

# Brazil is a sexual Paradise – for whom?\*

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## Abstract

Starting by confronting two contrasting images of Brazilianness associated with sexuality, I develop a discussion about the changing theoretical and political meanings that can take on reflections regarding the connections between pleasures and dangers, concerning both feminism and sexual and gender diversity issues. I try to explore the constant and productive tension between these contradictory ideals as narratives, which are effective in constructing social ways of understanding and experiencing gender and sexuality.

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In one part of her book *Laughter out of place: race, class, violence and sexuality in a Rio shantytown*<sup>1</sup>, U.S. anthropologist Donna Goldstein recounts a discussion she had with a man she met in New York City. She had just mentioned to an older man (“above 5 and almost certainly retired”, as she described him) that she had been in Brazil for a time. “Brazil!” the man exclaimed. He began talking enthusiastically about the time that he had spent in Rio de Janeiro, 30 years ago, which he would “never forget”. “So many beautiful women, almost naked on the beaches. A paradise! Simply a paradise!” After awhile, however, the old man added “For men. Obviously. A paradise for men” (Goldstein, 2003:228).

There are many things one can explore in this anecdote, given the way it ropes in gender, nationality and age – not to mention certain implicit misunderstandings regarding sexual orientation. Principally, however, it illustrates the recurrent representation of Brazil as a country which has a positive attitude towards sexuality and the body, one which is uninhibited, ludic, and fruitful, set in frank contrast with more circumspect and puritan sensibilities and values. At the same time, the old man’s final comment illustrates that such a view of Brazil is, above all, a masculine fantasy that evolves around the country’s supposedly large number of exotic, attractive and sexually available women. It’s not hard to think of this, as perhaps some feminists do, a tale by men for men, told at women’s expense (or at least without their input), produced and shared by natives and foreigners, men and women, as some sort of collective commentary on Brazilianness.

Goldstein uses this anecdote to present a critical discourse regarding sexual positivity and the “carnivalization of desire” that is generally attributed to Brazil based upon the exuberant and

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<sup>1</sup> This book was the result of a decade of research conducted by the author among women in a Rio de Janeiro favela. It has been well received in North American academic circles but, even though it was published in 2003, it has been little read or debated in Brazil and, as far as I know, it has not been translated to Portuguese.

laidback beaches of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>2</sup> Her argument is that this view of things is only partially true, being constituted in large part through a masculinist view of desire and transgression.

Whether partially true or completely false, this view of Brazil lies at the foundations of the most influential narratives and formulations regarding the sexual ideologies and classifications that predominate in the country. It constitutes a powerful and meaningful discourse that naturalizes and normalizes the flow of daily life for men and women in Brazil. According to Goldstein, it is extremely difficult to elaborate views which clash with or contradict this discourse, except through occasional and ambivalent humor.

In view of questions raised by reflections on sexuality that take into consideration the interconnection between pleasures and dangers, I take Goldstein's argument as the author herself proposes it: as a provocation and invitation to debate. If we are in the realm of “partial” or half-truths, it might be good to point out, straightaway, that images and narratives of Brazil as an erotic paradise have coexisted and competed for some time now with other representations that seek to emphasize the opposite. These situate Brazil as a hell where sexism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia prevail. This second view is largely created by the agenda of movements that are legitimately engaged in the struggle against discrimination based on sexuality and gender. These organizations talk about violence in a context in which it is constitutive of the experiences with sexuality of a considerable number of women and LGBT people, particularly in its most extreme representations of brutalization.

To see Brazil as predominantly a society which has “frightfully porous sexual borders” (Fry, 2005:50) or as a world champion of violence against women and against LGBT people, are both largely the result of situations and positions that take on certain expressions in political clashes, especially those fought in

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<sup>2</sup> This is found in Chapter 6: “Partial truths, or the carnivalization of desire” (Goldstein, 2003:226-258).

the struggles around gender and sexuality. These images produce even as they disguise. We must therefore not look at them as if they were mutually exclusive. They involve complex and changing connections between pleasure and danger. Specifically, they both refer to a “border area” where norms and transgressions, consent and abuse, pleasure and pain coexist, flex against each other, and suffer shifts (Gregori, 2010). It is the constant productive tension and of these contradictory ideals that I seek to look at here: not as simulacra, but as narratives that are quite effective in terms of how they form social manners of understanding and feeling gender and sexuality, pleasures and dangers.

### **Above and below the equator**

Carole Vance begins the opening article of the classic volume, *“Pleasure and danger: exploring female sexuality”* by making affirmations about the power which structures the tension between sexual peril and pleasure in women’s lives:

Sexuality is simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency. To focus only on pleasure and gratification ignores the patriarchal structure in which women act, yet to speak only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women’s experience with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live (Vance, 1992:1).

The volume was the result of a famous conference at Barnard College in New York in 1982. It was destined to question a long-standing and deep tendency of Euroamerican and puritan feminist reflection which had, since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, insisted upon the danger masculine sexuality posed to women. Said sexuality was largely portrayed as violent, predatory and objectifying. The Barnard volume sought to combat this point of view, which understood sexuality as principally (if not exclusively) a field in which gender oppression was constituted.

The book's articles reacted against expressions of this conservative, puritanical, and anti-sex tendency, which had reappeared in the positions taken by radical feminists, particularly in the US anti-pornography movement. Since the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, radical feminism made pornography its principal target in the struggle against violence towards women. "Radfems" also mobilized against prostitution, sadomasochism and sexual promiscuity. Running against this normalizing wave, the Barnard conference project and its resulting book sounded a clarion call with regards to the importance of exploring women's desire, pleasure and sexual choices, and for the need to claim a more active and diverse female sexuality.

This effort to broaden the discussion of sexuality beyond gender domination models was often based on confidence in the liberating potential of pleasure, as long as it was achieved through egalitarian and mutually consenting relationships. For this reason, the pro-se feminist perspective did not always closely examine the historical and social links between pleasure and danger within erotic relations.<sup>3</sup>

These concerns seem to have been overshadowed by the political struggle of the moment. It's notable the way in which the conference goers and book's collaborators called attention to the ongoing turn to the right in American politics, labeling it a moral crusade that was reacting to the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s and which appealed precisely to women's feelings of sexual vulnerability. As Carole Vance put it:

The right is trying to re-implement traditional sexual accords and the hitherto inexorable link between reproduction and sexuality. In this way, the right offers a complete project of sexual practice that, in part, finds an echo in women's fears in the face of immorality and sexual peril. For us to give a convincing response, as feminists, we cannot abandon our radical vision of sexual theory and practice. Very much to

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<sup>3</sup> For a critical discussion regarding this, see Gregori (2003).

the contrary: we should deepen and widen this, so that more women feel encouraged to identify with and act according to their own sexual interests (Vance, 1992:2-3).

Many of us can recognize similarities between this political-cultural diagnosis the moment we are going through in Brazil. In the last two election campaigns for the presidency, issues related to sexuality, abortion, gay marriage and gender identity were surprisingly in evidence alongside the usual social and economic demands (and sometimes, even overshadowed said demands) in the debates and declarations of the major contending candidates. However, during the years in which the debates surrounding *Pleasure and Danger* were occurring - the second half of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s - the political and cultural atmosphere in Brazil was somewhat different. We lived in a military dictatorship at the time and still suffered from political repression. And we also were living through a growing “discursive explosion” regarding sexuality, which corresponded to the formative years of the modern feminist movement in Brazil, as well as the black movement and the homosexual movement.

At almost at the same time “Pleasure and Danger” was being published (1983), Rose Marie Muraro came out with *Sexualidade da mulher brasileira: corpo e classe social no Brasil* (*The Sexuality of the Brazilian Woman: Body and Social Class in Brazil*). This was an ambitious study based on interviews with middle class men and women in Rio de Janeiro, peasants in Pernambuco and workers in São Paulo. In her introduction, Muraro recalls an episode which became important for Brazilian feminism: U.S. American feminist Betty Friedan’s March 1971 trip to Brazil for the release of the Portuguese version of her book *The Feminine Mystique* by Editora Vozes (a publishing house for which Muraro worked at the time).

For Muraro, this episode “was, at the time... a most explosive event with regards to the public discussion of the female condition in Brazil”:

We thought that then, at the beginning of the 1970s, when the practice of politics was rigorously banned, that behavioral problems were appearing [in the public consciousness] for precisely this reason. Brazil at that time was going through a hippie phase (Muraro, 1983:13).

Peter Fry and Edward MacRae, who were also writing in 1983, likewise remembered the '70s in Brazil in similar terms.

If one couldn't publicly criticize the regime or the economic system, one could question the foundations of daily life. People lived in communities, experimented with new forms of consciousness through the use of drugs and, more importantly for our ends here, questioned sexual morality (Fry; MacRae, 1983:20).

The first half of the 1970s saw the *years of lead*, the most violent period of the Brazilian dictatorship, with torture, murder and political persecution being committed by the State's repressive forces. Paradoxically, however, this was also a period of economic growth, artistic effervescence and cultural contestation in Brazil. With the mainstream press shackled by censorship, alternative newspapers sprung up in tabloid form, acting as vehicles for political critique, but also for the underground "counterculture" and more general cultural fads and crazes. Drug use, psychoanalysis, expansion of consciousness, African-Brazilian religions, exploration of the body, communal living, sexual liberation, androgyny and unisex fashion were all topics of interest in this alternative media, which a certain section of the period's middle class youth explored with gusto.

The greater part of this youth "movement" was also involved in the consumerist euphoria of the military government's brief years of economic prosperity and distanced itself from institutional politics or leftist opposition (as they were then understood). However, many of these life(style) experiments were lived and felt as a form of political contestation. Certain sectors of the military regime understood this to be the case as well and

sought to maintain control over public morality and customs through censorship, heavy policing and threats of judicial retribution.<sup>4</sup> This cultural scene widened even further through publications, research, organizations and movements that challenged both sexual morality and conventional male and female behaviors as well as the separation of political and daily life itself. All this took place under the military regime's nose and in spite of the efforts of certain sectors of the government to put a halt to it.

In many ways, Brazil's cultural life in the 1970s thus contrasts with the scenario in which *Pleasure and Danger* was published. One might say that the Brazilian situation at this time was, in many ways, similar to the sort of milieu that the authors of *Pleasure and Danger* wanted to construct. It was characterized by a growing recognition of forms of gender and sexual oppression which was coupled with a certain celebration of the power of experimenting with bodies and pleasures. Without a doubt, the 1970s were a privileged period with regards to Brazil's ideological (re)elaborations of itself as a people and a nation – especially in terms of those representations that presented the country as ambiguously embracing and celebrating sexuality. This had the effect of resituating sexuality as a key to understanding Brazilian realities, particularly as it was linked to wider cultural and political processes of transformation of the lived experiences of sexuality and intimacy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Regarding “crazes” and “counterculture” and their relationship to the gender and sexuality movements of the 1970s, see MacRae (1990) and Lobert (2010). For a more recent investigation into the relationship between the cultural effervescence of the ‘70s and repression in Brazil, particularly the repression of homosexuality, see Green & Quinalha (2014).

<sup>5</sup> For a wider view of the changes in patterns of intimacy and sexuality during this period, see Weeks' “Ocidente”, 2007.



## **Partial perceptions**

Goldstein takes a critical look at the works produced by the Brazilian social sciences regarding sexuality during these years and notes that there was a general trend towards research into and reflections about homosexuality, using Peter Fry's formulations as a theoretical basis (1982). Muraro's work, however (which Goldstein understands to possibly represent a certain type of Brazilian feminist thought regarding sex) received much less attention. Goldstein presents us with some reasons for this apparent contradiction. First of all, she notes that the feminist literature produced in Brazil has been seen as too "essentialist". Secondly, she suggests that these works tended to privilege questions linked to wider struggles and the greater movement against the dictatorship, in detriment of a more critical agenda focusing on sexuality and masculine domination (caricatured at the time by part of the Brazilian media as a movement made up of "man-hating bourgeois imperialists" (Alvarez, 2000:389).

A third and "possibly stronger" reason for this situation (according to Goldstein), is that the feminist literature regarding sexuality of this period was understood to have an excessively "negative" view of sexuality. Goldstein believes that the relative success of the anthropological studies of masculine homosexuality had to do with the fact that it explored the more playful and permissive aspects of erotic transgression, avoiding focusing on the more normative aspects of traditional gender relations.

On the one hand, Goldstein recognizes that this primary interest in masculine homoeroticism in Brazilian "sexual culture" represents a "courageous and exceptional case of study and research" that in many ways "anticipated the emergence of queer theory in Europe and the United States". On the other hand, however, she feels that the same process helped contribute (without meaning to) to occluding research regarding other forms of sexuality and to marginalizing other discourses, most notably those which looked at women's points of view. In short, Goldstein questions what she considers to be "a lack of feminist critique with

regards to power relations marked by gender and with regards to normative heterosexual relations” in Brazilian feminism (Goldstein, 2003:235).

A quick examination of these criticisms turns up some problems with them, however. With regards to the charges of feminist “essentialism”, it’s worth noting – together with Adriana Piscitelli, Maria Filomena Gregori and Sergio Carrara -- that certain analyses of heterosexualities imprison gender “in a binary distinction, in which sexuality is divided by a rigid frontier separating men from women” and establishing “a continuity between ‘sex’, and gender, even as it takes into consideration a wide series of differentiations” (Piscitelli; Gregori; Carrara, 2004:17). This may be due to the fact that much of this production tends to focus on or presupposes the existence of gender and sexual identities that are coherent and stable. Muraro’s work hardly escapes this criticism, given its emphasis on the fundamental difference between “diffused” female and a “genitalized” male sexualities, which seems to originate in the conceptual presuppositions of the author herself, rather than anything revealed by empirical research.<sup>6</sup> Even when calling attention to the changes that were happening in the “middle classes” which moved towards greater equality between the sexes, with women refusing “to indiscriminately satisfy the male desire,” Muraro understood said changes as demonstrating the fundamental point that “a woman’s desire is different from a man’s: she wants to eroticize a relationship that takes into account both the body and the psyche, while the man generally tends to get hung up in physical sexuality” (Muraro, 1983:328-329). In this way, Muraro seems to echo certain strains of differentialist feminism, thinking about sexuality in terms of a complex of biological, psychological and social determinations: a “libidinal economy” that generates essential differences between men and women.

The issue of opposition and/or linkage between gender struggles and Brazilian feminism’s broader policy struggles is

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<sup>6</sup> For a critique of Muraro’s work, see Duarte (1987).

certainly complex and cannot be given a proper treatment within the limits of the present article. It should be noted, in any case (and in accordance with several critical assessments), that a powerful aspect of what it means to be a feminist in Brazil throughout the 1970s and into the next decade involved a kind of “double militancy” that sought both to propagate further analysis and awareness of gender oppression and to advance the struggle in general, especially in terms of opposition to the dictatorship (Alvarez, 2000:389-390). In this sense, the Brazilian feminism of that period ended up emphasizing demands for political equality and for social and legal rights. As summarized by Lia Zanotta Machado:

The construction of the category of “women” by Brazilian feminism took place within the political dimension of alignment with the struggle for democracy, the fight against class inequality and in favor of proposals for equal rights between men and women.... It was as if there was such an identification of [common] social situations and positions among women that it was possible to create a political identity that could encompass women’s diversity. Brazilian feminists sought to construct common demands in the face of society and the State, seeking full citizenship in the public and private spheres (Machado, 2014:18).

Brazilian feminism’s clamor for political and social equality may have pushed the debate regarding identity and difference into the background, but did not prevent the theoretical or critical reflection regarding power relations and violence marked by gender and by normative heterosexual relationships. I refer here to relevant revisions that have already been made in this regard (Heilborn; Sorj, 1999; Debert; Gregori, 2008; Grossi, 2010; Machado, 2014). It is worth noting that the growing critical incorporation of the concept of gender in Brazilian academic production made it possible to overcome the polarization between the essentialized categories of “man” and “woman”, making room for the consideration of an increasing multitude of sexualized notions of

person, or of genders as situationally built, learned and applied processes which are intertwined with other positionalities and assemblages, forming at crossroads where different orders of hierarchy and stratification meet.

One of the first effects of this increasing sophistication in gender analysis was precisely a questioning of the view of women as victims, through an effort to understand male/female relations within a field of meanings that referred to culturally constructed sex differences. Mariza Correa, one of the pioneers of this intellectual enterprise, recalls an episode that illustrates the kind of political and intellectual tensions that this relational perspective could create:

I remember the criticisms that I received from a certain feminist group when I wrote an article that summed up the data presented in my master's dissertation [published as *Morte em família*, Rio de Janeiro, Graal, 1983]. In this, I showed that the agents of the juridical system tended to favor women with lighter sentences and to absolve them in crimes of passion. This was because these judges shared with feminists a certain view of women as weak and as potential victims of masculine domination. The article was not published (Corrêa, 1998:49-50n).

### **Mobile borders**

Stranger still is the idea that homosexuality studies in Brazil have favored the playful and carnivalesque dimensions of sexuality at the expense of concern with hierarchies and power relations that are marked by gender. In an influential article that discussed two competing systems of classifying male sexuality, Peter Fry (1982) rightly stressed the gender hierarchy (which Fry then called “sex roles”) underpinning the “popular model”. This, according to Fry, is expressed in terms of the roles expected during the sexual act: an active role leading to classification as “a real man” and a passive role resulting in classification as a “queer”, “faggot”, or etc. Fry also pointed out that the difference produced by this model

referred to inequalities of power and status to the extent that the active/passive pair acquires senses of domination and submission, respectively. Thus, the relationship between “men” and “faggots” would be analogous to the relationship between men and women, expressing a more general hierarchy of male over female.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, it’s also worth remembering the essay Michel Misse wrote at about the same time. In it, Misse cleverly conflated “passivity” (i.e. receiving a penis into one’s body) with a wider and enduring effect of diminishing one’s status. This is not Always seen in social interactions, but inevitably becomes clear in the more or less conscious dimension of language use, most notably in the use of swear words (Misse, 2007).

In the introduction to a recent edition of this work, which briefly reviewed the discussions about sexuality, sex and gender towards the end of the 1970s and into the ‘80s, Peter Fry wrote:

Michel Misse’s essay (...) strengthened my conviction that the language of sexual relations expressed and ritualized notions of domination and submission between the masculine and feminine, independent of the sex of the partners involved. The language of sexual relations reveals a deep connection between representations of sex and gender and the distribution of these representations in the markets of love and work. The moral of the story is certainly that any change in this unequal distribution would fundamentally depend upon a concomitant transformation in representations of men and women, masculinity and femininity (Fry, 2007:10-11).

Academic reflection during this period thus emphasized the intimate links between hierarchical regimes, gender domination – then understood as “patriarchy” – and what’s recently begun to be called “heteronormativity”. It thus permitted a critique of gender hierarchy and segregation and this, in turn, permitted a certain affinity between homosexual and feminist activists, given that both

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<sup>7</sup> For a wider discussion of this topic, see Carrara and Simões (2007).

groups promoted ideals of “equality” and “symmetry” in sexual-affective relations and, indeed, in social relations more generally. Another effect of this “meeting of minds” was the creation of a political and theoretical movement that sought to “de-essentialize” and pluralize categories and identities of gender and sexuality, seeking to simultaneously create a shift in gender hierarchies in other axes of stratification and power such as class, race and even region of origin.

Key inspiration for these ideas was found in Mary Douglas’ reflections on the ambiguities and abnormalities that are found along the borders and interstices of classificatory systems and, in particular, the ambivalent state of the simultaneously creative and destructive capacity of these phenomena, which evoked both power and danger (Douglas, 1976). Dualistic classifications such as hetero/homo, man/fag (or man/not man, as Don Kulick would later put it in his study regarding Brazilian *travestis* [2008]) were a form of “expressive supersystematization”. They opened a breach which sustained sexuality as a mode of “inherently disordered experience”, which called for controls through means of reduction of ambiguities and abnormalities. At these same time, these ideas entered into dialogue with formulations such as “that which is socially peripheral can be symbolically central”. These, in turn, had certain affinities with conceptions of transgression as the “blurring”, “contamination” or “mixing” (and not simply “inversion”) of borders.<sup>8</sup>

Roberto da Matta was also a cultivator of these ideas in Brazilian anthropology, particularly in his theories regarding the institutionalization of intermediaries and mixture. In Da Matta, however, the dimensions of pollution and danger theoretically associated with ambiguous states tends to be obfuscated in favor of a view of Brazil as a “relational system” whose critical types – personifications, places, rites, customs – are all liminal. Thus the

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<sup>8</sup> A Strong influence here that is not often recognized is Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the “carnevalesque” (Bakhtin, 1987).

lover, the *despachante*<sup>9</sup>, the “spirit”; the veranda, the yard, the square, the beach; the “*jeitinho*”<sup>10</sup>, the rite of “do you know who you’re taking to?”, the “*pistolão*”<sup>11</sup>, the “*carteirada*”<sup>12</sup>.... Da Matta understood all of these to be expressions of a fundamental and quotidian sociability in which ambiguity could not be necessarily understood as an “axiomatically negative state”. The author went further, in fact, suggesting that in a context in which hierarchical values take on quotidian importance, liminality creates crucial experiences of individuality and autonomy. This is what Da Matta would call, in another context (referring to racial classifications) Brazil’s distinct “sociological intelligence”: a classificatory system that doesn’t distinguish and share discrete and contrasting units, but rather values ambiguity and negotiation. Thus, “flirting and *sacanagem*”<sup>13</sup>“ express the liminal in the Brazilian “sexual system”. Da Matta adds:

Not to mention the inter-, trans-, homo- or pansexual celebrities among us who are not objects of horror and abomination (as is the case in the United States), but rather are objects of curiosity, fascination, desire and admiration (Da Matta, 2000:14).

For Da Matta, “*sacanagem*” is an important organizing category in Brazilian sexuality precisely because it links, in the field of sexual practices, ambiguous notions of play and cheating, fun and nastiness; excitement and transgression. *Sacanagem* can be

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<sup>9</sup> A sort of official “red tape cutter”. (Translator’s note)

<sup>10</sup> Muddling through via unofficial bending of the rules. (Translator’s note)

<sup>11</sup> A powerful patron who can make one a “favorite son” candidate in a supposedly neutral competition. (Translator’s note)

<sup>12</sup> Recourse to authority in a situation where one would presume said authority should not prevail. (Translator’s note)

<sup>13</sup> Formally out-of-bounds sexual play which is, nevertheless, highly satisfying and often as much sought after as it is officially repudiated. *Nastiness* in the urban African American lexicon would perhaps be the best English approximation. (Translator’s note)

an act which can delight, play with, humiliate, or hurt another person. It can be some or all of these things at once, or it can shift from one quality to another. If we consider the fact that *sacanagem* operates with the compulsive, perverse and often ungovernable aspects of sexuality, on the razor edge between permission and violation, we find ourselves once again face to face with the tenuous border between pleasure and danger. Néstor Perlongher (2008), criticizing the “libidinal tensors” that supposedly operate in virile male prostitution, created what is perhaps the most hard-hitting formulation regarding the linkages between the differences that operate in desiring agency. These configure both the possibilities of pleasure and consent as well as those of pain and abuse.<sup>14</sup> One point to consider here is that physical and moral integrity are put at risk not only in those practices that openly test the limits of sexuality, but also in the more common and generalized repertoires of sexuality and affect. Here one may find that the borders between pleasure and abuse may be more diffuse and tenuous – ambiguous, certainly, but depending on the circumstances, also not always negotiable.<sup>15</sup>

### **In the streets or in the bedrooms**

In conclusion, let us consider connections between things that mark out gender inequality, domination and violence, on the one hand, and concepts and practices of affect and sexuality, on the other, insofar as these demonstrate quotidian forms of discrimination against the feminine. In their analysis the results of research regarding the sexual values and repertoires of Brazilian youth, who reported engaging in heterosexual anal sex, Heilborn, Cabral and Bozon (2006) bring valuable subsidies to our discussion

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<sup>14</sup> For a better appreciation of Perlongher’s work, see Simões (2008).

<sup>15</sup> Regarding the notion of limits to sexuality, see Gregori (2010). For other developments regarding the relationship between pleasure and danger in contexts of “risky undertakings” in daily life, see Facchini (2008). For reflections on shifts between consent and abuse in contexts of humiliation pornography, see Díaz-Benítez (2015).



about the specificities of the linkages between sex and gender in Brazil. First of all, these authors verify that there is a great disparity in declarations regarding practices of anal sex among Brazilian youth, with 63% of the men claiming to have engaged in this practice versus only 25% of the women. These responses, however, contrast with those found in similar research in the U.S. and France, where less difference was noted in male and female responses (which both ranged around 20-27% in the affirmative). Heilborn, Cabral and Bozon understand that the most plausible explanation for these results can be found in how Brazilian men value anal sex as a “badge of masculinity” and also in asymmetries in gender relations in terms of the exercise of sexuality.<sup>16</sup> According to these authors (who specifically dialogue with Fry on this point):

Declarations regarding the practice of anal sex may be the way in which the subjectification of feminine to masculine is imagined and presented in Brazilian sexual culture (Heilborn; Cabral; Bozon, 2006:244).

To this, we might add the observation that, in this imagined field of desire and transgression, “women” are situated as those who maintain the borders around what is considered to be the safe and healthy exercise of sexuality, both in physical and moral terms. Meanwhile, “men” are the ones who are expected to break these barriers. Goldstein offers up many examples of precautionary strategies used by women in Rio’s favelas to protect themselves and young people – not just girls, but also boys – from the sexual predation of men, particularly those men who do not

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<sup>16</sup> Based on their qualitative data, Heilborn, Cabral and Bozon (2006) mention a stigmatizing representation of anal sex, in which it is understood as “practiced only by women classified as ‘easy’ or by sex professionals”. This may inhibit women in terms of their reporting their sexual habits, leading them to be less open about practicing this technique or to evaluating it more ambivalently.

form part of the strict nuclear family: mainly stepfathers, but also uncles, brothers-in-law, cousins and fathers-in-law.<sup>17</sup>

The classical bibliography regarding masculine homosexuality, which we dealt with above, recognizes that “adventure and the taste of the unknown continue to be strong spices for a good fuck” (MacRae, 2005:305). However, these authors also point out that, for this very reason, efforts were often made to minimize the various “agencies of passion and death” involved in this scene (Perlongher, 2008). Nestor Perlongher emphasized the paradoxes involved in the “business of hustling”. On the one hand, this could be a desired escape that brings bodies together; on the other, a series of apparatuses or dispositions are activated in this desired transaction in order to avoid, block, or neutralize the dangers of escape. These may appear in the death or beating of the client, but also in the passion and feminization of the prostitute.

And interesting counterpoint to this can be found in the kind of “gender negotiation” that Kulick suggests exists among *travesti* sex workers and their boyfriends, which often feminizes the latter, given that they are expected to “stay at home while their partners work in the streets to earn their daily bread”. More: the *travestis* like to have their man at home, available at their leisure. They do not tolerate infidelity or let their men have an independent social life. In the words of the sole boyfriend Kulick managed to interview, this is a sign that “*travestis* want to be more than just a woman” (Kulick, 2008:145).

The situations I have just outlined involve complex links between love and material existence, which cannot be adequately

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<sup>17</sup> It is worth remembering that similar protection strategies can be found outside of the lower classes as well. The risk of unwanted sexual advances and violence that arise for women (and for the female category in general) in many different situations. These tend to be read, however, as the result of the woman letting her guard down in such a way that she appeared open to such advances. An example of this tendency can be seen in date rape cases involving drinking and dancing at university parties. For an investigation of the thorny issues involving “consent” and “abuse” in these contexts, see Almeida (2014).

translated via a simplistic mercantile view that sees only a contract for the fulfillment of sexual services. As Adriana Piscitelli points out (2011), expanding upon the ideas of Mark Hunter (2010), sex and love are always material. When money and sex are intimately interlinked, love is paradoxically more (and not less) embedded in social relations, structuring them and being converted into a place of negotiation and dispute. These are situations that include addiction, desire and need. Although they are part and parcel of poverty, they go beyond it. The instabilities that mark these supposedly “marginal” or “extreme” situations reveal much about what goes on in the hearts of many “normal” or “significant” intimate relationships, in which, after all, boundaries and reciprocity are no less inaccurate and often pave the way for excess and violence. Analytical separations lose sense in view of the materiality of brutalization and the dangerous territories themselves expand. “In the streets or in rooms, deaths find their place” (Efrem Filho, 2016:334).

The route we taken here, via modes of questioning sexuality and gender oppression, began by confronting competing versions of national ideals regarding sex and eroticism. In Brazil, a much ballyhooed predisposition for erotic transgression coexists with a repeated concern for demarcating and monitoring borders that postulate the inferiority of women. Each myth tells part of the story while seeking to disqualify and deny its opponents, without us knowing exactly where truth lies. After all, none of the versions is fully predictable and consistent: positions of privilege and oppression can be shuffled in various different situations and relationships. No cultural convention is immune to dissent, and divergence is likewise not usually raised up as a standard.

Policy choices must still be made, however. Admitting the close relationship between gender and sexual discrimination and recognizing the weight of the long-term structures that maintain these forms of discrimination, I ally myself with those who believe that combining demands for equality and respect for diversity, and ending discrimination based on gender classifications or sexual experiences, remains the central challenge. This is especially true

in the present context, where conservative reaction (often religiously inspired) strives to recreate a climate of threats, intimidation and fear.

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