story I am telling is very traumatic, a story of much pain, much loss, much suffering, but this is the history of Brazil. This is the history of the world.<sup>38</sup>

Political militancy in the region consisted of an approach to the local peasants, drawing attention to their lack of support from public authorities and showing the importance of the demands for better conditions of life, health care, housing, education, and work. According to Crimeia:

We spoke of how forgotten the region was by the state, that it was necessary to build a school, that there was no health center. Though there are, for example,

other comrades who survived and say that they did no work of a political nature, I did. I spoke of the lack of a school. For instance, there was a little school some five kilometers from my house with a blind and semi-illiterate teacher. I mean it is a lot of contempt for the school, isn't it? For she could hardly write, and then how could she correct what the boys wrote? . . . We talked of the need for a health center, of what we could and couldn't do . . . You try to do something, so some of the comrades went to teach, and I, for example, went to work in health. And I said 'I can't do it all. I know very little. I have no school. You have to have a health service.'<sup>39</sup>

The PCdoB itself sent Crimeia to Araguaia after she had studied nursing in Rio de Janeiro. She worked as a nurse, as a doctor, and as a midwife, accomplishing an enormous number of tasks in accordance with the immediate needs of the inhabitants of Araguaia. In her words:

I was a midwife. I delivered a lot of babies and treated diseases, malaria, leishmaniasis, things of that sort. This is such a cruel country that I found a small book in the school's library and I even stole the book, as I was going to the country, when I studied at the school . . . in Rio, right? I take possession of public property when it is in my interest. This little book was like this. It was a book of historical value. I can't remember the author. A little book by some doctor, English if I am not mistaken, who wrote on the treatments he applied during the First World War when he had no resources. What value can this book have here in this library in

Rio de Janeiro? However, I am going to the country and it will be of value to me.<sup>40</sup>

In living together with the population, new ways of learning about life in the countryside were acquired. New bonds of friendship were forged. The social difficulties became demands for the elaboration of a program of revolutionary action of the party. Crimeia notes:

This was the perspective from which you went to talk to people, to speak of their needs. This was the occasion we conducted a survey of the main demands of the population and wrote a program that was to be known as the ‘Program of Twenty-Seven Points.’ The twenty-seven points dealt both with the rural and urban regions – and what was urban there was very rural. This was it then: facilities to make the products flow without a middleman, there was then a need for municipal or state boats to carry the products . . . These twenty-seven points are still valid for the region. Most of them came to be. There is nothing communist about them. Nothing. So, for example, a rural school for capable, trained teachers, for I always remembered the blind and semi-illiterate teacher. A hospital was a system of medical assistance. We proposed to have an ambulance that would move around.<sup>41</sup>

The denunciations of sexual and gender violence gain strength in Crimeia’s testimony when she narrates the experience of being pregnant in jail in the DOI-CODI in São Paulo and then in a military hospital in Brasília.<sup>42</sup> If the condition of

being a mother spared her some but not all physical tortures, rape, and other forms of bodily sexual violence, it did not spare her psychological sexual violence. Besides, the constant threats of kidnapping her baby prevented a less tormented life. However, the deep desire to ensure the birth of the child renewed her strength. As Crimeia recalls:

Not all tortures were done because I was pregnant. Now, on the other hand, from a psychological point of view torture is very great, another type of torture, because simply being a prisoner, subject to death, means the death of your son.<sup>43</sup>

The category of gender organizes this narrative of the self, making evident the psychological, sexual, and physical violence of the bodies of the female prisoners, which were seen above all as double transgressors for going beyond the universe of domesticity and for challenging social and gendered codes. In Crimeia's feminist discourse the body is emphasized as a dimension constituting language itself. As she says:

Naked, I was always naked at the interrogations. And one of the things I always refused to do was to strip. And they would then tear the clothes from me because they wanted us to take our clothes off for extra humiliation. With all that, my clothes were all torn. They would be violently torn. They had one button less, one seam less each day. You were always arranging yourself . . . what kept me going through it all was the rage I felt at them. That kept me going. For when they took your clothes off it was very embarrassing, when you were in front of strangers, not only strangers but ene-

mies. I would have felt better naked in the middle of the street. And it took me a long time to feel that. I won't feel it! I would then cross my little legs, cross my little arms. I aimed at covering my breasts and ass, and I would be there like a lady: 'Yes, sir, no.'<sup>44</sup>

It is not easy to find testimonies on sexual violence perpetrated against female political prisoners during military dictatorship in Brazil. However, some brief references to cases of rape and sexual abuse can be found in the report *Torture in Brazil* prepared by the Archdiocese of São Paulo and published in Portuguese as *Brasil: Nunca mais* in 1985.<sup>45</sup> Many women testify about the various hideous forms of abuse they suffered, as does Inês Etienne Romeu, a young bank worker who was incarcerated in a private "house of terror" in Petropolis for a long time, or Elsa Pereira Lianza, a 25-year-old engineer who submitted to electric shocks to her sexual organs.<sup>46</sup>

As for Gabriela, the prejudices faced in her defense of the rights of sex workers were very strong, especially in the absence of support from groups on the left who perceived prostitutes through the Marxist category of lumpenproletariat.

The NGO DaVida began in 1992. . . . It was a very difficult beginning. There was some opposition from the Institute for Religious Studies (ISER). Of all our financial backers only one remained, one from the US, which helped us with our infrastructure. Nobody else. . . . When I left ISER we were closing a project with the European Community and we needed an institution. . . . We had no place to take the headquarters of DaVida. I have friends in the samba school Estácio

and one of them had a very large plot of land and offered it for us to build something there. There we went and put up a large wooden shed . . . I know many people in that place. I stayed in that red light district for many years.<sup>47</sup>

This identification with transgressive imaginary female figures also comes close to the one that links Gabriela to the prostitutes and fuels her fight for them. As Gabriela affirms, her experience of many years as a professional prostitute makes her a most singular person, for she speaks from the interior of this so distant and unknown universe. Moreover, prostitutes that came from the poorer classes, had college degrees, and became political activists were exceedingly rare in the eighties. Gabriela also chose to change her name, an act that can surely be read as the assertion of a different subjectivity, the definition of a new, more independent, free, sensual, daring, and transgressive way of being. In her words:

In my birth certificate my name is Otilia Silva Leite. Gabriela is a very old name, much more a part of me than Otilia. It is really the name I chose. I changed it when I went into prostitution. This was in the early seventies. I have a lawsuit moving on in the courts to add Gabriela. I will be Otilia Gabriela. I have both of them. Everybody calls me Gabriela, except my mother.<sup>48</sup>

We have to consider the historical context in which she operated in order to understand how radical her choices were and how far they reached. The break she enacted was enormous for a generation that was raised for marriage and maternity in the fifties and sixties to the point that her mother is the only person

not to recognize her as Gabriela. Moreover, we can say that Gabriela is, as she interprets herself, a feminist despite clashes with feminists themselves, when we take into consideration her fight for the rights of poor women that live in conditions of absolute social abandonment. Gabriela founded the NGO DaVida that fights for better working conditions and for the quality of life of prostitutes. Since the eighties, when this movement was born in Brazil, they have been called “sex workers,” with the understanding that their activity is work like any other and deserving professional recognition from the state.

It is not possible to consider the important transformations in the lives of women in Brazil nowadays without mentioning the experiences of the feminist movement. Along their different paths, facing taboos and deep-rooted prejudices, breaking with the stereotypes of their time, and opening new forms of political, professional, and personal action, the feminists above asserted new ways of being and new ethical codes. They are singular and exemplary figures, and we should recognize their merits and victories. We come out more empowered when we observe their political achievements, such as the creation of the Union of Women of São Paulo and DaVida, or when we think of the forms of theoretical production now in existence in Brazil, such as the provocative reflections and strong criticism brought to feminist studies through Ivone’s philosophical reflections (alongside those of other well-known feminist scholars), or when we come to know the intense work in the sphere of religion undertaken by feminist theologians in their fight for the decriminalization of abortion, for a different reading of the Bible, and for new interpretations of the sacred texts, among other fundamental subjects.<sup>49</sup>

NOTES

- 1 Ricardo Lopes translated this article.
- 2 Dom Hélder Pessoa Câmara (1909-1999) was one of the founders of the National Conference of the Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) and a renowned human rights activist.
- 3 Ivone Gebara, interview with the author, January 4, 2008, São Paulo. See also Margareth Rago, “Reinventing themselves, reinventing Brazil: feminism, subjectivity and politics,” *labrys, études féministes/ estudos feministas*, nos. 20-21 (July/December 2011-January/June 2012), <https://www.labrys.net.br/labrys20/brasil/margaingles.htm>.
- 4 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1986); Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).
- 5 Margareth Rago, *A aventura de contar-se: Feminismos, escrita de si e invenções da subjetividade* (Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2013). See also Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges, eds., *Feminism and the Final Foucault* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).
- 6 Margaret A. McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).
- 7 Michel Foucault, “L’écriture de soi,” in *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*, Vol. 2, 1976-1988, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald with the assistance of Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Quarto/Gallimard, 2001), 1234-1249.
- 8 Michel Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité: Le gouvernement de soi et des autres II, Cours au Collège de France (1983-1984)* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2009), 15. In this regard, McLaren writes: “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.” *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*, 153.
- 9 Ivone Gebara, interview with the author, February 16, 2008, São Paulo.

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- 10 Gebara, interview with the author, January 4, 2008.
- 11 Bandeirantes Operation (OBAN) was an information center that practiced torture. The army created it in São Paulo in 1969.
- 12 Jacob Gorender, *Combate nas trevas: A esquerda brasileira: das ilusões perdidas à luta armada*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Ática, 1987); Taís Morais and Eumano Silva, *Operação Araguaia. Os arquivos secretos da guerrilha*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Geração Editorial, 2005).
- 13 Crimeia Alice Schmidt Almeida, interview with the author, January 8, 2009, São Paulo. João Amazonas (1912-2002) was a Marxist theorist, political revolutionary, and leader of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB). He had been involved in the communist movement since 1935.
- 14 Margareth Rago, “Foucault, Hysteria and the Spider,” *labrys, études féministes/ estudos feministas*, no. 25 (January-June 2014), <https://www.labrys.net.br/labrys25/recherches/margareth.htm>.
- 15 Gabriela Silva Leite, *Eu, mulher da vida* (Rio de Janeiro: Rosa dos Tempos, 1992), 9.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 17 Ivone Gebara, *Le mal au féminin: Réflexions théologiques à partir du féminisme* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999).
- 18 Ivone Gebara, *Rompendo o silêncio: Uma fenomenologia feminista do mal* (Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 2000), 31
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*, 85
- 22 *Ibid.*, 87
- 23 Ivone Gebara, *As águas do meu poço: Reflexões sobre experiências de liberdade* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 2005), 26.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 30.
- 25 *Ibid.*

- 26 Ibid., 68.
- 27 Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (The Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 336.
- 28 Ivone Gebara, *Teologia Ecofeminista: Ensaio para repensar o conhecimento e a religião* (São Paulo: Editora Olho D'água, 1997), 53.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., 84.
- 32 Gebara, interview with the author, January 4, 2008.
- 33 Crimeia Alice Schmidt Almeida, interview with the author, January 15, 2009, São Paulo.
- 34 Almeida, interview with the author, January 8, 2009.
- 35 Michel Foucault, *A hermenêutica do sujeito: Curso dado no Collège de France (1981-1982)*, trans. Márcio Alves da Fonseca and Salma Tannus Muchail (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2004), 305.
- 36 Almeida, interview with the author, January 8, 2009.
- 37 “Depoimento de Maria Raimunda Veloso à Comissão dos Familiares e dos mortos e desaparecidos políticos, em 26/10/1980. Relatório da caravana dos familiares dos mortos e desaparecidos na Guerrilha do Araguaia.” *Revista da Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil Ano X/XI* 12/13, n. 27/28 (September/December 1980-January/April 1981): 289.
- 38 Almeida, interview with the author, January 8, 2009.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 The Department of Information Operations - Center for Internal Defense Operations (DOI-CODI) units institutionalized the use of torture and other violent methods against the opponents of the regime after 1969. Each state had its own DOI subordinated to CODI, which had the

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role of centralizing the operations. The largest DOI-CODI was in São Paulo. At its peak, it had nearly 250 agents occupying a large building on Tutóia street in the Paraíso neighborhood.

43 Almeida, interview with the author, January 8, 2009.

44 Ibid.

45 Arquidiocese de São Paulo. *Brasil: Nunca mais* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1985), 46-50. For the English version, see Archdiocese of São Paulo, *Torture in Brazil: A Shocking Report on the Pervasive Use of Torture By Brazilian Military Governments, 1964-1979*, trans. James Wright, ed. Joan Dassin (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 28-32.

46 Archdiocese of São Paulo, *Torture in Brazil*, 28.

47 Gabriela Silva Leite, interview with the author, January 25, 2008, Rio de Janeiro.

48 Ibid.

49 The Union of Women of São Paulo is an autonomous feminist organization that was created in 1981 by the former political prisoners Maria Amelia Teles and Crimeia Alice Schmidt de Almeida, among other feminist activists.