


## Descolonial epistemologies from the site to the global: memories of the feminist movement

*Epistemologias descoloniais do local ao global:  
memórias do movimento feminista*

*Epistemologías descoloniales del local al global:  
memorias del movimiento feminista*

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**Abstract:** The article seeks to reflect on the trajectory of the feminist movement in the city of Pelotas/RS, through the narratives of the pioneer women, making their experiences in political activism visibilizing. According to the decolonial feminist referential and the epistemologies of the south, perspectives linked to the resistance of the globalized capitalist world systems. The methodology used is life histories and autobiographical narratives. The corpus originates from four narrative interviews of women under the focus of feminist political participation. In the analysis procedure, the categories of intersectionality and social empowerment were highlighted. As a result, we emphasize the importance of knowing and recovering the history of the construction of the feminist women's movement in relation to women's rights.

**Keywords:** Decolonial feminism. Feminist movement. Activism.

**Resumo:** O artigo busca refletir sobre a trajetória do movimento feminista na cidade de Pelotas/RS, a partir de narrativas das mulheres precursoras, visibilizando suas experiências no ativismo político, de acordo com o referencial feminista descolonial e das epistemologias do Sul, enquanto perspectivas vinculadas à resistência dos sistemas mundial globalizado capitalista. A metodologia utilizada é de cunho qualitativo e se compõe de narrativas autobiográficas. O corpus é originado de quatro entrevistas narrativas de mulheres sob o enfoque da participação política feminista. No procedimento de análise destacaram-se as categorias interseccionalidade e empoderamento social. Como resultados ressaltamos a importância de se conhecer e resgatar a história de construção do movimento das mulheres feministas em relação aos direitos das mulheres.

**Palavras-chave:** Feminismo descolonial. Movimento feminista. Ativismo.

**Resumen:** El artículo busca reflexionar sobre la trayectoria del movimiento feminista en la ciudad de Pelotas/RS, por medio de narrativas de las mujeres precursoras, visibilizando sus experiencias en el activismo político. De acuerdo, con el referencial feminista descolonial y de las epistemologías del sur, perspectivas vinculadas a la resistencia de los sistemas mundial globalizado capitalista. La metodología utilizada es de las historias de vida y narrativas autobiográficas. El corpus es originado de cuatro entrevistas narrativas de mujeres bajo el enfoque de la participación política feminista. En el procedimiento de análisis se destacaron las categorías de la interseccionalidad y empoderamiento social. Como resultados resaltamos la importancia de conocer y rescatar la historia de construcción del movimiento de las mujeres feministas en relación a los derechos de las mujeres.

**Palabras clave:** Feminismo descolonial. Movimiento feminista. Activismo.

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## Introduction

This article presents aspects that are part of an research in progress by the authors. We intend, with this study, to get to know the trajectory of the feminist movement built in the city of Pelotas/RS, starting from the memories and life trajectories of women who participated and made this moment and from their experiences in political activism, especially related to women's rights. Our vision can be situated considering the dimensions of the academic work and political and social activism of these women. In this regard, we found similarities with so many other feminist women of the “peripheral countries”. Therefore, we propose to understand the feminist movement from where we live, establishing approximations between social movements and scientificity, looking to build other epistemologies for transformation of the reality lived/studied.

The research dialogues with a feminist descolonial referential and the epistemologies of the South because we understand them as perspectives that exert resistance to the globalized capitalist world-system. In these perspectives, it is considered that colonization produced identity markers such as race and gender in a process of domination and exploitation (CURIEL, 2007). Thus, both race and gender are expressions of control of control, labor, resources and products. There is in the referential of coloniality a recognition of the multiple relations between continents, with diverse and discontinuous cultural and political influences, under a supremacy of eurocentrism, causing a subordination of the south in relation to the north (SANTOS, 2010).

According to the approach of the descolonial epistemology the knowledge of the place where one lives can contribute to descolonize the knowledge and to make visible practices of social, cultural and economic empowerment. However, it is not a question of overcoming individual oppression, even though they are important, but of building a community of resistance against patriarchal and eurocentric oppression. In this way, we intend to approach this context from a local conception that acts dialectically with great conjunctures, proposing in this dialogue the presence of people who participated in this story.

Pelotas is a municipality located in the south of Brazil, being the fourth most populous city in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The municipality has a high rate of violence against women, if compared to others in the same state<sup>1</sup>. In this characterization, we need to consider another facet that affects mainly women: in a study conducted by Francisco Vargas (2017), it was found a situation of high vulnerability at work, where there is a total of more than 62 thousand people in precarious or informal work. In this context, the difficulties of a socially unequal city lead to the creation of groups of confrontation, and it is in this social space that the women in this study are inserted.

In Pelotas, in the 1990s, two groups of women were created which worked against poverty and domestic violence. Besides that, these groups had in common the search for inclusion of women in political positions and decision-making. The groups were denominated, *Grupo Autônomo de Mulheres* - GAMP (Autonomous Group of Women) and the *União Brasileira de Mulheres* - UBM - Pelotas (Brazilian Union of Women). Both groups

are active today. Also in this period we had the creation of the Municipal Council of Women and the House of Refuge, as institutions to protect women who were victims of violence.

The collaborators who participated in this study are women over 60 years old who have been indicated by other feminist activists because of the social and political recognition of the work done. The methodology is based on qualitative research, in which we conducted narrative interviews<sup>ii</sup> with women who told their trajectories aiming to recover the way that happened the organization of the feminist movement and their participation in the process for the women's rights. The methodological perspective aligns with the feminist descolonial theory by listening to knowledge that is not hegemonic and often becomes invisible, and to understand that there is no neutrality in the social sciences, therefore, we do not intend to research only about women, but a dialogical praxis between the participants of the research.

### Seeking for a cultural and epistemological descolonization

It is very important to the colonized people to understand the historical process of colonization in their relations of power, based on patriarchy, racism and capitalist greed. We defend an education focused on critical and descolonial thinking, covering the theoretical contributions of the different feminist perspectives and the recognition of the culture of different people. Thereby, what science, or rather, what scientific paradigm can contribute to changing the context of the various conflicts that the industrial and colonizing modern society produced historically?

The modernity and the eurocentrism presupposed an evolutionary line, where Western Europe would be the civilized, the new world, thus the most advanced of the species, and all the knowledge produced would represent true knowledge, making other forms of knowledge production invisible. Thus, by creating structures of power, for example, institutions to homogenize the basic forms of human existence, which are: a) capitalist enterprise, with the control of labor, of their resources and products; b) bourgeois family, in the control of sex, their resources and products; c) Nation-state, control of authority, their resources and products (QUIJANO, 2005). These three structures have hegemonic and interdependent relations, constituting the first known global world system, in order to constitute the formation and colonization of America with elements in common, the coloniality of power, capitalism and eurocentrism (QUIJANO, 2005; 2010).

Ramón Grosfoguel (2016), considers the project of Eurocentric modernity as a project of social equality that has become impossible, because it only materialized from epistemic racism/sexism. The relationship between colonialism, racism and sexism can be found in a deeper analysis in Quijano (2005; 2010), Mignolo (2008), Curiel (2007) and Mendoza (2014). The epistemic racism and sexism consist of “the inferiority of all knowledge coming from human beings classified as non-western, non-masculine, or heterosexual” (GROSFOGUEL, 2016, p. 31). According to this author, the Eurocentric project has built genocides and epistemicides throughout the history of humankind. Note that the colonizer continent already internally engendered the domination and annihilation of otherness, as an

example we mention the women who had their bodies burned under accusation of being witches, who also wanted to erase their oral knowledge passed from generation to generation (FEDERICI, 2017).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010), based on the critique of eurocentrism and modernity, presents a new paradigm, based on the sequences of research relegated by the imperialistic monoculture. Thus, it develops an idea of epistemologies of the South, to compose an epistemological diversity of the world. His proposals postulate epistemology as the notion or idea, reflected or not, on conditions of what counts as valid knowledge that a certain social experience becomes intentional and intelligible. “Different types of social relations produce different epistemologies” (SANTOS, 2010, p. 16). For the author, the South is understood metaphorically, due to the challenge of being necessary to repair the damages and impacts caused by capitalism and the colonization of peoples.

In this proposition of the epistemologies of the South, Santos (2010) also developed a reflection on western modern thought, characterizing it as abyssal line, a system that produces the non-existence of the ‘other’, having as characteristic the impossibility of the co-presence on both sides of the line, being a way to make invisible the knowledge and the produced knowledge, presenting a relation of power. In this epistemology, scientific thought was tensioned by social movements, we could say of a knowledge more concrete, human, situated and democratic.

However, for Francesca Gargallo (2004), there is a great difficulty to refer to a latin american feminism as a theoretic unit, cohesive and homogeneous. Even if there were plurality and discontinuities, a strong characterization of latin american feminism could be linked to the fights for political freedom, during the dictatorships, at the historic moment when feminist guidelines were hatching. In Brazil, besides that, we also had a big proliferation of activities in opposition to violence against women. The movements didn't want more dead women in the name of honor and patriarchal culture. In a more theoretical sense, the well-known waves that classify feminism in phases may have influenced this continent, although they are neither consensus nor the only way to understand, they help to conceptualize feminism historically. About feminism, Ochy Curiel (2009, p. 1) affirms that,

Although as a concept feminism is born in the first wave, in this context is as a proposal that synthesizes women's struggles in a specific place and time, if we understand feminism as any struggle of women who oppose patriarchy, we would have to build your genealogy considering the history of many women in many places-times. This is for me one of the main ethical and political gestures of descolonization on feminism: retake different stories, little or almost never told.

Thus, the author proposes another history of feminism, emphasizing the opposition to patriarchy and their differences of schedules and even making visible the oppressions of colonization and coloniality. In this way, the movements of Latin American women showed us ways, because in a convergent sense they demanded changes in the s world globalized system, questioning the condition of oppression linked to social inequalities, class, gender, race and age.

Breny Mendoza (2014) considers that the gender social pact between white men constituted a community of interests that excluded white women. They did not have the same rights and, moreover, lost their rights to their bodies because of the witch hunt process. Therefore, they have not benefited from the coloniality of power in the same way as white men, and let us not forget that gender oppression will be closely related to racial discrimination.

In this context, we can propose that the descolonial feminist perspective is a movement of resistance of the colonized people to the systems of domination and exploitation patriarchal, industrial and capitalist on the bodies of the racialized women. A condition of subalternity that occurs in the relations of power and hierarchization where the superiority of one culture in relation to the other engender itself, producing coloniality, which permeates the culture.

According to Marcela Lagarde y de los Rios (2015), the condition of women is a historical creation. The author explains the differences that refer to social class, nationality, conception of the world, age, customs. From this angle we can see different heritages of eurocentric culture. As we have said, the eurocentric project has genocides and epistemicides, let us see that in the history of Europe, in an age of consolidation of modernity, so influential in Western thought, women's identities were forged in fear and genocide. According to Silvia Federici (2017, p. 294),

The definition of women as demonic beings and the atrocious and demeaning practices to which many of them were subjected left indelible marks in their collective psyche and in their sense of possibility [...] the witch-hunt was a turning point in women's lives.

This way, western culture builds an organized supremacy of discourse, but their processes and shadows can't always claim for justice, often creating injustices. Ideas like feminism best known for the waves have their origin in the world of the colonizer, however, it is part of these shadows that bring the germs of discontent and transformations. Besides that, Lagarde y de los Rios (2015) affirms that all societies are stratified in gender and almost all in classes and other social categories, indicating that differentiation is exclusive and compulsory between men and women, and from this differentiation emerge the differences between women themselves.

In this regard, descolonial feminisms contribute significantly and propose to know and analyze the specificities of women as a historical form of human beings and the diversity of women each other. They also contribute to demystify the natural condition in which women were placed in society, occupying spaces of subalternities.

### **A brief historicity of feminism on the southern continent**

The most expressive feminist movement in Latin America occurred in the 1970s, in the period of the military dictatorship, characterized by the defense of democracy and resistance of the left wing. At that time, there was a strong influence of the Cold War, a

period in which the United States financed dictatorships in the countries of South America. In Brazil, the feminist movement stood out in this same period, although there are registers of movements confluent to the feminism, however they did not call themselves feminists. Examples are the suffragist and anarchist movements. Besides these more specific movements, mobilizations performed by women workers from factories in São Paulo happened during the 1930s (SARTI, 2004). All these movements were influenced by the European and North American experiences, with the specificity of contestation to the military coup began in 1964. According to Céli Jardim Pinto (2003) and Cynthia Andersen Sarti (2004), the women's groups of this period were articulated with clandestine organizations from the left, with the main objective of opposing the current government.

In this period of fight for democracy, other guidelines were also present, the main feminist claims body rights, sexual freedom and egalitarian work, which were influenced by the effervescence cultural of May 1968. Decade in which the country was modernized with access to contraceptive methods and popularization of the media. It changed the affective and sexual pattern, especially of middle-class women, promoting advances in the traditional patterns of the family. Sarti (2004) considers that the official recognition of United Nations Organization (UN) about women matters as a social problem has made the cause visible and has led to the creation of various groups of women who before meted clandestinely. In the beginning, the feminist movement had more support from middle-class women. We could say that before it was a movement of women that had practically no economic and schooling problems that gradually expanded through the articulation and neighborhood organizations with women of the popular classes (PINTO, 2003; SARTI, 2004).

It was in the 1980s, according to Sarti (2004), that Brazilian feminism was influenced mainly by women who returned from exile in Europe. New guidelines were presented, such as gender relations. There were new groups, mainly in trade union associations and political parties. It is also possible to observe a more specialized and institutionalized performance in this period. In this intense decade occurs the outbreak of diverse feminist fronts such as the academic research, the popularization of the theme in the publishing market, also the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) appeared and in the governmental plane the Women's Councils were created.

The feminist movement in the city of Pelotas appears during this period, but it gains more visibility and concreteness a little later, in the 1990s, when a more organized and institutionalized feminist activism begins. The triggering fact was a case of local femicide, which at the time was still called homicide, of a university student, killed by her ex-boyfriend. The fact generated a great commotion in the city and the crime was much publicized by the media.

In this moment of indignation some women who militated in spaces such as political parties, unions and in the ecclesial base communities of the Catholic Church mobilized against the silence and leniency of the judgements in the cases of homicides and "violence against women". This indignation led to the creation of the first NGO in the city in 1992, known as GAMP, which became a non-governmental organization aimed at combating domestic violence, promoting women's rights, combating different forms of discrimination,

prejudice and oppression and, mainly, treat the historical and cultural violence. Acting in collaboration, but with some differences with the GAMP guidelines, the UBM-Pelotas<sup>iii</sup> was created that developed more actions in the political field against the oppressions of gender in an emancipatory and transforming of the society perspective, in the fights for their rights in the constituent, for the freedom and democracy, thus seeking the insertion of women in all social spaces. The UBM had his acting closest of left political parties that fought against the military dictatorship.

In the beginning of the feminist movement in Pelotas it also occurred the election of a woman to act like councilwoman in the local legislator, militant of the Partido dos Trabalhadores. After a long time without the presence of a woman in the City Council, her actions contributed to the creation of the law that established the Municipal Council of Women's Rights in Pelotas. Next was created the Women's Police Station and also a shelter to welcome women at risk known as *Casa de Acolhida Luciety*, in honor of the woman murdered at the time that generated the mobilization previously cited.

In the wake of these advances, the Network for Combating Violence against Women was created, linked to the Specialized Women's Police Station, where currently work the *Maria da Penha* Patrol/Military Brigade, the Lilac Listening Service (that is a telephonic line of attendance to woman), with the support of the Women's Reference Center, the Public Defender's Office and the General Institute of Expertise (IGP).

Given this brief historical context of the structural organization of the Pelotas feminist movement in the 1990s, we understand that we need to listen to the narratives of the women who have traced and built this network of activism, and how they perceive their trajectories on the construction of the feminist movement. Because it's a movement of continent-wide comprehensiveness and related with the local and the global, we choose the epistemologies of the South as a representative systematization of the descolonial feminist perspective, which makes it possible to visualize practices that are often suffocated by “grand Eurocentric narratives”.

## Choices, bonds and epistemological and methodological constructions

Investigating from the descolonial feminist perspective implies being sensitive to the other, the complexity and the social context in which one lives, looking for a valuation of the place in relation to the global, listening to life stories. Therefore, investigating about women who've had positioned themselves in favor of feminist activism implies political and ethical positioning. In this sense we opted for a qualitative research methodology with emphasis on narrative interviews. The narrative interview, “aims at a situation that encourages and encourages an interviewee [...] to tell the story about some important event in his life and in the social context” (JOVCHELOVITCH; BAUER, 2002, p. 93). We also need to be aware of what points out Edla Eggert (2012), who affirms that when we research other women, we identify points that invariably lead us to think about ourselves, as well as raising questions in the women surveyed.

Delory-Momberger (2012) highlights the singularity of biographical research, which consists in perceiving the unique relationship of people with their own biographical activity, with the historical and social world and in studying the built forms that people give to their experience. The author also highlights the temporal characteristic present in the biographies that lies at the origin of a peculiar elaboration of lived experiences. She constructs what she calls “biographization”, which emphasizes the procedural character of biographical activity and considers the various mental and behavioral operations by which people inscribe their experiences in temporal schemes oriented and finalized. This is a process of elaboration of experiences, which are individual, but at the same time collective, because they are flooded with social representations, which demonstrate different and common aspects to many people and/or groups, fruits of a certain culture.

The set of narratives we present in this writing was constituted through individual narrative interviews with four women who acted politically in the 1980s and who are currently over 60 years old. These women participated in institutionalized spaces of militancy such as the *Conselho Municipal da Mulher* (Municipal Council of Women), GAMP, UBM or trade unions. All the collaborators helped in some way to build the history of the feminist movement in Pelotas, with their militancy and strong political action. We choose to use fictitious names to preserve their identities and the most intimate moments they want to share. The collaborators themselves chose their fictitious names.

The epistemological construction of the research processes sought to question the hegemonic knowledge that is invented and reinvented in the middle of the social movements, these, being dynamic and plural collectives, are constantly rethinking, getting together to the paradigm of the epistemologies of the South. When creating open, uncertain, yet shared senses, we are intending to make visible social groups and “voices” that were refused by modernity. In the specific case, women activists of a city of the interior, their languages and cultures. This new perspective suggests to create conditions for concrete social emancipations for existing groups. A kind of social transformation that gives value to substantial practices and everyday educational actions that involve people of different cultures and values.

## **Feminist Experiences and Empowerment**

Between so many women who participated in the construction of the feminist movement in Pelotas, we've opted for those collaborators who developed actions to improve the social, political and economic condition, promoting the empowerment of themselves and other women, combating discrimination, prejudices and structural inequalities of gender, race, class, age and other identity markers, forged in modernity to subalternize.

Starting from the narrative of four women, identified in the research by the names of Sofia, Ana, Rosa and Maria, in their trajectories we seek to understand the trajectory of the feminist movement in the city. We realize that the beginning of activism happened in different ways for each of them and, of course, their life histories present its particularities. The collaborators differ in relation to race, schooling and economic class, which did not



prevent them from approaching in some moments of militancy for looking to success in their guidelines. They acted in their generation in the historical context of the country, marked by high rates of different types of violence, of gender, race, poverty, among other problems arising from social exclusion. Added to this is the fact that they all share the status of working women who are not satisfied with the *status quo*, seeking in the feminist and political activism the social transformation.

Lagarde y de los Rios (2015) points to the category of women as the product of their own differentiation, but as a gender it shares the same historical condition of patriarchal oppression. The author indicate us to think, through the narratives, that what brings these women together in the struggle against inequalities and prejudices is the struggle for women's rights, because their life trajectories are different.

Maria had her activist participation linked to student movements and political affiliation, she is currently a university teacher and continues to militate in the same political party. The other collaborator, who we call Ana, was a state school teacher and actively participates in the ecclesial communities of the Catholic Church (CEBs) and in the teachers' union (CPERGS), she also dedicated herself to party politics and is currently retired from teaching. Sofia, on the other hand, is a retired civil servant, worked as a social worker in several cities of the state, mainly with young people in situation of social vulnerability and, like Ana, also participates in the CEBs.

In regard to Rosa, we must point out that among all the collaborators she was the one that suffered the most from the intersectionality between several social markers allied to the gender perspective. She lived in a quilombola community in the Pelotas region, having entered formal school only at the age of 11. She felt the institutional prejudices of the lack of literacy at the "right age". She describes herself as a black woman, a domestic worker, trade unionist and poor. She does not define herself as a victim, but as a woman who had struggled and still fights for valorizing her workspaces.

When we think about the group studied, Rosa's identity as a poor and black woman highlights the markers of triple oppression: gender, class and race. In this sense, Curiel (2007) highlights the importance of black feminism in rethinking feminist practices that disregard triple oppression. About the aspects that are common to the group, in what the triple oppression counts as a difference, Rosa potentialized the feminist movement in which she acted, experiencing intersectionality, because Collins (2017) understands that race and gender can not be understood separately, both in academic analyzes as in the social movement. Curiel (2007) points out that racism, sexism and social class affect women in different ways. From this perspective, Rosa, by affirming her racialized identity, questions the foundations of white and liberal feminism.

According to the narratives, we can infer that all of them, despite the cultural and racial differences, suffered some kind of gender discrimination, since the difficulty of feeling safe to manifesting themselves in public due to the exposure to what they would be exposed to, until their taking personal decisions, such as choosing not to exercise motherhood or even maintaining an affective relationship with a partner, considering that they recognize the existence of a social charge for the "traditional" family model, among other forms of

oppression that are daily, coarse or subtly imposed on women, even those who subvert patriarchy. Such situation is due to patriarchy, the binary conceptions and gender determinations. Lagarde y de los Rios (2015) considers that women live in social captivity, imposed by the patriarchal system, deprived of power, subalternized by the historical construction of the woman category.

Thus, we understand that the awareness of the structural oppression suffered by these women contributed to a coherent practice and we can say that the woman collaborators, by providing spaces of empowerment, constitute an individual and collective transformation. Joice Berth (2018), highlights the importance of social empowerment. For this author, the empowerment of women challenges patriarchal family relationships and, in order not to retreat, it is necessary to be in democratic and participatory spaces, such as women's organizations, which allows to generate alternative visions. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that this is a complex concept, because it aims at the formation of critical awareness and movements to awaken potentialities that will define how to act in society and make confrontations.

Rosa, reflecting about her negritude, her social class and her status as a woman, realizes the importance of the condition of a black and poor woman, when she affirmed that

I began to become aware of blackness, I got to know the association of domestic servants, it was all in 1987, the militancy with domestic work and black movement. [...] It was together, blackness consciousness, it is such a struggle, I became aware of race and class, race and class because what it is , a race and a domestic working class, black woman, poor, domestic worker, a lot of discrimination, I started to realize, I didn't attend school (Rosa, 2017).

Out of the four narratives, Rosas is the one that shows the most the character of awareness. We understand that such narrative is expressed by intersectionality, therefore it is more potent in expressions, that at each period of life can return to their condition of oppression and discrimination of class, gender and race. Her activism also has the identity mark of valuing the profession of domestic servants, seeking labor rights and acting on the self-esteem of black women. Self-esteem that, historically, has been negatively and aggressively distorted, remaining in our culture in the form of coloniality of power.

The individual struggle to me is a bit worthless, I like struggles for a collective good, I think the feminist I recognize in myself is this, is to see a happy collective, and not a mass of maneuver, to be a mass of maneuver is not to speak just because it's going to generate controversy, if I can not explain a controversy, I can even be quiet, but if I can, I'll go ahead, I speak, I will try and see what's possible (Rosa, 2017).

We can infer that, for the women in this study, the achievements were made possible by being with other women, discussing in collective spaces of resistance and governance. In this way, they gradually became more empowered and, above all, made possible an empowerment in practice, by waking up from their limitations imposed by patriarchal society.

Ana mentions, in her narrative, the confrontations to overcome the patriarchy and to be able to act in a trade union. The trade union, however, despite being a democratic space and dialogue, has always been marginalized.

In this liberation, we have to liberate ourselves, call ourselves a trade unionist at the time was a dirty word, at the time we came from the history of the dictatorship, we came from that whole history and to get free from all of this (about sons) all these moorings that we had in relation to the woman, mainly education, because my generation, for example, was able to work in education, of course that in my generation there were already other women already free from the patriarchal issue, that massacred our generation, but we took steps in the feminist liberation that had all those international leaders and we began to be inspired by this process (Ana, 2017).

The achievements are reaffirmed both by perceiving the advances in the world as well as in their more local actions, tending the abyssal line, and proposing more direct transformations in relation to work and women (SANTOS, 2010). The importance of other women in the movement is well emphasized by Mary. Thus, we perceive that the collective spaces were powerful to face the gender discriminations.

[...] we have achievements here in Pelotas extremely important thanks to the movement of women, thanks to people like Z., like CE, M., several of these girls to V., has several achievements J., that participated in the GAMP, achievements that are very important, you having a care center for women victims of violence is important, all of those are things that were the struggle of women (Maria, 2017).

We can also observe that the collaborators recognize the protagonism of several other women in the construction of the feminist movement in Pelotas and that, each one their way and with their own reading of world contributed, considering that the movement needs many fronts of action. Nevertheless, besides this more lively and attitudinal performance, there are less visible works. Sofia, besides participating in political manifestation, does an important work of documentary organization.

I prefer to stay behind the curtains, I'm very organized, right? So I prefer the organization of documents and minutes, I have everything organized by date, and I think this is very important, if we need to prove anything I have the records. We also made a text for those who go to the media to give an interview about the council, we organize our actions to be publicized, but I prefer not to speak in public, I have always been more discreet (Sofia, 2018).

The systematization of these documents allows a deeper understanding and provides concreteness to the movement and its institutions. It indicates the need to have these systematized experiences to share with other groups of women, about the obstacles and advances of their actions. In this way, it contributes so that new generations of feminists, to the academics have means to rescue the realized practices and actions.

As already mentioned, these women at several times were together, evidencing a collective influence on the solidarity empowerment and the action in the social emancipation. In a more systemic reading of the narratives we can see that being together sharing their knowledge and their preoccupations with the discriminations and social exclusion allowed the creation of some spaces of empowerment, and not of assistance. Despite some punctual

actions, they also discussed and deepened about taboos themes, such as marriage, abortion, maternity, the sexual division of labor in a progressive perspective of transformation of patriarchal society.

According to Lagarde y de los Rios (2015), autonomy and gender affirmation are requirements for the construction of what we have called *sororidade*<sup>iv</sup>, which is not a given relationship, natural, but built, being the education necessary to develop gender empathy. Examining the narratives we can conclude on the fundamental value of *sororidade*, not only between the group (women of fight), but also with other women who very much need support. To know the example of social experiences and, thus, be together for a greater ideal. Even if it seems to be accomplished in small actions, it makes possible a transformation of the traditional paradigm and the valorization of other epistemologies.

### **Women's movement and descolonial empowerment: final considerations**

These women who, in partnership with others, built the history of the feminist movement in the city researched, remain active in activism and participate in institutions such as trade unions, NGOs, and also autonomous groups. In these associations, they seek to build relations between their trajectories and experiences with the present. We realized in the narratives a elaboration at some level distant from their private lives, serving only as a backdrop for valuing public events by relating them to student, social, and union movements.

In the convergence of meanings of their participation in the study, they evaluate that the feminist movement, although has advanced in some guidelines in others, still remains stagnant. As a main advance, they pointed the growth of mobilizations through social networks and the permanence of basic problems, such as the fight against domestic violence, valorization and the equality of the work.

We emphasize the importance of knowing and recording the construction of the feminist movement from the memories of the women who participated actively in this trajectory in the municipality of Pelotas. We have as an epistemological assumption the descolonial feminist perspective, for they are Latin American women, and we need to make visible our practices of activism and research, knowledge that was previously usurped by the eurocentric model. If modernity has as project the hegemony of cultural knowledges, we think of descolonial feminism to practice a resistance movement when telling the story from the narratives of working women and activists, women who relate to the city, use public transport, talk to other women, they understand that striving for a better world is necessary.

The activism as a project of life and social practice is not easy, especially in a country with so many inequalities of race, gender, social class, age, among other markers of exclusion, where sometimes we do not know where to go, but to going ahead by acting here, there and over there. Therefore, we understand that the narratives of Maria, Sofia, Rosa and Ana are potent, because they rescue some paths already traced, such as empowerment as a self perception and a perception of other women. For them, the construction of the activist and feminist woman gradually came to power, especially with the social transformations and

understanding of their existence and the very difference between women. In this way, they look at their families, mothers, sisters and daughters, make comparisons between past, present and future, believe that transformations are possible. They have built and opened up some spaces for meeting local and global notions to discuss the status of women in society, where they still act strongly against male chauvinism and patriarchy.

We understand that collective empowerment has become an important category for dialogue with the narratives, once the collaborators through activism work with women in situation of social and emotional vulnerability. Another aspect to emphasize is that the collaborators contradict modern expectations, where young people and adults in working conditions are the only ones heard; on the contrary of this prejudice, they are women over 60 and remain active in society. What comes to confirm that empowerment produces a less subservient thought-action to the neoliberal capitalist world system, enabling other forms of economic production, recognizing the place that produces global actions and vice versa and values cultural diversity, class identities, race, gender and sexual orientation.

We conclude that we still have much to fight and depatrialize the institutions and culture. We corroborate with the thinking of Lagarde y de los Rios (2015), in which the cultural influence of feminism makes it possible to gather women around a greater cause, which contemplates the struggle for rights and equity. In this way, we propose that the activism of these women constituted as empowerment, here understood not as a rhetorical term, but as a practical and relevant action becoming an instrument of social transformation. Despite the intersectional differences, the influence of the community and the union between the group allowed the opening of doors that probably will not close, attested by the institutions and organizations and social recognition about the work developed. In this regard, the decolonial feminisms contribute significantly to know the specificities of women in their historicity, diversity and mobilization for social transformation.

As we said before, decolonial thinking points to the necessary construction of another epistemology, which incorporates acquaintances and knowledges of Latin American groups and cultures, denouncing the erasure historically instituted by an epistemology of the global north. This research, which we have conducted with elderly feminist women, seeks to contribute to the construction of this other epistemology, which points to a process of construction of a Latin American feminist science. With this intuit, it is fundamental that we can rescue the historicity of local feminism, articulated to the national context.

This rescue could be done with the use of documents, but what interested us was to rescue the life trajectories of women who exercised activities often not allowed to women of the time. These are living stories of women who have overcome many barriers, of different orders, to exercise the right of political militancy. We believe that these stories can reinforce the importance and the fight strategies of the current movement. We can not plan tomorrow without looking carefully at the experiences of the past as a way of decolonizing both science and the feminist movement.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> See data in the page of the Secretary of Public Security of Rio Grande do Sul. Available at: <http://www.ssp.rs.gov.br/indicadores-da-violencia-contr-a-mulher>. Accessed on: October 13, 2018.

<sup>ii</sup> According to Rosenthal (2014) the narrative interviews allow the collaborators of the research greater freedom possible for the articulation of their own experiences.

<sup>iii</sup> See the UBM story at: <https://ubmpelotas.blogspot.com/>. Accessed on: October 13, 2018.

<sup>iv</sup> Sororidade understood by feminists as the main aspect of the political and ethical dimension of gender equality, avoiding judgments and prejudices between women themselves, thus breaking stereotypes macho prejudicer and patriarchal.

