

Brazilian Travestis, immigrants and sex workers in Portugal and Europe. A trilogy of subordinating discrimination. Structuralism or the subject's agency capacity?

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to deepen the role of structural and infrastructural powers in the co-production of identities, through an exercise tacitly delegated in socialization institutions, passive or negotiated by their recipients. In this context, there are authors who organized their academic careers accentuating another perspective of approach, commonly known as structuralism or agency of subjects. Structuralism, as its name indicates, comes from structure and this finds in discourse and its shaping action of behavior, one of its privileged means. The agency and self-determination capacity of subjects, in turn, is based on an argument that aims to substantiate the relevance of performativity as being itself, simultaneously, a consequence and source of discourse, maintaining a close relationship of dialogically conditioning reciprocity with it. In this framework, we will seek to analyze authors who assume one or another theoretical position, having not only as a reference their bibliography, but also the case study of Brazilian Travesties² who at a certain point considered emigrating to Portugal with the intention of dedicating themselves to the activity professionals they work in the sex industry, trying to achieve, like other migrants, better living conditions. To this end, we use participant and non-participant observation – using semi-directive interviews – as well as analyzing the evolution of gender relations, which are historically deeply hierarchical. The fundamental question we raise is whether the expression of gender, the activity carried out and the migratory project undertaken by Brazilian Travestis are situated within the scope of social constraints that pressured them to do so, or, if, on the contrary, such phenomena occur having as their fundamental origin their agential capacity within the superstructure, or even, if they result from diverse social combinations between both poles of approach.

Keywords: Identity, Travesti, Structure, performativity, Migrations, Sex work.

STRUCTURALISM AND POST-STRUCTURALISM

Some authors articulate subject and structure, as inseparable lenses of analysis with a focus on structural surveillance of identities and bodies that have been made illegal by virtue (GIDDENS, 1984, 1990, 1997, 2000, 2004, ORTNER, 1984). From the perspective of one of these positions, which can be called post-structuralist, Foucault (1978, 2003) does not deny the existence of processes of identity differentiation or even the (structurally) deviant posture of individuals in the face of powers; however, from the analytical point of view, the focus is directed to the way in which the powers affect the subjects, how they surveil, classify and give them visibility only in the "encounter with power", a moment from

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² We use the term because we understand that it arises from a Brazilian cultural idiosyncrasy and not as a pejorative synonym for cross-dressing. Quite the contrary.



which, and only there, they emerge, as institutionalized subjects (FOUCAULT, 2003). This attentive look of the structure, on the individuals, seeking to unveil deviant behaviors, reflects the very image of the panopticon, designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1791 (FOUCAULT, 1975), in which, through architecture and its spatial structuring, asymmetrical relations of power and vigilant domination are verified and reinforced. In this spatial structuring of power, in each cell, there would be an individual constantly watched by an entity - invisible to him - located in a central tower, equidistant from all of them and positioned on the same plane in relation to each one of them. Arranged in a circular fashion in relation to that watchful center – the tower.

Other authors argue that the productive nature of identities on the part of power implicitly takes on another dimension. Namely, that what is not structurally feasible is consigned to the plane of legitimate non-existence, due to the erasure or constraint of which it becomes the object (NAMASTE, 2000). Therefore, being an undocumented immigrant, travesty and sex worker, in times of massive and often semi-disordered flows, in a world system in convulsion, unquestionably assumes an evident parallelism – and concomitantly active – with socially expressed self-determinations of gender, when these pinch the heteronormative structure, on which most of the current institutions and relational systems are based. hierarchical. Marriage, kinship, church, morals, guilt, division of labor, in short, a varied panoply of potentially excluding imbrications. Borders, as geographically mediating/structuring elements of relations between people and countries (MEZZADRA, 2005, 2013, MEZZADRA and NIELSON, 2015), or between authorized and subversive bodies, assume a symbolic dimension that generates taxonomies that, in essence, prove to be discriminatory.

Butler, inspired by Rubin's insight (RUBIN IN VANCE, 1984) – according to which the sex and gender systems influenced each other, also conditioning social actors and their identity narratives – develops a theory of performance and performativity (BUTLER, 2007, Cf. VALE DE ALMEIDA, 2008 commenting on BUTLER, 2007). According to her, the idea that sexual practices destabilized gender arose when reading "The Traffic in Women" (RUBIN 1975 IN LEWIN, 2006), an article that corresponds to a moment in Rubin's career, in which, analytically, gender and sex/sexuality had not yet achieved their systemic, reciprocal autonomy. This perspective assumes that gender is the social expression of inequality between sexes and sexuality is the way in which this hierarchization is processed at the level of relations between people and between people who express gender (CATHERIN MACKINNON in BUTLER, 2007: XII). In Butler's view, this hierarchy arises from the potential capacity to produce gender (*doing gender*), updated by an institutional discourse under multiple dimensions, which defines from the outset what is or is not acceptable. According to Vale de Almeida, "an institutionalized way of thinking, a social frontier that defines what can be said about a given topic" (2008, commenting on BUTLER, 2007). Once again,



we are faced with a post-structuralist author, who conceives of a subject that is a mere consequence of the norm, aka the structure that determines it.

LANGUAGE AS A WAY OF ACTING ON THE STRUCTURE: EMPOWERMENT OF SUBJECTS

At the opposite pole, we have Kulick. Kulick (2003) counterargues that this theory of performativity, pre-enunciated discursively. Like Butler, Kulick also attaches great relevance to the discourse, however, he shifts the focus of his analysis to external frontiers to the structural sphere (KULICK, 1998) and, when observing transvestites in Salvador da Bahia, he does not do so from a certain institutionally active point of view, medical or legal, for example. On the contrary, it establishes as its primary objective, the analysis of their bodily and social practices, as well as "the words used to talk about their lives." (1998:14) In this context of *an emic* approach, directed to non-hegemonic discourses, as well as to the capacity of subjects to act outside a structural, absolute determinism, Kulick begins by distinguishing two concepts, equally important for Butler (2007). Also addressed by her and, now, recycled by him. "Performance is something that the subject does. Performativity, on the other hand, is the process through which the subject emerges" (2003 in CAMERON AND KULICK, 2006, p. 286).³ From this statement, it is concluded that performance can qualify an act/action disconnected from a broader temporal intention and, in this sense, disconnected from a political, social context and interaction determined by negotiated and symbolically mediated powers. Probably, originating from a past action, capable of being reproduced in the future and therefore also susceptible to be defined with greater analytical rigor insofar as it reflects a certain sociological position of the subject, outside the concrete interaction. This gives the subject an ability to intervene and negotiate with the structure. Including the power to subvert it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In line with what we have been arguing, performativity is everything that subjects strategically elaborate to produce themselves, as such, and in the sense of positioning themselves in a social space and time, before themselves, and before others. Discourse, posture, gestures, speeches, languages or symbolic boundaries are essential means for this process of affirmation. The element that mediates all these processes is the body. The discursive actions of social actors, concerted, more or less legitimizing and legitimized, more or less evident or implicit, authorized or prohibited, constitute themselves as

³ However, if we take performativity as a concept linked to the negotiated positioning in the interaction, this performativity of Butler, which is nothing more than a repetition of acts, can easily pass for performance and vice versa. (Cf. KULICK 2003 in CAMERON AND KULICK, 2006)



performativities and, simultaneously, forms of language that elevate the individual to the level of the community, abandoning the restricted scope of mere isolated performance, disconnected from a broader social context and only signaling a certain individual socio-anthropological positioning. which does not take advantage of his political assertion. Performativity, in our work, presupposes, therefore, the subject and its language – the body as part of it – as well as a community context and in this political sense, which reciprocally gives meaning to the practices and intelligibility to the subjects who perform or suffer them, through fluid relations and practices, although sometimes contradictory:

Also according to Santos (2006), identity is successively a brief stop in an identification process. Social groups and individuals in their life trajectory accumulate different identities and, on different occasions, they may have these various complementary and even contradictory identities. (SEPÚLVEDA, 2015, p. 111)

But what is coherence if not a way of legitimizing a *status quo*? Well, this oscillation and prevalence depend on the context and the need to be understood and socially classifiable, avoiding the worst of punishments – the lack of social place. Worse than a structurally illegal body, it is a body without a place. An individual who, in his or her practices and interactions associated with them, is not understood by the other and, as such, is not willing to understand the other through a similar process, does not emerge as a subject in interaction. It is at this point, therefore, that the political dimension of individual identity requires a social group or community at multiple scales – through identification, sharing or denial – and that the process of public externalization and vindication of this collective identity, distinct from the individual identities that form it, can acquire agonistic contours. This political context, in which differences are disputed, may involve negotiation, vindication and implementation of strategies aimed at pursuing common social and cultural goals (institutional recognition, struggle for rights, etc.), which do not exclude emotions and expectations, suffering or pleasure. In this sense, performativity can produce group idiosyncrasy by discursively instituting expected gender performances and expected sexualities in consonance. It is in a context of globalization, which enhances various transnationalisms, that performativities achieve, from a theoretical perspective, greater richness and, from a practical perspective, greater polysemy. In this context and under a structural dimension, the accentuation of the prevalence of multi-situated interactions that imprint various instabilities is underlined, both to the structure and to the practices that are dialogically related to it, by opposition, confirmation or simply, and, simply, strategic fluctuation. The body unquestionably assumes itself as its vehicle and visible dimension. As Pelúcio and Miskolci affirm in relation to transvestite performativity, more than just subversion or confirmation of heteronormativity, it reflects, in a certain sense, the subjection to heteronormative parameters, which allow them to be understood as human and social beings (2007:264). The mode? Their body and the way in which they communicate belongings or dissents through it. How? Exponentiating a



double political and symbolic subversion signaled and emitted by their bodies. Transvestites and Sex Workers.

In the case of Brazilian Transvestites in the context of sex work, their bodies have not only become the repository of their history and a reflector of their aspirations, but also become a language that emits a gender expression subject to heteronormative symbolic and moral logics. At the same time, it signals belongings and exclusions and, on another level, reveals itself as the object of the experience developed by the subject himself and, simultaneously, as a result of this experience. The body suffers efficiencies and constraints, however, it also emits efficiencies and coercibility when organizing sexuality, gender expression, labor, social or religious relations, assuming itself as a true Total Social Fact. From it we can unveil the various social dynamics in the most varied campuses (BOURDIEU, 2002). The body, as language, as an object of discursive production and as a structuring vector of social relations, becomes itself a norm that hierarchizes the social and, at the same time, an object and simultaneously the ultimate end of this social hierarchy by appearing as a subject, object, language, discourse, experience and object of the experience of the entire social process. The body, in the final analysis, reflects social inequalities and the way in which society hierarchizes itself at a given moment, through processes of symbolic subjectivation of the subjects who reveal and unveil them. The body of the illegal immigrant, the body of the sex worker, the body of the MOTHER, the body of the prostituta (OLIVEIRA, 2007), the body that actualizes authorized or immoral sexualities, the body of the woman who is a victim of domestic violence, the body of the active and enterprising man, the body of the autochthonous in the context of sex tourism, in short, all these bodies, They are objectively bodies and biology, however, subjectively, they can be everything in the scope of the production of identities, as long as they are subjected to the sieve of the normalized and normative gaze of the "other". Somehow, the subjectivation that we have been dealing with is revealed in the various and possible encounters with power (FOULCAULT, 2003). The gender, economic, geographical migrant, the asylum seeker. All of them are the object of structural constraints, but at the same time they are agents capable of resisting and subverting these constraints.



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