

**Global Feminisms  
Comparative Case Studies of  
Women's Activism and Scholarship**

**BRAZIL**

**Maria de Fátima Lima Santos**

**Interviewed by Sueann Caulfield**

**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
July 2014**

**University of Michigan  
Institute for Research on Women and Gender  
1136 Lane Hall Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290  
Tel: (734) 764-9537**

**E-mail: [um.gfp@umich.edu](mailto:um.gfp@umich.edu)  
Website: <http://www.umich.edu/~glblfem>**

© Regents of the University of Michigan, 2015

**Maria de Fátima Lima Santos** (who goes by Fátima Lima) was born in Aracaju in the northeast of Brazil in 1974. She describes herself as “Northeasterner. Feminist. Anthropologist.” She has a Master’s degree in Social Anthropology from the Federal University of Pernambuco (2002), and a Ph.D. in Public Health from the Institute of Social Medicine of the State University of Rio de Janeiro / UERJ (2010). She is an associate professor at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Macaé campus (northeast of Rio de Janeiro) where she teaches courses related to the fields of health and community. Her research is in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and public health with an emphasis in gender, sexuality, and health/disease processes. She is the author of the e-book "[Bodies, Genders, Sexualities – Politics of Subjectivity](#)" (2014) published by Editora Reda Unida.

**Sueann Caulfield** is Associate Professor of History at the University of Michigan, where she was the former director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies and currently heads the Brazil Initiative Social Sciences Cluster. She specializes in the history of modern Brazil, with emphasis on gender and sexuality. She has won awards and fellowships from the Fulbright Commission, National Endowment for the Humanities, and American Council of Learned Societies. Her publications include *In Defense of Honor: Morality, Modernity, And Nation In Early Twentieth-Century Brazil*, the co-edited volume *Honor, Status, and Law in Modern Latin American History*, and various articles on gender and historiography, family law, race, and sexuality in Brazil. Her current research focuses on family history with a focus on paternity and legitimacy in twentieth-century Brazil. She is particularly interested in questions of human rights in Latin America, and has participated in a number of workshops, cross-country teaching projects, and exchanges around topics of social justice and social action.

**The Global Feminisms Project** is a collaborative international oral history project that examines feminist activism, women's movements, and academic women's studies in sites around the world. Housed at the University of Michigan, the project was started in 2002 with a grant from the Rackham Graduate School. The virtual archive includes interviews from women activists and scholars from Brazil, China, India, Nicaragua, Poland, and the United States.

Our collaborators in Brazil are at the Laboratório de História Oral e Imagem - UFF (the Laboratory of Oral History and Images at the Federal Fluminense University in Rio de Janeiro, [LABHOI](#)) and Núcleo de História, Memória e Documento (the Center for History, Memory, and Documentation at the Federal State University in Rio de Janeiro, [NUMEM](#)). The Brazil interviews were conducted with support from the Third Century Learning Initiative and the Brazil Initiative (Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies), both at the University of Michigan, FAPERJ (The Research Support Fund in Rio de Janeiro), and CNPq (The National Council for Scientific and Technological Development in Brazil).

*Key words: LGBTQ, academia*

**Sueann Caulfield: So, to start, could you talk a little about your current work in the field of gender, women's rights, feminism?**

Maria de Fátima Lima Santos: As you said, I am an anthropologist. I have a doctorate in the field of public health and I teach courses in the area of health, mainly in the medical school. So it depends on... how shall I put this? I have as much work inside the academy as outside because in my opinion, the academy, my whole academic life since my graduation in the social sciences and in my professional life – I am 40 years old – to me it's always been inseparable from my activism. So this separation that exists with the academy on one side and activism on the other, well my academic life is a life of activism and I do a variety of things. For example, I've been working on a project with the medical students for over a year, two projects, about the access [to health care] and the comprehensive care for the lesbian, bisexual, transvestite, and transsexual population in Macaé,<sup>1</sup> trying to understand a little about this question of the production of health care. That's been going on for around a year or so, and for a year and a half I've been working in the area of violence. I'm working on issues of women's mortality from external causes. Just with these, I am working with more than 10 students – 12, 13 students – from the medical school as well as the nursing program. I think that inside the academy, one of my greatest areas of activism is taking on the field of health care. This is a field that has great difficulty addressing gender issues because of the power of biology in determining or trying to determine sexuality. I have done some of this. But I also have another life outside of this, I am a big activist with the LGBT community, and also with transsexuals as well as the women's movement, but without being affiliated to any institution. So this way I have a very diverse agenda because I believe there has to be porousness between academia and activism. All knowledge for me has to be above all activist knowledge, knowledge that can be applied. If it's knowledge that only serves science, for the academy itself, the world of representation, that's not for me. For me, above all, knowledge comes from social practices, from the production of life, the production of existence. So it's like that, you know?

**SC: Yes. So my next question is what led you to having this interest in being an activist. What was it in your personal life, your childhood, your university education such that you came to activism?**

MFLS: Well, it has a lot to do – I think – with how we perceive ourselves in the world. I am from Sergipe,<sup>2</sup> live in Rio,<sup>3</sup> and now I teach classes at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, but I was born in Aracaju, which is the smallest capital of Brazil's smallest state. So it's a place that has always been very provincial, a very conservative place, a place with a very strong aristocracy. And somehow all my life I've always been opposed to any form of oppression, whether economic oppression, gender oppression, sexual oppression, or

---

<sup>1</sup> Macaé, a municipality in Rio de Janeiro. Maria de Fátima teaches on the Macaé campus of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>2</sup> Sergipe is the smallest state in Brazil, located on the northeastern Atlantic coast of the country.

<sup>3</sup> Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

ethnic/racial oppression. So at a very young age I was an activist. I was part of some parties. I was part of the Communist Party at a certain point, and the Socialist at another, and also of the PT.<sup>4</sup> But my entire life was about this, and this is what led me to pursue studies in the social sciences at the Federal University of Sergipe. And since then, already in my studies of the social sciences, my interest was for themes that at the time, it was 1996, 1997, were themes that weren't the subjects of excellence in the academy. For instance my work in Aracaju, at the Federal University of Sergipe, was the first study of transvestites<sup>5</sup> in the city. So it was the first paper on this, it was an ethnography, and from that moment I already had a relationship with various lesbian women, I already dated, including women at the time, I already had relationships with women who were 15, 16. So all of that affected my life in that town, and my whole path was paved that way. But I have to say, it was this back and forth between my own life and the lives of people who were very close to me. Back then, there were many murders, and there still are today. But I remember through all my teen years and all of my youth, living with the murders of people who were close to me. So every murder, every act of violence was very upsetting to me. And I think that this thing of not accepting any kind of oppression or anything that oppresses the other, the rights of others to be themselves, has a lot to do with my upbringing. And this has always been with me. I can't tell when it started. I can say that ever since I realized that I really have a, how do I say, a very powerful compulsion to go against any kind of oppression, especially gender-oriented ones, and sexual, or racial, since then, this has been my whole life. And I have many areas of activism. I am an activist against mental health asylums,<sup>6</sup> for example, which is something that I am familiar with. I am an activist for the rights of the city. I am an activist against the compulsory arrest of people for crack use. So there are many areas, and I don't have one specific agenda of activism. I usually say that anything that is an affront to life, to me, is worth fighting for, it's something we have to pay attention to and stand up for.

**SC: What about inside your space, in the neighborhood where you grew up, before going to the university, did you already have some influence? You always felt outraged at social injustice, at oppression. But did you have anyone you viewed as a model, someone in your neighborhood, in your family?**

MFLS: Yes, so, I think we have many influences through our lives, right? I think from reading. Not so much from my family, my family is a very conservative family, you see, and I was always the strange element in the family. But I think I have many influences, you know.

---

<sup>4</sup> PT refers to the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Worker's Party), one of the largest left-wing parties in Latin America, launched in 1980 in Brazil in opposition to military dictatorships. It follows the democratic socialist trend, which differs from communism by embracing socialist economics but maintaining a democratic political system.

<sup>5</sup> Transvestites, also known as crossdressers, are individuals who choose to dress and often behave in manners typical of the opposite sex.

<sup>6</sup> The Movement to Close Mental Hospitals started in Brazil in the 1970s in opposition to poorly run psychiatric hospitals that are used primarily by the lower-middle classes. Wealthy families tend to go to private clinics. For more information, see <http://www.power2u.org/articles/international/brazil.html> (accessed 1/11/16); <http://www.ccms.saude.gov.br/VPC/reformaE.html> (accessed 1/11/16).

I think reading things like the Diary of Anne Frank, for instance, which was a book that had a big impact on me, reading things like –

**SC: This is when you were a teenager?**

MFLS: Yes, in adolescence, when things have such a big influence, for instance the music of Cazuza,<sup>7</sup> of Legião Urbana<sup>8</sup> –

**SC: This was in the '80s, right?**

MFLS: Yes, the '80s.

**SC: Some readings?**

MFLS: Yes, some readings, some readings including Marxist<sup>9</sup> to a certain point, you see. But it's interesting because when I realized what Stalinism<sup>10</sup> was, I also got angry. And I think at that point my problem with institutions started, and I wouldn't let myself be a subject of any institution. For instance, I couldn't be in a place that in any way found the Stalinist way of thinking interesting because for me, nothing can defend Stalinist thinking – Stalin's level of atrocities in the name of power, the communist power to destroy people. So I made a break. At that time I was a member of the Union of Socialist Youth and of the Communist Party of Brazil.<sup>11</sup> But then, at that moment, that didn't work for me anymore.

**SC: When was that?**

MFLS: I must have been 18, 16, 17 years old. It wasn't for me. A place that in some way, at that moment, adopted this thought, the thought of Stalinism, Stalin's thinking – as a group, it didn't fit me. I give this as an example because after that, any group that had any ideas

---

<sup>7</sup> Agenor Miranda Araújo Neto (1958-1990), known as Cazuza, was a Brazilian composer and singer who died from complications of AIDS. He is remembered as "Brazil's first public face of AIDS." For more information, see <http://library.brown.edu/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-8/aids/cazuza-brazils-first-public-face-of-aids/> (accessed 1/13/16).

<sup>8</sup> Legião Urbana was a Brazilian rock band. One of their members, Renato Russo, died in 1996 from an AIDS related illness.

<sup>9</sup> Marxism is a school of social and political thought founded by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the mid 1800s. The Marxist movement fights "for the self-emancipation of the working class, subjecting all forms of domination by the bourgeoisie, its institutions and its ideology, to theoretical and practical critique." <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/help/marxism.htm> (accessed 1/13/16).

<sup>10</sup> Stalinism is the name given to the policies and practices of Joseph Stalin, leader of the Soviet Union from the mid 1920's to 1953. He is often associated with a "regime of terror and totalitarian rule." <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Stalinism> (accessed 1/13/16).

<sup>11</sup> The Union of Socialist Youth is the youth wing of the Communist Party of Brazil (União da Juventude Socialista e do partido do PCdoB (Partido Comunista do Brasil). It is one of the oldest political parties in Brazil and is known for its reach on trade unions and student activism. It has been allied with the Worker's Party (PT) [see footnote 4].

with fascist connotations,<sup>12</sup> I'd be out of it very soon. And it always went like that. I'd go to meetings of the black movement,<sup>13</sup> and I'd get very upset. I'd go to a meeting of the gay community, and I would get very upset there too. So when the process of figuring things out would begin, the process of certain groups or people wanting to use their voice or an alleged truth in oppression of the other, I would always leave those places. I wasn't – as I'm not to this day – very into any group like that. And if I wasn't back then – twenty years ago you didn't catch me in a place like that – nowadays, for sure not. So that's why I say I'm not attached to any place, I don't belong to an institution, I'm not from any organization. I am in a lot of places as long as these places have respect for diversity. I would say it this way – I think there is a lot, as Foucault<sup>14</sup> said, a lot of micro-power and a lot of micro-fascism, including the practices that many times appear to be freedom-oriented. I think some of this has been a beacon in my life not to be caught in those places. I don't want to be in them. They don't do me any good.

**SC: And can you give us an example of a cause you were close to? You mentioned the black movement, the LGBT movement...**

MFLS: Oh I'd say many, many. The gay movement, I used to go to some meetings. That was a long time ago. I was 20 something, you know. And sometimes the black movement... It depends. I think it's everywhere. Of course it's not so, there are people who deal well with these spaces, who manage to take this micro-power and make a productive place with it. Maybe I'm not good at dealing with it, you know? And I am not saying that these groups don't have great powers. I think if it weren't for these movements... They have a great role in history for achieving rights. That is certain, it's undeniable. This isn't the issue. But I think when we go into the dynamics of the institution, they somehow don't catch me, although I have great respect and have many many friends who make a lot of difference in these places, you know. I am talking about many different institutions, many organizations, and I give full support despite the fact that I have a character that is more apart from others, more "untied," from other movements, and other spaces. I go anywhere I'm invited, for example, and I am able to start a conversation anywhere.

**SC: Yes, so you came from Sergipe for post-graduate work. Did you graduate there?**

MFLS: No. So, I graduated there, I graduated in 2000. And the same year I received my master's degree in anthropology from the Federal University of Pernambuco. I got my master's, I studied cinema and gender, and by that time already –

---

<sup>12</sup> Fascism is "a governmental system led by a dictator having complete power, forcibly suppressing opposition and criticism, regimenting all industry, commerce, [...] and emphasizing aggressive nationalism and often racism" (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/fascism>).

<sup>13</sup> The Black Movement (Movimento Negro) refers to the diverse Afro-Brazilian social movements that unfolded in Brazil during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For more information, see John Burdick, "The Lost Constituency of Brazil's Black Movements," *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 25:1 (Jan., 1998), 136-155).

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a French philosopher and historian, contributing to structuralist and post-structuralist thought. Foucault "sought for a way of understanding the ideas that shape our present not only in terms of the historical function these ideas played, but also by tracing the changes in their function through history." (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/foucault/>).

**SC: What was the department? Was it anthropology?**

MFLS: Yes, cultural anthropology at the Federal University of Pernambuco. And at that point the issue of transsexuality<sup>15</sup> was already catching my attention.

**SC: And this was the topic of your thesis?**

MFLS: It was about transvestites. At that time, it was still 2000, the theme of transsexuality was still very new to Brazil. So it caught my attention. And I ended up studying cinema. I wrote a master's thesis that had to do with cinema and gender. I studied Almodóvar films, for example. But after my master's, when I returned to Aracaju, the theme of transsexuality somehow, well it just chased me. And what made me the most angry was how an experience could be transformed – an experience of gender, a historical experience, performative, self-determined – transformed into a sickness. I was and still am totally against that idea. Why is it that this was turned into a pathology.<sup>16</sup> If someone is born, born with a determined sex, or declared male or female, and their construction wasn't aligned with that marker imposed by biology, does it necessarily have to be pathologized? So that frightened me a lot. I had a lot of criticism about this and I dove deep into the production of this disposition that increased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the productions of the lifestyles of the transsexuals and turned them into an MHD, a mental health diagnosis, psychiatrized. So this is an agenda I've come very close to, it was a major part of my doctorate and I did several interviews. Nowadays I am not studying this anymore. I have been a little out of that field. I have been occupied with other matters. And now I need to be thinking about my post-doctorate that I'm getting ready to do, which is to study non-monogamous relationships, the discourses and practices of non-monogamy, which would bring me back a little to the discussion about the family, of kinship, of sexual reproduction, social reproduction, and if these new reorganizations that are non-monogamous somehow destabilize, or not, heterosexuality, for example, and monogamy. So that is another area I am working in. Nowadays I am very active in the transsexual movement. But I think that transsexuals, both men and women, during my day, I remember I couldn't, I interviewed only one transsexual man. And now I have a number of transsexual male friends. They have become, for example, a lot more visible and many today are –

**SC: Because women were always more visible?**

MFLS: More visible. And nowadays, most of them, they are protagonists of their own stories. So today, for example, the transfeminist movement<sup>17</sup> is an extremely interesting movement for the feminist agenda, right? So they have, I have, for example, a transsexual

---

<sup>15</sup> A transsexual is "a person in which the sex-related structures of the brain that define gender identity are exactly opposite the physical sex organs of the body. Put even more simply, a transsexual is a mind that is literally, physically, trapped in a body of the opposite sex." (<http://www.transsexual.org/What.html>)

<sup>16</sup> Pathology is the study of causation of disease.

<sup>17</sup> Transfeminism is "a movement by and for trans women who view their liberation to be intrinsically linked to the liberation of all women and beyond" (Emi Koyama, "The Transfeminist Manifesto," <http://eminism.org/readings/pdf-rdg/tfmanifesto.pdf>) (accessed 1/13/16).

student who is enrolled in the master's degree program that I am a part of. So they make themselves seen, they are becoming more visible. And they are able to speak for themselves about their own life experiences. These days, my work is very much grounded in activism, so I know countless people fighting for this agenda, I'm going to call it an agenda of trans activism. And today that's one of the most important areas I am active in, parallel to the others, parallel to the ethno-racial agenda, parallel to the women's agenda, parallel to the agenda for the autonomy of the body, for natural birth, against obstetric violence. So there are a lot of things, right? It's crazy, how we have been dealing with so much. The use of drugs, for example. So there are a lot of agendas that pervade my life these days.

**SC: Uh huh. And you, when you did your doctorate on the transsexual movement, was it on the movement or, as you said, on the practice of –**

MFLS: No, in fact what I did was a discussion on how this was produced, how it was that this idea was produced.

**SC: Of the transsexual.**

MFLS: Of transsexuality as a gender dysphoria,<sup>18</sup> such as identity disorder at a certain point, and nowadays as a dysphoria. And so I interviewed many transsexuals, men and women, well, more women, who were connected to healthcare. And recently I've done another project that is coming out now as a book published by the Federal University of Bahia, and I will present this now at the Brazilian Conference for Anthropology, which is one of the last things I'm doing on the transsexuality theme, it has more to do with transsexual men, on the use of testosterone. So it's always been about that too – health, not health in the sense of absence of sickness, but in a broader sense. Health in the sense of the production of life, about care as Foucault talks about care, the taking care of yourself, this experience that people have in their relationship with others. These are themes that have interested me a lot. So always somehow I've been intersecting with the field of health care, and other fields that take these matters into account. These are the issues that move me, that make me go to the street, make me go to activist spaces, and so on.

**SC: And that was in Rio de Janeiro, the doctorate?**

MFLS: It was in Rio, in 2005. I came here on a journey. I had prepared two projects, one to be submitted to the Federal University of Santa Catarina and one to be submitted here at the IMS, the IMS here, the Institute for Social Medicine. This is where I met Márcia Arán, who sadly passed away, she passed away in 2011.

**SC: She was a professor?**

---

<sup>18</sup> Gender dysphoria is the medical diagnostically term used to describe individuals who “experience discontent with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender\\_dysphoria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_dysphoria)).

MFLS: She was 46, she had breast cancer. She was an amazing person. And besides being a teacher, she was a feminist. I think she was a person who had a great impact on the production of studies on transsexuality here in Brazil. So I came in 2006, I received my doctorate and I had a very interesting training. For my doctorate I had a lot of access to the discussion of Judith Butler,<sup>19</sup> the discussion on life. I really deepened my knowledge about the thinking of Foucault. So, well, in 2010 I defended my doctorate. In March or April of 2010 I returned to Aracaju. In the meantime, I applied for a public competition and I was approved, and so in late 2010, I was coming back to Rio, me and my partner, who lives here with me, and the dog and the cat. The cat actually died, it's not alive anymore, but so we came to Rio. So, since 2010 I've been here in Rio, teaching and doing other things. I'm also part of a post-graduate program – it's actually a group, a collective research group – called the Micro-politics of Work and Health Care, which is a very interesting group with a lot of real-life political agendas, [for example] against asylums and particularly the compulsory internment of crack users. I think all these policies have somehow placed people's lives in a precarious situation, you know, producing.... And I think this interests me a lot, and several agendas come out of this – the issue of the favelas,<sup>20</sup> and so on.

**SC: And how do you see this? It seems to me that you are describing a variety of activities and areas of interests, but most have to do with sexuality. How do you see this activism for transsexual rights, the right to health, and to change one's body, as an individual right, how do you see that in the context of the history of feminism in Brazil?**

MFLS: Okay, so, I think somehow, it's true, the issues of gender and sexuality are always my concern. And I think a lot of things have changed since I defended my doctorate. Some things have changed, but a lot of things still have to be achieved. So, talking about the feminist agenda in Brazil, I think Brazil is quite unique, you know. First, because of it's vast territory and also the diversity that we have here. We have diversity. So, for example, to think about what is the feminist movement – what are the movements? I always talk about feminist movements, because there isn't just one feminist movement.

**SC: Yes, and actually the name of the project is feminisms.**

MFLS: Yes, so we have various movements, various expressions. And lately, on social media, I have observed a big renewal of young feminism. But I also think many things appear under the banner of feminism that are extremely complicated. Sometimes many agendas incorporate positions that are not open to differences, to otherness, many extreme and strained positions, that sometimes shut out a particular group. So there are many

---

<sup>19</sup> Judith Butler (1956-) is an American philosopher and gender theorist most known for her work on queer scholarship and gender performativity. She is actively involved in the lesbian and gay rights movement. For more information, see <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/biography/>.

<sup>20</sup> A favela is a slum in Brazil within an urban area, originally created by homeless soldiers and former Black slaves in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, approximately 6% of the Brazilian population lives in favelas. See <http://www.brazzillog.com/pages/cvrjun97.htm> (accessed 1/13/16); <http://library.brown.edu/fivecenturiesofchange/chapters/chapter-9/favelas-in-rio-de-janeiro-past-and-present/> (accessed 1/13/16).

things, so you can't talk about what is *the* feminist movement in Brazil. And I think there's a lot of tension with transsexuality in some movements, in some places.

**SC: A tension between movements?**

MFLS: A tension between the feminist movements and the trans movement, which is very strong, transsexual women and transfeminists have very interesting agendas.

**SC: Since when? When would you say that started?**

MFLS: I think around two or three years ago it gained a lot of strength.

**SC: So then you chose to study this theme?**

MFLS: Yes. So the slutwalk,<sup>21</sup> for example, I've been keeping up with it from Rio and I also follow other debates in São Paulo, and that has been the incorporation, the very large presence of transsexual women. But I think there's a lot of tension in a lot of activism, so you can't really say what is the feminist movement. I see feminism more as a force and a way of being in the world, a way of entering into the world. And my vision of the world and my way of being in the world is a feminist way, in the sense that any gender oppression, or sexual oppression, it touches me and makes me react immediately. I have a point of view and a reaction that is not only individual, but also collective. And I think this is a way of being in the world. It's a choice about being in the world, without necessarily being attached to any trend. I like a lot of feminisms. I have been reading a lot and I've gotten closer to the Latin Americans for example, the black feminists too, and I think there's a huge agenda in the production [of knowledge] that helps people to think a lot. How was this produced, how was that produced, more than just an oppression. There's a word I like a lot, asymmetry, you know. How is it that difference – which I believe means a lot more – becomes such a powerful asymmetry that it legitimates inequality. And how is that we – this is the big question – how did we turn these differences into inequality, and turn this inequality and into acts of oppression. This is what makes me a feminist. It's being bothered by this asymmetry and seeking to build more symmetrical possibilities, which doesn't mean equal possibilities. There are differences between equality and symmetry, you see, because equality and symmetry assume, before anything else, difference. So this theme of difference, which is the theme of otherness, is inseparable to me. I can't detach it from my way of being in the world, not only in terms of thinking, but also in terms of the future. And I think it has a lot to do with that too.

**SC: Do you think that in the feminist movement in Brazil in recent decades there have been changes, there have been accomplishments, new issues that have come up? How do you see this?**

---

<sup>21</sup> "Slutwalk" is a transnational movement of protest marches against rape culture where women dress as "sluts" in revealing attire to draw attention to common tactics of justifying rape. For more information, see Brittany Leach, "Slutwalk and Sovereignty: Transnational Protest as Emergent Global Democracy" (2013). [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2300699](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2300699) (accessed 1/13/16).

MFLS: Yes, sure, of course. The movements themselves, they are constantly developing, today there are a multitude of movements, as I said. There are many young women activists, girls who are 18, 17, 19 years olds, both from within and outside of academic institutions; there are many organizations of black women, including young women, who are activists; the trans feminist movement itself is a movement that challenges and expands the borders of feminist activism in Brazil. It's obvious there is an agenda, which is very interesting, and generational, and will bring together many generations, and it keeps bringing together many people from different backgrounds. In my time, I have intersected with the most various people, from people who are in spaces of institutionalized activism, inside certain groups or sectors, to people like me who are not attached, who are more loose. It's obvious there is a multitude inside the academy, and this changes back and forth, inside and outside the academy. I think there is a lot of this. So, many things have changed of course, but we still have many urgent issues that are very important, like the issue of abortion, which is very important to us. It's a subject that is already beyond extreme urgency. How many times have we talked about the number of women who've died, and that it's really a matter of public health, of the collective health, because of unsafe and illegal ways of abortion. And there are problems when you try to inform [the public health authorities] even about legal abortions, for example.<sup>22</sup> So there's a tension. There's also the presence of a very strong evangelical group in Brazil, and that makes it hard for the country to face these issues. This hasn't been taken seriously in recent years as an important concern for the political agenda. You know I think it should be seen as an interesting sign that we invest a lot, for instance in the healthcare networks, which do really need investment, for example the "Stork's Network,"<sup>23</sup> but we have no movement, not only political but also in terms of investing resources, in other agendas that are women-related, that are not only about the maternity issue, which also is extremely important. Women's mortality is a serious problem, that's not what I'm saying, but these are very focused agendas, and agendas that unfortunately – they shouldn't – bring a moral dimension and often bring principles from religious-oriented people in an extremely prejudiced way, and it's been very hard to stand up against that. These agendas are urgent.

**SC: Now it's interesting because the last two governments of Lula,<sup>24</sup> who was reelected, and now in Dilma's,<sup>25</sup> which are both of the PT, a party that you were**

---

<sup>22</sup> Abortion is legalized in Brazil only if the pregnancy puts the life of the mother in danger or if it is a result of a rape. Although illegal abortions are punishable with jail time for up to three years and a permanent criminal record, they are common, especially with the rise of criminal gangs running abortion clinics. However, if there are complications with illegal abortions, women are often reported to hospitals and in turn to the authorities. For more information, see <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/3/30/abortion-still-illegal-brazil.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Rede Cegonha is a Ministry of Health initiative that ensures women the right to reproductive planning and to care during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period, as well as ensuring children the right to a safe birth and healthy development. [http://dab.saude.gov.br/portaldab/ape\\_redecegonha.php](http://dab.saude.gov.br/portaldab/ape_redecegonha.php) (accessed 1/19/16).

<sup>24</sup> Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil from 2002 to 2011, is member of the left-wing Worker's Party. He made his way to power from poverty, becoming involved in unions that under his leadership became strong independent movements. His presidency advocated social democratic reforms and social programs

**affiliated with, I'm not sure if you still are. What do you think of the action of these governments? You are talking about public policies that were created by the PT.**

MFLS: Well, no, I was never affiliated with the PT because it's very difficult these days... I also think it's very hard to say what's left, what's right. But if it's possible to say that there is a left wing, I am a member of this. All my life, all my votes, my activism, including some moments of political campaigns for certain people that at some point I was or am close to, I was part of it. But I never joined and I was never of any sector of the PT or anything. At some point I wasn't even in the mood anymore. In the Lula government, we had a lot of interesting things. The project Brazil Without Homophobia,<sup>26</sup> for example, made great strides. For something paradoxical, right, contradictory, that I think has to be thought about in various ways. There is not an element of judgment for me. This agenda lost a lot of its strength in the Dilma government.

**SC: Despite that she was the first female president.**

MFLS: Yes, despite being a woman, she almost had... you could say that she froze it, literally. Unfortunately some agendas are political agendas, extremely interesting, and it's not a criticism of these agendas, agendas that I share sympathies with, like the program for more doctors, for instance, which for me is an agenda that you could say – whether I am for it or against it, I won't put myself in that – but to me, it's an agenda that does something that I think is very interesting, it's to challenge the medical ethos and the power that this group has, right, considering it's own history in terms of the meaning of the production of medicine, as a field of power and knowledge about bodies. I think this brings some imbalance, but they are very focused agendas, many agendas that affect the immediate lives of people... It's urgent. They haven't been taken seriously, and they are not relevant in the current agendas. They are very weak now, and hard to be done, with very little investment. People will keep producing on the outskirts, including at the limits of resources, because for sure, most of the resources are allocated for the big politics. So whose is it? Whose is this agenda, who really believes in it? I'm sure these people are under a lot of pressure and face a shortage of resources to bring about these changes in this agenda. So I think we have to think about that a little. It's hard. It's not easy.

**SC: So, to finish, how do you see the future of the movement – if you can put it this way, like an umbrella – or the feminist movements in Brazil. Movements for freedom, against sexual oppression, in what direction do you see this movement being led?**

---

that left him with the highest approval ratings in Brazilian history. It is common throughout Brazil to refer to leaders with their first names.

<sup>25</sup> Dilma Rousseff is the current President of Brazil (2011-), now in her second term. She is a member of the Worker's Party and was formerly Lula Da Silva's Chief of Staff; she is the first female president of Brazil. She was reelected for a second term in 2014, but with significant controversy around economic issues and corruption. People typically refer to everyone, including political leaders, by their first name.

<sup>26</sup> The Brazil Without Homophobia Program is a governmental program that engages various government branches to prevent violence against the LGBTQ community in particular. For more information, see <http://www.social.org.br/relatorio2004ingles/relatorio028.htm>.

MFLS: Well, I think it has much greater reach now, I have no doubts about that – and this is connected to social networks, to social media. If you look today, for example, if you look in a few places like Facebook, for instance, or at other networks and social media, there is a huge number of different activist groups. And sometimes the issues they fight for intersect, because they are not totally separate. I see this as extremely positive because it reveals the diversity that, if well handled, can be very powerful. But I think it also brings a lot of tension, there is also tension, because there are disagreements over objectives, there are disagreements over conceptual frameworks, there are a lot of... I think, to go back to good old Foucault, when he brings up the question of micro-power, Foucault says somewhere in a text that he wrote once on Deleuze's *The Anti-Oedipus*,<sup>27</sup> one of the things he says is, don't fall in love with power. And these micro-powers are quite spread through these movements. I think these disputes, when they are well leveraged, have the potential to produce very interesting things, which is an unparalleled openness to diversity and differences. But I think we have to be careful not to fall into a reproduction of fascism, which often leads to the oppression of the other. I think these movements have to be very careful, they have to be discussing and rethinking things, they have to be promoting this openness. But it really is an unparalleled agenda. When I remember back to my time, I sometimes joke and say I wish I were 20 years younger. Back then there were fewer options, there weren't so many possible paths, things were more narrow.

**SC: Your time, when? Your time also is now. (Laughs.) You mean when you were in school?**

MFLS: It is now, but when I was 20 years old, 18, there were political parties and youth groups, one or the other. This also has a lot to do with where I was born, but it was very... Today so many possibilities are produced in an instant, at a very high speed. This is really interesting to me.

**SC: Judging from your comment, it seems that you see a lot of hope in this renewal of feminism, or the movements, the youth, because you talk about it like this, contrasting to when you were in your 20s....**

MFLS: Yes. I always have hope. And it's not a religious hope or a Christian hope. I always say that I have the hope of the present. Hope to me is hope in what's going on in the present. I think the more we have... having a lot of agendas, because at the same time sexism is becoming more visible, the violence against the LGBT population is present all the time in different ways. So the challenges are present every day, so the hopes have to be present as well. I don't have hope in the future because for me I don't have a future, the future is the present and I have hope in the present. And I think this is what moves me, having faith in the present. The present is: today I'm alive, and there's a lot of asymmetry, so there's a lot of hope in the things that have to be done. That's what I believe in, that hope is what moves us. But it's not a hope of something nostalgic, of a future where all will be equal and there will be no oppression in the world. I think we can fight for conditions that

---

<sup>27</sup> "*Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*" by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1972) is a philosophical book about the relationship between reality, desire, and capitalism.

are less and less asymmetrical, more symmetrical, more about the production of difference, even though sometimes the world points in a direction contrary to what I'm saying now, I think it has something to do with that, too.

**SC: I think you said everything. It's been very interesting. Thank you.**

MFLS: Okay, great.