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## **Parrhesia and female leadership: radical women in Brazilian geography against dictatorship and academic conservatism**

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**Abstract:** *This paper addresses the professional trajectories of women in geography who were or are based at the University of São Paulo (USP) and who belong to generations which faced the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985). Theoretically inspired by the ancient Greek notion of parrhesia in the Foucauldian sense of resistance and 'fearless speech', this paper extends recent literature on feminist historical geographies and histories of radical geography, and responds to pressing needs for challenging Anglo-American hegemonies in these fields. To this end, I draw upon exceptional sources, such as autobiographical archival materials and three interviews with 'privileged witnesses', to make internationally known outstanding cases of female leadership that disrupt narratives on 'big men' which have hitherto hidden these stories. Although most of these women do not display explicitly a feminist label, their trajectories show how feminist practices were put in place, sometimes implicitly, by female scholars mostly coming from working-class and migrant backgrounds. These cases from the Global South further expose the feminist and radical principle that emancipation should not be conceded from above but taken from below.*

**Keywords:** Radical Geographies; Feminist Historical Geographies; Parrhesia; Brazilian Dictatorship; Activism

This paper addresses the plural roles that were played by some women in the rising of critical and radical geographies in Brazil, namely at the Department of Geography at the *Universidade de São Paulo* (USP), starting from the years of the military dictatorship which ruled that country from 1964 to 1985. This responds to recent calls for doing histories of radical

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geography from different standpoints, beyond the classical Northern ‘core’ which remains ‘Anglo-American and exclusionary’ (Craggs and Neate 2019, 1). At the same time, I extend works discussing multiple exclusions in geography (Jöns, Monk, and Keighren 2017), and recent literature in feminist historical geography on women’s invisibility (Evans and Maddrell 2019; Rothenberg, Domosh and Morin 2016; McDonagh 2018) showing how academic careers still suffer from several kinds of ‘everyday discrimination’ (Maddrell, Thomas and Wyse 2019, 5). As most of these works focus on the USA or the UK, it is urgent to consider other countries, languages and cultures to foster intersectional critiques of academic discriminations and to further question the lingering universalism of Anglo-centred narrations, including in feminist geographies (Garcia-Ramon 2012).

My work also responds to the recent book edited by Trevor Barnes and Eric Sheppard on the history of North American ‘Radical Geography’. Several chapters of this work deconstruct ‘heroic’ legends on this movement by witnessing the masculinist behaviour of some of its leaders, mostly ‘white men’ (Barnes and Sheppard 2019, 18) fostering a ‘masculinist interpretation of Marxism’ (Huber, Knudson and Tapp 2019, 104) in departments where senior advisers could call female students and researchers “‘honey” and “babe” among other inappropriate comments’ (Huber, Knudson and Tapp 2019, 104). This research also corrects the prevailing emphasis on some ‘big men’ such as Milton Santos and Josué de Castro, which characterises the recent rediscovery of Brazilian critical geographies (Melgaço 2017; Davies 2019a). While archival collections of some eminent male geographers have been opened in Brazil (Ferretti 2019), few institutional archives document women’s leadership in critical geographical scholarship.

To reconstruct these stories, I draw upon published works and recollections of female critical geographers working at USP and on two new sets of sources. The first are three interviews that I made with some protagonists of different critical tendencies within USP geography: Amália Inés Geraiges de Lemos, Ana Fani Alessandri Carlos and Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza. The second are the autobiographical Memoirs surviving at the USP *Centro de Apoio à Pesquisa Histórica* (hereafter CAPH). These include documents from Rosa Ester Rossini, Maria Regina Cunha de Toledo Sader, Odette Carvalho de Lima Seabra, Sandra Lencioni and Amélia Luisa

Damiani. In the field of the history of geography, well-established methodologies exist in addressing autobiographical sources such as oral or written recollections. These allow analysing scholars' professional trajectories to understand geography's social and political contexts (Baigent and Novaes 2019; Scarim 2000; Van Meeteren 2019). However, it is worth explaining my use of these sources for this research.

The interviews were inspired by the notion of 'privileged witness', placing the subject's agency centre stage. Valorising individuals' voluntarist roles, I highlight dissidences, non-conformism and unorthodoxy rather than statistical trends, extending experiences such as Anne Buttimer's International Dialogue Project (Jones 2019). These interviews took place as free discussions with open-ended questions, following established approaches to 'elite interviews' (Harvey 2011). The interviewees were requested to provide their views on the role of women in the formation of critical geographies in Brazil, including at each time their own role, and the challenges that they faced as women geographers. I chose to first interview these three scholars because they represent different circuits that were all paramount in the construction of critical geographies at USP and in Brazil. As I detail below, Lemos is part of a transnational network of geographers who worked between the Universities of São Paulo and Buenos Aires. Carlos is a leading figure of the LABUR (*Laboratório de Geografia Urbana*), which encompasses research groups in critical urban geographies such as the GESP (*Grupo de Estudos sobre São Paulo*) and emanates from the so-called 'Lefebvre Group', a reading group which was established in 1976 and gathered a group of women who became leading scholars in Brazilian geography, as I detail below. Souza was a co-founder of the LABOPLAN (*Laboratório de Geografia Política, Planejamento Ambiental e Territorial*), which gathers Milton Santos's students. While USP critical geographical scholarship is not carried out exclusively at LABOPLAN and LABUR, these are nonetheless groups that well represent the formation of USP critical geographies from the 1970s onwards.

The Memoirs are a different source as they are written in a specific moment of USP scholars' careers, normally their bids for promotion to Full Professor. In these documents, the applicants are requested to describe their careers, highlighting their academic accomplishments. In most cases, the first chapters of these Memoirs include a certain amount of autobiographical

information, through which senior scholars often claim their successes in relation to their social origins or to other constraints. While the use of similar sources is consolidated in Brazilian scholarship to reconstruct histories of critical geographies (Verdi 2016), consulting materials that were produced for institutional reasons entails obvious precautions. Nevertheless, these documents are especially significant for my research for two main reasons. The first, they account for female leadership at the USP for their intrinsic nature of materials that scholars produce once they reach an important milestone in their career. The second, gaining academic success, most of these women felt the need of relating the difficulties that they faced due to their family origins or political ideas.

While this does not mean that I take all these claims as the ‘truth’, these sources expose a common background of political engagement and prickliness. Although these women do not represent a unique ‘group’, given that they worked on different projects and that an age difference of around a decade exists between the youngsters and the elders of them, there are relevant similarities in their stories. Eventually, they all encountered challenges during the dictatorship in different ways and at different stages, as students or junior academics.

Person	Sources	Dates of Graduation and PhD	Title of Doctoral Thesis	Laboratory and collaborations with other critical geographers
Amália Inés Gerages de Lemos	Interview; Published Recollections	Graduation (University of Mendoza): 1963 Master (USP): 1972 PhD (USP): 1980	<i>Exemplo de processo de metropolização recente na periferia da Grande São Paulo: Município de Itaquaquecetuba</i>	LABUR/LERGEO (USP) Milton Santos Maria Laura Silveira Monica Arroyo
Amélia Luisa Damiani	USP Memoir	Graduation (USP): 1975 Master (USP): 1985 PhD (USP): 1993	<i>A Cidade (Des) ordenada - Concepção e Cotidiano do Conjunto Habitacional Itaquera I</i>	LABUR (USP) 'Lefebvre Group'
Ana Fani Alessandri Carlos	Interview; USP Memoir; Published Recollections	Graduation (USP): 1975 Master (USP): 1979 PhD (USP): 1987	<i>A (Re)produção do Espaço Urbano</i>	GESP-LABUR (USP) 'Lefebvre Group' Milton Santos Wanderlei Messias da Costa Carlos Robert Moraes
Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza	Interview; Published Recollections	Graduation (USP): 1962 Master (University of Paris): 1967 PhD (University of Paris): 1975	<i>Ville/région - propositions méthodologiques</i>	LABOPLAN (USP) Armen Mamigonian Milton Santos Josué de Castro Manuel Correia de Andrade
Maria Regina Cunha de Toledo Sader	USP Memoir	Graduation (USP): 1963 Master (USP): 1970 PhD (USP): 1987	<i>Espaço e luta no Bico do Papagaio</i>	Manuel Correia de Andrade Ariovaldo Umbelino de Oliveira
Odette Carvalho de Lima Seabra	USP Memoir; Published Recollections	Graduation (USP): 1970 Master (USP): 1979 PhD (USP): 1987	<i>Os meandros dos rios nos meandros do poder: o processo de valorização dos rios e das varzeas do Tiête e do Pinheiros na cidade de São Paulo</i>	LABUR (USP) 'Lefebvre Group'
Rosa Ester Rossini	USP Memoir; Published Recollections	Graduation (USP): 1964 Master (USP): 1971 PhD (USP): 1975	<i>Contribuição ao estudo do êxodo rural no Estado de São Paulo</i>	LABOPLAN (USP) Milton Santos Armen Mamigonian
Sandra Lencioni	USP Memoir; Published Recollections	Graduation (USP): 1975 Master (USP): 1985 PhD (USP): 1991	<i>Reestruturação Urbano-Industrial. Centralização do Capital e Desconcentração da Metrópole de São Paulo. A Indústria Têxtil</i>	LERGEO (USP) 'Lefebvre Group' Wanderlei Messias da Costa Carlos Robert Moraes Manuel Correia de Andrade

**Table 1. Synthetic chart of the academic trajectories and networks of the eight women whose recollections are considered in this paper**

In the wider context of Brazilian society, historian Margareth Rago has shown how subjectivity and ethics inspired the engagement of some Brazilian women who fought the dictatorship in the 1970s. Engaging with the ancient Greek notion of parrhesia as discussed by Michel Foucault (2001 and 2019), Rago challenges the existing ‘silence on female autobiographical production’ (Rago 2015, 105) focusing on women’s life experiences that she deems disruptive for both the established political order and the conventional boundaries between the personal and political spheres. The writing (and telling) of oneself matches the concept of parrhesia as a way for challenging the power. While Rago does not address geographers’ biographies, the cases that I discuss extend these works and allow for connecting the opposition to the military dictatorship in Brazil and the ‘rise of women’ (Mitchell 2019) in Brazilian and Latin American critical geographies.

For Stephen Legg, the notion of parrhesia is part of a Foucauldian discursive elaboration of resistance as power (Legg 2019), and a polysemous term that can have multiple applications. I am interested here in the political definition of parrhesia as the courage of saying freely and boldly ‘something ... different from what the majority believes’ (Foucault 2001, 15), taking the risk of being prickly and nonconformist. For Foucault, parrhesia ‘is a form of criticism, either towards another or toward oneself’ (Foucault 2001, 17) and it can be a subversive practice, when ‘the *parrhesiastes* comes from “below” ... and is directed towards “above”’ (Foucault 2001, 18). In Euripides’s tragedies, the *parrhesiastes* is often a female figure: considering feminine parrhesia in Brazilian anti-dictatorship struggles as analysed by Rago, I would contend that this notion deserves further re-appropriations and re-elaborations in both critical geographies and feminist thinking.

Examples of outspokenness emerge from the recollections that I analyse regarding the battles that some interviewees fought with their families to start their academic careers (Lemos), their willingness to challenge some ‘untouchable’ male leaders such as Milton Santos (Carlos), or their way of claiming a nonconformist and relatively underrecognized professional trajectory

(Souza). In the Memoirs, other parrhesiastic elements emerge, such as the fact of paying a ‘price’ for expressing one’s ideas (Rago 2015, 120), that is prison and exile (Sader), delays in career progression (Sader, Seabra) and arrest during students’ mobilisations (Lencioni). Although heterogeneous and eventually directed to plural interlocutors, these critical and bold attitudes generally targeted the holders of political and academic power. These experiences can be considered as challenges from below to the *status quo*, by individuals who had to express their political engagement through scholarship, given the objective limitations to political freedom which existed during the hardest years of the dictatorship. A similar attitude appears today as most of them support current struggles against Bolsonaro’s government and in defence of public education in Brazil.

A recent special issue of *Gender Place and Culture* on worldwide feminist geographies discusses feminist scholarship as a pluralistic field that ‘varies across the globe’ and ‘must be heterogenous’ (Blidon and Zaragocin 2019, 917, 921), although encompassing ‘primarily the experiences of women’ (Blidon and Zaragocin 2019, 918). Based on these pluralistic grounds, my main argument is that the social and political contexts in which critical geographies originated at USP concurred in creating favourable circumstances for female leadership and for (partially) shattering patriarchy, even beyond explicit feminist activism. These contexts included solidarity between (female and male) students and teachers under the military dictatorship and the rising of generations of women who were gaining social emancipation as persons mostly coming from working-class families. For them, parrhesia has been a successful way to challenge a politically and academically conservative *status quo*. Another important circumstance was the transnational and cosmopolitan nature of these contexts, as most of these Paulista women in geography descend from European proletarian immigration or directly migrated from other Latin American countries such as Argentina. This kind of positionalities should also be considered in intersectional approaches, by adding further (sub)categories to the classical intersection of gender, race, and class, eventually migrant backgrounds and working-class origins. Although only few of these women declare themselves as ‘feminists’, they took their emancipation by themselves and imposed general respect for their work, providing practical examples of women’s liberation.

In the first part of my paper, I discuss the emergence of critical, radical and feminist geographies in the context of dictatorship and post-dictatorship Brazil. In the second part, I address the social engagement of transnational female geographers at USP, stressing the unorthodox professional trajectories of many of them. In the third part, I address the exceptional experience of the ‘Lefebvre Group’, whose members still contribute to USP research clusters such as the GESP and the LABUR. In the fourth part, I analyse openings and limitations of dealing with ‘big men’ as for the recollections of these outstanding Brazilian women, including the origins of the LABOPLAN.

### **1.Feminist, critical and radical geographies in Brazil**

In this paper, I use the definition of ‘critical and radical geographies’ as a broad umbrella under which also feminism is usually included in Latin American contexts (Ramírez Velázquez 2012). In Brazil, the military dictatorship was an important watershed which also affected the history of these geographies. Before the 1964 coup d’état, Brazilian geographers heavily relied on the regional approaches of French *Géographie humaine* that some of my interviewees call ‘banal’, ‘descriptive’ or ‘traditional’ geography for its lack of explicit political engagement. While these tendencies were brought to Brazil by the French university missions in the 1930s, a new interest for social matters characterised Brazilian geography after the 1956 International Geographical Congress celebrated in Rio de Janeiro (Borzacchiello 2016). Scholars such as Milton Santos and Manuel Correia de Andrade started to address matters of social planning, while Josué de Castro became famous worldwide for his works on the geographies of hunger and his activism in favour of the agrarian reform (Davies 2019b).

In 1964, in the context of this social unrest, the military government targeted numerous intellectuals, activists and politicians, suspected of ‘communism’, who were arrested, exiled or variously persecuted. While the new Junta revoked the political rights of Castro, who finally died in exile in 1973, Andrade and Santos were relatively luckier: Andrade was arrested for some months and spent later the academic year 1964-65 in France, being finally allowed to return to Brazil as he was no longer prosecuted. Santos lived abroad from 1964 to 1977, when the dictatorship became relatively less repressive under Ernesto Geisel’s presidency, and he could come back (Ferretti and Pedrosa 2018). After the 1978 Fortaleza Congress of the



Association of Brazilian Geographers (AGB), which is canonised as the starting point of Brazilian critical geographies (Borzacchiello 2016), Andrade and Santos became mythic figures for many younger geographers, who committed to political engagement and theoretical work as a challenge to the ‘descriptive’ approaches mentioned above.

While some Brazilian geographers had collaborated with the military government, including several exponents of ‘quantitative’ geography, a field of study which is still unpopular in radical milieus for this reason (Pedrosa 2015), repression severely hit Brazilian intellectuals from all scholarly disciplines in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1979, a group of USP academics published the *Black Book of the USP* (ADUSP 1979), that is one of the first pamphlets where scholars publicly denounced the direct responsibility of some of their colleagues in collaborating with political repression. The *Black Book* is considered as a classical source for Brazilian studies on the dictatorship, and it is often quoted in the recollections of USP radical geographers. This pamphlet documents how the USP was deemed a ‘subversives’ refuge’, as a pretext for violent police actions against students and for the sacking or forced retirement of dozens of professors, including famous Brazilian intellectuals such as Florestan Fernandes and Caio Prado Júnior. Police sources now disclosed at the State Archive of São Paulo show how, in the early 1970s, being in contact with foreign scholars meant being suspected (Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo, DEOPS, 50E 30 150, 28/02/1973). Leading figures of USP Geography were watched for their activities, including Maria Adélia de Souza, Léa Goldstein and Milton Santos (Pedrosa 2015, 25-26).

As for feminism, it emerged during the military dictatorship thanks to authors such as sociologist Heleieth Saffioti, who was among the firsts who connected feminist views to ideas of class solidarity in Brazil (Saffioti 1976), challenging what she called the ‘gender’s patriarchal order’ (Saffioti 2004, 31), which mobilises class, gender and race to create and violently reproduce patriarchal hierarchies. Yet, several authors lament a certain belatedness in the development of gendered perspectives in Brazilian and Latin American critical geographies. For Susana Veleda da Silva and Diana Lan, feminist tendencies remained concentrated in São Paulo before the 2000s and, even later, the introduction of gender in geographical curricula was not unchallenged (Silva and Lan 2007). Joseli Maria Silva and

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Marcio José Ornat have recently highlighted the dreadful situation that the wider Brazilian society still lives in terms of femicides, rapes and gendered violence, including homo and transphobic attacks (Silva and Ornat 2019). Yet, it is worth noting the powerful rising of feminist movements in South-American countries, despite the contradictions and challenges that several scholars have discussed (Mitchell 2020; Radcliffe 2015; Zaragocin 2019).

In Brazil, academic women face challenges in the context of power relations that are characterised by male models of academic performance penalising those who have more domestic duties. Discussing interviews and statistical data, Tamires Cesar shows that female representation in senior academic positions and in top-ranked publications in Brazil remains well below 50% as for Geography (Cesar 2019). Yet, Cesar refuses to present ‘women in the position of victims or unknowns in the scholarly world: this would be hypocrisy, given the number of women who emerged as exponents of Brazilian geographical thought from [her] research’ (Cesar 2019, 137), although she rightly claims that they still deserve much more visibility. Some of these arguments chime with the interviews that are discussed below: one can argue that it is also thanks to the pioneering women whose stories are told here that such debates are now prominent in Brazil.

Finally, postcolonial and decolonial feminisms challenge classical universalisms of European origin, showing how the feminist field is complicated and varied in Latin America. On the one hand, debates are ongoing around Maria Lugones’s notion that ‘indigenous societies did not have “gender” before European intrusion’ (Mendoza 2015, 116), and on Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s claims that the definitive step for institutionalising patriarchy in the Andean areas was the constitution of national states (Cusicanqui, 2010). On the other, scholars acknowledge the need for intersectional approaches addressing the ‘co-constitution of systems of power—gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality’ (Mendoza 2015, 104) arguing that: ‘There is no singular view of gender or how it intersects with multiple axes of power, including those of race, place, class, and sex’ (Asher 2017, 520). As I show in the next sections, intersectional approaches broadly inform work by USP women in geography, even when these approaches do not walk under this name.

## 2. Transnational and committed women

An important notion which allows understanding these stories is transnationalism. A transnational and multilingual dimension characterised works by several USP women in geography under three distinct forms. The first was scholars' migration to Brazil from other Latin American countries. The second was family origin in the traditional European proletarian migration to São Paulo. The third was exile under the Dictatorship, which paralleled experiences of more famous scholars such as Santos. Indeed, the 'exiled geographers' were not only men: in 1970, USP social geographer Regina Sader was arrested with her husband and served 'a short prison term' (Sader 1988, 4). On that occasion, Sader's research materials were seized, confirming how scholarly work was directly targeted by repression. In the following years, Sader lived between France and Chile (Verdi 2016). In 1973, she was also expelled from the Andean country, where she had become active in local geographers' networks: in her Memoir she claims that, after 'the military coup that removed President Allende ... we lost everything' (Sader 1988, 5). Then, she went to France where she remained until 1979, when she returned to Brazil. There, Sader's appointment to the USP was illegally delayed for three years due to the political suspicions which concerned her.

Yet, the dictatorship did not prevent other transnational scholars, such as Argentinian geographer Amália Inés Geraiges de Lemos, who is based in São Paulo since the 1960s, from migrating to USP. In her interview with me, Lemos evokes the violence of the dictatorship, arguing that even including certain authors in the curricula could be dangerous. It was: 'Something that you cannot imagine ... At any moment, when you were lecturing, they could open the door with machine-guns in their hands. Military men entered, you could even be a white-haired professor ... they told you "shut up if you don't want to be arrested with your students"' (Lemos 2019). Asked about women's role at USP and in Brazilian geography, Lemos is proud in highlighting that the first geographer who obtained a PhD at USP was 'a woman, Maria Conceição de Carvalho, a Pierre Monbeig's student, in 1946', and in claiming that: 'There is a strong women's influence here. Yet, I don't know if I cannot say that there is no masculinism, because there are certain men who became myths' (Lemos 2019). It was especially the case with Santos, whose writings, according to Lemos, 'came clandestinely to us' (Lemos 1996, 240), during the years of his exile. Asked on whether she had experienced or

witnessed overt professional gender discrimination, Lemos responds that this was not the case at USP, claiming that women, including herself, Souza and some ‘Lefebvre Group’ members, have been among the most productive postgraduate supervisors.

For Lemos, the university experience also meant emancipation from the subaltern position that women had in her background of origin, the region of Mendoza, in Argentina. When Lemos announced her intention to start university, in 1958: ‘This upset my family’ (Lemos 2019). Studying was not considered as a suitable activity for a girl and was even detrimental for her reputation as a future housewife. With humour, Lemos recollects how: ‘They started to introduce me to friends and relatives’ sons ... but I wanted to study. I was a feminist who was not aware of being a feminist’ (Lemos 2019). Finally, these battles were won, and here stands the key point in Lemos’s reflections on her trajectory: without even having heard about feminist theories, many Latin American women of her generation successfully fought ‘to quit the house, to quit the kitchen’ (Lemos 2019). Lemos endorses the current waves of gender studies as ‘very good’, concluding that it was also the outspokenness of her generation which allowed establishing female leadership. Today, she continues supervising and publishing, boldly claiming for a specifically Latin American critical geography, called a Mestizo Geography (Lemos 2018).

The transnational dimension of Lemos’s journeys between Brazil and Argentina fostered further female collaborations between the geography departments of USP and the University of Buenos Aires. Lemos is proud of having mentored other women whose careers took place between these two departments, namely Maria Laura Silveira, the co-author of a famous monograph on Brazil with the late Santos (Santos and Silveira 2001), Monica Arroyo, currently at USP and ‘also very close to Milton’, and Perla Zusman, currently in Buenos Aires (Lemos 2019). Lemos also highlights the importance of Latin American geographical conferences such as the EGAL (*Encuentro de Geógrafos de América Latina*) in fostering transnationalism. These meetings challenged linguistic and nationalistic barriers which were exasperated in the decades of the military dictatorship, when Lemos ‘needed a visa for going to and coming back from Argentina’ (Lemos 2019). She tells an anecdote about the first of these meetings, which took

place in Águas de São Pedro, in the State of São Paulo in 1987, but: ‘Nobody knew that this was a Latin-American meeting ... look how much we were isolated!’ (Lemos 2019).

In this transnational context, links between geography and society were fostered by the fact that most of these scholars came from working-class and migrant families and did sometimes non-academic jobs before joining USP. Therefore, the ‘implicit feminism’ claimed by Lemos is far from elitism or from mainstream white/middle class narrations, which are disrupted by the professional trajectories of several Paulista women in geography. The city of São Paulo grew through different waves of migrations, including European workers who were especially responsible for introducing socialism and anarcho-syndicalism in Brazil (Romani 2002). The USP Memoirs show how most of these scholars came from Italian (and sometimes Spanish or Portuguese) migrant families, namely Rossini, Souza, Damiani, Carlos, Lencioni and Seabra. In their youth, some of them experienced hardship for reasons which were not only political, but also economic.

This was the case with Rossini, who produced impressive research in analysing the work conditions of female sugarcane labourers in the State of São Paulo (Rossini, 1988). Her figure stands as an exception here, given that she explicitly claimed feminism and gender as key scholarly concerns, being considered as the pioneer of feminist geographies in Brazil (Silva and Lan 2007; Silva and Ornat 2016). Her Memoir explains her interest in working-class women by the fact that she ‘lived with them’ since her childhood in a working-class family from Serra Azul, where ‘life was difficult [and] no woman had ever studied beyond the secondary level’ (Rossini 1991, 1,4). Like Lemos, Rossini recalls that it was not easy to convince her family that she wanted to attend university. Yet, her studies allowed her reaching independence by settling in a Ribeirão Preto pension, with ‘other daughters of poor workers’, and later in São Paulo (Rossini 1991, 6). There, Rossini had to earn her living while studying, and found initially a job as a private teacher, which was anyway insufficient to afford the costs of her life in the city: ‘During six months, I only ate potatoes with salt and lemon: it was the cheapest food’ (Rossini 1991, 10). After the 1964 military coup, the shared apartment where Rossini lived was soon ‘filled with people who had “the wrong documents”. We only thought that we had to support people who thought like us’ (Rossini 1991, 14). In the 1970s, Rossini

was finally tenured at the USP and held important positions in terms of leadership, including direction roles at the AGB and the foundation of the IGU Commission on Gender and Geography. Finally, she claimed that she was the first woman from her town ‘who had a bike, who entered university and who had an academic career’ (Rossini 1991, 21).

While Rossini, Lemos and Sader were slightly more senior, some of the ‘Lefebvre Group’ women confronted the dictatorship at earlier stages of their career, when they were students. Sandra Lencioni was involved in street confrontations against the military police, as she recounts in her Memoir and spells out more fully in her published recollections: ‘A brave youngster, I did not fear repression and confrontation with the police. Demonstrations where we ran to escape tear gas bombs frightened me, but this did not undermine my will ... In September 1966 ... the head-breakers reached me and brought me ... with other students, to the *Departamento de Ordem Política e Social* (DOPS) for a political screening’ (Lencioni 2016, 420). For Foucault, parrhesia also means ‘scandalous behaviour’ (Foucault 2001, 199). Thus, we can consider these students’ protests as outspoken attitudes which also implied taking risks, as the evoked ‘screening’ meant interrogatories which could be violent or lead people to imprisonment. Lencioni relates that she also had non-academic professional experiences, in planning and school teaching (Lencioni 2006), and that it was the idea of geographical dissidence, including the myth on the exiled geographers, that attracted her to the discipline (Lencioni 2016).

In another Memoir, Amélia Luisa Damiani recounts that she also came to university as an outsider, in 1971, after experiencing ‘the conditions of the proletarian family’ since her childhood in Barra Funda (Damiani 2009, 4). This was a ‘typical popular working-class neighbourhood’, where her grandparents migrated from different regions of Italy, and where her father worked as a printmaker and her mother as a laundress (Damiani 2009, 12-13). Yet, she had the occasion to live the thrilling ‘circumstances of women’s liberation’, developing her nonconformist attitudes from her early political experiences: ‘I was always uncomfortable with institutional relations ... I have a taste for the periphery, for the margin, for the frontier of belongings, including political ones’ (Damiani 2009, 5-6). Interested in Situationists and Lettrists’ works, Damiani first educated herself by reading ‘the books of the itinerant library’

and observing the socio-spatial segregation of women in her neighbourhood leading to ‘feminine alienation’ (Damiani 2009, 15-16). Damiani highlights the role that her USP teachers, including Rossini, played in ‘resisting the proposed banalisation [that is, political irrelevance]’ (Damiani 2009, 34) of the discipline in the dictatorship years, well before the return of Santos. It was independently from these ‘great men’ that Damiani understood geography as ‘emancipatory consciousness’ to be built through outspokenness, challenging the prevailing political and theoretical paradigms.

Odette Seabra equally claims that she was not ‘born as an academic’, coming likewise from a working-class family (Seabra 1988, 6). In her neighbourhood, her friends were ‘Italian and Jew[ish migrants]’ (Seabra 1988, 4). As she told to Paulo Scarim, she self-educated herself at the local library, where: ‘I read everything which fell under my eyes’ (Scarim 2000, 173). Two of her uncles were anarchists: in a humorous note, she writes that they unwittingly took turns ‘being in prison’ (Seabra 2005, 155). After the death of her father, a shoemaker, Seabra had to work at the desk of her mother’s (a Spanish migrant) small shop, and later in clerical work. This led her to consider study as a way for emancipation, after experiencing how: ‘The disciplined, invigilated and timed work ... with ignorant intermediate bosses, was an obstacle to reason’ (Seabra 1988, 4). Seabra took advantage of the USP evening courses which favoured workers’ attendance, so that she arrived at university being ‘older than my classmates – to avoid spending evenings watching tv’ (Scarim 2000, 167) and to avoid ending as a housewife.

Therefore, female leadership at the USP was built by scholars who were exceptionally motivated in pursuing social and intellectual redemption from their condition of academic outsiders, mostly due to gender, social class, or migrant condition. Concurrently, the various forms of transnationalism discussed above helped building the cosmopolitan and open-minded mentality that allowed for big renovations in Brazilian geography, as I explain below.

### **3. Reading Lefebvre in Brazil, and female networks**

In recollections by Carlos, Lencioni, Damiani and Seabra, 1976 is mentioned as a key year for the respective lives and careers. That year, Professor José Souza Martins proposed to a group of students and early career scholars to undertake an endeavour which might appear crazy in

today neoliberal university based on fast-learning and intellectual disengagement: nothing less than reading the entire body of work of Karl Marx, by meeting and discussing a part of this work each week. Although they do not report big issues with censorship as the dictatorship became relatively less repressive after 1975, the choice of the subject was a challenge to the political *status quo* (Martins 1996).

Similar reading groups were not extraneous to USP traditions, but in this case an unprecedented fact occurred. In 1958, a group composed by future famous scholars and politicians including Octávio Ianni and Fernando Henrique Cardoso started the collective reading of Marx's *Capital*. Yet, while in the '*Capital Group*', Lidiane Rodrigues notes 'the absence of women' (Rodrigues 2013, 46), the group established in 1976 was 'a substantially feminine class' (Damiani 2009, 4). Today, this finds a continuity in the aforementioned GESP: Cécile Gintrac acutely notes that: 'While the GESP does not style itself as a feminist group, in practice it is undeniably this. Fifteen members are women. They also hold the most prestigious positions: on the twelve professors, nine are women' (Gintrac 2015, 69). As the GESP, still chaired by Carlos, is one of the emanations of the 1976 reading group, this continuity of women's prominence confirms how deeply rooted female leadership is at USP.

In her interview with me, Carlos recollects this way the beginning of the 'Lefebvre Group': 'With a Marxist background ... all women, we started a course in sociology' (Carlos 2019). Female networking was not unusual at USP, as in several Memoirs one can find evidence of the supervising roles that were played by more senior women such as Nice Lecocq Muller and Léa Goldstein (Sader 1986). Yet, Seabra highlights how exceptional was preparing 'one hundred pages per week' (Scarim 2000, 195): once all available Marx's readings were done, they started reading Henri Lefebvre, who was likewise chosen for being a 'classic' of critical thinking, and continued until 1993 (Seabra 1988, 18). For Carlos, in the group there was a 'strong friendship and affection' (Carlos 2004, 24) among those whom Damiani calls 'my most intimate and beautiful mates' (Damiani 2009, 17). According to Lencioni, the group worked 'outside all established rules' (Lencioni 2006, 21). Yet, most of its early members reached promotions to full professor at USP, moving substantially from the exercise of parrhesia 'from below' to the institutional recognition of female leadership.

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The 'Lefebvre Group' was informed by some key principles that we should consider if we want to understand the specificities of Latin American critical geographies. First, its transcultural and multilingual dimension: Marx's works were not entirely available in Portuguese, so most of these readings were done in Spanish. Then, to read Lefebvre, it became necessary to use French (Carlos 2004, 17-18). Memoirs and recollections account for these scholars' research sojourns in European and Latin American countries, as they are all familiar with at least two or three languages. They are also translators, and not exclusively from Latin languages: for instance, Lencioni translated work 'from Doreen Massey' (Lencioni 2006, 24). This intellectual vibrancy was also associated with other two key characteristics of Latin American critical geographies. The first is interdisciplinarity, as these geographers read Marx and Lefebvre together with other social scientists (Carlos 2019). The second is what Lencioni defines 'the continuous strife' (Lencioni 2006, 38) for defending geography's intellectual and theoretical dimension from technocracy and utilitarianism. Multilingualism, socio-political engagement and intellectual depth count doubtlessly among the main contributions that geography can receive from this Southern scholarship.

Carlos was born in Barra Funda to 'a family of Italian migrants who sought their fortune in São Paulo' (Carlos 2004, 6). In her interview, she claims how her generation promoted the shift from the aforementioned 'traditional' to an 'engaged geography', challenging 'descriptive and positivist geography' (Carlos 2019). This implied giving much more value to theory, under the form of Marxism or other critical approaches. For most of her career, Carlos worked around Lefebvrian notions such as an 'attention to daily life which allows assuming notions that social relations are substantiated as spatial relations' (Carlos 2019). While it is impossible to account here for the complexity and originality of Carlos's readings of Lefebvre, it is worth noting that she addresses the French theorist's thinking in the context of her militant idea of urban geography targeting social and spatial justice. In 2012, the editors of *Geocrítica*, who granted Carlos their international prize as an acknowledgement of her career, wrote that: 'In her works, one perceives a feeling of anguish before injustices' and a drive towards 'a fully democratic and socialist society' (Geocrítica 2012).

Carlos considers that gender issues are not among her main concerns, as she is more interested in core-periphery relations. This includes lamenting the marginal position of Brazilian scholarly production, also due to the prevailing monolingualism of the Anglosphere: ‘We speak various languages but we are not heard, our publications are not read’ (Carlos 2019). Yet, Carlos does not deny the importance of considering gender issues in society, although she is wary of readings which are too specialised on a single axis, and argues that the task of critical thinking is to change the world, which requires ‘an alliance of gender, race and class’ (Carlos 2019). Although Carlos recognises that ‘masculinism exists’, she argues that ‘the class approach is more powerful’ and the centre-periphery relation as well (Carlos 2019). It is quite clear that these scholars developed their own ideas on the intersection of different approaches to social change, even without displaying labels such as ‘intersectionality’. It is worth noting that Carlos and her fiends claim to have been those who ‘did the political and epistemological rupture’ (Carlos 2019) that inaugurated critical geographies at USP well before Santos arrived there, explicitly challenging Santos’ primacy in establishing this field, which is often taken as gospel in Brazil (Ferretti and Pedrosa 2018).

Interrogated on what roles gender solidarity could have played in the academic establishment of the Lefebvre Group’s members, Carlos hypothesises that some mechanisms of collaboration worked because ‘women are less arrogant’ (Carlos 2019). Albeit this statement might seem essentialist, it recalls some classical features of feminist discussion groups, such as the possibility of freely discussing with peers without being bullied or undermined. Moreover, collaborative scholarly work is indicated as an ‘example of feminist practice’ (Blidon and Zaragocin 2019, 919). Despite her denial of having ever suffered overt gender discriminations, Carlos notes that there is some lingering naturalization of roles for which ‘women are considered to be better teachers’ (Carlos 2019) while men tend to have more visibility as scholarly ‘stars’. According to Carlos, this is an effect of ‘the very society where we live in, which made men more self-confident’ (Carlos 2019), while women are always requested to demonstrate their skills, and their careers may be slower.

From a feminist standpoint, gathering to read works of white prominent men, such as Marx and Lefebvre, was undeniably a contradiction, or at least a limitation, for a mostly female group.

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Yet, that reading group has given to its members an occasion to gain their social and professional emancipation in the context of social struggles and big transformations in Brazil. This pioneering example of female leadership has been so (relatively) successful that most of its protagonists did not even feel the need of claiming feminism, although, as noted by Gintrac, relevant feminist elements are deployed in their practices. These are further highlighted by these women's relations with 'big men' in Brazilian radical geography, and especially the most famous, Milton Santos, which are the focus of the next section.

#### **4. Between female leadership and 'big men'**

What is discussed above leads to interrogate the relationships between eminent women and eminent men in Brazilian critical geography, addressing the example of Milton Santos. Extending scholarship which traces transnational networks to understand Brazilian geographies (Ferretti and Pedrosa 2018), this section discusses how some women played key roles in shaping these circuits. While there is no evidence for arguing that the male critical geographers mentioned above put women down as it happened in other situations, Santos's name remains more famous than those of his closest collaborators such as Maria Laura Silveira and Maria Adélia de Souza. This latter claims a strong connection between her work and Santos's.

Like the other scholars mentioned above, Souza is proud of her origins in a working-class migrant family, from Portugal on the paternal side and from Southern Italy on the maternal one (Souza 2003). I interviewed Souza in her Campinas house, where she first asked me why I looked for her, as one of her key concerns is the neglect or forgetfulness of a critical discourse, due to the failure of establishing some 'institutionalisation' of critical geography in Brazilian curricula: 'There is no undergraduate or postgraduate programme which is informed to what I call a "critical geography" able to provide a method which can deal critically with the current world' (Souza 2019). A close Santos's friend, Souza recollects her 'little disagreements' with him, namely on the definition of 'geographical space' as 'instance', that is the key Santos's idea of space as 'used territory', consubstantial to social reproduction (Davies 2019b). There, Souza proposes a distinction between geographical space as social instance and 'used territory as a category for social analysis' (Souza 2019). Yet, for Souza, the big problem is that Santos,

in Brazil, is often quoted but hardly understood, also because he died in 2001, only five years after publishing his main theoretical contribution, that is *A Natureza do Espaço* (1996). This implies that he had little time to supervise enough PhDs to build ‘his’ own school.

Despite her admiration for Santos, Souza strongly claims her own accomplishments, lamenting how, in Brazil, ‘some male geographers’ (Souza 2019) took the most relevant institutional positions, despite many women had provided important contributions. Souza especially mentions some female geographers who were based in Rio de Janeiro, namely Bertha Becker, Lia Osório Machado, Fani Davidovich, Lysia Bernardes and Maria do Carmo Galvão. In this context, Souza laments that, coming from a planning background, she was ‘never recognized as a geographer’ (Souza 2019). Yet, she had a leading role in the 1975-1979 Second National Development Plan, that she considered as a relatively progressive accomplishment during the years of Geisel, and an experience as ‘the first woman who ran as a candidate for Mayor of São Paulo ... against the Right’ (Souza 2019). On that occasion, Souza laments that: ‘I received the worst masculinist attacks by women’ (Souza 2019). Matching Carlos’s arguments, Souza clarifies that: ‘I never militated as a feminist. Although recognizing the disparities existing between men and women, I always preferred militating in general politics’ (Souza 2019). Souza’s general attitude matches another form of parrhesia, that is the pride of being the one ‘who thinks this and that’ (Foucault 2001, 13) stating one’s opinions and personality before an environment that is perceived as hostile.

This is again related to the dictatorship. In 1964, Souza was doing her Geography Master in Paris where she remained until 1967. Yet, she was not spared by that period’s hardship, given that: ‘My friends were arrested, several of them were assassinated ... When I came back, I could not find a university job ... because I had been a student leader of the Extreme Left’ (Souza 2019). In Paris, where she early militated to shelter the first exiles coming after the coup (Cestaro 2016), Souza met an impressive sample of ‘big men’ in Brazilian critical scholarship, starting from economist Celso Furtado, who was exiled after the coup and was then teaching at the Sorbonne, where he supervised Souza.

In 1964-1965, Manuel Correia de Andrade lived in Paris and shared a flat with Souza: ‘We went together to Furtado’s classes and remained close friends’ (Souza 2019). It was indirectly thanks to Furtado that Souza met Santos for the first time, bumping literally into him in a Paris bookshop where she had just bought Santos’ latest book and suddenly recognized him after first seeing ‘a black hand’ (Souza 2019) which helped her in picking up her fallen books. In this spicy anecdote, she remembers that, when Santos proposed to walk her to the nearby café where she had appointment with Furtado to ‘give a hug’ to him, Souza was first disappointed by the idea of losing the time that Furtado had reserved for her supervision. At the end, she claims that, in this café, she took: ‘The most wonderful class of politics and of honoured Brazilians I have ever listened to in my life’ (Souza 2019). In Paris, Santos introduced Souza to his friend Josué de Castro, whose sadness for his condition of exile impressed Souza. Jokingly, she recollects: ‘All three of us were lunching, nobody of them was a “geographer”. [Santos had graduated in Law, Castro in Medicine]. I was the sole geographer and they discussed of geography without noticing my presence ... Jokingly I said: “I am the sole geographer, don’t you let me enter the discussion?”. Professor Josué liked me, he died remaining a friend of mine .... Imagine how it was hanging out with all these big figures: in the years of the Brazilian dictatorship, in Paris there were plenty of people I wanted to know’ (Souza 2019).

Yet, Souza was much more than a follower of these scholarly men. For instance, her role was instrumental in calling Santos at the USP in the 1980s. At that time Santos, back to Brazil since few years, was looking for a faculty position, and it was Souza, who held a position at the USP Department of Architecture, who convinced him to apply to the Department of Geography, winning a battle against local resistances. According to Souza, Santos applied for a competitive exam where a certain candidate was designed to win and, as a result: ‘One week later they cancelled the selection. [Then] a new call was opened and again we convinced Milton to apply’ (Souza 2003, 193). After several attempts, Souza and Santos both managed to enter the USP Department of Geography where, according to Souza, they were first considered as ‘undesirables’ by the most conservative faculty, but counted on at least two allies: Rossini and Armen Mamigonian, who participated in the constitution of ‘the internationally-renowned LABOPLAN’ (Souza 2003, 194).

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Souza argues that, in today Brazilian geography: ‘The most successful woman is Ana Fani [Carlos]’, also for being a very prolific author. Although Souza disagrees with the ‘Marxist-Lefebvrian’ approach, she recognizes that Carlos ‘is the great authority in Paulista geography today’, noticing with some pride that: ‘She was my student in the graduate programmes’ (Souza 2019). It is worth noting that Carlos recounts her own relation to Santos in parrhesiastic tones, given that, when they were colleagues at the USP in the 1980s and 1990s, Santos was already a senior respected figure, one that was hardly challenged. Carlos recalls with humour that she was: ‘The only one at the Department of Geography who dared to question him ... I used to provoke him, [saying]: “I disagree with this”, then we argued ... in the corridor; it was wonderful’ (Carlos 2019). Although this did not impede collaboration, and Carlos defines Santos as ‘a very sensitive person’ (Carlos 2019), she claims that Santos should not be considered as the symbol of Brazilian critical geographies, being only a representative of a wider movement. While neither Carlos nor Souza evoke explicitly patriarchy in relation to these leading male figures, they were indeed ready to challenge several authoritarian features of academy and society, building a new leadership as women, political dissidents and academic outsiders.

Like Carlos, Souza considers feminism alone as insufficient to foster social change. Yet, she stresses how, in Brazil, ‘women’s mortality for violence is brutal and growing’ (Souza 2019) and finally argues for considering some wider problems of Brazilian society. ‘We did not resolve the ... biggest structural problem we had, that was slavery, and here I stand with my dear Frantz Fanon ... either you resolve this problem either you do not resolve anything’ (Souza 2019). Souza adds some implicit references to authors such as Lugones and Cusicanqui: ‘From what I read, primitive societies here were not masculinist, it is Europe that brought masculinism here’ (Souza 2019). As for her male collaborators, Souza denies that they were ‘masculinist’, but she reports with some bitterness that they had more possibilities to publish and to gain visibility, as she told once to Santos who wished to involve her in one of his books: ‘I am a woman, I have a house to look after and children to raise ... Here men are freer, they do nothing at home!’ (Souza 2019). While this is an implicit confirmation of Cesar’s positions on the lasting marginalisation of women within a field informed to masculine models, Souza’s final

remarks also demonstrate the relevance of these interviews, given that such personal themes are hardly addressed in my interviewees' published output.

## **Conclusion**

It is possible to conclude that the networks of Brazilian critical geographers were more populated by women than what has been portrayed and, even though their intellectual production still needs to be internationally rediscovered at the level of their male fellows, their roles emerge clearly. They were not disciples, but protagonists in building Brazilian critical and radical geographies, for both producing original scholarship and establishing national and transnational scholarly networks. While one may object that most of them were inspired by male figures such as Marx, Lefebvre, Santos and others, these women were decisive in the critical and radical breakthrough of the discipline which occurred in the last years of the dictatorship, and it is also thanks to them that a wider range of authors and themes is considered in Brazilian geography today. While most of them do not claim a feminist identity, one can contend that there is not only one way to be scholars committed to equality and female leadership: their positions are finally not so far from intersectional approaches mobilising race and gender in addition to class.

This paper has shown that these women's common origin in working-class and migrant families—or the fact of having being migrants themselves, constitutes a relevant circumstance to understand how academic leadership was built from subaltern positionalities. During the dictatorship, these positionalities implied the need to challenge at the same time a political establishment and a conservative academic mood, which they call 'traditional geography'. Feminism could precede political consciousness, as suggested by Lemos, or simply walk under other names within a broader political engagement as shown by my conversations with Souza and Carlos. Considering the issues with masculinism that still exist worldwide in the academic field, there is definitively room for learning something from the South.

I have argued that these stories can be understood through the concept of parrhesia. The fact that most of these women recollect their outspoken attitudes towards political and professional constraints confirms Rago's claims on the role that autobiography can play in extending this

concept. Parrhesiastic attitudes also characterised these women's relations with their male colleagues, questioning commonplace narratives on 'big men' in radical and critical geographies and suggesting ways to see these figures differently. In the recollections of Carlos, Lemos, Souza and the others, people like Santos and Castro lose something of their heroic aura and fit better in their social contexts. Unlike what was reported for other cases, my interviewees do not mention men's witting attempts to reproduce academic patriarchy. Arguably, this was not due to a special kindness of Brazilian men, but to the existence of the conditions mentioned above for women to get respect and establish leadership, including solidarity between male and female scholars before difficult political circumstances. These included dictatorship and exile, in which men and women were in similar situations and being a 'great man' did not actually help.

Finally, these experiences of bold Brazilian women in geography call for the rediscovery of internationalism, cosmopolitanism and multilingualism as key features of critical scholarship. While transnationalism is a lens that can help understanding the exile and the circulation of critical geographies (Ferretti 2019), rediscovering geographies produced from migrant, working-class and non-Anglophone backgrounds should be a powerful drive for enhancing future research in feminist, critical and radical geographies at a global scale.

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