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Comissões Unitárias de Mulheres do Porto: Recreating the Memory of a Social Movement

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Abstract

The *Comissões Unitárias de Mulheres do Porto* (Unitary Commissions of Women from Porto) were a movement of social struggle that has emerged and intervened in Porto between 1976 and 1990 which was mobilized in the strive for better living conditions and against governmental policies felt as harmful to the population. The memory of this movement is scarce and its historical accounts are too few and scattered. Starting from a set of public documents about this movement which were donated to one of the researchers, we tried to recreate the memory of this social movement, integrating it in a line of oral and social history research on the twentieth century's Porto. In this article we will be focusing on the theoretical and methodological foundations of this research project. The methodological path chosen for this project is based on documental analysis and oral history, seeking to revive the individual and collective memories of these protagonists, not only recreating the memory of this social movement but also to acknowledge the importance of the participation in these social struggles for these women.

Keywords

Unitary Commissions of Women from Porto; social struggle; women's movements; oral history; preservation of social memory; life stories

INTRODUCTION

This article emerges from a research project – *Estratégias de luta e recomposição identitária: Impacto sócio cultural das Comissões Unitárias de Mulheres do Porto* – developed between 2011 and 2012, at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of Porto University, and supported by the University of Porto and Santander bank, focused on the Unitary Commissions of Women from Porto. The project is part of a body of research on Portuguese social struggles, aiming at the preservation and dissemination of social, cultural and political memory, and social and oral history of Porto on the twentieth century, particularly on a set of significant events and relevant entities of the recent history of social movements in Portugal.

The Commissions of Women from Porto, partially since they had a relatively circumscribed existence or action in time, have barely merited the attention of the analytical eyes of academia and got dispersed in History. Thus, this project seeks to rebuild and to preserve

the memory of this particular social movement, which emerged after the Revolution of April 25th in 1974, where women united in a campaign against poor living conditions and livelihood. However, this same movement may also be seen as a movement of social and political action claiming for a new role for women in the public sphere in the Portuguese society.

The Unitary Commissions of Women from Porto rose after the 25th of April's revolution and lasted until the early 90's. Their actions may be defined by a proactive and participatory struggle in social issues directly related with living conditions. Being a well-structured organization, these commissions acted by enlightening the population on the value of active participation and mobilizing actions of manifestation. Their target was governmental institutions and essentially asked for equitable living conditions for the population. Their main activities were demonstrations, petitions, meetings and leafleting.

Based on public documents about the movement which witness these actions, we tried to trace the protagonists of this movement in order to meet them and recover their memories and life experiences and thus the memory of the movement itself. In this sense, based on the analysis of public documents, our research led us to the testimony of a group of six women who voiced the memoirs collected by reliving in memory the episodes reported in newspapers.

RESEARCH TEAM

This project featured a research team that integrates researchers and students from different fields: Educational Sciences, Fine Arts, History, Computer Sciences and Documental Sciences. Our purpose was to be able not only to reconstruct the steps of this social movement but also to consider it from both an educational and broader social point of view and to design and develop a website and an exhibition to publicize our project.

The constitution of a multidisciplinary team, as one of the project's objectives, aimed at the young researchers' involvement and training in a transdisciplinary perspective of research and autonomous collaborative work sustained by oral history methodology assumptions. The relationship established between the research of different participants enabled the development of a closer relationship not only between researchers and students initiated in research, as with the women interviewed and protagonists of this research. In Thompson's words' (1988, p. 10) the joint inquiry (...) bring teachers and students into a much closer, less hierarchical relationship, giving far more chance of informal contact between them. (...) The teacher may bring special experience in interpretation and in knowledge of existing sources, but will rely on the support of the students as organizers and field-workers, the project group is both research and teaching (...).

This multidisciplinary team allowed defining different project tasks according to each field of study represented by the students, providing an exchange of experiences and knowledge between them, but also the development of a project composed by various perspectives. Basing the research on the plurality of perspectives induces this project of what Ardoino (1998) conceptualize as "multireferential approach". We found echo in Canário (2003, p. 14) words who defends "this approach pertinence [emerging] from the need to produce intelligibility about complex educational facts which appeals to a plurality of perspectives and

even different languages”¹ allowing this project a plural reading of social history, as well as multiple and creative results.

On the other hand, the space that responsible researchers have given to students so they could take initiative in different project’s activities made this research’s path a formative moment in all project’s dimensions. Formative sessions about the different project stages were prepared and there was continuous monitoring by responsible researchers along with freedom of action and initiative, which allowed real learning.

In this sense, both the creation of a multidisciplinary team and the project’s organization as a whole enabled a working environment for freedom of expression and for combination of different areas and scientific knowledge under a common goal - preservation and recreation of Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto’s memory.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The project started with a collection of documents on the social movement Unitary Commissions of Women from Porto containing newspaper articles, reports made by insiders in several actions, propaganda promoting actions, among others. We started by organizing the document’s collection chronologically, then scanned the documents and created both online and offline databases. The website (<http://memorias.dcc.fc.up.pt/cum>) allows the viewing of these documents and their dissemination. This seemed to us as an important moment, since part of the memory preserving process involves its organization and publication so that anyone can easily access its vestiges.

In addition to this, based on the documents already possessed, we also produced a chronology of the movement. This was another important moment that allowed to realize how these actions of social struggle were organized by those women, and also to acknowledge how much they were aware of the major governmental and budgetary changes with implications in the living conditions of the population. For this chronology were considered dates, locations, actions and people involved in the initiatives, as well as, sometimes, its impact (extracted from the newspapers and the found public communications from the protagonists, informing about their achievements).

Recognizing names appearing in the documents and duly recovering contacts initiated in previous research projects on social struggles in the city of Porto (mainly from the project “*Memórias do Trabalho: Processos de construção de uma identidade operária no Porto*” (POCTI/CED/60786/2004, lasting from 2006 to 2010), allowed us to identify directly some of those women and establish contact with other protagonists of this social movement.

Meeting these women was crucial to the project development and to reach our goal of preserving and recreating the memory of this social movement. Despite being preciously useful, the documents to which we had access limited our research range to their simpler preservation, analysis and dissemination. Thus, having direct contact with these women changed completely this project’s path.

Not disregarding the importance of the written historical materials that provided testimony of this movement, it was being given the possibility to get in touch and interview

¹ The authors of this article are responsible for the translation of quotes and cited interview excerpts.

the protagonists that brought those documents to life and allowed to recreate its memory. However, during the performed group interviews, the documents and chronology previously produced served as support to help unleash women's memory on events. In this sense, the initial process of document analysis was crucial not only for researchers to draft an overview of the history and memory available but also for the interviewed women to identify with that past, actions and motivations that mobilized them.

ORAL HISTORY METHODOLOGY AND THE RECREATION OF A MEMORY ABOUT THE UNITARY COMMISSIONS OF WOMEN FROM PORTO SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The present research was developed and justified in the context of theoretical and methodological choices that are underpinned in the methodology of oral history and life stories. One of the main objectives of our work is the preservation of the memory of the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto by sharing materials and life stories of the protagonists. We also tried to construct, using the oral history methodology, a glimpse into a historical, cultural and social past tinted by the memories of these women who not only lived, but who also performed it. Moreover, since these memories are part of their life stories, we sought to understand how they integrate it into a continuum, not necessarily straight, between past and future. This would build a broader and more engaged collective memory of the past, allowing more points of view to be presented in a social reality that should not be built from a single voice. In the words of Ferrarotti (1983, pp. 50-51), our life story contains the history of the social system present in our actions, aspirations and behaviors, i.e.

we imply the social through a synthetic introjection which deconstructs and restructures giving at the same time psychological forms. [However] (...) the relationship that binds an act to a social structure is not linear, the strict relationship between social history and life is certainly not a mechanical determinism. (...) The individual is not a social epiphenomenon. Compared to structures and to the history of a society, it arises as an active pole, stands out as synthetic praxis. Far from reflecting the social, the individual appropriates, mediates, filters and retranslates it by projecting in another dimension, that, ultimately, is its subjectivity.

Oral history as a methodology can be defined by its purpose: a cooperative, interdisciplinary work aiming at building history by assigning a central place to the voices of those who made history by living it (Thompson, 1988). Thus, the search for historical, social and cultural knowledge from oral testimonies allows knowledge to be built not only from the study of official documents. Due to their status, official documents tend to be considered more important in the preservation of the memory than oral testimonies. Being considered personal, oral testimonies are not recognized as national or social matters. However, the history of places and societies rises from people's stories. In other words, we make history. Thus, oral history allows restoring heterogeneous and subjective condition to the narrated events.

We should take example of this from the *ardina's* statue, placed in the center of Porto and well known of city visitors. To tourists this object is simply presented as a newsvendor leaning over a mail post. However, this statue holds another symbology shared with us during this research by one of the interviewees: the *ardina* is the symbol of a profession

nowadays extinct from the city which owes its existence to one of the political activists of this movement, who was also a newsvendor. Her newsstand functioned as a communication bridge where documents from the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto and from the communist party were shared and divulged. Later on, as founding member of the newsvendors' commission she took the initiative to invite a sculptor to make this statue honoring all newsvendors. This testimony shows us how history is also made of short stories and thus through preservation of collective social memory. We have experienced that "the immediate environment also gains, through the sense of discovery in interviews, a vivid historical dimension: an awareness of the past which is not just known, but personally felt" (Thompson, 1988, p. 9); Oral sources render "a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account" (Thompson, 1988, p. 6).

The report provided by the testimonies of these women is filled with personal experiences. The emotions experienced in each meeting and for each petition allowed accessing to a lived memory that surrounds us and takes us on a journey into the past. The testimony of each of these life stories enables us to access the personal memories that, put together, produce a more complete and intersubjective collective memory of this social movement. This research method, in which "the place and the voice of the interlocutors" (Medina, 2008, p. 92) are the center of the whole process, has been previously held:

the way people tell their lives and analyze their paths, explicitly assigning meanings to their experiences, the vivacity, the realism, the affectivity and the richness of its human testimonies allow us, in many instances, to visualize and feel the events, episodes and memories that speak, allowing us to perceive their stories, unique and very personal, but at the same time social and legal as possible portraits of other similar experiences.

The methodology of oral history became essential for us from the moment we got in touch with these women, allowing us to reconcile the preservation process with the recreation of a memory about this social movement. The contemporary world confronts us with an incommensurability of events with different degrees of relevance that get dissolved in history by the phenomenon of history's dilatation (*cf.* Nora, 1989), involving us thereof in a certain expropriation. Oral history proves, in this project, that history is not only made *by us* but it is in our life, and every experience contains an experimenter, a witness who does, or can do, history by its memory. According to oral history methodology, memory is a fundamental process in order to create history by referring us to a certain individual and social responsibility ("duty memory"; *cf.* Nora, 1989) in social (re)construction. In this project, the recreation of the memory of a movement of social struggle recalls the reality of Porto's society of the late twentieth century, which is rarely reported and historically documented.

Furthermore, we appeal to the memory process as "absolute" (*cf.* Nora, 1989) in what concerns the gesture, the image, the object, giving life to what really happened and relating it to historiographical records, that undervalues the process of events, focusing on the continuity of time. Oral history has enabled this project to acknowledge the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto in an absolute sense, in a sense of life.

The reconstruction of the memory of the movement Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto through biographical narratives allowed us to access the dimensions of kinesi-
thetic and affective memory, and the very pulse of life in the events of this social movement. In this sense, this process allows us to achieve the memory lived and experienced, that does not last through history.

Defending the “history as collective memory”, Ferrarotti evokes Nietzsche’s distinction between human beings and animal that explains the process of memorization on human beings (which the animal is unable to do), which is in the basis of their ability and reflective orientation of their actions around objectives: “human behavior (...) moved (...) by a project (...) gives itself a purpose (...); on the basis of that collective memory, it is able to express sense of its own decisions and to value them” (Ferrarotti, 1983, pp. 31-32). In this sense, the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto as a collective movement, shares a collective memory enriched by different perspectives and meanings given to individual stories which unite, combine and complement overall as collective memory.

INTERVIEWS AND MEMORY CONSTRUCTION

THE PROTAGONISTS

Throughout this project we worked with a group of six women who were among the group that initiated this social movement in 1976. Aged between 50 and 80 years, these women were sewers and workers and generally only had experienced basic schooling processes.

THE INTERVIEWS

The interviews can be divided into two types: individual and group interviews, of which five interviews were individuals and three were collective interviews. The initial design only previewed individual interviews but women themselves hinted that they would rather get together in a group interview to begin with. Thus, the first meeting was a group interview that served as trigger of the whole process. To support and stimulate this process we shared with these women the documents we had in our possession and the chronology we had produced. This would help them remember and share their stories more easily. The fact that they were all together catalyzed the process of collective remembering.

On the other hand, the individual interviews focused on the life story. By this procedure we would not only collect the memories that these women had on the movement Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto but also about their lives in general, in order to better contextualize the whole process. In these moments we would deepen the shared memories collected during the group meetings and, above all, get to know the personal experiences and the role of each woman in this movement of social struggle.

RECREATING MEMORY

The interviews had a key role in the preservation process and possibility of recreating a memory about this social movement, being the collective meetings an asset in this process. As Namer (1987) refers, exploiting Halbwachs, individual memory is constructed and legitimized by the confirmation that others and objects give us about that memory: “we must help other’s memory or give us an objective verification to see that they correspond to the realities formerly perceived” (Halbwachs, cited in Namer, 1987, p. 22). In this sense, the collective meetings we had with this group of women, with whom we also shared the material we had about the movement, fit into this perspective by the way memory will be manifested by consecutive reviews. This situation was often demonstrated when women wondered about the exact dates of events and ended up confirming it by naturally consulting the other present women, comparing their memories and building in this process a collective memory.

Being that initially these collective meetings were not programmed, it was astonishing to observe how important they became to these women, keeping the group together and motivated by the project. The triggered individual memory from each woman, both when expressed isolated and in group, created a consistent sense of value on the work performed by them in the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto. We also perceived that the collective meetings gave breath to these women so they could, individually, value their experiences and their will to participate in the construction of a memory on this social movement. In this sense, both the interview process and the memory reconstruction process had an impact on these women, specifically legitimizing their actions as social actors and enhancing their self-esteem. A sense of relevance for the stories they were sharing also emerged. Being able to share their stories and tell us in detail what they did and how they did it, demonstrating that their actions have had positive results, seemed significant for these women. Above all, it was especially important for them to feel our interest in this movement and to participate in the recreation of its collective memory.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The collected material on the interviewing process provides access to a vast universe of meanings and information to cross with the previously collected documents. This allows us to combine a subjective dimension with the wider dimension of the events reported in the documents. Thus, content analysis was a crucial moment in this project since it is how memory lines stand out and unveil their meanings, defining the history of this movement and its pathways. This work is ongoing but we already have proceeded to the categorization of speeches according to the interview guides initially developed and to the themes stressed on the discourses of these women. We currently are in the analysis process for these speeches.

From the first impact, we already feel that the attempt to construct a memory of this movement based on some documents and on the memory of this group of protagonists will not allow the access to the entire history of the movement or to a linear and historical perspective of its development. For instance, we cannot yet define the moment of

the founding act for this movement. Women themselves have only a vague memory of it, stating that “things just happened”. Another important issue relates to the militancy of these women who in general were, at that time, members of the communist party. The women we got in touch with uphold that this movement was an unitary social movement of struggle for better living conditions in which participated women from other political parties, not clearly specifying whether there was a relationship with the communist party and what would its nature be. These are some of the issues that are still under review for a better understanding.

Moreover, their reports allow us to easily understand their ways of organizing their work, how they were received by the population and how they managed to run their lives conciliating the family management with both the labor management and participation in the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto movement. We can also deduce the role each of them held as founder. The whole process of recreating memory joins with a work of discourse analysis to identify the consonant and dissonant discourses as well as trying to understand the history of the movement itself. However, the testimonies collected are themselves a memory of this movement, having their own life - the life that the memory of each of these women assigned to them, according to their experiences.

PROTAGONISTS, CO-PARTICIPANTS AND CO-PRODUCERS OF RESEARCH

The theoretical and methodological choices outlined at the beginning of this project also define the epistemological position of the researchers. Through these methodologies we aim to recognize women that participate in this research as protagonists, co-authors and co-producers of a research project characterized by collaborative work. Hereby recognizing our protagonists simultaneously as subjects in the action and of the action, we have involved educational institutions and the community in the reconstruction of Porto's history. By placing those women at the center of our research we are considering subjectivity and personal experiences as privileged knowledge.

Starting with the memory given to us in the collected documents we finally reached these women's memory and their life stories. It is these women and their stories that enrich and deepen the extent of this project. According to Ferraroti (1983, p. 49): “traditional biographical method prefers secondary materials (“more objective”) to primary materials, that means the materials directly collected by the researcher in contact with the subjects of research”. In this sense, we corroborate the author's thesis that

we must abandon the privilege granted to secondary biographical materials. We need to bring to the very heart of the biographical method primary materials and their explosive subjectivity. Our interest does not only concern the objective richness of primary biographical material but also its subjective salience in the context of complex and reciprocal interpersonal communication between the narrator and the observer (Ferraroti, 1983, p. 49-50).

By claiming the subjectivity's presence in science as “access route - often possible - to scientific knowledge of a social system” (Ferraroti, 1983, p. 51), Ferraroti becomes part of a group of authors and researchers who break modern science's assumptions of

intersubjectivity as one of the principles of another way of doing science in a comprehensive and interpretative way:

a biographical account (...) is a social action through which an individual synthetically retotalizes his life (biography) and social interaction in progress (interview) with a story - interaction (...) he tells a present interaction through the intermediary of a lifetime. [Thus] the sociological analysis of a biographical narrative leads us to the hermeneutics of an interaction. (Ferrarotti, 1983, p. 53)

Both life stories and oral history justify our position towards these women and the research project by acknowledging them as partners during the entire research path. We share Raymond's Aron thesis refusing historical research objectivity, advocating a comprehensive and hermeneutic perspective of history considering that what an historian does it is not more than one interpretation (*cf.* Aron-Schnapper & Hanet, 1980). In Berger's (2009, p. 178) words,

research in social sciences tend, therefore, to always be a work of reworking, reinterpretation of group of phenomena that we all experience (...) This is one reason among others why research in these sciences appears always as a certain formalization of a knowledge tendentially already established which simultaneously generates a relation of expectation and rejection.

We would also like to point out that this research work would only make sense with women's involvement and implication in the project's different stages. If initially the involvement of our protagonists was limited to the acceptance of our invitation to discuss the creation and participation in the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto movement, afterwards women demonstrated a shared feeling of authorship when asking about the project's roadmap and contributing on the decision making on the project's exhibition content. Thus, our interviewees are authors of knowledge from a moment in the past which has been increasingly diluted from collective memory. More than protagonists of a movement, they are co-authors of the social history drawn after April's 25th. In Ardoino's words (1997, p. 3), on the concept of implication, both the actor and the author

are actually involved, (...) but differently. [And he explains:] I can, indeed, be an actor, without thereby being the author (creator) (...); the implication is, therefore, connected with authorization, as the ability to authorize himself to be at least co-author of what is socially produced; if the actor is always, more or less explicitly, carrier of sense, the author is the meaning producer and source.

FEMININE VOICE MOVEMENT

We should also consider this movement of female voice from the point of view of women's role in society, in order to understand social disruption that it symbolizes. As pointed out by Medina, Pacheco, and Caramelo (2012, pp. 420-421):

Significant from this period are also profound changes in women's play role, with emphasis on their action in all interventions fronts. On Streets, neighborhoods committees and popular associations, businesses and trade unions, in local authorities, there were thousands of women who attended and assumed leading and management of diverse initiatives,

attitude that illustrates the changing period lived in Portugal after the revolution of April's 25th in 1974. The women's emancipation is reflected on social intervention, community initiatives involvement to social struggle and claims which were previously denied to the population in general and particularly to women, to whom only a very restricted and concrete role was reserved in Portuguese society. Submitted to a very stressed patriarchal society, the promoted image of women was as housewife, responsible for children's and home care although in reality she was a worker like any man, even if their role and work were not valued, as tended to happen in labor world in those years (*cf.* Maruani, 1992).

The 1974 revolution is for the Portuguese woman also an opportunity to fight for change of women's social role. The Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto social movement is an example of this struggle, which is not only a social struggle for dignifying the living conditions but also a struggle for an active role and placement for women in Portuguese society:

I think that as happened April's 25 [revolution], and there was all that euphoria, (and at that time, I wasn't really that aware of what was going on), [but] I think the revolution by itself aroused in us a different thing. I think it was it! I mean, I do not quite understand but I think that it was what other women as me needed this freedom! Being able to go out, because until that time it was complicated for a woman go to a coffee, to wear pants, everything was difficult for women. Thereafter we started..., well first it was me, then it was another [woman], and then the women's explosion took place! Until that moment maybe there were some women [emancipated], but very few, very few. Then everything started to be more ... and then the fact that I could leave the house and go to the meetings with the others it was very important for me. Regardless of ... I became a person of well-doing and learned a lot, other women have chosen to follow another path...they just took as opportunity to go out ... even so just to be able to go out it was very good; this and women be able to vote. I think as long as I have strengths I will always vote. (Amália, member of Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto, individual interview, 2012)

These women's activity was not approved by the majority of men and also by some women.

In this sense, this movement is composed by a group of women that distinguished themselves as protagonists of a social struggle movement and also fought for women's emancipation: they were organizing a social struggle for decent living conditions, confronting the exorbitant price rises for food, rent, water and energy, and simultaneously they mobilized other women and acted as important social mediators.

Although their actions were mainly correlated with social struggle and claim for better living conditions, the mobilization of other women to support manifestations and meetings played a very important role for the general emancipation of other women, getting them involved in the social struggle and fight for a politically dignified placement in society. From their testimonies we are told that many women kept their participation in the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto meetings hidden from their husbands and that some of the movements leaders were asked to speak with men so that they would let their wives participate:

There was a big fight at the city hall doors because of electricity's price increases and we spent one night there. It wasn't easy, I mean, I think it was in '76, '77, '78,

but yet it was too difficult to take women with us because...well, in that time and when I got married, men were ..., they could go everywhere but for women was complicated. I even got to go to many women's homes ask to their husbands to let them come, because they wouldn't let them go out just like that, especially at night. (Amália, member of Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto, individual interview, 2012)

Moreover, these women were also social mediators, between parishes and population, calling on parish councils members to solve poverty and misery problems found in the population. They got together and participated in general city hall's meetings to make the population's voice heard - the voice of women with continuously reduced possibilities to manage their family finances.

In this sense, these women have created a movement of action, manifestation, participation and social support that breaks with women's representation in the Portuguese society and redefine their social role. Innovative for being a female voice movement, the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto are even more innovative by the way they take charge of important social issues, fighting for social justice and common good without relating themselves with stereotypes associated with other women's movements which tended to present women as victims or feminists. In this movement there is an exaltation of the potential action which also characterizes the group of women we met.

CONCLUSION

The work developed for this research project was enriched with the participation of the group of women who founded the Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto social movement. The purpose of preserving and recreating this social movement memory led us to explore a range of mechanisms (*cf.* Namer, 1987) that would allow us, based on documents we had about the movement, to help women's remembering process. The collective meetings and document sharing were factors not initially foreseen but that have become fundamental methodological processes in this research.

Under oral history and life stories methodologies we advocate oral sources importance on memory preservation. As Thompson (1988) points out, oral history was "the first kind of history", although at the time when positivism dominated scientific knowledge production, oral tradition was at first devalued and then rejected until the mid-70's of 20th century, when the events associated to the emergence of new social movements, namely May 1968 protests in France, would influence a new strategy that stands out by breaking with quantitative sociology assumptions. It is then that researchers start to "use the term oral history" to denote this new sociological method, the method of life histories, whose use is also proposed in history.

Working with memory implies the issue of a memory of memory (*cf.* Namer, 1987), here the memory of a social movement based on protagonist's memory. Hereby, it was very important to encourage the processes of remembering and sharing to construct a collective memory which, as Namer (1987) says, it is a group memory founded on a particular social time that ensures their group identity. The memory, which is "by nature multiple and yet

specific, collective and plural, and yet individual” (Nora, 1989, p. 9) shows up as ambiguous field of work, considering that its preservation and recreation involves the combination of different experiences and points of view that ask for multiplicity’s integration on the whole.

The purpose of preserving this memory led us to organize the documents and disclose them online by creating an online platform as well as to prepare an exhibition about the project where we would highlight the collected movement voices and its narratives. Finally we intend to produce a book that presents the work developed and the collected information. Through oral history methodology we dare to tell a new story on the life history of this social struggle movement.

The reconstruction of a collective memory framed by biographical narratives allowed us to retrieve important moments in history that testify the major role that social and political activism may have in identity reconstruction processes and non formal education processes, leading us to the discussion of how this process occurred and its impact on both individuals and social issues. This research, more than just defending the collective memory’s preservation, allows the reflection and discussion of the present, enrichment of people’s knowledge of the past and leads to more enlightened perspectives of the future. Today, after thirty years have gone by, these women feel that they carry an important social message that needs to be handed over to present generations: the social activism must return with improved resources but with the same strength and enthusiasm.

Through preservation of collective social memory we have experienced that “the immediate environment also gains, through the sense of discovery in interviews, a vivid historical dimension: an awareness of the past which is not just known, but personally felt” (Nora, 1989, p. 9); Oral sources make available “a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account. In so doing, oral history has a radical implication for the social message of history as a whole” (Thompson, 1988, p. 6). Thompson points out that “oral history is not necessarily an instrument for change; (...) Nevertheless, (...) certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history” (Thompson, 1988, p. 2). We corroborate Ferrarotti’s thesis about history’s importance as

a collective memory of the past, critical awareness of the present and operating assumption for the future. But at the same time, it is also dangerous: an excessive historical sense reduces the plasticity of human beings and thereby blocks their ability to make decisions. (Ferrarotti, 1983, p. 32).

Finally we hope that this research project aiming to bring back and preserve the memories of Unitary Commissions of Women From Porto social movement can serve as a catalyst of an historical reflexivity allowing to discuss the present and the future from social memory acquaintance so often forgotten or diluted by/and in fluidity of times and modern societies.

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