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A Geography of Transfolks: the vivid face of everyday realities

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A Geography of Transfolks: the vivid face of everyday realities

Abstract

In this theoretical essay, we engage with trans studies, urban anthropology, and transfeminism to discuss the production of space challenged by cisnormativity, proposing a geography of transfolks. We draw on Brazilian and anglophone trans authors to connect geographic analysis with autoethnographic texts that evoke the right to the city, understood as a call for the right to space. These accounts highlight a spatiality marked by stigma, prejudice, and restrictions. Finally, we analyze how the resistance tactics of these political subjects have evolved, from mobilizations during the civic-military dictatorship to the strengthening of the trans movement in recent years, becoming a relevant actor and achieving progress in institutional public policies.

Keywords: Production of space; territorial justice; trans studies; transfeminism.

Uma geografia das pessoas trans: a face vívida das realidades cotidianas

Resumo

Neste ensaio teórico, dialogamos com os estudos trans, a antropologia urbana e o transfeminismo para discutir a produção do espaço interpelada pela cisnormatividade, propondo uma geografia das pessoas trans. Fundamentamo-nos em autores trans brasileiros e anglófonos para articular a análise geográfica a textos autoetnográficos que evocam o direito à cidade, entendido como um clamor pelo direito ao espaço. Esses relatos destacam uma espacialidade marcada pelo estigma, preconceito e interdições. Por fim, analisamos como as táticas de resistência desses sujeitos políticos evoluíram desde as mobilizações durante a ditadura cívico-militar até o fortalecimento do movimento trans em anos recentes, tornando-se um ator relevante e alcançando avanços em políticas públicas institucionais.

Palavras-chave: Produção do espaço; justiça territorial; estudos trans; transfeminismo.

Una geografía de las personas trans: el rostro vívido de las realidades cotidianas

Resumen

En este ensayo teórico, dialogamos con los estudios trans, la antropología urbana y el transfeminismo para discutir la producción del espacio interpelada por la cisnormatividad, proponiendo una geografía de las personas trans. Nos fundamentamos en autores trans brasileños y anglófonos para articular el análisis geográfico con textos autoetnográficos que evocan el derecho a la ciudad, entendido como un clamor por el derecho al espacio. Estos relatos destacan una espacialidad marcada por el estigma, el prejuicio y las prohibiciones. Por último, analizamos cómo las tácticas de resistencia de estos sujetos políticos evolucionaron desde las movilizaciones durante la dictadura cívico-militar hasta el fortalecimiento del movimiento trans en años recientes, convirtiéndose en un actor relevante y logrando avances en políticas públicas institucionales.

Palavras-clave: Producción del espacio; justicia territorial; estudios trans; transfeminismo.

Introduction

As a initial outline, we seek in the following pages to unveil a geography of transfolks based on the premise that space is socially produced by individual subjects acting in a city's daily life which is politically permeated by conflicts (Lima, 2020c) and contradictions. Our purpose here is to discuss a trans geography of the city based on transfeminism, proposing a different reading for the production of space—one focused on the experiences of transfolks and travestis.

First, we devote a section to discuss the concepts (terms linked to trans thought and studies) used throughout the essay to guide the discussion. Next, we create a link between Geography and ethnography in Urban Anthropology to present the daily fabric of trans people and travestis—which differs from those of *cis* people (Araruna, 2017; Miranda, 2018; Nogueira, 2018; Aquino, 2019; Barbosa, 2023)—mediated by space. By articulating Henri Lefebvre's triads, animated by Doreen Massey's *vivacity* (2008), we pursue a specific conceptualization of space as a political opening, influenced by the a transfeminist perspective. Finally, the third section connects how, over the last 30 years, the resistance of these existences (trans)formed into rebellion have been generating changes in Brazil, evincing that "representing a collectivity as a political subject" (Aguião, 2018, p. 36) advances in the list of citizen rights.

Outlines: towards an “atraveciamento” of theory¹

Trans studies or *Trans geographies* are dispersed within Brazilian Geography: innumerable methodological branches and analytical lenses are generally situated in dialogue with Feminist Geographies; unlike the Anglo-Saxon tradition, in which a thematic field emerged around the term *Trans Geographies* (Browne; Nash; Hines, 2010). As this approach remains an appendix to normative geographies,² we have chosen to devote this section to explaining key concepts rather than relegating them to footnotes.

It has been little over a decade since transgenderism/transvestism/transsexuality has entered the research agenda of the Brazilian geography tradition. In this regard, the publication of *Geografias malditas: corpos, sexualidades e espaços* [Cursed Geographies: Bodies, Sexualities, and Spaces] (Toda Palavra Editora, 2013), collection organized by Joseli Maria Silva, Alides Baptista Chimin Junior and Marcio José Ornat, members of the Territorial Studies Group, State University of Ponta Grossa (GETE-UEPG), was seminal. Besides bringing together works on themes that cross trans/travesti existences and issues, the introductory section of this collection presents texts by trans women and travestis who, led by questions about their trajectories and experiences, retrace concrete trans/travesti geographical itineraries.

This geographicity of the trans/travesti experience articulates materiality and immateriality. Immateriality, here, is no less concrete than materiality. Abstract is the obverse of concrete, and the geographicity of the trans and travesti experience is permeated by interdiction. *Forbidden space* (Silva, 2013) emerges as concept to describe said interdictions, seeking to unveil a device's operation in relation to normative and dissident genders. This *forbidden space* represents the denial of appropriation, an “effect of regulatory actions, a set of practices that are read and interpreted by them [travestis] as spaces which they lack the right to be a part of” (Silva, 2013, p. 158). We will later return to this concept to discuss the so-called right to space.

For now, we would like to present terms that have been developed in Brazil (in dialogue with thinkers from other Latin American contexts) as a result from the efforts of a trans intelligentsia that is being constituted inside and outside universities. Especially in this essay, we dialogue with a generation of *trans* authors (transsexuals, travestis and non-binary folks) that reached spaces previously considered forbidden. We thus assert that the entry of trans people into institutions has produced significant changes (Carvalho, 2018), echoing Lohana Berkins³: “When a travesti

1 *Atraveçar* as a movement-action, according to Ferreira (2024), consists of “letting oneself be crossed by transvestism, whether one's own or someone else's.” We thus mobilize this term to appropriate the theory and build a critical essay around *Trans-experiences* (Barbosa, 2023). “Atraveciamento” is a term that gives new meaning to the slur “traveco,” used in Brazilian Portuguese in reference to travestis, similarly to the English term “queer.” The English equivalent would be “trannyfication,” derived from “tranny,” but translating it would mischaracterize our proposal. We therefore chose to maintain “atraveciamento” as the wordplay with “atraveçar” and travesti is particular to the construction of a political identity in Latin America. Moreover, the translators noted the absence of a similar movement towards reappropriating the term “tranny.”

2 Certainly, we are not giving the normative seal to feminist geographies, since they paved the way for us, today, to be able to geographically analyze the condition of trans lives.

3 Lohana Berkins was an Argentine travesti and human rights activist. She was an important figure in the approval of Law No. 26,743/2012, known as the Gender Identity Law, which completed 10 years in 2022. Enacted in May 2012, it made Argentina a pioneer in simplifying the process of rectifying name and gender through administrative means, eliminating the need for medical-psychological diagnoses. Available at: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/ley-de-identidad-de-genero-10-anos#:~:text=EI%209%20de%20mayo%20de,con%20su%20identidad%20de%20g%C3%A9nero>. Accessed on January 28, 2025.

enters the university, it changes the life of that travesti; when many travestis enter the university, society changes.”

Regarding the pair *cis* and *trans* identities, linguist Amara Moira shows that etymologically *cis* expresses the idea of what is on this side while *trans* expresses the idea of what crosses a line, a border, a limit. She says: “Beauvoir’s ‘one is not born, one becomes’ takes on a very particular meaning when it comes to this category [*trans*], because there is no option ‘to be born’ for us; only the option ‘to become’” (Rodovalho, 2017, p. 370, emphasis added).⁴ In terms of gender and sexuality, trans people would thus cross a *cisnormative* delimitation, contradicting the imposition of the sex-gender congruence norm based on sexual dimorphism (Preciado, 2017).

The norm is established by a regime—authors name it in different ways, albeit referring to the same logic, here we will choose to name it the *cisheterosexual* regime (Aquino, 2019). For some authors, the norm is considered discreet (Seffner, 2022); for those dissent experiences enclosed with aversion in the “closet”, however, the norm—the perception of what is conceived as a practical prescription—speaks loudly and clearly, and, at times, does not required being explicitly stated.

Michel Foucault (2021) presents the norm as constantly reiterated through the operations of devices, such as the *Foucauldian* device of sexuality that configures power relations. In *Butlerian* theory, this reiteration unfolds through performativity. Performativity corresponds to “a reiterative and citational practice through which discourse produces the effects of that which it names” (Butler, 2019, n.p.). In other words, “the regulatory norms of ‘sex’ work in a performative way to constitute the materiality of bodies” (Butler, 2019, n.p.). Since sex is only understood in its normativity and a human body is compulsorily a sexual body, sex is—in this sense—a “cultural norm.” Society invokes the norm when something escapes the control of the normal, habitual, imposing it in an embarrassing, violent, vexatious and discriminatory manner to curb behavior. Norm is closely linked to the power relations between subjects, people, individuals, agents and actors, each of these terms preserving its distinct nuances.

Cisnormativity is a paradigm in which bodily configurations and gender identities/ identifications are naturalized and idealized (Vergueiro, 2015). This paradigm establishes a regime of normality/abnormality within bodily diversity, distinguishing authenticity and legitimacy from what is pathological and clandestine. Historically, the term *cisgender* appeared in the 21st century to describe the experience of people who identify with the genders they were assigned at birth. Therein lies the idea of a *cis* privilege due to an adaptation to the cisheterosexual matrix, facilitating access to health care and citizenship as they are not repeatedly required to provide evidence of their identification, which is the case for trans people.

4 The first wave of feminism spans the late 19th and early 20th centuries, focusing on the struggle for the right to vote, education, political equality, and the basic lexicon of citizenship. The second wave, also known as the “women’s movement,” focused on what is conventionally called sexual liberation, reproductive rights, and recognition of unpaid labor. The third wave, starting in the early 1990s, aimed to confront some notions of the second wave, considering itself “sex-positive.” Supporting sex workers, third wave feminists were more open to discussing the inexorable truth of sex, as well as to pluralizing and shifting the discussion to other experiences of womanhood/femininity (Stryker, 2018, s.p.).

Viviane Vergueiro (2018) identifies three traits of *cisgenderism*: 1) pre-discursivity, 2) binarism, and 3) permanence. This effort to name cisgenderism moves towards its denaturalization, revealing “that transsexuality was conceptualized by a pathologizing bias that shaped how health, educational, and legal institutions discriminate against trans bodies” (Pfeil; Pfeil, 2023).

Let us break down these three elements. Pre-discursivity describes a “sociocultural understanding [...] that it is possible to define sexes-genders of beings (human and non-human) based on objective criteria and certain bodily characteristics” (Vergueiro, 2018, p. 45). Binarism dictates the alignment between two psychosocially required sexes-genders to qualify individuals⁵ as healthy—they are the inseparable pairs: male-man and female-woman. Contradictions to this binary premise “founds violence against bodily diversities that do not fit into these systems,” as discussed by Viviane and by Paul B. Preciado (2017), intersex people. Thus, fighting for bodily diversity “is fighting against Eurocentric binaries, against the idea that people belong to one or another mutually exclusive gender category defined in [supposedly] objective and neutral ways” (Vergueiro, 2018, p. 52).

Finally, permanence are expectations regarding gender, hence genders are expected to present a “physiological and psychological coherence in terms of whether they belong to one or another category of ‘biological sex’” (Vergueiro, 2018, p. 53). This coherence must permeate a person’s entire life trajectory; permanence establishes such identity construction as indisputable.

In this sense, Preciado argues—in dialogue with Butler’s theory of performativity—that “the transition process does not occur between femininity and masculinity (given that neither gender has an ontological entity, only a biopolitical one), but [occurs before] one apparatus of truth production to another” (Preciado, 2020, p. 221). In other words, Preciado questions the complete transition, equating the trans person to an exile seeking recognition in political-legal terms.

Trans is used here as an umbrella term to encompass a multiplicity of political identities; *travestis* is always pluralized and highlighted, doing justice to the desire for collectivity and because this political identity is historically traversed by issues of race, class, criminalization and pathologization (Vergueiro, 2018, p. 13)⁶, we highlight that it is a recognizably Latin American identity; *cisgender*, *cisnormativity*, *cistem* are terms that correspond to those people who align themselves according to linear sex-gender expectations, to the device that affects cis and trans lives daily producing a type of policing of expectations and performativity, to the organization (political, economic, cultural), respectively. Cisnormativity is therefore a paradigm that governs societies and establishes a political order, denying needs and defining which bodies are inadequate to enjoy space (Sennett, 2021, p. 22).

⁵ This is a term purposefully borrowed from biology.

⁶ Travestis are also trans people, but the semantic weight that this political identity carries in the vast literature of trans studies must be highlighted.

Occupying gaps between Geography and Urban Ethnography

(...) *They do not want any of us to survive. One was stoned to death. Another was burned alive, like a witch: [...]. We are vanishing left and right. A monster lurks out there, a monster that feeds on travestis.*

(Camilla Sosa Villada, 2021, p. 200).

Geography is a science focused on understanding and interpreting the multiple relationships between society and space, considering different approaches and perspectives that reflect its diversity and dialogue with other academic subjects. Metaphorically speaking, operationalizing concepts is related to a surgical procedure in which philosophically referenced categories are instruments used to develop reasoning supported by theories. Which concept one operationalizes will depend on the central question posed by the researcher, in addition to the emphasis chosen. A study can be enriched by navigating other waters, other academic subjects such as Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, since these can broaden our view and provide theoretical enrichment with their respective fertile fields. Considering transdisciplinarity, this topic weaves relations between Urban Anthropology and Geography, in an interpretative effort in light of consecrated theories such as the production of space (Lefebvre, 2013).

Henri Lefebvre, a materialist philosopher and sociologist and heterodox Marxist (Machado, 2008), criticizes and reformulates Kant's traditional view of absolute space, which treated space as a simple location or site. With his theory of production of space, Lefebvre highlights that space is not a stage or receptacle, but rather a relational construction which arises from social interactions and, therefore, should be understood as a dynamic product of interrelations, in the tired spiraling image of fleeting time (Diógenes, 2024). We therefore start from the premise of critically unveiling space as a *sine qua non* condition of societies.

Joseli Silva and Marcio Ornat (2022) undertake a theoretical effort to connect Lefebvre's work with feminist thought. Although a revolutionary theory, one of the seminal works for the *spacial turn* in the social sciences and which created a new guise for Marxist materialism, "the aspects of race, gender and sexualities [were] subsumed in class analysis" (p. 336). Nonetheless, the body is a fundamental element in Lefebvre's theory.

Feminist geographer Doreen Massey (2008) proposes space as an open and continuous production, following in the footsteps of Lefebvre's dialectical philosophy of uninterrupted (re) production of social life. She thus proposes another politics of spatiality, one that reflects on everyday actions and the trajectory of individual subjects. It is not a matter of isolating the apprehension of a phenomenon from individuals, but of assuming the "inseparability between individuality and sociability" (Massey, 2008, p. 93).

Another indispensable contribution to highlight the relations between body and space—that is, different spatialities—is sociologist Richard Sennett. In *Flesh and Stone* (2021), he shows how the construction of the West, in the name of civility and civilization, had the city as the locus of political power of territorial planning, establishing forms of domination over differences, complexity and strangeness based on moral values that segregated social groups into adequate and inadequate.

It follows a rapprochement between Geography and Ethnography which offers us an opportune material of reflections and data to discuss the differences of everyday life for *trans* and *cis* people. Gilberto Velho prioritizes the metropolis as a locus of interactions between different and unequal social networks and categories, arguing that “it is in the contemporary urban environment, with its complexity and dynamism, that these phenomena appear with greater intensity and clarity” (Velho, 2011, p. 178). According to anthropologist Silvana Nascimento (2016):

Urban ethnography, in turn, is built on the interaction between lived experience and theoretical models in an attempt to understand social dynamics based on the logic produced by the people who make the city (...) [Urban ethnography] emphasizes (...) the webs woven by city dwellers in their daily trajectories, or rituals, and reflects on the social uses of space beyond official maps. Nascimento (2016, p. 2).

From some narrative, essayistic and autoethnographic writings we learn about the city experience of transfolks and travestis, crossed by *cisnormativity*. Ethnographies can therefore be a powerful “theoretical resource for understanding social life on the margins of the State” (Castro, 2014, p. 102).

We highlight here the distinct experiences of *transmasculinities* and *transfemininities*—as we are not using non-binary folks as reference,⁷ we will not comment on them despite convergence points between the experiences of TT’s and NB’s people—since everyday situations are affected in particular ways by *cisnormativity* and *transphobia*.⁸ However, it is not our purpose to delve into them.

Moreover, the spatial experiences of trans people and the ways in which they face social interdictions cannot be understood without considering the intersectionalities of race, class, and gender (transfeminine or transmasculine). These social markers intertwine in complex ways, shaping their trajectories and geographical itineraries.

However, as several post- and decolonial authors point out, these structures—especially in Latin America—were forged by colonialism and upheld by the coloniality of knowledge, power and being⁹, safeguarding particularities that haunt the lives of these individual subjects and disrupt the social structures of domination, revealing the configuration of complexified power relations.

As for the intersection between race and class, black and periphery trans people are more exposed to violence, prostitution as a means of survival, and social marginalization, as we inhabit a modern world that favors whiteness and conceive of certain bodies as “spatial problems”

7 *Non-binary* constitutes a collective identity with legal recognition for rectification of vital records in Brazil. The first case occurred in 2020 (JUSBRASIL, 2022). Even though trans men and women escape binarism, since this is one of the components of *cisgenderism* (Vergueiro, 2018), and experiences of non-binary people make up the umbrella term *trans*, we understand that both political identities are situated on the margins and/or outside the gender binary.

8 *Transphobia* is the term used to describe violence resulting from “discrimination, prejudice and subordination of trans people due to their gender identities” (Miranda, 2018, p. 336). However, transphobia is not exclusively directed at transfolks and travestis, as we saw at the 2024 Paris Olympics with the attacks faced by the Algerian boxer, Imane Khelif. For a more in-depth discussion, see Caia’s text from Intersexo Brasil. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/C-K79yxOEWK/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA== Accessed on August 7, 2024.

9 For an in-depth look, see Lima (2024), referenced in the bibliography.

(Oliveira, 2022). Dossiers published by the National Association of Transsexuals and Travestis (ANTRA), for example, assert that Black trans women and travestis are greater targets of police violence and murder, whereas White trans people from middle and upper classes tend to have greater access to body transformation technologies, such as surgeries and hormone therapy, and greater possibility of attending educational and professional spaces that offer some protection against discrimination.

Experiences also diverge significantly between transfemininities (trans women and travestis) and transmasculinities (trans men and transmasculine folks). Trans women and travestis are often associated with prostitution and marginalization by stigmatization; trans and transmasculine men, especially Black and periphery, are more target by police violence and state violence.

According to an ethnography of transidentities conducted by Carvalho (2018), the emergence of non-binary and transmasculine identities among youth from the middle and upper classes reflects a greater gender fluidity that generates conflicts with older generations. Although problematic to assume an age argument to name an identity, in Brazil this claim stems from the numerous points of contact between non-binarism and *Queer* theory.

As shown by Caetano's (2024) survey conducted during their PhD thesis in Anthropology, non-binary is "an open concept of continuous elaboration" (Caetano, 2024, p. 149). Non-binary experiences, therefore, are developed through two aspects: denial of the normative pair man/woman and collective creation. Hence, non-binarism as collective self-determination refuses the enclosure of the binary pair man/woman by betting on the potential of the unintelligible to erase the *cistem* (Caetano, 2024).

We bring to light two ethnographies woven by Araruna (2017) and Miranda (2018)¹⁰ that outline the right to the city to show a way of experiencing the city curtailed by the stigmas imposed on *trans* bodies. *Cisgenderism* reveals itself as the norm, and agreeing with Vergueiro (2018), "masculinity—the expected role for individuals acculturated to be 'men'—and femininity—the expected role for individuals acculturated to be 'women'—do not exist outside the regulatory frameworks of cisgenderism" (Araruna, 2017, p. 134).

Stigma is based by both authors on Erving Goffman. From the interaction between individual and society stems expectations, derived from the latter, which are guaranteed by the maintenance of power relations on the former, generating stigmas. Stigmas are therefore "constructed through the creation of ideologies to explain the inferiority of a certain group of subjects" (Miranda, 2018, p. 341). Thus, in Young's understanding (2021), stigma draws itself closer to oppression by configuring a device that establishes hierarchies that deem a certain group as inferior. She describes oppression as a restriction on one's ability to develop and exercise skills and express one's needs, thoughts, and feelings (Young, 2021, p. 488)

To establish relations between individual and society, the scalar mechanism is a geographically analytical key that envisions an understanding of the production of space in its totality. For example, several instances of society—family, the State, organizations, etc.—affect individual

¹⁰ These are two *trans* authors: travesti Maria Léo Araruna, at the time a law student at the University of Brasília (UnB), and trans man Davi Miranda, at the time a master's student in Psychology at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA).

life by regulating the social fabric. For Grandi (2021), the scalar dimension finds relevance in the production of space, that is, scalarity is a tool that enables identifying the part-whole relation; in other words, the relation between the near order and the far order (Limonad; Lima, 2003).

Endowed with a perspective situated between experience and knowledge, Araruna (2017) and Miranda (2018), through these autoethnographic writings, are holders of localized knowledge (Haraway, 2009) writing about embodied subjection as embodied subjects. In this regard, they manifest a geography of existences (Lima, 2020a) that collides with a geopolitics of sensible bodies based on the condition of territorialized embodied subjects. In other words, it is a “geography as that which deciphers the conditions under which the autonomous search of embodied subjects for their best place in the world takes place” (Lima, 2020a, s.p.).

We highlight three recurring situations in the autoethnographic accounts that underscore the difficulties faced by *trans* people in inhabiting a *cisheteronormative* city (Aquino, 2019): 1) *corrective violence in public spaces*, cases of physical and verbal aggression; 2) *constraints in the use of collective spaces*—especially those segregated by gender; 3) *curtailment of collective life*.

Corrective violence is expressed both in the testimonies and data already mentioned here: murders, hate crimes, and even expulsion from the family since childhood/adolescence. As discussed by Souza and Feliciano (2020), LGBTI+ movement uses the term “hate crimes” to highlight the “composition of a scenario that ‘demonizes’ the LGBT person, attributing less value to their life and body in relation to a heterosexual and cisgender life and body” (Souza; Feliciano, 2020, p. 131). Research agendas on LGBTI+ themes in Geography have therefore contributed to the debate on “public security” (Nogueira, 2018), such as Almeida’s dissertation (2019) which mapped violence against dissident bodies. Combining cartography with gender studies, she produced a synthesis that underscores two logics: a) the verticality of the far order—using data from the São Paulo State Public Security Secretariat (SSP-SP), she created distorted maps that reveal territorially, the most dangerous places for dissidents to travel, that is, interpreting the origin of these data as a dimension of conceived space interfacing with the perceived, the interface between space representation and spatial practices; b) the horizontally of the near order by producing a cartography of sensible bodies, based on testimonies of LGBTI+ people, affectively revealing the interface between the dimension of the perceived and the lived, of spatial practices and spaces of representation.

Constraints in the use of collective spaces represents the restriction in using gender-segregated spaces—the ‘bathroom case’ has greater repercussions—or the regulation of bodies and their *gendered* clothing, or even by the legally instituted sex-gender norm which affect the countless bureaucracies to enjoy the right to citizenship, that is, access to health, education, work, etc.

Finally, connected to the other situations, the curtailment of collective life. According to Maffesoli (1997), sociability is what is instituted—the rules, the family. Given that *cisnormativity* prevails in customs and values, the sociability of trans subjects is entangled in a web of stigmas and prejudices.

Meneses (2022) employs the term “trans diaspora” to refer to the gender and territorial displacement of trans people. In his thesis, although counting on the exclusive participation of trans women and travestis, trans diaspora is defined as “the crossing of borders that the trans population engage in during their identity (de)construction, which is related to two cases: gender borders and geographical borders; whether both or just one of them occur” (2022, p. 201).

Continuing, Meneses argues: even though migration was not necessarily caused by what he calls an “identity crisis,” by distancing oneself from instances of restraint such as family or neighborhood, that is, from one’s city of origin (usually small and rural cities), one creates opportunities for new experiences and the possibility of presenting a new public image.

We can thus bring his analysis closer to Sennett’s reflection on the body’s experience in the city, impacted by the representations that are produced about it. As Sennett states: “Ideal images of the human body lead to mutual repression and insensitivity, especially among those with different and non-standard bodies” (Sennett, 2021, p. 22).

According to our central argument, the spatiality of trans people is questioned by the images that are constructed about them, mediated by the expected permanence of individuals within cisgender normativity. Meneses observes that “people only see and identify themselves as trans after migrating for some other reason, in this case not being a factor that drives the person to migrate [...], but rather a consequence of the migratory process” (2022, p. 206).

Access to spaces designed for socialization and entertainment of the LGBT population, usually located in large urban centers (Meneses, 2022), not only offers an environment of greater security and freedom, but also enables transition to a context of anonymity. By distancing individuals from their original normative structures, this displacement opens paths for the formation of new contact networks, especially among trans people. In these interactions, mutual recognition is strengthened, creating spaces where subjectivities can flourish.

According to Maffesoli (1997), *sociality* goes beyond what is established, and expresses the idea of *being-together*, of the commons, of sharing, of the community; thus, transfolks and travestis have, for many years, undertaken spaces to forge a common sense of belonging that instigate a positive rationality against negativities—for example, the countless people who devote themselves to producing the ballroom scene in Brazil¹¹. Consolidation as political subjects is forged through collectives around these identities, therefore, sociality produces new meanings of dwelling, a being-together, a commonality.

11 Available at: <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/babado-forte-erika-palomino/>. Accessed on January 28, 2025.

On collective identity: the organization to guarantee social rights

Since the Brazilian military dictatorship, or perhaps even since the European colonization (Cunha; York, 2020; Vergueiro, 2018), we identify resistance practices by trans people and travestis in favor of their ethically situated existence¹². In the comings and goings of social life, these practices reveal tactics of daily survival that are now elevated to strategies by constituting the trans movement, a relevant actor in the institutional scenario¹³.

Formalization of what can be called the trans movement in Brazil dates back to the 1990s, rooted in the travestis who founded the Association of Travestis and Transsexuals (ASTRAL) in 1992, in Rio de Janeiro (Carvalho, 2018). From a legal standpoint this milestone is significant for the movement's institutionalization, as prior to it there were only mobilizations. Coacci (2018) divides the Brazilian trans movement in waves starting in the 1990s, each with particular characteristics. According to him, it was only with the second wave in the 2000s that we see signs of progress in ensuring the basic rights of transfolks and travestis, reflected in laws and public policies formulated and participation in the execution of such actions. The favorable historical context added to a political fervor for the successful election of a progressive government provided breeding ground for progress on some agendas.

Among the current national entities that make up the movement we can cite ANTRA, the Brazilian Network of Trans People (RedeTrans), the National Forum of Black Travestis and Transsexuals (FONATRANS), the Brazilian Institute of Transmasculinities (IBRAT), among others. Local entities include networks and collectives of trans university students, the New Association of Travestis and Trans People (NATRAPE) of Pernambuco, and some shelters such as Casa Nem, in Rio de Janeiro, and Casa Florescer, in São Paulo.

Many authors point out that the 1980s were crucial for organizing the LGBTI+ movement, especially in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. State-sanctioned persecution against dissident bodies dates back at least to the 1970s (Quinalha, 2022; Iazzetti, 2023). A notorious example is Operation Tarantula (1987) by the São Paulo State Police which, on the pretext of fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic, persecuted, imprisoned and murdered countless travestis, transfolks, and other LGBTI+ people.

According to Carvalho and Carrara (2015, p. 383), "the binomial police violence/AIDS was a cornerstone for constituting the movement." Operation Tarantula (Figure 1) was endorsed by both the State and conservative civil society, which approved the street "cleansing." Moreover, several death squads emerged in the 1980s, whose targets were Black, poor, peripheral, and LGBTI+ people. A historiography of the LGBTI+ movement is built using journalistic sources, oral accounts of those who lived this past and became true living ancestors, and police reports (Araújo dos Passos, 2022).

¹² For a discussion about said ethics, known as territorial justice, see Lima (2020a).

¹³ We can refer to internationally recognized Brazilian personalities both in political life, like the São Paulo state deputy Érika Hilton (PSOL), and in cultural life by the singer, songwriter and actress, Liniker.

Polícia Civil “combate” a Aids prendendo travestis

Do Reportagem Local

A Polícia Civil do Estado resolveu entrar no “combate” à Aids na cidade de São Paulo. Com este objetivo, foi lançada na madrugada de ontem a “Operação Tarântula”, um comando especial de policiamento que visa realizar detenções em flagrante de travestis nos principais locais de prática do “travestir” aliciamento de “fregueses” nas ruas públicas. As primeiras ações da “Tarântula” já resultaram em 56 detenções, segundo Márcio Prudente Cruz, 52, delegado-chefe do Departamento das Delegacias Regionais de Polícia da Grande São Paulo (De-gran). Cruz afirma que a operação deverá durar o ano todo.

A operação está sob o comando do titular da Delegacia Seccional Sul, delegado Marcelo Alencar Aranha, e conta com uma equipe composta pelos titulares dos distritos policiais de Vila Clementino, Itaim-Itibi, Campo Belo e Vila Mariana (bairros da zona sul de São Paulo).

Segundo Cruz, o objetivo da “Operação Tarântula” é basicamente

Tarântula é uma aranha européia

Segundo o “Novo Dicionário Aurélio da Língua Portuguesa”, “tarântula” é uma espécie de aranha europeia da família dos léciosos, cuja picada causa febre, delírio e, segundo a crença popular, singulares sintomas que levariam o doente a cantar e dançar. De acordo com a enciclopédia da Lello Universal, sua picada causa aturamento e profunda melancolia, daí os antigos acreditarem que a vítima devesse agitar-se ininterruptamente para sair desse estado.

“Espantar a freguesia” e assim diminuir a propagação da doença, “Os tempos de Nostradamus estão chegando”, diz. Ele afirma acreditar que estamos num período pré-apocalíptico. No entanto, a operação não será efetuada durante o Carnaval, já que “os travestis tiram folga nesta época”, declara.

Cruz nega ter dito que pretende enquadrar os detidos na Lei de Segurança Nacional, ou que pretenda submetê-los a testes de Aids no Instituto Médico Legal, conforme foi publicado ontem no jornal “O Globo”. Para ele, os travestis podem responder a processos por ultraje ao pudor público e crime de contágio venéreo.

A respeito do nome dado à operação policial, Cruz diz que a autoria é do delegado Aranha. “A Tarântula tem vários braços, braços longos, e o objetivo é atingir várias ruas e várias avenidas onde se efetua o ‘travestir indecente’”.

Acidente na Régis Bittencourt mata quatro e fere dois

Do Reportagem Local

Um acidente envolvendo dois caminhões e três automóveis na rodovia Régis Bittencourt (que liga São Paulo a Curitiba, no Paraná), ocorreu de madrugada, provocou a morte de quatro pessoas e ferimentos leves em outras duas. O choque, ocorrido no km 331 da rodovia, próximo à cidade de Jiquitina (78 km a sudoeste de São Paulo), provocou também a interdição das pistas, nos dois sentidos, do horário do acidente até às 10h30. Logo após a liberação, o tráfego ficou lento por algum tempo.

O Fusca de chapas JK 9038 SP teria se chocado —segundo a Polícia Rodoviária Federal— com o caminhão Mercedes Benz CX 5825 PR, cujo motorista, Antônio Valença, 34, sofreu ferimentos leves. Todos os ocupantes do Fusca (Paulo Misaki, 28; Tereza Misaki, 58; Maria Valença, 20; e Julieta da Conceição, 55) morreram no local. O motorista do

Prefeito de cidade do Ceará é morto por desconhecido

Do correspondente em Fortaleza

O prefeito de Maracanaú (município da região metropolitana de Fortaleza, capital do Ceará), Almir Freitas Dutra (PDS), morreu atropelado, às 22h30, após ser atingido na cabeça por disparos de revólver. O crime ocorreu quando Dutra e sua mulher, Ângela Maria, saíam de uma churrascaria da cidade, nas proximidades da casa do prefeito. Segundo testemunhas, o casal voltava a pé para casa quando um homem mascarado aproximou-se e disparou contra o prefeito.

O fotógrafo Sebastião de Moura Alves, que estava perto de Dutra, disse que o autor dos disparos tinha o rosto coberto por uma máscara carnavalesca, da mesma forma que dois outros homens, que o acompanhavam. Ainda segundo ele, os três mascarados fugiram em um Corcel preto sem placas.

Dutra foi peça chave para a realização do plebiscito que decidiu pela separação do distrito do município de

Em MG é preso acusado de assalto a caminhoneiros

Das Agências

Foi preso ontem num sítio localizado na zona oeste de Belo Horizonte (MG) o motorista de caminhão Francisco Pereira de Souza, acusado de integrar a quadrilha de assaltantes de caminhoneiros que atua na rota via Itio-Hahia. Segundo o delegado da Dops mineira Renato Trade, autor da prisão, desde dezembro Francisco se escondia no sítio, cujo dono é identificado como Hilton, funcionário da siderúrgica Mannesmann. Hilton seria um dos maiores receptores de cargas roubadas de caminhões.

O delegado Trade disse que Francisco aliciava caminhoneiros para que simulassem assaltos, passando a carga para a quadrilha, sobretudo bobinas de aço inoxidável e chapas de ferro. Em seguida, faziam denúncia de assalto à polícia. De posse do caminhão, a quadrilha o desmontava para vender as partes. Desarmado

Dropes

- Passagem de autoridades militares em um momento de tensão da Aids - Uma cena noturna durante a operação

Figure 1 – Article from the newspaper *Folha de S.P.* (1987)

Source: *Aventuras na História*, UOL page.

Once the organized trans movement was consolidated, several injustices began to emerge, including “[...] police violence, medical negligence, exclusion from family and school environments, forced migration, public humiliation, domestic violence, systematic disrespect, precarious work, poverty, medical control, forced sterilization, prostitution as fate, HIV, human trafficking, corrective rape, and, at the top, the systematic murder of trans people [...]” (Carvalho; Carrara, 2015, p. 386).

We understand injustice as the perception of suffering, of an unfulfilled promise, of a right denied or infringed—and oppressions are the ingredients of an oppressive space. One must unravel the injustices to reveal the right to the city, the right to space. Rights and subjects, the city and everyday life, and Iris Marion Young’ (2021) five faces of oppression (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural domination, and violence) are intertwined here.

Territorial justice, according to Lima (2015), recognizes that territory is not only a space defined by control and limit, but a complex system that involves territorializing embodied subjects and the degree of autonomy conferred on them. Territorial justice is therefore the right to space, involving both resource distribution and the materialization of social rights (education, health, housing, work, security—as set forth in the 1988 Constitution). Territorializing social rights demands recognizing a collectivity as a political subject; hence the urgency in recognizing new identities, as conferring citizenship and legitimacy to dissident bodies in the city is fundamental for expanding the democratic and citizen exercise of the right to space (Aquino, 2019).

Nancy Fraser contributes to the debate on the dilemma between redistribution and recognition showing that these policies need not be mutually exclusive. For her, there is an analytical distinction between economic injustices—rooted in the economic-political structure—and cultural or symbolic injustices, which derive from the cognitive effects of identity such as representation, interpretation and communication (Fraser, 2006, p. 232).

But in Fraser's perspective, the trans population can be understood as a "bivalent collectivity" (2006, p. 233), that is, they simultaneously faces both categories of injustice. On the one hand, they are affected by the structural inequalities of political economy; on the other, they suffer cultural and moral injustices which impact how they are perceived and included in society. Faced with this double condition, the political efforts of the trans movement have been directed towards formulating strategies that seek both recognition and redistribution—two aspects that are equally crucial for overcoming these barriers.

The concept of decent city is intrinsically linked to the integrality of social rights, since the 1988 Constitution establishes the right to life, liberty and security. It is by organizing collectives that these rights materialize for trans lives. Expanding on Michel Foucault's idea of docile bodies, Lima (2020a) proposes that of sensible bodies—which not only are subjected to norms, but also disrupt them, territorializing their existences—, stating that if the body is the ground zero of human experience, then territorial justice must consider corporeality as an essential dimension of citizenship. Wanting a decent city means recognizing that the struggle for trans rights is not just an identity issue—in its anti-woke sense—but also a geopolitical struggle for the right to space.

In 2022, ASTRAL celebrated 30 years of its foundation in Rio de Janeiro, a historic milestone for the organized trans and travesti movement in Brazil. Its political-social transformation over three decades reveals numerous contradictions, especially when considering that Brazil remains the country with the highest number of trans people and travestis murdered (TGEU, 2017).¹⁴ Despite legislative advances in ensuring rights, Brazil remains a conservative and violent country, as these alarming data show. However, inter- and trans-scalar articulations such as the creation and activation of a network of collectives and NGOs in favor of LGBTI+ rights have driven progress in these agendas within the implementation of public policies.

Temporally repositioning landmarks of visibility is a fundamental aspect of the political struggle for recognition. Jovanna Baby, important *traviarch*¹⁵ of the trans movement, points out that the first march took place in 1995, in Rio de Janeiro, during the III National Meeting of Travestis (ENTLAID).¹⁶ This first Trans March sought to denounce the police violence victimizing travestis in the city, and was initially titled March for Sexual Diversity and later renamed March of the Travestis.

14 Other studies point out the degree of perversity with which such crimes occur. Above all, the numbers reveal the complications in vulnerability considering other social marks (Jesus, 2013; Silva *et al*, 2018; Nogueira, 2018).

15 Term used by the people in the movement to refer to those who started the mobilizations and movements.

16 MÍDIA NINJA. Jovanna Baby: a história do Movimento Trans e Travesti no Brasil. Planeta FODA, Mídia Ninja. Online. January 25, 2024. Available at: <https://midianinja.org/jovanna-baby-a-historia-do-movimento-trans-e-travesti-no-brasil/> Accessed on May 24, 2025.

Since 2018, the city of São Paulo has held the Trans Pride March annually, and, as of 2022, Rio de Janeiro has hosted the Trans and Travesti March (Figure 2).^{17,18} Besides these mobilizations, several other Brazilian cities in metropolitan regions of the North, Northeast, Midwest, South and Southeast, have organized similar acts via trans movement entities.

In the context of national articulation, and with support from the Federal Government, 2024 marked the first edition of the National Marsh¹⁹ for Trans Visibility²⁰. The demonstration took place in the Federal District and, since then, has been held annually always close to January 29, when the National Day of Trans Visibility (instituted in 2004) is celebrated.

These mobilizations in large cities reinforce our argument that urban spaces are arenas where expressions of resistance, advocacy, and advances in trans citizenship gain strength. Collective occupation of urban space by trans people, especially through marches, is a form of spatial resistance against interdiction, a direct confrontation with the faces of marginalization and violence (Young, 2021).



Figure 2 – Trans and Travesti March in Rio de Janeiro, in 2023, had as its theme “For the right to dream new futures.”

Source: MidiaNinja. Photo: Guará.

17 MIDIA NINJA. Marcha Trans e Travesti do Rio de Janeiro luta ‘Pelo direito de sonhar novos futuros’. Planeta FODA, Mídia Ninja. Online. November 14, 2023. Available at: <https://midianinja.org/marcha-trans-e-travesti-do-rio-de-janeiro-luta-pelo-direito-de-sonhar-novos-futuros> Accessed on May 24, 2025.

18 GI RIO. Depois de quase 30 anos, Marcha Trans e Travesti volta a ocupar o Centro do Rio. GI RIO. Online. November 23, 2022. Available at: <https://gl.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2022/11/23/depois-de-quase-30-anos-marcha-trans-e-travesti-volta-a-ocupar-o-centro-do-rio.ghtml> Accessed on May 24, 2025.

19 The spelling “Marsh” instead of “March” honors Marsha P. Johnson, a Black American travesti who was at the forefront of the Stonewall Uprising, which took place on June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn gay bar in New York. The Stonewall Uprising is a historic milestone for the LGBTI+ movement internationally. As this reference is made officially by the demonstration organizers, our use of “Marsh” in place of “March” respects its employment by the Brazilian trans movement. Although a US citizen, the Brazilian trans movement understands Marsha P. Johnson as a travesti.

20 RACE ANDEQUALITY. Primeira ‘Marsha’ Nacional de Visibilidade Trans no Brasil. Race and Equality. Online. January 30, 2024. Available at: <https://raceandequality.org/pt-br/resources/primeira-marsha-nacional-de-visibilidade-trans-no-brasil/> Accessed on May 24, 2025.

Moreover, the movement's consolidation and expansion meant advances in the guarantee of rights (Coacci, 2018), and the policies in favor of this population transform the notion of "target population" (Carvalho; Carrara, 2013) by understanding these subjects as citizens and relevant actors.

Final considerations

Throughout this work we sought to unveil the particularities of a geography of trans subjects, highlighting the spatial experiences of transfolks and tranvestis as a counterpoint to a cisnormative geographicity. From it, the production of urban space becomes a field of political disputes in which the trajectories and struggles of dissident collectivities are constantly renegotiated, both in terms of access to rights and in the constitution of their identities (Aguião, 2018). Embodied subjects turned into political identities reveal not only deep-rooted inequalities, but also resistance claiming the territorialization of rights. We called therefore upon territorial justice, arguing that social rights aimed at ensuring the satisfaction of human needs, whether material or immaterial—of an economic, cultural, moral, affective, political and/or environmental nature (Lima, 2015)—demand the recognition of individual subjects, either for guaranteeing classic rights or generating new ones (Lima, 2015, p. 64).

Establishing a dialogue between Geography and Urban Ethnography enabled exploring the intersections between production of space and the social dynamics that cross the daily lives of transfolks. *Cisnormativity*, understood as a norm that regulates and constrains expressions and gender identities other than those prescribed, both organizes space and defines who has the right to it. We aim, in this way, to reveal the nuances of trans identities since they all experience the three elements of forbidden geographies differently. Moreover, this complexifies the analytical look at spatialities by intersecting markers of race, class, gender, origin, age group, disability, etc. Given our anti-colonial stance, bringing to light aspects of the production of these various individual subjects within this broader social group of trans identities illuminates how these are non-coherent experiences brought together by affinities amidst the contradictions that constitute reality.

Agreeing with Lefebvre's argument that "for there to be *change*, a social group, a class or a caste must intervene by imprinting a **rhythm** on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner" (Lefebvre, 2021, p. 67, emphasis in the original), we underscore that the maturation of the trans movement, whether through institutional or organized civil society, has been fundamental to combat oppressive spaces towards decent cities. In this regard, we highlight the acronym T within the LGBTI+ aphorism, agreeing with Alvaro Ferreira that "a fundamental characteristic of social movements is to be born from a collective will" (2013, p. 62).

In contemporary times, it is in the city—locus of power—that arise resistances which manifest their existence by transitional spatial appropriations, that is, political manifestations such as trans marches. These mobilizations bring together countless individuals who celebrate their pride of being and trans-existing while inscribing other body images into history-geography (Sennett, 2021).

Finally, by highlighting the specificities of trans experiences in the city, we broaden the debate on territorial justice by evincing with embodied subjects the need for public policies that recognize and affirm the right to a decent city (Lima, 2020b). Building a path towards a decent city demands reflection on the integrality, guarantee and realization of social rights—only then can we move in the opposite direction to oppressive spaces.

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Data availability

The entire dataset that supports the results of this study has been published in the article itself.

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