

Origins and challenges of gender studies centers in higher education in NorthERN and Northeastern Brazil¹

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Abstract

In higher education, interdisciplinary gender studies centers deconstruct traditional androcentric positivist academic knowledge, making it possible to apply the gender perspective to all objects of knowledge. However, they suffer from insufficient recognition and weak institutionalization in Brazilian academia. This paper focuses on the trajectories of the gender studies centers affiliated to the North/Northeast Gender Studies Feminist Network (REDOR), and of their founders. The analysis is based on documentary data and biographical and autobiographical narratives. The histories of the centers and women intertwine personal and institutional dimensions: the involvement with feminist studies influenced their personal and professional lives; many of them suffered from prejudice and discrimination for researching gender; practically all of them continue their activism within the universities in order to sustain their centers. The research was supported by CNPq and Capes grants.

Keywords: Gender studies centers. Higher education. Feminist academics. REDOR/Brazil.

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Origens e desafios dos núcleos de estudos de gênero na educação superior no Norte e Nordeste do Brasil

Orígenes y desafíos de los centros de estudios de género en la educación superior en el Norte y Noreste de Brasil

Resumo

Na educação superior, os núcleos interdisciplinares de estudos de gênero desconstruem o conhecimento acadêmico tradicional, possibilitando aplicar a perspectiva de gênero a todos os objetos de conhecimento. Contudo, sofrem de insuficiente reconhecimento e fraca institucionalização na academia brasileira. Este trabalho enfoca as trajetórias de núcleos de estudos sobre a mulher e relações de gênero no Norte e Nordeste brasileiros, articulados pela Rede Feminista Norte e Nordeste de Estudos e Pesquisa sobre Mulher e Relações de Gênero-REDOR, e de suas fundadoras. A análise se baseou em levantamento documental e narrativas biográficas e autobiográficas. As histórias dos núcleos e das acadêmicas feministas entrelaçam dimensões pessoais e institucionais: o envolvimento com os estudos feministas influenciou suas vidas profissionais e pessoais; muitas sofreram preconceitos e discriminação por pesquisar gênero; praticamente todas continuam militando dentro da academia para sustentar seus núcleos e grupos.

Palavras-Chave: Núcleos de estudos de gênero. Educação superior. Acadêmicas feministas. REDOR.

Resumen

En la educación superior, los centros de estudios interdisciplinarios de género deconstruyen el conocimiento académico tradicional, positivista e androcéntrico, possibilitando aplicar la perspectiva de género a todos los objetos de conocimiento. Sin embargo, sufren de un reconocimiento insuficiente e institucionalización débil en la academia brasileña. Este trabajo trata de las trayectorias de los centros de estudios sobre la mujer y las relaciones de género en el norte y noreste de Brasil, reunidos en la Red Feminista de Estudios de Género del Norte/Noreste de Brasil (REDOR), y de sus fundadoras. El análisis se basa en datos documentales y relatos biográficos y autobiográficos. Las historias de los centros y de las académicas feministas entrelazan dimensiones personales e institucionales: el compromiso con los estudios feministas ha influenciado sus vidas profesionales y personales; muchas han sufrido prejuicios y discriminación por el fato de investigaren las cuestiones de género; prácticamente todas continúan su activismo dentro de las universidades para sostener sus centros. La investigación fue financiada por CNPq y Capes.

Palabras clave: Centros de estudios de género. Educación superior. Acadêmicas feministas. REDOR/Brasil.

Introduction: development of women, feminist and gender studies in higher education

The feminist movement encouraged sex and gender equality policies and generated women, feminist and gender studies, usually undertaken by academic feminist activists. These studies denounced the androcentrism of scientific institutions and practices, and generated a specific epistemology and theories about the political, economic and social situation of women and gender relations (HUMM, 1989; SCHIEBINGER, 2001; DENZIN & LINCOLN, 2006). They form a field in ongoing expansion and interaction with society, affecting public and private, national and international, political and economic institutions (VENTURA FRANCH, 2008).

Since the Declaration of the Decade for Women by the United Nations (1975-1985), equality between men and women has become one of the fundamental principles of law, and gender has become an indispensable lens to envision all dimensions of social and human development. More than an analytical variable (such as class and ethnicity), gender indicates a special case of social discrimination, since it does not relate to a particular social group or minority, but cuts across all groups, in which women always constitute half. Hence the fertility and impact of the gender perspective on social, cultural and educational analysis (MONTANÉ, VILARROYA et al., 2011). In the 21st century, despite the weakening of the state and the deregulation of financial and labor markets, promoted by neoliberal ideology, gender policies continue to advance in democratic states (CEPAL, 2010).

The World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action, generated by UNESCO and adopted by many higher education institutions (HEIs) in the world, prioritizes the promotion of access and the strengthening of women's participation through five main lines of action: awareness-raising, curriculum design, research and extension, institutional culture and inter-institutional coordination (UNESCO, 1998). To advance this goal, the action of interdisciplinary gender study centers in HEIs is important and strategic. On the one hand, the participation of women and men in

training, research and management, as students and professors, is still unbalanced, if not in access, in distribution, as sex/gender horizontal and vertical segregation remains. On the other hand, the creation of new areas of knowledge derived from inter/transdisciplinary gender studies encourages scientific and cultural development and innovation.

In Brazil, women studies gained momentum during the Decade for Women, with the rise of feminist groups and publication on gender inequalities, still under the military dictatorship (COSTA, 2009). In that context, Brazilian feminism, according to Costa (2009), had specific characteristics and challenges, which differentiated it from North American and European feminism, due to its alliance with sectarian and sexist leftist groups, and with the conservative Catholic Church, in the general struggle for re-democratization.

In the 1980s, the first women studies centers appeared and special interest groups were created in various scientific associations of the social and human sciences; however, feminist studies were concentrated in the Southeast. In the North and Northeast, they grew only in the 1990s, with the creation of the North and Northeast Feminist Network of Gender Studies Centers (REDOR), in 1992.

In 2005, the newly created Ministry of Policies for Women (SPM/PR) launched the Women and Science Program, in partnership with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MCTI), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The program had three intervention strategies: funding of research projects on gender, women and feminism; a contest for high school, undergraduate and graduate students (the Constructing Gender Equality Award); and the promotion of a National Meeting of Gender Studies Centers called "Thinking Gender and Science" (BRAZIL, 2008). The theme of the second meeting, held in 2009, was the institutionalization of women, feminist and gender studies in education, science and technology systems in the country, in accordance with the II National Plan of Policies for Wo-

men (PNPM) (SPM, 2010). The latest PNPM (2013/2015) also highlights, among its actions, “to support the establishment and strengthening of gender centers in universities, especially in public² (federal³ and state⁴) ones” (BRAZIL, 2013, p. 26).

The minor presence of women in the field of scientific research persists in the world. Overall, despite the growth in the number of female graduates at all levels, including PhD programs, there are serious obstacles to women’s access to power and prestige positions in academia, so that inclusion does not imply progress (GARCÍA DE LEÓN & GARCÍA DE CORTÁZAR, 2001; TAVARES, 2008), a phenomenon called “leaky pipeline” (DE PABLO, 2006). Likewise, the proportion of female instructors and professors in HEIs lowers as the hierarchical level increases. While this, in part, may be due to the recent massive access of women to higher education, the “glass ceiling” is a consequence of the prevailing male culture in the academic world, which tends to reproduce itself in the absence of gender equity policies. Admittedly, in the 21st century, a “woman-friendly” academia does not exist yet and the “chilly climate” persists, especially in the masculine fields (COOPER & EDDY et al, 2010). The “glass ceiling” phenomenon is a cause of concern in few countries, and those that implement concrete policy actions to address vertical segregation are even fewer (MONTANÉ & CARVALHO, 2012). In Brazil, even though women reached the majority of graduates at all levels of education in the end of the 1990s, gender equity policy is generally in lack⁵. Part of the 2008 PNPM and supported by ILO and UN Women, the Gender and Race Equity Program of the Brazilian federal government, targeting private and public institutions, has not been adopted by most of the federal universities.

The field of gender studies has been accumulating knowledge, which is often unrecognized. In common sense, gender has been equated to women’s issues; however, it refers to how relations between the sexes are reproduced, institutionalized, and produce discrimination; thus, it refers to relations of power and subordination, not just to the position occupied by women. The inclusion of the gender perspective in higher education aims to promote

ethical change and to incorporate equity and diversity in academic life (MONTANÉ & CARVALHO, 2012). Interdisciplinary gender studies centers deconstruct traditional, androcentric and positivist academic knowledge, and apply the gender perspective to all objects of knowledge (BALLARÍN, 2005). Their impact is both formal and informal, insofar as they highlight the social relevance of gender studies, mainstream gender in academic life, and effect social and institutional intervention committed to equity.

Equality policies are based on the distributive sense of gender justice (FRASER, 2007), through parity processes or quotas, being insufficient (where they advanced) to make visible and transform the sexism and androcentrism of the educational system. The practices and the effects of discrimination tend to become more subtle as equality and parity policies advance. Therefore, effective gender equity in higher education requires recognition policies (FRASER, 2007) for the transformation of institutional relations and the dissemination of a new culture. Interdisciplinary gender studies centers advance this perspective in two ways: by increasing knowledge about the qualitative aspects of gender inequalities in daily institutional relations; and by empowering women, both inside and outside HEIs, through training and extension projects (CARVALHO & MONTANÉ, 2012).

Research design and paper focus

The research from which this paper derives sought to register and make visible the recent history of gender studies centers in HEIs, of REDOR, and of their founders, particularly in Northern and Northeastern Brazil (CARVALHO, 2012). Therefore, the paper provides a detailed account of when, where, and how women and gender studies emerged and became institutionalized. It also briefly illustrates how pioneer feminist academics faced the challenges involved in establishing their groups or centers, in a way that intertwines personal and institutional aspects. Finally, it highlights some of the current challenges.

The original research was mainly descriptive and had several interrelated objects: the trajectories and contribu-

tions (institutional/academic, social/local) of gender studies centers and groups, and of REDOR; their scientific production, presented in annual/biannual meetings of REDOR; and the trajectories and perspectives of their founders and current leaders (CARVALHO, 2012). It aimed to recover, map and analyze the trajectories and contributions of these centers and groups through documentary analysis; to analyze the trajectories and experiences of feminist scholars, through biographical interviews under the framework of narrative and feminist inquiry (CLANDININ, 2007; ATKINSON et al., 2001; GLUCK & PATAI, 1991); and to map and analyze the development of scientific production within REDOR special interest groups, since 1992.

REDOR was established in order to articulate and strengthen women and gender studies groups and centers in HEIs in the North and Northeast of Brazil, regions that are recognized as less developed and more prone to traditional patriarchal social relations, such as 'machismo'. The network contributed to the creation and institutionalization of new groups and centers and to the social and scientific promotion of gender studies, as it held nineteen conferences in HEIs until 2016. The sustainability of the centers and of the network itself has been an ongoing challenge for researchers, aware that they play an important role in boosting gender studies, training new generations of feminist scholars and promoting inter-university cooperation in the two regions.

Apart from a few papers (COSTA & SARDENBERG, 1994/2014; SARDENBERG, 2005; ESMERALDO, 2010; FERREIRA, 2012), there is no research about the history of REDOR. Besides its historical and scientific value, research about the trajectory of this important network of gender centers and feminist scholars might contribute to the consolidation of the network and to the visibility of the social relevance of gender studies. The first academic feminist activists have met and transposed barriers to create and support these centers. Their views and evaluation of the changes achieved through the centers is an interesting object of research about past and present daily academic, professional and per-

sonal lives. However, this paper simply aims to offer a brief overview of this complex panorama, hoping to stimulate further research efforts.

The research was announced at the closing assembly of the 17th Conference of REDOR, held in November 2012 at Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB). The documentary approach began in February 2013, through a form sent by email to the current leaders of the centers, along with a letter explaining the research objectives and requesting materials about the history and production of the center/group, such as publications and conference proceedings. Very few responded, despite successive attempts through email and telephone calls; of 105 emails sent, 31 returned, five indicated another address, and only eight returned the completed form.

An opportunity appeared to reach feminist scholars during the 10th *Fazendo Gênero* International Seminar, an important event held at Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), in Southern Brazil, in September 2013. REDOR's members, who would attend the seminar, were previously contacted by email to arrange a meeting about the research project. Each one of them was requested to take the completed form and materials (digital or printed) from her center/group to compose the research corpora. Again, the collection of materials failed, but several feminist academics were interviewed at the time. Alongside, others were invited to write autobiographical accounts following the same outline (personal, professional and activist lives).

In April 2014, the information obtained was publicized in the website of the 18th Redor Conference that would take place at Federal Rural University of Pernambuco (UFRPE), in November 2014, with an invitation to the affiliated groups and centers in order to update or fill the form. This visibility strategy worked better and, from May to October 2014, new centers and groups were included, yet with many data gaps. Information about 32 centers and groups is available at the 18th Redor Conference website (https://18redor.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/nc3bacleos-e-grupos-de-pesquisas-membros-e-associados-da-redor_out-2014.pdf).

In the following sections, we present some results of this extensive research involving the gender studies centers/groups and REDOR's documentary data (see appendix for acronyms and HEIs), the evolution of REDOR's conferences, and excerpts of biographical and autobiographical narratives of their founders on becoming a feminist, the creation of the center/group, and vision about the future of REDOR. The interviews excerpts offer a brief glimpse of the issues they faced in getting gender studies into the HEIs agenda.

The female academics and gender studies centers/groups of REDOR

The embryo of REDOR emerged in the First National Meeting of Women Studies Centers in Brazilian Universities, promoted in March 1991 by professor Eva Blay at the University of São Paulo (USP). According to Cecília Sardenberg, from NEIM/UFBA, the Northern and Northeastern professors, invited to the event, realized the disconnection among themselves within their regions. In the following year, with a small budget provided by the Ford Foundation, the coordinators of a pioneer gender studies center at Federal University of Bahia (NEIM/UFBA) called female scholars from the two regions' HEIs for a meeting in Salvador. REDOR was born then, during the First Regional Meeting of Women and Gender Studies Centers (RABAY, CARVALHO & SILVA, 2013). Gloria Rabay, from UFPB, who attended the meeting, recalled:

It was a very important and encouraging meeting. We all left with the desire to build the network. There were few of us; all participants could fit in a room of NEIM. In addition, the course offered by Heleieth Saffioti⁶, at the time, was very interesting. We left the meeting articulating a research project to be conducted collectively.

Not only did REDOR articulate the existing centers/groups, but it also spurred the creation of new groups and centers ever since. It also legitimized the emerging groups, as Maria Luzia Miranda Álvares, from a gender studies center at Federal University of Pará (GEP/UFPA), in Belem, North of Brazil, said: "We began to exist because of REDOR!"

In both regions, 35 gender studies centers and groups were catalogued, by state and HEI, as shown in the appendix. They are mostly located in the social and human sciences, seldom in health or nursing. They develop various research, extension and training projects articulated with public policies and social movements.

There are 17 centers and 12 groups in the Northeast, and 4 centers and 2 groups in the North of Brazil. The great majority are located in public universities, mainly in federal universities, and a few in state universities, research foundations and NGOs. The centers are part of the university structure, potentially more stable than the groups. They are also interdisciplinary, involving participants from several departments and colleges. However, there are consolidated groups, which are larger than some centers, as GEP/UFPA. In addition, there are small research groups, linked to a graduate program and registered at CNPq directory, that are not interdisciplinary.

Considering the timeline of the 20 gender studies centers and groups that informed their foundation year, it is possible to observe that, in the 1980s, 5 centers/groups were founded; in the 1990s, between 1991 and 1998, 12 appeared, 6 of them between 1991 and 1993; in the 2000s, only 3 were created. From 1983 to 1993, 11 gender studies centers or groups emerged in the Northeastern region.

The pioneer centers were NEIM/UFBA/Salvador and FAGES/UFPE/Recife, both founded in 1983. NEIM/UFBA (founded by Cecília Sardenberg, Ana Alice Costa, Alda Britto da Motta and Malu Beloni) has been playing an important role in gender studies in both regions, by leading the creation of REDOR and hosting the network for some time. It organized REDOR conferences in 1992, 2001 and 2005. Today it has its own building and offers the only undergraduate, master and doctorate programs on Women, Feminism and Gender Studies in the country.

The first center of the Northern region was GEP/UFPA, founded in 1994 by Maria Luzia Miranda Álvares. GEP's research areas are women and political participation; women, labor relations, environment and development; gender, identity and culture; gender, art, literature and education; gender, health and violence.

Benedito Medrado and Jorge Lyra founded GEMA/UFPE in 1998, the only center of feminist men. It has various training, extension and research projects on psychosocial processes, power and collective practices; production of meanings in health; men, masculinities and social contexts; feminist studies and politics.

In short, the catalogued centers and groups were established between 1983 and 2009, with a space and time concentration in the Northeastern region, between 1991 and 1998. The North, where the Amazon rain forest is located, is the largest region of Brazil, with scattered and isolated towns and settlements, and the latest to develop and establish universities; therefore, it has only 6 center/groups and has held only two REDOR conferences so far.

The enormous difficulty in obtaining information about the history and trajectory of the centers and groups indicates their weak institutionalization and the activist character of their construction and endurance. Many of them have no institutional website, email or phone number, for instance; and most of them lack staff other than professors or instructors and undergraduate and graduate students. According to Castoriadis (1982), institutions first are instituted in the imaginary and are structured later. This explains why and how gender studies centers and groups are instituted before they are properly installed (materially and formally) in universities, due to the wider cultural change operated by feminism.

The conferences of REDOR

The organization of periodic conferences – previously annual and recently biannual – has guaranteed the sustenance of the centers/groups and of the network, as the joint research projects developed in the very beginning did not prosper. Besides promoting exchange between researchers and students within the regions and contributing to the advancement and legitimization of feminist and gender studies in HEIs and beyond, these scientific meetings also give internal (in the HEI) and local (in the city and state) visibility to the centers that promote them, and provide modest financial resources that can be used for publications.

The concentration of centers and groups in the Northeastern region and the vastness of the Northern region, implying high travel costs, contribute to the fact that REDOR's conferences have mainly happened in the Northeast. Attempts to hold meetings in Belém (at GEPEM/UFPA) and Manaus (at NEIREGAM/UFAM) in 2008 and 2010, respectively, coincided with a crisis in REDOR's maintenance and leadership. The Belém meeting was quite small. The Manaus meeting had 125 paper presentations, with few participants from other states (FERREIRA, 2012).

However, there has been a resumption in recent years, which indicates the growth potential of the network. In November 2012, the 17th Conference, promoted by NIPAM/UFPA in João Pessoa, had 245 papers presented in 13 special interest groups (SIGs) (<http://www.ufpb.br/evento/lti/ocs/index.php/17redor/>). The 18th Conference, held in 2014 at UFRPE in Recife, by a center just created in 2013 (NPAMC/UFRPE), revealed significant progress: about 725 registrations, approximately 295 paper presentations in 19 SIGs, and guests from Spain, Portugal and Southern Brazil, besides representatives of popular women's movements (<http://www.ufpb.br/evento/lti/ocs/index.php/18redor/18redor>). This research project contributed to this growth through the linkages made with the various feminist scholars and their groups, reviving memories and stimulating future projects. The 19th Conference, that happened in June 2016 in Aracaju, promoted by NEPING/UFES, gathered 1.169 participants, with 327 papers presented in 19 SIGs, despite the economic and political crisis in Brazil and the strong campaign against the "gender ideology" held by religious conservative groups.

It is important to stress the increase of male participation and interest in gender and feminism. At the 4th Conference, held in 1995 at UFPB/João Pessoa, there was no male researcher participation. Two years later, at the 6th Conference, held at UFAL/Maceió, 8 male authors presented papers. In 2002, at the 11th Conference at UFS/Aracaju, there were 17 male authors; and in 2009, at the 15th Conference at UFMA/São Luís, there were 20 presentations by male researchers. In 2012, at the 17th Conference held again at UFPB/João Pessoa, the number of men researching gender who presented papers reached 82. A new

SIG on 'Gender, men and masculinities' was introduced from then on. The 18th Conference at URFPE/Recife kept up with male participation with a figure of 73 presenters. And the 19th Conference at UFS/Aracaju had 402 male participants and 117 male authors.

Finally, it is important to stress the need for each SIG to map its scientific production longitudinally, and to evaluate its quality at each conference and during the course of various conferences.

Narratives of feminist scholars: from personal to institutional domains

In the minutes of the meeting in which REDOR was created, in 1992, there are signatures of 34 female professors/instructors, from 12 groups of 8 states: three groups from Bahia, three from Pernambuco, one from Sergipe, one from Alagoas, one from Paraíba, one from Rio Grande do Norte, one from Ceará and one from Pará. Few of those groups were institutionalized as centers then.

Considering that professional identity is a socially constructed and personally recreated experience with its

own meanings and intentionality, the individual biographical interviews were conducted from a gender perspective. The theoretical approach of biographical-narrative research considers how individuals construct their professional and personal reality in interaction with the social and academic world (MONTANE & SANCHEZ DE SERDIO, 2011). Through their own biography, subjects articulate knowledge about social relationships and life experiences, in complex ways. Thus, the aim was to understand, from a situated perspective (HARDING, 1993), the professional and life trajectories of feminist scholars in university settings where gender inequality exists.

We interviewed seven of the founders: Ana Alice Alcântara Costa, Maria Cecília Bacellar Sardenberg and Alda Britto da Motta, from NEIM/UFBA; Maria Luzia Miranda Álvares, from GEPEM/UFPA; Cristina Buarque, from Joaquim Nabuco Foundation/Pernambuco; Laura Susana Duque Arrazola, from NUPEM/UFRPE; Glória Rabay, from UFPB. The interviews were recorded on audio and video. Elvira Simões Barreto and Nádia Regina Loureiro de Barros Lima, from NTMC/UFAL, wrote autobiographical narratives. Their brief profile is systematized in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Profile and trajectory of the founders of REDOR

Name, hometown/state, center/HEI	Age in 2013	Marital status, children	Undergraduate degree, year	Master degree, year, focus on women or gender	Doctoral degree, year, focus on women or gender	Activism
Alda B. da Motta , Ilha de Itaparica/BA, NEIM/UFBA.	82	Widow, 3 children	Social Sciences, UFBA, 1967.	Social Sciences, UFBA, 1977. Yes.	Education, UFBA, 1999. Yes.	Yes. After entering academia.
Ana Alice A. Costa, Caravelas/BA, NEIM/UFBA.	63	Divorced, 2 sons	Social Sciences, UFBA, 1975.	Sociology, UNAM, Mexico, 1981. Yes.	Political Sociology, UNAM, Mexico, 1996. Yes.	Yes. Within and outside academia.
Cecilia Maria Bacellar Sardenberg , São Paulo/SP, NEIM/UFBA.	65	Divorced, 1 son and 1 daughter	Cultural Anthropology, Illinois State University, USA, 1977.	Social Anthropology, Boston University, USA, 1981.	Social Anthropology, Boston University, USA, 1997. Yes.	Yes. Within and outside academia.
Cristina Maria Buarque , Rio de Janeiro/RJ, Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Recife/PE.	66	Divorced, 2 sons, 1 deceased	Economy, UFPE, 1971.	Political Science, UFPE, 1991.	--	Yes. Within and outside academia.
Laura Susana Duque Arrazola , Sincelejo, Colombia, NUPEM/UFRPE.	66	Widow, no children	Sociology, Universidad Javeriana, Colombia, 1972.	Rural Sociology, UFPB, 1983.	Social Work, UFPE, 2003. Yes.	Yes. Within and outside academia.
Nádia Regina Loureiro de Barros Lima , Palmeira dos Índios/AL, NTMC/UFAL.	62	Widow, 2 sons	Social Work, UFAL, 1973.	Sociology, UFPE, 1985. Yes.	Linguistics, UFAL, 2011. Yes.	Yes. Within and outside academia.
Elvira Simões Barreto , Aracaju/SE, NTMC/UFAL.	49	Divorced, 2 daughters and 1 son	Social Work, UFPE, 1988.	Social Work, UFPE, 1999. Yes.	Media Studies, UAB, Spain, 2008. Yes.	Yes. Within and outside academia.
Glória Rabay , João Pessoa/PB, NIPAM/UFPB.	53	Divorced, 1 daughter and 1 son	Media Studies, UFPB, 1982.	Sociology, 1992.	Social Sciences, UFRN, 2008. Yes.	Yes. Within and outside academia.
Maria Luzia Miranda Álvares , Abaetetuba/PA, GEPEM/UFPA.	73	Married, 4 daughters	Social Science, UFPA, 1977.	Humid Tropics Sustainable Development, UFPA, 1990. Yes.	Political Science, IUPERJ, 2004. Yes.	Yes. After entering academia.

A first analysis of their narratives shows that feminism has influenced their personal and professional lives, their motivations and academic-scientific views. All of them addressed gender issues in their doctoral dissertations and more than half did it already in the masters. Nearly every one of them developed and still develop feminist activism outside academia; only the older ones, Alda and Luzia, engaged in the feminist movement after embracing gender studies. Cristina was Secretary of Women in the state of Pernambuco from 2003 until 2014.

Feminist consciousness came to many of them through family experience, in the birth family or through marriage. Cristina experienced her mother's struggle to raise four children, being 'legally separated' at a time when there was no divorce in Brazil. Alda suffered oppression in her marriage and had to fight (against her husband) to get professional training; her efforts to pursue an intellectual career led to the end of her marriage to an intellectual. Cecília and Glória perceived, during youth, the double standards that subordinated women. Elvira realized that she was unhappy in her marriage. Cecília, while trying to return to the USA to complete her doctorate, was severely punished by her former husband, who was an academic.

For Cristina (in political exile during the military dictatorship), Cecília and Ana Alice, the encounter with feminism occurred abroad, respectively in Chile and Germany, the United States and Mexico. The 'radical feminists' of Canada influenced Laura in the early 1980s, when she accompanied her husband, who was a scholar, in an academic exchange. Glória was very young when she got involved with feminism: she had contact with the first feminist group of João Pessoa as an undergraduate student and, from then on, never abandoned activism. Luzia, who had a happy marriage and the support of an extended family, went back to school, that is, started college when she was 32 years old, and became interested in women studies due to the influence of a female professor.

At Elvira's first attempt to enroll in a master program, she had her project on 'Gender and Social Work' rejected. Laura, Luzia and Glória also reported prejudice and resis-

tance to the subject at the university, including in graduate school. Cecília pointed out that gender studies were and still are considered 'minor studies'. Luzia said that, by declaring herself feminist, she was called 'crazy' by her colleagues. In 2008, holding already a PhD, she suffered moral harassment from a young male fellow in a generational and gender dispute, which led her to hand over the position of coordinator of the master's program she had created.

Discrimination against feminists at the university was evident, and they were often called lesbians. According to Cecília, NEIM (the gender studies center at UFBA) was discredited, and known as 'baixa das sapateiras', a pun on 'Baixa do Sapateiro', a neighborhood in Salvador, and on 'sapatona', slang that means 'dyke'. In this context, nearly all female professors found and transposed barriers to create and maintain the women and gender studies centers/groups.

About future prospects, they affirmed the importance of the centers and of REDOR in order to encourage, strengthen and maintain feminist and gender studies, and for the struggle against gender inequality. They wish to strengthen the bonds built since the foundation of REDOR, to enlarge the network, and to engage new feminist researchers.

Conclusion: the challenges

This text aimed to make visible women's contribution to academic knowledge and the work on gender developed in higher education in Northern and Northeastern Brazil, through mapping and analyzing the trajectories of REDOR's centers and groups, and their feminist scholars, pointing at the interweaving of institutional and personal dimensions.

These centers/groups and their current leaders still suffer from insufficient recognition and lack of support in terms of infrastructure and personnel. Moreover, feminist scholars still suffer prejudice and discrimination for researching gender. They continue struggling in academia to support their centers or groups, but they are few (and

burdened) to implement various tasks inside and outside academia. Besides the institutionalization, consolidation and expansion of a center/group, according to its life stage the institutional context, such tasks include: funding and development of training, extension and research projects; the training of new generations of feminist scholars; collaboration with women's and feminist movements; and investment in the support of REDOR.

In this context, critical evaluation by each center/group of its own contribution towards the advancement of the feminist project in the wider society, and particularly in academia – via the institutionalization of a feminist praxis in management, teaching, research and scientific dissemination, as Costa and Sardenberg (1994) pointed out – is found lacking. Challenges remain:

- the full institutionalization and sustainability, legitimacy and consolidation of centers and groups, in face of ideological obstacles, exhaustion of professors/activists in the context of the intensification of academic work, and in the absence of institutional support;
- the generational renewal of centers/groups;
- the institutionalization and expansion of feminist and gender studies in universities, with the establishment of regular programs, following the example of NEIM/UFBA;
- the relationship between academic feminism and women's or feminist groups outside the university, as well as policymakers; and
- the sustainability of REDOR, insofar as it empowers each center/group.

According to Glória Rabay, in the beginning of REDOR it was possible to materialize the network through a joint research project funded by the Ford Foundation. Then, REDOR became an NGO that could receive financial support, but this brought a bureaucratic burden. It was necessary to search for funding, lead the centers as a network, and manage the NGO, a role performed for a whi-

le by NEIM/UFBA, practically the only center with such a capability. However, NEIM had to survive and thrive on its own, and apparently, no other center could take the lead.

Currently, there are no funds for infrastructure or office work in order to sustain REDOR. The center that hosts a conference becomes responsible for maintaining the network until the next conference. Moreover, Glória Rabay considers that “the increasing demand for academic productivity has also been steering activism away. And there are also power and prestige internal disputes, even though REDOR has not the same stature compared to other scientific associations”.

These issues require reflection from the perspective of power relations, whether within the HEIs, whether specifically among women, for example, between the eldest academic feminists and the newcomers, between mainly activist professors/instructors and mainly academic ones, whether among different theoretical affiliations, in order to “integrate diversities” (ESMERALDO, 2010, p. 94). In the closing assembly of the 18th Conference of REDOR, at UFRPE/Recife, there was a dispute over which center/group/HEI would host the next meeting that reflected these differences, at a time in which the network, recently resurrected, needs to create consensus and strengthen itself.

In the closing assembly of the 19th Conference, at UFS/Aracaju, new groups of young academic feminists joined REDOR, and the choice of the site of the new conference was consensual: it will be held in Salvador, by UNEB/Diadorim and UFBA/NEIM in joint organization. In a moment in which we are experiencing a conservative backlash in Brazil and in the rest of the world, we certainly need consensus and union.

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APPENDIX: Gender studies centers and groups by state and region, Brazil, 2013/2014

Northeast (17 Centers and 12 Groups)		
State	Center / HEI	Group / HEI
Bahia (3 Centers, 3 Groups)	NEIM / UFBA [http://www.neim.ufba.br/wp/]	MUSA / UFBA
	MULLIERIBUS / UEFS	GEM / UFBA [https://generoenfermagem.wordpress.com/]
	NECLIF / UFBA	Laboratório de Gênero e Infância / UNEB
Sergipe (1 Center)	NEPIMG / UFS	-
Alagoas (1 Center)	NTMC / UFAL [http://www.ufal.edu.br/unidadeacademica/fsso/extensao/nucleos-tematicos/nucleo-tematico-mulher-cidadania-ntmc]	-
Pernambuco (4 Centers, 5 Groups)	FAGES / UFPE [https://www.ufpe.br/fages/]	Instituto PAPAÍ (NGO) [http://institutopapai.blogspot.com.br/]
	GEMA / UFPE [http://gema-ufpe.blogspot.com.br/]	Grupo Planejamento e Política de Gênero, Recife
	NPAMC / UFRPE	G.T. Mulher na Literatura / UFPE
	Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas da Mulher / UFRPE	Área Temática Gênero, Família e Idade / Fundação Joaquim Nabuco Grupo de Mulher “Fazendo Gênero” / Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas Josué Castro
Paraíba (3 Centers, 1 Group)	NIPAM / UFPB [https://www.facebook.com/pages/NIPAM-UFPB/423612381042424]	Grupo Flor e Flor Estudos de Gênero / UEPB [http://grupoflorestudosdegenero.blogspot.com.br/]
	NEMS / UFCG	-
	NEPGD / UFPB [http://www.ccj.ufpb.br/nepgd/]	-
Rio Grande do Norte (2 Centers)	NEM / UERN [http://nucleonem.blogspot.com.br/]	-
	NEPAM / UFRN	-
Ceará (1 Center)	NEGIF / UFC [http://www.negif.ufc.br/]	-
Piauí (1 Center)	NEPEM / UFPI	-
Maranhão (1 Center, 3 Groups)	NIEPEM / UFMA	GERAMUS / UFMA
		GEMGE / UFMA
		GENI / UFMA
North (4 Centers and 2 Groups)		
State	Center / HEI	Group / HEI
Pará (1 Group)	-	GEPEM / UFPA [http://www.ufpa.br/projetogepem/] [http://gepemufpa.blogspot.com.br/] [http://jornaliaras.ufpa.br/]
Amazonas (1 Center)	NEIREGAM / UFAM	-
Rondônia (1 Center)	Núcleo de Estudo e Pesquisa da Mulher / UFRO	-
Tocantins (1 Center, 1 Group)	Núcleo de Estudos, Pesquisas e Extensão em Sexualidade, Corporalidades / UNITINS / Miracema	Grupo de Pesquisa Memória, Cotidiano, Gênero e Sertão / UNITINS/Porto Nacional
Acre (1 Center)	NEGA / UFAC [http://negaacre.blogspot.com.br/]	-

Notas

1 This paper is a product of two projects: (1) "Gender and Higher Education: policies, narratives and curriculum", Project 303/13, Capes/DGU Program 040/2012, and "Programa Hispano-Brasileño de Cooperación Interuniversitaria Género y educación superior", Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte Programa PHB2012-0149-PC, Universidad de Barcelona; and (2) "Trajectories and contributions of Women and Gender Studies Centers, member of the North-Northeast Feminist Network of Women and Gender Studies Centers-REDOR: from personal to institutional dimensions", Process 404888/2012-7, Call 32/2012, MCTI/CNPq/SPM-PR/MDA, both developed by NIPAM, PPGE, Federal University of Paraíba-UFPB. A preliminary version was presented at the Brazilian Education Research Association-ANPED 37th Meeting, at Federal University of Santa Catarina-UFSC, October 4-8, 2015.

2 Public universities in Brazil (funded by the federal government, or state governments) charge no fees. Entrance exams are very competitive, so that public universities were considered elitist. Recently, there have been affirmative action programs to include low income students from public schools. Since the 1970s, private universities have been growing countrywide, and came to comprise the majority of enrollments at undergraduate level.

3 There is, presently, a network of 63 federal universities, at least one per estate, which are still prestigious, despite budget cuts and regular strikes. Most of them were created from the 1950s on. The first university founded in the country was the University of Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro, in 1920, which later became Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). In colonial times, higher education was forbidden in the country.

4 Among the state universities, the most prestigious are in the state of São Paulo: University of São Paulo (USP), created in 1934, number one in Latin America, according to international rankings; and University of Campinas (UNICAMP), created in 1962.

5 Brazil is in 85th place among 145 countries in the 2015 Gender Inequality Index (GII), which considers the likelihood of women participating in political and economic life, as well as access to education and health (http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/videos_e_fotos/2015/11/151118_100w_calculator_vj_2015). We rank 121th in women's participation in politics, with just over 10% of seats in the National Congress, 10% in City Halls, and 12% in Municipal Councils, despite a quota law for candidacies by sex. There are also persistent inequalities in the labor market and the division of domestic labor. We are the 7th country in the world with the highest rates of femicide; and the number of rapes was over 50,000 in 2012 (www.onumulheres.org.br/brasil/visao-geral/). According to the Map of Violence 2015: Murder of women in Brazil (www.mapadaviolencia.org.br), in the international ranking, Brazil was 5th among 83 countries.

6 Heleieth Saffioti (1934-2010) was an important Brazilian feminist academic. In 1969, she published *Women in class society: myth and reality*, a best seller. As a sociologist, specialized in gender studies, she worked in universities in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

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