

History as Possibility: Trajectories, Affections and Resistance in Oral History¹

Interview with Marta Rovai

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Marta Rovai is a historian, graduated from PUC-SP, USP and UFF, and presents a significant trajectory in the fields of oral history and gender studies. Her work in centers such as the NEHO-USP (Center of Studies on Oral History), the Center of Studies on Gender and Sexuality and the AMHOR Group (Collection of Memory and History of the LGBTQIAPN+ Pride in Southern Minas) by the Federal University of Alfenas (UNIFAL-MG) has contributed to relevant debates about memory, gender and resistance. Her research stands out for her commitment with sensitive hearing and the valorization of historically silenced, but not silent, voices, mainly of women, LGBTQIAPN+² individuals and marginalized groups.

In October 2024, Marta Rovai participated in the IV Colóquio do Programa de Pós-Graduação em História da Universidade Estadual de Ponta Grossa (PPGH-UEPG) (IV Colloquium of the History Graduate Program of the State University of Ponta Grossa), whose theme was “Historical knowledge and resistance: sensitive and autonomous audience”. Her closing conference, held at the Campos Gerais Museum, impacted deeply the audience for approaching the

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¹ Interview carried out by Alessandra Izabel de Carvalho and Robson Laverdi on 11th November 2024.

² The acronym LGBTQIAPN+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, *travesti*, queer, intersexual, asexual, pansexual, and non-binary individuals.

importance of affection in the historiographic practice and the recognition of difference as a constitutive element of social relations and in the production of historical knowledge.

In this interview, carried out for the *Revista de História Regional do PPGH-UEPG* (PPGH-UEPG Regional History Journal), she shares reflections about her academic and professional trajectory, her experiences with oral history and her understanding of the role of historians in contemporary society. The themes approached include the relationship between teaching and research, commitment to public history, intersections between gender, class and race, the importance of the affective dimension in historical knowledge production.

Robson Laverdi: We consider your education solid, it was developed in outstanding institutions such as USP and UFF, and during your work in centers of great expression such as NEHO and the Center of Studies on Gender and Sexuality of UNIFAL, and the AMHOR group. Can you tell us about the main moments or influences that guided your theme and institutional choices, mainly in the fields of oral history and gender relations history.

Marta Rovai: This is quite a broad question. Oral history has two moments in my life. The first is when I was still an undergraduate. I graduated at PUC-São Paulo, where in the 80s there was no tradition of oral history – I studied at PUC between 1984 and 87. In the third year of the course I started to teach in a public school in Osasco-SP and was deeply impacted when some workers visited the school where I was teaching to speak about a strike – the Osasco strike of 1968 – which I did not know at all. I did not know oral history or strike, even being an Osasco resident! Their speech revealed to me the history of a strike that I knew nothing about and an image of the city where I lived and which I didn't know either. Osasco was always portrayed in the popular imagery as the “crime city” in the 1970s and 1980s, but at that time those workers showed me Osasco as a city of fight and resistance against the military dictatorship. There, without having read anything about oral history, I wanted to interview those people; I wanted to register their histories. I had the chance to interview those people in 1987 and I remember that at the university there was great resistance! We did not have a specific advisor – there were three professors who taught a research subject and advised all students. They were quite resistant, and said that it would be very difficult, that oral history was not a good methodology, and the oral source was not a good source. Anyway, I decided to do it even with the few materials available about both the strike and oral history... After that, my priority was to teach in basic education and

share with my students those workers' history. I thought it was absurd that living in Osasco we were ignorant of that strike and its meaning!... It took me some time to enter the master's program, and when I entered in 1996, my research theme was not related to oral history – I ended up focusing on Getúlio Vargas, the organization of youth in Vargas government. It seems relevant to say that what guided me into research was my classroom practice in basic education. I cannot see this separation between teaching and research, but teaching came first in my life, and it guided my research. In 1992, a colleague, a historian who also worked in basic education called José Eduardo Paes, told me: “Read the book called *Canto de Morte Kaiowá*, by Professor José Carlos Sebe. You'll see how incredible this work is!³ That was my first reading about oral history. I was impacted by the Kaiowá people's narratives, digesting that difficult content about suicidal youngsters. I learned a little more about the importance of oral history and its social value... In 2005, I interviewed the former workers from Osasco again, not with the idea of an academic work anymore, but with the intention of producing a documentary about them following the invitation by a filmmaker colleague, Rui de Souza. Meetings were held with former unionists, workers in the Cobrasma and Cobraseixos factories, many of them had become guerrillas in 1968 and 1969. This was when my doctorate project about the strike was born, now with better knowledge of oral history. In 2007, I did a course at NEHO, from USP, and met professor Sebe, and later I met professor Eclea Bosi. I was enchanted with the possibilities created by oral history! I wanted to listen to those people again, but not about the strike history told by the strikers – at the time, I was interested in the memory they produced after so many years. Because the union promoted celebrations in the city, and I wanted to understand this memory around which there was an effort of perpetuation. I heard workers such as José Groff, Inácio Gurgel, Antônio Cândido, who were members of the Commission of Ten in the Cobrasma factory and were linked to the Base Christian Commissions in the 1960s; and José Ibrahim, Roberto Espinosa and Roque Aparecido, who were students-workers who took up arms, becoming members of the Popular Revolutionary Vanguard, led by Carlos Lamarca. But, during the interviews, I started to realize some absences, which were the women who did not appear in the male participants' narratives. I asked myself about where the female workers were in that strike. Then, I decided to listen to the women – this was my doctorate project, the memory of men and women, perceiving narratives from gender. However, if I had to develop

³ Meihy, José Carlos Sebe Bom. *Canto de morte kaiowá: história oral de vida*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1991.

the thesis again, it would be a different discussion, surely. We always do, but it would be a discussion much more guided to gender and race issues. I did not address the race issue in the thesis, and I was not aware of the presence of only two black people among those interviewed. Today, although I am a white woman, the race issue, even due to the perception of my whiteness, guides me towards those discussions. After presenting the thesis, in 2012, I went to Piau , where I worked with fishermen and fisherwomen at the Delta of the Parna ba River. There, I changed my focus again, I started to work with the heritage issue, stimulated by a post-doctorate program invitation in which I entered to hear the riverside population. Once, when I was doing a test for Unicamp, during the interview, the professors asked me: "Why do you keep going to different places all the time? Why don't you stick to a theme and place?"... Because working with people is like that! There are so many voices and histories calling us!... In Piau , my interlocutors were fishermen and fisherwomen, and when I passed the test to work at UNIFAL, in 2013, I came to work with the *congadeiros* and *congadeiras* of the south region of Minas Gerais. Then, the race issue became stronger to me! Not only did those people talk to me about racism, but they also talked about their ancestry, their strength!... Well, anyway, I ended up on this new path, a new journey with the LGBTQIAPN+ community, still in Southern Minas Gerais. Because when I arrived in the state of Minas Gerais, where the Federal University of Alfenas is located, I was also impressed by the large community of LGBT students, and I was invited by that community to register their history. So, I have been working with this population since 2016, and they always affect me as a cisgender and heterosexual person. It seems to me that considering the whole process, this is where I had to be! As a white woman, a cis hetero individual, as an urban person; I had to discover myself in those places and realize how I could contribute to it by using oral history!

Alessandra Izabel de Carvalho: This seems to be linked to what you had said before. In what way has your work at the Oral History Center, in the Center of Studies on Gender and Sexuality Research and in the AMHOR Group influenced your methodological approach? Is there a moment in your trajectory that transformed your way of working with voice transcription in the oral history field?

Marta Rovai: Well, my joining the Oral History Center at USP, in 2007, was fundamental! Up to that point, I understood that oral history meant to interview people. When I went back there in 1987, when I wrote my graduation monograph at PUC, I only wanted to extract information from those people,

and I thought their narrative would make understand the facts. That was my main concern, maybe because I wanted to know one part of the history of my city that I did not know... When I entered the Oral History Center, professor Sebe, who became my advisor, showed a certain posture regarding the work with memories, with subjectivities, and with affection and meaning communities. This was new to me! And he would always say: “Let’s do something nobody else is doing “. And his concern with the softness of the voice and the responsibility for the word was what I ended up calling sensitive hearing. I did not invent that, obviously it was learned. Professor Sebe had already talked about it, the need for a certain hearing to understand the messages, the intentionality and unintentionality. Even today, he still talks about the dreams, that oral history has to think also in what is not explicit, the things that people dream and project. Then, I started to understand that working with oral history was not exactly about facts, but rather about memories of facts, desires related to facts, perspectives, projections, and disputes. And the NEHO had – I say ‘had’ in the past, because unfortunately NEHO no longer exists, it was extinguished when the professor retired, but there are the ‘neohists’, I guess we can call them that way, those who hold a different concern from that of other institutions. For example, the CPDOC was concerned with building up a large collection of large institutions, Brazilian personalities linked to the Brazilian politics, to Brazilian companies. The NEHO always followed a path that we call ‘the margin’. The group produced a huge amount of work with prostitutes, prisoners, tortured individuals, workers, guerillas, black women, albinos, LGBT community, rural workers, indigenous, *quilombolas*... And there I realized the greatness of working with oral history, how broad it was, and how it involved the public history perspective! Currently, we discuss public history, but the first person whom I saw talking about oral history as public history was professor Sebe at the Oral History Center and in his book *Canto de morte Caiowá (The Caiowá Song of Death)*. At that time, when we went to events, we were called “The populists”. I remember that people said: “The Literary arrived” or “the populists arrived”, because this dimension of listening groups from the periphery and the so-called social feedback was considered by many colleagues, even inside the University of São Paulo – and I think even today many think like that – as something that violated academic scientific parameters. We were not even discussing gender issues – they started to appear... Through some people that came to the NEHO, and ethnic-racial issues were also broadened. Gender issues, for me, were inserted later, because

although I discussed gender issues in my thesis, they were marked by whiteness and cis heteronormativity. I believe that they really affected me when I started working at the university, and I noticed those communities of diverse womanhood and femininities; when they started to go through me and made me broaden my reading repertoire and feminist activism. This was when I found out the gaps of my own education as an educator and researcher. I started to realize that social classes had color, race, gender, desire... and I realized that this was still missing inside the university! I noticed how our curricula were still male, hetero, white and stiff curricula. I also realized how this affected the classroom relations, the research, and even the university structure. Then I started to realize that it was necessary to discuss, because those bodies, dissidents from the white cisnormativity matrix were there, but they were ignored in the curricula, and they were neglected in the research and outreach projects. And for a long time, I had been part of it!... I have to say something important: before entering the university, the ones affecting me with gender issues were the basic education students! Even when there was no literature about it. It is relevant for me to say! Again, I go back to that place, the classroom where I started in the 1980s... that was the first impact, when I started to notice LGBT students, girls suffering violence, black boys and girls with their histories that were ignored by the school. I started to notice that just saying “everyone is equal” was not enough... So, I always tell a history to my students of a very sad moment that we experienced in a public school: the death of a black girl who was in that classroom, in the second year in the evening high school in Osasco. She had been murdered and found inside a large pipe, one of those that Sabesp uses to supply water to the neighborhood... In the same week, there was the history of a white girl murdered at the Alphaville, which is a very rich neighborhood in São Paulo. The murder of that rich girl was on the cover of the *Veja* magazine. I remember that I entered the classroom one evening, the same classroom where the black girl who had been killed used to study, and the students were crying for the white girl whose photo was on the *Veja* magazine cover. And they were saying: “Miss, did you see? So pretty...” and we started to discuss what was the meaning of being beautiful, and what the value of mourning was. “Then, that girl, your colleague, the one that has just been killed, the black one, doesn’t she deserve your crying because she was black? And for being black, does this mean she was not beautiful?!... I remember, when Airton Sena died and everybody cried for him, and while people waved their white handkerchiefs on the streets and viaducts, a woman, she was a black maid who was pregnant,

she was run over by a car and was only recognized for her thumb, because nobody stopped to help her... and I asked my students, boys and girls, why should we mourn the death of a white rich man, who was so far from their lives and experiences, but we had no tears for that woman from the periphery, who was much closer to their existence... Then, these things started to affect me: which lives deserve mourning? as questioned nowadays by Judith Butler⁴. How could I, a basic education teacher for such a long time, be so blind to these issues in the classroom? Why did it take so long for these things to start bothering me when I discussed class issues?! Then, I think that these interrelations led me to the theory, to understand these intersectionalities. Obviously, there is a point where everything mingles, but I consider that these issues of living with difference – and a difference that is intertwined with inequality – make me think about the centers I joined later on when I was a professor at university. The centers gave me theoretical support for what I already thought of as lived experience. My first group was NEHO, but it was at UNIFAL when I participated in the Center of Studies on Gender and Sexuality, that these issues became stronger in my research. It had a short existence since the coordinator professor left to another institution. Then, during the pandemic, I created a group that gathered people from several courses to discuss gender issues. The group was called Gender, Diversity, and Affection. It was a group of studies, but at the same time one of welcoming. In fact, it was a request from the students in the medical course, not from history. We created a group that joined students from dentistry, medicine, social sciences, education, geography, history, and biotechnology, all concerned with the vulnerability of the bodies and the gaps in the curricula regarding worries with lives considered dissident. The group used to meet every week – during the pandemic it was a strong group, it lasted two years – it gathered professionals from several universities and NGOs who worked with the LGBTQIAPN+ community. Wow, that was very strong for me, realizing that the theme crossed so many fields of knowledge and that it was possible to gather around common issues! And how about the perspective? The need for an inter and multidisciplinary discussion led to the creation of the AMHOR group after the pandemic⁵. This is the group I currently coordinate. The idea is to create a virtual collection of documents related to dissident bodies and

⁴ Butler, Judith. *Vida precária: os poderes do luto e da violência*. São Paulo: Autêntica, 2004.

⁵ The Collection of Memory and History of the LGBTQIAPN+ Pride in Southern Minas Gerais is a group of research and outreach that organized a virtual collection, surveys and produces sources, works with oral history, develops studies and actions in Alfenas and other cities of the region with the community and public schools.

their histories; but, going further, we have created several actions of historical dissemination and debate, in the public history perspective; and this group is very active and sensitive, it also gathers people from several courses and members of the internal and external communities, who welcome each other. We organized exhibitions in the museum and held an exhibition in the public square close to the public defender's office during the campaign in favor of the change of names for trans people. We also wrote collectively a book about the Gay Movement in Alfenas (MGA)⁶.

Robson Laverdi: You emphasized this aspect of your trajectory of how being a teacher in basic education became a motor of your subjectivity, let's say, where you somehow met all these demands. How did this impact your academic life, your scientific production in the History area, and your relationship with transdisciplinary fields? Can you tell us about your personal experience, how you transfer, modulate, and produce from this dialogue with your personal experience? How have your research choices and your subjectivity transformed you into your current version as a researcher, historian, and activist?

Marta Rovai: Another difficult question... Well, I graduated from a wonderful university, that is, PUC São Paulo. I entered the course at PUC in 1984, the year of "Diretas Já" (campaign for direct elections in Brazil). I am the result of education at the time of the military dictatorship, its final part, when the redemocratization process was going on. I entered university without knowing what a dictatorship was, because it was not possible to talk about it at the time!... I remember that one of my history teachers called Susan, in the third year of high school, used to discuss dictatorships in Latin America. This was between 1981 and 1983... She taught us about dictatorship in Argentina and guerrillas in Central America, for example, but never talked about Brazil – she kept biting around the bush... I keep thinking how she sought to introduce the theme of dictatorship using other ways. And that enchanted me and drove me into history; but I really did not know what a military dictatorship was, and I was immersed in it! When I entered university, two things marked me at PUC São Paulo: first, the "Diretas Já" campaign, in which I took part in the Vale do Anhangabaú. I was never an activist in the students' movement, my activism was always in the union movement – it is interesting to think now how come the students' movement never seduced me. I started to teach when I was in the third year of my university course, I was 20 years old at the time,

⁶ Rovai, Marta G. O. *Celebrando o orgulho: 24 anos de lutas e conquistas do Movimento Gay de Alfenas*. Teresina: Cancioneiro, 2024.

and I immediately joined the union, the Apeoesp. But I do remember that crazy thing at PUC, the active students' movement, and then, at the time of the "Diretas Já", I have an image: PUC all covered in black fabric; students covered the buildings with black fabric... But there was no subject addressing dictatorship at the university. The theme was addressed by a professor who taught Studies of Brazilian Problems, he converted the curriculum into discussions about dictatorship. There I was impacted by the lesson given by Professor Lúcio and, soon after, the visit of those workers to the school in Osasco. Well, all that introduced me into a strong relationship with the military dictatorship issues, dismantling all my prejudices! And I always took that to the classroom - the impact I feel, objectively, immediately, when I feel impacted, the first thing I think is: I need to share this! It has always been a posture. I need - isn't there this thing that happens when you see something very beautiful and think: "What if somebody was here?", because what is beautiful is so beautiful that you cannot live it alone, you want to share it! I consider that the discovery issue is like that too - when you feel enchanted with the discovery, you think: "OMG, I cannot discover it by myself!"... Discovering in the sense of opening one's eyes, we have to tell it to everyone! I want everybody to feel the same impact I felt. Then, I immediately take that to the classroom, because I want to share. I usually tell my students, it's like a mantra, a little bit of what professor Sebe used to do and say: "Let's do what nobody else is doing". So, if nobody was talking about dictatorship, we would! And that became a great theme for me in the classroom. And while I was getting impacted by those dictatorship issues and then by those of gender and race - it is interesting because I am a cis hetero and white woman, but the LGBT and race issues impact me a lot! Students call me the 'mother of gays', they like to play with that, but this is because when I notice that in the classroom, the exclusion issue, for example, I get really indignant, because I have met students frustrated with school and university. And then I transformed this into content to be discussed in the classroom and in the research I advise. All these issues entered my basic education and my university curricula, because I always thought that we cannot omit ourselves when we see the violence that is happening in both the classroom and society in general. I start one of my books, for example, telling readers about the view I used to have of LGBTQIAPN+ individuals; a kind of salvationist view that came from my very Christian family, that idea of "poor things, let's pray for them". In the 1980s, as a girl, I used to share that image, as well as the image I had of trans bodies, manly the figures of Thelma Lipp and Roberta

Close, who entered my childhood when I watched the TV programs presented by Chacrinha and Silvio Santos. Objectified bodies about which I learned to think: “Poor things, they are sick, they need to be treated, they need to go to church”. But when I became a teacher, in 1987, those people entered my life, and occupied spaces where I was and questioned me, they challenged the model of school that for years I had helped to create. I remember Matheus, who is a lawyer today, he used to come to class with his nails done. He was a student in the third year of high school, in the 2000s, who was not ashamed to show his homosexuality. And this bothered the teachers, his posture “disturbed the classes”... And because we are formed by binary gender technologies and try to reproduce them... I talked to him: “Matheus, why do you use nail enamel? You disturb the classes”, I was just reproducing the school cis heteronormative discourse. And he would say: “Where do I disturb your class, Martinha? How about my marks? What are my marks? Don’t I participate in the class? Don’t I read everything you tell me to? Martinha, my nails are my happiness! This is your problem, yours and the other teachers’. You should solve it!”. And that was great! We needed to be shaken by the diverse existences!... And I started to realize how these things could tear me apart – when I say that we tear inside, they make us reflect upon the violences we have contributed to with our “good will”, with our joy, but those are violences that we do not realize we are perpetrating! And then, when I worked with the fishermen, in 2013, I found out that my doctorate meant nothing before all that knowledge, those people, if I could not learn something from/with them. Then, gradually I learned that some names had been given to all those things – what professor Sebe called collaboration, and the historian Michael Frisch described as “shared authority”⁷ –, this position of exchange between the *expertise* and the experience, which are things that we live. And that all that implied in sensitive and continuous hearing, able to transform us, and that it would not only occur at the time of a study on oral history: it was in teaching, in the relationship with the community, in life! Practices exist before they are named. The Academia gives names, but the relationships are built by different people that we meet on the way. People teach us. Then the Academia tries to frame it to explain, which is important, of course; but, it is also necessary to appropriate from that to make some things intelligible,

⁷ Frisch states that historians are no longer the only interpreters, authors and authorities, since in the work with oral history, dialogue and recognition of diverse types of knowledge is fundamental. Frisch, Michael. A história pública não é uma via de mão única: De Shared Authority à cozinha digital, e vice-versa. In: Mauad, Ana M.; Almeida, Juniele R.; Santhiago, Ricardo. *História pública no Brasil: sentidos e itinerários*. São Paulo: Letra e Voz, 2016.

things that not always occur to be intelligible, rationalized – they are there to be felt, to be lived, only to be experienced!... Taking that into consideration, I was always highly impacted by the histories narrated by people I could talk to in my classes and in the research I developed. Regarding the fishermen and fisherwomen, for example, when I had the chance to recognize the relationship they have with nature, with the world, and with everything that they wanted to say to the Academia in the sense of charging them with some more democratic and dialogic attitudes. I learned that oral history is not only a methodology, as already explained by professor Sebe. It can be a project, a political posture, a commitment with public history and with new epistemologies, male and female subjects. Its reasoning cannot be born in the Academia, since although we might organize and systematize knowledge, the desire to speak, the sharing, the desire to make that experience shared and public knowledge comes from those that many times we ignore, we call the oppressed, those that are “below” when we want to insert them in theoretical debates. They call us, they charge us, they propose partnerships... And then, when you are facing them, you notice the grandeur of being open to listen and being listened to... This is what occurs also when I come to UNIFAL, always considering the oral history perspective, the NEHO, and I listen to individuals from the LGBT community; I realize how much they affect me, and that they analyze me too... The university with those bodies that are dissident from cis heteronormativity (my own existence standard), the *travesti* girls telling me: “Miss, you are not talking about us. Talking about the Gay Movement of Alfenas is not talk about our bodies. You are contributing to silence us!”. Or when the black worker women from Osasco told me: “Miss, you are talking about class fight, but you are not talking about fight within the class. Where are the women, miss? Where is race, miss?”...

Currently, I work as a collaborator professor at USP and I advise eight black women in the graduate course. Those eight black women tell me when I am being, how can I say, I wouldn't say racist – they don't call me that – but they say: “Miss, the whiteness of the Academia is at work there “. And then we start to realize that our education is full of gaps and holes and marked by the racist, sexist, LGBTphobic, classist system. Then, advising black women – who are no longer girls, they are real women– has impacted me a lot, has guided me to other readings, has led me to other types of research, and made me face it! I have found out that when noticing people different from me in the world, I started to notice myself in the world. Up to that point it was all about “listening to the other”, “learning about the other”, “explaining the

other”. When interacting with such different communities I started to explain myself, to explain society where I am inserted in, whiteness, cisgender, and heteronormativity in the Academia. I have been thinking a lot about who I am, how I have contributed to oppression, and how I can be deconstructed as a woman, as a professor, as a researcher in the classroom, outside the classroom, I feel much more torn by the words of others, other women, who narrate themselves but also narrate me. One of my former advisees at USP, who finished her master’s course, Fernanda Gomes, a black lesbian woman usually says: “Miss, I hate when white people come to me and say ‘what can I do to help? What can I do to contribute?’ ... You white should take care of your business! This is your problem! You created a problem, you solve it”. I think that is it, but more and more I realize that we white people, must take care of our own business and find out a way to contribute, by creating partnerships and convergences, deconstructing violences that we helped to build. And the Academia for me is one of these spaces for contribution, but it can no longer be the canonical contribution. It requires rupture, confrontation, including confronting who we are.

Alessandra Izabel de Carvalho: Perfect, Marta. Now, we would like to listen to something else about your intellectual production. Oral history transcribes the voices of other people, respecting their subjectivities and experiences. In your trajectory, you have dealt with sensitive memories such as the activists of military dictatorship and LGBTQIAPN+ students. How does this responsibility affect your methodological and theoretical choices in the treatment of such memories?

Marta Rovai: Well, as I said before, when I started graduation in 1987, I thought I was doing oral history since I thought that it meant to interview people. I also remember an experience in the classroom in a public school in São Paulo, when I read *Canto de Morte* in 1992. I thought: “I’m going to do oral history in the classroom”. The São Paulo city hall was run by Luísa Erundina and I taught in the periphery in a neighborhood of São Paulo called Jardim D’Abril. I asked the students to interview their families, because I was interested in all those histories, and they were completely out of those formal curricula of basic education. For example, it made no sense to discuss ancient history at that time in a totally peripheric neighborhood, with a black and poor population facing violence and drug dealing problems. And then, I asked everybody to interview their families. At the time, I thought about their mother and father, because in my head I had this nuclear view of family, then I found out there were students without a father, or without a mother, others who

lived on the streets. That affected me deeply!... And when the children came back with those interviews, I did not know what to do with them! I asked myself in anguish: “What can I do with all these interviews?!” Then, not knowing what to do, I asked the boys and girls: “Now you’ll draw, make a drawing representing your family from the interview “. And it ended there, because I did not know how to treat them!... Nowadays, it would be another discussion, obviously. I had no understanding of the life sharing issue; at that point I was not dealing with experiences, I was dealing with data that came from interviews. There were no discussions about memory, identity, and experiences. I had no idea of deeper discussion, also, because in my head, what mattered was social class – that was my education – and social class was a great abstraction! Thus, I discussed with the students about social class as a great, universal and abstract idea. The absurd of the situation: I talked about Marx in the fifth grade of basic education without realizing that social class was there, body, soul, blood, everything in front of me! That social class was there alive, existing, and I was theorizing about the industrial revolution for basic school students in a neighborhood in the periphery of a big city, without discussing their very existence! And I ended up leaving that school, because I went home crying every day, because I could not stand their reality! I asked to leave without telling the students... It was one afternoon, I left without saying goodbye, because it would be too much to leave if I looked at them! Today I think that if I had had at that time the education I have today, things would have been different. But, at the time, I was not able to stand their existence, their experience! Although I knew the theory, I could not deal with life!... Today, I would not leave, but at that time, it was necessary. Because giving up is sometimes also a courage act. And with the education I had, I could not contribute to them, because I did not know how to hear those histories, I did not listen to their lives! Then, that school marked me profoundly!...

Up to that point, I had left graduation without any production, because this was not required at the time, academic production was not motivated. I was convinced that basic education teachers had nothing to say to the Academia. For me, those with master’s degrees were “geniuses” who knew a lot! In my mind, I would never reach that condition. Although I’m a white person, I lived in the periphery of Osasco, and I remember when I passed from the fourth to the fifth grade I wanted to stop studying because I told my mother that would not be able to continue studying, I was not smart enough. For me, masters were people from another world! Regarding doctors, I even did not know what they were – a doctor for me was a physician. During my master’s course,

I published an article motivated by my advisor, the beloved Antonio Pedro Tota, in fact, it was a review to pay homage to professor Alcyr Lenharo, who had died. It was not even an article, and I still had this idea that only very good people could produce something. I started to produce quite late, when I entered the doctorate program in 2008. At the time, I was already 42 years old and had been working as a teacher for 22 years, very different from the trajectory of our students who follow the academic career these days. I always liked writing, but then I was 42 and still did not know exactly how to write an article! But, since I had been participating in the NEHO since 2008, there were some exchanges. We had meetings every fortnight at USP, we read, discussed, people told me about and shared their research. And then I started to realize that I could write about what I had been researching and living. So, from there, I started my production around the Osasco strike, the things I had learned about memory and oral history; the hearing that I had had the chance to practice. Thinking memory for me was extraordinary – thinking that memory could bring another perspective to history, the idea of possibility... There is something that the students also say, that when I die my grave will have a plate saying “history is possibility”, because I started to realize that everything was possible from memory. Everything was possible, because memory allows affection, emotion, imagination, and dream! Memory does not treat a past that is over, but rather a past that is open and intertwined with future, entangled with the present. The former workers from Osasco and those women, their life partners, talked about dreams, what could have been, their future, when they remembered their experiences!... And it was quite enchanting to me, writing about memory!... And I remember that at the time of the interviews with them, I read a text by Eduardo Galeano called *A pedra arde* (The Stone Burns). It's a small book for children which tells the history of a boy who entered the yard of a Jewish man to steal apples, the man had a large scar on his face. The boy thought the man would hurt him, but the old man, instead of punishing him, gave him an apple. The boy was so grateful to the man, but he realized that the man was very ugly, he was full of scars and marks... Then he thought: “Wow, I want to help this old man, he must have suffered a lot “. Then, one day, the boy found a different stone, it was bright and burned, and he had heard that if you managed to touch the stone you could erase the memory of your suffering and you could even get younger. The child was very happy and met the old man to tell him: “Look, if you touch this stone, all your scars will disappear, you'll be young again

⁸ Galeano, Eduardo. *A Pedra Arde*. São Paulo: Loyola. 1989.

and will be able to move on”. And the man answered something like: “I’m not touching the stone. This is me. If I touch the stone and my scars disappear, I’ll forget everything I lived in Auschwitz. And all my survival, and my family, and my religion. It would be a betrayal”. I read this history during my doctorate program, and its meaning impacted me deeply: the importance of memory for people, for their identity. Then, I first turned to a male memory about the 68 strike in Osasco; I started to realize the importance of hearing, of narrating and understanding who we are or who we would like to be; and also the importance of a memory that is collective and generate feelings of belonging. “Wow, I need to listen more, there are things being said and I am not paying attention”... And there was always a man saying: “the women were in the backstage of the strike”. And I thought: “But who are these women, don’t they have names? Who are these women, what is this backstage?”... And then they started to tell me: “My mother hid the weapons under her bed; my wife fed us in the kitchen; my sister visited us in prison”... What kind of backstage is this?! And then I found those women – “I need to know who these women are, what their names are. The only woman who had been named in their speech was the “Aunt” – which is not a name either, in fact it was the “war name” of a lady who was the right arm of captain Carlos Lamarca, who was in the guerrilla as the leader of the Popular Revolutionary Vanguard, VPR. That is why they remembered her! The Aunt had no name. For this reason, I only found out her real name, Tercina, years later⁹. That is a woman I never managed to interview since she had died in 2004. But I tried to interview all the female workers, some I never found, except for Ana Maria Gomes (also a VPR member), even if I was informed that over 200 female workers took part in the strike. I could never interview one of the 200 female workers because I did not know their names and I heard that they were sent home by the men in the strike because “strike was not a woman’s thing”. And then, I interviewed the partners of those men to understand how a strike during a dictatorship could impact the life of those women who were never remembered. They were women with four, five kids, who had never had a job, some of them were even illiterate, they might not even have understood what communism, or

⁹ Tercina Dias was the mother of the worker called Manoel Nascimento, nicknamed Neto. She was the right arm of captain Carlos Lamarca in the guerrilla of Vale do Ribeira. She was banned from Brazil with her four grandchildren, when there was the exchange of guerrillas for the Swiss Ambassador in 1971. To know more about her history, from her granddaughter’s memories, see: Rovai, Marta Gouveia de Oliveira. *Entrevista - A tia dos guerrilheiros: Tercina e o enfrentamento à ditadura brasileira nas memórias de Zuleide, sua neta. Caminhos Da História*, 28(2), p. 183–197, 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.periodicos.unimontes.br/index.php/caminhosdahistoria/article/view/6796>. Accessed on: 14 Nov. 2024.

a dictatorship were at that moment! All this changed the route of my production in the sense that it is necessary to listen more! And then I started to write texts about the memories of the strike, about the women and their internal exile¹⁰. I wrote a text in 2010 entitled “The stone that burns: the right to memory against the seduction of forgetting”, which was published in the *Sæculum* journal, and two texts about the ethics of listening, one for the oral history journal that belonged to the ABHO, in 2013, and another for an Argentinian journal called *Testimonios*¹¹, in 2015. When I found that text by Portelli, “Oral history and power”¹², I thought: “My Goodness, Alessandro Portelli ‘stole’ my ideas!! This is what I used to think!”. It was funny!... It was great to have contact with that text, in which he wrote about the responsibility with the other’s words, the ethics of listening. He wrote the text in 2010, I had not read it yet, but I was worried about that: “My Goodness, how can we listen to this people?”... and more and more, Robson and Alessandra, when I am listening to people, I keep thinking about the responsibility for their words and questioning that strange thing that I later started to reject that is the idea of “giving voice”. I started to notice our academic arrogance and how generous those people were by allowing me access to their voice. They were giving me something, they were giving me their voice! Then, I started to realize that the practice of giving someone voice did not exist, I started to notice that we did not manipulate the interview. Because for years I had heard it, back in 1987, from those professors who advised me while I wrote my monograph: “Oral history has flaws, because interviewees will always tell you what you want to hear “. And then, when experiencing this practice, we discovered that there is great dialogue and that in the positive sense, the participants manipulate each other! Because the idea must be this – every

¹⁰ Among those articles, we highlight Rovai, Marta G. O. Rompendo a invisibilidade: narrativas femininas sobre os bastidores da militância política em 1968, na cidade de Osasco. *Revista Perseu*, n. 7, ano 5, p. 41-57, 2011. Retrieved from: <https://revistaperseu.fpabramo.org.br/index.php/revista-perseu/article/view/34>. Accessed on: 17 Nov. 2024. Rovai, Marta G. O. O direito à memória: a história oral de mulheres que lutaram contra a ditadura militar (1964-84). *Revista Tempo e Argumento*, Florianópolis, v. 5, n. 10, p. 108-132, 2013. DOI: 10.5965/2175180305102013108. Retrieved from: <https://revistas.udesc.br/index.php/tempo/article/view/2175180305102013108>. Accessed on: 18 Nov. 2024.

¹¹ The texts can be found at: Rovai, M. G. de O. A Pedra que Arde: o direito à memória contra a sedução do esquecimento. *Sæculum - Revista de História*, [S. l.], n. 23, 2010. Retrieved from: <https://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs/index.php/srh/article/view/11516>. Accessed on: 17 Nov. 2024; Rovai, Marta G. O. A ética da escuta: o desafio dos pesquisadores em história oral. (2015). *Testimonios*, 4, 109-120. <https://revistas.unc.edu.ar/index.php/testimonios/article/view/32375>. Accessed on: 13 Nov. 2024; Rovai, Marta G. O. Aprendendo a ouvir: a história oral testemunhal contra a indiferença. *História Oral*, 16(2), 129-148, 2013 <https://www.revista.historiaoral.org.br/index.php/rho/article/view/313>. Accessed on: 13 Nov. 2024.

¹² Portelli, Alessandro. História oral e poder. *Mnemosine*, 6(2), p. 2-13, 2010. https://www.e-publicacoes.uerj.br/mnemosine/article/view/41498/pdf_183. Accessed on: 14 Nov. 2024.

person manipulating the other since we are not equal, we speak from different places and with diverse intentions. We need to manipulate all the knowledge and memories, the very different ones, so that we get to a common place, a way of sharing for the good of all. Oral history is this dialogic process, in which there is negotiation, manipulation, matches and mismatches, where we commit to and become responsible for the other's words.

And then I also found out that it was not about working in a community where everyone was happy and everything was consensus, where everybody was friends. In oral history, we discover that speaking about the community is to reveal disagreements, and I found disagreement among the workers, the fishermen and fisherwoman, among *congadeiros* and *congadeiras*, and the LGBTQIAPN+ community more than in any other place! But we tend to romanticize those fights... This all started to appear in my texts, this issue of a sensitive hearing that did not end with the interview, one which continues throughout writing and in the publication of the narratives. We keep on hearing!... There resides the care with writing, how to deal with this writing, with transcreation, and transcription... And then I see each male or female researcher putting a bit of themselves in that writing. And what matters is the ethical care with the other's words from a dialogic process – not hurting, not twisting, not omitting, not exposing anybody. Not everything that is heard can go into the writing!... This is something I learned with all those voices. To respect the other person's will since they might be in favor of publishing it today but in the future they might no longer be. Then, this is a sensitive hearing that lasts forever. And this touches me, mainly when I write a book with the transwomen and *travestis*, and when I start to think how to write a text considering the huge differences of our bodies. And then I asked myself: is this about or is this with, or is it from being a cisgender woman? And then I asked them. I had to ask them! When facing difference, the written form also modifies in me, when I ask them: "What do you think about me? What do you think of a cis woman who researches transwomen and *travestis*?" And one of them says: "Do you expect to be legitimated by the community?". And I said: "Are you going to legitimate or not. How can we do it? And then, what do you want me to say? What kind of readers do you expect for this book?"... And then we built up a text together, they would talk, I would talk, and then I realized that it was beyond the authority of the Academia, it was far beyond any methodology. We also started to discuss authorship. We started to think about the issue: who is in fact the author of what we write? All this affected me and was transferred to my texts. Therefore, I want to share, I want other

people to know that there are other possibilities of writing and other uses for writing. It is possible to produce other things that are not necessarily written. Professor Sebe did not agree much with that, but for me, the production of a documentary from the narratives is transcription, an exposure for me is transcription. It is a careful translation of the other's words which can be converted into writing, image, or a series of other ways.

Robson Laverdi: In your thesis about Osasco in 1968¹³, you highlighted female voices in a context that was historically dominated by the male perspective. Which were the greatest challenges and rewards of that choice and how did it impact your view about the workers' resistance in that period?

Marta Rovai: When I talked to them, we always recalled that expression that we usually hear that is "I have nothing to say". And they used to tell me "talk to my brother, to my husband, they made history". One of the histories that impacted me deeply was that of Ms Iracema, she was a cook in a public school in Jaguaré, a neighborhood of São Paulo, she had two brothers that were guerillas – one of them, João Domingues da Silva, was tortured and killed by the dictatorship when he was 18 years old, and the other, Roque Aparecido da Silva, was also a guerilla and one of the prisoners exchanged for the Swiss ambassador, who had been kidnapped by the guerrilla in 1971. I remember him in the film *Ainda estamos aqui*¹⁴ (I'm still here), recently launched, because he was one of the guerillas exchanged for the Swiss ambassador, he is in that list of 70 people. The brother that died, João, was a butcher not an industry worker. He took part in the robbery of Ademar de Barros' armored car. He was imprisoned and tortured for three months, dying under torture. And Iracema, a simple woman, had to collect his body to have the right to bury him! This history, I compare it to the Greek narrative Antigone¹⁵, in which the sister goes after the brother's body to bury him in his own land, as a right. Ms Iracema confronted the mathematics teacher from the school where she worked as a cook because she found out he had been one of the torturers of her brother. She, a lady, confronted the general by herself to release João's body from the hospital! She confronted the general, brought the body, and

¹³ The thesis was published as a book: Rovai, Marta G. O. *Osasco 1968: a greve no masculino e no feminino*. São Paulo: Letra e Voz, 2014.

¹⁴ AINDA estou aqui. Direção: Walter Salles. Brasil: RT Features; VideoFilmes; Mact Productions, 2024. Film (135 min).

¹⁵ The Antigone Myth is a Greek tragedy written by Sophocles em 441 a.C.. It tells the history of a Woman who disobeys the men's law by revolting against a decree by king Creonte which condemns her brother to be killed and buried far from his homeland, Tebas. Antigone challenges the power to legitimate her brother's right, the condemned Polinices, to be buried in the place where he was born.

the fact that she brought the body back to the town denounced the death to the city of Osasco, denounced torture!... The history of Ms Iracema is one that impacts me deeply!... She took the correspondence, short notes, even after her brother was killed, inside her bra to the families, she continued visiting those that were in prison. I asked her: “Iracema, you already had a murdered brother, another in exile, and even so did you continue visiting the imprisoned ones?” She answered: “Do you know this song ‘you catch me alive, I escape dead’?” ... These are histories that really impact me, they are histories of a specific exile. They said: “You historians speak about the exiled ones, but you never talk about our exile, the women that were exiled, alone, with their children to bring up! How about our exile, who is going to talk about it?!”. See, these are very strong histories and histories that do not report victimization, but rather a great empowerment, because they went to the streets, they took tables to the squares to collect signatures for the amnesty of the imprisoned and exiled by the dictatorship! They visited the imprisoned, took messages hidden in their bras, took cakes for those in prison. And when I asked them: “why did you take cakes?”, they would say: “Because the cake time was a break during which our brothers, husbands and friends could leave the cell. It was a breath of life to eat a piece of cake!”. Then, they noticed things that provoked a new rupture in my image of class, of canonical activism, of a political party activism, of armed fight, and social movement. They were also in the political movement, but it was a movement through affection, a movement for life! They fought for those people’s lives!... And at that moment, they were not discussing left or right wing, they did not even know what that was... Many of them would say: “I didn’t even know what communism was; I asked the priest, and the priest said he had nothing to do with that, and I should deal with my communist husband!”. Then, you see, it was solitude, and I started to understand what that exile was, what was the solitude of not understanding things. And when they started to understand, they started to visit the prison and started to notice the poverty of their acquaintances and the unemployed workers and started to create community fairs in their homes, in their yards, to give food to those who needed it. Then, I ask myself, how could we historians be oblivious to these histories?! They had to spend whole nights burning their husbands’ documents so that they would not be incriminated. I asked them: “Do you have photographs?” and they answered: “The photos were burnt in the holes opened in the backyards, in the small hours to protect our families and our mates “. All of them did that! And what is powerful in that? Those are not arranged practices, because the men’s

narrative and the men's practice are based on a pact – it is the virile masculinity pact. This pact has deeds and values in common, they are public! Women have no pact! Their pact is the survival of their families and their partners who were dying!! They produced a powerful political practice! They claimed day care for their children, they went to churches and started a new type of activism against dictatorship. And this register provokes such an impact that when I launched the book, it impacted men, because they had never read the history of their female partners. This led the Metallurgic Union of Osasco to produce a documentary with them, promoted round tables where they could participate. In my defense, those women were all there, while the men were not. And this impacted their lives in such a way that they took that to their families. I interviewed José Campos Barreto's sister, he died with Lamarca. I remember that when I first talked to her, Maria de Lourdes Barreto, a teacher, she told me: "I have nothing to say, because I did not even know that my brother was a guerrilla. I knew that he took part in the guerrilla on the day his photo appeared, his first photo, which is a classic photo in the *Estado de São Paulo* newspaper – he was in cuffs being taken to prison ". José Campos Barreto was an industry worker in Osasco, he was 18 years old, and joined Lamarca in the fight, he was also murdered with him by the Bahia army. And his sister told me: "I realized the impact of my brother's death, his prison, when they invaded our home in Bahia! We did not even know what was going on and the army of Bahia killed my brother, another brother, arrested my father, I hid under the bed in a neighbor's home. I was a 13-year-old girl, and the soldiers invaded the neighbor's house looking for me, saying 'where is that tramp, Carlos Lamarca's lover? The time we put our hands on her, she'll know what it is like to be someone's lover' ". And she said: "I heard all that and did not understand, I did not even know who Carlos Lamarca was. I was experiencing terror hidden under a bed!"... And when I asked her about the importance of telling those things, she answered: "Today I am aware of how important it is to tell these things, I have never told before. But, from now on, I will tell my family about that experience ". When I gave her the book, she said: "I'll give it to my daughter, my nephew, because this is a history that they do not know. The history of my family up to then was the history of José Campos Barreto". And the way the women tell the history of José Campos Barreto is very different from that told by men: "José Campos Barreto was a boy who liked eating fried eggs. And when he hid under my house, I made him six fried egg sandwiches ". The other would say: "I liked Campos Barreto because he played the guitar. Wherever he went, he would take his guitar.

José Campos Barreto loved children! José Campos Barreto was a seminarian. José Campos Barreto wore worn out sandals “... But no men told these histories of him! The women did, because the memory is different, it is no longer the framed one, the one that says what is politically approved and publicized. Women’s voices were not authorized to say it, but when they decided to say, they humanized José Campos Barreto. The guerrilla was a boy wearing worn out sandals who liked children, played the guitar, and enjoyed egg sandwiches. And I remember when presenting my doctorate thesis, one of the female professors in the board asked me: “How come you dare to reduce Campos Barreto to this?!” I said: “I am not reducing Campos Barreto to this. Those women are telling that Campos Barreto was a human being as anyone of us, anyone of us could be José Campos Barreto”. This is the humanization of those people, and this is what their narrative shows all the time. These are those women’s memories of him! They told me about their partners: “They were boys violated by dictatorship! Dictatorship could negotiate, dictatorship could only arrest them, but the dictatorship killed our friends “. Then, they point out another issue, I started to see from them a different Osasco, a different strike, and that is why the title of the thesis was, *Osasco 1968: the strike in the male and female views*, because it is a different history. It is the history of their courage. To give you an idea, their history arrived at the Federal University of Amazonas. Once I got a Facebook message from a girl who paid homage to Ms Iracema from Amazonas. I immediately forwarded the message to her: “See, you said you had no history to tell, and now you are being honored in Amazonas”. And Sônia Miranda, who talked a lot about the exile, she was the wife of a guerrilla, she told me one of these days: “Professor Marta, I gave my book to Lula”. Then, I think about the dimension, the importance those women ascribed to that record of their history. Men also gave it importance, but those men had already told their history in other books, in other records. The facts were the same, the events were the same, but those women disturbed the events because the events have another meaning, they become other events. They bring the political issue to a private dimension. Those women promote a rupture with the private, they go public, and they go and come back. They have another dynamics, they go forward and back again, and interfere in everything around them. They practice affection politics and passion for life! Then, I consider that it is in this sense that research impacts a lot. I don’t think I hear the history of Osasco being told without including the women of Osasco.

Alessandra Izabel de Carvalho: Marta, let's now address another layer of your academic and social work that is about public history and heritage. You once coordinated the PIBID at UNIFAL and you have had an active work in the Brazilian Public History Network. How did this experience change your view of the public history role in teaching and in the education of critical citizens? And what were the specific challenges of working with themes such as dictatorship and gender in basic education and in higher education?

Marta Rovai: I worked in PIBID from 2018 to 2022, for two terms. I did not work as an area coordinator, but rather as an institutional coordinator. And there is an interesting history: soon after I entered the university, in 2014, there was a vacancy for the PIBID History Coordinator. I applied for that position and told the colleagues that I would like to contribute since I came from basic education and I had worked for 26 years in public and private schools in São Paulo, between 1986 and 2012, and had also worked with teachers' education in Recife and Teresina. And the answer I heard was: "But, do you have a master's degree in history teaching? Do you have a doctorate degree in education or history teaching?". I said no, and then I was told I could not coordinate, I should have developed some research. I thought: "Well, I developed research, because while I was a teacher I researched, I thought about my practice!". "It does not count; you cannot use it!"... For this reason, I was never a coordinator in the area, I became institutional coordinator and learned a lot with my colleagues. Although I like to be in the classroom a lot - in my opinion, the classroom is my place -, I remember having proposed discussions about gender and race in the PIBID. We created interdisciplinary projects with these themes and qualified basic education teachers. Of course, it was not only me, there were other male and female colleagues that were also worried with the themes! Currently, the history PIBID - I'm no longer there, but I follow their movements - has several projects linked to gender, sexuality, and race. And a relevant detail is that those projects linked to gender are not promoted by professors, they are mostly articulated by male and female students! They are the ones who, when professors ask them to create a project, they insert gender there. It is impressive, because the students' demands on this theme are huge, despite the resistance of many female and male colleagues. What I listen to many times at university is: "Everybody works gender and race; it is inserted in the curricula". It is a shameful thing, because it is not. The debates are not taken seriously, they are transformed into ghettos. And students develop all projects! I have seen several beautiful works that the students, many of whom take part in the AMHOR project, have developed. Besides PIBID,

AMHOR project has been invited to carry out interventions in schools. Right now, we are talking to teachers from a school located opposite the university, a public school, they are asking us to promote an intervention there against transphobia and LGBTphobia. The idea is to promote some discussion with the students, talking about our diverse bodies: white, black, cis, trans, non-binary, homosexual... Last year, I was in two schools with the AMHOR group. There, we discussed feminism, gender violence, and transsexuality. This touches the schools, and many times students who are also teachers start this movement. Others, who already finished university and work in schools call us to talk about dictatorship, gender power relations, sexism, and racism... Then, all that generates a movement that sensitizes, affects, and impact schools, it touches the university professors too because it makes them rethink their practices... All movement is plural, it impacts curricula, research, actions, and relationships! I think that we get contaminated by a political love that seeks transformation via education!

Robson Laverdi: Marta, you're a woman from Osasco, embedded in Osasco, let's say; embedded in this experience of a city, and moves out to work in the Parnaíba Delta, and again to work in the south of Minas Gerais. How do you keep the balance, then, all this alterity, how do you deal with this alterity?

Marta Rovai: As I said, it was a great impact! Working with fishermen and fisherwomen meant to deal with a completely different world. I went there for a post-doctoral program in Parnaíba, a city on the Piauí coast, in 2013. I had something very important that was the support of 14 students from the State University of Piauí. Dealing with that alterity was less difficult in the sense of facing the unknown, the strange, because those boys and girls, a great number of them were fishermen's/fisherwomen's children/grandchildren, who lived in fishing communities. And they took me there – we researched on the Parnaíba shore and crossed the Parnaíba river to the Maranhão islands. Part of the research was developed in Piauí, and a great part of it on the Canárias Island, in Maranhão, which is on the Rio Parnaíba Delta, a gorgeous place! Being impacted by that nature was something!... I had never seen a world like that, I did not know it existed. The landscape is really different: there are the boats, the crabs, the women washing clothes on the river banks... What kind of world is that?! There are the huge dunes!... when I arrived there, my view was an urban view of somebody who lived in São Paulo, in Osasco – which is a big city of around 900 thousand inhabitants. When I got there, I entered the simple houses, many of them were wattle and daub houses, with people offering me *murici* juice, which was a horrible juice,

but I drank it, because it was part of that relationship – they were offering me their best, and their best was the *murici* juice that the woman from São Paulo did not like... But, the juice mediated the dialogue, mediated the talk, mutual generosity, all sitting on hammocks or on the floor, and they were making their fishing material, the boat, the cast nets... And I thought: “Who am I with this doctorate degree here? How much is the Academia worth right now, if I cannot listen to and understand this world?”... Those fishermen, the shellfish collectors, they all were very suspicious of the Academia, and they ask: “And then professor, are you going to use our voice again to do nothing? The Academia loves to listen to us and do nothing about it. You like to be praised thanks to us”. I heard that many times, many fishermen/women refused to give interviews to us because they would say: “You use us. You want to interview us, but you never come back!”... For this reason, you need to let that other world tear you apart, the strange that also feels strange about us and evaluates us!... I also want to tell a history that happened to me when I was there with the shellfish collectors, and my view about them was still the one of an urban individual, ascribing to them the suffering that may not even have existed, but I imagined resided in dealing with the river. My looking at their work collecting shellfish was crossed by the desire to see and listen about their difficulties, reducing them, somehow to that. And I asked them about that work, expecting to receive a specific answer. But they surprised me, they would say: “Here is paradise, here is heaven”. And gave me some feedback of my evaluation by them: “Well, professor, your face shows that you expected us to say that everything is bad here. Bad is where you live in São Paulo, with pollution, noise, and crime “. And then, another learning happened! I was also being judged there, interpreted, as well as my world. And the exact thing that I considered, naively, as a certain alienation in relation to the exploitation of their work, they responded to in a later action, when they blocked the passage to the Rio Parnaíba delta, when I went there for “tourism”: “You are here for tourism. All these dunes that for you represent tourism, are beautiful, for us is sand in our children’s lungs. We want you to take care of our rivers and the people who live on the riverbanks!”. And I started to notice that the urban individual here did not have so many things to teach but had to listen and listen. I had to reconstruct myself a lot! I slept on a hammock – sleeping on hammocks gives me backache – but that was the resource there, there was no bed. It was the hammock and the sand underneath. I had to be transported on a boat, and I was afraid of the river; I sat to listen to the histories of the community, learning to be humble... Then, you are

forced to reconstruct yourself, reinvent yourself, and you discover new worlds, reenchanting us with other possibilities of existence! And they were also learning and reconstructing themselves with the university... Once, when I was teaching in a graduate course, I was talking about oral history with students, and they asked: “Miss, we know the *Bumba-meu-boi* people, from the Ilha Grande community. Let’s invite them for an interview?” I said: “Let’s have a collective interview here, an oral history exercise “. And then the *Bumba-meu-boi* group arrived... And the students started to ask them: “How great is it when you go out on the streets to practice the *Bumba-meu-boi*?”, “When you go for the *Bumba-meu-boi* and dance, don’t you feel like you are in another dimension?”. And the people from the community only answered: “Yes”... It was kind of funny and at the same time highly disrespectful to speak for the other... then, at a certain point, one student said: “Ah, you put certain character there in the manifestation, one that is not even a character of the *Bumba-meu-boi*”, somehow disqualifying the group’s decisions. And then a lady, who belonged to the community, answered: “if it is in the *Bumba-meu-boi*, then, *Bumba-meu-boi* it is”... When they left, I told my students: “Today, you gave a lesson of how not to do oral history, you attacked the community, you assumed how the community feel, you chose meanings for them “. It was an absurd! And then I started to understand the violences that Academia produces, because we want to “talk about”, “talk for”, we do not want to “talk with”. Many times, our positioning is not one of listening to, because what other people have to say does not matter since we already have the answer. Other times, students consider that they have already learned by reading the theory and end up transforming the community experiences into examples. And, for others, if they are not the example of what we believe to be true, they are not considered – they are removed from history. Learning with alterity is not about putting yourself in their place, or making them fit our world simply. It means, many times, deconstructing oneself, disturbing everything, recreating theories. It is also about creating bonds, being affected... I still keep affective bonds with those people, I went back to Piauí other times, and this transformed me. I remember a scene that marked me deeply: on the day I left Piauí and I went to the university to say goodbye – this time I did not run away as I had done in the past, I left looking into their eyes and learning with their world... We had a social meeting in the evening, on the beach and they told me: “We’ll never forget the only professor that hugged us “ ... Because in that city, at that moment specially, a hug was not a cultural practice. When I tried to hug them, they would put their heads on my chest,

and I would say: “Guys, look in the eye. Come here kiss on the cheek and hug!”... And when I was leaving, I arrived at the bus station, and they were all there! Guys, everybody at the bus station! That was a collective transformation, a collective learning experience!! Then, these are the networks that we build on the way... and in Minas Gerais, when I arrived there, I saw a demonstration – I had never heard about the *Congado*... when I arrived in Minas Gerais... at the central square of Alfenas, there was a *Congado* demonstration linked to the Mãe Cida *Candomblé terreiro* (meeting place). Mãe Cida is a very important personality in Alfenas, from a *Candomblé and Umbanda terreiro*, I think. They promote a meeting on the African culture day, they occupy the square and bring several *Congado* groups. And then I thought: “I’m going to interview these people!”, because, in fact, there is a constant movement towards learning and sharing these existences with the world. And those communities linked to the *Congado* in the city also wanted to register their memories and histories. When I arrived, I interviewed mother Cida’s family and I remember that in the first interview, I took some students with me to interview the women. And the students had told me that there was no *Congado* in Alfenas, because the master was a man, and the leadership passed from a man to another man. Since in that family no other man wanted to take the *Congado* leadership and they would not let their daughters to take that position, there was no *Congado*. And I went to talk to them about that: “I’ve heard that there is no *Congado* em Alfenas”. And they answered: “Professor, what do you think *Congado* is? *Congado* is a feeling, professor! *Congada* is an experience. Only because we do not go to the streets, this does not mean there is no *Congado*”. They brought flags, some clothes, and told me: “*Congado* is religion, professor!”. And then, I found out that I was in that place where I knew nothing, again, and again! Once more I reflected: “I have to listen to those people! I have to learn! I have to see these people acting, doing things”... I sometimes went to the *terreiro*, because I did not know a *terreiro* either. I had to know the *terreiro*, see how those people dialogued, who attended the *terreiro*, how it was linked to the *Congado*; how the Catholic church fit in there. And then, we started – students and I – to work on the *Congados* in southern Minas – Poços de Caldas, Alfenas, Areado... But then, see what happened, how difficult it is to produce oral history and how alterity must be respected: the state of Minas Gerais launched a call to publish books and we decided to try it. But, in that call, the ones signing were the *Congado* people, that is, the community, the masters. And we started to look for them, but they disappeared, vanished! They wouldn’t answer our calls, students went

to their homes, they would not answer the door. And finally, we missed the deadline, so we could not compete for the publication! Later, we found out that they had had an argument, and due to the argument, they did not want us to publish their history anymore. Well, to sum up, the final word was the community's. Then, we have this material that was never published, because we were not authorized by them, because somebody had given the interview, but the other member disagreed with that... And we realized in practice, how much in the community is political dispute, power dispute, and that we had no right to continue that research: "Ah, but they gave the interview..." Yes, they gave the interview, but it goes beyond that, and we kept listening to them to the end, and we also listened when they said no.

And there is also the LGBTQIAPN+ issue, which, as I said before, has crossed my whole life, but at the university, it became much more evident in the classroom. When I started talking with transwomen and the *travestis* of southern Minas, I was extremely transformed by their histories! I broadened my reading, dialoguing with trans and black intellectuals, such as Megg Rayara, Letícia Carolina Nascimento, Lélia Gonzalez, Grada Kilomba and many others who unveiled me and put our whiteness and cisgender in checkmate, and denounced their harmful effects on the Academia and social interactions. From those dialogues provided by oral history throughout the pandemic, I elaborated with the interviewees – subjects of those narratives – a book called *Sob nossa pele e com nossas vozes*¹⁶ (Under our skin and with our voices), in constant negotiations with them about the written material and its publication. They also wrote the presentation and considerations about the work, inserting *travesti's* poetry and their histories entirely recorded, without any cuts. The book was launched during a debate at the city Council, together with the LGBTQIAPN+ community, which also originated a film called *Potência Trans*¹⁷ (Trans Power), shown at the Municipal theater and at the UNIFAL. This process revealed the power of oral history, promoting public presence and debates in society showing other possible existences and worlds!¹⁸ ... This work inspired me to create a subject called "Gender and

¹⁶ Rovai, Marta G. O. *Sob nossa pele e com nossas vozes: feminilidades transbordantes no Sul-mineiro*. Teresina: Cancioneiro, 2022.

¹⁷ The documentary *Potência Trans* (Trans Power), produced by Luiz Vicente and Rodrigo Mikelino in 2024, can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrYrdXlKXQ>. Accessed on: 17 Nov. 2024.

¹⁸ About the interview process and research publication, we suggest Rovai, Marta G. O. ROVAI, Marta Gouveia de Oliveira. "A gente é pessoa!": narrativas de mulheres trans sobre Direitos Humanos. *Revista Tempo e Argumento*, Florianópolis, v. 12, n. 29, p. e0105, 2020. DOI: 10.5965/2175180312292020e0105. Retrieved from: <https://revistas.udesc.br/index.php/tempo/article/view/2175180312292020e0105>.

Sexuality”, which worked masculinities, feminism, and femininities, and where I invited the individuals I had interviewed to talk to the students. I created another subject, which is called “Friendship, Love and Happiness”, because I started to understand better the exiles inside the university, the exile those women in Osasco had talked about years ago; the solitude of black and LGBT individuals in the city and in the Academia, things that we do not discuss at the university... And I think this comes from my transformation, the contact with alterities, understanding that in oral history we do not deal with an object, we deal with people, we deal with male and female subjects of their lives! In fact, the whole Academia deals with people. It is not only in oral history practice – the entire Academia should be aware that they are dealing with people, individuals who should have the right to their identity, alterity, life, and a dignifying existence! The university needs to ‘unobjectify’ itself and ‘unobjectify’ the other. It needs to learn with diversity, listening, and tearing itself continuously... It is necessary to let life enter...

Alessandra Izabel de Carvalho: During all your speech, we notice it is being crossed by an idea that history works as a type of political resistance. So, how do you see the historian role in the current context, and how can history be used as a social transformation tool?

Marta Rovai: The Academia has several disputes, and we need to be careful with them. But it is possible to understand that alliances and convergences around political positions are possible to defend a public and democratic history, of an anticolonial collective resistance, as defended by Nego Bispo. When the Brazilian Network was created in 2011, a discussion started around the issue of digital technologies, broadening the audiences and public dialogues. I agree that the use of digital technologies has been highly relevant, but I also think that on my side, basic education never abandons me, because I consider that the first type of public history is found in the classroom. One of these days, I met a friend at the V International Symposium on Public History in Rio Grande do Norte. Aliny Pranto is a professor at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte and she told me that she attended the international event in Europe, in Luxembourg. According to her, the group she dialogued with did not admit public history to be thought of as an ally in history teaching. They stated that public history is one thing, and teaching is another thing, because the argument is that teachers in basic education have

Accessed on: 18 Nov. 2024. Rovai, M. G. de O. Um livro, muitas vozes: as potencialidades de um trabalho de história oral em dimensão pública e dialógica com feminilidades trans. *História Oral*, 26(1), p. 43–61, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.51880/ho.v26i1.1318>.

not reached the Academia debate yet. This view shows a type of hierarchy in teaching between institutions, which intrigued us both! I think that the first moment at which we can understand ourselves as public history in its organized and systematized sense is in history lessons. This does not mean that every teacher in basic education develops public history, because there are democratic principles that are not always found in a lesson. Public history has to do with dialogism, submission to public debate, respect to democracy, respect to science, production and dissemination of collectively appropriated knowledge. If we cannot gather these elements, I don't think there is public history. I can create a podcast and might not practice public history. I can make a film as *Brasil Paralelo* (Parallel Brazil), a popular and simplistic book, full of prejudice, such as the one put forward by Narloch, but this does not mean I am making public history. Public history also needs listening, it is not only oral history. In any public history practice, it is necessary to listen to and understand that public is not only audience. Public is the people involved in the whole knowledge production and dissemination process. As pointed out by Fernando Nicolazzi, we deal with lots of public: the public at university, the public at school, the one at the internet, that one that is in communities¹⁹. Then, we must take those various public(s) into account if we want the kind of practice that transforms. This is our role as professionals in the history area, which cannot be understood as a technical role only, such as at universities in the United States aiming at graduating “public historians”. Ricardo Santhiago wrote an article²⁰ where he discusses, for example, curricula in the United States, focusing on expertise in museums and archives, for example. Just like him, I question a merely technical qualification since public history is a matter of listening, it is the practice of affecting things in the world, a political position in the world against its injustices. And it seems relevant to mention that our role is not to rescue anybody! Doing oral history, practicing attentive listening, exercising teaching through dialogue and defending positioned science, it is not a mission and is not there to save anyone! I always tell students: “Do not want to save anybody, do not carry this burden on your shoulders. Our role is to fight collectively against the prejudice that haunts us, our own perverse and oppressive practices, and

¹⁹Nicolazzi, Fernando. Os historiadores e seus públicos: regimes historiográficos, recepção da história e história pública. *Revista História Hoje*, v. 8, nº 15, p. 203-222, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://rhhj.anpuh.org/RHHJ/article/view/525>. Accessed on: 14 Nov. 2024.

²⁰Santhiago, Ricardo. Servir bem para servir sempre? Técnica, mercado e o ensino de história pública. *Revista História Hoje*, v. 8, nº 15, p. 135-157, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://rhhj.anpuh.org/RHHJ/article/view/533/302>. Accessed on: 14 Nov. 2024.

this is only possible when historical knowledge is submitted to public debate; when we question who we are and what other possible worlds exist. Currently, we have excess information, excess misinformation and distorted messages as mentioned by Mariana Joffily – I like the way she calls it²¹. She pointed out that we have no denialism, we have dangerous distortions, because conservative and reactionary groups produce other truths, distorted and antidemocratic ones. And we are there amidst digital excess, with which I don't think we can compete. In fact, I consider that it is not about competing, but rather acting upon whatever we can, where we can be, dialoguing and being guided by science committed to diverse human and non-human life. I remember in the 1980s, when the dictatorship was over, the discussion was: Good Lord, how can we compete with television?" That was the discussion in the meetings of educators in basic education. "How can we compete with television?"... Currently, our discussion is how can we deal with the virtual issue, and it seems that if you cannot deal with digital technologies you'll not resist, we cannot transform knowledge and history teaching. I think that we will deal with that within what we know and we can do! I am still an analogue person, I am not digital. I am hopeless with the digital. Does this mean that I am not producing public history or working dialogic processes, or produce listening, or contributing to produce presence in the world? Our role is to contribute to produce presence in the world. And this is not small!... When we are registering a text that somebody looked us in the eyes and trusted us; when we produce participant processes in research and in the classroom, we mediate relationships of trust and respect to identities, questioning absences in canonical narratives, and we fight oppressing histories. This might be our greatest responsibility, to think the impact of different narratives – either oral or not – on life appreciation, human dignity, when provoking colleagues that work differently, when provoking the university and the school. But this is a collective process. I consider that this is our role, never ignore, never turn our backs to the histories we listen to. I always think about the meaning of that history told by Primo Levi, a survivor from Nazism, in the book *Is this a man?*²². He wrote about the recurring dream he had of telling people about his experience in Auschwitz just to see them turn their backs to him and go away, not wanting to listen to it. And many times, this is what we do in the

²¹Joffily, Mariana e Ramalho, Walderez. Distorcionismo: uma nova categoria de análise para o campo de batalha da história no século XXI. *Tempo*, Niterói, v. 30, n. 1, 2024. Retrieved from: <https://www.scielo.br/j/tem/a/drqN6hrmpt4PP3nckRCwwFg/abstract/?lang=pt>. Accessed on: 14 Nov. 2024.

²²Levi, Primo. *É isto um homem?*. São Paulo: Rocco, 2013.

classroom and in our research... The world is happening at school, at the university, in the communities, in social networks, but we turn around and go away... I left, I turned my back once in that school in the periphery of São Paulo in the 1990s, because I could not stand the weight of that world; I was afraid of knowing more about it and facing it with my students. But, in fact, I did not understand that the world weight did not have to be carried on my back, alone. I learned that we neither have to bear the weight of the world nor leave; we have to stay and support each other, for the knowledge produced and shared collectively, and for the affective bonds that we can build up... But, staying does not have this physical meaning, it is about standing the tension of our differences, of our pains, so that we can promote alliances, convergences, encounters, and ways. We are mediators of possibilities! For being historians, teachers in basic education or professors at universities, our main role is not to save anybody – we don't even have that power of something so complex – but we can mediate several types of knowledge, authorities, spaces, voices, conflicts, and resistances. And I think that another role is also never give up, not turn our backs, wherever we are. And for this reason, we must always keep a sensitive hearing, keep our ears always open, the “eyes that see”, an open soul, always torn! Because if our soul is not torn, life cannot enter it.

Robson Laverdi: You were with us in the IV Colóquio do PPGH and your speech had a deep impact for two aspects: the importance of affection in establishing reflection and when you said “we are not equal “. How do these ideas belong to your practice as an educator and a historian?

Marta Rovai: Starting with affection, I do not think you can teach without being affected by the existence of other people. Affection in the sense of care. I remember that Paulo Freire once walked past me at PUC in 1987 and I felt touched! I had read *Pedagogia do Oprimido*²³ (Pedagogy of the Oppressed) and *Pedagogia da Esperança*²⁴ (Pedagogy of Hope), which impacted me deeply, and they describe this type of love, of care, which nowadays bell hooks calls political love²⁵. This idea of affection also came from my family because my father is a Portuguese who became a teacher when he was 70 years old, and he was deeply in love with education, and my mother, an extremely religious Portuguese woman, were fundamental for my ethical education. They never used religion as hatred to the different. Loving people was what they taught

²³ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogia do oprimido*. 17ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987.

²⁴ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogia da esperança: um reencontro com a Pedagogia do Oprimido*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1992.

²⁵ Hooks, bell. *Tudo sobre o amor: novas perspectivas*. São Paulo: Elefante, 2019.

me through their everyday practices, they took me to the classroom, where I always found myself. From my first day as a teacher, when I was 20, I desired that the lesson was a moment when those people wanted to be there learning. As a “child of the dictatorship”, who was afraid of the schoolteachers, I always told my students: “This meeting must be worth it. We are going to laugh, and cry, there will be some telling off, but we are here, together!”. Happiness always mattered to me, because it has to do with dignity. I always liked the collective hearing and exchanges: we had poetry and music sessions; we would go outside and make a circle under the trees. I wanted people to know that although knowledge has its dose of discipline and pain, learning is also cool. In the Academia, wherever I have been, many times in its hard and scientific version, many times there was no space for our affection. I remember my master’s advisor, a wonderful person, saying: “Do not include anything about yourself in your dissertation, the Academia is not interested in knowing who you are “. But, in oral history and in the democratic teaching of history, speaking about us and getting affected came strongly: you cannot gain people’s trust without affection, you cannot learn without affection. Regarding not being equal,

I also learned that in the classroom, and in research. In the 1980s and 1990s, I reproduced this discourse of “we are all equal”, up to the point when I saw Matheus painting his nails, and a couple of boys being punished for having kissed in the yard, or a girl suffering violence in social media, or a black student being killed without her colleagues mourning her. I used to teach in two extreme contexts: a school in the periphery at Jardim D’Abril and a high-middle class school at Parque dos Príncipes, in São Paulo. I researched with and taught the children of fishermen and fisherwomen in Piauí, youngsters coming from the plantations in the interior of Minas Gerais, and USP students. How could we be equal?! When considering power, gender, LGBT, and racial issues, I notice that we are not equal, because we are different, not only unequal. Being unequal is bad, but being different is very good! And people do not have to enter history only through suffering, but also through their beauty, their fight, and their power. Oral history can tell stories of happiness, desire, and love. Once, I was walking with students at Estação da Luz when a *travesti* came close and challenged me to hug her. I hugged her, and then gave her the kiss she asked for, and she looked at me, with a bright smile I’ll never forget and said: “I knew you would hug me, because you have red hair, just like mine “. There, I realized the beauty that exists, there is not only suffering in people; there is humanity and the possibility of encounter! Oral history is

being transformed – we left the informant’s history to the being’s history, from people who speak about themselves and about us. Education needs to be transformed too: it is not about audience and transfer, but public teaching because it is dialogic teaching.

Alessandra Izabel de Carvalho: Marta, when we thought about this interview, we knew it would be super cool, but we never imagined how touching it could be, or that it would be such an incredible experience. Then, we would like to thank you for the time you spent with us and for sharing a little of your history. And finally, we would like to ask you if there is anything that we might not have approached and that you would like to register here.

Marta Rovai: I don’t know guys, I think I said a lot here, but there is one thing that I always like to register: We must be attentive to basic education. I don’t think it is possible to have an Academia if we do not think in the education we have produced in its broadest sense at schools. Schools educated me and I dedicate my history, first to my parents, who were the founders of everything, my family, my children, my husband, who always participated in this journey to discover the world. But I always want to dedicate my history also, to students who worked with me and were my life teachers too. Also, I thank my colleagues with whom I share the dreams and possibilities of the historiographic doing and of teaching. I thank you two for the friendship and the sensitive hearing. It was great to be here with you! I’m really grateful for all opportunities that makes us relive again and again!

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