

**Global Feminisms
Comparative Case Studies
Of Militant and Intellectual Women**

BRAZIL

Maria Amélia (Amelinha) Teles

Interviewed by Sueann Caulfield

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Maria Amelia Teles, born in 1944, is a founding member of the São Paulo Women's Union (*União das Mulheres de São Paulo*), a feminist NGO focusing on the fight against domestic violence and for women's empowerment and rights. She is a former member of the Brazilian Communist Party and, in the 1970s, she was a victim of torture by the military regime that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985. Teles often lectures on feminism and human rights. She is also the author of several books on the history of feminism and women's rights in Brazil.

Sueann Caulfield is an Associate Professor in the History Department at the University of Michigan. She was the director of the Center for Latin American and the Caribbean Studies (LACS) (1999-2004) and currently directs the Brazil Initiative Social Science Network. She is a specialist in the history of contemporary Brazil, with an emphasis on gender and sexuality. She has received numerous awards and scholarships from the Fulbright Commission, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). She is the author of, among others, the books *In Defense of Honor: Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early Twentieth-Century Brazil* (*Em defesa da honra - Moralidade, modernidade e nação no Rio de Janeiro (1918-1940)*), *Honor, Status and Law in Modern Latin American History* (co-edited with Sarah Chambers and Lara Putnam), and several articles on gender and historiography, family rights, and race and sexuality in Brazil. Her current research focuses on family history, with a special emphasis on the history of fatherhood and legitimacy in twentieth century Brazil. She is particularly interested in the subject of human rights in Latin America, and has been participating in a series of workshops, transnational teaching projects and exchanges on issues such as justice and social action.

The **Global Feminisms Project**, located at the University of Michigan, started in 2002 from funding for interdisciplinary projects in partnership with institutions from other countries. The virtual archive includes interviews with activist and intellectual women from Brazil, China, India, Nicaragua, Poland and the United States.

Our collaborators in Brazil are researchers from the Oral History and Image Laboratory (*Laboratório de História Oral e Imagem – Labhoi*) of the Federal Fluminense University (*Universidade Federal Fluminense – UFF*) and the History, Memory, and Document Center (*Núcleo de História, Memória e Documento – NUMEM*) of the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (*Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro - UNIRIO*). The interviews in Brazil were conducted with the support of the Third Century Learning Initiative and the Brazil Initiative at the University of Michigan and, in Brazil, of the Foundation for Research Support of the State of Rio de Janeiro (*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro- FAPERJ*) and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico – CNPq*).

Sueann Caulfield (SC): This Global Feminisms Project interview is with Maria Amélia Teles, Amelinha, the well-known social justice and human rights activist in Brazil, and pioneering leader of the feminist movement as well as an intellectual, a researcher and author of several articles and academic books on feminism and social movements.

So, in the first part I would like to ask you about your personal life and your political role from the seventies to the nineties, and then we will move on to the more recent period. Thus, even though our talk will mainly focus on your role as a woman and leader of the feminist movements since the 1970s, I understand that it must be very difficult for you, if not impossible, to separate the totality of your personal life from your broader political activism, and secondly, from your work as a feminist. I understand that it must all be very intertwined. Therefore, we can start talking a little bit about your personal life, that is, where you think that your feminism began, how you think that your family experience or your upbringing influenced the sensibility that led you to articulate more specifically your commitment to feminism.

Maria Amélia Teles (AT): So, I was born in a communist family, thus I have been practicing politics practically since childhood because Brazil is a country of many contradictions, of many struggles and I am the daughter of a trade unionist, a longshoreman, so there was always some dispute, and I was already taking the side of the workers, as it was part of my everyday life. I became a political activist in my adolescence and started to work, trying to talk to men and women to get them to understand, and to participate in politics. And I encountered only men, my first experience was working only with men. Women never showed up. I invited men and women, but only men came [to meetings], and the women were forbidden by the men themselves, by their partners, brothers, fathers...Even the communist fathers, they thought that their daughter couldn't go to a meeting at night. I am talking here about the sixties in Brazil. And then I found it peculiar, because I went, I participated, but I was always alone, so I was an activist, the only woman, and I did a lot of work with workers and everything because very early on I got a job at a major steel factory, I passed the competitive entry exam. There was an exam, so all

the workers wanted to learn how to pass the exam. So they sought me out a lot, and I was able to handle this very well.

And suddenly, that is to say, there was a very big conflict in Brazil in the sixties, which ended in the military coup of 1964, and a little before that there was that Walk with God, for the Family and Freedom (*Marcha com Deus, pela Família e pela Liberdade*). I was living in Belo Horizonte at the time so I remember it very well, March 19th, 1964; on that day I do not even know why I did not go to work, and I went downtown, because I knew that the walk was going to happen and I wanted to see how they were going to do it, it wasn't that I participated, I did not, I was against that walk. The Walk with God, for the Family and Freedom was a right-wing walk, of the extreme right, it was the Catholic church, businessmen, the military, that wasn't me, I was always from the popular movement. But I wanted to see how they would do it. And suddenly I saw many women, many women went, I have never seen so many women together in my life as I have seen in this walk, never, decades have passed and that was remarkable. And they were black women, poor, from the favelas. They were the women whom I, together with some men, sought to convince about our struggle, about the importance of our struggle. Those women were against us at the time, not consciously, obviously, as I realized later, but it shocked me so much at that moment because I remember that I was on the street and I was crying, you know? I was eighteen years old and I was crying a lot, because I was thinking: listen, how can it be that the people for whom I am fighting, for whom I want freedom, are fighting against their own interests? And the women there, I just couldn't accept it...And it was very interesting because it was like this, the white women, the rich, middle class ones at the front and the black women behind, and everybody carrying little banners against the government, against communism, against the agrarian reform. I said to myself "man, those things are precisely what they need." I think at that moment I suddenly learned, I don't know if learned is the correct word, I became conscious, that there was something we were doing wrong. It wasn't possible, the people who should be with us were with them. So I started thinking about that, I questioned myself about the path we were taking. And then the military coup happened. The coup happened, and my father was arrested, and I went into hiding. There was nothing but persecution. And every time I tried to raise a discussion with

the left I was interrupted by other events, I wasn't able to develop the discussion. I was always choked because I wanted to debate, but there were people dying, there were people being arrested, you had to rush to help the families that were alone because a *companheiro* (comrade) had been arrested. So I did my work for the party, working at the press, and the debate did not happen. But still, in the short articles that you can find in the newspaper *The Working Class (A Classe Operaria)* of that period, you will see that there are some little things, here and there, they are very few, that talk about women, and it was me who was writing them, and I wrote...

SC: I'm sorry, in which newspaper, do you mean?

AT: It was always in *The Working Class (A Classe Operária)*, which was the newspaper of the party in which I militated. And I worked for that newspaper, the articles were very short even though I wrote long ones, but they cut them. They said that there were more important things going on, that they couldn't [publish them]. But what about next month? Something else happened. And I never had the space, never, and it was like that until 1968. 1968 was a very important year in the life of everyone who lived that time. It was something that changed lives: there was the sexual revolution, there was the cultural revolution, there were many revolutions, of the youth...And then women began to join the party, because there weren't any women before. But I couldn't talk to them because it was all compartmentalized, but I observed and found them far more advanced than me, those women, challenging more, you know, in the sense of rebellion, and I kept wanting to imitate those women, you know? Because I thought those women who came in, they were right, because those women were raising questions...They died, all of them died in the Araguaia guerrilla offensive. My feminist references, still a very embryonic process, but I saw one of them saying to a male leader: "You have to change your attitude because otherwise I am going to leave this party, this party needs to respect women." And I saw that, and I found it so beautiful, I said to myself, yes, and I began also to, I started to rebel, and soon I was arrested, too. I was arrested and my entire family, well, there is a whole other story of imprisonment, torture, witnessing murder and everything. So all that discussion that I began was once again interrupted. But then in prison -- after that all happens, you go to

prison -- there were twenty-three women political prisoners, and I learned a little bit from them as well. It is interesting that none of them, with the exception of Eleonora Menicucci, who is now a federal government minister, who was also my partner in jail, she is the only one who considers herself as a feminist today, so it is basically her and me. Eleonora Menicucci is Secretary of Public Policy for Women of the Presidency of the Republic and she is a feminist, from the feminist movement. She and I, from those twenty-three.

SC: She was from which party at the time?

AT: From another party, the POC, The Communist Workers Party (*Partido Operário Comunista*) and I was from the Communist Party (*Partido Comunista*). But everything had almost the same name, everything had the same name, but they were separate and divergent groups. But I was a good friend of hers, of Eleonora, I still am to this day. And I think that she and I were the feminists, because nobody was identifying like that at that time. But all of them contributed a lot to feminism without being aware of it. If you look for the others and you talk to them, and you tell them that in jail they became feminists, they will say "no, what do you mean? I never became a feminist." Do you understand? But there for me it helped a lot, it was the first women's collective in which I participated, in prison. I put it this way: the jail is all prison, pure restriction, full of barriers, but I had that freedom of living with women, I mean, contradictory or paradoxically I lived with these women, it was very good. And from there I left, the day I was out I went to...

SC: What year was that?

AT: 1974. I went to look for a job and for some other forms of participation, too. How am I going to participate in politics? And the women themselves taught me what I had to do when I went to look for a job. My husband was still in prison, I had two children, and I had my pregnant sister who gave birth in prison and I had to take care of the baby. So, actually, there were two women with three children to take care of everything. And the women who were spouses of the disappeared political activists, or were their partners, or mothers, or daughters, or sisters, they would come to me to find out if I had seen their disappeared

loved ones in jail. And then, I went, I was approaching that movement, and it was funny – it was always the women, always the women, I could mention several women. And one of them who wasn't related to a disappeared person, but she was from the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church (*Comissão de Justiça e Paz da Igreja Católica*), Margarida Genevois, came to me and said: "Do you want to give a statement about what you went through in jail?" It was a very clandestine thing, because you couldn't even denounce it, but I said, "I am going to," and I went with her there. It was in a basement. She took me there, I went there, I gave the testimony...

SC: Where was the basement?

AT: It was the basement of the metropolitan curia, they had a cellar wherever they could...

SC: They had the archive.

AT: They had the archive later, but they would collect the testimonies in a way that the police wouldn't discover. Then she said to me: "Whenever you can, you have to denounce the torture that you suffered." She said that to me, that is what women taught me, many women taught me. So I am grateful. The first job I got when I was out of the jail, it was a woman who helped me...

SC: What was the job?

AT: It was a job at a school for mentally disabled children here in Brooklin. The owner of the school was a German Jewish woman. And I went, people said that I wouldn't...I wasn't able to find a job, nothing, I wasn't able to. People would look at me like...you don't have your work permit signed, what did you do in previous years? If you don't have your work permit signed, nobody wants you. And then she told me, someone told me, look for that woman from that school in Brooklin, she will give you a job because she is very understanding and very supportive. Then I went there and she talked to me, she sent me to

take a test, an interview, she approved me and I started working, I received my first paycheck and...

SC: As a teacher?

AT: As a teacher, I was doing everything, I did everything she asked me to do. If I had to stay with the kids I would talk to them, tell stories, they had a huge yard, it looked like a farmhouse. I would take the children to play, the children, the adults, would climb the tree, I did everything with them. And then one day she asked me to come to her office, just after I received my first paycheck she asked me to come to her office. When she called me to her office, and I had not told her that I had been a political prisoner, I just told her that I needed the job. So, when she called me to her office, I thought there's something going on, maybe she found out that I was a political prisoner and would send me away. Because the stigma is very strong, right? You have been arrested, you know that the entire society rejects you, you don't even need to open your mouth, people reject you.

SC: Would that be because of fear, too?

AT: Out of fear, because, being an ex-prisoner, no matter the prison system that would be, everybody is...Even more so at that time when a political prisoner was considered a terrorist, it was heavy, it wasn't like just nothing. So, she called me in and I said, all right, she is going to send me away, what a pity, I thought. And so, I went to her office and I said: "Hi, how are you? Did you send for me?" And she said: "I did, do you know why? Were you a political prisoner?" When she said, "were you a political prisoner?" I thought, all right, goodbye, I will have to say that I was and I am going away. I said, "I was." She looked at me and said: "do you know why I am asking you this?" So, I said, "what happened?" And she replied: "It is because the DOPS (*Departamento de Ordem Política e Social*, Department of Political and Social Order) investigators, the police came here to tell me not to let you work here because you are a terrorist, you are being prosecuted under the national security law so you cannot work here. And do you know what I told them? She is going to work, yes, she is going to work here, she is already working, what is the problem? You are prosecuting

her, so you can continue doing that, as long as she is free she will work here. And they said, you have to dismiss her, you have to, I don't know what else. And I said, look, I don't have any reason to fire her." When she talked to me like that, wow, I hugged her and she hugged me and we cried so much, we were crying together. Then I said, wow, her name was Ilo, she passed away a few years ago. I said... "Look, I don't know what to say, I don't know how to thank you, because you were very kind to me, and very generous." And she said, "I am a German Jewish woman, I was also persecuted by the Nazis, I came here, to Brazil, fleeing the Nazis, so I know what you are going through." And I said "Look, now I understand that you also lived through this experience." Because she was so generous to me, so supportive and so brave. They could have attacked the school, they could have done something, threatened her, but she was not afraid, she said, "No, here, we are here to support one another." And I became her friend on that day and for the rest of my life, a true friend, a friend from the heart, I did everything [for] Ilo. So, the women, I am not the type who thinks that women are good and men are bad. No, it is not like that, but the women...I encountered very generous and supportive women. My lawyer was Dr. Rosa Cardoso, who is on the Rio Commission today, who was part of the National Truth Commission, and on the day I got out of jail she said, "Tomorrow I am going to get a court order and you are getting out of jail, a court order for your release." I told her: "Rosa, I am happy and at the same time I am sad, because, where will I go?" I had a house, but they dismantled it. They attack you, they destroy your house, they throw away all your belongings, they steal everything you have, so that you wouldn't have anything. What I had, the clothes that I had, were given to me by my companions in jail.

SC: Your children...

AT: My parents. No, my children have a terrible story, oh dear. My children were kidnapped and they stayed at the clandestine repression center that to this day I have not been able to locate, and then they were taken to the house of a police officer. My parents were in hiding and I could not look for them, and they were living in Rio de Janeiro, they did not live here in São Paulo. So, that meant that I did not have a place to go. Rosa looked at me and said: "do you know where you are going? You will go to my house, I am going to take you to my

house.” It was on the Alameda Santos, I stayed in her house for as long as I wanted, she even went to the trouble of giving me an envelope full of money and I said, Rosa, what is this? I am staying in your house...She said: “No, it is not me who is giving you this money. This is from people who sent it to me to give to you.” But, “who are these people?” “I cannot tell you, because everything is clandestine, and I cannot tell you who it is.” So I never knew if it was Rosa herself, and she made up that there were other people, or if there were other people. Rosa never told me, she said, “I am not going to tell you who it is, I cannot tell you.” “Rosa, is that money yours?” “It is not mine, it is from the people who...” so Rosa helped me a lot until I found that job, and I stayed there. There was always something. And then, in 1974, because of my contact with relatives of the disappeared and because of where I was working, I always worked with very distressed groups, because the relatives of the people with disabilities were also very much in pain. They were not politicized, but they were in pain, and they were very supportive of me. I used to tell my story to all the relatives who were there in that school, because we had a friendship, it created a very strong bond of affection. So they were also very supportive, and they helped me a lot, wow, I don’t have... And then I met a group of women who were fighting for political amnesty and who created *Brazil Woman (Brasil Mulher)*, that is why I wrote the book *From the Guerrilla Movement to the Feminist Press (Da guerrilla a imprensa feminista)*, because *Brazil Woman* ended up being the first feminist newspaper of that time, and I was participating in that group.

SC: What is the name...?

AT: *Brazil Woman (Brasil Mulher)*, the newspaper was called Brazil Woman. It was a newspaper whose objective was the fight for political amnesty, to talk about political persecution, but that from its first issue spoke of black women, you read there about black women, about old women, about common women, about women from the favelas, workers, so since I already had the experience from the previous struggle, it was there that I found my path.

SC: I wanted to ask you about that period, but first I would like just to clarify some of the things you have said. The first is that you said you passed a competitive exam and that steelworkers sought you out, what was the job you were competing for?

AT: To get a job in a steel factory. It was called Mannesmann Steel Company (*Companhia Siderúrgica Mannesmann*), it was the largest steel company, and the only one that made seamless steel tubes in the entire world, it was famous. And I was working in the administrative sector, but that competitive exam was applicable to everybody, the company had ten thousand employees, and everybody had to pass the exam, it was a...

SC: Even if they worked ...

AT: Any position, it was an exam that was like this, it required knowledge in various subjects. One part of the test was about knowledge of Portuguese, mathematics, and in that part you had to do math equations and the like. There was another part that was called “psychotechnical” (psychological, technical and occupational test). At the time it was very important, we always thought that the “psychotechnical” test was a capitalist technique to study the workers to see if we were going to produce enough for them, if we were hard working or not, if we were interested in work. And everyone was afraid of that psychotechnical test at that time, and workers were scared to death because they had to do math calculations, but even so, I taught them how to do calculations, how to write, what you have to write at minimum, you have to write this and that, you have to do multiplication, division, subtraction. That was that what I told them and I gave them tips and things. And another part was the psychotechnical exam, which had a group dynamic, they made you talk to each other, to use your imagination, so the workers were very afraid. Suddenly there is a group and they say things like, look, this is the situation. Let’s say, the company is on fire, what are you going to do? Do you understand? Let’s suppose, situations like that: the company had a power blackout, there is no energy, what are you going to do? They were very scared, what am I going to do? I am going to fail here, I am going to lose my opportunity to work, and that was a very good company, the salary was high, steelworkers at that time were...

SC: But did you have a university degree at that time?

AT: No, no, my college education is only going to happen in the twenty-first century my darling, just now. I never studied, like that, formally, I studied at the [Communist] party school. I studied, I even did translations, lots of translations.

SC: At the party school?

AT: At the party, even being clandestine, you had to study the texts, to account for that, and I don't know what else.

SC: To read Marx.

AT: To read Marx, Lenin, there were a lot of things for us to read. And you had to take a sort of small seminar, in small groups, you are going to read that and you will present that for another three, four people. They were very small groups because you couldn't gather too many people in the houses. And so we did that, but this kind of studying was worth nothing in the labor market, nothing, it's just to become, as they say, smart, because you know how to read and to write, at least you knew how to read and write.

SC: Were your parents college educated, middle-class people?

AT: No, they were just workers, they were not middle class.

SC: Were they also steelworkers?

AT: No, my father was a port operator, he worked at the port, a dockworker, later he went to work at the *Fecover de Santos*, which is near here, São Paulo. Later he became a dockworker, sorry I mean, later he became a railway worker.

SC: In São Paulo?

AT: No, there in Minas.

SC: That is why you lived in Minas.

AT: Exactly, at the time of the coup I was living in Minas.

SC: Two more things that you already talked about: first you said that when you watched the conservative women's protests, you were very surprised and sad to see many poor, black, working class women joining this conservative movement. How do you interpret this today?

AT: It's very clear to me. I understand it like this. The left always has a revolutionary intention, although nowadays it is less revolutionary, but it has never given enough importance to women, do you understand? So the women were never, let's put it like this, the focus of the left. The left wanted workers, but not women, because women for them, for the left of that time, and I think this was clear that at that time, the woman only **added work** to the organization. They would get pregnant, they menstruated, if a woman joined all the men would make fun of her.

SC: So, another thing that I wanted to clarify was when the women joined the party and questioned it. You said that you admired them a lot, that they said things and had attitudes that you admired. Why do you think that you found yourself in the position of looking admiringly at them? What did you admire in them? I'd like to know your experience and their experience.

AT: I was living in hiding, I hadn't had the experience that they had in the student movement, where there were men and women, in fact, more men than women at that time, right? But there were women, and they were very intellectual women who were in academia, I had never entered in the university. I was a woman of the party, inside a

clandestine party, so I did not have the same experience as them, I did not have the same intellectual training they had, they were much smarter, let's put it in this way, much sharper than me. And they already had the experience of collective reflection as women, and I did not, I never had that. I only began working with organized women and activists in 1975, which was the international year of the woman, promoted by the UN. We took advantage of that, it allowed us to discuss women's issues even under the dictatorship, because they were not going to be able to mess with us. It was that idea that we had, do you understand? I think we figured out how to take advantage of that very well, feminism in Brazil took great advantage of the UN initiative, do you understand? Because we were being massacred. So I saw those women, and I saw that they...there were already women who were conceiving of feminism in a more systematic way, in a more advanced way, in a more daring way, and then I rode their wave, I became part of that movement.

SC: I understand that at that time, with the political opening, women who were clandestine in Paris, or in other parts of Europe and the United States, returned to Brazil. They came with those ideas about feminism, a feminism of people who studied, who understood society in a different way. What I was going to ask you was that, even with that situation, when they arrived here and you started to create feminist movements, using the word feminism, there was a lot of reaction, lot of resistance. Why do think that was? I have heard many people say that feminism was a bourgeois movement, an imperialist imposition, that it was imposed from the outside, that we are the third world, and that feminism was part of a bourgeois middle class from the first world. How do you think that this debate happened here?

AT: Well, here it happened a lot inside the academic milieu, inside the trade union milieu, inside the intellectual milieu, you know, among the artists and all of that, this resistance against feminism. The left was very much against feminism and the political organizations that were still clandestine, they were against feminism, they thought it would divide the working class. Even that banner that you talked about today, against violence against women, people on the left thought that we shouldn't talk about that violence against women because the men who beat up women would be workers, so you are not going to pit

the male worker against the woman worker, they said. So, we were seeing that this was already going against women, regardless of whether or not we spoke up, it was a reality that already existed, we weren't the ones who invented violence against women. We wanted to give visibility to that violence, in order to confront it. Now, the issue of abortion: they thought we shouldn't raise the issue of abortion, and there is even an article by Lenin. Lenin advocates in favor of abortion; they said that Lenin did not defend it, but he did. I even read that, and there are other communists who defend it theoretically, you have that in the books, and so on. But the communists from here, the people who apply communism here are very backward and they said things like this: "we are not going to talk about abortion, because you will push away the Church, and we are calling on the progressive Church to create a front with us." So, you couldn't do anything, all our topics and demands were postponed, that's for later, they said. No...I think that those who made feminism in 1975, public -- because then we made it public, it was not legalized, but it was public -- we created a newspaper to show everybody -- and there was a lot of repression here. It was not during the political opening (*abertura*), no, people get this wrong, even historians confuse this. The repression from the time of President Geisel, because Geisel was until 1978, in 1978 Figueiredo took power. That repression was the cruelest, the most perverse in the history of Brazil, because it was when the most people were disappeared. Geisel did not take political prisoners or murder people -- Médici did, he did it like this: "terrorists were killed in a shootout." It was all a lie. But Geisel didn't do that; instead, Geisel made people disappear, the bodies disappeared, and that was the greatest tragedy that we lived through, that people are still living through today, the consequences, and that spread out beyond Brazil, nowadays you have all kinds of disappeared people. As an example, there is the case that became the most famous that is the one of Amarildo, but if you go and look there are several cases. Then, in 1975, when we went public, the repression was very strong here. Vladimir Herzog, who was a journalist from *TV Cultura*, the director, he was killed, he was murdered inside the DOI Codi (*Departamento de Operações de Informações – Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna*, Department of Information Operations – Internal Defense Operations Center, the Brazilian intelligence and repression agency under the military government of 1964-1985). The DOI Codi was in full swing, do you understand? But we were going to raise our own issues and to start thinking the following: "there is no

way; the parties are always going to think that we are always wrong, and coming at the wrong time,” do you understand? We were never getting there together, so much that we were going to be...We were going to do party activities and activities of the feminist movement, and it was almost as if those were two incompatible activities. You did one thing here and another thing there, it was double militancy, we have always done double militancy. And this double militancy was painful for us, it was painful, because you were there with the women, “we are going to embark on our struggle, our feminist struggle, we are going to create our autonomy.” And then, when we fought alongside the men, “no, that is not a priority, instead of you discussing abortion why don’t you discuss the steelworkers’ strike in the southern zone, it is more important to discuss the steelworkers’ strike.” The question of sexuality then, they thought of it as absurd. I heard a communist saying this: “for the working class, sex does not exist.” That is, they understood the working class as asexual, I am sure of that, I am absolutely certain of that. It was incoherent, do you understand? They made it an abstraction, to suit themselves, and sex...they had a dual morality, they had lovers outside their marriages – this was discovered later on, they had everything, right? But that’s how it was. So, this was the feminism that we -- I think that in this we were pioneers, because we confronted them, we confronted everything! We confronted the church, we confronted the party, we confronted the right, we confronted the left, we confronted everyone. And we did not even understand feminism all that well, from a theoretical point of view we did not have – listen, to read one page, two pages of feminism was a find, we did not have that. The only feminist book I had was Heleith Saffioti’s book, *Women in Class Society (A mulher na sociedade de classes)*, which was her thesis. It was very difficult for us to read that, but it was the only book that we read. And then it appeared, like that...

SC: Do you remember the date?

AT: She presented it in 1967, I think, 1967. It was the only book, the only one. We were discussing Simone de Beauvoir, someone discovered it...it was old, right, but we discovered it during those years, in 1970, here. So we read Simone de Beauvoir, we studied that article by Juliet Mitchell, “The Longest Revolution,” someone brings Shulamith Firestone, who was

an American. Someone brings Margaret Mead to us, and that is how we were finding out about them. Then someone brings Alexandra Kollontai, because they said “no, you are reading a lot of bourgeois things,” because Simone de Beauvoir was bourgeois for them, for the men and for the women, for many people. So we read Alexandra Kollontai, too, then some things by Inês Armand, who was a friend of Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, we read Rosa Luxemburg a little bit, but she did not have, you know, she did not address feminism, at least in the documents that came to us, she dealt more with economics, but we read that too. By then it was already a leftist front, we created a leftist front. It was interesting because it had women from all types of leftist clandestine political organizations. We were around thirty women, sometimes we spent the entire Sunday sitting inside and studying, one of us reading a mimeographed piece, some piece of information....Then those who were exiled in Paris, mainly, they began to send texts to us, to criticize, because they said that we were very sexist, because then in Paris other things were already being discussed. But our feminism was very much dredged up from our gut, it was very deeply felt...

SC: So, all of these people with whom you first had contact in prison and then, when everybody got out of jail, were they already creating these groups? Were there more communists or were they from other parties?

AT: They were from many parties, but all of them were prohibited, all of them were clandestine. All of them were banned and all of them were clandestine. Now, they were women I was meeting through this process.

SC: Did you study at the house of one of them one week, and at another’s house the following week?

AT: We did that sometimes, but we even came to rent a place for us, we got to ask Ruth Escobar, who was a famous artist here in Brazil at that time give us a place.... She gave us one of her houses, because she had many houses, an empty house, she said, go there and stay inside that one.

SC: Someone was her friend, and then she...

AT: We went there to ask her, she gave us the key and we went there. So, it was like that, after we got each other to contribute with a little money and we rented a little room there in Vila Madalena. Look, we did everything, everything.

SC: And when did you leave the Communist Party?

AT: I did not leave, I was expelled. I never left, I never left because of the following: I never found communism wrong, I think that communism is beautiful, I think that everybody needs to be treated equally, justice for everyone, land for all the people, food, everyone can study. I wanted everyone to have that, that it wouldn't remain in the hands of...like this: those who have the means will have [these things], and those who do not, we'll help them so they can have these things too, I think like that. So, I am never going to abandon that principle of the communism, I am very proud that I was like that during my entire life, that is what I learned from my parents. With my parents it was like that: if you arrived there hungry, you went to the kitchen. My father could bring a beggar to the the kitchen to eat, do you understand? You will not be hungry, we are going to split the food and everyone is going to eat. Now, those communists were not like that, they were not like that. So, I see that, in a way, I was always very idealistic; I was always very romantic even in designing a communist world. I think that it is good, we have to be. And I was expelled because of feminism, because of feminism and because of other very dirty politics that they engaged in. Parties, I don't like parties to this day. I was expelled, I don't know, it must be almost thirty years ago that I was expelled. But I was expelled even before then. Officially I was expelled thirty years ago, but that was a policy, the party began the process of...While I was clandestine I do not regret being part of the party, because that was different. Under the dictatorship there is no other way, you have to be part of a group, because how will you survive doing politics otherwise? Later, when we went through that process of redemocratization, they wanted a place in the government, they wanted to be elected at any cost, do you understand? They wanted to get votes from the people by any means. I don't like that, the manipulation of the opinion of the people, I think that this is not the way,

because it is not, do you understand? For instance, that story of I need to be in power because I am going to improve people's lives, it is that what they think. But then you seek power by any means, under any agreement. You end up putting more emphasis on the agreement than on the people, do you understand? So, I don't agree with that. And feminism was unbearable [for the party], and I was expelled because of feminism, I was expelled. So I went to give a speech, I was chosen by the entire feminist movement of Brazil to argue in favor of the legalization of the abortion at the Constituent Assembly (of 1987), I was the person who went there to speak. There is no record of that, but I went there to give a speech and to talk about the legalization of abortion. I made the speech, of course, with the help of several women who were doing everything with me, but the person who went there to present was me, on August 26th, 1987. That day I went there, and on August 28th, 1987 they expelled me. They couldn't handle it, do you understand? They couldn't stand it, and they were very cynical, I didn't like them because they, you see, I am from a party that formed the guerilla of Araguaia group. How many militants died there or are disappeared to this day? There is my brother in law, and my brother in law's father, I have another brother in law, and my friends. I had friends there with whom I had coffee, we lived together in those contraptions when we were in hiding, do you understand? And they did not give a damn, they never gave any explanation to their families. They should have looked for the families to say, look, this happened, but no, they did not, they thought that they did not have to explain anything to anyone. You had to give, do you understand? I am not here discussing whether it is right or wrong to create a guerrilla force, I am not discussing that. But I think that if we create a guerilla force, we have to explain. We did that, people had this intention, they thought that this action would bring us to a better place; it did not work. Our partners were killed or disappeared, but we are going to take responsibility or to accept that responsibility of searching, together with you, for the rest of our lives, isn't like that? At the very least, right?

SC: Did your parents survive?

AT: No, my parents died, but they died more of sadness, of old age. Not actually of old age, because my mother died practically at my age, but it was of...They had very hard lives being clandestine. It was very hard, very hard.

SC: I'm so sorry. And this much have made it even harder for you.

AT: Yes, for me and my family.

SC: Speaking of that period, and bridging to the more recent period, you said that 1975 was the international year of the woman, which gave a lot of support here in Brazil for talking about feminism, about women's right. And later the dictatorship ended, in that period when, at least for sociologists, for the people who study that moment in Brazil and in Latin America in general, it was a moment of what they call the new social movements, which is just what you are talking about, people mobilizing on issues outside the traditional parties of the left. So, how do you understand the importance of international feminist movements in promoting the movement and also in helping to define the issues, in Brazil, and in helping to define strategy? For example, you were involved in the first case of violence against a woman that was heard by the [Inter-American] Commission on Human Rights, even before the most famous case, the case of Maria da Penha. How did that strategy of using international institutions influence the growth and the greater acceptance of feminism within Brazil? And when do you think that this happened? Because in the 1970s, and even in the 1980s there was a lot of rejection, even by women where were mobilized, a rejection of the term feminism, the concept was still seen as a bourgeois concept, or an imperialist one. How was it changing and how did international influence help, or not help, bring about that change?

AT: This change takes place internally, too, because when Brazil began the process of redemocratization, it began to have more freedom. And freedom helps the development of ideas, thinking, to create new forms. And then there was an important process of globalization, too, that is, the 1990s saw many international meetings, where Brazilian feminists met other feminists and some went to Europe for these meetings, some to the

United States, others to Latin America. So, there were already meetings happening here in Brazil, that nowadays have stopped, but there were the national feminist encounters and you also had Latin American feminist encounters. We met so many feminists and we learned from them. We saw women saying what we wanted to say, they were better able to express themselves. So we were seeing that we could move forward. I think that they taught Brazilian women a lot, because we, Brazilian women are very participatory, very active, but they sometimes were more introspective and profound, so we started deepening our politics, deepening our autonomy and international solidarity, which I think grew a lot. We have to be more supportive of each other, to ask ourselves how we are carrying out the principles of feminism, the right to decide about our own bodies, our sexuality, the personal is political... Those discussions were extended much more, it was very beautiful for us to see all of that and I think that it was a process like that, we ended up being, each of us ended up integrating more with a specific group from abroad, from other countries, and we were... Soon after, the internet arrived, and that helped a lot, wow! Because before you had to write a letter and wait until that letter arrived... I did that a lot, now it is not like that, you post, you sat there, so... That grew a lot, the possibilities of this interaction, it was enriching us and it was also teaching us that many of the issues that we brought up here also existed there, that there were many points in common. That is what I found interesting, because we were suddenly here discussing one thing and they were there discussing another thing. That was very good, that whole process was very good.

SC: And did you also have any criticism? Because, for instance, Shulamith Firestone, whom you said you read in the 1970s when you were clandestine, together with other women writers from the United States and other countries made a strong critique of upper middle class American or European feminists for being, for not thinking, for believing that there was only one feminism and therefore ignoring differences among women. Did you enter in these debates from here?

AT: We participate in these debates to this day, this is a current discussion. It comes from four decades ago, from forty years ago, but it is current. It's funny because I am even participating in it now, yesterday, the day before yesterday. I participated in a feminist

meeting near here and the women were raising it, that is to say, there are mostly middle-class women, white women, and where are the black women from the periphery, where are the indigenous women, where are the working-class women? This is a discussion that we see very clearly, feminism carries this contradiction within itself. Because feminism...all the women in the world are discriminated against, all social classes, races and ethnicities, women of any sexual orientation, of any age group, of any territory.... People talk about Muslims, but also in the United States you have it, I also see it in France. Now, women are unequal. Among us there is a lot of inequality, the inequality that I am talking about. I mean, it is social, political, economic. This inequality is very strong. And how do you combine that? I think that feminism will always bring this contradiction. Even, if it were possible, in my dreams, I would like for society to be at least more egalitarian, and then people would be less unequal, independently of being women, men, it doesn't matter. But today, nowadays Brazil is experiencing enormous political turbulence. Today we are living through this because I think that when the left was in power it forgot, it did a lot of things, but it insisted on not letting the people politicize. It made sure that the people did not learn their history, because the left made many spurious deals, do you understand? Many spurious deals with the right, with the conservatives. Now the change is coming from the streets, because it is very cruel to see here on Paulista Avenue, which is eight blocks long, to see a torturer on the streets, in an *trio elétrico*¹ making a speech, asking for the return of the dictatorship, saying that the mistake that they made was to not have killed us all, they should have killed us all, and fifteen, sixteen-year-old girls taking selfies with them, and then posting them on Facebook. Ah, that hurts, it hurts. I see it nowadays, and I say this: what is our responsibility for this? Here the dictatorship ended – it never actually ended because it is right here -, but it was considered a re-democratization, as if these things were static. You have a whole process that does not end with a decree, and we did not even have a decree to end the dictatorship. But it does not end, I mean, you allow the institutions to continue cultivating backward ideas, fascist ideas. We have a lot of fascist institutions here, including the military, the army, the navy and the air force, they keep commemorating, in

¹ “Electric trio,” a term used to refer to floats mounted on a flatbed truck, frequently used during carnival and political campaigns.

the name of the fatherland, they keep commemorating a series of disastrous events for the nation. And we are living with this. So, this turbulence, it also ends up falling on the feminist movement, because the feminist movement, the feminist movements, they are [made up of] very unequal women, women from very different political experiences and political engagements. And each person reads this turbulence in their own way, because this turbulence now comes so fast, it comes very fast. Brazil seemed to be living that...Everybody was saying “ah, here everything is great, cool, you have the *Bolsa Família*² Program, you have that, the people are ok, they have jobs (...)”

SC: So, continuing the conversation, you were talking about the differences among women, which are still are very great, also forty years ago they were very great, so I would like to know if since the beginning the movement that you were talking about, the movement of feminist women of the 1970s and 1980s, who were beginning to form the first feminist groups, if those women who were organizing, if they already had, if you were conscious of the differences among women and if there was a lot of resistance against feminists from people who thought all feminists were from the upper middle class, or all of them were from a certain social group. Do you think that this has changed, or has not changed?

AT: What I think is that when we were initially organizing feminist groups, we were coming from the left, we were left-wing militants, the great majority of us. There was one or another woman who was not part of the left, but most of us were left-wing militants.

SC: Were most of you upper middle class or college graduates?

AT: There were many from the university, many, I wouldn't say that most of us, I don't know, but yes, there were only a few who were from outside of the university. The women who discussed feminism here, at least here in São Paulo, were middle class women and women from the university, intellectual women. And they were women who came from the left and had a very strong sense of the format of class struggle, and they were looking to

² Bolsa família (Family Grant program) was the signature social policy of the leftist regime of President Luis Inácio da Silva (known as Lula). Federal funds were dispersed to poor families with children in school.

Marxism and the class struggle for models for how to organize feminism. They were very much guided by this idea, because it was the experience that they had, concretely. So, I think that they and I, I am an intellectual, I mean, self-taught, because this is who I am, more like that. But I am also an intellectual in that sense, with a lot of questioning, to put it that way. I am not an academic, but I am full of questions. And so we had that format, but I was able to perceive the inequality among women because we were always talking about that. Also because I was very connected to biology, I even started studying biology in college, but I couldn't continue because of the military coup, but I had that idea of a biologist – just the idea because I don't know anything about biology, if you ask me I don't know anything. And biology has very much the idea of differences, we are all different, biologically all women are different, so much that you have a digital fingerprint, you have the type of hair, everything. Now, inequality was something that we stressed a lot, inequality is social; it is built by the society. Because having blue eyes, and others green, brown, black, it is more a question of biology itself, of genetics. Now, I am poor and you rich, that is a social construction, so we had a little bit that idea from the beginning, but we had no idea about how to deal with that, because our model was solely the model of class struggle. So, you wanted to put all our differences and inequalities, which are two different things. I remember very well that in the first protest here – I even wrote this in my book, in that book, *A Brief History of Feminism (Breve História do Feminismo)* -- the first protest, on March 8th, that was in 1976, we did an action inside MASP [Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Art Museum of São Paulo], in the MASP Auditorium, and when we...And who showed up: there were the people who were going to speak, there were a lot of police, a lot of infiltrators, lots of people who were watching the feminists. So we discussed who should speak, who was going to start, who spoke, how she would speak, everything was very measured, very heavy, I mean, we did not have...spontaneity could not prevail in our speeches, given the danger of the police arresting you right there. And a young woman appeared there, I don't know how, she was black, she was a lesbian and she had come from the United States. She had studied there, and she came up talking about feminism, of what was like to be a lesbian, of what was like to be black. That caused a shock as much to the police as to all of us, and I even wrote about that, and the feminist were more scared than the police themselves. Most of them were white, they were frightened by seeing that women because... because

she was talking about that, they were feeling scared about that, especially about homosexuality, maybe. I think that at that time it was the question of homosexuality that frightened them more than her being black, I have that impression, because we were called dykes by almost everyone. I mean, people called lesbians, dykes. They used to call us dykes, so we were all dykes, the dykes, the butch. And the feminists, those feminists, that year they did not want to be taken for dykes, because we were already considered to be. Which is silly, right, since you were already labelled that way. And nowadays people ask me, are you a dyke? I am a woman, you know. You are looking at me, what did you see? Am I or Am I not? I make fun of that, you know...What difference does it make if I am a dyke or if not? But that happened a lot, the sexual repression was very strong, very strong indeed, so the lesbian black woman who appeared there created a total scandal. And it was such a huge scandal that nobody remembers it, only me, I wrote about it. Nobody else. Sometimes I meet with some colleagues from that time and I say: "Do you remember that?....," "WHAT? was there a woman like that?" I say, yes, and we were all like, "look at that!." I found it beautiful, I always find it nice among the women, "wow, how brave she was, guys." But I also thought, she came from the United States, the United States was already in a different discussion, it was on another level, and we were under a dictatorship.

SC: What year was that?

AT: March of 1976. We were able to gather three hundred people, I mean, between us and the police, because the police also gathered a lot, so it was us and the police. But we did it anyway. It was something else, very strong. For us it was very strong, the first time that I could not only organize a March 8th, but to also be there in action, to be there participating, I had never participated in a March 8th in my life. So, I found that very nice, very cool. And, I mean, we did not know how to work with that inequality, to tell you the truth. But we were conscious, we wanted to, so much that I am going to show you: In *Brazil Woman (Brasil Mulher)* the first cover is a black woman, a young woman, barefoot, pregnant, playing with a child. I mean, we wanted to give visibility to this woman, we wanted to give visibility to that woman who was the reason for our feminism, do you understand?. But we did not know how to address it, I did not know how to deal with it. I remember that in one of the

women's meetings, and I did not write about that, but I should have, someday I will write about that, I do not remember having written about that, but actually, I will look to see if I wrote about it or not. I am saying that I did not, but sometimes I did write about that, I even remember that so strongly, like that, in my head, that a woman stood up and said: "A black woman is missing there." We replied, "no, here we are women," I mean, we tried to neutralize, to counteract or to stifle her question, do you understand? It was kind of ugly. I kept thinking, what an ugly thing. Because there was no black woman right there where she was asking, at the table. A black woman was down there, do you understand? It was at the PUC (Pontifical Catholic University), in the PUC theater. And then there was an event that was terrible, one that many American women even wrote about. I am not sure, some people already wrote about that. It was in 1985, at the meeting in Bertioga. It was the Latin American feminist encounter, in which a bus full of black women from Rio de Janeiro arrived but they couldn't get in, they remained outside. And then the discussion came up about whether that was racism, or if it was not racism. I mean, the allegation of the organizers was that they had not signed up.

SC: You had to pay to sign up.

AT: Yes. You had to pay to sign up. The organizers were in part right because they were going to pay for the meeting, do you understand? They had to have the money, they had to get the money from somewhere. But, on the other hand, they could have proposed, that for the meeting, they would collect from everyone in order to make it possible to include more black women, do you understand? Couldn't they do that? No, it remained an ugly fight, it was awful. I mean, the black women, I can speak without fear of making a mistake because I participated in many things, many struggles, the black women wanted to participate in feminism, but feminism did not accept them? It did not incorporate them in that first moment. And nowadays you have a lot of black feminism that questions white feminism. There are some people who say, once again you are replicating the United States, but it is not like that. The United States are racists, Brazil is too, that is why you repeat that. Brazil is sexist and the United States too, so you repeat that. I mean, when these men come to say that we are imitating Europe and the United States I reply: "and you? Who was Marx,

wasn't he German?." He wasn't Brazilian, so, I mean, you are doing that too. It is silly, the problem is not imitation, the problem is what you are proposing. I am trying to imitate those feminists because I want to propose feminism for us, and that is why I want to emulate, this is the importance that it has, if you are a feminist and I am trying to emulate you, no, I want to read, I want to do the things you do, it doesn't matter if I want to create a feminist movement here. The problem is that they are against feminism, so they keep making up that story, do you understand? Now, the black women wanted to participate, they wanted to. They wanted us to understand racism, and I think that we did not facilitate that – when I say “we” I mean white feminism, it did not facilitate that. And another thing that you ask is about the international human rights' system. It is what you would like to know now, right?

SC: We have to close, but if you can quickly summarize it...

AT: Because the issue of the human rights I think that we learned it in two strands: on the issue of the disappeared and on the issue of feminism. They were two movements that sought an international protection of rights. We learned about rights in the Constitution, in the struggle of 1988 and with the Citizenship Constitution [as the 1988 Constitution is known], which was the first time that we had formal equal rights in Brazil, even though some rights were lacking. I don't mean that it was like that in reality, no, because the reality is what it is, right? But we obtained them, and we started to learn to deal with rights, then, in that struggle. Feminism taught us that. Why, if the woman is there at home, and the man is at home, why is the man the head of the conjugal society? Is it because the Law says so, does it impose that? Then we started to discuss the question of heteronormativity, everything is what the Law establishes, defines, that is why I studied Law. I said “We had to deconstruct the Law by knowing it,” so that is why I went to study. And then we would also learn that there is an internal system of protection of rights and that there is also an international system. And then we would discuss, yes, without women the rights are not human rights, and there were other women who brought the discussion to Brazil. It wasn't us who invented that slogan, “without women the rights are not human,” it was other Latin American women. And then we learned that we had to have this written in some

international treaty, and it was at the Vienna Conference in 1993 when it was written in the platform, in the eighteenth article of the declaration, in which girls and women have inalienable rights...which are human rights. We then achieved the Belém do Pará Convention, therefore these conquests are going to...This process, at the same time as it deepened women's citizenship, it started to formalize, to structure women's citizenship and it also started instigating differences. So, the transsexual person, is she going to have equal rights? She does, but how? What are the rights that she needs in order to have equal rights? Then other sectors started to appear. Do black people have equal rights? They do. And why is it that they don't have equal rights? It says there that all people have equal rights, but black women do not have the same rights as white women, so what is needed? I think that people started to discover, I mean, to structure our thought better in relation to diverse identities and diversity started to be part of our vocabulary, and we addressed this mostly through politics. It is a process. Just because you discover yourself as a feminist does not mean that you already discover everything, no, it is a process. I think that we are always trying to learn how to walk.

SC: This brings us to a last question, then. What do you think that are the great achievements that the feminist movement has made in Brazil and what is the great challenge today?

AT: I think that, I mean, women in Brazil, conscious or not, they have more autonomy, much more autonomy. They are aware of their rights. Today you are going to see women talking like this: "I am going to such place because I have the right to go there." This is a current discussion, at least in urban areas, nowadays Brazil is very urbanized, it is enormously urbanized, and you see that consciousness. Nowadays a woman goes to work, she thinks that she has to work, nobody needs to tell her, she thinks that she has to work, at some point she has to have money for her to have independence. She chooses, she leaves her partner. Women, in terms of autonomy, it is not what we dreamed of, but they have more autonomy, they have more rights over their own bodies, women decide more. They are even used because of that, but they can make decisions. They are very consumed by the publicity, you have a pattern, a stereotype of the woman and all of that, but I think that the

achievements, I mean, in terms of citizenship, in terms of autonomy, in the world of work...Women today study more than men, women are going to school more than men, there's no doubt of that. Now, in terms of what women need, they need many things. You see it like this: we are in the job market but we earn less than men, and depending on the level of inequality our salary is lower. You can see it, black women are the ones who earn the least, in the salary pyramid they are the ones who have the lowest salary. Black men are earning less than white women in many cases. So, there is inequality there that we have not solved yet. On the contrary, in the world, I think that everything has deepened that inequality, the world is more unequal than ever, and Brazil has followed that strongly. Brazil has always been an unequal country and remains so, despite all the feminisms, with all the antiracist, antisexist, antilestobtransphobic struggles, with all the fights we have not managed to change the logic of the system that maintains inequality. We are underrepresented in politics. Women, if I am not mistaken, are the majority of the voters, of the electorate we are the largest population, but we are not occupying the political offices, our occupation in the political space is very small. We are one of the countries ...we are at the bottom in the rankings, I think that we are the hundred and twenty-first, some other time it is the hundred and...Hundred, fiftieth, I don't know. We are way behind, we are behind Iraq for you to understand, we are after Iraq, people say, I say, oh really? Listen, everybody thinks that Brazil is great, it is just cool, but Brazil is a backward country, and that makes it difficult to move forward, the materialization of the political conquest, the achievement. We had many achievements, but they were more in the formal field than in the concrete field. I think that violence against women is like this: we have a law, we talk about it in the morning, in the afternoon and at night, but the violence has not decreased. Women are killed, the murder of women here, every two hours a woman is killed in Brazil as a result of gender violence and now we are seeing throughout the Brazilian parliament in all its divisions, municipal, state, national, the most conservative parliament of the history of the country since 1964, for sure. And let's not mention others, because there must be others, you are historians and must see that Brazil has a terrible history of backward, conservative, elitist politics. So, we are going to see the following: gender cannot be part of the Municipal Plan of Education here in the city of São Paulo. São Paulo is not just anything. São Paulo is the biggest city in Brazil. It is the city that had the first public policies

for women; it is here where they were implemented. The first female police station is here in São Paulo, the first Council of the Feminine Condition, that is, the first public body for dealing with public policies for women was created here in São Paulo. You see, São Paulo has some things that are absurd, right? The first legal abortion service was done here in São Paulo, there in the Jabaquara Hospital. And now you cannot work with gender, do you believe that? You can't even talk about gender. And it is like this, they are not the conservative parties, all the left-wing parties also voted like that, the PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* – Workers' Party) I don't know what else...

SC: At the State level...?

AT: Municipal. There were only two male councilors who voted in favor of gender, so gender lost, because only two is not enough to...

SC: Can you say the name, the plan...

AT: Municipal Education.

SC: Every ten years, right?

AT: When they do it, yes, I think it is, right? It is ridiculous that you have to explain to these councilmen, and it is not only here in São Paulo, no, I am talking about São Paulo, but Campinas, too. I was there too, on Sunday they also voted against [allowing the study of gender in municipal schools]. The fundamentalists are in every sphere of political power, with a well-orchestrated, articulate campaign to move[educational] policy backwards. So you are going to see the...It is sad for you to have to explain to the councilmen that "UN Woman" exists. Gender is a category already adopted around the world, do you understand?, the UN...

SC: Just to make it clear. The movement is against including the study of gender in the educational plan for the municipalities in Brazil.

AT: The conservative movement, the fundamentalist movement. The women's movement doesn't. So it is us, the feminists, we are now in institutional terms, at the institutions, we are absolutely isolated, we are totally excluded. Because it is not enough that I am there, my idea has to be there too, my political proposal. This cannot be, I mean, you cannot talk anymore about abortion, Brazil is a country in where the word abortion cannot any longer be said. In fact, gender -- I already heard two female university professors tell me that they are afraid to talk about gender at the university. And these are two feminist women, left wing women, who always participated in the movement with me, they are not just any women, no, do you understand? Not just women that I saw in the street talking about that. They said "I'm scared Amelinha, because I am being threatened, I receive over the internet threats from students, from professors, I don't know from whom, from strangers, saying that I am a murderer of children because I speak about the legalization of the abortion, that I am trying to destroy the Brazilian family because I am talking about gender..." So, these people are scared. I was amazed when I saw two feminists talking like that. I said to myself, we are witnessing a rapid process, we are in a very fast backward moving process, so fast that we cannot even think straight about what to do, we are still perplexed, let's say.

SC: In that sense I am going to ask you one more question, the last one. What do you think about this new generation of feminist women, young women, who are coming out...?

AT: I think that this is great, first, I think it's great, because feminism...

SC: But do you find it meaningful? What do you think it means in terms of hope for the future?

AT: A lot, you know, a lot, because today, to every university I go to, I give a lot of lectures at universities, all of them have feminist collectives, all of them are bringing us in to talk because they think we have some...This is what I am talking about, I don't have any formula to solve the problems, I don't, but the process...we have to talk and to understand each other because sometimes they want some magic formula for having some... But of course I

understand their inexperience, they are very young so they think that you are going to suddenly come up with a rabbit out of the sleeve, a hat, a star, I am not going to do that. But I think it is very good that you have this feminism because it is the renewal of feminism, this is the maintenance, and this is the continuation of the struggle. Sometime from now I am going to be off this planet and they will be here continuing this. I think that this is very good. Now, of course, in a turbulent moment like this there are some wild ideas in the name of feminism, for sure. I would say that there are two issues that bother me. The first one is like, a terror of men, a fear of men, do you understand? I even understand the fear, but to repudiate men, I say “No, that’s not the way, this is very biologizing, to be angry with men because they are men,” do you understand? I think this is very...and we have even confronted biological determinism theoretically, and in practice, with the category of gender, we already denaturalized those inequalities, those differences, so let’s not be angry at men because they are men. We are going to remain, of course, we are against sexism. And the other thing is the horror that they have, like, there is a proposal of many feminists to abolish prostitution, in way that I think is very aggressive against the prostitutes. That bothers me a lot, because...leave the prostitutes alone. Even us here, wasn’t I saying that we have always been called whores, what is the problem? We are going to discuss, we are going to address these issues. They are people who have rights. I cannot be campaigning against prostitution, do you understand? I have to talk and to deal and to work with the prostitutes. I think this is very moralistic. I see those girls, of course that they are a sub-set of them, I am not going to say they are...Usually they are from the university, these girls. They go and get close to, you know, those girls, like the Catholic sisters, who walk around with a rosary and are against it. They are very moralizing and judgmental and this is a disservice to feminism. But on the whole, the majority of young feminists working in many different groups, young black women, trans women, many others – they are the future of feminism and it gives me hope, even in these bleak times. The struggle will continue.

SC: Amelinha Teles, I am so grateful to you for agreeing to this interview. This has been an amazing experience for me and for Marília Ariza and Maria ..., university students whom I should have introduced at the beginning, who have helped with the interview but did not

want to appear in the film – maybe you two can turn the camera around now? No?
(laughing off camera)

AT: You're welcome, you're welcome and good luck.