

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A DISCOURSE OF IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE: EMMA GOLDMAN'S *LIVING MY LIFE*

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RESUMEN

En este trabajo se analiza *Living My Life* (1931), la autobiografía de la anarquista Emma Goldman, como discurso de identidad y resistencia. De entre los diversos ejemplos de sus muchas resistencias a todo tipo de autoridad, el discurso autobiográfico de Goldman puede interpretarse como un acto de resistencia en el que la autora construye su identidad enfrentándola a la imagen demoníaca que el gobierno y la prensa de los Estados Unidos habían dibujado de ella. *Living My Life* puede así ser estudiada como un buen ejemplo del potencial existente en los textos autobiográficos para convertirse en lugares en los que el sujeto autobiográfico es agente activo de algún tipo de cambio, en lugares en los que cambiar los sistemas de significado de una sociedad es posible. El análisis de *Living My Life* apunta a que ese texto autobiográfico pudo provocar cambios en algunas concepciones sobre las relaciones políticas y humanas, así como sobre el papel jugado por las mujeres en los Estados Unidos de principios del siglo XX.

PALABRAS CLAVE: autobiografía, Emma Goldman, Foucault, feminismo, identidad, resistencia.

ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes the anarchist Emma Goldman's autobiography, *Living My Life* (1931), as a discourse of identity and resistance. Within the different descriptions of her many resistances to any kind of authority, Goldman's autobiographical discourse can itself be perceived as an act of resistance: one in which she constructs her identity by confronting the demonic image that the Government and the press of the United States had previously portrayed of her. Thus, *Living My Life* can be studied as an example of the potential of autobiography as a place of resistance, a place where the autobiographical subject can become an agent of change, a place where the systems of signification of a society can change. In the case of *Living My Life*, a change in conceptions about politics and human relations, or about the role of women in turn-of-the-century United States can be seen to be a possibility.

KEYWORDS: autobiography, Emma Goldman, Foucault, feminism, identity, resistance.

One of the major contributions of Michel Foucault to contemporary thought was his description of power as something which does not belong to a select group



of people, to a dominant class, but as something which can be used, displayed, and exerted by individuals in specific situations. Individuals, furthermore, are able to respond and can resist power at certain moments. This notion of power, which opposes the old models which identified it with specific social classes or groups, moves away from the idea that identities are fixed, stable, and clearly defined, allowing for a conception of individuals as vehicles who have the ability to transmit power (Gordon 1980: 72). Foucault's emphasis on the close relation that exists between knowledge and power has also shed light on many fields of the academic world; his contention that power is discursive and spreads knowledge makes us reflect upon the way in which discourses circulate in our society, above all if we ponder upon his opinion that knowledge produces «truths», which for him are but forms of power manifesting through discourse (Foucault 1980: 131-132).

The subject, as posited by Lacan, is constituted through language, but from a Foucauldian perspective it also becomes an effect of different discourses which are situated in a specific historical context, immersed in a whole network of power relations. The «technologies of the self» that Foucault theorized would allow for individuals to behave, act, and think consciously, fashioning their own identities, acting—at least temporarily—upon themselves (Foucault 1988: 18-19; McNay, 1992: 3). Autobiography can thus be understood as an element of power, an instrument which individuals can use to become agents of change, whereby they construct their own discourses and so escape the common tendency to homogenize discourses. Foucault's interest was not only centred upon the discursive practices of society, but also on the non-discursive practices which accompanied those discourses of truth. «How can the subject tell the truth about itself?», he wondered, and his answer pointed to power relations «exerting themselves upon one another» (Kritzman 1990 [1988]: 38). His reflections about the subject stimulate critics of autobiography, leading them to analyze how, under what conditions «something like a subject» (Foucault 1991 [1984]: 118) appears in the autobiographical discourse, reinventing his or her self, and thus acquiring autonomy. Autobiography could then be analyzed as one of the means that the individual can use in order to penetrate the discourse, reinvent his or her self and acquire that autonomy.

If we analyze an autobiographical discourse from that perspective we must bring into question, among other things, to what extent the experience of the autobiographer, or even the identity that s/he presents in the text are nothing but simple discourses (Scott 1998). Identity, as many critics following Foucault have posited, would then become a temporal construction; it would not be understood as something fixed and stable, and it would not be connected to the concept of «essence». Furthermore, the autobiographical discourse can be analyzed in terms of the way it confronts other discourses that have circulated about the identity of the autobiographer, thus becoming a discourse of resistance, and an opportunity of which s/he takes advantage in order to respond to the power that has been exerted on him or her through knowledge. Such is the case of *Living My Life*, the autobiography in two volumes that Emma Goldman published in 1931, in which we can observe how, by circulating *her* own discourse about *her* identity, the anarchist of Russian origin was resisting the official discourses that the media and the authorities of the United



States had constructed about her. Goldman had spent many years surrounded by the legend of «Red Emma», the «most dangerous woman in the United States», a woman whose very name frightened children, a woman who was finally deported from the country in 1919 after many years of political activity and persecution.

When Emma Goldman decided to write her autobiography in exile, she was determined to challenge those negative discourses that had been constructed about her, mainly in her country of adoption; so, in *Living My Life*, together with the image of the woman full of fighting spirit, she showed that of the fragile and tender woman who suffered ostracism and who had to give up motherhood in order to defend her anarchist ideal. Using language as the main weapon, Goldman places herself among multiple and contradictory discourses, moving away from the idea of the coherent and unified self that many autobiographers try to depict. By reading her autobiographical discourse closely and contrasting it with many of those official discourses that had constructed «Red Emma», we could say that Emma Goldman managed to penetrate the discourse and reinvent herself. She interpreted her own experience (Scott 1988; De Lauretis 1984) and managed to construct an identity for herself, resisting the one that had been imposed on her. Both from an individual and a micropolitical perspective, in the everyday practices that she shares with the readers of *Living My Life*, Goldman shows her agency, and confronts hegemonic discourses (De Lauretis 1987), constructing her-self and displaying her own contradictions.

Furthermore, by presenting a model of womanhood which moved away from the canons of her day, Goldman somehow provoked changes in the systems of signification of her society – about concepts such as «woman» or «gender». Her autobiography is a good example of the contention held by many feminist scholars, such as Teresa De Lauretis or Joan W. Scott, that meanings change and fluctuate depending on the historical moment in which they are generated. The change of the concept «female subject» appears as something possible in *Living My Life*, where we observe a woman who resists the subjectivity which has been imposed on her and who manages to show that women, in turn-of-the-century United States could occupy spaces which were normally forbidden to them. In *Living My Life* we find a woman who occupied the public arena from the last decade of the nineteenth century, transforming the political platform into «the only place where I could feel at home» (Goldman 1970 [1931]: 377). In fact, Emma Goldman gave up the place normally inhabited by the women of her time, home and family life, in order to become a public figure and a famous speaker. As a speaker, Goldman depicts herself in her autobiography as someone who managed to control big crowds, avoiding riots and adopting the platform as a public place where she felt comfortable. Goldman shows her resistance to remaining silent, despite the many efforts on the part of the authorities to silence her voice and her rebelliousness. Thus, by presenting herself as a woman who resisted and confronted power and authority, the autobiographical subject Emma Goldman was able to show her agency and could generate changes in the systems of signification of her society about the role of women.

One of the most powerful images that she offers in her autobiography finds her in the street, in 1891, when she was only twenty-two years old and was determined to speak during the May Day celebrations in Union Square, New York. The event



had been organized by the socialists, who had promised the anarchists that they would be allowed to speak:

But at the last moment the socialist organizers refused to let us erect our platform on the square. Most did not arrive on time, but I was there with a group of young people, including Sasha, Fedya, and several Italian comrades. We were determined to have our say on this great occasion. When it became evident that we could not have our platform, the boys lifted me up on one of the socialist trucks. I began to speak. The chairman left, but in a few minutes he returned with the owner of the wagon. I continued to speak. The man hitched his horse to the truck and started off at a trot. I still continued to speak. The crowd, failing to take in the situation, followed us out of the square for a couple of blocks while I was speaking. Presently the police appeared and began beating back the crowd. The driver stopped. Our boys quickly lifted me off and hurried me away. The morning papers were filled with a story about a mysterious young woman on a truck who had waved a red flag and urged revolution, «her high-pitched voice putting the horse to flight.» (1970 [1931]: 80)

This image that the autobiographer offers to her readers, the image of a «mysterious young woman» on a truck, determined to speak against all odds, imposing her right to express herself, is the image of a still unknown Emma Goldman. She would become a public character the following year, after the unsuccessful attempt of Alexander Berkman against the life of the industrial manager Henry Clay Frick. Berkman, an anarchist of Russian origin, was Goldman's comrade and lover, and she was suspected of being his accomplice in this *Attentât*. Despite the many efforts on the part of the police to prove her complicity in Berkman's deed, no evidence was found; but from that moment she became a target for the press and the government of the United States, who began a fierce campaign against her.

With the passage of time, the encouragement of many comrades – above all Johann Most and Alexander Berkman – and through her own personal development, Emma Goldman would become one of the great anarchist speakers of her time. One of her most famous lectures, delivered in Union Square in 1893, ended with her arrest and conviction to one year's imprisonment. It was an exhortation to the unemployed which she summarizes in her autobiography; she declared that the State was her worst enemy, and encouraged them to fight for their rights, to «demonstrate before the palaces of the rich; demand work. If they do not give you work, demand bread. If they deny you both, take bread. It is your sacred right!» (1970 [1931]: 123). Those were Goldman's last words to her large audience, and the reaction was immediate: «Uproarious applause, wild and deafening, broke from the stillness like a sudden storm. The sea of hands eagerly stretching out towards me seemed like the wings of white birds fluttering» (1970 [1931]: 123). Goldman did not hesitate in stirring up the masses and disturbing the peace, and her confrontations with power are commonplace in *Living My Life*. But she makes it clear that those confrontations had been part of her personality since childhood.

In *Living My Life*, Goldman speaks of her earliest confrontations with authority: her rebellion against the aggressiveness and sexism of her Jewish father, her constant



challenging of that figure of authority which was part of her everyday life. Another example of her early rejection of power appears in her school life reminiscences, when she tells the readers about the physical punishment exerted by the religious studies teacher, which was avenged by the young Goldman: «I used to organize schemes to annoy him: stick pins in his upholstered chair, stealthily tie his long coat-tails to the table, put snails in his pockets – anything I could think to pay him back for the pain of his ruler. He knew I was the ring-leader and he beat me the more for it» (1970 [1931]: 117). This man finally denied Goldman a certificate of good behaviour, telling her in front of all her schoolmates that «I was a terrible child and would grow into a worse woman. I had no respect for my elders or for authority, and I would surely end on the gallows as a public menace» (1970 [1931]:118). Leaving aside the judgment of the religious studies teacher, we can say in retrospect that his words seemed to foretell the future of political engagement that awaited his pupil.

Other examples of Goldman's resistance to authority come when she speaks of her life in prison – a place, incidentally, which was not normally inhabited by women for political reasons in her day (Bergland 1994: 153). Once, when she entered Blackwell's Island, she was asked which religion she professed, «None, I am an atheist», she answered. The matron then told her that atheism was forbidden there, and that she would have to attend a religious service, «I replied that I would do nothing of the kind. I did not believe in anything the Church stood for and, not being a hypocrite, I would not attend. Besides, I came from Jewish people. Was there a synagogue?» (1970 [1931]: 133). That became the best excuse, since there was no synagogue in the prison, only special services for male Jewish prisoners; as she was the only Jewish woman imprisoned, it was not appropriate to make her stand among so many men. Goldman also makes reference to an incident that happened during that stay in prison, when she refused to «become a slave-driver». She had been put in charge of the sewing-shop, having a dozen women under her supervision, and one day the head matron told her that she would have to get better results from them. Her answer was clear enough: «I resented the suggestion that I became a slave-driver. It was because I hated slaves as well as their drivers, I informed the matron, that I had been sent to prison. I considered myself one of the inmates, not above them. I was determined not to do anything that would involve a denial of my ideals. I preferred punishment» (1970 [1931]: 135).

In her autobiography, Goldman recalls her experience in prison in 1901, when she was arrested after the assassination of President William McKinley by the anarchist Leo Czolgosz. Although she had nothing to do with Czolgosz's act, and the man himself had declared that she was not involved, Goldman was again under suspicion by the authorities. She was taken to one of the police stations in Chicago, and she explains in *Living My Life* how, during the transfer to Cook County Jail, she was badly beaten by the police. Two other prisoners who were also being transferred were hit with a club by a policeman, and Goldman did not hesitate in speaking for them:

«You brute» I said, «how dare you beat that helpless fellow?» The next thing I knew, I was sent reeling to the floor. He had landed his fist on my jaw, knocking out a tooth and covering my face with blood. Then he pulled me up, shoved me



into the seat, and yelled: «Another word from you, you damned anarchist, and I'll break every bone in your body!»

(1970 [1931]: 307)

Goldman arrived at the county jail with her waist and skirt covered with blood, and her face aching, and emphasizes in her autobiography that nobody showed any interest in her battered condition; she was not even offered water to wash herself. She was kept alone in a room for two hours, and finally a woman arrived informing her that she would have to be searched:

«All right, go ahead,» I said. «Strip and get on the table,» she ordered. I had been repeatedly searched, but I had never before been offered such an insult. «You'll have to kill me first, or get your keepers to put me on the table by force,» I declared; «you'll never get me to do it otherwise.» She hurried out, and I remained alone. After a long wait another woman came in and led me upstairs, where the matron of the tier took charge of me. She was the first to inquire what was the matter with me. After assigning me to a cell she brought a hot-water bottle and suggested that I lie down and get some rest.

(1970 [1931]: 307-308)

It is in describing these small battles that she won over the authorities that Goldman shows how she could keep her dignity even in those moments when she had been humiliated and battered. Despite the beating and the insults, the image that she portrays is that of a woman who is not easily intimidated, a woman who manages to avoid humiliation while being searched, and who does not ask for help, but makes others care about her physical state.

At some points of *Living My Life*, Goldman presents herself as a woman who was encouraged by political repression and persecution. Thus, she comments on one occasion during one of her lecture tours of the United States, when she was being persecuted by the police in every town:

My tour was trying and strenuous, made more so by the necessity of speaking surrounded by watch-dogs ready to spring on me at any moment, as well as by being compelled to change halls at a moment's notice. But I welcomed the difficulties. They helped to rekindle my fighting spirit and to convince me that those in power never learn to what extent persecution is the leaven of revolutionary zeal.

(1970 [1931]: 331)

Making that ironic comment in her autobiographical discourse, Goldman continued to challenge power and those who represented it, resisting them, using her words as a weapon. Irony was a necessary tool in order to support the public image of herself as a strong and self-sufficient woman; however, there are other points in *Living My Life* in which Goldman shows her fragile and insecure side. Thus, after Berkman's attempt on Frick's life in 1892, Goldman suffered one of her first moments of loneliness and ostracism. Those were hard days for the still young Emma who could not find a place to sleep in New York City, as not only her landlord, but also comrades and friends refused to give her lodgings. Her grandmother agreed





to put her up for a few days, but her home was too crowded. These are Goldman's words in her autobiography: «My own life was full of misery. Grandmother's place was too crowded and I could not prolong my visit with her. I went in search of a room, but my name seemed to frighten the landlords. My friends suggested that I give an assumed name, but I would not deny my identity» (1970 [1931]: 103). Goldman spent some nights riding «back and forth to the Bronx in a street-car» (1970 [1931]: 103), and finally found lodgings in a brothel, the only place where «[n]o questions were asked about my identity» (1970 [1931]: 104).

She also shares with the readers some terrible moments of her life when she had to make difficult decisions, debating with herself her need for a private and intimate life and her love for the anarchist ideal. Goldman did have strong feelings towards motherhood, but at one point of her life, when she was told that she would have to undergo an operation if she ever wanted to have children, she decided to give up that longing: «Years of pain and of suppressed longing for a child – what were they compared with the price many martyrs had already paid? I, too, would pay the price, I would endure the suffering, I would find an outlet for my mother-need in the love of *all* children. The operation did not take place» (1970 [1931]: 61). When she decided to end one of her more stable and long-lasting love relationships, the one she had with fellow anarchist Ed Brady, she also realized that by refusing to live with that man who insisted on her having a baby and abandoning anarchism, she was forever renouncing a home life (1970 [1931]: 237). Those and many other intimate confessions show the fragile side of the demonic woman that the press and the authorities of the United States tried to depict for many years, but they also help to explain my contention that through *Living My Life* Goldman was contributing to changing notions about the role of women in her society.

Goldman was certainly concerned about the situation of women in turn-of-the-century United States, and would become an icon for the feminist movement in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century. One of her most important contributions has to do with the birth control movement. At one point of her life, after having worked for some years as a midwife in the ghettos of New York, Goldman decided to fight for the right of women to control their pregnancies. After the arrest of William Sanger, the husband of Margaret Sanger, one of the pioneers in the fight for birth control in the United States, Goldman decided to speak openly about methods used to prevent pregnancies:

Information on methods I gave only when privately requested for it. Margaret Sanger's difficulties with the postal authorities over the publication of *The Woman Rebel*, and the arrest of William Sanger for giving his wife's pamphlet on methods of birth-control to a Comstock agent made me aware that the time had come when I must either stop lecturing on the subject or do it practical justice. I felt that I must share with them the consequences of the birth-control issue.

(1970 [1931]: 553)

Goldman knew that it was illegal to speak openly about birth control methods, but she assumed the risk, and tells her readers that whenever she was to give a lecture on that issue she travelled with a small bag, prepared to spend the

night in prison – something which did eventually happen. That was brave Emma Goldman, the challenging figure who would not hesitate either, to disagree with the feminist movement of her time, with those women who were fighting to obtain the right to vote. As an anarchist, Goldman would not share with them that aim, and she would discuss that and many other issues openly, attacking not only their objectives, but also some of their critical attitudes towards men. Her words were so harsh sometimes that she was accused by some suffragists of being «a man's woman and not one of us» (Goldman 1970 [1931]: 557).

In *Living My Life*, Emma Goldman presents herself as a subject who inhabited multiple spaces during her lifetime – many of which were not considered a woman's place at that time. In what she refers to as her invasion of «a male sanctum», she recalls an invitation by the male-only members of a professional club, who were eager to learn about her ideas. Goldman, showing her challenging spirit once again, answered that she did not believe in special privileges, and would only attend «if I could have a few husky members of my own sex to assist me» (1970 [1931]: 397). The members of the club finally accepted the «danger of a female invasion», and Goldman comments proudly: «We made them conscious that there is nothing duller in all the world than exclusive gatherings of men or of women, who are yet never able to eliminate each other from their minds. On this occasion everybody felt relief from sex obsession, natural and at ease» (1970 [1931]: 397). On another occasion, she was asked by a Reverend Dr. H. S. McCowan, whether she would dare speak about her ideas in his church, «In hell if need be», was her answer, «provided the Devil won't pull at my skirts» (1970 [1931]: 204). That was how fierce anarchist Emma Goldman ended up speaking from the pulpit of a church; needless to say, Reverend McCowan had to resign from that church afterwards. The image of a female anarchist «profaning» a religious temple with her ideas on free love and atheism is one of the most powerful to be found in *Living My Life*.

In her autobiography, Goldman offers those potent images of her constant challenge to power, transporting us to the many public spaces that she occupied throughout her long political career. But she goes further than that, challenging the morality of her contemporary readers by talking explicitly about her most intimate affairs and her sexual life, something which was very unusual among the women writers of her time. Thus, she recalls the «[e]rotic experiences of my childhood» (1970 [1931]: 21) by describing the first time that she masturbated, and speaks about her frustration when she discovered on her wedding night that she had married an impotent man. She gives the complete list of the many lovers that she had, and confesses that sometimes she maintained two relationships at the same time. She speaks about her sexual life in a very natural manner, the same manner in which she speaks about her public life; she seems to consider that aspect of her life as a very important one in the shaping of her personality, and thus shares those experiences with her readers freely and openly. She was a resolute defender of free love, and her autobiography is the best example of how she lived up to her beliefs.

Yet, she was conscious that her attitude towards sex was not tolerated by most of her contemporaries – not even by most of her own comrades. Those were the moments when her challenging personality would appear, when she would show



her defiant self. This can be seen in part of a conversation with a prison matron, as she recalls it in *Living My Life*, which took place during her last stay in an American prison, and it shows how Goldman had become a veteran in handling those situations:

«Any disease?» the head matron demanded abruptly.

I was somewhat taken aback at the unexpected concern over my health. I answered her that I had nothing to complain of except that I needed a bath and a cold drink. «Don't be impudent and pretend you don't know what I mean,» she sternly reproved me. «I mean the disease immoral women have. Most of those delivered here have it.»

«Venereal disease is not particular whom it strikes,» I told her; «the most respectable people have been known to be victims of it. I don't happen to have it, which is due perhaps much more to luck than virtue.»

She looked scandalized. She was so self-righteous and prim, she needed to be shocked, and I was catty enough to enjoy watching the effect.

(1970 [1931]: 626)

Goldman's ironic and witty comment to the matron seems to have had no other object but to shock the lady, and it reminds us of the witty remarks of an Irish writer that Emma Goldman admired and publicly defended in the United States: Oscar Wilde. She tells in her autobiography of her response to the astonishment of a doctor she met in Paris when she told him that she had dared defend Wilde in «puritan America»: «'Nonsense!' I replied; 'no daring is required to protest against a great injustice'» (1970 [1931]: 269). Goldman was thoroughly convinced that the United States was full of what she called «moral eunuchs,» with censor Anthony Comstock as one of the main offenders. Thus she tells us that during a conversation with Moses Harman, one of the birth control campaigners, she expressed her doubts about the handling of the woman question at that time, «as to whether the approach to sex, so coarse and vulgar in America, was likely to change in the near future and Puritanism be banished from the land» (1970 [1931]: 219). Goldman had real doubts as to Puritanism actually being banished from the minds of the people of the United States, but her public appearances, her different discourses on the question of sex—including her autobiographical discourse—were an attempt at generating changes in people's minds.

In an article on autobiography and postmodernism, Betty Bergland analyzed Goldman's autobiography, comparing it with the autobiographies of two other immigrant women from an ethnic studies perspective. When dealing with *Living My Life* in particular Bergland, as noted earlier, points out that as an autobiographical subject Goldman occupies spaces that were forbidden to women in the dominant culture of her time; she contends that, as a result, «female embodiment of these spaces becomes itself an anarchist statement» (1994: 151). Goldman's political statements, as expressed in her own autobiographical discourse, can be analyzed today in the light of contemporary theories on postmodernism and feminism:

From the framework of postmodern feminism and cultural theories, contemporary readers can appreciate Goldman's struggle against patriarchal power and control.



Though lacking contemporary language for that critique, narrator Goldman used her positions as anarchist *and* feminist to resist patriarchal oppression both within dominant institutions and among male anarchist friends with whom she shared a larger political agenda, but who were often blind to their own formations in oppressive patriarchal ideology.

(Bergland 1994: 151)

Her confession of how, after painful pondering, she decided to give up motherhood in favour of public life is but one example of the many we find in *Living My Life* that would help prove Bergland's contention that Goldman resisted patriarchal oppression. Another example is shown when she recalls an argument with her comrade and preceptor Johann Most on one of her first public lectures; Most was making patronizing comments while flirting with the young anarchist, and Goldman explains how she ended the conversation «declaring I would not be treated as a mere female» (1970 [1931]: 53). When she explains her unambiguous resolution to split with anarchist Ed Brady, after a long lasting relationship, Goldman shows her assertiveness as a woman. One night, they had gathered with friends and comrades, and Emma was praising Nietzsche as an anarchist, «a poet, a rebel and innovator» (1970 [1931]: 194); Brady interrupted her, saying that Nietzsche was just a fool and that he would be forgotten in less than a decade. Being humiliated in public by her lover was more than Goldman could stand, and these were some of her last words to Brady:

Under the pretext of a great love you have done your utmost to chain me to you, to rob me of all that is more precious to me than life. You are not content with binding my body, you want also to bind my spirit! First the movement and my friends – now it's the books I love. You want to tear me away from them. You're rooted in the old. Very well, remain there! But don't imagine you will hold me to it. You are not going to clip my wings, you shan't stop my fight. I'll free myself even if it means tearing you out of my heart.

(1970 [1931]: 194-195)

In that passage, Goldman shows herself as an assertive woman who takes the initiative in ending a relationship, as a woman who has the situation under control and who rejects a man who is «rooted in the old,» despite his claims that he is an anarchist, someone who is supposed to be fighting for the freedom of humankind. By sharing all these memories with her readers, Goldman is showing how she resisted being pigeonholed in the traditional role that her culture attributed to women. Finally, one of the most popular images of Emma Goldman, countless recalled by various feminists in the 1960's and 1970's, confirms her resistance to patriarchal oppression and to the expectations of her society and her own comrades. Goldman presents herself to her readers dancing —and enjoying the dance— when a young comrade suddenly approaches her «[w]ith a grave face, as if he were about to announce the death of a dear comrade», whispering to her that it «did not behoove an agitator to dance» (1970 [1931]: 56). The young man accuses her of being frivolous, and of hurting the anarchist cause with her behaviour:



I grew furious at the impudent interference of the boy. I told him to mind his own business, I was tired of having the Cause constantly thrown into my face. I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy. I insisted that our Cause could not expect me to become a nun and that the movement should not be turned into a cloister. If it meant that, I did not want it. «I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things.» Anarchism meant that to me, and I would live it in spite of the whole world – prisons, persecution, everything. Yes, in spite of the condemnation of my own closest comrades I would live my beautiful ideal.

(Goldman 1970 [1931]: 56)

Goldman's particular vision of anarchism had a brighter side to it than her—mostly male—comrades were able to accept, and as shown in the passage above, she was resolute in fighting for it. The impact which that apparently insignificant anecdote has had on feminist and anarchist thinking shows how powerful autobiographical, or any other kind of discourse, can be.

Emma Goldman seems to have been a woman who rejoiced in challenge, and her autobiographical discourse remains the written proof that she loved provocation, but also as the proof that she managed to resist the identity that had been imposed on her. By constructing *her* life and opposing the demonic legend that had been created around her, Goldman showed her agency, her capacity to change the conception that her contemporaries had of her and, in doing so, many other conceptions about politics and human relations, or about the role of women. With the perspective granted by time, we can say today that Emma Goldman managed to modify the legend of «Red Emma», and not only among her contemporaries. Indeed, thanks to *Living My Life* Goldman became the icon and heroine of the feminist movement and the New Left in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, and in recent years she has become a more serious object of study for many scholars. Goldman seems to have noticed that her existence was highly discursive, and maybe that is the reason why she made the effort to construct a long autobiographical discourse which would then trigger the production of many other discourses. In 1931, *Living My Life* began to circulate around the world, confronting the «discourses of truth» that had been circulating about «Red Emma». That is how Goldman exerted her discursive power, by creating knowledge; it was only a matter of time for it to become another «discourse of truth» and to produce many other discourses.

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