

CONTEMPORARY FEMINISMS IN BRAZIL: ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES, AND TENSIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Brazil has been known for the strength and diversity of its social movements and for women having always constituted an important part of them. More importantly, over the last three decades, women in Brazil have forged and carried their own specific struggles, feminists representing a rather small segment – but a very active one – of women’s movements at large in the country (SOARES ET AL., 1996; COSTA, 2005). Contemporary feminist activism in Brazil emerged in a moment of political upheaval, playing an important role in the process of re-democratization of the country and stretching the very concept of democracy in this process (ALVAREZ, 1990; PITANGUY, 2003). Moreover, within Latin America – and even beyond – Brazilian feminisms have drawn special attention for having articulated what has been regarded as “perhaps the largest, most radical, most diverse, and most politically influential of Latin America’s feminist movements” (STERNBACH ET AL., 1992:414).

This recognition is certainly not unfounded. Over the last three decades, feminisms in Brazil have brought important contributions, not only in terms of a change of values regarding women’s place in society, but also towards building a more gender equitable society in formal terms (COSTA; SARDENBERG, 1994; SOARES ET AL., 1996). Indeed, feminisms in Brazil have been instrumental in the passage of new legislation towards gender equity and in the formulation of public policies for women, carving as well new spaces in state machineries and apparatuses to implement and monitor them (COSTA, 2005; SARDENBERG, 2005). This has been specially pronounced during the last fifteen years, going against beliefs that women’s movements would tend to fade in a post-authoritarian regime context (RAZAVI, 2000; CRASKE, 2000).

However, despite these significant gains for women in Brazil registered in the period – and in spite of a pledge by those in power to implement “gender

mainstreaming” in all spheres and levels – major changes in that direction have yet to be enacted in formal power structures, such as those of the legislative, judiciary and executive branches (ALCÂNTARA COSTA, 2008; ARAÚJO, 2003; NOGUEIRA, 2005). They have remained notoriously resistant to the inclusion of women, such that, so too in Brazil, “[...] the new wave of democratization has not, by any means, had a feminizing effect on the parliaments, cabinets and public administrations of the new democracies” (RAZAVI, 2000, p. 2). This has resulted in a major paradox for Brazilian feminists: on the one hand, the presence of a wide and well articulated women’s movement, and on the other, a notorious absence of women in decision making positions (Alcântara COSTA, 2008). One of the consequences of this state of affairs is that we still lack a “critical mass” of women to push forth the implementation of new state institutions and policies, such as those for confronting violence against women (SARDENBERG, 2007a). There is also little support in the legislative and judiciary to guarantee greater advancements insofar as women’s sexual and reproductive rights are concerned. As such, legal and safe abortions in Brazil have remained strictly limited, resulting in high rates of maternal mortality, particularly among Black young women living in poor neighborhoods throughout the major cities (SARDENBERG, 2007b; SOARES, SARDENBERG, 2008).

In this paper, our purpose is to address these issues as we highlight the major achievements – as well as the shortcomings and challenges – of feminist struggles in contemporary Brazil. In so doing, we hope to show that meeting these challenges will not be an exercise free of tensions; they have been an integral part of the outstanding capacity of feminism in Brazil to “diversify,” thus the need to use always the plural and speak of Brazilian “feminisms.”

Note that plurality in this case does not pertain only to the incorporation of different segments of women’s movements into the ranks of feminism; carving new

spaces of action, be they in the state apparatuses or in institutions of civil society at large (the NGOs, unions, and political parties, for instance), and whether in local, national, or “global” spaces, has also been equally important and mutually reinforcing (ALVAREZ, 2000; COSTA, 2005). This process has demanded and promoted the “professionalization” of feminist activists (ALVAREZ, 1998b) and the development of what we may regard as new “feminist careers”, including academic ones. Yet, as it will be seen ahead, the exercise of “agency” in all of these different spaces and fields of action has not unfolded without “tensions”, both within feminisms as well as between feminists and other segments in the wider women’s movement.

As feminists engaged in both activism and practice as well as in “academic feminism,” we have tracked through these different paths of feminist activism in Brazil, and engaged in many of the struggles to be discussed in this paper. As such, we are conscious that our expectations and frustrations regarding feminisms and women’s movements in Brazil will certainly emerge in our analysis, revealing the intricate symbiosis established here between subject and object. We assume, as such, the duality of those who attempt to exercise – as well as to analyze – a transformatory action in society (DURHAM, 1986, p. 26), well aware of the epistemological and political underpinnings of such an attempt (SARDENBERG and COSTA, 1994).

ACHIEVEMENTS: “WE MADE HISTORY”

Feminism may be thought as critical thinking as well as political action that challenge the existing gender order, seeking to improve women’s position in society. In this perspective, feminism has a long history in Brazil (SARDENBERG and COSTA, 1994; SOARES ET AL., 1996). From the last quarter of the 19th century into the first three decades of the 20th, the so-called “first wave” of feminists in Brazil defended women’s education rights and struggled, in parliament, for the extension of suffrage rights to women, only granted in 1932. “Second wave” feminisms emerged in the mid-1970s, bringing into the public arena women’s demands for the criminalization of domestic violence, for equal pay for equal work, for equity in decision making spheres, and for women’s sexual and reproductive rights – demands which still remain unanswered in many

respects. As such, second wave feminism in Brazil has not come to an end – it has been thriving on for over thirty years, although incorporating, in this period, new discourses, diverse strategies, and different forms of organization.

Even if much has been said lately about the shortcomings of the “globalization of feminism” and of the subversion of feminist politics by developmental agendas (MENDOZA, 2003), one cannot deny their important contribution to the advancement of local struggles. In the case of Brazil, at least, it is a well established fact that the designation of 1975 as “International Women’s Year” by the United Nations, marked by the Women’s World Conference held in Mexico City that same year, had a determining role in the launching of the contemporary Brazilian feminist movement. Until then, the military dictatorial regime that had been established with the 1964 coup had succeeded in keeping women’s struggles off the streets by violently repressing any type of public manifestation (SARDENBERG; COSTA, 1994). The UN initiative not only granted a new *status* to the cause of women in Brazil (PINTO, 2003), but also opened the way for local expressions in that direction – such as the UN-sponsored conference held in Rio de Janeiro which resulted in the creation of the Centre for the Development of the Brazilian Woman (*Centro de Desenvolvimento da Mulher Brasileira*). It was also in 1975, with UN legitimacy, that feminist meetings began to be held during the annual conferences of the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (*SBPC*), a practice which lasted for the following ten years and marked feminist incursions into the academic world (COSTA; SARDENBERG, 1994; SARDENBERG, COSTA, 1994; PINTO, 2003; SARDENBERG, 2005).¹ Prior to that, some women’s groups inspired by feminist issues had already begun to be formed in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, yet, the UN proclamation of 1975 as International Women’s Year created the means for their legitimization, and for events such as the aforementioned seminar sponsored by the UN Information Center, still regarded as a marker of the emergence of contemporary feminisms in Brazil

¹ Since 1985, Feminist Meetings have been held independently of the SBPC Annual Meetings (SARDENBERG; COSTA, 1994).

(PEDRO, 2007; PINTO, 2005).² During 2005, therefore, a number of events, academic and otherwise, were held to commemorate “30 years of *non-interrupted* feminism in Brazil”.³ One of such events occurred in the Rio de Janeiro State Congress, in December of that year, when Congresswoman Inês Pandeló (PT – Workers’ Party), make perhaps one of the best summations of the assessments of the 30 years of feminism in Brazil stating that: “In the last 30 years, we made history. But we cannot stop here. Everyday, every hour we must take significant strides in the struggle for women’s rights in society. May we renew today, right here, our energies to continue fighting for our full citizenship”⁴. In tracing this history, it becomes evident that feminist struggles in Brazil have experienced significant changes, related to the political context in which they unfolded; they stand as markers for distinct periods in the history of feminisms in Brazil in the last 30 years. For Jacqueline Pitanguy, for instance, it is possible to distinguish three such periods:

the first, running from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties, marks the appearance of feminism as a political actor and its struggle for legitimacy and visibility. The second period, which occurred in the eighties, is dominated by the inclusion of a feminist agenda in public policies and normative frames. The third, in the nineties, sees the internationalization of this agenda through transnational coalitions that will play a major role in the re-conceptualization of human rights language (PITANGUY, 2002, p. 1-2).

We believe a fourth period could be added to this chronology, more specifically, the period occurring in the years 2000, characterized by the strengthening of state machineries for the promotion of gender equity, and thus, of “state feminism”. It is a period marked, as well, by the expansion of “identity feminisms” (COSTA, 2005) and of widening the spheres of feminist activism.

² It is well to note that the Women’s Movement for Amnesty, led by Terezinha Zerbini, emerged as well in 1975; in 1977 and 1978 were held the I and II Encounter of Working Women, and in 1978 the I Encounter of Metalworking Women (PINTO, 2003). On “global” and “local” links, see also Pitanguy (2003).

³ This was the title of a seminar organized by CLAM in Rio de Janeiro. Available at: <http://www.clam.org.br/publique/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?infoid=217&sid=41>.

⁴ Available at : <HTTP://jbonline.terra.com.br/extra/2005/12/05/e0512343a.html>.

The Dual Struggles of the 970s

Like other countries of the so called “Southern Cone”, so too in Brazil contemporary feminisms emerged in the context of the democratic struggles and resistance against the military regime that came into power with the coup of 1964. As such, in this first period, feminisms had a dual role in fighting both for the re-establishment of democracy as well as for the inclusion of gender inequality as a “central democratic theme”, thus widening the issues in the democratic agenda (PITANGUY, 2002). This also involved the redefinition of the concept of politics in order to include the “personal” for, as Alvarez (1990) has stressed, the practices of everyday life should also be considered in the realm of the exercise of citizenship – a perspective that was not easily accepted by progressive forces at that time. It could be thus affirmed that the

[...] initial steps taken by feminists to establish a public presence were directed at gaining political legitimacy, broadening that political base among women, and refuting conservative critics who argued that the time was not appropriate for such a movement (because they believed it would divide the opposition) or who denied their claims altogether (PITANGUY, 2002, p. 2).

It is well to note that feminists integrated a much wider women’s movement that included, in its ranks, groups with different interests and forms of organization. As true of women’s movements in other countries of Latin America in the period, so too in Brazil three major “streams” or segments were represented: human rights groups, popular women’s movements, and feminist groups (VARGAS, 1995). In Brazil, however, human rights groups, such as the *Movimento Feminino pela Anistia* (Feminine Movement for Amnesty), never drew as much attention as the *Madres* in Argentina, and the *Agrupación* in Chile, nor took a major leadership role in the wider movement. Besides, they tended to fade away after 1980, when amnesty was conceded to those in exile, in prison or otherwise condemned for political reasons. In contrast, popular women’s movements, as well as feminist groups, not only became more visible, but also have remained much more active than their “human rights” counterparts.

During the 1970’s, popular women’s movements grew around the *clubes de mães* (mothers’ clubs) organized

by the more progressive sectors of the Catholic Church in the periphery of the larger cities. These “clubs” grew in numbers and visibility, as they came to command the *Movimento contra a Carestia*, literally, the “Movement Against the High Cost of Living”, that gained nationwide attention. In the 1980’s, women became active in neighborhood movements for collective goods and services, leading the struggle for the creation of community daycare centers (see, for example, SARDENBERG, 2007). They found support in their quest from feminists active in the wider women’s movements, with important partnerships and coalitions emerging from these associations.

Most feminist activists in that period came from middle-class families and had access to college educations, being characterized as “professional” women. But many came from organizations recognized as part of the “Revolutionary Left”, espousing a Marxist perspective of national liberation. These and other activists suffered through the experience of armed struggle, underground clandestine lives, imprisonment, torture, exile and, in especial, they faced authoritarianism and sexism from both the left wing organizations in which they militated as well as from the repressive state mechanisms (COSTA, 2005). Nevertheless, in spite of their critical standing regarding these left wing organizations, Brazilian feminists maintained their ideological position and political compromise with a radical change in the social relations of production (STERNBACK ET AL., 1994:74). This perspective distinguished Brazilian feminisms of the 1980s, as feminisms in Latin America as a whole, from their American and European counterparts (CRASKE, 2000). It has also granted it the special characteristic of promoting a wider project of social reform that involved different forms of organization opened to the involvement of women from the popular sectors (MOLYNEUX, 2003:269) with their own demands, within which women’s rights were realized.

Indeed, in general lines, we could characterize the feminist movement in Brazil in the 1970’s as being part of a wide and heterogeneous movement that articulated the struggles against the oppression of women in society with the fight for the re-democratization of the country. Their strategic discourses were diluted in the discourses of other social movements against the State, materialized

in the military dictatorial regime as the common enemy to bring down (LOBO, 1987). Nevertheless, feminist organizations emergent in that period strove to enlarge the debate on gender inequality by bringing forth new issues into public debate, such as domestic violence, the discrimination suffered by women in the labor force and their exclusion from decision-making spheres. Yet, although issues such as sexuality, contraception and abortion also began to be brought into public discussion, they had to be introduced “gradually and awkwardly, since they raised themes considered taboo by the Catholic Church and rejected by democratic forces allied with the church against the military” (PITANGUY, 2002, p. 2).

It is well to point out that “autonomy” was already a major defining issue – as well as conflicting one – of the movement in that period (PINTO, 2003). But autonomy actually stood for more than an issue: it was a fundamental organizational principle. And it involved not only autonomy from political parties, churches and other institutions and organizations. Feminists stood for women’s autonomy as a political subject, with the right to decide over their own bodies and lives. Of course, in that conjuncture, autonomy in relation to the State, the “common enemy”, was not even posited. But the defense of autonomy as a fundamental feminist organizing principle did not implicate a defensive or isolationist position that prevented articulation with other social movements with shared interests, but rather the definition of an autonomous space for articulation, exchanges, reflection and definition of strategies (COSTA, 2005:16). The document *O Movimento de Mulheres no Brasil* (The Women’s Movement in Brazil), published in 1979 by the Women’s Association, an organization based in São Paulo, defines precisely the understanding that prevailed in relation to “autonomy”: “we believe that this movement should be autonomous because we are certain that no form of oppression will be overcome until those directly interested in its eradication assume the struggle themselves” (in COSTA PINHEIRO, 1981, our translation from the original in Portuguese).

1980s – Dialogues with the State

It is relevant to note that, by the end of the 1970s entering into the 1980s, other important social

movements were to make their appearance in the political scenario, also claiming “autonomy”, particularly from political parties. Among them were the black, gay, ecological, landless people movements, as well as movements in support of the demarcation of indigenous territories. All of them extending “the political terrain and the concepts of citizenship, democracy, equality, and participation” (PITANGUY, 2002:2-3). Indeed, the 1980s were to be the scenario for the unfolding of the process of re-democratization of the country, in which social movements would play an important role and forge demands to the state. Two relevant developments would mark this process: the granting of amnesty to political prisoners and those in exile, and the political party reform (PINTO, 2003). Amnesty brought back to Brazil left activists and, among them, many women who had militated in feminist groups in Europe and the US, bringing new fodder to feminisms in Brazil. At the same time, party reform opened the way for negotiations and alliances with members of newly created more progressive parties, and, as such, for putting forth the demands of the women’s movements.

The 1980s would thus mark a second period of feminist activism in contemporary Brazil, in that, in this new context, feminists were to be successful in including a feminist agenda for women in public policy and normative frames (PITANGUY, 2003). One of the major policies in question responded to issues regarding women’s health; with the launching of *PAISM – Programa de Assistência Integral à Saúde da Mulher* (Program of Integral Assistance to Women’s Health), an important and much needed dialogue between officials in the Ministry of Health and feminist activists was opened (VILLELA, 2001).⁵ It was also in São Paulo that, as a result of campaign negotiations with opposition candidates, “state feminism” began to be constructed with the creation, in 1983, of the first *Conselho da Condição Feminina* (Council for the Condition of Women), followed by the implementation

of the first major public policy related to the combat of violence against women with the creation, in 1986, of the *Delegacia Especializada de Atendimento à Mulher – DEAM* (“Police Stations for Battered Women”). By 1992, there were 141 DEAMs across the country, a number that at present extrapolates 300 (PINTO, 2003; DE AQUINO, 2006). The creation of local and state councils for women’s rights did not follow at the same pace, but it is important to highlight the creation, in 1986, of the *Conselho Nacional dos Direitos da Mulher – CNDM* (“National Council for Women’s Rights”).

One important aspect of these new councils for women was the role played by the different segments of the feminist movement in their composition. Prior to that, state organizations of this kind had always been formed by government appointments, a fact which curtailed the autonomy of these organs in making critical decisions. In response to the demands of the feminist movement, the new councils were to be formed with at least half of their members being appointed by their own organizations, which granted them a lot of room for independent decisions, and, as such, greater efficacy in fostering women’s interests and demands. However, although this is the more democratic of the two options, it is not easily accomplished. Many of these councils have been formed by situation party recruitments, leading to their loss of autonomy (PINTO, 2003, p. 71).

This possible outcome was in fact a source of rejection of participation in the councils by some segments of the feminist movement at the time, and as such, a polemic issue in the National Feminist Encounter, held in 1986 in Belo Horizonte (SARDENBERG; COSTA, 1994). Indeed, participation in the new organs and support to these state policies for women raised new challenges to feminists, particularly as to the need to rethink the movement’s position in relation to the State, now no longer identified as the “common enemy” (COSTA, 2005). Feminists had to recognize the capacity of the “modern state” to influence society as a whole – and not only through coersive means. It became evident that it was just as important to recognize the relevance of legislation, of social and economic policies, as well as cultural regulation mechanisms in the education and public communication processes and, as such, to look at the state as a potential ally in the transformation of the condition of women (MOLYNEUX, 2003, p. 68). Add

⁵ Indeed, as a result of this “dialogue”, abortion services in the cases prescribed by law began to be performed in public hospitals for the first time, the city of São Paulo being the first to provide these services (PINTO, 2003). Let it be noted that, since the 1980s, feminists have worked close together with health secretariats, promoting campaigns on issues regarding women’s reproductive health and many integrating health councils throughout the country (VILLELA, 2001).

to this the widening of the understanding of the role of the state towards guaranteeing the viability of a set of social, economic, political rights for the totality of the population, with mechanisms for the amplification of citizenship rights (COSTA, 2005).

The recognition of this possibility led the movement to integrate itself in the articulation and construction of a wider movement to interfere in the elaboration of the 1988 Constitution.⁶

Through a direct action – identified by the media as the “lipstick lobby” – to convince parliament members that would be drafting the new Constitution, and with the support of an ample process of social mobilization and political pressure, feminists were able to have 80% of women’s demands approved in the new Constitution. In that moment, the support of the CNDM was fundamental. Created in 1985 as part of the Ministry of Justice but with its budget and a president with the status of cabinet member, the CNDM was formed by 17 councilwomen, nominated by the President of Brazil, and representing both governmental organs as well as civil society organizations. The CNDM also had a technical staff and an Executive Secretary, enabling it to be particularly active during 1985-1989, articulating women’s demands.⁷ Among some of its activities was the promotion of a number of national campaigns, including the writing of the *Carta das Mulheres* (Women’s Letter), presented to the *Assembléia Constituinte* (“Constitutional Assembly”).⁸

⁶ During the military regime a severe constitution, taking away all citizenship rights, was put into effect. With the process of redemocratization of the country in course, a new constitution had to be elaborated.

⁷ Ana Alice Alcantara Costa, the second author of this part, participated in this lobby as Executive Director of the CNDM. Prior to that, she served as a member of the Salvador, Bahia, City Council for the Defense of Women’s Rights. Cecilia Sardenberg, the first author of the paper, served as a member of the State Council for the Defense of the Rights of Women of the State of Bahia.

⁸ This consisted of a two part document, the first one defending “[...] social justice, the creation of a Unified Health System, free public education in all levels, autonomy to the labor unions, agrarian reform, tributary reform, negotiation of the foreign debt, among other propositions” (PINTO, 2003, p. 75). The second part was totally geared to the defense of women’s rights in different areas such as employment and work, health, property rights, the conjugal society, among others. In particular, the *Carta das Mulheres* tended to the problem of violence against women, defending women’s

The *bancada feminina* (Women’s Caucus) in the National Congress also played a fundamental role in the defense of women’s rights in the new constitution. The *bancada* consisted of 26 women elected for the 1986-1990 legislative mandate and representing different political parties. Only one was a self-identified feminist (Dep. Moema San Tiago), nevertheless, the women in the *bancada* were able to “rise to the occasion”, assuming a supra-partisan identity and presenting 30 amendments defending women’s rights in the new constitution (PINTO, 2003, p. 74-75). They were backed by women’s groups all over the country who, under the general coordination of CNDM, were active in collecting signatures in support of these amendments.

Perhaps precisely because of the growing importance of the CNDM under Jacqueline Pitanguy’s presidency with the group of feminists working with her in Brasilia, daring to challenge institutional sexism and racism in Brazil, the Ministry of Justice, under new leadership, deemed it would be safer to “cut its wings”. The new Minister sliced CNDM’s budget and relative autonomy, an act which brought the resignation of Jacqueline Pitanguy and of all the other members of the CNDM along with the staff. It would be years before a National Council, equally representative of feminisms and women’s movements in Brazil, would again be formed (SARDENBERG; COSTA, 1994).

The 1980s saw the emergence of new segments within the wider women’s movement, many of them opened to close dialogues with feminism. In the 1987 National Feminist Encounter, for example, nearly 79 percent of the participants affirmed to be active in “labor unions, in the Black movement, in neighborhood associations, in mothers’ clubs, in the church, and in political parties” (SOARES ET AL., 1995, p. 309). It was precisely in this National Encounter that Black women publicly claimed a specific space for their struggles both against sexism and racism (RIBEIRO, 1995; BAIROS, 1995). To be sure, Black feminists have been a part of the so-called *Second Wave* of feminism in Brazil right from its emergence in the

rights to physical and psychological integrity, and demanding the creation of special police stations for battered women. Although it did not explicitly defend the legalization of abortion, it also included a polemical point in discussing a woman’s right “to know and decide about her own body” (PINTO, 2003, p. 75).

mid-1970s; however, it was only in the aforementioned Encounter, held in the city of *Garanhuns, Pernambuco*, that a Black women's movement was demarcated. Since then, several national and regional encounters of Black Women have taken place, and a number of Black Feminist NGO's have been created in Brazil, leading to the articulation of the Forum of Black Women's Organizations.

It should be observed that the 1980s also saw the emergence of another important space of feminist activism: academic feminism. Indeed, in national scientific and academic organizations, as well as within universities throughout the country, research and study groups on women's and gender issues were to be formed (COSTA; SARDENBERG, 1994), leading eventually to the demand for new "professionals" and thus to the carving of new "feminist careers". Academic feminism has been expanding ever since, witnessed not only in the proliferation of women's and gender studies groups, primarily in public universities throughout the country, but also in terms of special events, publications, thesis and dissertations defended in this field of study in the last two and a half decades (SARDENBERG; COSTA, 2006).

1990s – The Professionalization and Transnationalization of Feminisms

In writing about Feminisms in Brazil in the 1990s, Jacqueline Pitanguy (2003, p. 5) has observed that with the dismantlement of the CNDM, "the feminist agenda in Brazil was carried forward during the 1990s mainly by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)". She adds that,

[...] the significant role played by women's NGOs in the national arena and the efficacy of the advocacy strategies developed by regional and international networks and coalitions of NGOs characterize this third moment of feminism in Latin America. The internationalization of the feminist agenda and the impact of globalization mark the political actions of women's movements in the nineties and in this new century (PITANGUY, 2003, p. 5).

Indeed, the increase in the number of government organisms for public policies for women, of Police Stations for Battered Women (DEAMs) and other "state feminism machineries" as well as the formulation of specific public policies for women, propitiated the growth of the demand for professionals specialized or

with the expertise on gender and women's issues.⁹ Coupled with the effects of the neo-liberal policies implemented particularly in the direction of the shrinking of the state, this led to the development of a process of professionalization among feminists, who began to assume the task of expert lobbying for policies for women, becoming themselves in many cases also planners and practitioners. This, in time, has engendered the emergence of feminist NGOs (non-governmental organizations). They have assumed the lead in the lobbying to pressure the State, raising new challenges and dilemmas for feminist movements (ALVAREZ, 1998b).

It is well to note that, at the beginning of the 1990s, the various modalities of feminist organizations and identities were multiplied (LEBON, 1997). Women of the popular classes articulated through neighborhood associations, factory workers through the women's departments of their unions and national union coalitions, rural workers through their various organizations begin to self-identify themselves with feminism, the so called "popular feminism". Besides, the black women feminist associations continued to grow and amplify the feminist political agenda and the parameters of the feminist struggles themselves, such that, "the existence of various feminisms, with diverse points of view, major issues, means of organization and strategic feminist priorities were widely recognized in the 1990s" (ALVAREZ, 1994, p. 278).¹⁰

The growth of the so-called popular feminism had a fundamental consequence to the wider women's movements: the dilution of the ideological barriers and resistances to feminism. This diversity that has characterized the Brazilian feminist movement was very present in the Movement's preparation for intervention in the IV World Conference that took place in September 1995 in Beijing, in the incorporation of wide sectors of the women's movements.

In January of 1994, with the support of UNIFEM, took place the first preparatory meeting for Beijing, called by some feminists that had already participated in previous conferences. Close to 100 activists

⁹ On Police Stations for Battered Women in Brazil, see, for example, Hautzinger (2007).

¹⁰ On Black Feminisms in Brazil, see, for example, Carneiro (1999), Ribeiro (1997), McCallum (2005).

representing state and municipal women's Fóruns¹¹, local articulations as well as women's groups from 18 different states met to deliberate about the creation of a national coordination – the Articulation of Brazilian Women for Beijing 95 (*Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras – AMB*), that became responsible to supervise, raise funds, inform and articulate the actions and activities of the movement in order to guarantee democratic procedures in the organization for participation in the Beijing Conference. Following an orientation already applied in other Latin American countries, the major focus of the meeting was to take advantage of that moment to assess the changes effected on women's condition in the previous decade, draw the attention of civil society to the importance of the international conventions on women's rights, and establish new mobilization dynamics for the movement (FEMENÍAS, 2007). The Beijing preparatory process brought new energy into the Brazilian feminist movement, stimulating the creation of local women's Forums in cities in which they did not exist or were inactive, the articulation of new coalitions, new women/gender departments in unions and in other institutions of civil society. As a result, pre-Beijing preparatory meetings were held in 25 of Brazil's 27 states, involving over 800 women's organizations. It is worth pointing out, for instance, that AMB, the "Articulation of Brazilian Women" was created in 1995 precisely to organize Brazilian women's participation in the Beijing Conference.¹²

¹¹ The "Fóruns de Mulheres" – Women's Fórum – are non-institutionalized articulations, constituted by feminist groups or organizations, women's groups in unions and other organizations, and independent feminists (or "feministas autônomas") operating in Brazil's major cities. They are responsible for organizing, articulating, and implementing campaigns, events and other mobilizations of the feminists and women's movements throughout the country. The fóruns maintain thematic coordinations without a deliberating or representative power, except when such power is explicitly authorized by the participating women and organizations. At present, these fóruns constitute the most organized manifestation of the so-called "autonomous" or independent feminism in Brazil. Cecilia Sardenberg and Ana Alice Costa, authors of this paper, participated in the creation of the women's forum of Salvador, Bahia, being active members for close to two decades.

¹² Indeed, speaking of the impact of these Conference on women's movements in Brazil, Maria Aparecida "Shuma" Shumaker, one of the coordinators of AMB, has observed

This articulation was able to bring forth important advancements. In spite of the CNDM, then in the hands of a conservative leadership, feminists were able to establish, for the first time in Brazilian history, a participatory dynamic for the elaboration of an official document, a dynamic made also possible by the Ministry for External Relations (*MRE*), the Brazilian governmental organ responsible for this document. For this purpose, the MRE had created a special work group, with the inclusion of notable feminists, responsible for the elaboration of the brief, and integrated tens of activists by means of seminars centered on the themes to be included in the document.¹³ Many of the recommendations presented by activists in these seminars were included in this document. This articulation guaranteed, not only the presentation on the part of the Brazilian government of a representative document, but also the approval of the Beijing Platform on its entirety by the Brazilian government, and more important, from thereon, a better assimilation, on the part of the federal government, of the demands put forth by women's movements.

In addition to this important achievement in terms of mobilization and organization, the Beijing process also contributed to the greater articulation of Brazilian feminist movements with other Latin American feminisms in terms of a joint action. Of course, despite this being the first time that Latin American feminisms participated in a world conference as an integrated and well organized regional network, it is true that since the

that: "This mobilization provoked and constituted (women's) Forums/Articulations in 25 Brazilian states, and the promotion of nearly one hundred events (state meetings, seminars, research projects, etc.), involving more than 800 organizations. In the history of Brazilian women's movements, I do not know of any other international event that has counted with such an intense mobilization in the country. In some Brazilian counties, the Beijing event stimulated the creation of new spaces for debate. For the first time women's movements elaborated 22 documents/diagnostics which showed the complex nature of inequality among women in the country, giving us the opportunity to evaluate the degree of organization of the movement in each one of these states, assess regional priorities, and propose the design of policies to be implemented" (in PINTO, 2003, p. 114-115, our translation).

¹³ Ana Alice Alcantara Costa integrated this work group, being responsible for the coordination of the Conference on Gender and Power, held in Salvador, Bahia, organized by NEIM/UFBA. Cecilia Sardenberg participated in this Conference as co-coordinator.

1980s Latin American feminisms have experienced a transnational dynamics, by means of formal and informal networking and, in special, through the “Encuentros”, that is, the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters (STERNBACH ET AL., 1992; ALVAREZ ET AL., 2002). Starting back in 1981, these Encounters occurred first every two years, and more recently, every three years, the last being held in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2007. As noted by STERNBACH ET AL. (1992, p. 396) in these Encounters are expressed the progresses, conflicts, new dilemmas and perspectives, and an intensive exchange of experiences. They “have served as springboards for the development of a common Latin American feminist political language and as staging grounds for often contentious political battles over what would constitute the most efficacious strategies for achieving gender equality in dependent, capitalist, and patriarchal states”.

On the basis of her following of these Encounters, as well as of the preparatory seminars and articulations for the Beijing Conference on the part of Brazil, Sonia Alvarez (2001) identifies five major tendencies in Latin American feminist politics during the 1990s, the first one being their heterogeneity. According to Alvarez, the Beijing process made it possible to amplify the spaces and locations of activism of the self-identified feminists, with the incorporation and visualization of other feminist identities, such as Black feminisms, indigenous feminisms, lesbian, popular feminisms, academic, eco-feminisms, and those of governmental advisors, NGOs professionals, Catholics for the Right of Choice, union feminists, that is to say, feminist women who do not limit their activism and organizations to the so-called “autonomous” feminisms. This heterogeneity of practices has engendered the reconfiguration of the Latin American feminist political identity of the 1970s and 1980s, bringing forth the plural, multicultural, and pluri-ethical character of these feminisms (ALVAREZ, 1998; 1998b).

A second tendency has been the relatively rapid absorption, by the dominant cultural institutions, by the parallel organizations of civil society of the political society, and by the State itself, of some elements of feminist discourses and agendas – obviously, those less radical. No doubt, this process of incorporation comes as a result of much effort on the part of feminists. And it is materialized in the creation of special

organisms, such as ministries, bureaus, etc., for the implementation of public policies for women by the government of different Latin American countries, Brazil including, and in the incorporation of precepts that guarantee equality between women and men in the new democratic constitutions of those that had been under military rule, such as in the case of Brazil. Similar processes of incorporation of such principles have also unfolded in local unions and national workers federations, as well as in political parties and by social movements at large.

It is interesting to note that this comes precisely at a moment in which, as a consequence of the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies, a process of the shrinking of the state is set in motion (MENDONZA, 2002; ALVAREZ, 1998b; ALVAREZ ET AL., 2002). The third tendency – the progressive professionalization and specialization of important sectors of feminist movements, such as is the case of the NGOs – comes as a consequence of this process, as well as of the growing demand for “expert” information on women and gender issues, needed for the implementation of the new policies for women by the new institutionalities created (ALVAREZ, 1998b). A fourth tendency, also related to this process, is the articulation and interconnecting of the diverse spaces and locations of feminist politics through the proliferation of specialized networks as well as of formal coalitions, often fomented by bilateral and multilateral organizations, that have functioned as major intermediaries with international forums (ALVAREZ, 1998a).

The fifth and last tendency identified by Alvarez is precisely this process of internationalization and “transnationalization” of discourses and practices of Latin American feminisms, that have been propitiated by the capacity of articulation of many NGOs and professionalized feminist practitioners that have enlarged their influence in world, regional, and national spheres, interfering in the setting of agendas, deliberations and defining political action (ALVAREZ, 2001; 1998a; 1998b).

According to Alvarez, these marked tendencies of post-Beijing feminisms in Latin America were not easily assimilated by the movement as a whole; they provoked new tensions in the interior of a movement more

complex and diverse each day. In Mexico, Bolivia, and Chile, in particular, this brought conflicts between so-called *feministas autônomas* (independent feminists) and the *institucionalizadas* (those linked to an organization or institution)¹⁴, the latter being accused of trying to establish hegemony within the movement and of utilizing “state-centered” strategies within a patriarchal and neo-liberal logic. This conflict became even more intense during the VII Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter, held in Cartagena, Chile (1996), when a clear-cut polarization of positions was established. For Alvarez et al. (2002:28):

[this] lack of dialogue meant, among other things, that Cartagena was largely a missed opportunity for an analysis of the positive and negative consequences of the Beijing process for national and regional feminist politics. Instead, the Beijing legacy contributed to the polarization of participants and hovered like a ghost over Cartagena.

Nevertheless, this polemic was attenuated in the *VIII Encuentro*, held in Santo Domingo in 1999. Instead of the expected confrontation started in Cartagena, the Santo Domingo Encounter was the scene of attempts to resolve the old conflicts, with re-positionings in both sides. In point of fact, some of the so-called *institucionalizadas* had already been showing their disposition to critically reflect upon their activism – particularly on the dangers incurred by a strategy based solely upon the defense of policies and negotiations with governments and international organizations, directed to influencing the setting of agendas. As such, they accepted some of the criticisms made by the *autônomas*. The latter, on the other hand, began to realize that their radicalized position could lead to the fragmentation of the movement (ALVAREZ ET AL., 2002).

It must be stressed that, in Brazil, this conflict did not gain momentum; even though the issue came up in several national meetings, it never rose to a confrontation level. Perhaps one of the major factors working against this type of confrontation is that in Brazil the Beijing preparation process did not favor the hegemony of one or even of few NGOs in detriment of other segments. The Articulation of Brazilian Women –

¹⁴ “*Feminista institucionalizada*” is the pejorative expression used by the self-defined “autonomous” feminists in relation to those engaged in work in bilateral and multinational agencies, in state organisms, and to those working in NGOs.

AMB, articulated in order to democratize the process, was very zealous in the avoidance of excesses in centralization. Besides, the local forums established throughout the country also exercised control in that direction. Actually, different than what has been observed in other Latin American countries, Brazilian feminisms have always been characterized by more participative and democratic decisions and by the permanent control and questioning, by those on the base, of the spheres of power and formation of leadership, making it difficult for confronting positions of that order to emerge (COSTA, 2005).

At the same time, feminist NGOs in Brazil are known to be preoccupied with promoting mechanisms of participation and the enlargement of their basis of consultation, always searching for political support to legitimate their actions. Indeed, contrary to statements about feminist NGOs exploiting grassroots women’s labor, as put forth by Razavi (2001), feminist NGOs – as well as academic feminist organizations – are known to support grassroots women’s organizations, not only by offering them training, but also in offering them assistance in writing projects for funding and in acting as mediators between these organizations and funders (THAYER, 2001; AVILA ET AL., 2001). Perhaps, the origins of Brazilian feminist NGOs have influenced these differentiated practices, in that most of the organizations emerged from autonomous groups and thus, through the feminist “*que hacer*”. Even the NGOs that were formed more recently bring together long time activists, well known for their participation as autonomous feminists and for maintaining their links with the non-institutionalized movement (COSTA, 2005).

But it cannot be denied that the experiences of Brazilian feminisms in transnational spaces introduced new strategies and discourses in national activism (ALVAREZ, 2000; 1998a). Referring to this process, PITANGUY (2003, p. 6-7) points out, that:

Brazilian feminists, as well as feminists from other Latin American countries, have been insistent advocates in the United Nations arena, networking at the national, regional, and international levels when international human rights language is written at the UN. These feminists have participated in NGO coalitions and in government delegations during the United Nations conferences that took place in the 1990s, during which,

in a surprising cumulative effect, women's citizenship rights were reaffirmed and accrued.

Of course, to this effect have contributed the enormous advancements in information and communications technology, fostering in its path “networking” – both virtual as well as “presential” – as a major organizational strategy, successfully put to work by feminisms and women’s movements in a global context (CASTELLS, 1996). During the 1990s, a number of such networks were articulated in Brazil, most of them still at work.¹⁵

2000s – Strengthening State Feminism

The new millennium inaugurated a new space for transnational feminisms in the World Social Forum (WSF) Conferences, the first three of them, held in 2001, 2002 and 2003, taking place in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil. Brazilian feminisms were present not only in these “local” transnational spaces, but also in the WSF held elsewhere, organizing panels, events, and public manifestations, be it as part of their organizations and groups, or as members of regional networks, such as Marcosul, or of global ones as in the case of the World March of Women – WMW (CONWAY, 2007; VARGAS, 2003; ALVAREZ; LIBARDONI, 2003).

One of the more important positive consequences of Brazilian feminists presence in these and other international/transnational spaces – or perhaps, a result of a what Alvarez (2000:3) identifies as “transnational activists logics” – is the boosting of their position locally and nationally to fight for public policy for women. This is what Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (in Alvarez 2000:4) call the “boomerang pattern” of influence, explained by Alvarez as the kind a influence “[...] whereby transnational coalitions of non-governmental, governmental and inter-governmental actors put pressure on more powerful states and IGOs to bring pressure to bear in turn on a

particular government which violates rights or resists the desired policy change”.

Indeed, the national and transnational articulation of feminists in the Beijing Conference process eventually paid off with the creation, in 2002, of SEDIM – the National Secretary of Women’s Rights, in the last year of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s term. One of the first tasks of this organ was the elaboration of Brazil’s first report to the CEDAW Committee, a task that was more than 10 years late, commissioning, for that purpose, a number of feminist NGOs. This came in response to the mobilization, on the part of feminist NGOs, under the coordination of AGENDE and CLADEM/Brasil, to monitor the process of ratification, on the part of the Brazilian government, of the Facultative Protocol¹⁶ to CEDAW – the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, as part of the World Campaign “Women’s Rights are not Facultative”. Although CEDAW’s article 18 affirmed that all member countries that signed CEDAW (passed in 1982) should present periodical reports each 4 years, it was only in 2002 that the Brazilian government would first respond to that obligation.

Following the practice established by the CEDAW Committee, the feminist movement in Brazil, coordinated by AGENDE and CLADEM/Brasil, focal points for the “Women’s Rights are not Facultative” Campaign in Brazil, articulated a network of 13 other networks¹⁷ involving more that 400 entities, to

¹⁶ The Facultative Protocol adopted by the United Nations in 1999 and open to adoption by countries that had already signed CEDAW, began valid in December, 2000. Brazil joined CEDAW in 1984, signed the Protocol in March, 2001, and ratified in June, 2002.

¹⁷ Participated in this process the following Networks and National Coalitions: AMB – Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras; Articulação de ONGs de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras; ANTMR – Articulação Nacional de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais; Comissão da Mulher da CGT - Central Geral de Trabalhadores; CNMT/CUT - Comissão Nacional Sobre a Mulher Trabalhadora da CUT; MAMA – Movimento Articulado de Mulheres da Amazônia; REDEFEM – Rede Brasileira de Estudos e Pesquisas Feministas; REDOR – Rede Feminista N/NE de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre a Mulher e Relações de Gênero; Rede Nacional de Parteiros Tradicionais ; Rede Feminista de Saúde – Rede Nacional Feminista de Saúde, Direitos Sexuais e Direitos Reprodutivos; Rede de Mulheres no Rádio; Secretaria Nacional da Mulher da Força Sindical; UBM – União Brasileira de Mulheres.

¹⁵ Among the major feminist networks first articulated in the 1990s in Brazil are: 1) Rede Nacional Feminista de Saúde e Direitos Reprodutivos (created in 1992); 2) REDOR-Rede Feminista Norte e Nordeste de Estudos sobre Mulheres e Relações de Gênero (1992); 3) AMB- Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras (1994); REDEFEM – Rede Brasileiras de Estudos Feministas (1994); Rede Mulher.

elaborate the Alternative Report, also known as “Shadow Report”. This report, along with the Official Country Report, was presented to the 29th Session of the CEDAW Committee in New York, with the presence of representatives of the organizations and networks that participated in the elaboration of the document.¹⁸

The pre-Beijing Conference process was also put to work again in the articulation of feminist movement for drawing the Feminist Political Platform (*Plataforma Política Feminista*), in 2002, to be presented to all candidates in the forthcoming presidential elections. The formulation of this Platform involved the participation of women active in local “women’s forums” throughout Brazil’s major cities in state conferences, culminating with a Brazilian Women Conference held in Brasília, with the presence of over one thousand women, followed by the presentation of the document to the candidates.¹⁹ A similar process would be put to work for the First and Second National Conferences for Public Policies for Women.

This process was launched by President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva’s government, who established 2004 as *Ano da Mulher* (Women’s Year), through federal law. As part of the events for that year, the *Secretaria Especial de Políticas para Mulheres – SPMulheres* (Special Secretariat for Women’s Policies), created by the Lula government with a cabinet status in 2003, organized the *I Conferência Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres – I CNPM* (First National Conference on Policies for Women), that took place in Brasília, the national capital, in July, 2004. Close to two thousand women delegates elected by their peers in the state conferences, held all over the country, assembled in Brasília.²⁰

¹⁸ Ana Alice Alcântara Costa, one of the authors of this paper, was one of the activists present at the CEDAW Committee Meetings, representing REDOR (na academic feminist network), and speaking at the UN for the coalition that elaborated the “shadow report” from Brazil.

¹⁹ Ana Alice Alcântara Costa participated in this Conference as part of the delegation from Bahia.

²⁰ Cecilia Sardenberg, the first author of this paper, participated in the I CNPM as delegate from the State of Bahia, and in the II CNPM as a delegate from the Ministry of Education, representing NEIM – The Nucleus of Interdisciplinary Women’s Studies of the Federal University of Bahia – UFBA. Ana Alice Costa participated in the II

The stated purpose of this nationwide process was to establish a dialogue between civil society and government – from the municipal through the federal levels – for the formulation of the *I Plano Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres – I PNPM* (First National Plan of Public Policies for Women) towards the eradication of gender inequalities in Brazil. A second conference, the *II Conferência Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres – II CNPM*, was held in Brasília as well in August of 2007, bringing together more than 2000 delegates from all over the country, to evaluate the I PNPM and suggest the needed adjustments.

Feminist activists of all walks and faiths participated in this process, conscious that it could revitalize the feminist movement as an “actor in the national political scene”. However, feminists were aware of the risk of being used “for a merely illustrative participation, with few concrete results as to definitions of the future plans” (AMB, 2004a). In order to avoid falling into this situation, AMB, the Articulation of Brazilian Women devised participation and intervention strategies for feminists participating in the municipal and state preparatory conferences, in order to guarantee the largest possible number of delegates identified as feminists and thus ensure the incorporation of the demands formulated in the Feminist Political Platform in the I PNPM. This strategy payed off. In all but one of the state conferences (state of Minas Gerais), the legalization of abortion on demand was approved by a wide margin (SARDENBERG, 2005). In addition, as a recommendation to this Plan, it was approved in the I CNPM:

[the] feminist position that affirms the responsibility of the State over the financing, formulation, and implementation of public policies for women, and the articulation between social an economic policies, both with a distributive character, in addition to the maintenance of budget links to health and education, the relevance of affirmative actions, and the principles of equality and equity, the lay nature of the State, and the inter-sectorial character of the actions needed for the implementation of these policies, and thus the need for the participation of all governmental areas (AMB, 2004, our translation).

It is estimated that approximately 300 thousand women were involved, directly or indirectly, in the entire preparatory process to the I CNPM, from the city to

CNPM as group coordinator.

the federal levels. It is known that 14.050 women participated as delegates in the 27 state conferences held during May and June, 2004; 2000 of these participants were nominated for participation in the I CNPM. Among these participating women, 47% were identified as members of organizations of the Black women movement, and about 3% from native indigenous groups, whose voices ensured the inclusion of race and ethnicity issues in all the points included in the I PNPM.

In 2007, with the objective of making adjustments and advance in the implementation of this Plan, the II National Conference for Public Policy for Women – *II CNPM* was held, involving preparatory processes similar to the previous one. This time, a total of 2.559 were elected in the 600 municipal, regional and state conferences that were part of this process, implicating, once again, the direct and/or indirect involvement of over 300 thousand women across the country. Among them were several AMB as well of WMW members, the former wearing colorful hats and the latter tee-shirts for the legalization of abortion, stating: “I abort, you abort, all of us clandestine.”

In the final document resultant from the *II CNPM*, some important achievements, such as the launching of the “Pact Against Violence” and the passage of the comprehensive legislation to combat domestic violence known as “*Lei Maria da Penha*” (to be discussed further ahead), were recognized and reaffirmed. The demand for the legalization of abortion was also reaffirmed, by a wide margin (Sardenberg, 2007). Within the new recommendations for the II National Plan of Public Policies for Women – *II PNPM*, the following points deserve special attention for their feminist character:

- To foment and implement Affirmative Action Policies as a needed instrument for the total exercise of fundamental rights and freedom by distinct groups of women;
- To promote the balance of power between men and women in terms of economic resources, legal rights, political participation and interpersonal relations;
- To combat the distinct forms of appropriation and exploitation of the body and lives of women, such as sexual exploitation, the traffic of women and the consumption of stereotyped images of women;
- To recognize the gender, racial and ethnic violence as structural and historical types of violence that express the oppression of women and in need of being treated as matters of public security, justice and health (BRASIL/SPM, 2008:30, our translation).

It should be noted, as well, that the *II CNPM* included the issue of “Gender and Power” in the discussions that were to serve as basis for the elaboration of the II PNPM, feminists having been successful in guaranteeing the inclusion of the principle that “[...] to widen women’s participation in power and decision making spheres is to work for the consolidation and perfecting of Brazilian democracy (BRASIL/SPM, 2008:118, our translation)”. This has also fostered the creation of state machinery at the municipal and state levels to oversee the implementation of the policies in question, and councils for the defense of women’s rights, formed by representatives of civil society to monitor the process. Although, as Razavi (2001) well notes, this form of “state feminism” may be seen as resultant from blockages to women’s participation through more traditional processes (party politics, for instance), their importance cannot be denied, regardless of the factors that have contributed to their emergence.

SHORTCOMINGS AND CHALLENGES

It is necessary to emphasize that, despite these unquestionable achievements, feminisms in Brazil still face a number of challenges that will be in our agenda for decades to come. A major problem arises from the fact that in the last three decades, Brazilian society has experienced two distinct – even contradictory – processes that have profound implications for the formulation of policies regarding women’s issues. As noted in the previous sections of this paper, in the period outlined we have participated in the gradual re-democratization of our political institutions, a process marked by the emergence of new actors in the national arena – including feminists – opening the way for events such as the National Conferences for Public Policies for Women to take place. Yet, at the same time, we have suffered the effects of a perverse combination of the processes of globalisation, production re-structuring, and the large-scale advancement of neo-liberalism, which have made labour relations even more fragile and resulted in the widespread impoverishing of the population. In particular, the implementation of fiscal adjustment policies demanded by the International Monetary Fund, with the consequent cuts in social programs, have rendered the life of the Brazilian poor labouring classes even more difficult, if not

downright painful.²¹ As such, despite the important advancements made towards the re-establishment of political and citizenship rights which have culminated with Lula's swearing in as President, Brazilian society is still profoundly marked by social inequalities, particularly those resulting from the intersection of gender, class, race, age, and other equally widespread social determinants.

Other challenges come as a result of the continuing strength of patriarchal values in Brazilian culture, which have prevented advancements in the legislation regarding sexual and reproductive rights, the decriminalization of abortion in particular, as well as created a number of obstacles in the implementation of new legislation to combat domestic violence. Likewise, deep-set patriarchal values are still in the way of women's rise to decision-making positions in formal power structures, despite the establishment of quota systems to offset the unbalance of power on gender lines. In this section of the paper, we shall look at some of these major pressing issues for feminisms in contemporary Brazil.

Gender and Race Inequalities²²

To this day, Brazil is still characterized by deep set social inequality, holding the record of being a country with one of the highest percentages of wealth concentration in the world, a country where the opulence of few stands against the misery of millions. The rise to power of the Workers Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT*) with the election of President Lula in 2002 and again in 2006 has yet to alter the

structure of inequalities, although some important strides having been taken in that direction. Among the most miserable, women detain the majority, being submitted as well to domestic violence, low wages, unemployment, etc. It is no wonder that women represent today the absolute majority of the unemployed, and those that are in the labor market face low wages, the least paying and least prestigious occupations, such as domestic work in which women respond for 98% of these jobs. This corresponds to 12 million women, 60% of them working without any social security benefits.

Yet, even if inequalities between women and men still persist, and are considerable, they have tended to narrow down within given social groups, whereas inequalities among women – specially between black and white women – have instead widened considerably. Insofar as education levels are considered, for example, data from the 2000 population census indicate that women have supplanted men in all levels of schooling, and particularly at the university levels. However, this does not apply to all women in the same way. Indeed, while the proportion of White women who have completed secondary schooling has grown to 17,2%, only 10,2% of all Black women reached that same status. Let it be noted that similar differentials were found in terms of college education: 7.7% among white women, and a mere 1.9% for non-white females (IBGE, 2003).

Of course, women as a whole still earn lower average incomes than men, regardless of their color/ethnic groups and independent of their level of schooling. In point of fact, these distortions increase as we move up in terms of years of schooling. Nonetheless, White women, as a whole, earn more than Black men, while Black women earn, on average, half of the earnings of white women and a mere fourth of what white men receive.²³ Besides, as a whole, Black women tend to face the most precarious conditions of insertion in the labor market, a large proportion still working as domestic workers. Another issue which should deserve special attention on the part of feminists is the noticeable increase, in the last decades, of the proportion of women headed households. For example, in the state of Bahia, this proportion rose from 20.0% of

²¹ As explained by Montecinos (2001, p. 176): "In the past two decades, policy elites faced the challenges of political liberalization while attempting to implement comprehensive and painful economic reforms prompted, in part, by stringent demands from international creditors and investors. Social mobilizations to oppose market-oriented policies and protest unemployment and deteriorating wages were contained to avoid possible reversals to military control, perceived as an imminent threat in some countries. Elected governments placed unpopular policy choices in the hands of competent experts, shielded from the unpredictability of party coalitions, interest group politics, and public debate. Instead of looking for new avenues to expand citizens' rights and participation, the fragile new democracies pursued a policy-making strategy that insulated and empowered economic reformers".

²² Portions of this section were published in Sardenberg (2005).

²³ This is not true when we consider White women and Black men with the same education levels. In this case, black men earn more than white women (IBGE, 2003).

the homes, in 1991, to 27.1% in 2000, corresponding to an increment of 35.3% (IBGE, 2003). This rise was more pronounced in urban areas than rural ones. In the city of Salvador, for example, women headed households, composed by “women and their children”, correspond to 37.5% of all the homes (IBGE, 2003; BERQUÓ, 2002).

These statistics gain significance as well to current debates on the “feminization of poverty”. Studies have revealed that households headed by women present greater vulnerability to poverty than other households, in that the female heads are more likely to be among the unemployed or working part time, and pooling, on average, more reduced earnings (LAVINAS, 1996). Indeed, according to the 2000 census, nuclear family households headed by men earned, on average, \$295,80 *reais* (about 60 pounds), while this average was reduced to \$263,90 *reais* (about 52 pounds) in the case of households headed by a woman living alone with her children. And the situation is considerably worse in the case of households headed by Black women; these households earn, on average, 74% less than households headed by White men (IBGE, 2003; BERQUÓ, 2002).

Clearly, insofar as this situation is more crucial in the case of families headed by Black women, poverty reduction policies in Brazil must take a gender and race approach. By the same token, poverty reduction and the fight against racism are among the fundamental challenges posed to feminist activists in the decades to come. For certain, feminists need to take a strong stand in favor of affirmative action policies on gender and race lines, as well as press for stronger and more inclusive social programs geared to poor families, particularly those headed by women. In that regard, it must be stressed that existing programs, including the “new” ones being implemented by the Lula government, such as the *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant) still remain basically “paternalist”; they merely “assist” women. Feminists must ensure that new policy to come will actually “empower” women, such as to tend not only to the “practical gender needs” of women, but also to our “strategic” interests (MOLYNEUX, 1985).

Women’s Representation in Power Structures²⁴

For Brazilian feminists, it has become clear that the path towards meeting these “strategic interests” passes through increasing women’s participation in power spheres. In this regard, it must be remembered that, as true of other Latin American countries, so too in Brazil the process of re-democratization left women out (DEL CAMPO, 2005; MONTECINOS, 2001; RAZAVI, 2000). Indeed, despite actively participating in the so-called “informal political spheres”, women in Brazil have not been able to break through the traditional political structures. As in Del Campo’s (2005, p. 1701) words:

After the transitions to democracy, a participatory modality was established in Latin-America that we could say combined, on one side, the predominant classical participation structures - in which women were still excluded in good proportion - and on the other, new channels of expression where feminine incorporation had a space in an increasing way.

Although women in Brazil have conquered the right to vote back in 1934 and represent, today, 51% of the electorate, we do not fulfill more than 10% of elective positions in the country. This places Brazil as one of the most backward countries in terms of women’s political representation. Indeed, according to the data computed by the Inter-parliamentary Union, Brazil occupies the 100^o position in a total of 135 countries in their world classification. Of course, this low rate of representation stands in contrast to the strength, reach, and political influence of Brazil’s feminist movement. Despite three decades of vibrant activism and evolving engagement with the state, increasing women’s political participation has remained an all but insurmountable challenge. This remains a key paradox in Brazilian feminism: it has succeeded through its political strength in putting women’s demands on the table, but it has failed to open formal political spaces to the women themselves.

Feminists first organized to address women’s political representation in 1995. Working closely with federal congresswomen and men, they pushed for the passing of Law No. 9.100 of 1995, known as “Quotas Law”, that guaranteed that 20 percent of all candidates in proportional elections (town councilors, as well as state

²⁴ Portions of this section were published in Alcântara Costa (2008).

and federal deputies) would be women. Although applied in the municipal elections of 1996, the new legislation was not enough to change the situation of women's exclusion. In 1997, Law No. 9.504 was approved, raising this percentage to 25 percent for the 1998 elections and to 30 percent for subsequent elections. However, despite this legislative success, the quota has not translated in practice for three main reasons:

- The law does not include a penalty for parties who fail to meet the quota, so many simply ignore it
- It provides no concrete support for female candidates, such as public campaigning funds or free TV and radio advertising
- It neither establishes nor offers incentives to the creation of any mechanisms within political parties to encourage women's political development and education.

In the absence of these enforcement and support mechanisms, increasing the proportion of women who hold public office in Brazil has remained an elusive goal. Aware of this fact, in June 2007, CNDM and the Women's Caucus in the National Congress promoted, with the support of *SPMulheres*, a public act on the front yard of the National Congress with the objective of calling attention to the persistent exclusion of women from decision making spheres and for Congress to make use of a gender perspective in proceeding with the political reform. With the theme "Not more nor less: just equal (*"Nem menos nem mais: apenas iguais"*)", women showed their preoccupation with the needed political reform, demanding greater space for women in the Brazilian Parliament (SPM, 2008, p. 117). A few weeks later, in the midst of the heated discussions going on in Congress, NEIM/UFBA, along with two feminist NGOs (AGENDE and Project Women and Democracy of the Casa da Mulher do Nordeste), and the Women's C ucus at the National Congress, promoted an International Seminar on "Pathways of Women's Empowerment: International Experiences on Affirmative Action" in the Congress Hall, to bring forth examples of successful experiences in that direction.²⁵

Another means of pushing for reform in the way of guaranteeing the quotas was to include them as part of the PNPM – the National Plan for Public Policy for Women. As known, part of the democratization process in Brazil has been the creation of a participatory governance structure that operates in parallel to the representative democratic system. At each of the three tiers of government, sectoral secretariats-such as for health, education, women, environment and so on-are obliged to hold regular conferences to engage with organized civil society in shaping and monitoring public policies. These conferences, such as the National Conferences for women previously discussed, offer a significant opportunity for social movements to engage with the state, composed as they are of 50% representation by organized civil society and 50% representatives of the state.

In the northeastern state of Bahia, we worked with colleagues from the Interdisciplinary Nucleus of Studies on Women of the Federal University of Bahia (NEIM/UFBA) through six municipal conferences to establish consensus on a set of consistent proposals that would address women's demands through the creation of institutional mechanisms aimed at facilitating truly democratic participation. Our proposal, which centered on the need for strong legislation that would guarantee political parity between men and women in all public functions and positions, as well as public funding for election campaigns and women's political development, was approved at the state conference in Bahia and sent on to Brasilia for consideration at the national conference. By the time it reached Brasilia, it had benefited from a process of consultation involving 250,000 women from across the country. Meanwhile, we worked to build support and awareness among lawmakers by organizing the aforementioned seminar entitled "Pathways for Women's Empowerment: International experiences of Affirmative Action" during the political reform process that took place at the Brazilian National Congress in June 2007.

The seminar brought together federal deputies, senators, and male parliamentarians, as well as representatives from the executive branch and women activists from

²⁵ This seminar was part of the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Program Consortium in which NEIM participates as a partner institution. See, for example:

<http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org>. DFID, along with the Brazilian Congress and the Pathways of Women's Empowerment RPC were the major funders of the event.

both feminist organizations and political parties, was organized by NEIM, with support from national and international partners. Focusing on a critical evaluation of the Brazilian quota system, the seminar sought to build politicians' and activists' awareness of the kind of reforms that are needed to bring about significant shifts in women's political representation, based on women's experiences in other countries. It coincided with a week of high-profile political reform, and attracted significant attention in both the National Congress and Brazilian press.

Clara Araújo²⁶ from the State University of Rio de Janeiro provided a real insight into the Brazilian experience identifying a number of weaknesses in Brazil's political system, in particular, the government's inability to redistribute power over the last 13 years, which has consistently kept women (among others) outside the decision-making sphere. This analysis was confirmed by the reform process that ensued that very same week. Despite a unified set of proposals backed up by international experience and strong state-civil society partnerships, feminists and their allies in the Brazilian legislature were able to secure few measures aimed at ensuring gender parity in political representation.

Women managed to guarantee that free TV and radio advertising for political parties would address the political participation of women, and succeeded in ensuring that 20% of public campaigning funds would be set aside for female candidates (10% less than the desired 30%, which would correspond to the current quota), yet very few of women's overall demands were incorporated into the Political Reform Project's official report (PL 1210/07), and still fewer made it onto the list of final reforms. The Brazilian women's movement is accustomed to transforming experiences of struggle into opportunities for learning. Despite the overall defeat, women used the political reform process to organize, raise awareness, build new alliances, and strengthen existing collaborations with members of the executive branch and female deputies and senators from the legislative branch. Two months later, the women's movement entered the Second National Conference on Women's Policies armed with new allies and broader public and political support for its original proposal. At that conference, the proposal was strongly reaffirmed,

and the women's movement was able to secure a commitment from the federal government to make building representative parity among men and women a national priority.

Time will tell if this commitment will translate into real changes. However, the results from the 2008 elections are not very promising. The data on both the candidacies and that on the elected show that women's representation will continue to be limited. In point of fact, the average percentage of women candidates fell below the minimum of 30 percent: women represented a mere 21,34 percent of the candidacies, with 10,41 percent for mayors, 15,48 percent for vice-mayors, and 22,07 percent as municipal deputies. As per the final results, in the next four years, women will represent 9,09 percent of the municipal government, as mayors, and 12,53 percent of the municipal legislating bodies (RANGEL, 2008).

It is important to emphasize that not only in the legislating bodies, but also in the other two branches of government – Executive and Judiciary – women's exclusion from the higher posts continues to be notorious. In point of fact, women's participation in top positions in the Executive Branch, despite showing an increase from 13 percent, during President Cardoso's terms, to 19 percent with President Lula, is still way behind. For instance, at present, among the 37 cabinet members, only 4 are women, and only 11 of the 37 ministries have women occupying higher positions.

It pays to observe that, according to Nogueira's (2005) study of hierarchies within federal public bureaucracies of the Executive Branch, the higher one moves up in these hierarchies, the lower is the presence of women. Looking at the gender distribution in the "DAS" posts, which represent the commissioned posts in these bureaucracies, Nogueira (2005, p. 8) found that whereas at the level of DAS-1, the lowest paying commissioned posts, women represent 47,8 percent, this percentage falls to 16,7 percent at the DAS-6 level, which corresponds to the highest posts in these hierarchies. Similar distortions are to be found in state and municipal level executive bureaucracies, characterizing public power in Brazil as still essentially "patriarchal".

Unfortunately, the situation is not different in the Judiciary Branch. It is known that more than 40% of

²⁶ See also Araújo (2003).

those in the base of the Judiciary Power are made up of women. However, very few women have climbed into higher levels. According to Minister Eliana Calmon, of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice and one of the few women to occupy this post, those that have been able to break through the “glass ceiling” have only done so because of pressures on the part of women’s movements and the international community.²⁷

Of course, as Montecinos (2001, p. 191) well observes, “it cannot be expected that women in positions of power will represent the interests of women above other considerations as it cannot be argued that the interests of all women could be unambiguously reflected in a demarcated set of preferences”. However, the experience of the “lipstick lobby” in the inclusion of legislation favoring women in the 1988 National Constitution suggests that a “critical mass” of women in the power positions can make a positive difference.

Criminalizing Domestic Violence Against Women: Maria da Penha Law²⁸

One area in which this “positive difference” is needed is certainly in the Judiciary, particularly insofar as the implementation of “*Lei Maria da Penha*”, the new legislation regarding the criminalization and prevention of domestic violence, is concerned. This new legislation comes after more than thirty years of feminist organizing and campaigning for the criminalization of violence against women, but, as we shall see ahead, it is encountering a number of obstacles from judiciary authorities in the way of its implementation.

It is well known that domestic violence against women is, in fact, quite pervasive and still highly tolerated in Brazil as throughout Latin America as a whole. Indeed, as reported by Dollarhide and Bouabid (2004, p. 2):

The Latin American Statistics on Domestic Violence, compiled in 1998 by the Organization of American States, also showed that domestic violence is the main cause of injuries suffered by women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the region. Between 30 and 40 percent of women have suffered some type of family violence. One out of every 5 women misses work due to domestic violence and more

than half of men who beat their wives also beat their children.

It is commonly thought that domestic violence is linked to economic stress and alcohol consumption, but, certainly, these elements could not trigger aggression against women without the support of patriarchal cultural values. In Latin American, these values are part of the Mediterranean cultural heritage of the region of which patriarchal violence is an important characteristic. In Brazil, for instance, during colonial times, society was organized on the basis of a patriarchal order that granted total power to the father/husband over all other members of the family. Women were considered to be property of the men of the house, and it was not uncommon for them to perish in the hands of their male relatives in the name of the “legitimate defence of the honour”. In the late 1970’s, men were still literally “getting away with murder”, claiming defence of the honour. In 1979, for example, Doca Street was acquitted of the crime of murdering his girlfriend, Angela Diniz, during a notorious trial in which his lawyers built their case on the “legitimate defence of honour” argument. He was brought to trial again in 1981 and found guilty, serving 15 years in jail. But it was only in 1991 that the Brazilian Supreme Court outlawed the use of the “honour” argument (cf. ARDAILLON; DEBERT, 1987).

Throughout Latin America, the struggle for the eradication of domestic violence has been, as such, a “cultural struggle”, in that Latin American feminists have worked steadily and consistently not only for official recognition for the legitimacy of the demands for legislation and public policy in that direction, but also to eradicate patriarchal values regarding gender relations, so as to put “private violence in the public eye” and denaturalise it. The first major break towards that end came in 1994, with the adoption by the Organization of American States (OAS) of the Interamerican Convention to Prevent, Sanction and Eradicate Violence Against Women, better known as “Belém do Pará Convention”, after the name of city in Brazil where it was passed. Prior to that, Puerto Rico was the first country in Latin America to adopt:

[...] specific legislation to prevent and crack down on domestic violence against women, in 1989. The next countries to follow suit were Chile and Argentina in 1994, and Bolivia, Ecuador and Panama in 1995. Colombia, Costa Rica, El

²⁷SPMulheres. Available at: <<http://200.130.7.5/spmu/informativo/informativo.asp?edicao=34>>.

²⁸ Portions of this section were extracted from Sardenberg (2007).

Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru enacted similar laws in 1996, and the Dominican Republic modified its penal code to include legislation against domestic violence in 1997 (LAMA, 2000).

As previously noted, in Brazil a first step in this process was the creation of special Police Stations for Battered Women (*Delegacias Especiais de Atendimento às Mulheres* or *DEAMs*), ideally staffed by police women, the first such station being created in São Paulo, in 1985 (today there are over 300 in the country). In many states were also created Reference Centres and Shelters for Battered Women, and a network of services (including coroners' offices, hospitals, etc.) was articulated to assist women victims of violence. However, the major instrument to combat domestic violence was developed fairly recent. Law nº 11.340, sanctioned on August 7, 2006, and named *Lei Maria da Penha* (in honour of a woman shot and crippled for life by her ex-companion 20 years ago), not only increases three times over the period of imprisonment for such violent acts (from 1 to 3 years now), but it also allows flagrant and preventive arrests. In addition, it includes a number of measures to protect the woman.

This law was formulated on the basis of a legal document elaborated by a consortium of feminist networks and organizations²⁹, passing through a long process of discussions and reformulations by a working group formed by representatives of several government ministries coordinated by the Special Secretariat for Women's Policies (*SPMulheres*), before being forwarded to the National Congress by the federal government. In the drafting phase of the bill, the proposal was discussed in public hearings held throughout the country, with the participation of feminist and other activists in women's movements, always earning ample approval. The final product constitutes one of the most comprehensive legislation package pertaining to combat against domestic violence, bringing significant advancements in the way towards the criminalization of domestic violence against women. Indeed the important changes brought by the:

[...] Maria da Penha Law are not few, both in classification of crimes of violence against woman and in the legal and police procedures. It classifies domestic violence as one of the forms

²⁹ADVOCACY, AGENDE, CEPIA, CFEMEA, CLADEM/IPÊ and THEMIS.

of human rights violation. It alters the Penal Code and makes it possible to arrest aggressors in the act, or to have them arrested preventively when they threaten the woman's physical integrity. It also provides for new measures of protection for woman under life threat, such as removal of the aggressor from the home and prohibiting him from physically coming close to the victim and her children.³⁰

It is important to stress, however, that legislation that criminalizes domestic violence has not been easily accepted. In Brazil, for instance, several judges have claimed that the Maria da Penha Law is "unconstitutional" because it "discriminates" against men. And in Rio Grande do Sul, in the southernmost part of Brazil, the family judge Edilson R. Rodrigues rejected all incoming petitions for application of the law in the areas under his jurisdiction, stating that:

Human disgrace started in Eden: because of women, as we all know, but also because of man's naivité, stupidity and emotional fragility [...] The world is male! The idea we have of god is male! Jesus was a man". The Special Secretariat for Women's Policies took the case to the supreme court, who applied a disciplinary measure against Judge Rodrigues, declaring that "the magistrating exercise is not a green light for the expression of prejudice and verbal distemperance.

Unfortunately, Judge Rodrigues is not alone. In her speech during the Second National Conference on Public Policies for Women (*II CNPM*), Minister Eliana Calmon observed that even women magistrates find it difficult to understand the dimension of Maria da Penha Law. According to the Minister, these judges did not understand that Law 9099 (previous to Maria da Penha Law, and that allowed for cases of violence against women to be treated in minor criminal courts, establishing pecuniary and services sentences to batterers) was prejudicial to women living under domestic violence. They did not realize the damage that "law 9099 was bringing to society", by making violence against women a minor violation.³¹

Aware of these possible drawbacks against Maria da Penha Law, the SPMulheres elaborated and has been firming the "National Pact for Combating Violence Against Women" (*Pacto Nacional pelo Enfrentamento à Violência Contra a Mulher*) with the 27 State

³⁰ SPMulheres. Available at: <<http://200.130.7.5/spmu/docs/law%20maria%20penha.pdf>>.

³¹ SPMulheres. Available at: <<http://200.130.7.5/spmu/informativo/informativo.asp?edicao=34>>.

governments in the country, with the objective of consolidating the National Policy for Combating Violence Against Women.³² *SPMulheres* has also promoted the articulation of consortia to monitor the implementation of Maria da Penha Law throughout the 27 states, by means of a public tender.³³

Observe – the Observatory for Monitoring the Implementation of Maria da Penha Law created by the winning Consortium – has conducted research in 6 city capitals, revealing that after nearly two years of the passage of the new legislation, few strides have been made towards its implementation according to what the bill states, with the greatest obstacles to be found in the creation of the needed courts. The study also reveals that feminist and women’s movements have been active in pushing for the implementation of the law, as it is clear that it will not be enacted without pressure from the interested groups, in this case, women of all walks.

The Fight for the Legalization of Abortion³⁴

Insofar as domestic violence has no “boundaries” – it affects women of all classes, races, ethnicities and ages alike – it is an issue that has brought together the different segments of the women’s and feminist movements in a common struggle. Sadly, the same cannot be said of the fight for the legalization of abortion. Given its controversial character and strong opposition to it on the part of religious groups, it is a struggle that has been carried out mainly by feminist activists. Besides, although this struggle in Brazil already spans over 30 years, only within the last decade has it gained wider proportions.

³² This Policy package includes not only the implementation of Maria da Penha Law, but also the promotion of women’s sexual and reproductive rights, the combat against the feminization of AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), combat against sexual exploitation and the traffic on women, and the promotion of human rights of incarcerated women.

³³ The chosen Consortium, formed by 9 entities, including four academic research centers, and four feminist NGOs plus 3 national feminist networks as partners, is coordinated by NEIM, with Cecilia Sardenberg as National Coordinator and is at present devising a methodology to carry out the monitoring process. . They have created the Observatory Lei Maria da Penha – Observe, that can be reached at: www.observe.ufba.br.

³⁴ Portions of this section were extracted from Soares and Sardenberg (2008).

Since the 1940s, abortions in Brazil have been legal in two counts: when pregnancy comes as a result of rape, and when pregnancy endangers the life of the mother. In spite of being prohibited in all other instances, however, it is believed that between 750.000 to one million clandestine abortions are performed in Brazil every year, resulting in the admission of nearly 250.000 women into public hospitals due to abortion-related complications. Studies show that nearly 10% of them die as a result, and close to 20% leave with severe damage to their reproductive organs (Sugimoto, 2005; Martins and Mendonça, 2005). In great part these women are black and poor, since middle and upper class women are able to find safe abortion services in clandestine clinics.

It should be noted that, even in the cases permitted by the legislation:

[...] women could not count on the support of the State to have their rights recognized. They not only had to deal with the many bureaucratic obstacles to have access to the procedure, but also faced the refusal of medical personnel in the public hospitals, as no legal and infrastructural provisions existed to guarantee what the law prescribed (SOARES; SARDENBERG, 2008).

It was only in the late 1980s, that the first public health service providing legal abortions was created (in the State of São Paulo), similar services across the country only beginning to be provided in the 1990s.

But the 1990s would be characterized by a “change of mood” insofar as women’s reproductive rights were concerned. It began with the launching during the Fifth Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting, held in 1990, of the “September 28 Campaign”³⁵ for the Decriminalization of Abortion in Latin America, with the support of women from 21 countries and 7 regional networks. This was followed by a series of international conferences – Rio in 1992, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the Copenhagen Conference in that same year, the 1995 International Conference in Beijing – in which support to women’s struggles for reproductive rights would build up.

³⁵ September 28 is the International Day of Struggle for the Decriminalization of Abortion.

Let it be stressed that since 1991, when the September 28 Campaign was first launched, it has been gaining supporters across the country. Indeed, the Feminist Network for Health, Reproductive Rights and Sexual Rights, known as “*Rede Feminista Saúde*” (Feminist Health Network), has been a major actor in that regard, leading the September 28 Campaign along with CLADEM, a Latin American Network with similar goals. They have focused on three major paths of action: a) working with the Ministry of Health and local health officials and professionals to guarantee the availability of services for legal abortions; b) building and monitoring changes in public opinion in favor of the legalization of abortion, which has included monitoring the media; and c) dealing with the law, particularly with the situation in the legislature (VILLELA, 2001; SOARES; SARDENBERG, 2008).

Note that the legislation has been a major focus of the action, given that, between 1991 and 1998 alone, 24 different bills on issues related to abortion were presented to Congress. Whereas most were favorable to liberalizing abortion, granting greater reproductive rights to women, a few were quite severe, threatening existing rights.

According to Gilberta Soares (2006) who led the campaigning of the *Jornadas Brasileiras pelo Aborto Legal e Seguro* (Brazilian Journeys for Legal and Safe Abortions), great part of feminist efforts towards the legalization of abortion in the recent past could be seen as “re-actions”. Feminists were often called to put out a “fire” that threatened rights already established. In 2003, for instance, there was a strong reaction on those opposing abortion rights in the National Congress, particularly within the Family and Social Security Committee. This led some organizations and feminists who were dealing more directly with the issues to reflect upon the situation. They concluded that efforts towards the legalization of abortion had been fragmented: “[...] a more organized and systematized agenda was needed, so as to combine efforts and promote synergy. Moreover, it was necessary to move from a ‘re-active’ position into a ‘pro-active’ one” (SOARES; SARDENBERG, 2008).

The September 28 Campaign promoted in 2003, already reflected the change of strategies, as a result of an intense process of political articulation, several sectors

and organizations active in the feminist movement joined the campaign, holding several in different Brazilian cities. Coordinating the Campaign that year were *Cunhã Coletivo Feminista* (Cunhã, Feminist Collective), the Focal Point for the Campaign in Brazil, *Rede Feminista de Saúde*, and the Brazilian Catholics for the Right to Decide Organization. This created the conditions for the articulation of the *Jornadas Brasileiras pelo Direito ao Aborto Legal e Seguro*, around the slogan: “Abortion should not be a crime. No woman should be arrested, fall ill or die because of an abortion” (SARDENBERG; SOARES, 2008).

In 2004, aiming at changes in the Brazilian Legislation regarding abortion, the *Jornadas* defined as one of their major actions the participation in the First National Conference for Public Policies for Women. To that end, *Jornadas* opted for a processual strategy, actively participating in the preparatory conferences (local and state wide) across Brazil. In the process of these conferences, the *Jornadas* adopted the slogan: “Abortion: Women decide, Society respects the decision, the State ensures its execution”.³⁶ With the exception of the State of Minas Gerais, all other state conferences approved the legalization of abortion. As previously noted, over 1,700 delegates present the I CNPM voted in favor of the legalization of abortion.

Approval in the Conference was followed by inclusion in the First National Plan for Public Policies for Women (*I PNPM*). To carry it out, the Lula government created a Tri-party Committee (*Comissão Tripartite*), constituted by representatives from civil society, and from the executive and legislative governmental bodies. They had as their major objective to formulate a legal pre-project tending to the demands of the feminist movement to be presented to Congress. Unfortunately, the process between the installation of the Tri-party Committee and the presentation of the project unrolled in a critical political conjuncture, marked by charges of corruption in the legislative body and in the situation party (PT- Workers Party).

It must be noted, however, that the campaign for the legalization of abortion in Brazil has benefited from the rise to power of more progressive political parties, such as the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers’ Party/PT),

³⁶ “*Aborto: As Mulheres Decidem, a Sociedade Respeita, o Estado Garante*”.

that brought Luis Inácio Lula da Silva to the presidency of the country in 2002. Nevertheless, it also faces growing opposition from fundamentalist religious groups, particularly elements of the Catholic church which were notably strengthened by the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Brazil in 2007 (SARDENBERG, 2007).

In May 2007, for instance, more than 5,000 people connected to various religious groups staged a protest in São Paulo denouncing abortion as “murder”. They highlighted the case of a baby called Marcela, who although born without a functioning brain was still alive at four months, thus challenging medical claims that life outside the uterus is impossible for anencephalous infants. Such a case, they argue, invalidates arguments in favor of legalization of abortion (SARDENBERG, 2007a).

The response of Brazilian feminists to this counter-effort has been to avoid a head-on collision. This is a strategic choice: recent polls indicate that public opinion in Brazil has taken a strongly conservative turn in relation to abortion. In 1993, 54% of those polled defended the maintenance of abortion laws as they stood, while 23% supported full legalization; a poll in *Folha de São Paulo* in October 2007 suggests that the percentage favoring legalization has fallen to 16% (SARDENBERG, 2007a).

In any event, it is clear that the Catholic Church has emerged as a major enemy of women’s rights and women’s lives. The Church has the financial backing needed as well as the scope, through its parish system, to carry a strong campaign, and is not being scrupulous about the means that are used. An example of how low the Church can stoop to achieve the goal of bringing a retrocession in the securing of women’s reproductive rights is to be found in the distribution of plastic aborted fetuses to people who attended Sunday mass in the city of Rio de Janeiro’s parishes this past December, with the full support of the local Bishop. The Church has also been behind the approval of local legislation prohibiting the distribution of the “morning after pill” through the public health system in cities such as Recife, in *Pernambuco*, and *Jundiá*, in *São Paulo*. Even if these approvals have been overturned on the basis that they are unconstitutional, they have an impact on public opinion. And recently the Church scored two major

points: it was instrumental in having the project elaborated by the Tri-Party Committee defeated in the Congressional Committee for Social Security and the Family, and it is backing a Parliamentary Investigating Committee (CPI) to investigate abortion practices in Brazil.

Let it be noted that the backlash against the gains obtained for women by the feminist movement is also thriving in the judicial system. Nearly 10,000 women in the city of *Campo Grande*, State of *Mato Grosso do Sul*, are being tried for having had an abortion, some of them already been convicted. Of course, this backlash will not stop the campaigning for the legalization of abortion in Brazil. However, it is clear that as *Jornadas* and partners take a more pro-active role in this struggle, that of “firefighters” cannot be put aside. Indeed, as we move forward, resistance to the securing of women’s reproductive rights, fostered by the more conservative forces in our society, will continue to try to impose patriarchal restrictions on our way towards achieving full autonomy (SOARES; SARDENBERG, 2008). Combating these forces will then constitute a major challenge to feminists in the years to come.

FEMINISMS AND WOMEN’S MOVEMENTS: DIVERSITY AND TENSIONS

In a background paper to UNSRID on contemporary women’s movements in Latin America, Nikki Craske lamented that the changing nature of the state in the region had worked as a dispersion factor for social movements, such that “[...] by the 1990s, it is increasingly difficult to speak of a ‘women’s movement’. Rather it is diverse, plural and complex as its different constituent elements seek ways of furthering their goals on the new institution terrain” (CRASKE, 2000, p. 5). She added that “the mobilizing capacity of the women’s movement is greatly weakened and civil society generally in Latin America is demobilized with few issues generating much public engagement”. Craske further noted a change in the relationship between the women’s movement and the state: “There has been a shift from making demands on the state to negotiations with it” (2000, p. 6). This shift came accompanied by – and fostered in turn – a proliferation of NGOs as professional groups and playing the part of “major actors in the women’s movement, almost to the point that these are becoming

proxies for other actors whose voices are being drowned”.

Similar views have been espoused by a number of authors, who have argued that Latin American “women’s movements in the post-transition period appear highly dispersed” (RAZAVI, 2000, p. 30), or with widening gaps between professional groups, on the one hand, and working-class women, on the other (LEBON, 1997). Razavi (2000, p. 39) speaks, in fact, of a very “diffuse” women’s movement, stressing that:

[...] with the consolidation of the ‘normal’ processes of democracy dominated by political parties, women’s movements (like other social movements) have become increasingly marginalized and dispersed. The fact that women’s gender identity is not always transparent or primary effectively means that women rarely act as a bloc. This makes it extremely difficult to establish peak bodies for policy concertation. It has therefore proved much more difficult to organize women in defence of their other interests, than to demonstrate against authoritarian rule (RAZAVI, 2000, p. 39).

Considering what has been discussed in the previous sections, it is difficult to agree with these rather negative evaluations insofar as Brazilian feminisms are concerned. Let us remember that, writing about the relations between the feminist and women’s movements back in the mid-1990s, Soares et al. (1995, p. 309-310) already recognized the heterogeneity of women’s movements in Brazil, observing that it reflected “[...] the many dimensions of women’s subordination as well as the social, cultural, ethnic, and generational diversity of its participants”. Moreover, Soares et al. also emphasized that in addition to being heterogeneous, women’s movements in Brazil were also “spontaneous”, which led to “[...] a varied presence in the national arena and sometimes to ambiguous and contradictory demands”. Going along with Vargas’ (1993) considerations, the authors advanced that despite diversity, women’s movements had as common ground “the discovery of a common identity as women and the emphasis on daily life”. However, they stressed that: “Each part of the women’s movement could be analyzed as a social movement in itself, with its own dynamics and modes of expression. These parts intersect, interrelate, and, at times, conflict”.

Nearly fifteen years after Soares et al.’s analysis, their observations continue to be valid insofar as the “women’s movement” in Brazil is concerned. And it is

also still valid to say that the feminist movement is “but one expression of a broader women’s movement” (SOARES ET AL., 1995, p. 310). Nonetheless, it has become increasingly more difficult to define borders and limits between one and the other in terms of the people involved, as feminists are active in all of the “expressions” that make up that broader movement. Likewise, the feminist movement has also expanded considerably, including, in its wings, increasing numbers of women from other segments of the broader women’s movements (Costa, 2005).

Indeed, as seen on Table I (ahead), in comparing the profile of participants in the *Conferência Nacional de Mulheres* (National Women’s Conference) – a theoretically “feminist” space articulated in Brasilia in June, 2002, where women elaborated the *Plataforma Política Feminista* – with the profile compiled of the women who attended the *I CNPM*, a space that was characterized of the broader “women’s movement” – very little differences appear, both in terms of their “location of political activity”, as well as of “area/segment of activity” (or we could say major “cause” defended).

It is important to observe, in particular, that, in both of these conference spaces, members of NGOs were not in the majority. Of course, those active in governmental organs were a greater number in the *I CNPM*, because this was a conference organized by the government and it was important that its different organs and agencies were represented there so as to construct the needed support for implementing changes. But note that they were also not in the majority; participants declared to be active in a variety of political locations, those active in “social movements” corresponding to the location with the largest representation. This is consonant with Sonia Alvarez’s considerations regarding the new trends of feminisms in Latin America. It pays to transcribe here her analysis, even if at length:

Feminism – like many of the so-called new social movements that took shape in the region during the 1970s and 1980s – can today more aptly be characterized as an expansive, polycentric, heterogeneous *discursive field of action* which spans into a vast array of cultural, social and political arenas. [...] The 1990s saw a dramatic proliferation or multiplication of the spaces and places in which women who call themselves feminists act, and wherein, consequently, feminist discourses circulate. After over two decades of struggling to have their claims heard by male-dominant sectors of civil and political

society and the State, women who proclaim themselves feminists can today be found in a wide range of public arenas – from lesbian feminist collectives to research-focused NGOs,

from trade unions to Black and indigenous movements, from university women’s studies programs to mainstream political parties, the State apparatus, and the international aid and development establishments (ALVAREZ, 1998b).

Table 1 – Profile of participants in the Major Women’s Conferences – BRASIL

Location of Political Activity of Participants	National Conference - Plataforma Pol. Feminista (2002)*	I CNPM I PNPM (2004)** (more than one choice)
Social Movements	34.7	34.0
NGOs	32.19	27.0
Political Parties	20.21	25.0
Govern. Organizations	7.53	29.0
Universities	5.37	5.0
Autonomous	–	7.0
Other	–	5.0
Total	100.0	0
Area/Segmento of Activity	National Conference - Plataforma Pol. Feminista	I CNPM I PNPM (more than one choice)
Feminist Movementt	34.22	35.0
Popular Movement	16.59	25.0
Other	–	17.0
Labor Unions	11.89	12.0
Black Women	12.78	10.0
Senior	2.30	10.0
Youth	4.23	9.0
Rural Women	7.20	7.0
People with Deficiencies	1.20	5.0
Domestic Workers	2.14	4.0
Lesbians	1.45	3.0
Indigenous Women	3.03	3.0
Gays	–	2.0
Midwives	2.97	1.0
TOTAL	100.0	

Source: Table elaborated by authors on the basis of the following sources: * AMB (2002); ** SPMulheres (2004).

Reflecting about the *Encuentros* in another work, Alvarez (2000:6) also stresses this “increasingly expansive, polycentric, heterogeneous Latin American feminist field” and observes that the *Encuentros* “have brought together thousands of women active in a broad range of public spaces – from lesbian-feminist collectives, to rural and urban trade unions, Black and indigenous movements, landless movements, research NGOs and university women’s studies programs, guerrilla organizations and mainstream political parties”. Besides, as she notes, irrespective of their self-identifications, “the *Encuentros* provided a unique space for activists to debate collectively the always-contested meanings and goals of feminism and its relationship to other struggles for rights and social justice in the region”. She concludes by saying that the *Encuentros* have thus played “a critical role in fashioning common discourses, fostering a shared (though polysemic) Latin

American feminist political grammar, and providing activists in individual countries with key theoretical and strategic insights and symbolic resources which they subsequently “translated” and redeployed locally.”

It should be noted that this is also true of the National Feminist Encounters; indeed, a “feminist discursive field” has also unfolded at the national level in Brazil. This is important, for, despite the cross over of activists from women’s movements at large into feminist activism and vice-versa, feminist struggles, issues, and, of course, a feminist discourse is demarcated. In this regard, it pays to consider the Table II below, elaborated by the AMB, differentiating the *Conferência Nacional de Mulheres Brasileiras (CNMB)* from the *Conferência Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres (CNPMM)*. In the same Bulletin where this table appears, AMB clarifies that their objectives in participating in these conferences were different. Whereas in the

CNMB, held in 2002, they wanted to affirm the feminist and women’s movements as political actors in the presidential electoral context, presenting our own propositions, in the I CNPM (2004), the purpose

was to reaffirm the incorporation of the feminist perspective in national public policies for women, so as to “make them promoters of effective equality and justice.”

2002 – Conferência Nacional de Mulheres Brasileiras (CNMB) The conference of the Social Movements	2004 – I Conferência Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres (I CNPM) A government conference
Called for by 10 national networks of the women’s movement	Called for by decree of the Presidency of the Republic
Objective: to build a feminist political platform	Objective: to propose guidelines for the National Plan of Public Policies for Women
Content: analysis of the Brazilian social context and affirmation of the propositions of the distinct movements to transform Brazilian Society and Women’s condition	Content: debate on Brazilian reality and evaluation of governmental actions being development in municipal, state and national levels
Participants: close to 2.000 delegates from state conferences plus representatives from the national networks	Participants: total of 1.993 delegates from governmental organs and civil society, elected in the state conference plus members of CNDM and the federal government
Principal norm: chart of principles	Principal norm: internal regiment and by-laws
CNMB was the public space for the dialogue, disputes and alliances between women’s movements	CNPM will be the space for public dialogue, disputes and alliances between the government and civil society

Source: AMB 2004, Bulletin n. 2, our translation from the portuguese

Contemporary Brazilian feminisms deem to be anti-sexism, anti-racism, anti-homophobia and for radical transformations in the social relations of production, taking an anti-capitalism stand. These principles have been thoroughly incorporated in the *Plataforma Política Feminista*, and are also very strongly affirmed in the guidelines defined for the First and Second *Plano Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres*. These guidelines respond to a number of demands from distinct segments of the women’s movements, such as: “Black women, indigenous women, White women, *quilombolas*, gipsy women, coconut breakers (*quebradeiras de coco*), community leaders, lesbians, persons with deficiency, new and historical activists, etc” (SPMULHERES, 2008). However, this does not mean that arriving at them has been a process free from tensions and conflicts, when not outward rifts. To the contrary: “social movements fields are constituted by continuous contestations – discursive and strategic” (ALVAREZ, 1998a, p. 19).

Indeed, contestations along distinct lines within feminisms, and between the feminist and other segments of the women’s movement, have marked the history of

feminisms in Brazil in the last three decades. A major source of conflict since the 1970s has been “party politicking” within the women’s movements. Up into the early 1980s, in fact, traditional leftist parties in Brazil, such as the Brazilian Communist Party (*PCB*) and the Communist Party of Brazil (*PCdoB*), still regarded feminism as a “bourgeois” expression, considering women’s struggles to be subordinate to the “general” struggles of society.¹

Although they have since become supportive of feminist struggles, the practices of the *mulheres de partido* (political party women) within the feminist and women’s movement clearly indicate that they put party interests above those of the respective movements. An example of this type of practice occurred during the debates in the National Congress regarding political reform in the way towards creating mechanisms for greater efficacy in the quota system for women, when Congresswomen, otherwise known for their support to

¹ In point of fact, this line of thinking provoked the first major split within the contemporary women’s movement, particularly insofar as the *Movimento Feminino pela Anistia* was concerned.

enlarging women's presence in the legislative, voted with their parties, joining in the "pacts and alliances among political cronies squelched the possibility of real reforms" (Alcântara COSTA, 2008).²

Asunción Lavrin (1998:527) has stated that "class and race remain among the most divisive factors in national and international feminisms". To a certain extent, this is also true in Brazil. Indeed, up to the late 1980s, the Brazilian feminist movement, in contrast to other segments of the broader women's movement, was composed primarily of White, middle-class women. However, as Cecilia McCallum (2007, p. 67) well observes, whereas a number of works have actually focused on the supposed "historical split between black feminists and mainstream white feminists and underline the latter's failure to address the issue of race during the 1980s", the *Plataforma Política Feminista* "gives extensive and unprecedented space to discussing racial discrimination and proposing measures to combat it". Furthermore, in following up the events and processes that unfolded in Salvador, Bahia, in preparation for the 2002 – *Conferência Nacional de Mulheres Brasileiras (CNMB)*, McCallum (2007, p. 80) was witness to the fact that:

Black, white, middle class and working-class feminists meet, work together, exchange ideas, and provide support, easing – if not overcoming – tensions. Rifts to occur, notably, the separate identities of black and white feminists, but [...], separate identities and the recognition of difference is also a basis for solidarity.

Nonetheless, a recent development within the broader women's movement in Salvador illustrates how race,

² Another common practice of *mulheres de partido*, and one which is highly condemned by their non-party comrades within the movement, is their constant in-fighting and use of questionable strategies to guarantee positions/seats for their party cronies within the local councils, in the new posts being opened with the expansion of State Feminism, or even as delegates to the municipal, state, and national conferences for public policies for women- a practice known as "aparelhar" (use of state apparatus or other deliberating instances so as to favor the interests of a determined party) Not rarely, two or more political parties make a pact to distribute these seats or places in a delegation. This happened in the Municipal Council for Public Policies for Women held in Salvador, Bahia, in May, 2007, when PCdoB (*Partido Comunista do Brasil*) and PT (*Workers' Party*) took control of the nomination of delegates, bringing on the revolt of the non-party participants and the intervention of the coordinator of the event.

class, and gender relations can articulate so as to give rise to a conflict of interests between Black women activists and White feminists. After the election of a new governor for the state of Bahia, affiliated with PT (Workers' Party), more than 100 White and Black feminists and activists in women's movements were reunited in a meeting sponsored by NEIM, for the elaboration of a document defending the creation of a State Secretariat for Public Policy for Women for Bahia. However, renegating his campaign promises, the new governor created a hybrid Secretariat – the Secretariat for the Promotion of Equality (SEPROMI) in Racial and Gender lines, nominating a Black congressman to the post of Secretary. Of course, this raised women's protest against the new Secretariat.³

However, when a year later the governor replaced the male Secretary by a leading Black feminist, protests against SEPROMI on the part of Black feminists ceased altogether, and White feminists, who voiced their demand for a separate Secretariat for Policy for Women were called "racist". Now that this moment of tension is over, it seems obvious to many observers, Black and White feminists alike, that as a "hybrid" organ, SEPROMI has become a space for Black women's exercise of power, as neither Black men, nor White women, could gain the support of both movements. It is no wonder Black women now rally for support to this state machinery.

Turning now more specifically to the question of class divides, it is relevant to bring up the notion, espoused by several authors, that the relations established between middle-class feminists and women in the popular movements during the 1970s and 1980s were severed with the "professionalization" of feminisms, particularly in the emergence of feminist NGOs. As per Razavi (2000, p. 11):

[...] in some contexts this has meant a shift away from feminist-inspired activities such as mobilization, popular education and consciousness-raising, and towards more technical and advisory functions, such as the delivery of social services, advising government agencies on how to design gender-sensitive programmes, or training their staff in gender planning. Some argue that, as feminist groups and NGOs have become more professionalized and specialized, their

³ See, for example, the protest we organized and that took place during the Carnival festivities in Bahia: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpL91rNZtXE>.

links with the grassroots and community-based organizations have been severed or weakened.

It is well to note that in her study of feminism and women's groups in São Paulo, carried out during the 1990s, Nathalie Lebon (1997, p. 7) ran across "a number of low-income women's groups in which at least some members identify themselves as feminists", as well as some low-income feminist groups that acknowledged "their feminist identity". She was able to ascertain that these groups received considerable "ideological and logistical support" from feminist organizations, "in some cases on women's issues, and in some although not in all, in getting them to focus specifically on women's issues, and in some cases to emerge altogether". However, it is important to stress that her study does not bring support to the claim that "many working class women members of neighborhood associations (in Brazil and Chile, for example) now find themselves working for NGOs usually in voluntary or secondary positions" (RAZAVI, 2000, p. 31). To be sure, Lebon does report some complaints on the part of women in these groups regarding the location of meetings and events scheduled by NGO feminists in places distant from working-class neighborhoods, a fact that made it difficult for them to be present.

Likewise, Millie Thayer (2001) studied the relations between the *Movimento de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais (MMTR)* – Rural Women Workers' Movement – in the northeastern state of Pernambuco, and SOS Corpo, a major Feminist NGO operating out of Recife, Pernambuco, a large urban center. She also does not report a situation of exploitation denounced by Razavi; instead, she, witnessed the bubbling of "tensions and conflicts" between the two groups, but adds that "they were resolved because the relationship was a mutual one, both organizations gaining from it (THAYER, 2001, p. 261).

Nevertheless, Thayer does call attention to the fact that funding to women's organizations in Brazil "while small in relation to overall foreign aid," was an "indispensable condition of survival for many of them, given the lack of local philanthropy and scarcity of state funds". However, as she further notes,

[...] along with funding came ways of conceptualizing feminism that grew out of US and European movements and that became part of the discursive terrain on which Brazilian women defined their politics. The unequal distribution of

these material and conceptual resources among women's movements aggravated previously existing hierarchies among them, granting visibility and power to some, while marginalizing others (THAYER, 2001, p. 253).

Awareness of this course of events has led some of these organizations to try to bridge the gap. During the 2005 National Feminist Encounter held in São Paulo, *SOS Corpo* held a workshop to discuss "feminism and popular organizations", centered on the question: "What are some of the challenges that the situation of poverty and extreme inequality (of gender, race, class) place to feminism?" For the SOS educators, this is a major survival challenge: not only in terms of the survival of feminists in popular groups, but also of their organizations. Thus, middle-class feminists, working in consolidated organizations, should ask of them/ourselves how both types of groups are contributing to the building of feminism (ANDRADE, 2005). This is certainly a question that we, as academic feminists, should also have always in mind when thinking of feminisms in Brazil.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As our concluding considerations to this discussion in turn of feminisms in Brazil, we would like to bring forth the results of a survey conducted in 2001 with a representative sample of 2.502 women in Brazil (VENTURINI ET AL., 2004), that focused on a number of issues regarding women in public and private spaces in Brazil. Among the questions put to the interviewed women, were some regarding their views on feminism and *machismo*. Two questions were asked in regards to feminism: one asking if the woman considered herself a feminist and the other what she understood for feminism. As to *machismo*, the women were asked where they believed there was *machismo* in Brazil, and what they understood by it (SOARES, 2004).

Only 28% of the respondents recognized themselves as feminists, the highest percentages corresponding to young women 15-24 yrs old (35%), to those with at least a high school education (35%), and those that live in families with a higher purchasing power. This seems to conform to the notion that most self-identified feminists are in fact young professional women from the middle-classes.

When it comes to their perception as to the presence of *machismo* in Brazilian society, however, age, education, and income distinctions diminish considerably; nearly 90% of all the respondents affirmed the existence of *machismo* in our milieu. Among them, 78% correctly defined it as the power of men over women. Respondents had also realistic perceptions regarding the condition of women in Brazilian society, 65% recognizing that women's lives improved in the last 20-30 years. They defined "being a woman" today as entering the labor market and gaining economic independence, freedom and social independence to act according to one's desires, to make crucial decisions regarding one's lives, and to have conquered equal rights in formal terms, identifying, as such, the major changes that have occurred to women's lives in the period in question (SOARES, 2004, p. 168), and that point to a process of women's empowerment. The results showed that the majority of those interviewed:

lived well with the female condition, was conscious of the gains obtained (right to work and social autonomy), but complains of the weight of the double-day and demands the eradication of discrimination, be it in the labor market, or in the form of violence, and the division of responsibility in the care of children and of the home (SOARES, 2004, p. 170 our translation).

We may say then that, despite the percentage of those that identified themselves as feminists being still reduced, feminist values – and the achievements of feminism in Brazil, are recognized and appreciated by the great majority of the women in the study, who statistically represent Brazilian women. This, we believe, is a relevant assessment of the history of feminisms in Brazil – even if we still be dealing with a number of challenges to transform gender relations in favor of women in the decades to come.

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