

Feminist militancy and the academy: survival and voluntary work

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ABSTRACT

The survival of an academic magazine in Brazil depends on assistance from financial agencies, institutional support and lots of work for editors, which does not always correspond to the prestige that occupying this function signifies. The Revista Estudos Feministas, because it is both academic and activist, has had support from a considerable amount of voluntary work of a number of people. This article discusses the journal's efforts to survive, the difficulties that it faces because it is seen by many as a militant vehicle and the support from volunteers that it receives precisely for this reason.

Key words: *militancy; academia; voluntary work.*

The dispute between activism and academics was a subject of much discussion within feminism.¹ Despite clear links between the two, each activity involves elements not accepted by the other – prejudices that certainly would not stand up to better analysis. The journal *Revista Estudos Feministas* (REF) is one of those places at which the work of militancy and scholarship come together, combine and complement each other. The academy is considered in this article as a place for scientific, university research that prepares new generations of researchers. Feminist militancy or activism is seen as a voluntary commitment to the struggle for gender equality.

There is already a consensus in the history of the women's and feminist movement in Brazil that, in the 1980s, universities came to include centers and study groups called "women's" or "feminist", or later "gender" studies. They included personalities who had begun work in a movement that gained strength after 1975, which the United Nations defined as International Women's Year and the beginning of the decade of women. Some of these people had been exiled for their activities in leftist groups, armed or otherwise, and while abroad they had contacts with feminism. In addition, while living in other countries, they conducted studies that allowed them to enter universities.

Of course it was not only after their return from exile that there was discussion at the universities of woman, women, feminism and gender. The pioneer work of Heleieth Saffiotti, *A mulher na sociedade de classes: mito e realidade*,² was the result of advanced scholarly study and presented in 1967.

It was, however, only in 1980, for example, that the first Women's Studies Center was created at the Catholic University at São Paulo, (PUC/SP), under the initiative of Fanny Tabak. In 1981, the Center for Studies, Documentation and Information about Women (NEDIM) was created at the Federal University at Ceará. In 1973, Zahidé Machado offered the course "Family and relations between the sexes" at the Federal University at Bahia.³ Studies conducted in the 1990s found nearly 150 university study centers.⁴ In 1997, a study by Miriam Grossi⁵ found 147 such centers.

These centers brought together – and continue to do so – researchers and professors who had been conducting work in isolation. They are usually places for exchange of experiences, documentation and theoretical discussion. There is no standard model: in each location they take on different forms.

Why did the university become an important space for feminism in the 1970s and, even more so in the 1980s? Perhaps because it was the place of greatest resistance to the military government, it appeared, to many, a much more legitimate space than the positions in the recently democratized State that they were offered. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the entrance was not easy: for many at the university, women at these various study centers who had graduated since the 1980s were considered "merely" feminists, and therefore without academic qualification. Meanwhile, feminists who continued in the movement, disqualified these same women as being "academics." This tension exists until today.

¹ PEDRO, 2005.

² SAFFIOTTI, 1979.

³ Ana Alice COSTA and Cecília SARDENBERG, 1994.

⁴ COSTA & SARDENBERG, 1994, p. 389.

⁵ GROSSI, 2004.

Other tensions permeate the groups involved with the women's and feminist movement. In the 1980s, another impasse divided them: whether to maintain the militancy involved in activities such as demonstrations, direct action among popular classes and the formation of consciousness groups, or to participate in the government that had recently emerged from the dictatorship. The debate at the time thus focused on how to maintain autonomy, which was so important to feminism of the 1970s,⁶ how to sustain active militancy, that is, how to continue all the work of cultural transformation of society if the militants continued to participate in positions within the government that invited them? That which was for some the end of political activities and feminism, was, for others, a opportunity to find new spaces for interference, to change society and or to seek individual career alternatives.

This confrontation between militancy and the university continued beyond the 1980s. The *Revista Estudos Feministas*, created in 1992, was a tributary of this debate.⁷ In the first phase of the journal a concern for autonomy in relation to any type of institution can be noted. This decision was evidently not a total consensus. It should be remembered it was not only the Brazilian feminist movement that was involved in this debate. The movements in other Latin American countries also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of institutionalization. At the feminist meeting at San Bernardo, in Argentina, in 1990, the event organizers rejected the government assistance that they had received.⁸

It was amid this debate that the *Revista Estudos Feministas* was created in 1992, and, although it was initially based at the Interdisciplinary Center for Contemporary Studies of the School of Communication of the Federal University at Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), support from the Fundação Ford was what guaranteed autonomy in relation to the university institution. The intention, according to Lena Lavinás, was to not be "directly institutional." Moreover: among other innovations, they planned "a rotation of the editorship of the magazine every two or three years, in order to contemplate, in the most democratic and broadest form possible, the plurality of the academic orientations that compose the wealth of the field and create new disciplinary connections."⁹ This rotation at the journal was linked to its goal to "ward off any institutional connotation."¹⁰ At the same time, however, there was a concern for providing the journal academic support. The first issue, in 1992, was released at the annual meeting of the National Association for Graduate Studies and Research in the Social Sciences (ANPOCS). In addition, Lena Lavinás, who signed the first editorial,¹¹ said that REF worked from the supposition of the inseparable nature of "academic and political practice," although each has "its own autonomy and dynamic."¹² The proposal thus intended to combine militancy with academic rigor.

Functioning, therefore, in a regime of institutional rotation, the second home to the journal, and where it remained throughout 1995 until mid 1996, was the Graduate Program in Social Sciences at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. From the second semester of

⁶ Sonia MIGUEL, 1988.

⁷ PEDRO, 2006, p. 53-63.

⁸ Nancy S. STERBBACH et al., 1994, p. 287.

⁹ LAVINAS, 1992, p. 4.

¹⁰ Albertina de Oliveira COSTA, 2004, p. 209.

¹¹ LAVINAS, 1992, p. 3.

¹² LAVINAS, 1992, p. 3.

1996 until 1999, the journal was based solely at the Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences at UFRJ.

In terms of resources, since 1994, REF received support from FINEP, CNPq and from the Fundação Universitária José Bonifácio. Thus, if on one hand the rotation of the institutions that hosted the journal guaranteed autonomy in relation to these institutions, on the other it reinforced a need to work for survival by turning to financial agencies from the academic field.

This survival was seriously threatened in 1999, and it was at this time that there was another institutional shift: the journal was moved to Florianópolis. Since 1998, editorials of the *Revista Estudos Feministas*, signed by Leila Linhares Barsted, had warned of the journal's financial difficulties. The resources that it was receiving from various financial agencies were not meeting the cost of remuneration for the journal's employees. In addition, the number of subscriptions was not enough to guarantee autonomy. Thus, the journal's move to Florianópolis also represented the recognition that the institutional tie and support that it could receive from UFSC offered a possibility for survival.

In Santa Catarina, it was Miriam Pillar Grossi¹³ – well known for her research in the field of gender and feminism – who received the proposal to continue the journal's activities. At that time I – Joana Maria Pedro – was director of the Center for Philosophy and Human Sciences (CFH) at the Federal University at Santa Catarina and together with a group of people at this center and from the Center for Communication and Expression (CCE), we had been organizing, every two years since 1994, an international and interdisciplinary encounter called “Fazendo Gênero” [Making Gender], at which we brought together men and women researchers involved with the issues of feminism and gender. It was, certainly, the involvement in these activities that made the researchers at UFSC qualified to receive the journal.

The transfer to Florianópolis was not a rushed decision. Miriam Pillar Grossi and Cláudia de Lima Costa – the first editors¹⁴ – and the entire team conducted countless meetings with the editors in Rio and with representatives of the university in Florianópolis. In relation to what happened in Rio de Janeiro, we can affirm that REF no longer had the desired “autonomy,” because it had become “directly institutional,” which was not part of the initial project in 1992. The journal thus became an academic activity at UFSC, involving two educational centers, CFH and CCE; on the other hand, it gained institutional infrastructure. Volume 7 was published with this arrangement, and included issues number 1 and 2 of 1999.

Another change was that of frequency. Since 2004, we began to publish three issues per year, in an attempt to meet the demands of one of our indexers: SciELO. This indexer came to demand that journals in the field of the Human Sciences initially publish three and then four issues per year. After convoking the other journals and entering in contact with SciELO representatives to demonstrate the difficulty that this demand would present, our editor at the time, Luzinete Simões Minella, together with editors from other journals, were able to persuade SciELO to withdraw the requirement. Nevertheless, *Revista Estudos Feministas* began to publish three issues per year, not only to meet the demands, but also because the number of quality articles, dossiers and thematic sections required this expansion.

¹³ GROSSI, 2004, p. 215.

¹⁴ Miriam Grossi and Cláudia de Lima Costa were editors of REF from 1999 - 2001.

Whether in Rio de Janeiro, or in Santa Catarina, *Revista Estudos Feministas* has never been able to survive with earnings from subscriptions, even if countless campaigns and promotions have been made. In Santa Catarina, we have been able to significantly increase the number of subscriptions – we received from Rio de Janeiro only three subscriptions that were up to date in their payments. We now have 150 subscriptions; but, even so, these do not cover publishing costs. Public funds and those from other financial agencies continue to be essential. It is important to emphasize that all of the publishing work is voluntary. What we pay for services is very little compared with the amount of unpaid work that produces the journal.

In any case, we must recognize that it is the institutionalization of the journal at the Federal University at Santa Catarina that has provided it a basic support structure. This, together with financial support and subscriptions, have allowed its survival until now. At UFSC, REF has had, since 1999, an infrastructure, which if not extensive, provides the minimum conditions needed to maintain its existence. This includes a room, on the third floor of CFH, with air conditioning and a telephone – with electricity and telephone paid for by the university.

In addition, CFH provides a secretary, Carmem Ramos, who has been accompanying the magazine since it came to UFSC. Her presence is very important, to the degree that it guarantees a living memory of what has happened. Different people have taken turns coordinating the journal, and there have been different interns as well; but fortunately Carmem has remained as secretary.

At the beginning of its stay at UFSC, REF had occupied a much smaller space at CFH. It had been in a tiny ground floor room, which we called the “drawer.” Today, although we still do not have the space we would like, the office has expanded considerably, providing room for file storage.

Another element that is part of the infrastructure is the guarantee, since 2005, of postage for the journal, which is a significant cost that had been the sole responsibility of CFH and is now shared with CCE.

Over the years, we have received direct and indirect assistance from some financing agencies. I am calling direct assistance that which is aimed directly at the publication of the journal, and indirect that aimed at an event that involved publication of a part of the journal in its budget.

Indirect support:

Year	Amount	Origin
2002	R\$ 280.842,32	Fundação Ford – allocated to the Portal Feminista and to the formation of the Network of Feminist Publications
2003	R\$ 24.595,00	Special Secretariat for Women’s Policies – for the Encounter of Feminist Publications
2005	R\$ 23.080,00	Institute of International Education (IIE) – secured through the Fundação Ford for the circulation of the Revista at events in Brazil
2007	R\$ 17.000,00	FAPESC – for the 15 years of REF

Direct support:

Year	Amount	Origin
1999	R\$ 12.050,00	CNPq
2000	R\$ 15.000,00	CNPq
2001	R\$ 24.000,00	CNPq
2002	R\$ 17.000,00	CNPq
2003	R\$ 21.600,00	CNPq
2004	R\$ 37.000,00	CNPq
2005	R\$ 23.000,00	CNPq
2005	R\$ 30.000,00	SEPM
2006	R\$ 15.000,00	CNPq
2006	R\$ 15.000,00	CAPES
2006	R\$ 10.000,00	CEPESC
2007	R\$ 20.000,00	CAPES/CNPq

Total direct support by year:

YEAR	CNPq	SEPM	CAPES	CEPESC	TOTAL
1999	12.050,00				12.050,00
2000	15.000,00				15.000,00
2001	24.000,00				24.000,00
2002	17.000,00				17.000,00
2003	21.600,00				21.600,00
2004	37.000,00				37.000,00
2005	23.000,00	30.000,00			53.000,00
2006	15.000,00		15.000,00	10.000,00	40.000,00
2007	10.000,00		10.000,00		20.000,00
				Total	239.650,00

These resources are spent on the following items: a) editing; b) photolithography and cover; c) *laser film*; d) production of the cover; e) technical editing; f) printing; g) transcription of interviews; h) translations; i) toner; j) interns; maintenance of the *Revista Estudos Feministas* on the site of the Portal Feminista and digitalization of journals such as *Pagu*, *Gênero* and *Espaço Feminino* to be presented on this site; and m) layout.

Of all of these costs, the largest is for printing, or some R\$ 8.000,00, followed by editing, layout, and placement of data from the journals on the Portal Feminista, as well as maintenance of this portal. In this way, the average cost of a journal in printed and on-line format totals R\$ 18.000,00, for a total of R\$ 54.000,00 per year. This price does not include all of the voluntary work of the editors and the contributions made by the Federal University at Santa Catarina, which, as mentioned above, provide a large portion of the support. It is important to remember that this support from the university, as well as that from financial agencies such as CNPq and Capes, is directly related to the fact that the *Revista Estudos Feministas* is recognized as a journal of academic quality.

Only a small portion of the expenses have been covered by the sale of the journal and subscriptions, which, at this time, total only 150. The table below indicates the number of subscriptions each year..

SUBSCRIPTIONS

1996	155
1997	125
1998	81
1999	85
2000	284
2001	322
2002	416
2003	368
2004	277
2005	286
2006	320
2007	150

It is worth highlighting that, in 2002 and 2005, we received important contributions that allowed us to expand the number of subscriptions. The Fundação Ford and the Institute of International Education (IIE) provided funds that allowed the journal editors to attend various academic and feminist events where they secured subscriptions. We are continuing to work on this task, but without support. The presence of REF at events depends on the opportunity that the editors have to travel to meetings, seminars, or colloquiums, with their own or institutional support. At this time, the Fazendo Gênero event provides the best opportunity for capturing new subscriptions and to renovate existing ones. Thus, they are expanded every two years.

I would like to highlight, once again, the voluntary work that is undertaken at the *Revista Estudos Feministas*. For example, the general coordinating group of REF dedicates 15 hours a week to this task. This time is not considered in the hourly teaching, research and supervising duties of the university staff. That is, although it can be considered extension work, it is conducted in addition to a professor's other responsibilities.

Below I list some of the volunteer tasks that are conducted to publish the journal. I emphasize that this work is not conducted solely by the editors, who are professors at UFSC. The work is also conducted by professors at the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC). Many are on editorial boards of a number of journals, some come from the Federal University at Paraná (UFPR) and there are researchers from different places in Brazil and abroad, who kindly help by submitting article reviews.

I tried to divide the tasks by the steps of preparing the journal, which are described in sequence.

- 1) Selecting what will be published: a) initial reading by the editors of articles and texts that arrive, and issuing preliminary reviews, deciding how to proceed; b)

seeking reviewers who are able to collaborate; c) confirming that the reviewers respond, accept, and send the reviews; d) insisting when the reviewers do not respond to messages sent; e) reading the reviews sent, selecting the best articles, returning those rejected and suggesting changes; f) accompanying the organization of the dossiers by reading the articles, proposing changes and dialoging with the authors; g) stimulating the realization of interviews; h) receiving, reading and evaluating the interviews; and i) choosing which articles will go to the next issue of REF.

- 2) Organization of the editing: a) conducting meetings with specific editorial groups; b) conducting meetings with all the editors; and c) guaranteeing a minimum harmony among the various components, assuring a rotation of tasks, positions and prestige.
- 3) Promoting the journal: a) taking REF when attending a local, national or international event; b) mounting stands, selling journals, promoting subscriptions and making donations; c) promoting the subscriptions; and d) assembling, each year, a calendar to promote the journal.
- 4) Preparing the various parts of the printed journal: a) suggesting people to submit reviews; b) coordinating preparation of the Debate section; c) insisting that the people who agree to send articles do so within the deadline; d) writing the mini-biographies according to the norm; e) writing editorials; f) accompanying the technical review of the texts by contacting authors who do not respond to the reviewer; g) helping to find, on the internet, bibliographic references that the reviewer and the author do not have (or do not have time to find); h) coordinating translation of articles; i) finding images for the covers; j) checking the summaries; l) copy-editing the texts after layout and first printing; m) discussing, with the printer, the changes, prices, delivery, quality of printing; and n) taking the journal to the university post office.
- 5) Preparing the *on-line* journal: a) choosing the articles that will be published on SciELO, in English; b) participating in the SciELO meetings; c) accompanying the translation of the selected articles; and d) placing on the internet a list of the articles chosen and waiting patiently for some of the other editors to issue an opinion.
- 6) Maintaining the journal: a) paying for the services provided and the providers; b) preparing to projects request funding; c) writing requests for reconsideration if insufficient resources are sent; d) presenting progress report to financial agency on deadline; and e) insisting that CFH and CCE continue to cover expenses for the journal's postage.
- 7) Maintaining the journal's prestige: a) sending letters requesting reconsideration when the Qualis Capes commission does not give the journal a good review; b) looking for new indexes and maintaining the existing ones; c) receiving the at times virulent criticisms from authors who had their articles rejected by outside reviewers; d) editing outside reviews that arrive to avoid that authors receive harsh criticism; and e) administering the criticisms that come soon after publication of the journal, indicating remaining errors.

When we think of militancy, we often refer to the volunteer work of assistance, support to people or objectives to be achieved by a group, a class, a gender, a generation. To produce the *Revista Estudos Feministas* requires, as can be seen, a considerable amount

of voluntary work. It is thus possible to say that this is work of militancy. A counter argument could be that the people involved with the editing of journals earn academic prestige and qualified entries on their official resume [Currículo Lattes] and, therefore, enjoy a return for this work. Nevertheless, producing a journal such as *Revista Estudos Feministas* also involves putting up with the disdain that some people in the academy express for a journal with an activist objective.

It is obvious that it is not only the *Revista Estudos Feministas* that demands this amount of voluntary work. Editors at other academic journals experience the same drama. Most of them have very little – if any - human resources support, that is, only one person is responsible for all of the editing functions, which often leads to problems with the frequency of the journal. Nevertheless, the work of this person is recognized academically by his or her peers.

This finding leads me to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of participating in editing the *Revista Estudos Feministas*. The considerable disadvantage is the constant criticism from peers that it is a militant journal; nevertheless, it is the very militant nature of the journal that stimulates the expressive participation of the team in the large quantity of voluntary work. The very militancy that is responsible for the lack of academic prestige for those who work at the journal, is precisely what stimulates their work.

Another characteristic that has helped to achieve support is the adoption of a rotation in the journal's different editorial positions. There is no single "editor" of the journal who remains in the post for years. There are editorial boards, there are editors. There is no clear division - as is customary at other publications – between the people who only undertake specific tasks, while others decide the policies and enjoy the little prestige that an editor enjoys. To be involved in any of the tasks at REF, to belong to the editorial group, involves a lot of work, but also signifies an opportunity to participate in making decisions and to come to be recognized as being part of this journal, that is to find oneself in it.

It is clearly not easy to administrate the conflicts that arise in a horizontal editorial group such as this. Nevertheless, until now, the disputes and the conflicts have been less than the effort, the support, the solidarity, the commitment. That is, *Revista Estudos Feministas* has been able to survive by balancing scholarship and militancy and is completing 15 years of existence.

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