

ROSE MARIE MURARO

Transgressive feminism



The violence of a sexist world is not just physical, but also takes more subtle forms, rooted in the simplest habits, the most common statements and the most mainstream ideas.

Rose Marie Muraro, 81, knew that this violence could not be defeated by force. But ideas, and the chance to express and disseminate them, were a way through which women could disrupt discriminatory logic and domination, both cruelly considered natural.

As a writer and a publisher, she gave voice to her audacious positions and progressive ideas on gender-related themes. Her literary production was dedicated to women's rights: "I worked with the 'woman' because I thought it was through her that things would get better. Human rights fundamentally have to do with her condition. If you change her condition you change that of her children and, therefore, the chain of generations," she says.

In the 1960s, as editorial director of the *Vozes* publishing house, she contributed to the mobilization of two important social movements in Brazil: feminist emancipation and liberation theology, with Leonardo Boff.

Over the last forty years she has written more than thirty books, many of them controversial, such as *The Sexuality of the Brazilian Woman – Body and Social Class in Brazil* (1983), *Automation and the Future of Mankind* (1966) and *The Woman's Sexual Liberation* (1975) were considered pornographic by the military government and censored.

Because of her intellectual contribution and her militancy, Rose Marie is an icon of the feminist movement in Brazil. She was especially active in the 1970s; her revolutionary, liberatory rhetoric was one form of resistance to the military regime. In 1986, after the publication of *The Christian Eroticism*, she had to leave the publishing house due to reprisal from the Catholic Church's conservative sectors. She recently received the Brazilian senate's Teotônio Vilela Award in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the 1979 political amnesty in Brazil.

The common misconception that women are the fragile sex quickly disappears when you meet this courageous, unconstrained woman. "When I started to work, in the 1970s, I was alone, just

letting the military slap me in the face. I was crazy, I feared nothing," she says of those violent, repressive times. Rose Marie recalls that meetings were banished in the country, but that did not prevent mobilization and the creation of the first feminist organizations.

In 1975, with women from the Communist Party of São Paulo, she founded the Center for the Development of the *Paulista Woman*, dedicated to organizing and mobilizing middle class women and young liberal professionals to disseminate feminist ideas among the lower classes. "We carried out a struggle with political projects, went to the slums, but nothing was funded. We did interviews, recognized the needs of the women, worked for the decriminalization of abortion, marched," she recounts.

Her involvement with human rights was a part of practically her entire life. Her first activity was with Bishop Helder Câmara, when she was fifteen. At the time she had joined one of the groups of Student Catholic Action, through which she got intensely involved with social movements.

Another surprising aspect of her story is that she was born practically blind and recovered her sight only at the age of 66. When she saw herself in the mirror for the first time she said: "Today I know that I am a very pretty woman."

Today Rose Marie reckons the feminist movement is big all over the world, including in Brazil, and has a record of important accomplishments, such as the decriminalization of abortion in a number of countries. However, she affirms there's still much to be done to counteract gender asymmetry. For her, one of the ways to ensure women's access to their rights is through their empowerment, to be achieved through their economic autonomy.

Her contribution to the realization of human rights has been recognized in many times. She has been elected nine times "Woman of the Year." In 1990 and 1999 she was appointed by *Desfile* magazine "Woman of the Century." In 2003 she became a member of the National Council for Women's Rights and in 2006 was named Patron of Brazilian Feminism.