New Feminist Movements and the Challenge of Micro-Politics in Italy: The Case of 'Femminismo a Sud'

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Abstract

The present paper aims at analyzing new feminist cyber-activism, focusing on re-articulating space and materiality as a political subjectivity. In particular, my main purpose is to examine how the current feminist practice of crossing public-private spheres in Italy is located in *blogs* as the political intersection between *means* and *aims*. Such a practice deals with the re-configuration of semiotic strategies used to discuss how the body is the subject-object of feminist political agenda. Moreover, the stress on politics portrays a constant struggle concerning 'marginal' and 'central' positionings in feminist movements able to re-define their alliances. Micropolitical narratives of the blog "Femminismo a Sud" show racism, pornography and war *through/as* agentic and subjugated bodies. Metaphors as *places* of struggle and the public production of sexual pleasures become a core point for claiming political action. The entire discussion will be based on a quali-quantitative methodology suited to meet different research interests about the interrelation of contents, rhetorics and bodies.

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to explore the peculiar discursive dynamics of power occurring in networking activities enhanced by new media, starting from what is depicted in the public arena as marginal, superfluous or partial.

Along this way, the choice to investigate female practices of giving voice to otherness (Schweder 2003) is not a gender-differences-research-interest – since it implies a sort of homogeneous and reified binary structure, i.e. (all) men vs. (all) women – but it aims at furthering new kinds of power deriving from the constant experience of <<connecting things that are structurally disconnected>> (Steiner and Pichler 2009, 50), which is still a female prerogative in contemporary society.

For the purposes of the present study it is necessary to stress this subjective approach to social structure through language, that is to argue about the question of power rather than ontology related to social structures. Such a power is performed by language (Mininni 1999).

As Judith Butler argued:

> We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both 'what' we do […] and that which we effect, the act and its consequences. (Butler 1997, 8)

The language-as-action approach to power and social formations (Billig 1987) provides a lens to further different pathways to knowledge and to the related (Western) dualisms about objectivity vs. subjectivity, public vs. private. As a matter of fact, emphasizing the active role performed by individuals by means of discursive practices doesn't imply conceiving individual agency in a social vacuum; rather, it aims at stressing both the social construction of structures as <<powerful sedimentations>>

(Steiner and Pichler 2009, 52) shaping personal experiences and the individual appropriation of these structural meanings, including its transformation (Rasmussen 1999).

My interest, hence, relies on questioning objectivity as hierarchical categorization to conceptualize knowledge and to establish power, by suggesting a <<situated knowledge>> (Haraway 1988, 581) as a partial, subjective perspective, capable of starting from the individual, embodied experience, to explore the overlapping social influences. In this sense, starting from the particular, concrete conditions of experiencing the world - that is, identifying who is speaking, from which socio/cultural background and so on - implies a constant redefinition of the dominant separated and hierarchical ways of knowing (Belenky *et al*. 1997).

"Voicing" (Brown and Gilligan 1992) is the main expression through which I suggest to stress the structuring power of metaphor (Mininni *et al.* 2012) with respect to the intertwining processes between language, knowledge and power. In fact, metaphor represents the possibility to speak of phenomena usually conceived as distant and antithetic, showing the intrinsic capacity of language to create bridges between what seems to be and what is (Valsiner 2000), which is always related to the arising of new thinking. Thus, this constant attempt to escape the logic of *sameness* for embracing <<otherness and surplus logic>> (Petrilli 2006, 81) represents an adequate lens to approach new meanings coming from connected ways of knowing and distributed practices of power.

Voicing has to do with the fragility of human connections, with a conceptualization of differences as potentially untranslatable; but it also stresses the intrinsic necessity of dialogue and its productive tension in exploring the experience of otherness and making sense of the Other as the possibility for sharing power. As a matter of fact, the metaphorical use of vision in Western intellectual thought has been suggesting a specific idea of knowledge in terms of 'illumination' and, most importantly, as a camera passively recording a static reality. In so doing, this sort of equation of truth with light has been claiming that disengagement and objectification are central to the construction of knowledge. Visual metaphors, thus, foster the (supposedly possible) removal of any polluting interrelation between subjects and object. Unlike the eye and visualization, the

ear and listening operate through closeness between subjects and objects, dialogue and interaction, since listening is conceived as a never once-and-for-all, fixed and uni-agentic process.

This disseminated aspect of power is well depicted by the metaphor of 'rhizome' (Deleuze and Guattari 2003), since it indicates horizontal connections without a centre instead of vertical and linear structures, suggested by the metaphor of the 'tree'. So, this multilayered organization fosters circular practices of meanings, where obtaining a voice is not only possible following the main root but also following the margins, where condensed nodes of meanings are located.

The present contribution stems from a feminist standpoint epistemology (Collins 1986; Harding 1991; Hartsock 1997) with regard to the evaluation of knowledge produced from marginal positions, since they allow alternative perspectives that challenge beliefs about social categories. As a matter of fact, this theoretical standpoint is particularly prone to reject universalism since it tends to embody lived experiences and to value otherness. Moreover, such a standpoint leads to question the status quo in order to display how the consolidated social categories – accepted as natural – are embedded in social construction of fundamental asymmetries of power; thus, starting from the margin, provides a vantage point of view in getting rich information that cannot be captured otherwise.

These scientific efforts to start from what is constructed as marginal and partial, show the possibility of imagining different ways of knowing, able to not transcend the subjective and embodied for producing a neutral intellectual knowledge, to emphasize that the *knower* is always in the *known*. And both of them are stemming from a specific gender, race, class, sexual orientation, cultural experience of the world. This last point implies that the connection between subject and object of research is part of scientific activity and, accordingly, it stresses the intrinsic power-relations they (subject and object) are a part of, while questioning those power-relations themselves.

This research work starts from the voice of women – whose experience is still relegated to the margins – and from specific practices of circulation of different meanings and empowering through dialogue – whose characteristics of crossing public/private boundaries show the political structure of the private itself.

With respect to this, it is necessary to emphasize that the female point of view at stake here is related to sense-making processes and collective practices which can also forge male experiences, while it does not imply that all women perform their social activities along these lines. By the way, women's experience of connection and men's education to separation in Western societies (Gilligan 1982; Chodorow 1974) lead to argue that it is more likely that women could follow a pattern of knowledge inspired by subjectivity, tendency to question a generalization of meanings by speaking from a specific point of view, and tolerance for ambiguity as the possibility of overcoming dualisms.

1.1 Connection and power through the web

The choice to focus on particular new media formats, such as blogs, comes from the noteworthy role that these new kinds of writings are performing as cultural actors (D'Ottavio 2009) in redefining multiple subjectivities pertaining to new practices and connections among feminist networks in Italy.

As a matter of fact, especially with the arising of Web 2.0, blogs have been developing as network cultures (Terranova 2006), where the constant sharing practices consist in sharing on-line their own contents and lead to a semiotic shift from the metaphor of Web 1.0 as virtual communities (Rheingold 1993) to Web 2.0 as endless construction of networks. This turning-point emphasizes the gradual approach to internet not only in terms of optimizing information available to the users, but rather in terms of fostering social connections through the internet's networking potentials. Along this line, it has been argued that the network is the platform (O'Reilly 2004), that is a sort of crossing over the distinction between the medium and the content, in order to stress that the particular format of blog is itself both the subject and the object of these network cultures.

If the metaphor of 'virtual community' implied sharing some pre-established and relatively fixed common interests among users, the metaphor of 'network' emphasizes the permanent discussion about what is to be considered similar and different *within* certain groups of users and the constant interrelation *between* distinct groups.

In this vein, what is remarkable is the tendency to create particular social arenas on the web and to reject the deterministic metaphor of 'impact' in approaching cultural meanings arising from technological artifacts, such as internet. In fact, studying the impact of internet communicative resources requires a conceptualization of passive users and of the web as a huge database, neglecting the analysis of how people in different social contexts appropriate technological potentials for their own needs of sense-making and how they actively contribute to the development of web environments themselves.

Thus, technological tools do not allow a mere juxtaposition of resources to the initial communicative affordances; on the contrary, a reciprocal adaptation between technologies and social actors is required, which takes different forms in different contexts (Mantovani 2002).

1.2 Subjective struggle and/as political resistance

A *blog* is the *place* where current new collectives locate their *scale* agenda of daily-life-gender-activism. This format enhanced critical elaboration by connecting dimensions that are usually displayed as strictly distinct: politics, artistic activities, daily-life stories. The present study analyzes one of the recent most representative feminist *blogs* in Italy, during the entire 2009: "Femminismo a Sud" (FaS, Feminism in the South), http://femminismo-a-sud.noblogs.org/.

The choice of FaS relied on the consideration that it has been one of the first and most important feminist web space explicitly framing a feminist agenda in accordance with antiracist, antifascist and antispecieist causes. Moreover, FaS is openly introduced as a collective blog, that is co-edited by a flexible group of bloggers in line with the *free sharing of ideas as free access to political participation*. In particular, it was one of the first feminist platforms on the web crossing a public-private diaristic style in terms of feminist critical analysis of institutional politics.

This choice was further driven by the exemplar feature of 'strategical frivolity' (Bazzichelli 2006) related to this web-environment, where *bloggers* are engaged with a concept of political resistance which is different from the institutional structure of

dissent. FaS *bloggers* foster an idea of civil disobedience as embedded in the hybrid of *party* and *protest,* occurring in a general atmosphere of diversity, self-organization, mutual support. This *fuzzy* pathway to public participation rejects hierarchical structures of formal, masculine, political parties. The approach to technology itself – typical of the so-called 'third feminist wave' – becomes both object of analysis and means of political struggles.

2. Methodology: Intersecting open materiality through language

The corpus of data is extracted from a website and taken into account in terms of different forms of language as embodied action and body as open materiality (Grosz 1995). The body as an open materiality implies that it can be understood neither as a culturally inscribed product of the social, nor as a simple part of nature. Representations, the language through which bodies become intelligible, and the materiality of bodies are intertwined in so far as there is no *inside* or *outside* of the bodies as such. Understanding bodies as open materialities also entails, in this perspective, the investigation of interrelations between materiality and language in light of the power-relations operating through this 'openness'. Consequently, bodies are not conceived as merely material and opposed to the language-driven data.

I have been exploring these narratives according to a quali-quantitative methodology. My research interest relied on discussing whether and how technology displays the body as the political intersection of means and aims. In addition to this, my general research question dealt with embodied technology as an example of 'universality without totality' (that is, putting differences in the same yet de-centralized realm, Levy 1997). In other words: do FaS bloggers position the body as the *subject/mean* to make sense of similarities and differences?

All the excerpts used for the quantitative analysis are related to posts appeared on FaS in 2009. Those used for the qualitative one are instead related to the period 2009-2011 and reported according to their rhetorical relevance to the abovementioned purposes, together with their respective original links. The choice to more accurately

investigate 2009 was due to its specific political relevance for the renewal of feminist action in Italy.

With regard to the quantitative side, a thematic and sequential analysis of the social interaction was conducted through a software called GSEQ (Generalized Sequential Querier, Bakeman and Quera 1995), by focusing on some temporal sequences between certain categories of meaning arisen from the authors' posts and the users' comments, together with the relative frequencies of these categories themselves.

Then, a diatextual lens (Mininni 1999) has been utilized in order to highlight the subjectivities constructed in this environment, the rhetorical strategies used for arguing their positionings and their stylistic modes of expression. In so doing, my aim was to underline a notion of <<context as it is perceived, represented and accounted by speakers in the texts>> (Mininni 1992, 63) to show from *where* and *how* these new political formations are merging into the public arena. Diatextual analysis of media operates as literary critique, that is mainly by fostering a deeper and more accurate interpretation. In this vein, such a literary approach tends to highlight a subjective and fallible positioning of the analyst, constantly focused on intersubjective processes arising at the intersection between authors and (possible) audiences.

2.1 The thematic and sequential analysis of social interaction

The analysis of the most significant sequences of meanings provided by GSEQ aims at finding any correlations in a temporal perspective between certain categories – labeled as *given* – and others – labeled as *target* – in order to explore whether some specific issues are more likely to follow or precede others.

On the other hand, I was also interested in exploring to what extent different themes have been discussed both in the authors' posts and in the users' comments, through their relative frequencies. According to this purpose, all web-narratives were coded using each single *post* (labeled as 'x') and each single *comment* (labeled as 'y') as units of analysis. The corpus of data was composed of 917 authors' posts and 2889 users' comments.

The categories[1] have been created as collections of individual accounts (every single post or comment) towards condensation beyond the singular level [?]. Then, a broader level of analysis involved the development of integrative interpretive categories. Following procedures inspired to grounded theory (Pidgeon 1996), broader themes are extracted from the data in order to identify meaningful patterns of categories:

AAA: antisexism/antiracism/antifascism rhetorics

BLaf: affiliation rhetorics (general support and consensus expressions)

BLalt: discordance and reformulation rhetorics (generic dissent expressions)

AD: self-determination rhetorics (in relation to abortion, sexuality, pornography, prostitution, contraceptives, etc ...)

VG: gender violence rhetorics (physical, psychological, institutional, stalking & cyberstalking, rapes)

SLW: sexism & job-market/welfare

SUD: Southern-Italy issues

POLD: politics & women (in relation to institutional politics and women, political parties and feminist activists)

SM: sexism & media (sexist biases in advertisements, institutional campaigns, daily-life language, artworks, etc ...)

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[1] These categories have been validated by two independent judges who coded 25% (482 units of analysis) of the entire corpus and reached an agreement of 85% (413 agreements, 69 disagreements and omissions), enough to confirm the proposed categories themselves.
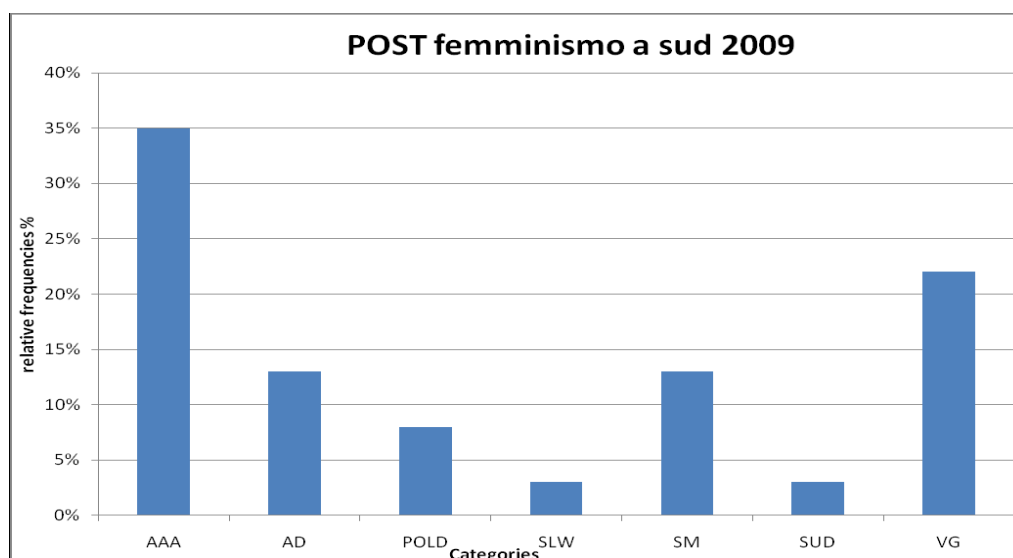
Fig. 1. Relative frequencies posts FaS 2009

As it is visible through the relative frequencies displayed in Fig.1, the so-called "third wave of feminism in Italy" has been focusing its discourse at the intersection of multiple social causes, in so doing framing their new political agenda as simultaneously "antisexist/antiracist/antifascist". In fact, the AAA category is the most present (35%) throughout the entire 2009 and it shows how the new feminist discourse is not tuned into a sort of pure gender discourse, rather it stems from the idea that patriarchy works at different levels (Collins 1986), which are strongly interconnected. In this line, FaS represents a cultural/political struggle aimed at embracing multiple marginalities (women, immigrants, gay/bisexuals/transexuals, etc .).

It is also interesting to notice how classical concerns for previous feminisms – such as sexism and job market, paid and unpaid work – appear significantly less (3%) than others (such as self-determination, gender violence). In some ways, this may be connected to the ever-difficult efforts for women and feminist activists to penetrate the private-public dichotomy by proposing new coherent and effective practices, as it is also shown by the decrease in discussions explicitly related to politics and women (8%). Of course, this could also imply a sort of rejection of institutional politics as well as the male-oriented structure of parties, by promoting different ways of re-approaching the ever-central theme: *the personal is political*.

Besides, though not highly present in the authors' narratives, Southern Italy issues (3%) are becoming a topic for this new feminist agenda, since it allows one to locate their action and belonging, not only in terms of geographical attachment, but rather as cultural affiliation to the concept of 'South' (which in Italy is stigmatized as social/economical under-development).

Some of the statistically significant data are drawn for the present discussion on the sequential analysis of social interaction. In particular, it is shown how all post categories as *given* (Y axis) are likely (positive values on X axis: ADJR>1,96) or less likely (negative values on X axis: ADJR<-1,96) to be followed by comments' categories as *target* (X axis). For such a purpose, I have not considered posts without comments along 2009. In so doing, the corpus included 620 posts and 2889 comments.
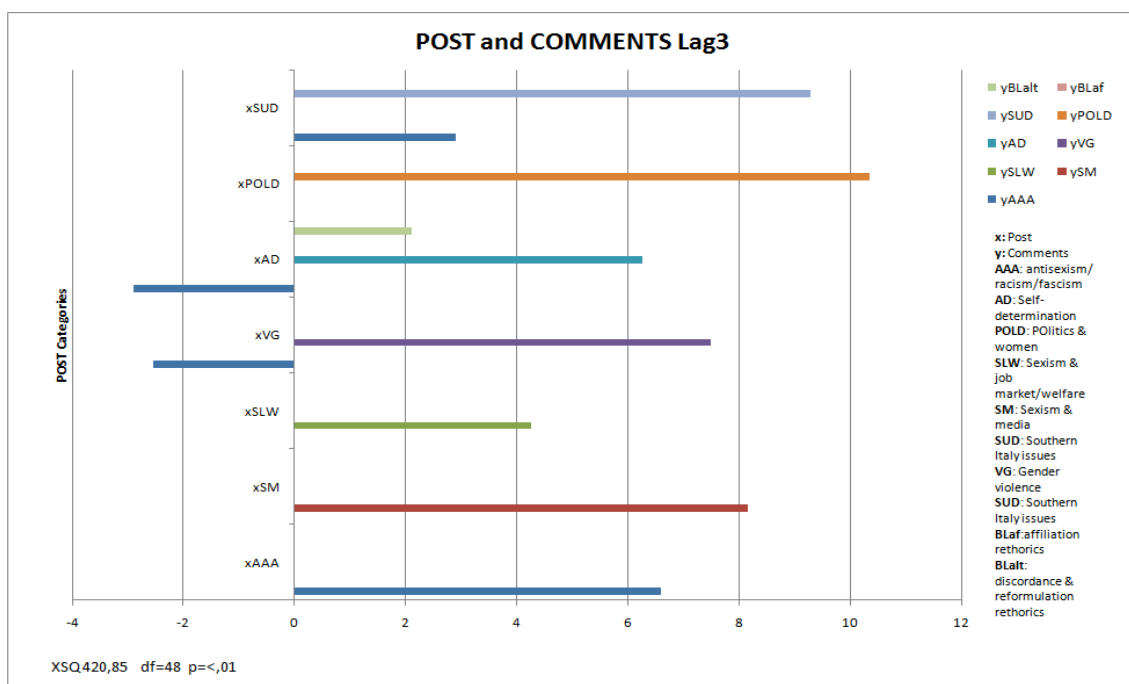

Fig. 2. Sequential Analysis of Social Interaction – Posts and comments FaS 2009 (Lag3)

Fig. 2 shows the sequences of meanings between posts and comments at Lag3, that is the likelihood that, given certain contents in the posts, there will be certain others in the comments - *not in the immediate next one but within three units of analysis*. The choice of investigating the discoursive sequence at this level of analysis (Lag3) implies

deepening the discussion regarding how meanings put forward in the posts by the authors are likely to be followed by the users in their comments, or are likely to trigger different ones.

Thus, it is possible to see from the graph how comments are generally in line with the posts, nonetheless it is interesting how Southern Italy issues (SUD) in the posts are likely to trigger a discussion about the antiracist-antifascist-antisexist perspective (AAA). This seems to be in line with the current emphasis on intersectionality of the feminist movements (AAA), by stressing the relevant interconnectedness of diverse social causes. Remarkably, this correlation appears only at Lag3 and *not before*, suggesting that it requires a higher level of elaboration and maybe a necessity to recover oneself-homeland-specificity just in order to bring out the abovementioned interrelations. In this vein, it is also interesting how both gender violence (VG) and self-determination issues (AD) are *not* likely to be followed by AAA, somehow stressing the peculiar sexist aspect related to these forms of oppression since both VG and AD imply power-relation contents, mostly regarding *women*. With respect to AD itself, it is interesting to highlight positive correlation to discordance and reformulation rhetorics (BLalt) in the comments. It seems that sharing the same positions, contents and style of discussion, doesn't prevent the emergence of plural – even openly divergent – points of view. According to this, FaS provides an example of how it is possible to match similarities and differences, to intersect distinct stances into the same action, by supporting the request of deeper elaboration and co-construction of meanings, in a sort of dialogue-without-neglecting-specificities. Such a dialogue relates to the sort of dialogical penetration between speech genres previously discussed, capable of creating the conditions for the emergence of *intensive* singularities into *extensive* frameworks.
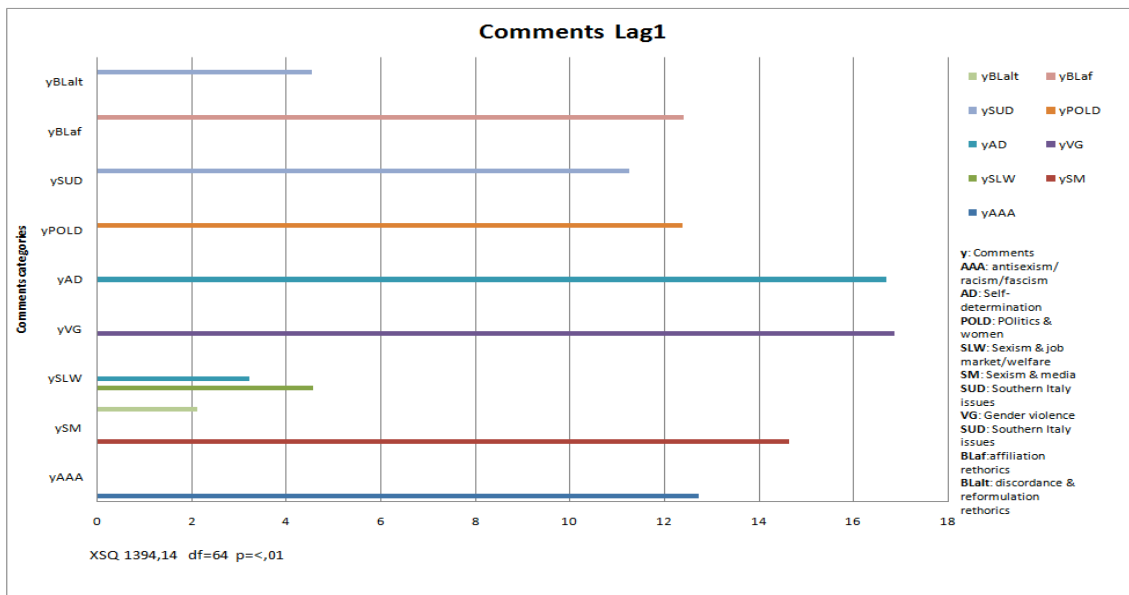
Fig. 3. Sequential Analysis of Social Interaction between comments_ FaS 2009 (Lag1)

The abovementioned graph (Fig. 3) displays the immediate sequence of meanings (*one-to-one-unit of analysis*) between comments; as it was expected, there is a significant correlation among comments related to the same category. Moreover, the work/welfare issues (SLW) are significantly likely to be followed by the discourse about self-determination (AD). In this sense, it seems that this classical focus of feminist movements – sexism and job market – is still particularly present among the blog's readers and it is still highly linked to the very possibility of female self-consciousness, authentic relationships, chosen sexuality and reproduction (all meanings included in AD). FaS readers, then, usually re-frame their presence on the blog-space by prompting new dimensions for their interconnections, even when not directly motivated by FaS bloggers (as was discussed in terms of relative frequencies in Fig. 1).

Furthermore, both sexism and media (SM) and Southern Italy (SUD) issues are positively correlated to discordance and reformulation rhetorics (BLalt) among the comments. In fact, both these contents are densely discussed according to divergent positionings among the readers.

SM seems to trigger a deep elaboration on how to approach free expression of thoughts in art, advertisements, TV formats and the like, and the necessity of coping with its potential sexism. Consequently, most of the discussion is focused on avoiding

censorship and enhancing different ways to face the problem, for instance by promoting *subvertising* practices of communication. It is noteworthy how Southern Italy issues appear as controversial topics among blog's readers who have strongly discussed about what it means to be and to feel southern-italian according to a post-colonial perspective (Spivak 1999), coupled with adverse criticism from Northern Italian feminists and women, who stressed how this located lens would be similar to nationalist (and racist) memberships.

2.2 Diatextual Analysis

2.2.1. Subjectivity: feminism as intersection of voices

Fig. 4. Homepage FaS

As is visible from the general frame of this blog (Fig. 4), bloggers have been stressing even in their denomination and in the main pictures of the web-page their doubly-marginalized-belonging: that is, they openly speak from a gender and located position, as women from the South of Italy. This is also evident from the picture of old women portrayed in a sort of *daily-life-protest-pose* against soldiers; a choice, in this sense, along the line of displaying those who are not usually *appealing* in the public discourse and are often shown only as victims, not capable of providing a relevant voice for the public interest. Bloggers are also dealing with a constant redefinition of multiple struggles on the border of different marginal groups, not only including women but also immigrants, gays and lesbians, Palestinians and israelian dissidents. These are strongly polyphonic narratives even when they are introduced in the first singular person; as a matter of fact, they include links to other sources of information on the web along their

storytelling, always encompassing the personal as well as the plural approach to social events. Furthermore, these kinds of writings are inherently pursuing an inclusive line of action also in relation to the constant connection between on-line as well as off-line domains, by creating posts as hybrids of web contents and public demonstrations. Such an interconnected practice frames FaS as an interplay between an *intralocutor* and an *interlocutor* diatext insofar as bloggers seem to always be in direct dialogue with private spheres as well as public spheres, in other words with different kinds of audiences.

Thus, their positionings about similarities and differences are always aiming at re-framing modalities to *speak* and to *act* politics by questioning its assumptions (Gomez Sanchez and Belén Martin-Sevillano 2006).

Excerpt 1: Florence. March for Palestine. report and photos

A lot of Palestinian women and men. At the beginning of the march a lot of women, little boys and girls were holding little bloody puppets. Little boys and girls murdered in Gaza during an endless massacre. […] I have seen a lot of Palestinian flags, slogans, no burned flags, contrary to what has been shown on the regional TV channel without any evidence. […] […] I believe in a non-religious idea of peace. But I don't want to promote cultural colonizations. I don't want to export the need for a critical approach. But let me speak. Let me talk about it, because, at the same time, I also don't want to feel forced to stress a position according to a faithful urge to support somebody in opposition to someone else. [..] I support Palestinian women and men. I am supporting harmed people like in the past I was supporting victims of Nazism. This massacre must be stopped. That's it. **(fikasicula, 11.01.2009, translation is mine)**

Voicing the experience of multiple margins through multiple codes was shown by acknowledging <<the interconnectedness as well as the specificity of each oppression>> (Perumal 2006, 740), with regard to the solidarity with Muslim migrants for the palestinian cause. In this case, the clear peculiar strategy was to position women's cause within the religious framework associated to the palestinian struggle, in an openly secular and political way.

In addition, FaS dialogue among diverse social causes tended to specify some sort of positioning in a controversial overlapping of influences and supports. In fact, bloggers were often engaged in writing their dissent about the use of the palestinian cause perpetrated by new nazi-fascist formations in Italy against Jews, by stressing that their support to this demonstration did not imply an anti-semitic cause.

Excerpt 2: There is no fight against patriarchal violence without antiracism and antifascism

> How can you accept a definition of feminism without anti-racism, anti-fascism and anti-authoritarian causes? How can you be focused only on superficial issues, authorizing the logic of victimization of various subjectivities, women, gays, trans, only useful to the request for "security" [...]?
>
> [...] There is a kind of cross-union of women, at least so-called, deeply racist, which cares about "white" women or migrant women in order to criminalize whole ethnic groups. So, it is not true that feminism is not a right- nor left- wing matter. Right-wing women try to call "feminism" all fascism and racism that they bring into the public arena. But it's not about feminism and it never will be.
> **(fikasicula, 26.11.2009, translation is mine)**

This last excerpt shows the current redefinition and inner struggles in the feminist movement; in so doing, it explicitly frames itself as *intersectional movement*, a sort of broader stance aimed at embracing all the subjectivities exceeding the dualistic structure of western societies.

These contemporary feminist movements are constantly engaged in discussing the inclusiveness of the term 'victimization' or 'oppression' and whether oppression unites or divides women.

The example of FaS sheds light on constructive responses to victimization by reinforcing the political role of intersubjectivity between different oppressed categories starting from a feminist positioning. In so doing, it does not only prevent cycles of hostility among oppressed people but also fosters positive relations with other groups, by focusing on structural causes of oppression and suggesting that gender consciousness

is not only related to women's issues (Angelique and Culley 2003), but locates itself at the intersection with race, class, sexual orientation, religion and so on.

2.2.2. Argumentation: corporeal rhetorics

2.2.2.1. War through bodies

As is shown in a number of posts about the israeli-palestinian conflict in January 2009, these bloggers are engaged in imagining other ways to familiarize with the experience of the war, from a multiply marginalized point of view; they introduce life-stories about what a daily-life war means, speaking in the first person while linking to other usually hidden sources of information, trying to talk about the concrete implications of a war for human beings.

They reclaim the possibility to speak from supposedly trivial aspects of daily-life in ironical/controversial ways, in order to make a *political* sense of reality itself.

In the following excerpts bodies are not introduced in terms of 'epistemic bodies', bodies-as-they-are-known *through* narration; rather, in terms of narration *as* embodied structures that rejects a concept of language as autonomous, self-dependent and self-referential.

Excerpt 3: War is "lack of/missing"!

> I do not have news. I'm not in Palestine. I'm not one of those frightened little girls who are dying of heart attack in Gaza. I'm not living war. I feel angry and powerless. [..] When I think about war the word "lack of" comes to my mind. Maybe, it means a moment when you are lacking everything. Suddenly. You are missing things, your things, your oxygen, your bed, your TV, your hair-dryer, your glasses. […] You are missing fear because when you get used to bombings, to seeing corpses, to the smell of burned human flesh, you start to stop feeling fearful. Fear is inside your body and in your skin. It's already a part of yourself and you will not be able to get free from it. […] I'm not living war, but when I think about it, the word "lack of/missing" comes to my mind. From the safe place where I

actually stand, I'm lacking the capacity to understand how people that have experienced Shoah can replicate the same to other people.

(fikasicula, 06.01.2009, translation is mine)

This last excerpt unfolds a transversal theme and rhetorical strategy along these writings, that is a sort of grotesque body (Bakhtin 1984) approach to improve the dialogism between political events and their most invisible, mistreated, private counterparts. This notion stands as a subversive culture, that questions the mind/body separation, still predominant in contemporary society. In this vein, the *grotesque realism* followed by FaS is materially embodied and builds up realistic, cosmic, social and bodily elements together as an indivisible whole. So, the 'grotesque body' concept is profoundly dialogical and stresses a tendency to <<opening the meaning through opening the body>> (Traversa 2010) by focusing on those (neglected) ordinary, bodily phenomena in order to make sense of social events, such as war.

The female body as a means to make sense of the world and to reveal how corporeal regimes produce particular relations to the self/other relation (Kim 2003), represents for women a need to act as cultural producers in a time when they feel overwhelmingly involved as consumers, especially in relation to their bodies (Stasko 2008).

Excerpt 4: It's all about security

How could we define them? Defective bodies, bodies having problems to appear, those that cannot be displayed since there is a whole culture that makes them ashamed to exist. Standard and normalized bodies, with respect tof which it becomes revolutionary to show yourself as you are. […] The issue of bodies is closely linked with attitudes, behaviors, thoughts, opinions. All people conforming to something become vulnerable due to the need of affiliation. […] Trapping bodies and sexuality is a serious matter and it doesn't take a lot from here to trap thoughts and individuality.

(fikasicula, 24.05.2009, translation is mine)

The body constitutes a very intimately private matter and a public space/order meaning at the same time. These new feminist collectives are focusing on the body in

their discourse about individual self-determination; in so doing, they are claiming that the political agenda *represents* public regulation over bodies, that is always a constraint over human differences.

Hence, the corporeal rhetorics included in security narratives aims at stressing the dialogicality between mind and body, as well as the interrelations between body and politics; in this line, they are arguing about how legitimizing a *one-way body* serves as prelude to establishing a *one-way thinking*.

2.2.2.2. Racism through bodies

By drawing on FaS, it is possible to investigate how the body is a political battleground and how social formations, such as gender and race, are interrelated in the current asset of the European Union.

As is visible from the next excerpt, Italian feminists are focusing on how the standardization of female bodies serves the racial campaigns in Switzerland (Squires, 2010). In addition, they argue that this is an ever central point enacted by all authoritarian governments.

Excerpt 5: Women's bodies used for racist campaigns

Fig. 5. Women's bodies used for racist campaigns

These are pictures drawn from an anti-immigration campaign in Switzerland.

Such a racism is structured on female bodies. Perfectly in line with a mass-media point of view, slim, more or less white (Aryan), almost plastic, the women on the left, the Swiss par excellence. Large, fat, clumsy, smoking, as Southern Italy's housewives or as Rom women, more or less real, those on the right, the foreigners. In the first case, what is depicted is harmony, beauty, purity, white water. In the second one, the water recalls the dirtiness of immigration and it looks like the Nile, or any other river where these women are immersed with their clothes.

The analysis of pictures about different models of femininity have been used by the nazis too, when they compared white women's bodies to black-women's. Thus, the current racist campaign followed in Switzerland seems to be in line with anti-immigration discourse in the entire European Union. In this sense, the homogenization of bodies corresponds to the homogenization of thoughts.

(cybergrrlz, 18.11.2010, translation is mine)

Significantly, this local issue is readily connected to another italian local issue, the Southern Italy one. In fact, stemming from the 'South' as a cultural positioning rather than as a geographical location, the bloggers link the african/rom discrimination to the Southern Italy discrimination. These activists are deeply involved in reclaiming a positive, self-determined value to the concept of 'South'. In so doing, they are engaged in tracing similarities between apparently different kinds of oppression. Simultaneously, they are attempting to *name* differences in order to re-signify their social status while creating unpredictable alliances.

For instance, the emphasis on irregularities, the exceeding somatic features of african as well as southern italian women, are reclaimed as their agency itself. That is, as a precious feature.

Excerpt 6: Women's bodies used for racist campaigns

Racism and sexism are interrelated and this is precisely what is going on in Europe and it will destroy us, unless we firmly oppose it.

We are Southern (Italian) women and we have been experiencing cultural racism, in relation to our bodies, in a crucial way too. We were described as ugly, black and furry. It does not matter that Greeks and Normans came here and diffused in the South fair skins, very blond hair and blue eyes. We keep on being, proudly, Africans, Arabs, foreigners, victims of a geographical and cultural still existing annexation.

(cybergrrlz, 18.11.2010, translation is mine)

With regard to this, it is important to notice how this renovated pride does not correspond to the rejection of *otherness*, rather it seems to show how the re-appropriation of a mistreated cultural belonging enhances further connections.

This last point is also in line with the commonalities between the current attempts in Italy as well as in Switzerland to re-frame laws about the family in a misogynist way, that is neglecting feminicides and the problem of gender violence (swissinfo.ch, 2010).

The *location* of the speaker, the *space* for speaking out, has always been a central theme among women's movements. In fact, as highlighted by the shift in the politics of scale followed by the WMW (World March of Women) between 1998 and 2005 (Dufour and Giraud 2007), conceiving a change in place or scale does not simply represent a change in the target of the protest, from the national or local to international scenarios, since neither place nor scale are given but they are constructed out of social relations and social practices.

The shift in the politics of places and scales followed by the European activists included in WMW produced the creation of their own scales and places, mostly independent from traditional sources of authority and governments, in order to designate which institutions and actors were concerned with women's affairs. The WMW chose to occupy places that were not always recognized as pertinent by these authorities and to construct their own scale from the margins, choosing not European capitals but the mediterranean areas (Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria) as places for their meetings, even when their reclaims were addressed to European institutions in Brussels, bridging long-time divides and creating new spaces as political actors. This process was focused on solidarity building within the various women's movements and across

different kinds of activism – humanitarian, environmental, peace, as an experience of political empowerment.

Once again, gender and race appear to be social formations working as social exclusions in different contexts, but in similar ways. The possibility of agency lies in the same conditions of oppression: by re-articulating the system of values in more inclusive ways, by highlighting differences in order to keep heterogeneity, in bodies as well as in minds.

2.2.2.3.Re-appropriation of pornography as struggle

FaS puts forward a critical perspective on pornography, by arguing its political framework. The possibility of choice is strictly related to the possibility of legitimizing multiple desires. In this sense, according to new feminists, post-pornography (Sprinkle 1998) enhanced the possibility of performing multiple bodies, multiple desires, multiple thoughts. For instance, by drawing on mainstream pornography along the 20th century, it was clear how the *un-marked-eye* was a male one and - starting from the 50's - pornography was a male product based on male desires. Playboy served as a crucial tool for emphasizing male eroticism and was about *who has the power to get sexual pleasure* and strongly related to the same social hierarchical structure. In fact, women and men were depicted in highly stereotyped roles, mirroring their different social status: women as waitresses, housewives, secretaries.

Post-pornography suggests a non-binary way of thinking bodies, beyond the binaries of language and materiality, representation and pre-representational objects. Bodies are marked by specificities, not least from ageing and disabilities. Bodies are unruly and impacting representations, but also *formed out* of cultural discourse. Post-porno's desire seems to emphasize the whole of the body as a way to de-centre the importance of genitality. The body's capacities for producing pleasure and desire, becoming, is closely linked here to feminist aspirations of rethinking sexual morphologies. Desire is neither bound to genitals nor to encounters between two (or more) people. Nonetheless, it exists as a force or flow without specific aims but its own proliferation.
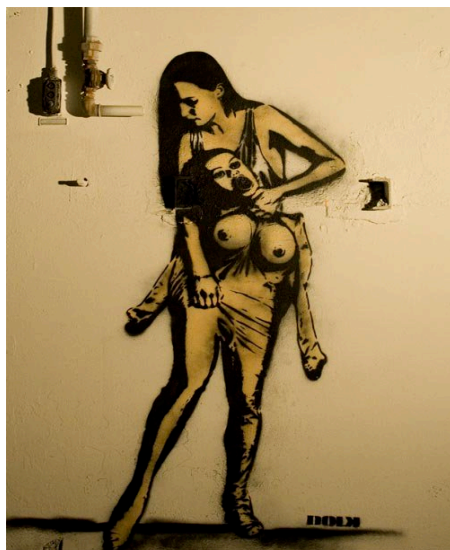
Excerpt 7: Why we like post-porno

Fig. 6. Why we like post-porno

> It is precisely this sexual scenario, populating men's fantasies for years, that enhanced the construction of the hetero-normative social model. In other words, the imposition of heterosexuality as a norm, where the distinction between male and female was based on hyper-sexualized bodies and strictly different social roles. **(Iafra, 06.01.2011, translation is mine)**

Such a one-way approach to pornography derived from a specific male eye: heterosexual, white, western, middle-class. This point reveals how the power of getting pleasure is a political issue, since all the subjects excluded from such a realm are, by the same token, excluded from other political rights.

As is visible in the next excerpt, pornography matters since it enhanced sexual liberation; nonetheless, it was always embedded in power-relations. In this sense, the body is always at the intersection of the private vs. public spheres and – again – it can perform both subjectivity, agency, as well as subjugation.

Even though the current debate about pornography among feminists in Italy is far from having disappeared, the ambivalence of the phenomenon is what matters. In this sense, if some feminists (Marzano 2010) highly criticize such a view on sexuality that could re-relegate women to a passive and hyper-sexualized positioning, new generations

of feminists tend to reclaim pornography in order to re-articulate its asset. Pornography operates as a mechanism of *public* production of the *private* and dramatization of the domestic sphere insofar as it also frames different kinds of human relationships with space. Along this line, FaS' activists criticize the one-way model of pornography, the one-way model of desire, the one-way model of body, reclaiming multiple practices of pleasure. That is, according to the ever-central feminist insight 'the personal is political', reclaiming an inclusive distribution of power.

Excerpt 8: Why we like post-porno

> Post-porno aims at questioning people about their superimposed sexual models, by suggesting them to become their personal pornostars. Its action is not only giving voice (and whimpers) to all people not fitting into mainstream pornography, rather it is inventing new, shared, inclusive, visible, open sexual practices. Post-porno is the copyleft of sexuality that overcomes dominant pornography's standards and the normalized sexual habit. Its aim is to change the cultural and hormonal production through a political movement […] Why do we like it? Since it de-constructs gender, it's resistance, fun and desire. It is our sexual revolution.
> **(Iafra, 06.01.2011, translation is mine)**

The 70's sexual liberation fostered a still male-oriented porno-culture, ignoring female desire, just because there was no authentic female liberation. That is why women's sexual pleasure has never been legitimized, since it would have implied a total solution of the patriarchal dualism: saint or whore, bad and good girl.

Along this line, my point is that sexuality has been working, in Foucaultian terms, as a biopolitical control, by imposing another one-way model of emancipation and pleasure. For instance, mainstream pornography in the 1990's has more and more been showing only fake, shiny, plastic, perfect bodies. No other bodies were legitimized to be displayed, to get pleasure. This was also a product of consumerist society, which absorbed new sexual trends to enrich the new-born porno industry (such as porno-vhs). Sexuality became a great business and imposed its standards. The post-pornography of Annie Sprinkle (1998) attempted to deconstruct these standards by showing people usually not depicted as 'enjoying sexual pleasures', such as disabled, dwarfs, fat people.

Irregular bodies, so to speak. This point clarifies, once again, how the same conditions of reification could be de-structured and re-invented in order to meet different subjectivities. In this sense, according to Foucault's use of pleasure as self-care and resistance, the reaction to the one-way standard of perfect body could not be simply its reversal, the imperfect body, since it might be re-absorbed in a consumerist and homologated way. Rather, it could be the *self-determined* body, that is the body choosing *per se*.

Hence, people are not discriminated for what they *do*, but rather for what they *are*. And what they *are* is constructed on their bodies.

2.2.3. *Mode: metaphors and language as place of struggle*

Fig. 7. Homepage FaS

As can be seen on the homepage, these activists make ironical/critical use of classical gender symbols and try to create their own vocabulary and images: for instance, the pink picture above (Fig. 7) displays the inscription "Non delego responsabilità. Chi mi sta attorno mi riguarda" (I don't delegate. Those who are around me matter to me) in order to stress the interrelation of male/female as a circular process requiring a gender re-construction, as also shows from the symbolic title of this picture: "Mayday Ri/Generi/Amoci" (Mayday Let's Re/Gender as Generate/Us).

Another interesting experiment of intersemiotic challenge – as heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1981) – to classical concepts of femininity and war is located in the image below, where

the female gametes stand for a "Bollettino di Guerra" (War Bulletin, Fig. 8), that is a page collecting statistics and information about domestic violence and what the authors call 'feminicides'.

Fig. 8. Homepage FaS

This is interesting in terms of declaring an ordinary phenomenon – relatively ignored or wrongly dealt with in the public arena – as a *war*, even more dangerous because it is hidden and is only taken seriously when violence against women is to do with immigrants and not with the usual, accepted, structure of gender relationships. This kind of counter public rhetoric is deliberately not conventionally political, as it combines personal points of view, political analysis, artworks and links to other relevant websites for activists' off-line activities; in this sense, this is a way of exchanging political ideas by those who are marginalized by the mainstream political debate. It does not only represent a political but also an epistemological subversion of domestic violence, since it approaches such a hidden/daily-life phenomenon according to institutional rhetorics. In regard to this, these web-environments are less valued within the mainstream blogging culture, and less likely to be ranked highly or linked to (Ratliff 2004). They tend to operate for information sharing, consciousness-raising and community-building, but can also be leisure-oriented and mix up personal and political material (Harris 2008).

Since "everything is political, but every politics is micropolitics and macropolitics at the same time" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003, 307), it is important to stress how these

molar and *molecular* configurations require each other, as the first one could not exist without its interactions with the effervescent, potential innovation deriving from the multiple micropolitical and molecular formations; by the same token, the molecular level could not exist beyond and without influencing the macropolitical domain.

New feminist practices in Italy choose to follow this *micropolitical* perspective – capable of taking into account what resists encapsulation in the dualistic definitions of society - in order to establish new patterns for a full public representation of marginalized groups – starting from women – by adopting semiotic and affective strategies in their networking activities.

This became visible during a national campaign and public demonstration occurred in 2007 in Italy, when the network of new feminist movements entered the public space in order to stress their point of view about how the mainstream media ware talking about gender issues, and how the political discourse about violence against women was making use of women's bodies for promoting racist and security rhetorics . In such a circumstance, it was evident how micropolitics can penetrate the macropolitical scenario, since the fluid and different social connections developed on the web were able to focus their positionings around the Organizational Committee's blog[2] through horizontal and inclusive decision-making processes.

It was just this kind of constant networking practices among distinct and even divergent perspectives that created the possibility to merge into official mass media, thus enhancing the discussion within the movements themselves and extending it to the *offline* public context.

In fact, the model for political action in the national demonstration on violence against women (24/11/2007) was this shared participation from below, well represented, for example, by some press releases and slogans made by groups like "Sexyshock*"* and "Comunicattive*"* (the latter being a neologism stressing communication strategies and/as action) about how they approached violence against women and the circular, cultural struggles required to face this phenomenon, in comparison to the security-oriented discourse about it: << Do not forget me. Against violence we need inclusive

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[2] The first website focus of this network was www.controviolenzadonne.org but later, due to the lack of circular and horizontal communication processes and the static structure of the website, some groups arranged their activities on *mailing lists*, one of the most participated was sommosse@inventati.org

politics, networks and sharing>> **(Comunicattive, Sexyshock et al., 23.11.2007, translation is mine)**

This tendency to highlight the necessity of an horizontal participation and not to ignore "private" and daily life dimensions was also well described in this excerpt from the press release text:

> [we need] a consolidated and effective movement […] based on a wide range of alliances: from the neighbor capable of realizing the tragedy unfolding next door, to funding for centers against violence, to self-defense programs [because] political effectiveness relies on multiplying spaces and strategies against violence that can speak to all women, and to all men.
>
> **(Comunicattive, Sexyshock et al., 23.11.2007, translation is mine)**

2.3. Conclusions: redefinition of 'margin' vs. 'center' through a feminist lens

The present research work aimed at furthering the possibility of producing knowledge from the margin, as an experiment of fostering dialogue between diversities, as well as political empowerment (Moane 2006).

This does not mean, however, a lack of questioning about what we define 'margin', which always implies the existence of a 'center'; rather, it tries to display the movement, the contaminated dynamics of peripheral locations in order to offer a different lens to approach the center itself. This contribution is not only dealing with discourse about how the margin can survive and flourish without any external supports; on the contrary, it represents an effort to imagine a different, not hierarchical categorization of the social arena.

According to this, I have tried to follow one of the simplest and most disturbing feminist insights: *the personal is political.* This statement leads to question the usually taken for granted 'private aspects' in everyday life, showing how relationships once imagined as merely private are "infused with power" (Enloe 1990, 195). Furthermore, this statement can be read backwards, that is *the political is personal*. In so doing, it is suggested that politics is not only included in legislative debates, political parties, public

meetings and mainstream media; rather, this concept of politics requires the construction of the margin, the unofficial, the non-relevant to public interest, in order to exist.

The possibility of enhancing a permanent dialogue between these spheres in order to stress their interconnectedness comes from these networking activities, for instance – as another effort to overcome abstract, separated ways of knowing.

This plural perspective can emphasize the androcentric assumptions which establish masculinity (and, respectively, a specifically normalized femininity) as unmarked norm, while marginalizing-delegitimizing women and men with different experiences. In this line, these feminist practices of connection and tendency to otherness have provided an exercise of multiplicity and inclusion: by recognizing the specific location of every speaker as the possibility of an authentic, contextual objectivity. Thus, when power is examined from such a point of view, it is possible to frame this experience within a specific socio-cultural and psychological context, at a specific historical moment, which is expressed by subjects and their bodies.

The multi-methodological analysis of FaS verbal-iconic dimensions highlights possible ways of crossing political gaps in gender identity's construction. The richness and complexity of the abovementioned textual production clearly relies on the ideological plot of body as unavoidable borderline between different power-centers. Accordingly, the interplay between culture and language suggests looking for the mind inside the body (Sharifian *et al.* 2008). Humiliated or seductive, burdened or evanescent, the female body (in every South of the world) marks the difficult liberation struggles of political subjectivities fighting against sedimented psychodiscoursive practices and knowledge. The virtue(ality) of FaS enacts the rhetorics of feeling and the will for well-being as embodied place for a new order of discourse (Foucalt 1970) capable of letting people and communities combine their needs of justice with longings for acknowledgement and jouissance.

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