

stance, but is embodied in bodies, in territorial conflicts, and in the alternative memory of the defeated. Furthermore, this defeat is not only not definitive, but in the conditions of existence of those peoples lies the possibility of liberation.

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GABRIELA LEITE. *Daughter, Mother, Grandmother, and Whore*. Translated by Meg Weeks. Duke University Press, 2024.

Gabriela Leite's autobiography is one of the most significant documents for understanding the formation of the prostitutes' movement in Brazil, as well as its internal tensions, political shifts, and struggles for recognition in a country marked by gender coloniality, Christian morality, and state violence in its many forms.

The book, originally released in 2009 to the Brazilian public, is now being published by Duke University Press in 2024, translated by Meg Weeks, with a preface by Carol Leigh, notes by the translator, and an introduction co-authored by her, Laura Rebecca Murray, and Esther Teixeira. The texts that precede the original writings illuminate for foreign audiences the social, political, and cultural context that was contemporary to Gabriela as well as what we experience today in Brazil. It also mentions her transnational connections and how she was perceived and viewed. However, the densification of these propositions takes on other contours through her whore-writing.

Unlike narratives that moralize this profession through metaphors of "deviation" or "social tragedy", Gabriela's work elaborates a historical counter-narrative about the body, work, morality, motherhood, friendship, politics, and language. In doing so, it strains the boundaries between intimacy and the public sphere, between autobiography and manifesto, between personal memory and collective genealogy. In fact, everything seems to be collective when it comes to the co-founder of the Rede Brasileira de Prostitutas (Brazilian Network of Prostitutes; RBP).

In this sense, this is not just an autobiography; it is also a historical document, a political analysis, a memoir, an urban chronicle, and a treatise on philosophy and ethics written from a social position whose legitimacy is often denied. Gabriela follows in the lineage of Southern feminist epistemologies, whose situated existences and experiences construct, following the understanding of territorialization and deterritorialization, an affective cartography, as proposed by Jan Simon Hutta (2020). The geographical topography described by the author in her travels between São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Rio de Janeiro merges

with that of her own skin in those environments. They add another meaning to the “zones,” to use the name given to the places/districts where sex work was historically offered. I understand that they are inseparable “contact zones” which expand even further when she becomes a public activist, organizing protests and speaking to the media.

Just as the Black and LGBTQIA+ movements did to combat stigma, thinking about language and naming were fundamental to combating hegemonic narratives that still insist on erasing these people, denying the violence they have suffered, and their own stories. Or even revictimizing them. From an early age, Gabriela Leite confronted both the moral norm and the institutional jargon that insists on naming prostitutes as “sex professionals” or “sex workers.” As indicated in the preface written by Carol Leigh (p. 10), there was tension between Gabriela and institutionalized spaces that preferred the term “sex worker,” coined by Leigh in the 1970s. For Leite, we should widely adopt the words *prostitute* and *puta*, understanding the weight of these terms, without adopting a sanitized proposal imposed by NGOs and segregationist governance.

I emphasize that this dispute is not only terminological, but above all ontological. To call oneself *a whore* is to dispute the legitimacy of one’s own social place in the face of centuries of stigma, criminalization, and pathologization. It is also to reject the euphemism that seeks to sanitize the profession, making it palatable to funders or national and international public health agencies.

Gabriela understands the word *puta/whore* as a dense cultural sign, with layers of history, violence, and also power, since it can produce rupture: it is not a matter of softening the experience, but of naming it in a direct, politically affirmative, and popular way. When Carol Leigh states that “the word is transgressive, it provides the shock necessary to make people listen to us” (p. 10), she highlights the politics of visibility that Gabriela has always practiced.

That is, making public precisely what was socially taboo, despite all its complex materiality and objectivity. Not surprisingly, when she participated in the first Conference for Women from the Favelas and Urban Periphery, at the invitation of Black parliamentarian Benedita da Silva, she recalls that when she said she was a prostitute, it caused a commotion: “The prostitute had spoken! It seems unbelievable, but the taboo persisted even there, among politicized women: prostitutes shouldn’t speak up. But I had spoken. Following the model set by the other women, I explained what working conditions were like for prostitutes in the Vila [Mimosa], our hardships, the problems we routinely faced” (p. 123).

On the other hand, Gabriela is frank when she recounts episodes in which the community of prostitutes itself rejects the term. At the launch of the newspaper *Beijo da Rua*, in the city of Recife (PE), a colleague appears with a knife shouting, “Who is calling me a whore?” (p. 144). The scene reveals a fundamental

fact: asserting oneself *as a whore* politically does not mean that this term ceases to carry pain. Gabriela's attempt to reappropriate it is, therefore, a political and epistemological intervention, but it does not erase the symbolic violence accumulated in the word. The re-signification encounters vivid resistance among the women who have suffered most under this label. Still, through dialogue, as happened with the woman who raised the knife, we can disarm it.

The dispute over language culminates, years later, in the debate over changing the name of the Brazilian Network of Prostitutes to "Brazilian Network of Sex Workers," a proposal attributed to Congressman Fernando Gabeira (p. 144-145). Gabriela vehemently opposes this: "Changing the term is more of an excuse than an affirmation" (p. 145). For her, the name change symbolized an attempt to sanitize and dampen the disruptive power of the movement, aligning it with institutional and bureaucratic standards. From an academic standpoint, this refusal resonates deeply with decolonial feminist theories, which denounce the institutional capture of insurgent practices. Just as Ochy Curiel (2007) argues that institutional categories can neutralize the radical force of popular movements, Gabriela insisted that the category "puta" was politically more truthful than "sex worker", as it was not submissive to the logic of NGOs, churches, parties, or the state.

The autobiography reveals how Gabriela became a political leader amid adverse circumstances. The dream of organizing activism came and went in conversations with her other whore friends and alongside her indignation. Her process of politicization emerged from her readings of the world and concrete experiences: police violence, the disappearance of colleagues, repression during the dictatorship, and daily precariousness in prostitution zones, including through her "patronage."

Police repression during the dictatorship is narrated in dramatic detail. Gabriela describes *curfews*, violent raids, arbitrary arrests, beatings, and disappearances. She reports: "Prostitutes were not allowed to stay on the streets after ten o'clock at night. If we went out after that, we ran the risk of being arrested and beaten" (p. 80). The disappearance of two women inside a police car (one of them pregnant) ignites her desire for collective action: "I was convinced that we had to do something" (p. 80). Police repression, combined with her colleagues' low self-esteem, creates a scenario in which violence becomes normalized: "We are just prostitutes," they said (p. 80).

In response, Gabriela organizes a protest at the Praça da Sé in 1979, which attracts hundreds of people and significant media attention (p. 81). This episode marks a turning point: it is the first major public action led by prostitutes in the context of the dictatorship. From then on, visibility becomes part of her political strategy. Her meeting with Lourdes Barreto in 1984 in Bahia deepened her

politicization. Lourdes, who learned to read as an adult through the Pastoral da Mulher Marginalizada (Ministry for Marginalized Women), shared with Gabriela her outrage at the paternalism of the Church (p. 130-132), which organized the activity in which both participated and whose structure and discourse they disagreed with. Their friendship evolved into a decisive political alliance, culminating in the creation of the RBP in 1987.

Her narrative also reveals the clash with religious and charitable institutions, especially the archdiocese linked to Banco da Providência. Gabriela reports that she was forbidden from voluntarily spending time with children because she was “considered a bad influence” (p. 127-129). The absurd proposal to “teach prostitutes to paint mayonnaise jars to earn money” sums up charitable paternalism (p. 127). Gabriela’s opposition to welfare reinforces her structural critique: these are social positions shaped by stigma, not “lack of talent.”

The First National Meeting of Prostitutes, organized in 1987 by Gabriela with the support of Flávio Lenz, Edda Mastrangelo, Zwinglio Mota Dias, and Rubem Cesar Fernandes, the latter three from the Instituto de Estudos da Religião (Institute for the Study of Religion; ISER), consolidates the national movement. With funding from the World Council of Churches (based in Germany), attracting thousands of people, intellectuals, artists, and activists, the event broke paradigms. At this event, for the first time, prostitutes saw themselves collectively as political agents (p. 135-138). The articulation with feminists such as Rose Marie Muraro and Lúcia Arruda, as well as with artists such as Elza Soares and Martinho da Vila, demonstrates the breadth achieved in circulation through Rio de Janeiro venues such as Circo Voador and the Calouste Gulbenkian Arts Center, in addition to the support of the Brazilian and international media invited to the launch.

However, the occasion was not so harmonious: she recounts, for example, her experience within ISER (where she began working and was later dismissed from the project she created) and the tensions surrounding the financing of the First National Meeting. When the international money arrives, seven thousand dollars, she is suddenly considered “unsuitable” to coordinate the project: “They said I needed a college degree to coordinate the meeting. Have you ever heard of a degree in prostitution?” (p. 135). The dispute reveals the logic of institutional control and the risk of co-optation of her struggles, which are still latent in social organizations.

Gabriela also describes how, within the context of HIV/AIDS NGOs in the 1990s and 2000s, she perceived the risk that the movement might be neutralized. Carol Leigh, in the preface, acknowledges this perception when she states: “Gabriela warned us from within the NGO (...) about the risk of sanitization that accompanied the incorporation of prostitutes into mainstream categories”

(p. 11). The criticism is profound: too much institutionalization can depoliticize the insurgency.

In 2011, during a conference of the Network in Pará, the movement decided to stop requesting federal funding for AIDS projects due to the stealth return of the category “risk group” (p. 17). The 2013 government censorship of a campaign created for International Prostitutes’ Day reinforces this diagnosis: “The Ministry of Health censored the campaign” (p. 17). Gabriela co-signs a text denouncing the moralistic setback. This episode anticipates contemporary debates about institutional capture and depoliticization via funding. At the same time, the Gabriela Leite bill, proposed by Congressman Jean Willys in 2013, was pending that year, but was shelved in 2016 and not enacted. The congressman spoke with Gabriela in 2012, before she passed away in 2013. The bill, registered as PL 4.211/2012, contained proposals to regulate prostitution as a profession and guarantee labor rights.

Everything in Gabriela Leite’s life was political, since more than two-thirds of this work takes us into her private life: fears, desires, values, passions, and a lot of hard work. I understand a relationship with work that reveals her connection with her creativity, her form of production, as well as to power, family, romantic and sexual relationships, clients, and friendships. Leisure had a place at the outdoor tables of bars and in conversations that went on into the early hours of the morning, as well as in the rooms where she worked, in the alleys, backstreets, and daily life of the impoverished urban neighborhoods where she chose to circulate.

There were many challenges and difficulties: losses, separations, and mourning. Many rearrangements caused the author to move geographically, but the distances never made her lose herself; rather, they guided her. Some gaps remain for me as a reader, thinking, for example, about the circulation of transgender people in the same spaces, the ethnic-racial relations that permeated her trajectory being presented as alliances, but still with a certain distance, or even how RBP functioned in the early 2010s.

In an interview with the television program *Roda Viva* in 2009, Gabriela acknowledged the difficulty of completing the book, as it was not just a matter of discussing her political articulation, but of revisiting her history and that of her family during the three-year editing process. Collectivity, I reiterate, is an integral and undeniable part of Gabriela. In a way, by writing and launching the book, she undergoes another cathartic process, one of making peace. Work is once again that powerful, mobilizing tool that accompanied her in her various roles as a researcher, cook, creator of the DASPU fashion label, daughter, mother, grandmother, and founder of *Davida*. And as she said in an interview

to *Folha de São Paulo* (February 28, 2006), even though she no longer worked as a prostitute, she continued to fight for her rights, “since whores don’t retire.”

Orality holds an important place in women’s lives, especially in the oral transmission of knowledge. It is even part of the ethics of prostitution, its internal rules of not kissing the client on the mouth and keeping their secrets, fantasies, and names safe, as she tells us in this work. It was in the oral tradition of samba, in its poetry and in its schools, that Gabriela spent part of her adult life, discovering a world of beauty, color, rhythm, and friendship in which she also found fulfillment.

In 2026, the Unidos do Porto da Pedra Samba School (RJ) will remind us of this when it presents the theme “Das Mais Antigas da Vida, o Doce e Amargo Beijo da Noite” (Among the Oldest of Life, the Sweet and Bitter Kiss of the Night), developed by carnival designer Mauro Quintaes and plot writer Diego Araújo as a homage to prostitutes and their historical legacies. Lourdes Barreto, Gabriela’s friend and co-founder of RBP, has already been confirmed among the highlights. I close this text thinking that, unlike the samba school parade, not all *alas* are open yet, but all *putas* are still on the move.

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M. A. HERTZMAN. *After Palmares: Diaspora, Inheritance, and the Afterlives of Zumbi*. Duke University Press, 2024.

Marc A. Hertzman’s *After Palmares: Diaspora, Inheritance, and the Afterlives of Zumbi* offers a penetrating reexamination of one of the most iconic episodes in Brazilian history: the Quilombo dos Palmares, which for roughly a century stood as the paramount symbol of resistance to colonial slavery. Its last leader, Z/zumbi (1655–1695), is recognized as one of the most important Black figures in Brazilian history. More recently, in the context of the far-right’s rise in Brazil, the memory surrounding Z/zumbi has become a site of political dispute. Even the Fundação Cultural Palmares (Palmares Cultural Foundation)—established in 1988 under the auspices of the post-dictatorship constitution to commemorate the centennial of the abolition of slavery—has been drawn into these controversies.

Hertzman structures the book into five parts. The first, *War and Conquest*, contains the chapters “March 21, 1645” and “Before He Died, I Killed Zumbi.” The second, *Spirits*, includes “Whose Confusion?” and “Flying Home?” The third, *People*, features “Pedro, Paula, and the Refugees,” “The Powerful and Almost Powerful,” and “The ‘Indians of Palmares.’” The fourth, *Places*, comprises “Greater Palmares” and “Farther North.” The fifth and final section,