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Amanda Álvares Ferreira

**Travesti Prostitution in Brazil: Reading agency and
sovereignty through dissident sexualities**

Dissertação de Mestrado

Dissertation presented to the Programa de Pós-graduação em Relações Internacionais, of the Instituto de Relações Internacionais of PUC-Rio in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Mestre em Relações Internacionais.

Advisor: Prof. James Casas Klausen

Rio de Janeiro
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Abstract

Ferreira, Amanda Álvares; Klausen, James Casas (Advisor). **Travesti Prostitution in Brazil: Reading agency and sovereignty through dissident sexualities**, 2017. 76p. Dissertação de Mestrado — Instituto de Relações Internacionais, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

"Travesti Prostitution in Brazil: reading agency and sovereignty through dissident sexualities" investigates the marginalised subjectivities of travestis within the Brazilian context, to analyse discourses both in the local and international realm. I conduct a critique of discourses on sex-trafficking and prostitution, pointing to the naturalisation of gender norms that hinders an understanding of experiences that exceed the binary "prostitute versus trafficking victim". To do so, I analyse, through a foucauldian and butlerian queer perspective, travestis subjectivities that constitute themselves precisely in the field of prostitution practices. I propose, therefore, that these experiences allow both resistance and subjection to gender regulations that are legible in the preset society. Finally, I present a critique to the formation of a biopolitical society in Brazil: pointing that a sovereign power predominates in "making die" these unintelligible bodies, so that subjectivities considered normal in gender, race, and class terms can be "made live". This opens the possibility of reflecting on how the Brazilian state denies its queerness as it tries to adequate itself to homonormative speeches, as well as to discourses of defense of LGBTTTQI community, that emerge in the international realm, but still allows that a sovereign power is exercised over non-ideal transsexual bodies.

Keywords

Gender; prostitution; transgender; sex trafficking; queer theory; transphobia; biopolitics.

Resumo

Ferreira, Amanda Álvares; Klausen, James Casas (Orientador). **Prostituição Travesti no Brasil: lendo agência e soberania por meio de sexualidades dissidentes**, 2017. 76p. Dissertação de Mestrado — Instituto de Relações Internacionais, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

"Prostituição Travesti no Brasil: lendo agência e soberania por meio de sexualidades dissidentes" investiga as subjetividades marginalizadas de travestis no contexto brasileiro para analisar discursos no âmbito local e internacional. Conduzo uma crítica de discursos sobre tráfico sexual e prostituição, apontando para a naturalização de normas de gênero que impedem o entendimento sobre experiências que excedem o binário "prostituta versus vítima do tráfico". Para fazê-lo, analiso, por meio de uma perspectiva foucaultiana e queer butleriana, as subjetividades travestis que se constituem justamente no bojo das práticas de prostituição. Proponho, nesta lógica, que essas experiências permitem tanto sua resistência quanto sujeição às regulações de gênero que são legíveis. Por fim, apresento uma crítica à formação de uma sociedade biopolítica no Brasil: apontando que um poder soberano predomina em "fazer morrer" estes corpos ininteligíveis, para que se permita o "fazer viver" de subjetividades consideradas normais em termos de gênero, raça e classe. Isso abre a possibilidade de refletir o Estado brasileiro que nega sua queerness ao procurar se adequar aos discursos de homonormatividade e de defesa da comunidade LGBTTTQI que surgem no âmbito internacional, mas ainda permite que se exerça um poder soberano sobre corpos transexuais não-ideiais.

Palavras-chave

Gênero; prostituição; transgênero; tráfico sexual; teoria queer; transfobia; biopolítica.

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1. Introduction

“Prostitution” as an object of study can be approached through several different aspects and perspectives that try to pin down exactly what are the social and political problems involved in it, and therefore how it can be dealt by the State. Usually, feminist curiosity upon this thematic involves an attempt to understand women's subordination and to understand the origins and reasons of exploitation of women. The central aim in this work, critically engaging with that, is to understand the effects and possibilities opened by different discourses on prostitution considering the background of travesti prostitution in Brazil and, also, understand how these localised experiences can produce insights over larger power structures.

It is my intention, therefore, to look at travesti prostitutes bodies as *possibility* of subversion not only of gender norms of a Brazilian morale that hangs on a thin line between tolerance of subjects marked racially and sexually, and an underlying necessity to violate and exclude these bodies, or many times, kill them. This leads me to questioning how the conception of a Brazilian state is informed by certain notions that produce such controversial and violent relationship to marginalised bodies of prostitutes, and specifically, transgender prostitutes (travestis).

Considering how each society is informed by traditions that determine its stereotypes; by "a web of signs and references for the idea of difference arises out of a society's communal sense of control over its world" (GILMAN, 1985, p. 20), I take into account how political communities construct, and are constructed by, the *other*, and by the stereotypes associated to this other. Difference, in this logic, would be that which threatens order and control (GILMAN, 1985). And, considering the travesti as this differing other (and its constitutive role), I wish to understand the stigma around these bodies that are somehow unintelligible (BUTLER, 1993), its fetishist and sexualised constructions that allow their lives to be marked by desire, as well as violence and marginalisation.

To understand how this other came into being, we need to understand what kind of body the current society needs. Therefore, I question: how are the subjectivities of these prostitutes in conflict with the normative state? Are their lives grievable, considering the frequent impunity those who commit violence against travestis enjoy? How can we reveal the artificiality of already naturalised notions, of gender and political norms through the lives of these individuals? To answer these questions I need to look at these bodies, that are object of desire and violence, as "deeply political bodies", constituted in reference to historical political conditions while also acting upon the world.

This differs from the traditional analysis of violence in the discipline of International Relations: the ones that argue that violence is a strategic action of rational actors, usually the State, or a violation of community laws and norms (as in liberal and constructivist theories). In the present analysis, I look at how violence (as well as sexuality) can be productive, a creative force that shapes the limits of how we are understood as political subjects, as well as forming the boundaries of our bodies and political communities (WILCOX, 2015). I intend to take account of the precariousness of bodies, as in Judith Butler's argument (BUTLER, 2011; BUTLER, 2016), to understand them not as exogenously given, but constituted politically; and also to show how normative violence acts allowing certain bodies to be subjected to violence without such acts and speeches being actually considered as a wounding or a violation (WILCOX, 2015).

It is essential, to the present work, to juxtapose and compare how local realities connect themselves to the international and how they produce each other. Taking on a queer approach from the South, henceforth, will mean translating this coproduction and transforming it to think local stories and engage differences theoretically in a spatially and historically localised manner (PEREIRA, 2012). As a methodological and epistemological choice, therefore, I chose to write in the first person as a form of both diminishing the distance between the I and the Other to be observed; but also marking and emphasising this very difference between this I and Other.

In order to conduct my analysis, I have relied on different ethnographic work produced about prostitution and about travestis (BARBOSA and

PIMENTEL, 2011; BENTO, 2006; BENEDETTI, 2005; KULICK, 2005; PELÚCIO, 2005; PERLONGHER, 1986; SILVA, 2007). Even though I have engaged personally in research and got in contact with many travestis during the time I have been doing this research, for the purpose here intended, to conduct an ethnographic work would be out of possibility. Relying on other ethnographic work to conduct a discourse analysis has been possible because there seems to be a common ground in these anthropological analyses of travesti experiences. Engaging with these works in no way implies that I necessarily agree with its theoretical presupposes or its conclusions.

I do not commune, for example, with Hélio Silva's (2007) approach to travestis using the masculine pronoun in Portuguese: "o travesti". This reference to travestis is, many times, reproduced at different vehicles of information and by common-sense discourses that, even if implicitly, do not recognise their identification with the feminine gender. As William Peres (2012) would argue, these constructions of "o travesti" or "o transexual" are usually ones demarcating a negative visibility of trans people: associating them with criminality, drug trafficking, etc.

The word *travesti*¹ derives from *transvertir*, or cross-dressing. But being a travesti is not simply about cross-dressing, or drag performing, but adopting feminine names and pronouns, hairstyle, clothing style, cosmetic practices, ingesting hormones and applying silicone directly onto their bodies. Don Kulick (1998) affirms that travestis do not self-identify as women, and therefore travestis would configure a specific combination of female physical attributes and male homosexual subjectivity. However, I would be reticent to simply state that travestis' subjectivities are reducible to a male homosexual recognition: even though they *do* recognise they are not precisely what heteronormativity says it means to be a woman, most of them do not recognise themselves as "gay men"². On the contrary, travestis do pursue and adopt a transsexual identity but, as it will

¹ I decided to maintain the term "travesti" untranslated precisely because it is na specific term by which these women identify themselves. Their lives and experiences do not translate directly from "transvesti". Therefore, I write it in Portuguese in order to demarcated the historically and locally specific use of the term.

² As Sandra, a travesti in Marcos Benedetti's ethnographic work, explain to him: "A gente é viado, mas as gays são as gays e as travestis são as travestis" (BENEDETTI apud PELÚCIO, 2005, p. 525). Or: "we are *fags*, but the gay are the gay and the travestis are the travestis".

be later described in this work, most of them do not go through "corrective" surgeries, and do not wish to do so. In this sense, answering *what* is the gender of travestis is rather difficult without falling into dangerous generalisations (PELÚCIO, 2005).

What I would like to emphasise, throughout this work, is that travestis' experiences and performances cannot be reduced to universal and monolithic explanations. This is so because, first, travestis subjectivities are too multiple in the present context, and there is, most certainly, a gap between those who have managed to fight for their rights and militate on a national level to denounce violence committed against trans people in Brazil³, and those at sites of subalternity, of extreme marginalisation and poverty.

In any way, observing how varied travestis' experiences can be is important because *giving voice* is not the simplest part of a feminist project. There is always a difference between considering marginalised women experiences in feminist theory and actually managing to give voice to (or listening to) people in sites of marginality and subalternity: "When we (finally) give marginalised people voice, we really give ourselves microphones through which to broadcast Western subject-centred egoism" (SPIVAK e MOHANTY apud SYLVESTER, 1996, p. 264). To avoid that, my intention is to focus on the contradictions of universalistic explanations and to deconstruct naturalised binaries upon which our knowledge is built.

This requires understanding the social and historical construction inherent to these pairs to be able to deconstruct them, as proposed in Judith Butler's work (BUTLER, 2016). The choice for queer theory in the present work is based precisely on its proposition of embracing deviation, of straying from the norm and opening the possibility of allying differences, and not taking fixed identities as a departure. However, to manifest this difference without falling into the repetition of preceding authoritarian practices requires caution not to blur the very difference queer theory means to affirm. Generalising moves in fighting compulsory heterosexuality and mining easy binaries without proper contextualisation can end up, according to Pedro P. G. Pereira (2012), in a rushed approach that integrate

³ e.g. Indianara Siqueira, Amara Moira, and others.

different positions in a homogeneity. In his terms, away from the context of enunciation and without proper attention to the singularity of each theoretical body, we would simply reproduce theories — in a repetitive movement from centre to margins — rejecting the resistance of the realities analysed to these very theories.

1.1. Feminist Curiosities and International Relations

During the time I've been engaged in this research, I've been answered with surprise as I mentioned my research topic. The question always being: but what does it have to do with International Relations? And, maybe not so surprisingly, many times this came from colleagues inside the discipline. While this seems symptomatic in many ways, I answer this question with Cynthia Enloe's (2014) feminist theorising of International Relations: to make feminist sense of international politics demands looking precisely at what is usually too trivial, at what is conventionally dismissed by the discipline, and understanding women's already influencing part in World Politics (ENLONE, 2014, p. 3).

Reading power through lives at the margins of society, at places "lower than low politics" (SYLVESTER apud ZALEWSKI, 1996, p. 348), at a realm that would hitherto be outside of the level of policy-making and world politics discussions, is the primary proposition of the first feminist International Relations thinkers, as it is mine, in a general sense, in this project.

Therefore, theorising, as Marysia Zalewski (1996) puts it, means in this work that international issues in international politics are not ontologically prior to theories about them. Doing so means I bring a feminist poststructuralist, postmodernist suspicion upon the so called positivist methodologies in International Relations and its Enlightenment's inheritance, over discourses and, thereof, over social phenomena (DER DERIAN, 1989).

This involves a critical view towards objectivity and logocentrism, to which I address by taking on Donna Haraway's (1991) proposition of situated

knowledges, and consider an embodied "objectivity" to this feminist project: it means taking into account that all vision is circumscribed into our bodies, and therefore my view is not infinite. Avoiding the god-trick of social sciences is precisely recognising the impossibility of a disembodied and mobile vision, in either too totalising or relativistic analysis. It also means that "seeing from below" is not unproblematic, that the position of the subjugated are not innocent ones, but are also subject to critical examination, deconstruction, and interpretation (HARAWAY, 1991, p. 1991).

With this in mind, the analysis here proposed aims to deconstruct and denaturalise the inherited language, concepts and texts that are privileged in International Relations discourses (DER DERIAN, 1989). This textualising post-structural strategy allows a subversion of scientific texts, it allows mining the border between what is regarded as actual knowledge and what would not be. As in Donna Haraway's cyborg myth:

"the transcendent authorisation of interpretation is lost, and with it the ontology grounding 'Western' epistemology. But the alternative is not cynicism or faithlessness, that is, some version of abstract existence, like the accounts of technological determinism destroying 'man' by the 'machine' or 'meaningful political action' by the 'text'. (...) Both chimpanzees and artefacts have politics, so why shouldn't we?" (HARAWAY, 1991, p. 153)

Once again, it entails disturbing conventions and concepts (such as sovereignty and violence, as I propose here) that are taken as natural truths to the field, as well as denaturalising "accounts of individual subjectivity so as to analyse relations of force, violence, and language that compose our profoundly unnatural bodies" (WILCOX, 2015, p. 2), bodies which are constituted by but also constitutive of world politics. To that end, a (butlerian-) foucauldian perspective is in place to understand how differentiation and marginalisation are not isolated from discourse. In fact, these processes are essential to our existence as subjects.

Butler's analysis inherits two major insights from Michel Foucault's work. First, power is to be understood as strategic relations of force that permeate life and is productive of subjects, desires and discourses. This subject, secondly,

cannot precede power relations in an individuated consciousness, for it is formed by them. Power, therefore, is the condition of possibility for the subject to exist and, because of this, the very process that allows a subject to acquire agency is what secures its subordination. The issue, though, is not how the social enacts the individual⁴, "but what are the discursive conditions that sustain the entire metaphysical edifice of contemporary individuality" (MAHMOOD, 2005, p. 18).

As Foucault affirms, the disciplinary mechanism produces individuals, constitute them — the norm (in this case, gender and racial norms) are a measure and a means of producing a standard to each people are subjected. These norms, in this sense, have no ontological status and exists in the its very reproduction through its embodiment. Therefore, it only persists as it is re-enacted and reidealised through "the daily social rituals of bodily life" (BUTLER, 2004, p. 48). Following that, a norm is not as much characterised by the use of force or violence, but more as an implicit logic that allows power to clearly define its objects, it is a force that enables us to imagine life and the subjects in it, and therefore creates the sphere of the biopolitical (EWALD apud BUTLER, 2004, p. 49).

Bearing this discussion in mind, I take on Butler's problematisations of generalised heterosexuality and of feminist views that connect gender to a binary structure. Therefore, I consider, in her terms, woman as an ontologically precarious category. This problematisation is precisely what opens space to understand the subjectivity of individuals living at the margins and "outside" of gender norms.

⁴ The social cannot simply enact the individual under this approach, for the subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated. Signification is, according to Butler, not a founding act, but a regulated process of reiteration (BUTLER, 2016).

2. Reading prostitution through Human Trafficking discourses

This chapter's intention is to relate prominent discourses on human trafficking and prostitution to the context of prostitution in Brazil and local feminist discourses, understanding their contradictions when put into contrast with butlerian theory and the impossibilities of their replication in the (post-colonial, queer) context of Brazilian society. The reason why I bring on such discourses, abolitionists or pro-sex work ones, is to address the main question (agency-related) that is underlying both of them: can prostitution be freely chosen? Is it necessarily exploitative? It becomes central to the present work to understand how abolitionist arguments can actually contradict a feminist political project (HOSANG and YAMIN, 2016). My argument is also that discourses on prostitution, departing from sex trafficking debates, are heavily engaged in a heteronormative logic that does not approach the complexity and ambiguity of experiences of sex work and cannot theorise possibilities of *agency*.

It was in the 1990s⁵ that debates around trafficking re-emerged, with a rhetoric of "modern slavery" that focused on the growing porosity of national borders (and international criminal organisations easier evolution due to it) and deviant gender norms (HOSANG and YAMIN, 2016, p. 392), but which did not necessarily follow a huge increase in the flows of trafficked people⁶. As an ambiguously defined term that collapsed migration, organised crime, prostitution, sex trafficking and sex work, and human rights, human trafficking seemed even more difficult to be practically handled due to the insufficiency and unreliability

⁵ According to Claudia Aradau (2008), after the 1949 United Nations (UN) Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, trafficking evaded from the political agenda in Europe and the United States. It is important to note that, at this convention, it was stated that "prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of human persons and endanger the welfare of the individual, the family and the community" (UN, 1949). The convention also proposes the fusion of the concepts of prostitution and trafficking in persons; the rejection of legal tolerance to prostitution and the compromise to criminalise it; and, also, it considers anyone involved in prostitution as a victim (PISCITELLI, 2012, p. 21)

⁶ In Daniel HoSang's and Priscilla Yamin's analysis on the Californian context of sex trafficking and violence, they call attention to the short number of trafficking victims and offenders identified by law enforcement, in contradiction to the expectations of anti-trafficking activists after the dramatic increase in anti-trafficking efforts with the Trafficking Victims Violence Prevention Act of 2000 (HOSANG and YAMIN, 2016, p. 393).

of data (even though statistic numbers are still largely used by scholars trying to describe the scope of the problem).

Different researchers and militants, concentrated mainly in the global north, organised in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) or the European Union (EU) (ARADAU, 2008), tried to pin down the truth on sex trafficking and the global sex trade. It is in this well known context that the broadly cited split between feminists — between those who see prostitution as sexual slavery and those who see it as labour — takes place.

My intent is to analyse overlaps between local discourses and abolitionist views: anti-prostitution (and anti-trafficking) works and efforts such as Kathleen Barry's contribution (1995, 1997) along with the Coalition against trafficking in women (CATW), as well as Catherine MacKinnon's (1993). These works seem in line with the (surprising) alliances between abolitionist feminists and evangelical militants, all of them with an approach that deems prostitution to be degrading to women. This position considers prostitution and sex trafficking as the same phenomenon, the only difference being that the last one involves crossing borders. Prostitution, therefore, can only be part of and result of a continuum of violence: from violence inscribed in social and economic structures to actual physical violence (ARADAU, 2008, p. 30).

This line of argument is largely criticised for denying any agency and self-determination to women; it considers prostitution as an expression of women's subservient roles, their inferior social and political status. My intention, however, is neither to reduce it to "one monolithic explanation of violence to women" through abolitionist arguments (KEMPADOO, 2001, p. 28). Adopting an argument in line with the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW)⁷ also shows itself unsatisfactory, in different ways, when looking at it from a Third World perspective. As I argue, both solutions to the question of prostitution rely on the state as the guarantor, but what remains unanswered is: what is the relationship prostitutes can have to a State and a society marked by certain racial and sexual conceptions and stigmas impose on prostitutes? How can

⁷ See at: <http://www.gaatw.org/>

we understand their agency when they are embedded in such a marginalised context?

Prostitution is, according to Larissa Pelúcio (2005), usually understood (by travesti sex workers) in an overlap and dialogue between: (a) a discrediting and degrading activity, with which they would only engage out of necessity, and would leave it as soon as possible; (b) as a way of ascending socially and achieving material and symbolic conquests; or (c) as work, as a form of generating income and as a sociability site (PELUCIO, 2005, p. 223).

Bringing travesti's experiences to this work is not a random act. First of all, their existence and subjectivity, in their multiple experiences, is challenging in several ways: challenging universalistic answers to patriarchal domination of *women*, to prostitution and victimhood; as well as opening the possibility of questioning binaries upon which our knowledge about the "man" and the State are built; and undermining the very category of *woman*, which shows the fragility of gender norms and puts into question the reach of the feminist political project, as it is proposed in Butler's work (2016). Their marginal resistance to norms of both sexuality and race is a queer questioning of our model of modern society.

With this very basic schema in mind, it is possible to begin to comprehend how multiple and contradictory are these transgendered experiences of prostitution (and of gender performances). As Berenice Bento affirms (and I argue in the present work), the generalised heterosexism in feminist theories made it unable to listen to voices oppressed by another kind of exclusion — that of divergent sexualities and bodies (BENTO, 2006). I consider how bodies of travestis, in violating rules that define what it is to be a man or what it is to be a woman, put discourses in dispute: when discourses try to dissipate ambiguities, (travesti) prostitutes' voices are silenced.

My intention is, in this sense, precisely to keep contradictions and ambiguities alive. In this sense, denaturalising accounts of individual subjectivity as to analyse relations of force, violence and language that compose (our) bodies, especially ones deemed abnormal, will provide a background to analyse agency further in this work. This will be done by looking at how the reproduction and challenging of norms by these marginalised bodies perfect and/or subvert

conceptions which are deemed *natural* — and, with this move, show its artificiality.

2.1. Notes on trafficking of Brazilian travestis for sexual exploitation

According to the Palermo Protocol of 2000, or the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime⁸, to which Brazil ratified, trafficking in persons:

"shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs." (2000)

Brazil's present legislation was adapted in accordance to the ratification of the Palermo Protocol (*Plano Nacional e Política Nacional de Enfrentamento ao Tráfico de Pessoas, decreto nº 5.948, de 26/10/2006⁹ e decreto nº 6.347, de 8 de janeiro de 2008¹⁰*). It is necessary to highlight, however, that it does not expressly consider a vulnerability of LGBTTTQI¹¹ community to such crimes (SMITH, 2012), as it does delineate when mentioning "women and children".

⁸ Content available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx>

⁹ Content available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2004-2006/2006/Decreto/D5948.htm

¹⁰ Content available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_Ato2007-2010/2008/Decreto/D6347.htm

¹¹ LGBTTTQI: lesbians, gays, bissexuals, transexuals, transgender, queer, intersexuals

Considering the widespread marginalisation and criminalisation of trans people in Brazil, due to sexual, racial and class factors — due to the unacceptability of their bodies — two conditions, in general terms, call attention when considering LGBTTTQI vulnerability to sexual exploitation by third parties: the common picture of instability and rejection at household environment, and the discrimination at the work market. According to the NGO *Associação Brasileira de Lésbicas, Bissexuais, Travestis e Transsexuais* (ABGLT), 90% of the trans population in Brazil is engaged in prostitution¹².

It is important to differentiate, however, the terms of exploitation and the terms of trafficking: the fine line that separates them seem more like a question of the lenses through which the question is seen and interpreted. In addition, as mentioned above, even though there's a clear connection between migration and sex work, the numbers still seem (or always) very inaccurate to balance the situation (PELÚCIO, 2010). For example, the absence of specific notification as *transfeminicide* when travestis and transsexuals are murdered make it even more difficult to map out the motivation of crimes and the circumstances of them. Estimates, many times, are based upon media information and denunciation on social networks (BENTO, 2016; CARVALHO e CARRARA, 2015).

Several cases broadly publicized by the media of trafficked *trans* people report networks that alienate people from the North and Northeast regions of the country (Pará, Amazonas, Ceará) and traffic them to be exploited at the South East (São Paulo)¹³. But these news seem somewhat rare in comparison to cases of those who *willingly* left their home towns to cities like São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília, or to Europe (Spain, Italy, Portugal¹⁴) as did trans activists like Amara Moira (MOIRA, 2016), and others. It is essential to remind, however, that leaving willingly, or migrating willingly, does not exclude the violence to which they are subjected to in their daily lives.

¹² Content available at: <http://www.abglt.com.br>

¹³ See more at: <http://cgn.uol.com.br/noticia/92091/acusada-de-explorar-travestis-segue-presa> ; <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/sorocaba-jundiai/noticia/2013/07/cpi-ouve-travesti-que-comandava-rede-de-exploracao-sexual-em-jundiai.html> ; <http://diariodonordeste.verdesmares.com.br/cadernos/cidade/travestis-na-mira-do-traffic-de-pessoas-em-fortaleza-1.267255> ;

¹⁴ I take this into consideration departing from my personal contact with *travestis* in Rio during the execution of this work.

Since the 1970s (KULICK, 1998), the flows of Brazilian travestis to Europe¹⁵ have been increasing, and this route usually means conquering significant changes in their lives and bodies: "*a 'transformação' como projeto permanente de feminilização, vincula-se inextricavelmente à mobilidade como processo constituinte das travestilidades*"¹⁶ (PELÚCIO, 2010). Travelling to Europe, becoming *Europeia*¹⁷, comes from the ideal of being beautiful and feminine, fine and sophisticated, being a diva instead of a "viado de peito"¹⁸, as Pelúcio suggests. Going to Europe is the biggest dream of many travestis, as it means living an experience that would otherwise be impossible to Third World inhabitants, even if they recognise there's still stigma and prejudice around migrants, and, especially, prostitutes, the risk (and the price they pay for it) seems worth it. Marguinha Minelli, a travesti who lived and worked in Paris, reports that, still, in Europe, men respect travestis and liked her a lot more "as woman", something she says would be unthinkable in Brazil (PELÚCIO, 2005, p. 242).

Still, the focus usually given by national media to travestis' trips to Europe remains on human trafficking and imprisonment (PELÚCIO, 2005): a focus on their non-agency, on their *unwillingness* to migrate, which emphasizes and reiterates their invisibility based upon fragile data and common sense. These discourses, of course, do not place them as the ideal *victim* of traffic, but in a space between victimhood and threat. While women and children are frequently pictured as a victimised category, vulnerable to threats and dangers and demanding of protection, travestis oscillate between being potentially dangerous (and also as perpetrators of trafficking in persons and prostitution, which they sometimes are), and being victims.

The colonialist focus international discussion has on the matter of trafficking in persons is marked by an obsession with irregular migrants, particularly those originating from poor countries (PISCITELLI apud PELÚCIO, 2010, p. 894). In this frame, class, nationality, race, and gender (and, especially, non-normative sexual behaviour) are contributing factors to the construction of

¹⁵ Larissa Pelúcio (2005) indicates that in 1980s, Paris was the most desired destination. In the 2000s, however, Italy and the South of Europe became more disputed regions.

¹⁶ "The 'transformation' as a permanent project of feminilisation is inextricably linked to the mobility, as a constitutive process of travestility itself".

¹⁷ "European". Slang commonly used between travestis to refer to those who go to Europe to work.

¹⁸ "fag with breasts".

otherness of these migrants. This *otherness* is enhanced by the frequent invisibility of transgender people's desires to migrate and work at the sex industry, in a "victimising discourse known as trafficking" (AGUSTÍN, 1988, p. 7). I reiterate, however, that this does not mean cases of trafficking (or exploitation, especially) do not exist — only that harsh laws against trafficking often exacerbate the plight of these sex workers. As Pelúcio states it, travesti prostitution in Europe is not fed by trafficking in human beings, but by the material and symbolic oppression that circumscribe them, making their access to education and work more difficult, and compromising their projects of transformation and insertion outside of the sphere of prostitution (PELÚCIO, 2005, p. 243).

With this in mind, my aim is not to take as a premise that prostitution is always and intrinsically violent and exploitative, but *why* and *how* is it so, and why discourses related to prostitution and transgenderism bring a rhetoric of heroism against "people whose activities are considered deviant" (AGUSTÍN, 1988, p. 7).

2.2. Abolishing prostitution of women's sexuality?

"Do ponto de vista do conservadorismo radical (movimento mais conhecido como radcon), é um absurdo alguém defender que mulheres possam vender prazer a um homem, negociar esse prazer, pôr a ele um preço. Dar lucro a um patrão, ok, submeter-se a péssimas condições de trabalho, ok, mas vender prazer e ainda ousar saciar esse prazer, isso nunca! (...) Para o radcon, a prostituta será sempre vítima, sempre 'explorada' pelo homem perverso vulgo seu cliente. (...) Sento, laminto e choro, mas prefiro dar voz à nós prostitutas, ouvir nossas próprias histórias e demandas, lutar para que tenhamos plenas condições de escolher o caminho que quisermos, seguir a prostituição sendo um deles. Ninguém aqui acredita, em sã consciência, que viverá para ver o fim da prostituição. O mais urgente, portanto, é lutar por melhores condições para que

*essas que estão na atividade possam exercê-la em segurança, melhor remuneradas, sem o peso do estigma*¹⁹". (MOIRA, 2016, p. 58).

I introduced the discussion on trafficking and prostitution to arrive at the main point of this chapter, which is to question if prostitution is *necessarily* a violence, and to bring on travesti's dissident sexualities as an abject subjectivity that challenges present discourses and solutions to the global sex trade. My aim is to understand how these discourses are heteronormative in such a way that it needs to produce an *otherness* (otherness that is still within these regulations) of deviant sexual behaviours to establish itself hierarchically and limit the borders of a feminist (female-based) project.

I will work with the abolitionist logic based mainly on the classic approaches by Kathleen Barry (1995, 1997) and Catherine MacKinnon (1991, 1993, 2009) and their interconnection with present abolitionist discourses in Brazil. It seemed important, first of all, to quote Kathleen Barry's work, as it is broadly cited as a reference to abolitionist views and it understands prostitution as a (gendered) human rights violation, as sex would be "an integral dimension of the human being that is to be accorded the respect, dignity and rights inherent in being human"²⁰ (BARRY, 1997, p. 29). Therefore, when sex is made into a commodity, sold and purchased, the human being is violated.

Once defined as an abuse of human rights, the abuses of sexuality are seen as a result of power structures, in systematic and institutional levels, that make them possible: when sex is used for financial or personal gains, it results in harm and dehumanisation. In this sense, once the actual harm is identified (in an

¹⁹ "From the radical conservadorism (radcon) point of view, it is absurd for someone defend women who may sell pleasure to a man, negotiate that pleasure, put a price to it. Give profit to a boss, ok, submit to terrible work conditions, ok, but sell pleasure and dare to enjoy it, never! (...) To the radcon, the prostitute will always be the victim, always 'explored' by the perverse man, also known as your client. (...) I sit, lament and cry, but I prefer to give voice to us prostitutes, listen to our own stories and demands, fight so that we can have full condition of choosing the path we want, following prostitution being one of them. Nobody here believes, in our own minds, that will live to see the end of prostitution. The most urgent, thus, is to fight for better conditions for those who are in the activity to be able to exercise it in safety, with better remuneration, without the weight of stigma.

²⁰ Barry states that this approach is compatible with the 1949 United Nations (UN) Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (BARRY, 1997, p. 43).

objective manner, according to the author) it does not matter if the victim declares consent or not, as they are distinct facts. While in rape or sexual harassment there is no consent, in prostitution and pornography there might be — still, in all cases, there is a harm to human dignity (besides being prejudicial to women's physical and mental health), and that is the objective fact about it. This would explain why activities as sex trafficking and prostitution can be merged into one category: both of them are a violation of human rights and women's integrity, no matter if the victim consents or not.

Barry (1997) affirms that trafficking in women, military prostitution and the mass marketing of sex are phenomena generated and made global by the normalisation of sexual exploitation, and producing the "prostitution of sexuality" as a model imported from the United States and other Western states. At a certain level, there is a social sanctioning of sexually exploitative measures over women's bodies, turning such practices acceptable, and making possible individualist explanations of women's agency and desire for the sex work industry (while they would actually be victims). She claims that abuses are reinforced by industries (such as the pornographic one) and technologies, actions which turn harm increasingly normalised. In this sense, these exploitative practices over human sexuality become *desire*, are made normal.

This process is what allows consumers of prostitution sex to be seen as normal, as they promote the *universal class condition* of women's sexual subordination through the impact of the global free market economy that makes anything merchandise. The normalisation of prostitution in the United States and Western post-industrial countries through the media and advertising, pornography and the promotion of teenage sex, according to Barry, makes "normal sex" more and more undifferentiated from prostitution sex, and spreads to newly-industrialised countries and helps the promotion of the sex industry and trafficking of women for brothels and forced marriage.

Not only that, as long as Western liberal and legalistic approaches continue to distinguish between free and forced prostitution, women's victimisation would be reiterated, and their perspectives for looking for help and therapy to rebuild their lives would become more distant. For example, while women who are

trafficked into a country for sexual exploitation are treated in a different manner from prostitutes who are already there, these last one's exploitation would become more legitimised and more and more normalised. For these reasons, Barry calls upon states to penalise all those involved in prostitute-related activities, denying any laws that legitimises prostitution of any person and any distinction between free or forced prostitution, or any attempt to legalise it as a profession.

Facing that, HoSang and Yamin (2016) have importantly noted the parallels between such abolitionist narratives and the widespread panics in the early twentieth century over "white slavery"²¹. In both cases, (white) female vulnerability is emphasised in contrast to the savagery and unrestrained sexuality of men (of colour) in order to justify 'rescue' initiatives. The response from the State to this vulnerability, according to them, is also gendered: the masculinist state must intervene through law enforcement in order to prevent these unrestrained men from committing such crimes against victimised women; while it should also provide the means for other (empowered and white) women to restore the wounds of these vulnerable women. These discourses, demanding and relying upon law enforcement to dismantle networks of sex work and providing support for "rescued" sex workers, help produce an ideal victim, a "mythical female subject of trafficking in women" (DOEZEMA apud HOSANG and YAMIN, 2016, p. 394), that is constructed precisely through sexual vulnerability. This victimised subject depends, therefore, on the heroic actions of abolitionist (white) females (and the State) to rescue them and bring them back to freedom.

The most obvious observation that comes to mind is: how to end this prostitution of sexuality if the State is, most times, the very agent of (political and physical) violence and perpetrator of the marginalisation of these bodies, be they migrants or not, and if law enforcement against prostitution seem to actually enhance prostitutes' marginalisation? When looking at travesti's experiences of sex work, not only is there lack of legal support to them, through the lack of acknowledgement of their gender identity in police reports²², for example; but,

²¹ In HoSang and Yamin's work, they analyse it facing the context of law enforcement in California, USA, through proposition 35.

²² Berenice Bento (2014) calls attention not only to lack of report of these crimes as gender-motivated, or the mere recognition of their gender, but also to the frequent use by the media of the masculine pronoun ("o") when talking about travestis. "O" travesti and not "a" travesti. Their

most importantly, the frequent cases of police violence against them, which is accompanied, most times, by legal impunity. One example (of the several) to quote here is present in Don Kulick's (1991) ethnography on the lives of travestis: the case of a policeman in Rio that was convicted, in 1994, by a court of military justice for killing a travesti with one shot on her face and two shots on her back. He was also under investigation for the death of other 5 travestis, who also had their genitals cut off. His sentence was reduced from twelve years to six because the victim was, according to the judge, engaged in a high-risk activity — therefore she was not taken by surprise. "Travestis working as street prostitutes, in other words, are asking for it, and no one should expect courts to unduly penalise a man just because he shoots travestis in the face" (KULICK, 1991, p. 30-31).

What seems to be underlying such narratives about 'rescuing' women in name of their human integrity is, in fact, a reiteration of the subject position of a Western feminist in contrast to the subject prostitute as a victim and silenced other. The Western feminist embodies, in this sense, a project of saving "other" women, assuming an inherently masculinist position of protector; in a binary where the protected are formed as necessarily without agency. Considering that, it makes no sense to "save" women so that they would be recognized as subjects, with agency, for this would undermine the very subjectivity of the Western feminist who saves them (PENTTINEN, 2008). Penttinen associates the reiteration of this binary with the results that prohibitive policies and law enforcement has in actually turning those engaged in prostitution more vulnerable, instead of the opposite (PENTTINEN, 2008, p. 18). In another interpretation, the rhetoric of "women saving *other* women" is constructed upon a progressive narrative that places those who save in an enlightened position, contrary to those

gender identities are not respected at the news about their death, at the preparation of the body, or at the death report. The murdered person is assigned an imposed gender. Alive or dead, bodies are understood and classified around the sex/gender system. It's crucial to reiterate how offensive this is for these individuals, independently of the will to go through surgery. On the occasion of the murder of Luiz Carlos Ruas, who died because of defending a travesti from two men in São Paulo last December 2016, travestis and transsexuals protested heavily on social media for the recurrent use of masculine pronouns by the media during the coverage of the events. This reflects their political fight for being treated, in all public instances, according to their preferred gender, as they adopt feminine names.

who need to be saved. In any way, this is still a masculinist move which places some women's knowledge as critical and superior²³.

It was, according to Adriana Piscitelli (2012), also during the 1990's that the heterogeneous debate on sex tourism and prostitution gained visibility in Brazil, in a moment which feminisms were under strong debate, gaining space in the political scenario of reformation of democratic institutions after the end of the military regime. In this scheme, readings of prostitution under a negative rhetoric gained attention, as it was more and more linked to sex tourism and international sex trafficking and new transnational feminist movements (against sexist violence, against poverty) also gained strength in the country (*Marcha das Vadias/ Slut Walk; Marcha Mundial das Mulheres*²⁴). Meanwhile, different prostitute organised groups, such as the *Rede Nacional de Prostitutas*²⁵ and the NGO *Davida*²⁶ and the *Federação Nacional das Trabalhadoras do Sexo*²⁷, and also the first political *travesti* organisations in Brazil, such as the *Associação de Travestis e Liberados do Rio de Janeiro* (ASTRAL), founded in 1992, and the *Associação Nacional de Travesti e Transexuais* (ANTRA), founded in 2000, marked their presence in proposing regulation and legalisation of prostitutes rights and, in the case of the last one, fought for the prevention of AIDS and other sexually transmitting diseases.

It is worthy to call attention to the part played by the *Marcha Mundial das Mulheres* (MMM) in Brazil, movement formed in 2000 and which is aligned with Marxist and abolitionist ideals (PISCITELLI, 2012). In 2016, before the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro and when lots of debate was generated around sex tourism and prostitution, the MMM in Rio launched a pamphlet: "offensive against the mercantilisation of women's bodies"²⁸. In this document, the realisation of events such as the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games are cited as capitalist and patriarchal strategies for the commercialisation and exploitation of

²³ This rhetoric is compatible with MacKinnon's (1991) feminist approach that will be described further in this chapter.

²⁴ Women's World March.

²⁵ See at: <http://www.redeprostitutas.org.br/>

²⁶ See at: <http://www.davida.org.br/> Both the *Rede Nacional de Prostitutas* and the NGO *Davida* were created by Gabriela Leite, a sex worker and feminist militant that got widely known in Brazil for her fight in favour of the regulation of prostitution.

²⁷ National Federation of Sex Workers

²⁸ Content available at: <http://www.marchamundialdasmulheres.org.br/>

women's bodies: at these moments, the exploitation and banalisation of women's bodies is enhanced and made conventional to the society, as women are put for sale and subjected to men's domination.

The offensive also declares the movement against the law project Gabriela Leite²⁹ proposed by congressman Jean Wyllys³⁰, stating that: it is against normalising, by the patriarchal capitalism, of a form of patriarchal sexuality, with the objective of augmenting the market and control over women's sexualities; it is against treating prostitution as a result of individual behaviour (and not part of an organised institution); and that it considers the argument of women's sexual freedom hypocritical, facing the androcentric character of sexuality.

Hence, regulating prostitution would mean legitimating the practice of prostitutes (which includes both those who promote it and men who consume it). The Marxist teleological view adopted by the *Marcha*, working for the end of violence against women and against the sexual division of labour, claims for the State to take action to put end at the violence and discrimination that women suffer in face of prostitution, and also demands retirement as a politics for those women who were subjected to such practices.

This brief representation is, of course, one out of many abolitionist approaches in the Brazilian context, less or more radical, institutionalised or not. These approaches are commonly associated to militants who identify themselves as *radfem*³¹ (and, sometimes, even as TERFs³²) (CARVALHO and CARRARA, 2015). These *radfem* discourses³³ have, many times, facing the growth of transsexual participation in feminist debates, with emphasis to the context of prostitution and HIV-prevention militancy, adopted a position which does not recognise the integration of transsexuals to the feminist movement (BENTO, 2006). Not only are they not considered "properly women", and therefore do not

²⁹ Law project proposing the regulation of prostitution and pimping in Brazil. Its aim is to extinguish sexual exploitation and limiting the profits of third parties over prostitutes' bodies. Content available at: http://www.camara.gov.br/proposicoesWeb/prop_mostrarintegra?codteor=1012829

³⁰ Jean Wyllys is a congressman from the leftist party PSOL (*Partido Socialismo e Liberdade*).

³¹ Radical Feminists.

³² Trans-exclusionary Radical Feminists

³³ Amara Moira (2016) cites *radcon*, as in the quotation at the beginning of this section: the commonality between these discourses is the positioning against prostitution. Besides that, discourses more or less excluding of transsexuals are also related to these approaches.

share the same vulnerabilities, they would be invading a feminine safe space and would also be threatening these women by pretending to be vulnerable. Any empathy towards them, consequently, would be some kind of betrayal — travestis and transsexuals destabilise the discourse of protection of women by women.

If, as Berenice Bento (2014) puts it, the feminine represents what is devalued socially, when this feminine is embodied by bodies that were born with a penis, there is an *overflow* of people's collective consciousness that is structured upon the belief that gender identities are an expression of hormones and chromosome arrangements. This *overflow*, or excess, means that there is no conceptual (or linguistic) apparatus that justifies and explains the existence of trans people: they are unintelligible.

These discourses against the participation of *trans* in feminist debates — and, by the same token, in debates about prostitution — construct transsexuality as an exclusive matter of sexuality, and not gender, and builds male homosexuality as based upon misogyny. Women would be, therefore, at the centre of male homosexuality, or, the reason why it was generated. As Butler (2011) signals in her analysis of *Paris is Burning*, understanding male-to-female transsexuality, cross-dressing, or drag as such would follow the same logic as affirming that a lesbian is as she is because she had a bad experiences with men, or has not yet found a proper man.

What is to be noticed in these discourses is that they understand *being a woman* as result of sexual harassment — and, therefore, becoming a woman depends precisely on heterosexuality. This movement inscribes heteronormativity at the heart of the radical feminist argument. The attempt is to delineate prostitution as a *gendered* violence, as sex inequality, because of the fact that "prostituted women and the transgendered are more likely to be physically or sexually assaulted than are men prostituting as men" (MACKINNON, 2009, p. 293). Instead of opening the possibility for women's liberation through the investigation of the male point of view that creates the world in its own image (MACKINNON, 1991, p. 118), it reinforces this very logic to which they are trying to escape.

The reason why, therefore, prostitution is unacceptable in a radical feminist approach, in line with Catherine MacKinnon's (1991) work, is because prostitution, as well as rape, incest, sexual harassment and pornography are not only abuses of physical force and violence, but because they are abuses of women, and abuses of, most importantly, *sex*. It is through these practices that sex inequality is instantiated. Contradicting pro-sex work approaches, MacKinnon affirms that even though women *may* choose to prostitute themselves, they would be doing it out of lack of choice:

"The coercion behind it, physical and otherwise, produces an economic sector of sexual abuse, the lion's share of the profits of which goes to others. In these transactions, the money coerces the sex rather than guaranteeing consent to it, making prostitution a practice of serial rape. In this analysis, there is, and can be, nothing equal about it. Prostituted people pay for paid sex. The buyers do not pay for what they take or get. It is this, not its illegality, that largely accounts for prostitution's stigma" (MACKINNON, 2009, p. 274).

MacKinnon (2009) points that the structure of prostitution derives from colonialism and, therefore, poverty, abuse and stigma are congenital characteristics of those who are *prostituted*. By the same token, the reason why there is mostly women and transgender engaged in it is exactly because it is, as I mentioned above, a gendered violence. This is based upon a view that sustain that gender is basically the process through which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings that exist for men, and specifically for male sexual use.

To become a woman, in this sense, depends on this violence to which women are subjected to by men — femininity depends on masculinity to exist. First sexual (heterosexual) intercourse is a commonly definitive experience of gender definition (MACKINNON, 1991, p. 111), for male dominance is sexual. In agreement with that, the question is not if prostitution is consented to by the parties involved or not, or if it is legal or illegal (it should be illegal, to this approach), but that these practices are largely permitted: "as women's experiences blurs the lines between deviance and normalcy, it obliterates the distinction

between abuses of women and the social definition of what a woman is" (MACKINNON, 1991, p. 113).

This move, instead of creating a possibility for women's resistance through a critical view towards "male knowledge and objectivity", or through lesbianism³⁴, reiterates heterosexuality as *the* primary form of sexuality. And gender, thereafter, is the concealed effect of these heterosexual relations. In this logic, the feminine gender is always in a submissive condition to the dominant masculine gender; and, in this framework, sex inequality configures itself.

MacKinnon maintains that there is no possibility of gender outside of this form of this subordinating and exploitative form of sexuality. But, taking on Judith Butler's questioning, can we conceive of the inequality of sexualisation without a prior conception of gender, without an idea of what men and women are (BUTLER, 2004, p. 53)?

Butler (2004) claims that in proposing such a systemic character of sexual subordination, like in MacKinnon, that would demand a regulation of sexual abuses, another kind of *regulation* is instituted:

"(...) to have a gender means to have entered already into a heterosexual relationship of subordination; there appear to be no gendered people who are outside of such relationships; there appear to be no nonsubordinating heterosexual relations; there appear to be no nonheterosexual relations; there appears to be no same-sex harassment" (BUTLER, 2004, p. 54).

Hence, in MacKinnon's approach, certain expressions of gender are privileged in spite of others, and sexual harassment becomes the allegory of the production of gender. What remains unanswered, however, is how gender itself is regulated, producing masculine men and feminine women and continuously excluding other expressions outside of this binary. The subordination of women by men is, therefore, part of a larger social practice that creates gendered bodies — and specific gendered embodiments are prioritised by such discourses.

³⁴ According to MacKinnon (1991), feminism provides the epistemology of which lesbianism is an ontology.

Looking at this general framework of abolitionist views on prostitution, some conclusions should be taken into account: When proposing, by this logic, the prohibition of prostitution and related practices, aiming to diminish abuse women suffer, certain tacit norms of gender are carried on implicitly, and gender itself becomes a regulatory means for the production and maintenance of gender norms (BUTLER, 2004). Thus, certain ways of being women are privileged and reiterated: the vulnerable female victim that exists to the extent that threatening men harass her. Instead of ending stigma around prostitutions, it ends up reiterating it. Once you establish that femininity exists only in terms of masculinity, the possibility of agency and resistance to this system is undermined — prostitutes cannot speak for themselves because they are victims of this patriarchal structure.

This argumentation inherits a tradition in feminist studies that deem women's subordination to be universal, inheriting from authors such as Simone de Beauvoir (2009). This finding of commonalities, at a first moment, seemed like a necessary movement in face of political necessity in order to build a collective identity. However, as Bento (2006) puts it, the dangers of this conception are in an essentialisation of identities as well as victimisation of women, imprisoning feminist critical thought to a conceptual structure marked by an universal opposition to sex. As women's interests are pictured as inferior due to a biological condition, universal positions are reinforced, and gender parts are essentialised as identities of *men* and *women* are fixed. Gender, in this perspective, can be denaturalised, but it fails to be dessentialised: in an effort to understand "normal women" and find a common basis between them, a normalisation strategy is employed. Such a strategy is marked by certain class (colonial) class conceptions and prejudices which blinds itself to its own processes of normalisation (BENTO, 2006, p. 80).

Therefore, it is necessary to recognise the ontological insufficiency of the term *woman* in order to use it strategically for a political demand, instead of reinforcing a supposedly natural essence of being female. As Haraway would argue: "there is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices" (HARAWAY, 1991, p. 155).

By defending regulations in order to abolish prostitution, parameters of personhood are reiterated and this opens space for social punishment upon transgressors of these gender norms. It seems like there is an underlying *regime of bodies*, in Nestor Perlongher's³⁵ (1987) terms: as (transgendered) individuals use their body parts in practices that are not those prescribed by this matrix of power, they seem to threaten this well-sedimented structure upon which radical feminists build their theorisation. Being "male" and being vulnerable would be incompatible, being sometimes vulnerable and sometimes not, even more so. It would also be in place to think about how this prescribes acceptable behaviours for women: adopting a *dominant*, agential position would be incompatible for prostitutes or (trafficking victims); claiming for the right to exercise an activity deemed prejudicial to their *bodies*, too.

Transgendered individuals, travestis, in prostitution challenge these disciplinary regimes first by claiming agency in a position that would be reserved to victims; second, because of their ambivalent resistance and reiteration of norms, also being subject to a vulnerability even though they are "males" in "biological terms"; and third, because this gendered vulnerability is not one that is created upon a heterosexual relation.

The solution to contain this gendered violence that keeps so largely permitted, through the global sex trade and pornography industry, according to an abolitionist approach, relies entirely within state violence and incapacitation of prostitution agents. So, the State should rescue vulnerable women and girls and punish their violators in order to assert its moral and ethical legitimacy (HOSANG and YAMIN, 2016). Curiously, pro-sex work scholarship and activists³⁶ also rely on the State as the guarantor of prostitute's rights, and as responsible for stopping abuse at the sex industry (such as in trafficking and exploitation), but their

³⁵ Nestor Perlongher, in his visionary and illuminating ethnographic-queer work on the prostitution of men (*michês*) in São Paulo in the 1980s, mentions a regime of bodies concerning official recommendations about AIDS during the boom of the disease at the time. Analysing the recommendation, he argued that there was a certain hierarchical organisation of the bodies, enumerating them according to their proper function: the moth to eat, the penis for the vagina, etc. Alternative uses for bodies were considered unnecessary, especially when considering anal coitus (PERLONGHER, 1987; PELÚCIO, 2014).

³⁶ As mentioned above, in Brazil, cis and trans prostitutes articulate to defend their rights. Prostitution is not prohibited according to local legislation, but it is not regulated and recognised as a profession.

reliance on the state is articulated through legalisation³⁷. It would seem necessary to propose a deeper investigation upon how the feminist subject here referred to is also constructed discursively by the political system it is trying to overcome. Therefore, as Butler (2016) suggests, an acritical claim to this system in the name of emancipation of women would be doomed to failure. Besides, on a queer perspective, it may be precisely the strength of disidentification, and embracing of difference, that is crucial for democratic contestation.

The "voluntary prostitute", though, is continuously referred to as a white (Western) sex worker endowed with agency, while poor, black, (cis or trans) women at sites of marginalisation are still pictured as victims who need *saving*. As pro-sex workers movements present prostitution as a choice and defend sex work profitability, their argument is in no way counter-hegemonic or radical. They are not a form a resistance since they reproduce a neoliberal governmentality, defending principles of marketisation and consumerism by claiming their personal right to commodify their bodies. This takes place, however, through a delineation of a category of sex worker in a exclusionary manner. A real prostitute would be one who willingly chose to be so, and not someone who prostitute her/himself in order to buy drugs due to an addiction or out of necessity because of a irregular migration status, etc. Anyhow, the point is that this differentiation between real sex workers and drug addicts, or trafficked women, or ethnic others opens space for an *othering*, reinforcing the silence of vulnerable and abjected bodies (PENTINNEN, 2008).

In any way, it still seems like the agency of black (cis and trans) women in prostitution are continuously overlooked, as Kamala Kempadoo (2001) proposes, and even when looking at discourses produced at "this side of the Equator", this logic (of rescuing and saving) seems to reproduce itself. The reiteration of such binaries, reproducing truths and hierarchies resulting from a Western epistemology, reaffirms our (latin) condition of subalternity and recreates a logic of naturalisation of differences in the local context (MIGNOLO apud PELÚCIO, 2014). We carry on historical and cultural marks of the discourses that produce ourselves as peripheral. Perceiving how our colonisation is also an

³⁷ I intend to rely on the discussion on rights and legalisation and its contradictions on future work.

epistemological one in order to perceive both sides of a binary (cis and trans, for example) as product of the same system of power is a crucial step in order to exceed the limitations of present discourses, discourses which reproduce a global sex-race-capital system³⁸ (of regulation).

As much as we see progress in human rights, progress in the legislation for trans people's rights³⁹, progress due to the militancy of sex workers in favour of rights of prostitutes, it is necessary to question what the effect of law enforcement *actually* is. But if the law is evoked in name of a racial elite and not for a racial minority, or if the law privileged a group of women in spite of trans women, it is possible to map yet another system of power that works through this law. The question becomes, thus, if it is possible to work against this effect of the law and its regimes of power, and, therefore, how to exceed it.

³⁸ Term first cited by Beatriz Preciado, and quoted by Larissa Pelúcio (2014) on her work on queer translations and torsions to Brazil.

³⁹ In 2016, President Dilma Rousseff signed the social name law, making it a right for travestis and transsexuals to change their documents independently of medical authorisation. Content available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_Ato2015-2018/2016/Decreto/D8727.htm

3. "Ora Lixo Abjeto, Ora Objeto Sexual"⁴⁰

"Vinte nove anos vivendo como homem, mais especificamente o homenzinho padrão, branco, nada afeminado, lido como hétero mesmo sendo bi, classe média, e foi só transicionar e passar a ser lida como travesti pra viver minha primeira experiência de violência sexual. Eu, que me achava poderosa, em condições de peitar quem quer que fosse por conta da criação que tive, não dei conta de evitar que o cliente me forçasse a seguir com o programa mesmo depois de ele ter me machucado, mesmo depois de eu sem vontade alguma, eu sentindo as dores não só físicas, mas também as de não conseguir dizer não. Sinalizar sofrimento não foi o bastante para evitar que ele continuasse e, na verdade, hoje me parece até que ele se excitou mais em imaginar que, com seu pau, conseguiu machucar uma profissional do sexo"⁴¹ (MOIRA, 2016, p. 58).

In this chapter, motivated by a curiosity upon the possibility of agency in prostitution that exceeds present discourses, I read the subjectivation process of travestis as a resistant and subversive one. Besides that, I carry on arguments such as Pelúcio's (2005) to argue that it is through prostitution, in an unstable relationship to it, that travestis constitute themselves as subjects. It is essential to remind, as I mentioned previously, that travestis experiences and aesthetics is *not* a monolithic one: it is impossible to try to speak, at any moment, in a generalised way about their experiences. Different ethnographic works (KULICK, 1998; SILVA, 2007; BENEDETTI, 2005; BENTO, 2006; PELÚCIO, 2005) which inspired and oriented my work reaffirm that in several ways. Queering an analysis of travesti prostitutes means focusing on the multiplicity of bodies of travestis,

⁴⁰ "Sometimes abject trash, sometimes object of desire". This quote was taken from Amara Moira's protest on social networks against the offenses she suffered for using the women's toilet at UniCamp (*Universidade de Campinas*), where she is a PhD student. (CARVALHO and CARRARA, 2015).

⁴¹ "Twenty nine years living as a man, more specifically the standard 'little man', white, not effeminate at all, read as a straight even though I was bi, middle class, and it was just to start the transition and start being read as a travesti to live my first experience of sexual violence. Me, who thought myself to be so powerful, in conditions to face whoever it was because of the way I was raised, I could not avoid the client that was forcing to go on, even after he had hurt me, even after I had no desire of that anymore, feeling not only physical pain, but also the pain of not being able to say no. Signalling that I was suffering was not enough to stop him from going on and, actually, today it seems to me like he was even more excited in imagining that, with his dick, he could hurt a sex worker" (MOIRA, 2016, p. 58).

drags, trans, gays, lesbians, etc. To that end, it is not the "safety of the operated body" (PEREIRA, 2012, p. 373) that interests me here, but the bodies that do not conform. Their bodies, performances, surgeries, sexual practices, desires, are unstable, appointing precisely to the precariousness of the norms that oppress and produce them.

I take, as a point of departure, that present discourses on the regulation of prostitution are entangled in a vertical North-to-South logic that undertheorises agency and the possibility of resistance and subversion, as discussed in the last chapter with the prohibitionist logic adopted, for example, by the *Marcha Mundial das Mulheres*. I consider, therefore, Lauren Wilcox's (2015) argument that this movement, in International Relations, an inheritance from Western rationalist social sciences that considers bodies as exogenously produced and not as political sites. This is not only a limiting movement, but it also reinforces certain *regulations*, in a foucauldian sense, that limit the field to certain patterns of gender and sexuality.

In a discipline that inherits a Hobbesian notions of State, the boundaries of the human body are associated also to the boundaries of a political community — metaphors of threats as illness, contagiousness and existential threats are naturalised in order to protect a *single* voiced body politic (WILCOX, 2015, p. 19). Also, a Cartesian inheritance of the relationship between mind and body establishing rational, autonomous and sovereign individuals reiterates binaries that excludes the subjectivity of bodies that do not conform to a standard (white, bourgeois, heterosexual, cis-man).

*Travestilidades*⁴² are here considered as a possibility of questioning this basis of the discipline that mirrors itself upon an universal human nature to understand the behaviour of States: deconstructing (hierarchical) binaries, politicising sexuality and considering the ontological precariousness of bodies (BUTLER, 2004, 2016) are queering moves that go against the IR metaphysical tradition.

⁴² A term proposed by William Peres (2012) to speak about processes of *travestilização* ("*travestilisation*") on the basis that travestis do not stand upon one single model of sexuality and gender in order to exist and exercise their subjectivity.

Travestis constitute themselves as subjects in an oscillation between discourses and norms which discipline their bodies and regulate their pleasures, in a process of subjection that inaugurates new possibilities of aesthetics of existence (PERES, 2012). Their bodily expressions outside of the binary sex/gender system are challenging ones, but this does not mean that they are completely excluded from an order of discourses that constitutes a heteronormative and phallogocentric logic. On the contrary, travestis reiterate these models in their social, affective, sexual practices.

Pelúcio (2005) and Peres (2012) present travestis as inhabiting a zone of abjection, as Pentinnen (2008) does consider for prostitutes in her analysis. Abject beings, according to Butler (2011), are those who are not yet "subjects", but who form a constitutive outside of the domain of the subject. The abject, therefore, exists in precisely those unliveable and uninhabitable zones of social life, zones which are nevertheless densely populated. Without the abjected outside, then, the subject cannot constitute itself; therefore, the abject is an constitutive *inside* of the subject that allows it to found itself in a move of repudiation. These exclusionary operations are necessary for the subject formation, through the repudiation of all that is unspeakable, unsignifiable, and unintelligible.

Still, the domain of abjection and abnormality is not the opposite of the subject, it is, "after all, part of intelligibility; the latter [abjection] is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside" (BUTLER, 2011, p. xiii). Neither is abjection determined to perpetual failure. In fact, abjected persons' existence is a critical resource that opens possibility of rearticulating legitimacy and intelligibility, to renegotiate its borders and subvert them.

Travestis' expressions outside of the sex/gender correspondence system tends to be treated as criminal, sinful, abnormal, or perverse, thus, abject. Their lack of intelligibility under existing norms turn them into bodies continuously susceptible to exclusion and violence, into bodies that do not matter. But, as Pelúcio reminds us, they do matter. After all, the abjected needs to be there, even if at a hygienic distance, to demarcate the borders of normality (PELÚCIO apud PERES, p. 541). This demands, therefore, understanding how violence is not only

exercised upon their bodies, but is also constitutive of them — understanding how bodies are killed and violated but also formed, gendered, and racialised through political violence.

The intent is to show how the gender and sexual expression of travestis demonstrate the artificiality and incoherence of the current identity models, of heteronormativity and discourses deriving from it. This does not exclude the fact that the construction of abjected subjects is marked and regulated by discourses of power. As Kulick (1998) argues, travestis subvert the norm that poses that biological sex defines gender. On the other hand, they reinforce binaries when valorising several moral principles that define and designates what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman.

In the drag ball of *Paris is Burning*, analysed by Butler, she argues that we can witness and produce the phantasmatic constitution of a subject, "who repeats and mimes the legitimating norms by which itself has been degraded" (BUTLER, 2011, p. 89). I would like to emphasise, though, that Butler's drag⁴³ is not the same as a third world queer — if we can even use *queer* in a Brazilian context. First, I would like to reinforce that transsexual/transgender and *drag* are not the same. According to Bento (2006), drag does not reclaim an identity for their gender, only the legitimacy of transits, including bodily ones, between genders. Drag performances are disconnected from a biological reference, they are femininities without "women", or, in the case of drag king, masculinities without "men".

Second, *queer* is not directly translatable as its theorisations are also not. Used in a generalised way, without carefulness to look at the specificities of different experiences, would end up blurring the differences, instead of demarcating them (PEREIRA, 2012). The possibilities of appropriation, of antropophagy (PELÚCIO, 2014), of queer theory at the tropics⁴⁴, are numerous and opened, but demand a constant exercise of reflection over the specificity of social and historical context that produces *other* kinds of subjectivities.

⁴³ Even though some participants of the ball circuit undergo medicalised gender transition, Paris is Burning drag does not immediately translate into the Brazilian context.

⁴⁴ Queer studies arrived in Brazil through universities, and not social movements. Still, at the academic environment, queer theory became eminently a space of political fight (PELÚCIO, 2014).

So, I reiterate how the "category" of travestis is one marked not only a sexualised and racialised one, but also marked by class. This is shown by Berenice Bento (2006) when she appoints for the construction of the "official transsexual", the one based upon the production of a scientific, medical, knowledge that is separated from travestis, gays and lesbians. These *real* (or would it be ideal?) transsexuals are then determined not to have any "biological problem" because, after severe medical and psychoanalytical evaluation, they would be sure of being at the wrong body. Therefore, corrective surgery would be the only possibility for them to make sense of their identity.

Bento argues, then, that the creation of a medical knowledge (which is, in the end, a pathologisation) which defines an *universal* category of transsexual is done in opposition to these other crooked, non-ideal bodies that either do not wish or do not have the resources to achieve an ideal stage of transition. This is done in a move that disregards the historical and cultural constitution of their existence, depoliticising the experiences of transsexuality and concealing the power articulations behind this category.

This universal category is dismantled by different narratives of subjects that define themselves as transsexuals but find other answers to their conflicts of body, subjectivity, gender and sexuality; in identifications that do not conform to universal medical truths. In other words, their transsexuality is not necessarily based upon a hate⁴⁵ of their bodies, as in the specific case of many travestis who do not want to go through surgery. Once more, this does not compromise their identification as trans women.

The point is that travestis at sites of subalternity — as, for example, Cida, in Pereira's (2012) analysis⁴⁶ — who was 44 years old and living for 3 years at a shelter at the periphery of Brasília. She was originally from a small town in Minas Gerais, which she had to flee as soon as the hormones started to work on her body (applied by her doctor who abused her several times, according to her reports).

⁴⁵ Even though not all characterisations of transsexuality are build upon hatred over one's body, as in Salamon's (2010) analysis where she presents transsexuals who claim to feel like they are in the wrong body, I refer to hate over one's body according to Berenice Bento's (2006) analysis of medical discourses on "real transsexuality" in Brazil. In her ethnographic work, she claims that this hatred over one's body was one of the prerequisites analysed by psychiatrists in order to authorise sex change surgery.

⁴⁶ The author conducted his ethnographic work in 1998.

She moved to Belo Horizonte, then to Italy and Spain, where she worked as a prostitute and, at some point, contracted AIDS. Still, according to Pereira, she carried the strong accent from her hometown and affirmed she was never good with languages. As her body deteriorated because of the disease, and the effects of the hormones once applied on her faded away, she escaped the shelter weekly to attend Umbanda rituals. She could rebuild her body at the *batuque*. She was the daughter of Iansã, an orixá who was originally a man and then became a woman, who had masculine determination and denied maternity. Pereira argues that she found justification to her own femininity and sexuality by consecrating herself to a feminine saint. Orixás, exús, all of them were accessed by travestis to think of their body transformations and desires. Afro-brazilian religions, as the xangô, allow a resignification of kinship, of personality, gender and sexuality, and displaces matrimony from its centrality at the social structure: because of the treatment given to the masculine and feminine parts of the orixás; because of the critical view over maternity; because of the importance of the *família de santo*⁴⁷; because of the bissexuality of most members of the cult (PEREIRA, 2012, p. 385).

Cida most certainly does not follow the same pattern of transsexuality as Beatriz Preciado's (2016), for example, who speak three languages and wrote several books, who dominates philosophy and manipulates testosterone on her body with precision (PEREIRA, 2012). Not so far away, neither is Cida like transgenders who I've met, or who I'm friends with, that live at the richer areas of Brasília. This does not exclude, of course, the transphobia and violence to which these last ones are subjected to on a daily basis. My intention is simply to emphasise how a universal theorisation of transsexuality and queerness is inefficient, and even dangerous. Dangerous because it does not take into account different possibilities and levels of subalternity, and might end up reinforcing marginalisation of *other* experiences.

It is people like Cida, in fact, that delineate this borderline of abjection in Brazilian society, configuring a marginal subjectivity, and inhabiting Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) *frontera*, which carries an emotional residue of an unnatural

⁴⁷ "Saint family" would be a similar translation. A family that you are part of according to your orixá.

limit. The task is, therefore, to think how these borders are constituted and fixed as dangerous places inhabited by these prohibited individuals. In Anzaldúa's words: "the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (ANZALDUA, 1987, p. 3). In this scope, looking at these borderlines and those who inhabit it can bring an insight on how subjection is constituted. As Kulick (1998) proposed, travestis elaborate particular configurations of sexuality, gender and sex that crystallise Brazilian notions of what it is to be a man or a woman. Through this crystallisation, these abjected bodies can constitute themselves as subjects, through prostitution, for example, or through Afro-Brazilian religions, as in Cida's case.

3.1. On Embodiment

As the present work is inspired by a butlerian approach to sexuality that denaturalises the sex/gender system and depathologises *trans*, some observations seem to be in place. As she claimed that there is no sex without sociability, and, looking at the *drag*, gender can be understood as a performance (BUTLER, 2016), my intention is not to picture a "willful and instrumental subject" that Butler already countered at later work (BUTLER, 2011), but to understand how this subject is produced through these performances.

In this sense, gender cannot be approached as something we can decide on, but rather as something that decides on us. Gender is a regulatory ideal, constructed through relations of power and normative constraints that permit intelligibility to our (socially) sexed bodies. Not only are sex and gender deeply intertwined, as gender designates the very apparatus through which sex is established, a notion of gender that focus exclusively on the agency of the individual overlooks the matrix of power in which gender takes shape. And, it is precisely the continuous reiteration and repetition of this matrix of power that opens space for agency, for dislocating it, but never transcending it. In other words, the norm has no independent ontological status; still, it cannot be reduced

to its instantiations (BUTLER, 2004): it is reproduced in its embodiment, in acts that approximate to it but never fully achieve it.

Importantly, considering the social construction of bodies under this matrix of power does not disregard the materiality of bodies. As Gayle Salamon (2010) puts it, saying that "the body is a social construct means that our bodies are always shaped by the social world in which we are inescapably situated". This proposition does not undermine that we have a felt sense about our bodies, about what feels natural to it. What we feel about our bodies is also constructed; and the irrefutability of this *feeling* in no way exclude the fact that we affirm them through discourse. Hence, social construction is not oppositional to our bodily being; in fact, it offers a way to understand how that naturalness of the body arises in its historical and cultural variations, through the process of subjection. As Butler (2011) states:

"what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect. And there will be no way to understand "gender" as a cultural construct which is imposed upon the surface of matter, understood either as "the body" or its given sex" (BUTLER, 2011, p. xii).

In this logic, gender, as it is embodied, is always already theorised. This move limits the possibility of self-definition apart from power technologies. The transgendered subject does not simply define its gender freely, but is always already influenced by the disciplines that form his/her body. Performativity, then, is understood not as an act by which a subject brings something into being, or creates something through discourse; but rather as the "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (BUTLER, 2011, p. xii). This performativity (in its iterability) also informs Butler's conceptualisation of agency: as social norms are repeatedly enacted, agency is grounded upon the gap between each iteration and the possibility of its failure or its reappropriation and resignification for purposes either than the consolidation of the norm.

Lastly, in Butler's critique of the Lacanian symbolic (2004, 2011), she argues that the symbolic is in fact dependent upon social practices (and that radical alterations in kinship demand a review of the structuralist presuppositions of psychoanalysis). The rules that legitimate and limit what's *real* sanction certain imaginaries and ideals that are set as parameters of realness and naturalness. The reason Butler refutes calling this set of rules the *symbolic* is that, against what Lacanian theory would argue, there's no primacy of sexual difference over race in the constitution of the subject. Therefore, the symbolic would also be a racialising set of norms that is also informed by conceptions of norms. Prioritising sexual difference over race, in this sense, reinforces that it is an already sex-regulated presupposition. Thus, I consider Butler's proposal that sex is always already racialised, and race is always already sexualised. Race is not a secondary attribute to the constitution of sexuality. This seems of great importance when trying to read these non-ideal transgendered bodies of travestis. Even if it seems like the link between travestis and sexuality is the basic reference for their constitution of identity, its construction is always in a straight reference to a set of values that determines the part of each gender.

3.2. "A esquina é o palco onde cada uma dá seu show"⁴⁸

Finally, in a similar vein to Saba Mahmood's (2005) interrogations, I hope to understand how travestis resist and subvert norms but also contribute to their own domination in the context of sex work. Therefore, I understand territories of prostitution as fundamental to the construction of being travesti. While several idioms they use to build their femininities are grounded upon knowledges understood as stereotyped, sexist or even contributing to their own subordination, it is through these very practices that they manage to perfect their femininity and undermine the biological prerequisite of gender, and also manage to occupy spaces and enact performances that they could not if it were not for prostitution.

⁴⁸ "The corners are the stage where each one gives their show", Duda Guimarães, who worked at Avenida Indianópolis, São Paulo (PELÚCIO, 2005, p. 224).

It is in the cohabiting at territories of prostitution that travestis incorporate feminine values and forms, where they get to know tricks and techniques of prostitution, test the success of their body transformations, learn their tastes and preferences and adopt feminine names. These territories, therefore, are spaces where travestis build themselves bodily, subjectively and socially in a reciprocal relation with others at the same context:

"Travesti prostitution is thus not only a source of income but also, as Erica emphasizes, a source of pleasurable and reaffirming experiences. It is therefore thought about and practiced in ways that differ markedly from the prostitution described in most reports and studies. (...)travestis regard it as work, much like any other job—except that their work on the street makes them their own boss, and it provides them with access to more money than they could ever dream of earning through salaried employment. Furthermore, prostitution provides travestis with one of the few arenas open to them in Brazilian society for receiving compliments and accolades. Prostitution makes individual travestis feel sexy and attractive. It is one of the only contexts they have in which they can experience themselves as tantalizing objects of desire and develop a sense of personal worth, self-confidence, and self-esteem." (KULICK, 1998, p. 136).

As many travestis have to flee their families very early in their lives, commonly at the age of 14 or 15 years old (PELÚCIO, 2005), relationship with older travestis are essential to the beginning of their transformation, and so is the relationship with prostitution and clients. New forms of kinship are sometimes formed: many travestis are proud of being mothers or godmothers, protecting and teaching how to live and act in their terms, and many times acting as pimps as well (KULICK, 1998; BENEDETTI, 2005).

Being a travesti is always a process, becoming is never finished (BENTO, 2006). Building their bodies is a constant preoccupation, passing as a woman and looking for perfection in relation to some ideals of beauty, whatever they might be. And what seems underlying in travestis discourses, through my personal experience and research, is that prostitution is what, in many cases, allows this

building of a body. Conquering their *aque*⁴⁹ is what allows them to afford plastic surgeries, applications of silicon, buying hormones dyeing their hair, buying make up, and building a life apart from their blood-related families. It is always necessary to counter this argumentation to the fact that these experiences do not mean these women are perfectly happy to stay for the rest of their lives in prostitution. On the contrary, the experiences of sexual violence, police violence, abuse, exploitation, stigma, addiction to drugs and continuous marginalisation turn them away from the *métier*⁵⁰. As in the quote from Amara Moira (2016) in the first chapter, travestis have engaged in militancy⁵¹ for their rights to exercise prostitution, even though they recognise and denounce the several problems related to the profession⁵².

Amara Moira insists on working a prostitute. She claims to have decided to work as a prostitute out of desire, even though she studied and already had other occupations (she is a PhD student at UniCamp). On her reports, she affirms to have decided to charge for something she already did for free⁵³, since she was already treated "like a whore" just because of being a travesti: "*fiz faculdade para poder fazer sexo só de graça, aí descobri que estava perdendo dinheiro não aproveitando essa minha sabença e desenvolvutra*⁵⁴" (MOIRA, 2016, p. 123). As expected, though, the experience on the streets soon showed to be more difficult than expected, violence and abuse being part of her daily life in prostitution; but not exclusively so.

Considering these performances by travesti prostitutes, I would like to call attention to the fact that power is *dislocated* by them, as I mentioned above, but

⁴⁹ Slang for money, for what they receive for sex work.

⁵⁰ Of interest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SzGTnU2gmhE>

⁵¹ Indianara Siqueira is one notable example of this fight in Rio de Janeiro and in Brazil. In a long trajectory of fight, Indianara inaugurated a house for reception of transgendered (transvestigeneres, a term created by her) in conditions of social vulnerability, Casa Nem, in Lapa, where I met travestis and transvestigeneres, as well as cis-women who helped and inspired me in my personal and academic life. Her efforts also resulted in the creation of PreparaNem, a preparatory course for University entrance exams in Brazil (ENEM). Even though PreparaNem would be simply an initiative to take transvestigeneres out of prostitution, Indianara is also a fierce defender of the right of being puta. In 2016, she got elected as a substitute city councilor (vereadora suplente) by Psol (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade, a leftist party) in Rio de Janeiro. Further information on Indianara Siqueira's public facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/indi.siqueira/?fref=ts>

⁵² The contradictions and challenges related to legalisation and travesti social movements for it will be discussed in future work.

⁵³ This claim is something I've heard from more than one travesti.

⁵⁴ "I went to college so that I could only have sex for free, but then I realised I was losing money when not taking advantage of my knowledge and boldness" (MOIRA, 2016, p. 123).

never fully escaped. This works through the way they perform gender, their femininities, that do not correspond to their sexed bodies, but in doing so they also reinforce several stereotypes of sexuality and gender, with role models and principles deeply embedded in the heterosexual binary structure. Again, this does not mean that they do it in a free-minded way, in a liberal way, as their acts are always phantasmatically reproducing norms.

Different authors (KULICK, 1998; PELÚCIO, 2006; SILVA, 2007) observe the dynamics of their affective relations, informed by heteronormative marital rules, but working in arrangements completely different from the heterosexual logic. Still, these marital relations are deeply informed by essentialist perspectives on the parts to be played by each gender. This can be observed in the aim to achieve a conjugal life under "normality" patterns: financial stability, children, a house, a surprisingly hierarchical relationship that is connected to the desire of finding a husband who is a "real man". "Being a real man" implies all those aspects related to ideal virility, including being "active" in sexual intercourse. In several reports from travestis, it was deemed unacceptable for their partners to be sexually penetrated by them (PELÚCIO, 2006, p. 526). As Kulick argues, according to his extensive experience with travestis in Salvador, a real man always prefers a woman, and even if he engages in relationships with travestis, they would never resist a woman.

Still, even though it might seem like this is a mandatory aspect of *travestilidades* (as it is reported in the ethnographic work I read here), just as the processes to which they submit their bodies seem a necessary adaptation in order to attend to their sexual desires and practices, I have to call attention that the case is not necessarily so. In my personal encounters with travestis and transsexuals, it was made clear that assuming a travesti identity does not imply a certain choice of sexuality. So, I reinforce this argument by looking at Amara Moira's (2016) autobiographic book, in which she recounts relating to both men and women, either cis or trans, though prostitution always weighted heavily upon the possibility of having a relationship. She claims that only t-lovers and fetishists would dare to feel attraction to bodies such as hers, but always at night, always away from public scrutiny.

On her words, categories like gay, lesbian or bisexual do not work for trans people. While she disrupts the common knowledge that travestis are necessarily gay men, as she had affairs with women, cis and trans, lesbians, bisexuals, as well as trans men, she affirms that showing affection in public spaces was always problematic, to what it concerns to the safety of both parts. So, she states that besides all the difficulties of being a travesti, and, also, a prostitute (as 90% of them are), creating affective bonds is one of the most difficult aspects, especially if you only like cis men (MOIRA, 2016, p. 191).

What needs to be emphasised out of this is that gender, as Butler's queer theory would suggest, does not presuppose sexuality; and that engaging in any sexual practices does not designate gender. Under the logic of hegemonic sexualities (and, for instance, in the logic reproduced by many travestis), how anal sex is practiced determines your position as a "man" or not. This follows the same logic as MacKinnon's (1991) argumentation presented in the first chapter of this work, by which gender is an effect of sexuality. Anyhow, this is undermined by travesti expressions of femininities, and ambivalent relations to it: sometimes reproducing the norms by which they are themselves violated, sometimes overcoming them, an enabling violation (SPIVAK apud BUTLER, 2011, p. 83). This happens, importantly, because what is exteriorised or performed can only be so by reference to what is already defined as an corporeal legibility.

This shows us an ambivalent subject, one which is not unproblematically subversive, but also one which does not obey perfectly to universalisms and to norms. It is this very space of ambivalence that allows us to understand how subjectivation works, and under which terms, and how it also fails. The way travestis are informed by a certain system of sex, gender and desire, by a phallogocentric and heteronormative logic that instructs their miming, exposes the margins that constitute what's normal and what's abnormal.

These rearticulations of hegemonic forms of power are what opens up the possibility of resignification of the norms, "and the reworking of 'queer' from abjection to politicized affiliation will interrogate similar sites of ambivalence produced at the limits of discursive legitimacy" (BUTLER, 2011, p. 84). In a repetition that always fails to achieve an ideality, again, is where the possibility of

subverting the norm resides, and this is how I understand engaging in prostitution beyond the "threatening men versus vulnerable victim" binary. Considering travestis and their transits as hybrid, they express marginal forms of desire which demand different problematisations about themselves, and this move puts into question social, political and cultural paradigms.

In an interesting link, Peres (2012) considers travesti's expression to be a *parrhesiastic* one: originating from the term *parrhesia*, which means to have the courage to say the truth, as analysed by Michel Foucault (2011) in his last course at Collège de France, in 1984. To practice the *parrhesia* means to bluntly say the truth to yourself, in such a way that truth is inevitably also brought to the others, practicing a discourse that is frank independently of the consequences to be faced, as Socrates practiced when he died for the truth. Travestis, in their subjectivation that oscillates through disciplines over their bodies and pleasures, emerge affirming their bold truths in face of the determinations of sex, gender, and desires. The marginalisation and violence to which they are subjected would be a confirmation of this *parrhesiastic* move: showing the truths of our present social and historical context and about how our society works, would then be a form of resistance (PERES, 2012).

When considering travestilidades as subversive or nomadic (PERES, 2012), they are such because of its capacity of exposing the artificiality of heterosexuality. But this exposure does not *necessarily* leads to subversion, and it is not unproblematically so, as Butler argued when reading *Venus Xtravaganza* (BUTLER, 2011). There remains a possibility that heterosexuality augments its hegemony even through denaturalisation — these performances might reidealise heterosexual norms, as many times they do. Anyhow, the point to be made is that this form of subversion is not one which liberates one completely from the norm. Instead, the ambivalent aspect of these forms of marginalised expressions of gender is notable, as they reflect in a more clear way the effects of being embedded in regimes of power, and being constituted by them.

The heterosexual privilege, as Butler argues, also operates in a way that naturalises itself as the original and normal form of sexuality. This supposed *originality* of heterosexuality pathologises trans, as mentioned above, who aim for

changes in their bodies in order to exercise a "normal sexuality". Bento's (2006) counters that when she affirms that, in fact, the modifications they conduct on their bodies is in order to find social intelligibility. If society is divided by men and women, male and female, these dissident performances of gender cannot be inside the category of human.

What this reflection allows us to argue is that these "original", exclusionary, practices of gender are an imitation as well. Mimicry is also at the heart of the sex/gender system and its binaries, therefore, a cis woman performs an imitation as much as a trans woman. The difference lies on the fact that while travestis and transgendered individuals have to work in a relatively self-conscious way in order to build their identities, while the (cis) others are under the illusion to be simply acting *naturally*, they crystallise and expose many of the tacit understandings that guide the creation and maintenance of gender in our social life (SHAPIRO apud KULICK, 1998, p. 10).

This crystallisation through agential performances shows us how normative gender performances are also a process of becoming; and also not freely-willed. In other words, either cis or trans gendered performances are informed by regulations that are re-enacted and that produce, retroactively, the appearance of gender as an abiding interior depth. This goes against the free-willed rational agent, as previously mentioned, but a consequence of such an argument is that resistance is never achieved in a way that the norm is thrown down.

Even though travestis' experiences assimilate to Butler's drag in several senses, as mentioned during this chapter, her drag implies a certain fluidity between genders, and a practice of performance at the Ball of *Paris is Burning* that differs from the ones I here present. The reason why I bring such question is to complicate a binary of subordination versus resistance. While travestis are subversive in many ways, their reiteration of the norm presents us with a paradox. They resist the disciplines over their bodies in order to perform gender practices that are often seen to turn them "subordinate", as they reproduce stereotypes (for example, in their relationships as mentioned above).

This opens up a questioning in line with what Saba Mahmood (2005) proposes: if power is not an universal category, neither can resistance and agency be read as such. In this sense, agential capacity does not necessarily impose a teleology of progressive politics — travestis' agency may reside precisely in what seems to be a case of subordination and passivity, but it is through these practices that their resistance is possible. Because of this, I would argue that it is profitable to focus on their complex experiences and performances not exclusively as forms of resistance, but as forms of *inhabiting* norms, as Mahmood (2005) argues.

By this logic, I would suggest that travestis are indeed in a condition of abjection, of unintelligible exclusion, but that they may also configure a form of abnormality: in a pursue for realignment with the norm through discipline, aiming for normality. In their prostitution practices, travestis manage to build their bodies and learn how to perform their femininities, transgressing what had been previously assigned to their sexed bodies — and, therefore, they are assigned to a status of intelligibility and abjection. But, at the same time, they (re)create rules and boundaries of what is feminine and what is not, aiming (not necessarily in a fully self-conscious way) to achieve normality. By all means, analysing power structures from the point of view of travestis make it clear that subjectivity, from a localised, Brazilian, perspective, is highly contradictory about race, gender and sexuality.

4. Deviant sexualities, violence and normalisation

"Beyond its boundaries, the other lurks as a perpetual threat in the form of other states, antagonistic groups, imported goods, and alien ideas. The other also appears as difference within, vitiating the presumed but rarely, if ever, achieved "sameness." The other within the boundaries of the political community is "managed" by some combination of hierarchy, eradication, assimilation or expulsion, and tolerance." (INAYATULLAH and BLANEY, 2004, p. 6).

If we consider the construction of gender as functioning through exclusionary⁵⁵ means, what counts as human is produced against the inhuman that becomes prohibited, erased and kept outside the possibility of legibility. Therefore, the subject is not only constituted through the paradox of subjection (by which you become a subject but, by the same token, become subjected to power) but also through the constitution of an outside, of the less human, of the unthinkable. These excluded sites, then, are bound up to the subject as its constitutive outside — and this outside *within* represents the persistent possibility of reappropriation and disruption (BUTLER, 2011). As mentioned in the last chapter, it is always the exterior of what's taken to be acceptable to a heterosexual matrix that exposes the *boundary*. In this spirit, the aim of this chapter is to, firstly, understand how this move allows violence to be exercised upon these abjected bodies⁵⁶, turning their lives killable ones in order to defend a certain biopolitical configuration of Brazilian society.

Secondly, my aim is also to understand how Brazil attempts to *un queer* itself by portraying an image of tolerance over LGBTTTQI. This image does not sustain itself, however, when considering levels of violence upon dissident forms of sexuality. This allows us to understand the heterogeneity of society, and shows how the very idea of a univocal society (a univocal political *body*), of apparent

⁵⁵ But not exclusively exclusionary. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the excluded outside of abnormality and/or abjection is always in hope of reinsertion into the norm.

⁵⁶ Importantly, I would like to reiterate that the combination travesti and sex worker, which applies for most of the cases, make their vulnerability to physical violence and harassment even worse. As I mentioned previously, travestis are, most times, a category marked by class and race, for the lack of resources and opportunity turn them into prostitution, and make their path more difficult to achieve a state of *ideal* transsexuality, as proposed by Bento (2006).

"acceptance" of inversion of genders⁵⁷ and of a "racial democracy"⁵⁸ are, in fact, constructed by the constant exclusion and violation of these bodies that do not matter. As Claudia Aradau puts it:

"The imaginary promise of a desirable state in the future is subtended by practices in the present that represent problems, in order to intervene and manage them, act upon subjects and attempt to conduct their actions in view of the projected future" (ARADAU, 2008, p. 6).

According to Ana Carolina Barbosa and Ivan Pimentel (2011), violence practiced against travestis is marked by the function of reinforcing the condition of abjection; usually directed to precisely the signs that marks their difference: body parts and marks that attest their refusal of the norm. As the authors state, many of the cases of violence they collected from travesti testimonies are perpetrated during their work as prostitutes on the streets, by clients who end up beating, burning, torturing them. However, as clients, many of them engage in sexual intercourse with the travestis before committing violent acts (BARBOSA and PIMENTEL, 2011, p. 84). Police violence, frequent and, many times, arbitrary, besides usually being left unpunished, also opens space for questioning the value of these lives in a so-called biopolitical society. In other words, if their lives are grievable or not⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ "Inversion" here considered takes reference to what Kulick considers to be an inheritance from carnival culture. Carnival is a period of the year where, apparently, everyone is allow to invert gender roles. "Men dressing as women", and vice-versa. This myth of acceptability of inversion is fed by the portrayal of characters such as Roberta Close, and of androgynous singers such as Ney Matogrosso. It is, after all, an attempt that we have of convincing each other that we are part of a liberated, tolerant and open-minded society. However, as Kulick rightly posits, this is only a smokescreen to what transgendered experiences really mean in Brazil — which is not reducible to inversion and, also, is not as easily acceptable as we tend to declare.

⁵⁸ "Racial democracy": a terminology that was generated after the publication of "Casa Grande & Senzala", by the sociologist and anthropologist Gilberto Freyre in 1933. Because of the intensive miscegenation processes that took place in Brazil during its colonial period, besides the supposedly Portuguese "flexibility" to what concerned "interracial" coupling, Brazil would be a country of equality between the "three races" that constituted it: black, indigenous and white (STRIEDER, 2001). Not only that, Freyre's book suggests that, for the constitution of Brazilian society, Catholicism was more determinant variable of acceptability than race itself. Further problematisations of this work is, unfortunately, out of scope here. What I mean to emphasise is that this myth of a racial democracy is underlying Brazilian imaginary but is contradicted precisely by the disproportionate violence rates against non-white individuals (LOPES, 2003).

⁵⁹ Between January 2008 and April 2013, 486 deaths of travestis and transsexuals were reported in Brazil, 4 times more than Mexico, and in 2013, 121 cases were registered; placing Brazil as the

Violence is an ever-present scenario in travestis' daily lives. Even though they work their bodies in a way such as to find social intelligibility in society, as mentioned above, and most of them usually dress according to a feminine gender even during the day, the majority of travestis do not *pass as women*. Instead, their incongruent impression attracts attention of both desirable or disgusted looks: "travestis find themselves obliged to continually reassert their rights to occupy urban space", knowing that, at any moment, they may "become the target of verbal harassment and/or physical violence from anyone who feels provoked by their presence in that space" (KULICK, 1998, p. 30).

To understand how this *otherness* can come into being, it is necessary to understand what kind of body the current society needs, and this goes hand in hand, in a foucauldian perspective, with different power mechanisms that produce its subjects. As Foucault proposed, at the end of the eighteenth century in Europe, a new logic of *governing* populations emerged focused on the preservation of life, a logic of making live or letting die; instead of a (Hobbesian) logic of the *sovereign*, who lets live or makes die (FOUCAULT, 2008; FOUCAULT, 1988). The exercise of power in this society of populations, a biopolitical one, produces the *man*⁶⁰ as the figure of it, thought and defined in the human sciences of the XIX century and in its humanism; different from the simple juridical subject in face of sovereignty.

This thematic of "the man" as living being, working individual, speaking subject is understood whilst the population came to be an object of power and knowledge (FOUCAULT, 2008, p. 103). But the coming into being of this "man" is only possible in contrast to what is not supposed to be, to an internally produced outside incorporated, for example, by the foreign, the barbarian, when constituting citizenship in the modern State, for example, or also by forms of sexuality that are constantly and repeatedly produced as objects of discipline in order for the heterosexual couple to exist and reproduce (FOUCAULT, 1999).

country that most kills travestis and transsexuals in the whole world. This data was broadly approached by national and international media. Content available at: http://transrespect.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/TvT_research-report_ES_.pdf

⁶⁰ I emphasise "the man" precisely because it is the exact term used by Foucault (2008) in *Security, Territory and Population*.

In a combination of two mechanisms of regulation, with the larger presence of either one or the other, normal and abnormal are produced inside a population. Via disciplinary mechanisms, we depart from a norm that identifies individuals between normal and abnormal, in normalisation. Via security mechanisms, the normal and abnormal are identified through normality curves - the "more normal" will serve as a norm, and through these calculations that will help calculate which "normals" are more favourable: normalisation is understood as this process. By this same logic, according to Butler, it can be affirmed that "the field of reality produced by gender norms constitutes the background for the surface appearance of gender in its idealized dimensions" (BUTLER, 2004, p. 52).

Regulations, as an operation of power, can have a legal dimension but that does not exhaust the way it works (and as it work through the law, it govern and produces who the beneficiaries of a certain right are, and who are not) (BUTLER, 2004, p. 55). While discipline works in a diffused but totalising way, naturalising norms in a discrete way such that we are produced by them and inscribing norms onto bodies, normalisation works by *making regular*. A security mechanism, then, will work guaranteeing this process, and guaranteeing the security of the population, in what Foucault calls a natural way: not prohibition, but "in the form of a progressive self-cancellation of phenomena by the phenomena themselves. In a way, they involve the delimitation of phenomena within acceptable limits, rather than the imposition of law that says no to them" (FOUCAULT, 2008, p. 86).

Foucault (2008) describes politics turning into governing, producing, regulating and maintaining life in a calculated way. Claiming that, in fact, Machiavelli marked the end of an era, as his question of how to guarantee sovereignty is now safe: power in a biopolitical society takes a form that surveillance works in an organic way, managing populations, and no one can escape *this* system of sovereignty. Therefore, modernity is marked by politics turning itself into life, and sex is at the centre of the foundation of the identity and intelligibility of the (modern) individual.

When developing this argument, Foucault claimed his analysis was focused specifically in Europe. The Brazilian society at the XIX century, as Pereira (2012) proposes, did not exactly picture a formation of a biopower and

security mechanisms. According to him, in 1872 life expectancy was of 27 years, and 18 years for slaves — there was not as much of a possibility of establishing a population focused on propagating life. The point to be made is that the era of biopower was only possible at the expense of coloniality: the health and life expectancy at the West was not only simultaneous to the precarious bodies at the tropics, but also dependent of them (PEREIRA, 2012, p. 378). Western modernity and, also, biopolitics are, in this sense, a sign of colonisation.

Reflecting about that, it seems prudent to argue that what *is* biopolitical about the Brazilian state depends upon keeping levels of violence at an acceptable rate, rather than abolishing it. This is reflected in what Kulick (1998) claims to be an apparent culture of acceptance of inversion⁶¹, as part of carnival culture, where apparently it is allowed for men to dress as women, and vice-versa. The highlight of this would be the fame of and fetishism over the transsexual actress Roberta Close, that was the cover of a Playboy magazine in the 1980s. I would argue, according to Butler's analysis (2011), that this portrayal of Roberta Close is hardly a subversive one. What this notion of inversion conceals, in fact, is that travestis cause disgust in many Brazilians. The question is that travestis are actually considered threatening, portrayed as marginal and dangerous, and pathologised through the attribution of a determined nature that would compel their deviant behaviour.

As mentioned previously, police violence is a constant in travestis lives. But what I would like to call attention is to the impunity of crimes committed against them, as mentioned and exemplified in the last chapters. One example has to be taken into account here: last 25 December, 2016, in São Paulo, a street vendor, Luiz Carlos Ruas (whose nickname was Índio), was beat to death inside a subway station in front of which he worked (for 20 years). He was defending two homeless travestis who were being beat by the same two men who killed him. A surveillance camera video of the moment he was being beat, and no security guard showed up, and people passed by and did nothing about it caused enormous repercussion of the crime: not only because of the atrocity of the crime, but because the two men aimed to beat the travestis who knew Índio. LGBTTQI

⁶¹ See footnote 55.

community protested severely at social networks and at the site of the crime, and the two men were caught a few days after it. A few days later, after the two men guilty for the crime were arrested, the speech by the police officer responsible called my attention: he declared to national media that he discharged the possibility that the crime was motivated by homophobia⁶².

This is symptomatic of how these bodies that, besides killed and produced through violence, are bodies that do not *matter*, unliveable lives. Denying that the crimes were moved by homophobia seem to silence not only Luiz Carlos Ruas, but, most importantly, the two homeless travestis who were first attacked. This silencing move is one that denies grief to the bodies of travestis violated and killed precisely because of their transgression. For, as Butler (2004) argues, the value of a life is measured by its capacity to be grieved. In other words, political life is only possible if a life is grievable, if this life is one that is socially considered to be a human one.

When a life is grieved, something about the connection between the I and the other is exposed; and what binds *us* bodily and politically resides precisely in that. Therefore, a political life is an ontologically precarious one, as it depends on these ties; grief is a political process that has implications in furnishing a sense of a political community. Butler cites gender and sexuality as a working of such relationship: “neither gender nor sexuality is precisely a possession, but, rather, is a mode of being dispossessed, a way of being for another or by virtue of another” (BUTLER, 2004, p. 24).

In this logic, we are all vulnerable to the touch of the *other* that gives us a sense of what we are as individuals and as a community. Violence, then, is a form of exposing human vulnerability in an exacerbated, unprecedented, way — submitting one to the life of the other, and the life of this other is dependent of this one. In consequence of that, and as I can understand from this work, this vulnerability is more present under certain social and political conditions. But if there is no recognition of this vulnerability, violence can be largely permitted:

⁶² <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/delegado-nao-ve-morte-de-ambulante-no-metro-como-crime-de-intolerancia.ghtml>

some lives are seen as more vulnerable than others, more grievable than others (BUTLER, 2004, p. 30).

By naturalising and making normative a certain kind of human life, violence against those who do not fit to the norms can be naturalised (and inflicted upon these bodies) as well. This permits a paradoxical movement of derealisation upon those that are already considered unreal: they are constantly cited, animated and negated, and renegated. I quote Butler:

“They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never 'were', and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness. Violence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object. The derealisation of the 'Other' means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral” (BUTLER, 2004, p. 33).

If a life is not recognisable or intelligible, violence against this life does not permit a public act of mourning. This comprehends why violence against transsexuals to go so widely unremarked. Still, I would argue that this violence remains disclosed to an extent that permits a Brazilian political community to constitute itself as a biopolitical one.

Brazilian society, though, may look remarkably queer at the eyes of the West. Two images call attention about Brazilian relationship to LGBTTTQI: Brazil is frequently portrayed as a country that is tolerant towards sexuality and permissive about sex tourism (BLANCHETTE and SILVA, 2010), and, in the past few years, it has also been portrayed by international media as a country that kills transsexuals indiscriminately⁶³. A certain hysteria in the international media over killings of LGBTTTQI also seem notable in this context⁶⁴.

⁶³ See footnote 48.

⁶⁴ This is especially so because of International media attention to the country due to events such as the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2016. See: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/06/world/americas/brazil-anti-gay-violence.html?_r=0
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lana-de-holanda-jones/how-many-more-transgender_b_9637768.html
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/04/brazil-targeting-trans-people-impunity-150413210248222.html>
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/08/rio-de-janeiro--transvestite-dancer-dead-hate-crime-carnival-favelas-sexuality>

This movement is, undeniably, not an isolated one: it accompanies a growing acceptance of queer inside Western popular culture and politics. As Laura Sjoberg (2016) puts it, a "new liberalism" projects an image of tolerance and acceptance of queer and trans, justifying the West's superiority facing other *delayed* and underdeveloped countries that do not respect their LGBTTQI community. This reflects what has been called homonormativity:

"a new neoliberal sexual politics [that] does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustain them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay in domesticity and consumption" (DUGGAN apud WEBER, 2016, p. 105).

Even if there seems to be an amplification of the matrix of acceptable sexual desires, traditional gender parts are maintained and reinforced, translated into elements such as family structure, maintenance of a "straight behaviour" and keeping *queerness* in an individualised, depoliticised realm. While *gay* is absorbed by a neoliberal system (which remains intact) and constitutes a new marketing and consumer opportunity, new multiculturalist discourses arise but without questioning its heterosexist epistemological basis. This Western strategy is based upon a "homo righteousness" that orientalises and *queers* the Third World, and our (inferior) position is reaffirmed in this normalising process (KAPOOR, 2015).

In this context, I would argue that Brazil attempts to *un queer*⁶⁵ itself by approximating to this homonormative logic. As Ilan Kapoor (2015) appointed, this is, to a certain extent, "a reaction to humiliation and inferiority wrought by (neo)colonialism and Orientalism: the desire to be equal to one's (former) master, perhaps even to imitate him; and hence the desire not to be different or queer" (KAPOOR, 2015, p. 1617).

⁶⁵ *Unqueering* here is associated with Ilan Kappor's proposal that the Third World is produced as queer by Western countries: "abnormal, effete, passive (read: effeminate), strange, backward, underdeveloped, threatening" (KAPOOR, 2015, p. 1615).

Related to it, we can perceive a response to this homonormativity in Brazilian institutions⁶⁶, but which seems largely ineffective in what concerns LGBTTTQI people in marginalised sites and exposed to social vulnerability. In fact, what seems underlying in this logic is a promotion of neoliberal values. The result of that is actually a reiteration of Brazilian *queerness*, as it fails to achieve a similar status of homonormativity as in the "First World".

Even though Brazil could be considered a country that "embraces queer liberalism", with policies more progressive than in several other countries at the South Hemisphere, there still is, once more, a very contradictory view of the country both from the inside and from the outside. I would argue that this is related to the (many times, unsaid, as in the example above) violence and other homophobic practices against LGBTTTQI community. Kapoor proposes that this homophobic practices is related, in great measure, to the forms of heteronormativity that base developmental arguments: heterosexual marriage as the basis of the family unit and of social reproduction has meant a legitimating of patriarchal and capitalist relations of power.

In this scope, as Cynthia Weber (2016) would argue, the "gay rights holder" constitutes itself at the expense of the "undevelopable", and this division constitutes itself in Brazil according to race and class demarcations. This "gay rights holder" is associated with gay homonormative identities that leave unquestioned the social institutions and norms upon which Brazilian society is built, and is precisely the kind of subject that is tolerated and is part of a portrayal of Brazil as a and gay-friendly country. On the other hand, travestis, not conforming neither in reference to an ideal of transsexuality or in reference to the bourgeois family configuration, and not even configuring a potential marketing niche, could not fit into this framework.

The *unqueering* that takes place in Brazil, therefore, is not one that attempts to purge gay people through homophobic laws. Instead, what happens is

⁶⁶ This is reflected in laws guaranteeing the right to the social name (Decreto nº 33.816 de 18 de maio de 2011), besides laws determining punishment regarding discrimination of LGBTTTQI people (Lei nº 2.475 de 12 de setembro de 1996), and the creation of institutions and councils for sexual diversity and in defence of the right of LGBTTTQI community.

an adoption of queer liberalism that can only provide a "tolerant incorporation"⁶⁷ of LGBTTTQI into liberal capitalism, but that leaves unquestioned the hierarchies and racisms inherent in Brazilian culture and society and actually reinforces our Third World positioning. Once heteronormativity, as well as homonormativity, are considered in their artificialities, we can affirm that they are already set up to be a failure, to be never fully achieved. As Brazil tries to mimic a homonormativity inherited from the First World, we can perceive the ambivalences of both this homonormative discourse as well as of a Brazilian reality. What can be concluded from that is that Brazil is both tolerant *and/or* homophobic, and deeply embedded in gender regulations, even of its *gay* subjects.

4.1. Perversion and travestis' ambivalence

In "History of Sexuality", Foucault (1988) understands sex as an instrument of power through which society is regulated, and the development of this regulation, in the XVIII and XIX century, with the establishment of a *normal* sexuality. The regular couple, then, constituted itself as the norm of sexuality, along with its social function of populating, reproducing work force and carrying on a sexuality that was economically useful and politically conservative. Meanwhile, a series of perversions were cited, talked about constantly, but also condemned — in a mechanics of power which attributes to these perversions an analytic, permanent reality.

Instead of simply facing the bourgeois, European, family of the XIX century (and of our time, as he mentions) as a monogamist conjugal cell, Foucault proposes that it is also a network of powers-pleasures articulated in multiple forms, forming a society of explosive, fragmented perversion. To understand these networks and procedures of control, of delimitation of discourse, one has to focus on the dynamics of what is said and unsaid, to the silences that are a structuring part of discourses. In other words, trying to identify how different ways of *not saying* and how these different ways are distributed (BENTO, 2006).

⁶⁷ KAPOOR, 2015, p. 1620.

In this sense, it is not through the law or the severe prohibition of perversions that these regulations configure themselves, but through "infinite lines of penetration" that inscribe this power onto bodies and their pleasures and specify them accordingly, proceeding through the reduction of singular sexualities. The "perverse implantation" would be an effect-instrument: it is through isolation, intensification and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that these relations of power, sex and pleasure ramify themselves, measuring the body and infiltrating conducts (FOUCAULT, 1988, p. 47), in multiple focus and centres of power.

I bring on the "perverse implantation" as a final articulation to appoint contradictory aspects that are underlying in this picturing of a Brazilian contextualisation of prostitution. What seems to be underlying in the discourses about prostitution presented throughout this work is a reiteration of what Foucault understood to be the this network of power-pleasures that established the heterosexual monogamist couple⁶⁸ as the norm and basic economic unit.

Even though abolitionist prostitution discourses attempt to engage critically with the reality of sex work, in order to overcome it according to a Marxist theorisation, what they fail to problematise is the assumed universality of a desire for *freedom* of relations of subordination (and resistance being intrinsically connected to this desire), which is actually central for liberal thought (MAHMOOD, 2005). I take on this argumentation proposed by Mahmood precisely because, as I have argued throughout this work, experiences of travesti prostitution in Brazil are too complex to be approached by an universal solution to it. As Mahmood argues:

"This positing of women's agency as consubstantial with resistance to relations of domination, and the concomitant naturalization of freedom as a social ideal, are not simply analytical oversights on the part of feminist authors. Rather, I would argue that their assumptions reflect a deeper tension within feminism

⁶⁸ It is important to make an observation on the fact that the Malthusian couple Foucault speaks about is a historically located one, and relates a lot more to a protestant tradition. Meanwhile, in Brazilian society we are informed by a "Roman Catholic patriarchal inheritance" (KULICK, 1998) that is reinforced and perfected in performances such as those by travestis that perfect gender norms, but also undermine it by their engagement and defence of prostitution, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Still, I consider the similarities and tensions between Foucault's argument and the Brazilian context.

attributable to its dual character as both an analytical and a *politically prescriptive* project" (MAHMOOD, 2005, p. 10).

Even if travestis engage in prostitution out of necessity, if not desire⁶⁹, or both, their ambivalent relationship to the norms in which Brazilian society is embedded permits their insertion in a space of *otherness*. Meanwhile, discourses that try to pin down women's degradation due to prostitution and pornography industries help reinforce these varied implantation of perversions. For in order to secure a group-cohesiveness of feminism, certain expressions of sexuality are categorised as a sort of threat to a female-based feminism. The effect of that is a reiteration of the "capitalist, patriarchal" institutions radical feminists are trying to evade.

What seems to be a common base for travestis' *othering*, in face of power structures and, of course, different discourses (that are also embedded in these structures) is a pathologising move that classify their sexuality as a deviant one, and that try to stabilise a truth about them. What's queer about travestis is not only their undermining of the sex/gender correspondence logic, but also their dissident sexualities to what concerns the logics of a (neo)liberal system; the processes of normalisation of the gay, the lesbian, and the transsexual along with the conjugal monogamist behaviour upon which our societies are economically built; and their subjectivation process that does not necessarily follow a "liberating" path.

I would argue that their perversion and characterisation as *threatening*, resides not (always) on the fact that travestis are "homosexuals" who exercise and defend prostitution as a practice, even if having the opportunity to be "saved" from it. It resides, in fact, on the fact that they escape the *either/or* logics (WEBER, 2016) that build up our binary logics of understanding subjectivity. While travestis argue that they *can* be women *and* have masculine genitalia, *and* exercise prostitution, *and* be vulnerable — *or* not be vulnerable, *or* not exercise prostitution, *or* not consider have masculine genitalia, *or* not be women — their experiences translate can only *unintelligible* upon the eyes of logocentrism that

⁶⁹ I mention desire to become a prostitute with reference to, for example, the reports from Amara Moira, who declares to have started sex work in order to exercise her sexuality (MOIRA, 2016).

understands *meaning* as unitary⁷⁰. This is so because they are constantly reinventing meanings (as well as reiterating them, normatively) and deconstructing these binaries that instantiate hierarchies as well.

In this sense, in order to make sense of travesti prostitution, I would agree with Weber that it is necessary to exceed *either/or* logics and look at a plurality of meanings, in a theorisation that she inherits from Roland Barthes (WEBER, 2016, p. 40). This suggests a plural logic that understands subjectivities can be *more than* one thing, *and/or* another; and therefore travestis can be both resistant *and/or* disciplined in a multiplicity of ways (through, for example, their sexes, genders, sexualities and possible combinations), "in an antinormative way that *confuses* meaning around the normality *and/or* perversions of sexes, genders, and sexualities rather than just accumulating differences that makes it a queer logic" (WEBER, 2016, p. 42). It is, after all, the paradoxical aspect of travesti prostitution in Brazil that seems to make it unfit to universalising explanations of subordination, and therefore opens the possibility to rethink the agency versus resistance binary.

⁷⁰ As Cynthia Weber puts it: "logocentrism refers to how '*the* word' — indeed, a singular, specific word signifying a specific presence — grounds all meaning in a linguistic system because of how it is positioned as a universal referent that is located outside of history" (WEBER, 2016, p. 34).

5. Final Considerations

Expanding what I argued in the last chapter of this work, I would like to dwell on Cynthia Weber's proposition that figurations of homosexuality participate in constructing orders of international relations. This means that these orders are necessarily informed by various codes of sexes, genders and sexualities that, of course, have practical consequences for individuals, populations, States, and foreign policy (WEBER, 2016).

This would be the result, as presented throughout this work, of a construction of the State sovereignty mirroring a specific production of "man" as a singular subjectivity that characterises modernity. To be sovereign, then, means that every nation-state inscribes a particular figuration of man as an already existing domestic presence, as the foundation of its authority domestically and internationally. This implicates in a projection of this "man's" fears into the dangerous realm of international anarchy and therefore, marking other (colonial) subjectivities as dangerous, unruly, racially darkened and sexualised (ASHLEY apud WEBER, 2016, p. 35). It is crucial, therefore, to consider sexuality as influencing mechanisms of sovereignty and security, as Weber suggest, both in domestic and in an international level. This cannot be done, however, in an universalistic way: these sexualising moves have to be analysed in a historically and spatially localised manner in order to recognise the heterosexualisation at work within the State apparatus, otherwise the *State* might end up under theorised as a neutral aspect of this process.

It is through these discursive processes that the sexualised and queer construction and representation of the Third World is possible, in an Orientalising move, as appointed by Kapoor: "the Third World served, in this sense, as a screen onto which Western colonial sexual fantasies, desires and anxieties were being projected or transferred" (KAPOOR, 2015, p. 1615). Meanwhile, as presented in the previous chapters of this work, the Third World responds in an attempt of unqueering itself in order to achieve normality. After all, it is the fact that both are embedded in the same power structure of global capitalism that helps understand how the position of the West *and* of the Third World are deeply connected

(KAPOOR, 2015). This discussion seems very profitable when looking at the Brazilian case in relation to homonormativities.

Once more, the Brazilian society is, in a sense, unique, because of its paradoxical position. While Brazil attempts to unqueer itself by responding institutionally to international demands over the rights of LGBTQQI, our society is also permissive of violence against *specific* trans bodies, as I argue, of travestis. I remind, importantly, Pelúcio's (2005) observation that travesti is a category specifically marked by class. And, expectedly, this implies almost automatically a race demarcation (when considering the Brazilian context). It is not, therefore, simply a matter of racial or ethnic specificity to be added to gender or sexual oppression, but, instead, a mutual constitution of gender and race: a sexualisation of race and a racialisation of sex, in two constitutive movements that delineate the modernity of colonial sex (PRECIADO apud PELÚCIO, 2012, p. 403). The point to be made is, in this sense, that relations between "centre" and "periphery" can also be experimented and reproduced within the borders of a nation, also marked by gender and racial hierarchies.

Therefore, it seems prudent to argue that the research I have engaged with in this work opens up the possibility of questioning to what extent Brazilian society administers its *queering*, perpetrated by the West, in order to maintain a picture of tolerance over sexualities, in order to propagate and attract *certain* kinds of homosexualities that are not exclusively homonormative but, importantly, *white*.

Thus, it seems like the Brazilian position is one of both sexual liberation and tolerance *and/or* homophobia and transphobia — permitting a certain fetishism and sexualisation but, at the same time, denying it vehemently. This could be reflected clearly in the propagation of a myth of racial democracy and miscegenation which sustains that interracial sexual intercourse was, during the whole of Brazilian colonisation, largely accepted by *both* Portuguese men and, curiously, by African and indigenous women. Not only does it blur the racial inequality that is notable until the present day, but it also ignores that this miscegenation was only possible at the expense of enslavement and subjection of women (STRIEDER, 2001).

Therefore, as argued, dominant understandings of homosexuality as perversions are still present in Brazilian society, authorising violence over specific racialised and sexualised bodies at sites of marginalisation. It is about certain kinds of desires. This is a movement that ends up actually queering Brazil eyes of the First World: as a pathological state threatening human rights of LGBTTTQI.

Another aspect of this centre-periphery relationship being locally reproduced remits to the debates presented in the first chapter of this work. Adriana Piscitelli (2012), among other authors here approached, warns us about the reproduction of feminisms and their solutions to problems involving gender in a universalistic manner, which can result in a rhetoric of salvation both at the global and local level.

Echoing Berenice Bento's proposition, the reproduction of these discourses open room for essentialism and inability to theorise the local needs of a feminist project, while recognising its limitations as a political project. This can be exemplified by the several, and common, interdictions, over eligible participants of feminism: you cannot be a feminist and be a prostitute⁷¹, you cannot be a feminist and defend men as well, you cannot be a feminist because you destabilise women's fight by including transgender women (BENTO apud PELÚCIO, 2012, p. 409). This rhetoric is dangerous for it might implicate in an homogenisation of a "feminist" movement that reinforces a normalisation, creating several "outsides" in order to constitute an unitary feminist identity. As Butler puts it, these domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulating aspects of this construction, even when it is elaborated with emancipatory purposes (BUTLER, 2016, p. 23).

This is why it seems profitable to answer these difficulties faced by a combination of a feminist theorisation and theoretical engagement with a queer approach that allows difference and deviation as the common a basis to build up an alliance for resistance that embraces plural forms of performativity. This is so because, as I have argued throughout this work, placing *sex* in a pre-discursive realm may result, in numerous ways, in strategies of exclusion and hierarchies;

⁷¹ Bento exemplifies this authoritarian mark of feminism by quoting a feminist event in the United States in which Gabriela Leite, prostitute and feminist activist, declared herself to be both a feminist *and* a prostitute. She was answered by the moderator that she could not be both a feminist *and* a prostitute for it would be impossible for a feminist to sell her body.

besides creating an universalising subject which is precedent to action and reinforces a priority of sexuality over the cultural construction of it. If we take on Butler's (2016) proposal that gender is ontologically empty, then it is possible to understand how it is *always* embedded in social and political contexts with their own normative particularities. What remains, then, as the connection between these bodies at different sites of exclusion is precariousness.

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