The claim to violence: gender, sexuality and the construction of the victim*

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Abstract

This article seeks to discuss how gender and sexuality relations operate in the weaving of narratives about violence and how the narrative claim to violence contributes to making gender and sexuality relations. I analyze the narratives employed in the "*Emília* case" – a case of rape and murder – by some of the women who were part of the *committee* dedicated to uncovering her disappearance. I address three main themes: a) that the "struggle for justice" requires the dispute for the victim's legitimacy as a victim; b) that, within these disputes, the publicization of intimate pain and suffering usually operates along the outlines of the legitimation of accusations, accusers and victims, mobilizing, for instance, notions of gender related to motherhood; and, lastly, c) that the claims to violence tend to actualize moral conventions surrounding sexuality, such as those involving notions of "prostitution" and "human trafficking".

Keywords: Violence, Victim, Gender, Sexuality.

For Mariza Corrêa

1. "He apologized": introduction

On Wednesday, September 19th, 2012, *Emília* disappeared[1]. She was 16 years old. That day, she had gone to school, as usual. After school, she headed towards the small farm where she lived with her mother and siblings, in the rural area of the city of *Rosário*, located in the semi-arid region of the state of Paraíba.[2] She never made it home. *Tereza*, her mother, became desperate. Her daughter had never disappeared, nor was she ever so late. *Tereza* left her home, dropped by the headquarters of the *Rosário* Rural Workers' Union to pick up photos of *Emília* and quickly left for the local police station. Upon arriving, no one greeted her: the police commissioner was no longer available. *Tereza* waited all night, keeping in touch with her fellow union directors, but received no news. Finally, on Thursday, the police commissioner met her. In the police station, *Tereza* recounted her daughter's disappearance and her concerns, but was met with indifference. The police commissioner did not believe anything serious could have happened, put no effort into solving her absence. "The police commissioner said 'no, she must be with her boyfriend, she'll be back on Tuesday'". "And then the police commissioner would always say: 'that girl ran away with her boyfriend''. In fact, *Tereza* was only able to file a report – making her daughter's disappearance official – on Tuesday, six days after she failed to come home.

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[1] In this article, I italicize emic expressions collected during my field work and all fictitious names, which protect the identities of the individuals who were part of my research. Additionally, I use quotation marks to indicate longer emic expressions, quotes from people I interviewed, citations within paragraphs, approximate classifications I have made and words and expressions that require special emphasis or are under question in specific points of the text.

[2] *Rosário* is a small city located within the vicinity of Campina Grande and which, according to the IBGE census, has just over 42 thousand inhabitants.

Over the course of those six days, however, *Tereza* and the other union directors joined forces in the search. Together, they had a greater chance of finding *Emília*. On the Friday following the disappearance, the ASA (Brazilian Semi-Arid Articulation, in Portuguese) women's working group was to meet in Campina Grande. As a rule, *Tereza* would attend the meeting. As *Emília* was missing, she did not. The other activists noted her absence and learned, through the *Rosário* unionists, of *Emília*'s disappearance and *Tereza*'s difficulties with the city's police commissioner. Certain organizations related to ASA then decided to join the unionists in the search for *Emília*. This is why ASA members sought out the women's police station in Campina Grande, with no success. "We were not welcomed". The women's police station claimed the case fell under the *Rosário* police station's jurisdiction. This was also why a meeting was called between the union and the ASA organizations that had gone to the police station. "We had to decided what do to."

At the meeting, activists from different social movements decided to create the *Emília Solidarity Committee*, through which they themselves began to investigate *Emília*'s disappearance and to pressure legislators and government agents to take action on the "case". The indifference persisted. Though the police commissioner, under pressure from the unionists and other *committee* members, was "talking to many people", his explanatory hypotheses for *Emília*'s disappearance easily fell apart. In addition to the lack of a "boyfriend", to whom the disappearance was attributed, there was also no desire on the part of her father, something the police commissioner believed to be true. "His theory was that she ran away to be with her father. But she hadn't lived with her father since she was seven." When *Emília*'s father left *Tereza*'s home, her children were young. Their current bonds were loose. "The father came into town, went to the police station. That destroyed the police commissioner's theory."

Faced with the delays in the official investigations, *Tereza* and the unionists reacted. The *committee*'s political ties guaranteed a larger repercussion for *Tereza*'s search. They aided

in publicizing the case in the media, for example, and catalyzed the media's pressure on State agents. These actions resulted in a meeting between the Paraíba State Secretary of Public Security and members of the *committee.* Among them, alongside *Tereza*, was *Francisca*, an activist from the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT, in Portuguese) who, little over a year after the meeting with the secretary, would recount to me, still filled with indignation, his answer to the group of women: "And I had the displeasure of hearing the secretary of public security say: 'this girl ran away with her boyfriend and you're here all worried." When *Tereza* and the *committee* found *Emília*'s body, she had been missing for 45 days.

In the morning of October 30th, 2012, *Francisca* had barely arrived at her office in the CPT headquarters in Campina Grande when she received a phone call. It was no later than 8:30 am. On the phone was *Jussara*, a member of one of the ASA organizations, who lived in *Estrela*, a city near *Rosário*. "*Jussara* called me and said: – '*Francisca*, they found a woman, I don't know the story yet, all I know is that they found her this morning, injured, she was taken to the Trauma Hospital'". *Francisca* hung up and contacted other *committee* members. It could be *Emília*. The *solidarity committee* then moved once more. In fact, mobilizing people to go to the Trauma Hospital, in Campina, to find out what had happened was not difficult. As *Mariana*, a *committee* member and an activist in a non-governmental agro-ecology organization later recounted, "the *committee* was alert to all cases". "That same day, a 14-year-old girl had died, who was also a victim of rape." According to *Mariana*, that teenager had died due to an infection resulting from the sexual assault. "It was an Internet case. She went out to meet the person, when she came home, her father kicked her out." It could be *Emília*. It was not, just as the woman *Jussara* had mentioned on the phone was also not *Emília*.

The woman in the Trauma Hospital's ICU was *Glória*, a victim of multiple bodily injuries, rape and attempted murder. At the end of the previous day, *Glória* had gone out for a walk. She was surprised by a car. In it was *Paulo*, a cowboy who worked at a farm near *Glória*'s house. *Paulo* raped her. *Mariana* recounts that

he "beat her a lot, she had to have 27 stitches, lost part of her ear. He thought she had died. She fainted, actually". Unconscious, *Glória* was thrown into a five-meter-deep ditch that housed one of the major pipes of CAGEPA, the Paraíba Water and Sewer Company. There were pieces of metal at the bottom of the ditch, which further hurt *Glória*. There were stairs leading up, out of the ditch, which were used by CAGEPA employees when they repaired the pipes. During the night, *Glória* woke up and fainted several times, until she finally reached the surface. According to *Francisca*, "she managed to go up. To this day, we don't know how. She said she heard a voice saying she had to go, that those people were connected to the story of the girl, whom she didn't know, who had disappeared."

    Glória walked until she found a house. Dazed, she knocked on the door and was met by a woman. "She was lucky because it was a community health agent who recognized her through her voice, because she was completely deformed". This woman took her to the Trauma Hospital, in Campina Grande, and news of the case began circulating in the city of *Estrela*. Thus, *Jussara* came to know of what had happened. Hence, *Francisca*, *Tereza* and the members of the *solidarity committee* also learned of the attack and went to the hospital. There, they met *Glória* and learned of *Paulo*'s existence. *Glória* recognized him immediately. After a few days at the hospital, still debilitated, *Glória* went to the Campina Grande women's police station. The *committee* members then connected the women's police station with the *Rosário* police station and convinced the *Rosário* police commissioner to investigate *Paulo*. Uncovering the connections was not difficult. After all, according to official records, *Glória* was the cowboy's fourth victim.

    According to *Mariana*, on February 22nd, 2012, close to that year's carnival, *Paulo* approached an 18-year-old *girl* on a street in *Estrela*. "He stopped a girl, put a gun to her head, told her to get into the car, took her to the woods and raped her with a gun to her head". Afterwards, he sought her out and threatened her to keep her from telling anyone about what had happened. During one of these "encounters", however, a watchman witnessed the threat

and decided to talk to her to find out what was happening. She told him. The watchman took her to the police station. An investigation was opened, but, for reasons unclear to *Mariana*, *Paulo* was only charged with illegal possession of weapons, not kidnapping or sexual assault. "She underwent a forensic examination, but he started threatening her and she left". Little over a month later, on April 5th, while he was still under the initial investigation, *Paulo* approached a second *girl*, this time a 16-year-old, also in *Estrela*. He was not, however, able to consummate the violence. At the moment when he was coercing her, at gunpoint, to enter the car, a classmate intervened and pulled her out of the vehicle. "The second girl went to the police station and made a statement, but that didn't increase the gravity of the first case". As far as we know, *Emília* was the third victim.

When *solidarity committee* members presented the *Rosário* police commissioner with the evidence produced by *Glória*'s statement to the Campina Grande women's police station, he began to act. "After the fourth crime, the Police commissioner was super competent", noted *Mariana*. *Paulo* was arrested on November 7th, 2012. He was fleeing by car, having packed all his belongings, to Rio Grande do Norte. Soon after he was arrested, he made a statement and admitted to the crimes. He confessed he had spent one week watching *Emília*, her schedule and the paths she took along the road. It was a deserted path, with few houses in the vicinity. *Paulo* stated he coerced *Emília* and put her in his car. He beat her. Raped her. Killed her. Four hours elapsed between the kidnapping and the rape. *Emília*'s death probably resulted from the trauma to the head caused by being struck with a shotgun. "If you look at the photos, she's completely disfigured. He beat her a lot. She suffered a lot." "He beat her to death." The body remained where it was thrown, in the pen of the farm where *Paulo* worked, the same place where most of the attacks happened and where the body was buried on the following day. *Paulo*'s arrest took place between 6:00 and 6:30 pm. By 8:30 pm, the location of *Emília*'s body was known. The pen was located near the house where *Paulo* lived with his wife and daughter. At the

time of *Emília*'s murder, *Paulo*'s daughter was two years old. His partner was 16. *Paulo* was 21. Faced with the results of the investigation, the Paraíba State Secretary of Public Security embarrassedly apologized to *Tereza*. He apologized.

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The narratives concerning the "*Emília* case" and the reflections I bring together in this text are part of my doctoral dissertation, for which I received my doctoral degree in March 2017, under the supervision of Regina Facchini, at the Social Sciences Graduate Program of the University of Campinas (Unicamp). In the pages of the third chapter, and indeed here, these narratives join innumerable other narratives about violence in that, in all of them, what I have called "images of brutality" (Efrem Filho, 2016) occupy a central place. This "brutality" operates, as I have come to realize, in two dimensions that are umbilically tied to one another, are difficult to differentiate from one another and survive amalgamated to one another. As a didactic recourse, one could say that the first of these dimensions concerns the body brutalized by the "act" of violence. The act corresponding to the shotgun blow to *Emília*'s head, for example. The second dimension consists of the body brutalized by the narratives that forge it in documents and accusations or even in the documents pertaining to police investigations and court cases.

This second dimension is actualized in the presence of the information regarding *Emília*'s fractured skull in public statements or news reports. The act must be weaved by the word, (re)constructed, (re)formulated. It, the act, is inaccessible to anyone who has not experienced or witnessed its deflagration. For this reason, the first dimension exists only through the second. One does not precede the other. They make one another dialectically. The *Emília Solidarity Committee* – just as social movements and other political actors acting in similar contexts – invests in narrative forms of contact, in the contexture of the narrative dimension through which violence may be rendered visible. It is not enough

to make *Emília*'s murder known, something which, for all formal purposes, the official statistics do not ignore and in fact demonstrate. It is indispensable to make it known that, before or after being raped, her face was disfigure, her skull, fractured.

My perception of the two dimensions based on which brutality is actualized results from Mariza Corrêa's (1983) analysis of the relationships between "acts" and "court documents". In the indispensable "Death in the family", Corrêa analyzes the constitutive narratives of jury trials and court documents. In the book's introduction, she draws attention, however, to a fundamental methodological dimension of her work: the unrecoverability of the "fact". In her object of analysis, the court documents, the "fact" or "act" that gives rise to the conflict gives way to competing versions of this act. In the court documents, there is a plurality of facts selected by an agent of the court to figure as "truth" or to counter other facts. There are facts whose nature as "fact", reality or unreality are disputed. There are, lastly, facts whose meanings are questioned, differently interpreted. There is, thus, no "act" in a pure state to be discovered. For this reason, according to Mariza Corrêa, it is up to her – that is, up to all of us – not to scrutinize the "truth of the facts", but to maintain the facts, analytically, in a suspended state. After all, "there no longer exists the possibility of reviving them through the court case, following the inverse path and arriving at the real facts, at the concrete relationships that exist behind every crime" (Corrêa, 1983:26).

Analytically maintaining the facts in a suspended state does not imply a pretension of neutrality toward them. On the contrary, it demands an understanding of the power relations that make up the narratives and their contentions, the crime "as a pretext for the scrutiny of the adequacy, or lack thereof, of the accused (and the victim) to the social norms and to their reinforcement or attenuation" (Corrêa, 1983:24). In other words, it demands the analytical – political, in any case – confrontation of the power relations that allow, or disallow, the narrative architecture of the act of brutalization as an image of brutality, of the victim as

victimizable, the accused as accusable. It means considering the non-obviousness of the act, the violence and the brutality. Consequently, it means investigating the power relations that act in the interstices of the two dimensions of brutality. It just so happens that the first dimension only exists through the second: not only the "act", but the very notion of "brutality" is also under conflict.

Conflicts thus represent the main object of this article's discussions. Following Mariza Corrêa's lead, I intend to understand the power relations that make up the narrative disputes surrounding the acts claimed by social movements as "violence". I thus intend to discuss how gender and sexuality relations operate in the weaving of narratives about violence and, conversely, how the narrative claim to violence contributes to making gender and sexuality relations – which are reciprocally constituted by relations of class, race, generation, territory, etc.[3] In order to accomplish this goal, I address three main themes: a) that the "fight for justice" requires, beforehand, a dispute for the victim's legitimacy as a victim, so that the images of brutality used by social movements perform victims' bodies and help to forge these bodies as victimized; b) that, within these disputes, the publicization of intimate pain and suffering operates along the outlines of the legitimation of accusations, accusers and victims, mobilizing, for instance, notions of gender related to motherhood in the performing and organization of the collective political subject who demands the acknowledgement of violence; and, lastly, c) that the narrative claims to violence tend to mobilize and actualize innumerable conventions of gender and sexuality, such as those

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[3] Due to the influence of authors such as Anne McClintock (2010) and Néstor Perlongher (2008), I have been using the concept of "constitutive reciprocities" (Efrem Filho, 2017) in order to understand the ways through which social power relations, such as class, territorial, gender, sexuality, generational and race relations, among others, create one another in the subject's experiences and in social conflicts. With this, I allow myself to also address gender and sexuality as languages that enable the understanding of other conflicts, as Isadora Lins França (2012) has done.

involving notions of "prostitution" and "human trafficking", resetting or re-tensioning moral conventions surrounding sexuality.

In order to address these three themes, I follow the narrative *corpus* that resulted from part of the field research for my doctoral dissertation. It consists of narratives that address violences that were identified, by the narrators, as "gender and sexuality violences". I accessed these narratives through my ethnographic work following social movement activities and the activities that members of the *Emília Solidarity Committee* engaged in, such as a public act against violence that took place in the city of *Rosário*. Additionally, and especially, these narratives about violence were collected through in-depth interviews I conducted with *committee* members. Over the course of my field work, I followed the methodological indication, apprehended over the course of the research, that a narrative about violence leads to other narratives about violence. There is always one more "case" to cite and dispute.

2. Disputes surrounding the victim

Violence is not obvious. On the contrary, it is a narrative terrain of disputes. These disputes, however, are directed both at the narrative engineering of "facts" – *Emília*'s disappearance, the theory that she ran away, the disfigurement of her face – and at the characters in these conflicting narratives. Violence is not obvious because "victims" are not obvious. Neither was *Emília*. Their bodies and lives are under question. Judith Butler's (2010b; 2002) assertion that there exists no pre-discursive sex that precedes relations of power is well-known within the field of gender and sexuality studies. This notion stems from an explicit dialogue with Michel Foucault's (2010) works and consolidated a rupture – already suggested in previous works in the gender studies field – with the definition of gender as a cultural formulation superposed to a preexisting, biologically predetermined sex. According to Butler, sex was always gender, just as nature was always history, biology was always discourse and, ultimately, power. This

analytical movement set in motion by Butler – which is not substantially different from Mariza Corrêa's (1983) interpretative framework regarding the correlation between "acts" and "court documents" – engendered, in her work (2010a; 2009) the conclusion that an "ontology of the body" would necessarily consist of a "social ontology". The body, too, just as sex, does not preexist culture and discourse. Now, the body obviously exists. It becomes sick or injured, grows old and wrinkled, but it does not exist in spite of the relationships that make it. Thus, one concludes that bodies are forged through social relations, just as are lives.

In her lexicon, Butler refers to "precarious lives". This precariousness of lives, however, contrary to what may be assumed, is not reduced to the universal potential for death, the certainty that all life is fragile and, ultimately, perishable. It is far more than that. A deep cut. Life is only apprehensible in the face of the circumstances in which its loss gains relevance. The value of life is given to the importance of loss. Life is precarious because it may be lost, but it may only be lost if it is worthy of grieving. In other words, the loss must be felt.

> The apprehension of grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of the precarious life. Grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of the living being as living, exposed to non-life from the start (Butler, 2010a:33).

Thus, the apprehension of life demands, first, the apprehension of the meaning of loss.

In Butler's theoretical framework, the concept of "apprehension" is connected to the concepts of "intelligibility", "recognizability" and "recognition". Her discussions of these terms are complex and, in my opinion, at times confusing and circular. Broadly speaking, "apprehension" refers to a way of knowing that is not yet "recognition". Knowing life and, therefore, its precariousness requires the intelligibility of life, that is, its location within general historical schemes that establish realms of what is

knowable. Intelligibility, in turn, enables – though it does not necessarily engender – the recognizability of life, which may, in turn, lead to the recognition of life. In this conceptual landscape, "recognition" is the stronger term, with origins in the Hegelian tradition, and the object of intense theoretical debates, while "apprehension" is a vaguer, less precise term that "can imply marking, registering, acknowledging without full cognition" (Butler, 2010a:18). What concerns us from these vocabulary circumvolutions is the idea that the social conflicts and relations that forge – or not – bodies mutually forge – or not – their intelligibilities (and, on different scales, apprehensions, recognizability and recognition).

Thus, the bodies and lives of "victims" are not obvious because they are not, a priori, obviously grievable, worthy of mourning. They lack legitimacy for the assumption of a generalized mourning. Following Butler's (2010b) inferences, one may say that *Emília*'s body and life are not obvious because their intelligibilities are still under question, that is, their "precariousness" has not yet been apprehended. From this it does not, however, follow that *Tereza*'s daughter is not somehow understandable as a life; her death, for all intents and purposes, at least once proven, made her a "victim" in a court case. One may, however, conclude that her body and her life are not entirely apprehensible, at least, for example, in terms of the gender, sexuality and class relations that constitute them and constitute the brutality that signaled her death and, previously, characterized the unwillingness of a police commissioner or a secretary of public security to address the case of a *girl* whom they were sure had merely run away with her boyfriend. *Emília*'s absence was not felt by the State agents initially mobilized by the person who felt her absence, her mother. Their initial refusal to look for the missing teenager and, more deeply, their non-apprehension of the "disappearance" itself – not a mere "elopement with her boyfriend" – publicly make up the unintelligibility of the absence, of the absent life and, reciprocally, of the "fact". *Emília* is sufficiently intelligible as a teenager, student, daughter of *Tereza*, a

rural unionist. But her absence does not count, lacks relevance and, thus, does not engender the apprehension of the meaning of loss.

Thus, the efforts made by *Tereza* or by the *Emília Solidarity Committee* necessarily direct themselves to the constitution of the victim narrative, a victim who must be legitimated and apprehended even in the dimensions that are not contained within State intelligibilities. A significant part of these efforts to construct the victim explore the performance of the body as victimized. Thus, narratives mobilize the cut up materiality of the bodies and their scars, skulls and their fractures, through gestures that claim images of brutality which enable the victim's edification. This is the reason for the relevance, in the contexture of narratives about violence, of the images of the destruction wrought on *Emília*'s body; of her face's laceration; of the head trauma caused by the blow from a shotgun; or of the bruises that were still on *Glória*'s face when she was able to leave the hospital and go to the police station; and of her ear, cut off by the fall. The narratives that create victims brutalize their bodies in order to guarantee them intelligibility through the brutalization.

As frightening as the images of brutality may be, the strategy employed by the narratives claiming violence is also finely complex. The narrative brutalization of the bodies pushes the body to the extreme. It mocks State and liberal normative assumptions regarding the universality of life or of the right to life. Once the body has been stretched to the limit, the subjects who present it publicly engender tensions between bodies and norms until the life under question becomes worthy of attention from other subjects who, as self-declared or believed-to-be defenders of "life", albeit as an abstraction, will not be able to ignore that under such tremendous scars, in a body as capable of bleeding as any other, lies a life, even if deceased. They will, of course, be able to ignore this, as they usually do, but that is precisely where the irony of the dispute lies. Thus, contradictorily, the narratives that brutalize acts and bodies intend to produce life.

As Bruna Mantese de Souza (2015) argues, also based on Michel Foucault's (2010; 2008) work, violence is productive, as is power. In the sense employed by Souza, and that I also employ, following her lead, violence is not merely responsible for the destruction or obliteration of bodies. Within certain narrative contexts, violence produces victims and, in order to do so, produces a precarious life. The victim comprises a body which is itself a testimony, or, as Souza writes, "body-testimony", "a materialization of the act of witnessing" (2015:192). The scars and fractures have an impact on those who encounter the narratives. Scars and fractures are, at once, the extreme of the body and the extreme of the narrative. The problem resides, however, in the fact that often, before State agents and in the interstices of perverse social conflicts, not even the extremes are convincing.

In this dispute, subjects also maneuver a "moral approval" towards certain characters. The victim is certainly among them. The narrative dedication to characterizing *Emília* as a loving, obedient daughter who was already engaged in political activism – according to Francisca, *Emília* participated in union activities – contrasts with the positions taken by the police agents and the secretary of public security that she had freely chosen to "run away with her boyfriend" or that she had "revolted" against a mother who "exploited" her. "A happy girl who lived with her mother and siblings, who participated in the union youth group (...). Things did not connect her with the rebellious teenager who runs away". According to Francisca, *Emília* would not willingly leave her family's home unless she had been "enticed" –"even then, she didn't have the characteristics of someone who would be easily enticed". "Even if she had been taken, it would have been by force". The figure *Emília* is attached to the mother's persona and to family conventions – especially that of family affection – and this attachment opposes the conjectures contained in the official allegations regarding *Emília*, a girl who supposedly ran away with her boyfriend without even notifying her family and who, therefore, moved away from family ties. The members of the *Solidarity Committee* bring *Emília* close to *Tereza*.

However, in addition to the victim, the moral approval must also be extended to the subjects working to construct the victim, including her mother. During the process of legitimizing *Emília*, before her body was found, *Tereza* also lacked public legitimacy. "*Tereza*, at that time, in addition to having no news of her daughter, was also being victimized because the tough guys at the police stations usually blame the mother, because the mother wasn't supposed to have left the daughter alone in the home" – recounted *Francisca*. *Tereza* was questioned. Her divorce from her children's father and her dedication to the rural workers' union, for example, are elements of her life trajectory which, according to *solidarity committee* members, were gossiped about in the city of *Rosário* and integrated *Tereza*'s supposed guilt in *Emília*'s disappearance. These reasons are based on disruptions of gender conventions and the model notion of family. Combating them requires narrative investment, even if this investment ratifies sister-moral conventions to those *Tereza* is accused of violating. If *Emília* is narratively taken to the streets, *Tereza* brings her home, close to herself. If *Tereza* is taken to the streets, outside marriage and domesticity, the *committee* and the other subjects involved in the search for *Emília* must invest in characterizing *Tereza* as a "good mother". In other words, the "mother" figure, usually employed in order to grant the victim validity, is itself the object of conflicts. The mother is not an unquestionable moral authority.

The moral approval of the victim and of the subjects working to structure her as such often requires contrasts. In the disputes surrounding the victim's admissibility, she is antagonistically differentiated from the agent who carried out the violence, the tormentor, and contrasted with a cruel context which, more than mere backdrop, is also part of the victimization. The victim must be accompanied by her narrative opposite. In *Francisca* and *Tereza*'s words, *Paulo* is a "monster" or a "maniac", someone with a "sick mind", that is, the archetypal tormentor who is situated between insanity and bestiality. The choice to inform me that, at the time of *Emília*'s murder, *Paulo*'s daughter was two years old and his partner, only 16, was, therefore, not gratuitous. The *girl*

became a mother when she was 14. Paulo became a father when we was 19. "I see an extremely cold person" – Mariana said to me. The "monster", however, is also not unaccompanied. He is surrounded by other subjects – the *committee* members are particularly suspicious of a boy, the stepson of a prominent local politician, who was apparently involved with selling illegal drugs and whom *Paulo* himself claimed had participated in the crimes –, but is mainly surrounded by complex and frightening networks which, when arranged narratively, convert *Rosário* into an agent of peril.

A few months before *Emília*'s disappearance, in February, 2012, a *collective rape* shook the city of *Rosário*. According to documents published by the social movements that supported the victims, five women were offered as "birthday presents". *Estevão*, an inhabitant of the city, orchestrated a birthday party for his brother, *Afonso*, in his own home, inviting women and setting up a simulated robbery. During the party, hooded men penetrated the house, trapped the women in different rooms and raped them. *Estevão* and *Afonso* also donned hoods and participated in the rapes. Amidst the violence, two women recognized *Estevão*. Both were killed. The sister of one of the women, however, while hearing her sister scream while she was being raped, caught the name *Estevão* among the noise. The information provided by this sister and the other surviving women, in addition to the men's confessions, led all rapists to be convicted. *Estevão* was also convicted of the two murders.

According to *Francisca* and to feminist movement activists with whom I spoke, *Estevão* and *Afonso* were prominent figures in the *Rosário* drug scene. The many weapons they owned, their possessions and the lack of information on income, employment or any regular work proved the brothers' involvement in the drug market. They also proved that very young men participated in the simulated robbery and, consequently, in the rapes. In the narratives constructed by *Francisca* and the activists I mentioned, the women were delivered as gifts from one brother to the other, but they were also sexually offered, amidst a territorial

demarcation process within the drug market, to the subjects involved with the violence liturgy.

    Tereza, *Emília*'s mother, was part of a commission of women who were fighting for punishment for those responsible for the *collective rape* and the murders of the two victims who recognized *Estevão*. The night before her daughter's disappearance, *Tereza* had participated in a meeting of this commission – "a meeting", according to *Francisca*, "that discussed the issue of punishment for the men who ordered the crimes, the issue of societal mobilization for justice for that rape". Although police investigations and judicial conclusions do not point to connections of causality between *Emília*'s case and the *collective rape*, although nothing connects *Paulo* to *Estevão* and *Afonso*, the presence of the *collective rape* in the narratives about *Emília*'s case are emblematic of *Rosário*'s characterization as a dangerous territory, itself an "image of brutality".

    From what I heard during the interviews with members of the *Emília Solidarity Committee*, *Rosário* is a city tangled up with accounts of violence, with cases and even more cases to be minutely described and scrutinized. In what I heard about *Rosário*, everything converges toward terror, but in such a way that the hypothesis of some correlation, however tenuous and vague, between the collective rape and *Emília*'s disappearance acted as a threatening specter during the search for *Tereza*'s daughter. An attack against *Tereza*, against the rural workers' union or against the women's commission could take place through an attack on *Emília*. The improbable is no barrier to fictional realities. Worse. The improbable joins other hypotheses that are to a greater or lesser extent (un)likely and, together, they fill in the fine narrative fabrics of the reality of terror. *Mariana* told me *Tereza* received many prank calls. The phone would ring and an unknown voice would say "I saw your girl, in such and such place". *Tereza* would then jump on her motorcycle and head to the location. "Nothing was near the young man", *Mariana* said, suggesting a suspicion that the prank calls perhaps sought to distance the *committee*'s investigations from *Paulo*. In addition to the prank calls, however,

Emília's disappearance also led to the appearance of other stories of disappearances and, also, of what they identified as "human trafficking".

Paulo's appearance apparently eliminated the previous hypotheses and concentrated the responsibility for *Emília*'s disappearance on him individually. The guilty party was the "monster", the cowboy with a "sick mind". Case closed. Everything was explained. However, among the members of the *Emília Solidarity Committee*, the doubts were not dispersed. On the contrary, they lingered and moved toward the obscure zones of what cannot be understood, what makes no sense. The doubts firstly concern the relationship between *Paulo* and the young man he named as his accomplice, which involves the *boy*, his proximity with "drug trafficking" or his family members' influence within the State; but they also concern *Paulo*'s legal defense. "We ask questions, but we don't know how to investigate", said *Mariana*. "*Paulo* is a landless cowboy. He lived in a dentist's property. He looked after the dentist's cattle, which provides milk to a dairy. His father is very poor, he lives near the region. And he has two lawyers". In the court documents in which *Emília* appears as the victim, *Paulo* has two private lawyers. "And we wonder why".

The more or less reasonable doubts about *Paulo*, the prank calls *Tereza* received, the stories of drug, human and organ trafficking, the persistent shadow of the *collective rape*, the State agents' sluggishness or inertia during the search for *Emília*, the gossip in *Rosário*, all converge toward terror, to the fantastical composition of those fine, hypothetically interwoven fabrics, to the sensation shared by *committee* members that there are larger mysteries and dangers lurking around. "We became afraid of exposing ourselves too much. Because we ended up exposing ourselves a lot. We went on television", acknowledged *Mariana*. The desire to discover which facets of these fabrics correspond to the "truth" and which correspond to "illusion", however, re-establishes a kind of dichotomy on which terror itself feeds in order to fabricate what Michael Taussig called an "illusory objectivity" (193:87). According to Taussig's writing on the magical realism

present in Putumayo, this creates "an uncertain reality out of fiction, giving shape and voice to the formless form of 'reality' in which an unstable interplay of truth and illusion becomes a phantasmic social force" (Taussig, 1993:126).

The basis for Taussig's argument is the idea that all societies exist through fictions taken as reality. This means that, in his analytical arsenal, the very rupture between reality and fiction is called into question. However, what happens in the "culture of terror" is the transformation of what are usually philosophical, epistemological and ontological problems surrounding representation, reality and illusion, certainty and doubt, into something bigger, "into a means of domination strongly endowed with power" (Taussig, 1993:127). The fear felt by *Francisca*, *Mariana* and *Tereza* renders the effects of this power, of the real uncertainties produced within it, explicit. It is the fear in the face of doubt. It is the capillarity of fear and the incidence of its most cruel consequence: the urgent anxiety for stabilization, for definition, for security, and thus, for control. Faced with so many uncertainties and suspicions, some answer had to be given to *Tereza* and the *solidarity committee* members regarding the *girl*'s disappearance. Some answer had to put an end to the "case", confer intelligibility and coherence to the "facts", occupy the locus of "illusory objectivity".

As I have already stated, the solution to the "*Emília* case", which was a priori accepted by the *solidarity committee* members and by the State agents working on the case, was provided by assigning the responsibility for the violence to *Paulo* individually. Once *Emília*'s body had been found, the focus shifted to the fight for *Paulo*'s conviction. The individualization of the problem, therefore, separated *Emília*'s disappearance from the other cases and suspicions involved in those fine fabrics of terror. Formally, for all official purposes, the crimes committed by *Paulo* had nothing to do with "human trafficking", "drug trafficking", territorial disputes, local political agents or all the intertwined hypotheses and complex and imprecise relations of power. The individualizing solution, therefore, isolated *Emília*'s murder. If something of the "terror"

remained, it was narratively circumscribed to the brutalization of *Emília*'s body and to *Paulo*, the "monster". His "sick mind" encompassed all causes. Or nearly all, since, in the *committee* members' narratives, *Paulo*'s bestiality is added to the "sexism" of the *Rosário* region and to the long list of cases of violence against women. Otherwise, all other beams of terror are erased, are no more than an illusion, at least insofar as the coherent solution to the "*Emília* case" is concerned.

In short, the narrative context of terror conveyed by prank calls, illegal trafficking, inexhaustible doubts and uncertain realities demands the ratification of the dichotomy between "truth" and "illusion" so as to produce an (illusory) objectivity that explains, in accordance with formal State senses, the violence. This illusory objectivity – the judicialized individualization of the solution, in the case of *Emília*'s murder – bestows coherence upon the facts and distances them from the terror that initially demanded it. Thus, the dense fabrics of terror are not attacked, only the isolated solution is attained. The "monster" is punished, State senses are validated. However, as I have argued, the individualizing solution did not fully convince the *solidarity committee* members. Though they have fought for *Paulo*'s conviction, though some of them employed the notion of monstrosity, and thought they have accepted, as they had to, the cowboy's personal responsibility for the violence against *Emília*, the doubts I previously mentioned and of which the activists informed me keep terror on the heels of the illusory objectivity. The doubts continue to haunt pretensions of coherence and State logics.

To analytically discard these doubts as mere illusions would be to reproduce the dichotomy – between "truth" and "illusion" – that nourishes the terror and to dismiss the fine fabrics of that terror, or, in other words, the intricate power relations that reciprocally make one other within these frightening warps. Even though reality is untranslatable or unexplainable, unintelligible in the excesses of its horrors, power relations pulsate in the narratives that weave the incommensurability of terror. In the stories that the members of the *Emília Solidarity Committee* told me, there were

both signs of relations of class, generation, territory, race, etc., and signs of gender and sexuality. The fact that this "reality" is "fantastical", with monstrous characters and movie-worthy climaxes, does not undo the social relations it contains. But knowing these relations requires the analytical consideration of terror – of its narrative, always. Not because power relations survive in the basements of terror, hidden behind it, and must be "discovered", "revealed", as if the terror were no more that an "ideological" or dissembling cover, but rather because these power relations are terror. In many ways, they are incommensurate and incomprehensible, as is terror.

It falls to me, within the analytical space-time, to follow, as much as possible, the extent, the outlines and the stitches of the fabrics of terror, of the narratives about violence, considering the friction between this analytical effort and the essential incommensurability of terror. It is a battle for the margins of the intelligible – and this is also the reason why Judith Butler's theoretical contributions are relevant to this debate. It is a game of partial concealment, in which that which is not understood exists, point blank, within a dispute between attempts of understanding that will never be completed. The analytical handling of the narratives about violence requires the methodological acceptance of something that cannot be understood, described or rationalized, and that this incommensurability of terror must not, as stated, be discarded. It must, on the contrary, be taken seriously, since it is in the friction with this incommensurability that the analysis unfolds. Of course, this all becomes somewhat viable while one writes a text, as I am writing this article, and terror enters the object of analysis. When, however, the phone rings in the middle of the night and, on the other end of the line, someone says "your daughter is here", the trenches of the fabrics of terror provoke more anguish and fear than an academic analysis could bear.

"We became afraid of exposing ourselves too much. Because we ended up exposing ourselves a lot. We went on television". The tangle of terror seems, again and again, to penetrate all spaces and demand an "illusory objectivity" that

somehow offers some certainty. As discussed, this objectivity will not be enough, will suffice, perhaps, only for certain State senses, and the specter of terror will continue to haunt the doubts of those involved in the "case". However, by offering a "solution", however precarious and exclusive it may be, this objectivity lays the foundations for the victim's legitimacy, her intelligibility. *Emília*, discovered buried and mutilated in the pen of the farm where *Paulo* worked as a cowboy, is an indisputable victim. At least until someone disputes this. *Tereza* and the *solidarity committee* members, in turn, have their immediate reasons justified and, finally, deserve an apology. The "illusory objectivity", by apparently pushing away the incommensurability of terror, releases *Tereza* and the *committee* members from the need to discuss the unknown fabrics of that terror. From their narratives, human, drug and organ trafficking may disappear. Everything that converges toward terror, in theory, gives way to the "sexual nature" of the crime and to the "monster". They and *Emília* are therefore freed from the doubts and uncertainties of terror. At least until the phone rings in the middle of the night. After all, *Tereza* moves precisely within this place: within the risk of living in the flesh – and in the narratives, always – the friction with that which cannot be explained, but still threatens.

3. Collective mourning rituals and the mothering of political action

"I have heard your call/ I have listened to your words/ And now I am here to serve/ I am willing to fight/ I am willing to fulfill/ My promise/ Use me". I met *Tereza* at the very beginning of my journey. It was already dark and a few hundred people filled the narrow streets of *Rosário* following a van. From the car, speakers broadcast prayers, messages against violence and chants. *Tereza* and the other members of the *Rosário* Rural Workers' Union were carrying lit candles and a sheet with the lyrics to seven religious songs[4], just as I was doing. I said hello but quickly realized this was

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[4] The verses transcribed above are part of the song "Here I am", best known in the version recorded by gospel singer Arianne.

not the time to introduce myself. *Tereza* was crying while holding the candle. From the speakers came the voice of *Gisele*, the sister who survived the *collective rape. Gisele* spoke of her mother's suffering and of the need for justice for the murders of her sister, *Eliane*, and *Flávia*, the other woman who was killed. At the top of the sheet with the songs were the words: "Spiritual Life March/2 years missing *Eliane* and *Flávia*". At that point, two years after the simulated robbery, the series of rapes and the two murders, *Estevão* had not yet faced trial or been convicted of the murders. [Field journal notes, Februrary 12th, 2014].

The "Spiritual Life March" of February 12th, 2014, was a public moment of collective mourning of loss. In other words, it was a moment of shared signification of the relevance of those lives – "precarious", in the sense used by Judith Butler (2010a; 2009). These mourning rituals act on the engendering of the subject "us". The moments of shared production of mourning are part of the identity formation of groups and social movements: "one of us has died" is what is being said. By recounting the death of "one", subjects weave the contents and outlines of the possessive "ours" and, presupposedly, of the personal pronoun "us". In doing so, speeches such as those given by *Gisele* or the members of the *Emília Solidarity Committee* convert narratives about violence into an easily recognizable artifact of everyday life. They produce these narratives about violence and death not as something that is purely "exceptional", but as a constant. In the mourning rituals, therefore, the incommensurability of terror is rendered part of everyday life, familiarized and, thus, "domesticated", or rather, "rendered domestic". Thus, narratives about violence enter domesticity, gain intimacy, conform a shared technique and aesthetic of confronting pain and, reciprocally, of intertwining bonds of solidarity and constitution of the subject "us".

In short, the narrative claim to violence at moments of collective mourning give rise to the re-signification of violence through the domestication of the way pain is handled and participates in the construction of the subject that conjugates the

verb "to fight". That subject may be *Tereza* or *Gisele*, but it may also be a social movement, such as the women's movement, the *Emília Solidarity Committee* or the group "fighting for justice" for the "collective rape". This subject, however, can only be understood through its experiences, its dislocations and conflicts. In other words, I may say, establishing a dialogue with Regina Facchini's (2011; 2008) analyses, that if subjects traffic identities – *Tereza* is the rural unionist, the mother who knocked on the police's door, the activist who is a member of the *solidarity committee* –, if they experience conflicts and *struggles*, their verbs are not conjugated by a ready-made subject, already finished and complete, but, on the contrary and more complexly, this subject is contingently modified, it makes itself and makes history while it travels. These travels to which their narratives refer consist of "experiences" which, as indicated by Avtar Brah (2006) and E. P. Thompson (1987), do not succeed the subjects; they forge one another dialectically.

From what I could observe, collective mourning rituals are among these experiences. Certainly, in these rituals, the relevance of the pain and oppression marks the activists' narratives. However, the collective gesture of routinely narrating the violences and deaths ressignifies these marks and enables, as Veena Das (2007; 2011) would say, the rehabitation of a devastated everyday life. It is by experiencing this destructed everyday life that subjects make themselves and are made through these narratives about violence. In these narratives, images, usually brutalized, of the "acts" of violence are claimed and transformed in a narrative context within which other verbs are conjugated, by the living and the dead, and the *struggle* is vivified.

In narratives about violence, therefore, pain and oppression indelibly mark subjects, but do not eliminate them, nor do they exhaustively explain them; they do not have the weight of an unsurmountable structure, they do not reproduce the Foucaultian "disciplinary prison", nor the Althusserian "mode of production". On the contrary, in these narratives, as Das noted, the subject is molded "through complex transactions between the violence as

the originary moment and the violence as it seeps into ongoing relationships and becomes a kind of atmosphere that cannot be expelled to an 'outside'" (2011:15). In other words, in what interests Veena Das (2007) in her studies regarding the narratives of women who were marked by the violence of the Partition of India, or in what concerns this text more immediately regarding social movements' mourning rituals, violence does not necessarily impede subjects, especially if, through its everyday re-enactment, through the "descent into the everyday", subjects mobilize violence and move within its recesses. I argued above, referencing Bruna Mantese de Souza's (2015) dissertation, that violence is productive, not merely destructive. Its productive potential, however, is directly associated with the production of subjects who act upon it and narratively weave it.

"Present"! – it is the chant, what is said when the dead are named, remembered, mourned. Amidst a group of people, someone shouts, emphatically: – "João Pedro Teixeira"! All reply, as one: – "Present"! Or: "Margarida Maria Alves"! "Present"! "Carlos Marighela"! "Present"! In the congresses and meetings of the Landless Rural Workers' Movement, of the Pastoral Land Commission, of the Catholic church's basic pastorals, of the women's movements, of the political party of which I am a member, and, generally speaking, of the left in Brazil, the presentification of the dead is a fundamental instant for political organization and for the *struggle*. But these instants of collective mourning of loss are not circumscribed to the internal spaces of organizations and social movements. They are also made public. "*Emília*"! "Present"! – that was what was being said on the morning of September 19th, 2013, one year to the day since *Emília*'s disappearance, when the *Emília Solidarity Committee* and the regional branch connected to the *Rosário* Rural Workers' Union held a public act for "justice" for the "*Emília* case" and, consequently, for *Paulo*'s conviction.

According to what *Mariana* told me, that act gathered 500 women in the small city of *Rosário*. Before the event, *Tereza* and the unionists distributed around eight thousand pamphlets about

the case, in the squares, streets and schools of *Rosário* and of the neighboring cities. During the act, the women, who came from the other cities that form the union branch or from *Rosário* itself, distributed pamphlets, held signs and banners, shouted chants against violence and tied black ribbons across the city, symbolizing the 127 women who had been murdered in the state of Paraíba in the previous year, 2012. *Emília* was one of those women. So were *Eliane* and *Flávia*, the fatal victims of the *collective rape.* Initially gathering in front of the city's courthouse, the hundreds of women then followed through the streets, stopping and shouting chants in front of houses and commercial establishments connected with people who, according to *solidarity committee* members (and those dense fabrics of terror), had some connection with *Paulo*, his impunity and the crimes. The act ended in a religious service, in front of the Matriz Church, given by state representative Brother Anastácio, from the Worker's Party, a religious brother and an old ally to peasant movements and the Pastoral Land Commission.

During the public act, the collective mourning ritual filled the streets of *Rosário*. The narratives about violence rendered part of everyday life by social movements and the *Emília solidarity committee* reverberated in thousands of pamphlets, were presented to schools and town squares, were featured on banners with the names of victims, brought the images of brutality and the excessive numbers of murders of women to the chants. Among the hundreds of women who occupied the streets of *Rosário*, the collective mourning both participated in the construction of subjects – the victims, the *committee*, the movements, *the women* – and, to a greater or lesser degree, provoked accusations, called the supposedly competent State agents to action in order to produce "justice" for *Emília*'s murder. In the streets of *Rosário*, the collective mourning ritual made experiences of *struggle* for rights which are actualized through the publicization of affections, of the public claim to suffering.

Despite the more immediate goal of "punishing the guilty", in these experiences of collective mourning and *struggle*, what stands out is the confrontation of "violence" and not only of

"crime".[5] In these scenarios, the narrative claim to violence publicly constructs violence as something historically inadmissible, as something that cannot be repeated, and that is emblematically represented by the images of brutality and the numbers mobilized. The *struggles*, therefore, are not tied to the subjects who are directly implicated in particular cases. They are not circumscribed to *Paulo* or *Estevão*. They are not only concerned with *Emília*, *Eliane* and *Flávia*. The *struggles* seek to reach those subjects who should not be victimized by the same power relations that enabled the deaths of *Emília*, *Eliane* and *Flávia*. The *struggle* of *Tereza* and the *Emília Solidarity Committee* for *Paulo*'s conviction; the *struggle* of *Gisele* and the *Rosário* women's group for *Estevão* and the other men to be punished: none of these *struggles* is restricted to the "punishment", all of them narratively weave violence as something that is historically inadmissible, they construct and teach what must be understood as "violence", they dispute its meanings and, by promoting the collective mourning of loss, they signify the mourned lives, conferring them public relevance so that other lives – of other *women*, of other *workers*, of other *children* … – are no longer lost.

The mourning rituals have two other notable characteristics. The first is materialized in the "lit candles" and the second is evident in the figure of the "mothers". On the morning of February 12th, 2014, before leaving João Pessoa and heading to *Rosário*, I was informed that the "act" which was to happen that afternoon, to mark the second anniversary of the "collective rape" and the murders of *Eliane* and *Flávia*, would be a "vigil", a "spiritual march", something like a "procession". Feminist activists explained to me that "the women" from *Rosário* and from the movements involved with the case had preferred the "religious" format because "the city" feared more explicitly political acts with accusatory undertones. Although some months before, in September, hundreds of women had occupied the city in an act

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[5] This analytical differentiation between "violence" and "crime" results from a dialogue with the contributions made by Debert and Gregori (2008).

reagrding the "*Emília* case", as described, the current "climate" would not allow another such protest. The people of *Rosário*, even those who considered it a just cause, feared the repercussions of these acts and the possible consequences for anyone who participated. In this justification for the "religious" nature of that public manifestation, the dense fabrics of terror offered signs of persisting. The fear remained.

Therefore, when, on that February evening, I arrived in *Rosário* along with law students from the Popular Extension Nucleus (NEP, in Portuguese), the candles were already lit and *Tereza* marched, along with the other unionists, amidst the crowd, the prayers and the chants amplified by the speakers. *Emília*'s face was printed on her shirt. During the march, *Gisele* spoke at the microphone of the sorrow caused by the deaths of *Flávia* and *Eliane*, her sister. She spoke of the women's trajectories, especially that of her sister, both very young, both cherished and admired in the city; she described their jobs and choices; but she repeatedly recounted the suffering endured by her mother, who had not yet recovered from the emotional effects of the news of her daughter's death. In the pauses of *Gisele*'s account, religious songs were sung and prayers were made. There were also messages against violence against women. The march ended with a mass at the *Rosário* Matriz Church, in front of which *Estevão* had shot and left the body of one of the women, in the early morning following the party.

The lit candles and the religious aesthetic related to them are frequent elements in public social movement manifestations. They likely result, at least in part, from the legacy of Liberation Theology and the way in which the Catholic Church's basic pastorals and basic ecclesial communities engaged in the *social struggles* and influenced the appearance of the "new characters" discussed by Eder Sader (1988) in his work on the experiences and struggles of workers in the great São Paulo in the 1970s and 1980s.[6] In the

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[6] In addition to Sader's text, Ana Maria Doimo's (1995; 1984) work contributed decisively for the discussion, in the social sciences, of the rise of Brazilian social

Rosário region, and in Paraíba as a whole, the signs of that influence are still visible and even appear in the presence of CPT pastoral agents among the *Emília Solidarity Commission* members and in representative Brother Anastácio's participation in the women's act, on September 19th, 2013. Liberation Theology's legacy does not, however, fully explain the lit candles I saw illuminate the streets of *Rosário*. They are a retort to fear, as I was told, a public protest tactic adopted in an adverse context – which communicates their potential for social acceptability and legitimation. Protests would cause fear; lit candles enabled public grieving, collective mourning, and the *struggle* for "justice" in other terms.

In fact, the rituals of collective mourning of loss, even those that take the shape of "protests", usually mobilize religious signs. The effort to give testimony, the remembrance of the dead, the constitution of mourning and the exposure of the pain and of the example (so it will not be repeated) are all gestures that refer to cosmologies and beliefs, especially those belonging to Christianity. These references to religiosity may be more subtle or more evident, but they involve an aesthetic that is recognizable to a wider audience than that which is accustomed to repertoires employed by social movements in the *struggle* for rights. The "religious language", intersected with images of brutality and the narrative claim to violence, enables the formation and capillarization of a minimum, albeit fragile, consensus surrounding a certain demand, pushing away latent conflicts and dismissing the need for adopting a more severe stance. This religious language functions as an agglutinator. It catalyzes the coalition of different subjects and softens their differences and conflicts, if only temporarily. A "spiritual life march" does not require, for instance, that one explicitly adhere to a feminist or leftist political program. Thus, it encompasses a broad spectrum of probable participants, adding all those who stand a priori in solidarity with a family that

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movements post-1970 and also helps to understand their relationship with sectors of the Catholic church.

suffered a tragedy – but especially with a mother who suffered a tragedy – to all those who are abstractly opposed to "violence".

In some dimension, at its limit, this form of collective mourning, intensely shot through with religious language, loses political incisiveness. The tormentors, the people opaquely connected with them, and the members of the Judiciary and Executive Powers are no longer named, denounced and pressured. During a "vigil" or a "procession", prayers and testimonies are not interrupted so participants can shout chants at the homes of business owners or judges, or so they can enumerate cases of murders of women in Paraíba, as was done in the previous act, on September 19th, 2013. Saying the names, the numbers, the accusations, and the feminist chants could fracture that minimum consensus and harm the social strength promoted by the city inhabitants' support for the cause, for the convictions for the murders of *Flávia* and *Eliane*, the brutally assassinated daughter of a publicly inconsolable mother. On the other hand, by making this choice, activists may not denounce the judge's or the prosecutor's inertia, the sluggishness of the public services, the failures by State agencies and government mechanisms, the inefficacy of public policies, *etc*. That is, the narrative weaving of violence as a "historical inadmissibility", forged by rendering explicit social relations – of gender, class, sexuality – that enable the existence of violence loses critical potency and gives way to the "illusory objectivity" of the specific concrete case, to its individualization or, at most, to a discourse of "confrontation of violence" based on an excessively abstract notion of violence, distant from the connections with those social relations.

We see here something which is apparently similar to what Patrícia Birman and Márcia Pereira Leite (2004) have called "civic-religious movements for justice and peace". According to the authors, during the major events in defense of "peace" in Rio de Janeiro, such as the "Enough! I Want Peace" campaign of July, 2000, when "a generalized opposition to 'violence' seems to emerge in the city" (Birman; Leite, 2004:15), "peace" rises up as a locus of general convergence, bringing together both social

movement members, mothers of victims of police violence, human rights groups, and the major media outlets, State agents, such as the police officers themselves, who also present themselves as "victims", and government officials who participate in the events as "citizens". Birman and Leite (2004) argue, however, that in the twists and turns of this public performance of "unity", several meanings are attributable to what is called "violence" depending on what projects for combating violence are at stake. These projects, which may be antagonistic and mutually exclusive, are obfuscated by the peace motto, which is, in theory, universalizing and apprehensible by all. As Márcia Leite points out, the viability of this type of "manifestation" is due to the fact that it

> takes place without properly being against anything, or anyone, but in favor of that which all participants (just as all *cariocas* and/or Brazilians who individually share feelings and values contrary to violence) long for: peace (Leite, 2004:153).

These "events" which Márcia Leite and Patrícia Birman analyzed also have references to religiousness, but they are expressed differently. According to Birman, instead of the political framework offered by Liberation Theology and its demands for equality, initiatives such as "Enough!" seek a "moral unification of the city, based on the expression of emotions related to peace" (Birman, 2004:232). These "events" value a "mystical union" between different people and social groups, based on the assumption of a certain "spirituality", a "Zen form" of civic participation in the public arena. "They sought to create, through the ritual and media management of emotions, a proximity between people beyond their social, cultural and political differences" (Birman, 2004:232). Thus, in these cases, social conflicts are erased, from which follows the substitution of the s*truggle* for "justice", dear to social movements and the left, with the *struggle* for "peace", this rhetorical abstraction.

As I have argued, experiences of collective mourning – and, therefore, of *struggle* – that are intensely shot through with religious language may lead to the loss of political incisiveness and lessen their critical potentiality, as happened in the "march for spiritual life" that filled the streets of *Rosário* on February 12th, 2014, and which I followed closely, from within, with a lit candle in my hands. However, despite this loss, the *Rosário* march should not be confused with the events Leite and Birman analyzed. What sets them apart is particularly imprinted on the correlation between religious symbols and the political dispute. Whether they are influenced by Liberation Theology principles, by the more organic orientation of social movements toward the configuration of that "minimum consensus", or by shared beliefs, experiences such as the *Rosário* "march for spiritual life" experience the religious language through the political dispute and the political dispute through the religious language. This does not mean that the language is a mere "tool" in the service of the dispute. On the contrary, it means that the political dispute, the decision to take a stance and the *struggle* for "justice" make up the religious language. "I am willing to fight/ I am willing to fulfill" – said the song being transmitted by the van's speakers.

Additionally, this political dispute, as I have stated, is not restricted to the resolution of individual cases or the punishment of tormentors. It is directed toward the narrative weaving of the historical inadmissibility of violence and connects *Emília*, *Eliane* and *Flávia* to dozens of other cases and to the social relations that make them possible. This is why, in *Rosário*, the "march for spiritual life" of February, 2014 can only be explained in connection to the act carried out by 500 women in September, 2013 and to all other actions and mobilizations carried out by those subjects as part of their *struggle*. If the "spiritual march", understood in isolation, may represent a loss of political incisiveness, critical potentiality and capacity for making accusations, located within the meanders of the mobilizations, it gains new meanings, expresses social strength, capacity for articulation and mobilization and, at its limit, clearly – through

discreetly – shows the Judge, the Prosecutor, the Businessman, the Secretary of Public Security, etc., that those "women" have managed, once more, to bring hundreds of people to the streets of *Rosário* and, by collectively mourning their loss, to illuminate a city with lit candles.

To me, this seems no small feat, especially if we consider those candles were lit on the second anniversary of the "*Rosário* collective rape". As I have stated, the narratives of the *solidarity committee* members unravel through a constant friction with the fine fabrics of terror. But these fabrics become substantially denser when it comes to the collective rape. In it, the shadow of the incommensurability is so great that all "illusory objectivity" falters in the face of the unexplainable, the unknown, the fear. I mean, by this, that gathering "500 women" for a protest regarding *Emília*'s murder and against the cowboy *Paulo* – "the monster" – is a less arduous task than gathering those same women, in *Rosário*, to address *Eliane* and *Flávia*'s murders and *Estevão*'s punishment. A simulated robbery; a "birthday present"; men distributing and raping women they knew in the rooms of a family house; suspected ties to the illegal drug market and to land ownership: too many elements, too many horrors, too many doubts. Why were they in the house? Why did they go to the party? What kind of relationships did they have with "those people"? Why did only two of them die? How did they know who raped them? The feminist activists with whom I spoke told me these questions – voraciously marked by gender and sexuality conventions – circulated in *Rosário*, occupied the town gossip and, given the need for the victims' narrative constitution and legitimation, had to be answered. In these answers, the mother insurged.

According to what the activists told me regarding the *collective rape*, *Gisele* identified some of the men responsible for the rapes and for the simulated robbery to the police. From within the room where she was being raped by *Afonso*, though she was blindfolded the entire time, *Gisele* heard her sister *Eliane*'s screams coming from another room in the house. In the living room, *Eliane* cried, yelled *Estevão*'s name, asked him to stop, not to rape her, to

remember all the ways in which she had helped him, and claimed, resorting to the figure of her mother, that "my mother can't bear this". This phrase, related to me by feminist activists and published in the news reports of the *collective rape*, was also included in the court documents which led to *Estevão*'s punishment for the murders of *Eliane* and *Flávia*, the two women who allegedly recognized him during the rape because the blindfolds, initially placed on them by the alleged robbers, allegedly fell from their eyes[7]. In short, according to these narratives about the "fact", the "mother" was vocalized in the extreme instant of violence. Her figure would also be mobilized in *Gisele*'s memories of that night, in the court documents, in news stories, in statements from feminist activists and, at last, at the microphone during the "spiritual life march". The "mother", discursively set against *Estevão* in order to prevent the violence, comes, inconsolable, to my eyes and ears through many ways.

I previously stated that the religious language serves as an "agglutinator" because it guarantees a broad – albeit fragile and temporary – coalition of a priori dissimilar subjects. I now point out that the claim to the "mother" figure works in the same way. Its narrative invocation in different narrative corpora – activists' statements, court documents, news stories, etc. – seems to me to be no accident. The "fact" that *Eliane* spoke that sentence, the "fact" that *Gisele* heard her and the "fact", finally, that *Gisele* herself narratively weaved her memories of what happened that night would not automatically lead the sentence to the pages of court documents or of newspapers. Power relations act in favor of the convergence around the sentence, even its acceptability, in the conformation of the public or "official" version about what happened at the birthday party. I believe that the capilarity of the

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[7] Both court cases related to the rapes and murders were heard *in-camera* and, for this reason, details pertaining to these cases were not accessible. The information I provide in this text came, as stated, from feminist activists who followed the ramifications of the "case" as part of their activism. Most of the information here was also published in Brazilian news outlets, as well as news outlets from the state of Paraíba.

sentence "my mother can't bear this" symbolizes the relevance bestowed on the "mother" figure. There is, in the word "mother", an image, a force, a persuasive vigor.

On the other hand, this relevance derives, as Márcia Leite (2004) notes, from the prominence of Christian signs and, of course, from the allusion to the character of Mary, mother of Jesus. It also mutually derives from the gravity of the "mother" for moral and gender conventions and, consequently, for the altercations surrounding the "victim", something that Adriana Vianna's (2014) analytical contributions helped me to discern. The word "mother", if brought to life within narrative environments in which the "facts" are under dispute and are being structured, becomes a "word-act", as Vianna (2014) understood it: its activation gives rise to an "empathy" that is able to overcome differences and bring together subjects, and it composes moral maps that help to demarcate allies and opponents in specific conflicts. As I have noted, *Tereza*'s efforts to drag *Emília* home and, therefore, bring her close to herself, are a symptom of the "mother's" gravity to the daughter's legitimation as a victim of the violence being denounced and combated. The claim to violence, to the images of brutality, and the claim to the mother act as narrative Siamese twins in the processes of constructing the victim. How can one object to the status of "victim" of a person who, according to the narratives on the "case", brings up her "mother"– who can "bear" much, but "not this" – at the limit-moment of violence?

In the sentence that *Gisele* heard and remembered and that was insistently recorded and weaved by other subjects, the verb "to bear" consubstatiates the subject "mother". It is assumed that the "mother" is the one who "bears", that is, who is used to suffering and pain[8]. The reference to the verb "to bear" suggests, consequently, that the mother's relationship with everything that must be "borne" is common, frequent, ordinary; the extraordinary

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[8] My perception of this "body that can bear" derives from the notion, employed by Bruna Mantese de Souza (2015), of an "elastic body", the body of "women with grit" which bears pain and violence.

and the excessive, that which the figure brought to the foreground "could not bear", would be the sexual violence imposed on *Eliane*. The "mother's" persuasive vigor, its potential for agglutination around a "case" or a "cause", is tied to the narrative contexture of the "mother's" ontological disposition to pain, a pain that becomes unbearable in the inadmissibility of the violence inscribed in her daughter's body. Thus, there is a passage from routine pain to an exorbitant pain, to the space of the profoundly inconsolable "mother's pain", felt for her son, her daughter or, in the end, for her loss. This "mother's suffering" consists, according to Adriana Vianna (2014), of the image of a distinct suffering that is superior to all others, of a suffering-proof of the unbreakable bond between the "mother" and the lost daughter.

This inseparability between "mother" and "daughter", signaled by the "mother's suffering", was part of *Gisele*'s public speech during the "spiritual life march" of February 12th, 2014. Her dedication to describing *Eliane* as beloved and admired in *Rosário* was intimately connected with her references to her mother, but especially with the reference to the unsurmountable suffering experienced by the older woman who, due to the suffering and its effects, could not join the march – something which, given the sharpness of the pain, seemed understandable to all. From within the van, *Gisele* recounted, to the hundreds of people holding candles, who *Eliane* was and how "unfair" the violence against her and *Flávia* was. With this, *Gisele* reinforced her sister's intelligibility as a "victim". In this, however, she did not act alone. Through the speakers, *Gisele* brought her "mother" (and her pain) once more to the foreground, in a gesture that announced her relevance (and the relevance of her pain) to the characterization of the victim's intelligibility. In the march, as in the narratives Vianna (2014) analyzes, the "mother's pain" was reciprocal with the production of a "moral career" for the daughter. Similarly to *Tereza*'s narrative movements, *Gisele* enabled her mother – despite being physically absent, and precisely because of this – to bring *Eliane* close to herself.

The "mother", however, does not only work as a mentionable figure in the collective mourning processes and in disputes surrounding the victim's legitimacy. There are occasions and contexts in which the "mother" figure takes over the mourning. This may happen more directly, when the mothers themselves perform the "mother" figure, or in a more mediated fashion, when a group of subjects involved with the collective mourning rituals and with the s*truggles* for "justice" or for rights perform the "mother" and the "mothering". The first case obviously concerns *Tereza*'s *struggles*. The second case belongs, for example, to the *Emília Solidarity Committee*. According to what I have been arguing in this article, and as Márcia Leite (2013), Fábio Araújo (2007), Paula Lacerda (2012; 2014), Adriana Vianna (2014) and Adriana Vianna and Juliana Farias (2010) have argued before me, the experiences of *struggles* are often centered in the "mother" persona, the one who is assumed to embody a universally apprehensible and intelligible pain, that of losing a child. However, this "mother" goes far beyond the central figure that is *Tereza*, the person to whom the secretary of public security felt the need to apologize. Though the "mother" does not represent, as shown, an unquestionable moral authority, the gender definitions that distinguish motherhood are extended over other subjects, such as the *committee* and its members, who, whether or not they are mothers, are authorized to mobilized "maternal narratives" and "act in a motherly fashion".

The members of the *Emília Solidarity Committee* go to police stations and public hearings, confront State authorities, substitute police functions by investigating hypotheses and evidences of crimes, do the the possible and the impossible for "a daughter", something which, in spite of official procedures and formalities, is expected of a "mother". More than that, they collectively take on "mothering" *Tereza*'s daughter. "*Emília* was an activist in the (union) branch, in our movement, she was a youth

activist. She was in the *Felicidade*[9] march, she was a bus leader", *Mariana* told me. "When she disappeared, she stopped being *Tereza*'s daughter and became the branch's daughter." The decision to take the place of "mother", in addition to connoting feelings of closeness to, and affection for, *Emília*, offers these activists a field of action marked by "mothering", that is, by the possibility of "going beyond", of overcoming barriers, including legal ones, in defense of their "daughter", in addition to enabling them to aesthetically experience public mourning, to exercise, with even greater legitimacy, the collective mourning of loss and, finally, the *struggle*.

In their work "The mothers' war", Adriana Vianna and Juliana Farias (2011) recount an incident from their field work that clarifies the capacity of the "mother" image to be extended to other subjects, whether or not they themselves are mothers of victims, whether or not they themselves are mothers. During a session of the jury trial they followed, regarding a murder of which a military police officer was accused, they were themselves – sitting next to the murdered man's mother, her family and "family members of victims" – designated by the prosecutor as part of the "mothers" who "demanded justice" in that case.

> We could be turned into 'these mothers' because we shared and performed a specific way of inhabiting the public space and of 'demanding justice', anchored in the strength of the bond represented as the most vital and culturally unquestionable and in a specific aesthetic of suffering (Vianna; Farias, 2011:105-106).

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[9] "Felicidade" is the fictitious name of one of the cities that make up the rural workers' union branch of which the *Rosário* union is a part. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, the "branch" has a "women's" working group – whose meeting *Tereza* was unable to attend because of *Emília*'s disappearance. This working group organizes "marches" every March 8th, changing location every year. The "*Felicidade* march" was one of these marches in which *Emília* participated.

This possibility of "being a mother" therefore indicates performativity. It is a gender performativity, but especially a specific way of carrying out the *struggle* through signs of "suffering", exactly what I have called the "collective mourning of loss".

The collective mourning of loss, publicly exercised by *Tereza* or the *Emília Solidarity Committee*, is radically signaled by the "mother", by her performativity, by what that expresses in terms of competence for managing and remembering the dead and the pain, for the political exercise of the exposure of tears, for the legitimacy of the narrative claim to violence. In the conflicts in which they participate (or of which they are made a part), the political subjects I have discussed in this text – whether they are mothers, the *committee*, or social movements – move through strategies that are more or less (un)conscious, that may be called "mothering of political action". For this "mothering" to take place, the mother does not even need to be present in person, as in the "spiritual life march" of *Rosário*. In reality, there need not even be a mother to be referred to. Only the "mother" needs to be made present. What must be aestheticized and experienced publicly are the conventions, especially the gender conventions, that make up the idea of "mother", of the character who embodies the work of care that may be taken to the extreme, especially if the signs of the untranslatable and incomparable suffering are sufficiently visible.

In this process of mothering political action, subjects move between reaffirming gender conventions and disrupting these very conventions. The recourse to the "mother" (and to her pain) makes use of notions of "woman" and "motherhood" rooted in these conventions and, thus, points back to moralities and social practices that are historically involved in forms of subalternization. As Fábio Araújo has noted regarding the "mothers of Acari" movement, these notions of "woman" and "motherhood", formed based on the assumption of a "biological determinism that is ingrained in the construction of motherhood as a woman's natural purpose" (Araújo, 2007:51), are among the original targets of feminist critiques. However, as the author himself notes, these

notions are also the starting point for those mothers' action. It just so happens that the subjects and their astuteness mock the social structures and power relations that constrain them. In short, the subjects do what is possible, with or from the social structures – and, if they perform the "mother", they equally risk the impossible, as a "mother" is expected to do. The experiences of mothering political action do not reproduce forms of domination. On the contrary, the open up a field of action, aestheticized by the "mother" and by the suffering, which is manifestly opposed to any conjectured "passivity". The work of care is a political *struggle*.

Additionally, the broadening of "mother", its expansion to other subjects, denaturalizes the mother and motherhood, exhibiting norms and their fragilities, all that would be "essential" and "natural" to mothers, but that collective mourning rituals traffic, twist and enable other subjects to embody. The mothering of political action denounces the performative efforts for the construction of every "mother". It goes beyond: it denounces the fundamental gears of the State arenas in which social conflicts take place, such as the idea of the separation between public and private. The "mothers" – according to Adriana Vianna and Julia Farias' (2011:94) understanding –,

> by speaking for a domestic order that was brutally undone by their children's murders, they (and, in some cases, the other family members) bear the feminine not in their individual bodies, but as a marker signifying the broken relationships, as well as the illegitimate violence that destroyed them.

According to Vianna and Farias (2011), this scenario enables the "mothers" to bring the "home", the domestic, to the protest, which, I believe, signals the denaturalization of the borders between public and private and, thus, once again, denounces the efforts of performing these borders and separations, forged in gender relations (reciprocally, in relations of class, race, sexuality, territory, etc.).

The ratification of conventions surrounding the "mother" does not, however, encompass the entire plexus of situations in which gender and sexuality relations are actualized. At first, these actualizations seem perversely to be against subjects who do not correspond to those conventions, such as daughters or mothers who cannot be brought in line with the moral modeling – a dispute, as I have argued – of the "victim". To seek to bring *Emília* home, close to her family and mother, implies, as I have stated, conferring importance to the values surrounding these "feminizing" or "familiarizing" notions. It also, inescapably, implies transferring the sphere of illegitimacy to other subjects, that is, those who do not correspond to these values. It is, therefore, the repetition of the creation of "constitutive exteriors". What is interesting is that these exteriors are often weaved from what Maria Filomena Gregori (2016; 2014; 2008) called, in a dialogue with previous contributions from Gayle Rubin (1998) and Carole Vance (1992 [1984]), the "limits of sexuality", a border space in which norm and transgression, consent and abuse, pleasure and pain, the tense relationship between pleasure and danger, reside.

According to Gregori (2008:576), these limits

> indicate, in fact, a very complex social process concerning the enlargement or restriction of sexual normativities, in particular, regarding the creation of realms of greater tolerance and the new limits that are imposed, as well as situations in which that which is considered abusive is then qualified as normal.

In this conceptualization, the limits of sexuality operate through dislocations between old and new "problems" based on sexuality, from which it follows that confronting some of these limits ends up being related to the emergence of "new anxieties" surrounding what is or is not acceptable, recreating these notions, albeit on other points of the border, and alluding to "sexual panics". In short, the conflict surrounding maintaining or

overcoming a certain limit produces the opportunity for the emergence of new limits and forms of regulation.

In the narratives of the *Emília Solidarity Committee* members and in the disputes to which they are connected, prostitution, for example, emerges as an object of tension. However, the initial impression that the *girls* or women who do not fit within the moral investments made for *Emília* could not be legitimated as "victims" – because they did not return home or because they ran away with their boyfriends – is skillfully taken apart by the activists. The victims who, within the disputes for their legitimation, are pushed away from standards of morality and gender and sexuality conventions are the objects of new investments so they may be characterized as "victims". Thus, prostitutes are narratively understood as vulnerable "victims" of social inequalities and "human trafficking" rises up as an intelligibility key for understanding the frequent "disappearances" of teenagers and young people, especially women – *cisgender*, *transvestite* or *transexual* – but also of *young homosexual men.*

The statements made by the police commissioner and by the secretary of public security regarding an "elopement with a boyfriend", though showcasing the State's unavailability for resolving conflicts that involve certain subjects, such as working-class mothers and daughters, are somewhat backed by the experiences that make up the *Rosário* territory. "There's one thing that's interesting that no one looked at, like, there's no reflection about this in *Rosário*: why do girls, many girls, in *Rosário* meet young men from out of town, suddenly this young man offers her a home, food, clean clothes, they get married and leave?" According to *Francisca*, this migration of *girls* is very common and is explained by the economic acceleration in *Rosário*, a "border" town near the state of Pernambuco, through which, in the past few years of neo-developmentism, more money flowed and, with it, more prostitution, human trafficking and illegal drug trafficking. "We have a border, illegal trafficking, money, prostitution. If we put these four elements together with an extremely sexist society… Then we have a world of violent situations". This "world" led the

committee members to believe, while they were searching for *Emília*, in the possibility that human trafficking had taken place.

José Miguel Nieto Olivar (2013), Adriana Piscitelli (2013; 2008) and Thadeus Blanchette and Ana Paula da Silva (2011) provide relevant analyses of how political, moral, legal and even feminist narratives surrounding prostitution and human trafficking are part of exercises in gender control over dislocations, women, populations and territories. Piscitelli describes, for example, that to the women she interviewed – "sex workers" in Spain –, actions against trafficking did not seek to eliminate "human trafficking", but rather to control women, prostitution and migration. This in such a way that they – a priori, the "victims of trafficking" – feared the actions that claimed to "protect them", but that ended up criminalizing them. What is therefore at stake is the contrast between the determination of "victimhood" – given primarily, but not exclusively, by State agencies – and the hypothetical "victims'" disagreement regarding their condition as "victims" and the scope of policies proclaiming their "protection".

According to Adriana Piscitelli and Laura Lowenkron (2015), this contrast is indicative of a resistance to the State's power of tutelage, to modes of intervention that portray certain persons as "passive victims" of a supposed "international organized crime" and that, as a rule, subject migrant women to fear and undesired measures, such as deportation. As Laura Lowenkron (2015) rightfully notes, within this debate surrounding human trafficking, there is an altercation surrounding the concepts of "consent" and "vulnerability". In policies for combating human trafficking – normatively understood as an activity related to "sex work", "prostitution" or "sexual exploitation", depending on national legal standards and in who is using the terms –, the ability to consent completely gives way to an implacable notion of vulnerability.

It is following this same movement of denying agency for consent in favor a concern with vulnerability that *Francisca* asked "why do girls, many girls, in *Rosário* meet young men from out of town, suddenly this young man offers her a home, food, clean

clothes, they get married and leave?" This question served a narrative purpose, so that she could explain to me the reality of *Rosário* and the reasons why that was a propitious region for "human trafficking". The *girls*' migration was not a result of their "wanting" or their "desire", that is, of their consent, but of a social context of vulnerability that led to marriage to young men "from out of town" and, consequently, to migration. This "vulnerability", however, does not necessarily presuppose extreme situations of poverty or misery. *Francisca*, on the contrary, speaks of an economic acceleration, of greater money circulation and growth in transitory markets between legal and illegal practices, such as the illicit drug market and the prostitution market. This "development" scenario would enable the "world of violent situations" in which *Francisca* sees the root of "vulnerability".

    Francisca's narratives thus employ what Sérgio Carrara (2016; 2015) and Laura Lowenkron (2015) respectively called "human rights language" and "language of violence and rights". According to Carrara (2015), these types of languages are an emblem of the historical emergence of a "new" secular regime of sexuality, followed by a characteristic form of moral regulation. According to Lowenkron (2015:226), they are currently the "hegemonic discursive regime for the legal regulation of sexuality in the context of international politics and of Western (or Westernized) democratic regimes".[10] In the claim to violence and the *struggle* for rights marshaled in *Francisca*'s arguments, the investment to characterize *Emília* as a victim does not prevent the other *girls* – who may "run away with their boyfriends" – from also being characterized as "victims". This is because both *Emília* and these other *girls*, who cannot so easily be made to fit the moral conventions used to legitimate *Emília*, are seen as absolutely vulnerable to "violence". They are therefore "victims", even if they choose to leave.

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[10] According to Laura Lowenkron (2015), the hegemony of the "language of violence and rights" over current modes of regulation of sexuality does not prevent other forms of regulating and understanding sexuality from existing or acting upon political disputes, as happens, for example, with religious moralities.

The assumption of "violence" in these terms presupposes the presence of violence as a structural abstraction. It need not even be demonstrated, nor does its "historical inadmissibility" need to be constructed through collective mourning rituals, for example. To *Francisca*, but not only to her, violence is structurally (or conceptually) presupposed. Thus, we see something similar to what happens with "abolitionist" positions regarding prostitution. If "violence" is presupposed, the "vulnerability" that follows from "violence" is likewise presupposed or, in Laura Lowenkron's words, takes on a "phantasmic" sense,

> appearing less as a situation of social disadvantage that limits access to certain material and symbolic goods and, thus, the possibility of choice, than as a moral demand to correspond to an ideal of victim (Lowenkron, 2015:251).

At the heart of "abolitionist" conjectures or the quoted narratives on "human trafficking", "prostitution" and, inevitably, "sex", reappear as the limit from which the victim or subject become impossible to legitimate – unless "violence" and "vulnerability" justify the context and, thus, legitimize the "victims".

The inverse of this type of argumentative investment in constructing the victim is found, however, in what Maria Filomena Gregori (1993) called "victimism", the production of an image of a victim who is excessively a victim, incapable of action or decision, essentially passive, absolutely subjected. This image extended to *Emília* and the other *girls* – who may also be "women", but are almost always "girls" as a result of generational efforts to weave the "victim" and her inability to consent – negates the subject. The positive assumption of a structural violence is coeval to the negative assumption of an inert, structurally inviable, inexistent subject. These forms of understanding reinforce gender and sexuality conventions by ignoring that young women's dislocations, toward working in prostitution or not, toward marriage or not, consist of strategies of action employed, as

always, within social contexts and power relations that both constrain and enable action. Otherwise, *Tereza*, *Mariana*, *Francisca* and the other *solidarity committee* members would not be able to do anything regarding *Emília*'s disappearance or any of the *struggles* of which they are part. The same context of "vulnerability" and "violence" that led to the deaths of *Emília*, *Flávia* and *Eliane* – not at all abstract, deeply disputed – was the starting point and object of conflict, a setting simultaneously of terror and lit candles, for the *struggle* and conjugation of all the verbs which I could perceive in the activists' words and in a city vastly illuminated by hundreds of small candles placed in plastic cups.

I do not intend, with this, to refuse or accept the hypothesis of the existence of human trafficking in the *Rosário* region. The material I gathered during my field work does allow considerations regarding the "acts" of human trafficking. Additionally, if I call into question the structuralist presupposition of a violence abstracted from social relations and experiences of subjugation and subject formation, I also do not intend to reaffirm the liberal ideal rooted in the paradigm of an "autonomy" which is once again assumed and abstract. Inversely, and following Júlio Assis de Simões (2016), when facing a similar problem concerning images related to political confrontations surrounding gender and sexuality, I seek to note that "these images produce as much as they disguise". "It is the constant and productive tension between these contradictory ideals that I seek to address: not as simulations, but as narratives that have efficacy in the construction of social ways of understanding and feeling gender and sexuality, pleasure and danger" (Simões, 2016). For this reason, I have attempted, in this text, to value this tension analytically and to explore its potentials in the narratives on violence and in the *struggles* for rights or "justice."

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