

Heteronormativity: Good language and bad slang: Sex and gender roles of Brazilian travestis in the context of transnational prostitution

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ABSTRACT

Modernity and post-modernity correspond to the extension of globalizing phenomena, boosted by new technologies, both in the field of communication and in the economic interdependencies generated, highlighting processes of construction of dense urban networks, where it was possible to achieve anonymity in relation to erotic affinities or sexual orientation, experienced in a community context. The break in the unidirectional flow between sex and gender highlights asymmetrical and structural relationship schemes, as well as rooted models of thought. This cisgender collapse was, theoretically, possible when Rubin (in Vance, 1984), admitted the existence of two different systems of sex and gender, from an analytical point of view, operating, however, mutual influences up to the level of identity agency and life projects. In this way, Rubin highlighted the causes of the discontinuity between sex, gender and sexuality (Rubin, in Lewin, 2006, in Vance, 1984), seeing in them the justification for a biological sex not necessarily corresponding to a gender. The paradigm of this maximum systemic autonomy is achieved in the construction of a travesti identity in a context of transnational prostitution. The travestis, constituting themselves as a transnational group, marked by gender and geographic mobility, first within Brazilian borders and, later, in another phase of the project, to Portugal. The city, prostitution and migration emerge as key factors in geographic dispersion and the construction of the sexual/gender identity of this community. Language and slang play an important role in this identity.

Keywords: Travesti, Sex, Gender, Prostitution, Active, Passive, Discourse, Identity.

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INTRODUCTION

This research seeks to capture and analyze strategies and modalities of action developed by a segment of Brazilian travestis, who started migrating to Portugal in the late nineties of twentieth century and whose material sufficiency and identity narrative are possible by maintaining a significant intra-national and transnational mobility directed to prostitution market, that connects them through Europe and Brazil.² Supported by ethnographic study, we will try to show how travestis practices / agencies are built within and between various structures and by relation to them. To this aim, we mobilized analytical lenses essentially focused on the subject and his discourses, which simultaneously allow us to uncover structural features and limits that define a conditioning spectrum of discursive and performative possibilities to them.

In a migratory framework, where we could interact and observe Brazilian travestis in Portugal, we purchased an analysis of their agency modalities in relation to discursive and performative structures, which apparently exclude them (Namaste, 2000), interrogating constructions of gender and performative languages which they mobilize. To what extent these travestis embody and perpetuate dominant ways of thinking and acting masculine, feminine and heterosexuality? To what extent, however, they reframe performances of hegemonic gender and sexual roles, making them fluid and plastic, moldable and adaptable to specific circumstances? In which situations the connection between gender identity and sexual performativity relies on heterosexual normativity? In what other situations is renegotiated or, if we prefer, is constituted as a strategic relation with structure, and what combinatorial features can it reveal? This ambiguity in the dialogical relation between gender construction and sexual performativity can only be conceived as a strategy related to economic survival needs, due to prostitution scenarios where they engage in and which are characterized by particularly adverse contexts, both in Brazil and in Europe? We may perceive this ambiguity as a third gender possibility (Kulick, 1998: 226) or an underline of those existing?

ANALYTICAL CONCEPTS AND DIMENSIONS

ON THE NOTION OF TRAVESTI AND OTHERS RELATED

Urge, at this point of conceptual dimensions, to precise an analytical distinction between some gendered and sexualized social constructions, which may produce some miscomprehensions. We refer to transsexualism, transgenderism and homosexuality. Homosexuality/lesbianism is related to sexual orientation, while transsexuality and transgenderism refers to identity and gender construction, although, transsexuals at a certain stage of their lives become aware to their sex/ mind divergence and undertake a sex correction surgery medically oriented which make them in a certain sense structural products. Sexual orientation emphasizes the sexual attraction to men, women or both, gender identity

² Lisbon, Oporto, Milan, Rome, Frankfurt, Athens, Barcelona, Madrid, etc.



concerns to the way individuals feel and express their gender (Saleiro, 2009: 1-2). Travestis are a specific form of transgenders and in this article the term travesti qualifies only subjects that perform gender and signalize it by multiple social doings, however, not resorting to a sex-reassignment surgery (see Garfinkel, 1967, Kessler and McKenna, 1978). Our interlocutors self-represent themselves and present themselves mostly³ as travestis, getting their economic livelihood from prostitution, in which «the penis becomes the central element of their work». (Loise, 2006: 19, see Kulick, 1998)

Concerning to drag-queens, they perform female attributes acting before an audience returning to their daily male identity – which they never change - after the performance. Regarding to cross-dressers, they operate a touristic journey of gender (Ekins and King, 2006)⁴ - «between four walls, in sexual terms, everything is possible» (Adriana interview) - fact which is related to desirable erotic activities, however, also returning to their manhood status after that extraordinary event, separating private and public space concerning to their acting.⁵ Although, it also doesn't involve an identity construction. (Ekins and King, 2006)

The gender migrations only applicable to travestis, others transgenders and transsexuals (Ekins and King, 2006), highlights the use of trans prefix, which reflects a generalized conception of transgression, something that overcomes borders and simultaneously, as a collective aspiration of unity between those “*transgressors*” (Ekins and King, 2005, 2006, Namaste, 2000).⁶ So, if transsexuals converge with structure by submission to surgery, travestis often lie in a limbo, due to their resilience in maintaining a non-correspondence relation between sex and gender. By language they will frame their experiences and actions, which simultaneously frame that slung in a dialogical manner. Although, the implicit ambivalence we find in living like a woman, but having a man's sex, confers to their discursive enunciated specificities, often seen by structural powers like incongruences.

³ For example, at internet where they advertise sexual services; Thaira Lemos's advertises herself as «a beautiful trans». Day L. as «The travesti, sin color», referring indirectly to her blacked skin color.

⁴ Ekins and King argue that regarding to travestis we assist to a gender migration, which at transsexuals case goes further and that migration is extended to sex. On the contrary, processes which does not involve, identity constructions, like drag-queens and cross-dressers, are considered as touristic journeys with a consequent home come-back. (Ekins and King, 2006)

⁵ Zimmerman & West argue that gender has no specific context like other roles, namely doctors, police-man, nurses, etc. (1987)

⁶ Virginia Prince died in 2009 with 97 years old and was considered a pioneer in using the term transgender. Born as a male at Los Angeles, in 1912, early showed interest in cross-dressing, and gradually operating a total gender change and started to live as a woman until she passed away, since then. At Virginia point of view, a transgender is someone who was born as a male, although operates a change in the construction of his gender identity and lives thereafter always as a woman, putting breasts, but not resorting to surgery to genitalia. Often railed against re-reassignment surgery, when mind and body showed incompatibility of gender, arguing that the construction of gender has nothing to do with the sexual characteristics, however conceived this surgery as a valid alternative in cases of sexual incompatibility with mind. (Ekins and King, 2005)



FIELD WORK AND RESEARCH

This research was initiated in May 2006, using participant observation by living during some time at Adriana's homes at Oporto and Lisbon, and was extended till 2014 in the framework of a PHD thesis. Living at the social *locus* where they execute prostitution and also where they live their daily lives, allowed us access to their back-stages and having contact with many other Brazilian travestis, who traded home with her or with other travestis.⁷ In this research we also exercised ethnographic methodology, realized semi-directive interviews and observed – sometimes making part of it - social interactions in *facebook*, messenger and orkut.br. This on-line communication, made possible contacts with travestis living in many other cities of Europe, fact that would not be possible, without this communication channels.

SEX, LANGUAGE, BODY AND PROSTITUTION

“(...) If i was passive it was x, if i was also active, I earned x over x, so it was a lot of more money!” (Adriana's interview)

At Brazilian streets, after being expelled from their homes, starting or furthering a process of re-socialization in travestis social network, they face new circumstances and requirements. These behavioral patterns, resulting not only from the activity of prostitution which they perform, but also from the interaction with other group members, guide us to the assumption that the question of identity is negotiated in the field of interaction. First step token towards a re-socialization lies on the fact that new travestis arrived at Brazilians biggest towns⁸, can't live on their own, so they have, to look for a pimp's house – other travesti, usually an older one/*cafetina*– and pay her in a daily basis for the staying. At some cities, like Campinas, travestis also had, to applicate a minimum quantity of industrial silicone decided by older travestis – Cafetina - as a requirement to be able to stay and work there. That industrial silicone application was provided by the *cafetina*/pimp⁹ that does it in a handmade way using veterinary syringes and industrial silicone applied between the skin and flesh. Which may cause and already caused many deaths, including Adriana who in 2018, when she fell on the stairs of her home, saw the silicone enter the bloodstream causing sepsis.

⁷ By permuting houses, the majority of travestis may exercise prostitution at domicile, fact that does not happens in Brazil, where mostly they exercise prostitution/sex work at the streets. By this system of trades/home changes, a travesti today may be in Lisbon and Tomorrow at Oporto, or at any other city, in Portugal or Europe.

⁸ Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Campinas, Salvador, etc.

⁹ That travesti pimp often learned to applicate silicone by observing other applications and by doing on herself at the beginning. (See Kulick, 1998, Luis and Trovão in Trovão, 2010, Pelucio, 2006)

Image 1- Photo made at Adriana's home showing a silicone bottle and a veterinary syringe.



Then begins another stage level of being travesti, generally assisted by a street mother/*mãe* that has the function of initiating the new ones in sex work, while at the same time a street godmother/*madrinha*¹⁰ protects and teaches them about how to live in the streets and deal with other travestis and multiple kind of dangers.¹¹ So, at the streets and with a new micro socially reproduced family, their bodies become also a language¹², and at the same time a way of framing their discourse and slang.

GENDERING PROCESS. BODY, MIND AND STRUCTURE

So at another *campus*¹³ (Bourdieu, 2002) regarding sexual orientation and not gender construction, travestis begin to conceive themselves and be conceived by others as homosexuals, after they have their first sexual experience with a same sex partner – usually around 12, 13, 14 years old, at the same age they are expelled from home by their fathers (Kulick, 1998, Pelúcio, 2006, 2007, Luís, 2018) - and before they undertake the body transformation with silicone and hormones ingestion, done and acquired out of structure and at marginal networks markets. At the streets travestis realize sex practices which may not be only a question of pleasure or identity legitimacy, but also a guarantee of more income. (Kulick, 1998, Loise, 2006, Luís e Trovão in Trovão, 2010, Pelúcio, 2006, Luís, 2018)

¹⁰ Mãe de rua.

¹¹ These words are used by travestis. It useful to refer that in 90's, every street in Brazil had a chefe de rua, a street boss, and if a travesti went to street without asking permission, could be severely beaten or even killed. That is why they needed to be assisted and initiated at a street's livelihood.

¹² Body-done and used to sign their gender. (Benedetti, 2005)

¹³ Social field.



Thus, when we analyze identities and affiliations, that work must be done observing several approach scales (see scaled analysis - Silvano, 1997), characterizing them, and most of all, not looking for a logical and coherent line guidance between them, instead we must look for and analyze the processes of pursuing such legitimating logic, within a given scheme of thoughts, beliefs and rules, that influences subjects and vice-versa. By this argument the reflexive capacity of individuals is essential and always operates in relation to structure, and at a certain point, structure is dialogically determined by social actors, doings. And practices, even those that are considered subversives (See Giddens, 1984 – structuration and structural duality)

In this dialogical context, like many of her "*manas/sisters*"¹⁴, Adriana conceives sex with women – “never had an active relationship with anyone ... ever met a woman!” (Luís, 2018) - as incomprehensible (see in same sense Loise, 2006: 18). Women are part of the record of identifications (though incomplete) and friendships – “women friends, many! Woman, to me, is only friendship” (Adriana) in Luís, 2018. This symbolic process incorporates heterosexual normativity, which operates enormous influences on their discursive elaborations and practices strategies, as a reference. Although, not in a mimetic perspective, like argued Butler when referring to travestis and transsexuals. (2007, see also Namaste, 2000)

This multiplicity of relational contexts and consequent plasticity of variables involved in the legitimation of a social actor *being up* process – reflexively produced - is also clearly expressed by Pelúcio's example of Fabiana, a travesti whom, within the borders of her “lesbian” relationship with Veronica (another travesti), wore masculine underwear at home, and in the context of the street prostitution wore female "panties", reproducing and reflecting through this scheme, different spatializations and subsequently, others scales of interaction and action also determined by interests, emotions and affections (Coleman, 1990, Ortner, 1984). This presupposes therefore, an entire construction of gender that is developed in specific and differentiated interactive contexts, on the one hand the "house", on the other hand the "street" and the client, managing in each context what is expected from the individual by other (Vertovec, 2009). However, if what confers meaning to the relationship with Veronica is an attempt to legitimate identity through the binomial panties vs briefs¹⁵, with the client this signaling function can be contextually altered and likely to search for other intelligibilities when, for example, the client asks to be "he" to use panties (Adriana), or when Fabiana uses panties at the streets. That is why, regarding to Fabiana and Verónica, while masculine and feminine wasn't present in their relation in bed, sexual relations could not be performed or understood. This fact underlines the need of presence of a masculine and a feminine to make sexual relation, intelligible. Symbolically it is always necessary a feminine with her attributes, usually

¹⁴ It means sister, a word used among Brazilian travestis when they refer to their colleges of prostitution and gender social construction.

¹⁵ An indirect path to represent male and female in the relation.



connected to being passive and exterior signs of a role. Being masculine, yet today, is symbolically suitable with being active, bossy, and dominant. Thus, in multi-relational contexts language orders experiences and practices, discriminating, erasing, or providing the possibilities of emergence of specific subjects or objects.¹⁶ Although that ordering function depends on the combination of variables, which, also depends on contextual factors and social hierarchies.¹⁷

GAYSPEAK

In different social and financial contexts, homosexuals developed words to classify themselves and the others (men) according for example to their social ranking or sexual likes, also recreating words which classify gay men according to their racial preferences. “White males who seek out black men (*dinge*) are *dinge queens*, while black male who prefer white men are *social climbers...*” (Stanley in Cameron e Kulick, 2006:54). Again, language frames the actions and produce difference between individuals. More than ordering only roles performed in sexual relations, words used in that dominium situate an individual at a broader social interaction. Adriana as we see by her discourse also ranks social and ethnically her clients, “black people and Brazilians I do not attend, no!” Or their colleagues/sisters/manas as belonging or not to the travesti community; “Fagot/*bicha* has no chest, has nothing, they have no body done!” Adriana reveals in her speech the intersection of socially differentiated variables and markers, which demarks borders and provides discursive identity repertoires.¹⁸ At another social level of analysis, gay men acknowledge and reveal in their practices the existence of an adequate behavior to male or female:

(...) the allocation of behaviours along the more salient dimensions of interests, such as focal points of sexual likes and dislikes and continua of masculinity and femininity (...) enculturation into a community entails the learning of the language and the normative behaviour at the same time; one is embodied in the other. (Sonenschein in Cameron and Kulick, 2006:47)

For example, often they use the word «meat» to qualify a man that sells sexual-services and on the other hand, they call «butch» to the masculine partner of a homosexual relation, who dresses clothes proper to the performing of his active role.

Language is thus, a socio-historical product developed in certain temporal, spatial and political context and those are not universal, on the contrary they are products of human behaviors,

¹⁶ See Ekins and King about strategies to build gender identities, through processes of erasure, implications, substitutions, conciliations, or insinuations, produced on and through the bodies, in order, to highlight female characteristics and to hide male features. (2006)

¹⁷ Sex and gender are social doings, like many others human productions, that’s because sex, gender and language produce social stratification. Rubin considered that travestis, transsexuals and prostitution are ranked at the lowest scale of sex and gender doings by structural social perceptions, although in sex and gender speech we find other variables, which by different combinations between them can provide us many others analytical results. (Rubin in Vance, 1984)

¹⁸ This speech is produced in Portugal, ranking differently black people and brazilians comparing to what she did at Brazilian streets. Translocational positionality. (Anthias and Gabriela, 2000)



actions and historic established power relations (Ortner, 1984). That's why the newest communication technologies assumed great importance to minorities, tending to disseminate language more broadly in the same way that enhance the knowledge of slangs, which confers new dimensions to concepts of transformation, reproduction or identification and in parallel injects time and space (Ledrut, 1979), with new dynamic efficacies on slangs and collective identities. Anyhow "(...) any special gay language must be evaluated within a contextual Framework." (Hayes in Cameron e Kulick, 2006:68)

SLANG OUTSIDE THE STRUCTURE?

What we ask now is simple and concrete. Do slang keep structure like reference showing openness to it, or is it closed upon its own borders? These parallel linguistic processes will reveal us if groups are opened or closed to structural normativity. Hayes argues that language and slang is a specific speech produced to facilitate communication between members of a smaller group while at the same time excludes the other from it (Hayes in Cameron and Kulick, 2006). Although, others have a different opinion:

I have presented as a code growing out of a history with significance limited only to an in-group might be, expected to create differences in function as well. (Darsey, in Cameron and Kulick, 2006:80).

What Darsey emphasizes is the historical and interactive context in which *gayspeak* is produced, which, even that its efficiency only operates through the control of group expectations upon individual behavior, (Bourdieu, 2002, Coleman, 1990, Vertovec, 2009), however, is not only produced within the group, but through hard and complex interaction and negotiation with structural majorities that stigmatize it.

Shared specialized language bonds people, and for gays it can be a way of self-affirmation, a way of rejecting the taboo. Specialized language builds as well as responds to community. (Crew in Cameron e Kulick, 2006:56)

In this theoretical frame of dialogical connections between minorities and majorities, between individuals and structures, between actions and normativity, we propose in travestis case, an approach that conceives structure and social doings like the two sides of the same coin¹⁹, although sometimes operating that dialogical dimension of the relation through agonistic and painful social processes.

¹⁹ Structure duality. (Giddens, 1984)



SEXUALITY, GENDER, LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOR CONTROL

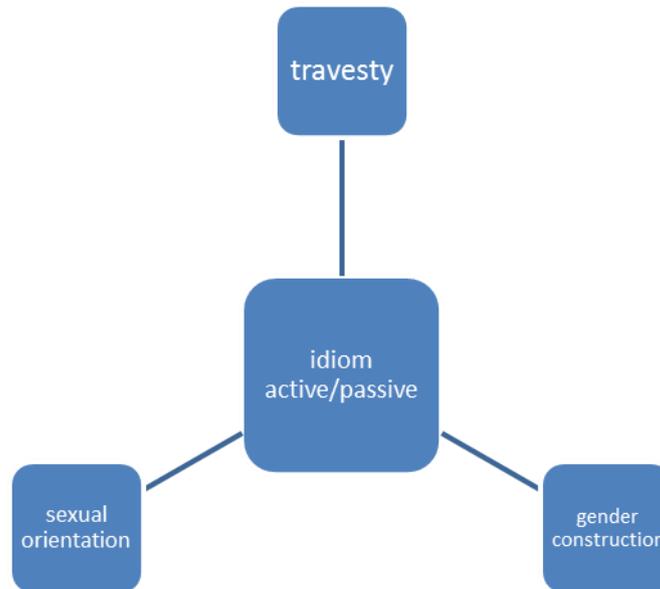
Reordering social variables, travestis in the context of Brazilian streets recreate other words to give meaning to individual's social positioning at interactions, namely words or expressions like *vicious-fag* or simply *vicious*. The first expression refers to a man, who besides looking for a sexual relation in which he is the passive partner, also tries to get it for free. Trying to have a free payment sexual relation is something very badly seen by travestis in the streets, because it devalues the main resource for their survival, which in addition to the lowest rank attributed to the client regarding is passive role, situate him in an inferior social hierarchy. Although, some travestis also perform and provide clients free payment sex. These ones are even more unpopular among other group/sisters/manas members - than the *vicious* clients – and may suffer sanctions imposed by other group members, like for example being expelled from her *ponto/place in the street*.²⁰ So by language, groups and its members can classify and hierarchize individuals, actions and behaviors.

By these previously mentioned symbolic system, social constructions and re-socialization processes made in it, travestis draw new relational links between variables, observing although a heteronormative guidance in terms of sex and gender performances. In this symbolic procedure, the system that ranks relations as heterosexual or homosexual is predominantly the gender one (Rubin 1976, in Lewin, 2006, in Vance, 1984) and not only sexual orientation, although revealing various interdependencies among them. These different line-ups of variables and liens established between them, turns possible that a man who maintains sexual relations with a travesti is not considered gay, if he is the active element. In this case he is considered heterosexual, as well as a relationship between two travestis can be described as lesbian and not as a homosexual one – the case we've seen of Fabiana and Verónica. “No! A man that stays with a travesti is not gay! He us just looking for another kind of sex” (Carla Tedesco in Carvalho, 2012), or “no way! A man wanting to be with a travesti is like he wanted to be with two women!” (Adriana in Luis, 2018)

Indeed, we consider that travestis operates a reordering of variables implied at sex and gender heteronormative systems.

²⁰ Their place in the streets. Their *pontos* in the streets are important on several dimensions. The first one refers to their survival, the second is a way of ranking prostitutes allowing them to stay at more visible places, or less visible ones, what operates great importance in their group status reproduction, since the ones with more social capital occupy the better places, and on the contrary, the lowest ranked one, the worst places. The visibility in streets also increases the possibilities of earning more money. All this structuration operates throw their re-socialization in travestis group borders. (see in the context of prostitution in Netherlands, [Gregory, 2005])

Picture 1 –Active/passive sexual idiom.



Thus, travestis reorganize links between gender construction and sexual orientation. In other words, travestis distort structural connections between sexual system and gender system (Rubin, 1984 in Vance), just because they don't acknowledge their structural correspondence, although sometimes they use it strategically. It is especially in the context of sexwork that travestis's gender language, unfolds from heterosexual normativity, even when, subverts or distorts it by gender or sexual performances. (Kulick 2003 in Cameron and Kulick, 2006)

Indeed, at discourse and practices level, managed in everyday life interactions, travestis discover men / clients who seek the passive side and pay them to take an active part. What, in other contexts constitutes a factor that invests subjects of manhood, in this case, specifically, gives them an advantage in the market of sexual exchanges, and in parallel, classifies those men seeking the passive role, as *mariconas/fagots*²¹, underlining the presence of a heterosexual symbolic system based on active and passive elements, and looking further, on an ideological masculine dominance upon feminine gender (Rubin 1975 in Lewin, 2006, in Vance, 1984), sustained on patriarchal system (Vale de Almeida, 2000, 2000a, Freire, 1964, 1987, Rubin 1975 in Lewin, 2006, in Vance, 1984) and political power.

This synthetic procedure, operating different scales of hierarchies between gender and sexual systems, also at the dominium of practices, turns possible that a passive man, partner of a sexual relation, is considered a *pussy/fag/maricona*, however, as travestis don't regard themselves as homo-oriented men, not even as men, they do not classify themselves as homosexual's partners in that specific kind of sexual relation. Once more, in their constructions, we note a predominance of gender

²¹ Pussy, fag.



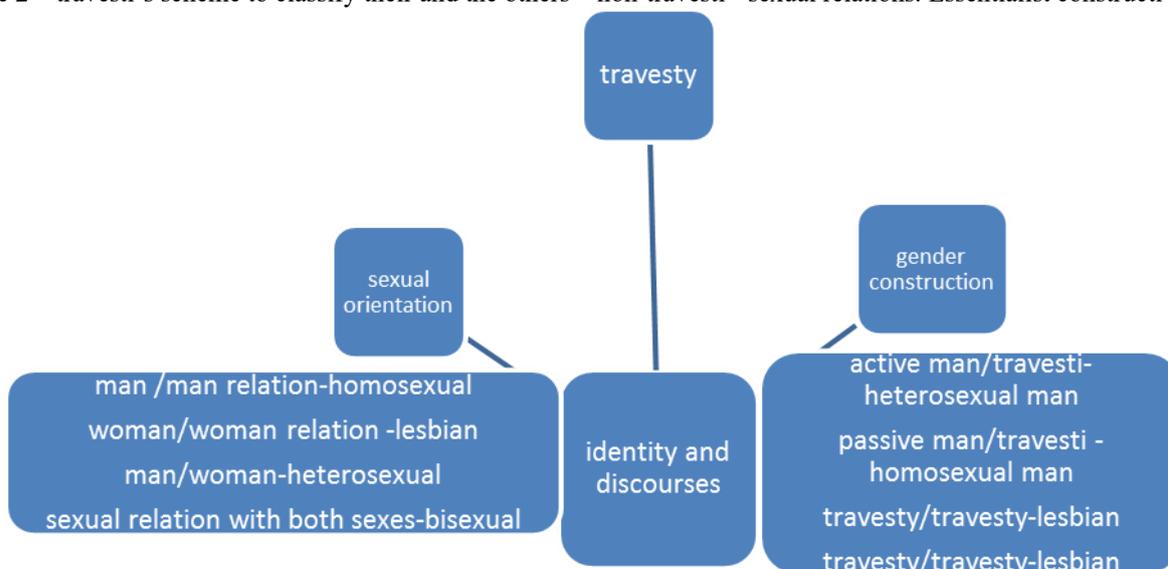
produced features upon sexual orientation roles. This way of delineating boundaries between sex and gender, might denote influences from a sexual model existing at the Brazilian Northeast – fag-man/*homem-bicha* model (Green, 1999, Kulick, 1997). This sexual and social arrangement prescribes that a man who participates in a sexual relation with other man, as active element, is not considered homosexual, while, the other male partner, being passive is classified as homosexual/*bicha*.²² In this view of things, the individual identity is positional (Hall, 1996) and he becomes male or female regardless of his sex, because the predominance is attributed to his gender proper role performed in a specific sexual relation. The male becomes female, only because he is passive and passivity is a female attribute, on the other hand, the male, the true man, stands male, regardless of having a sexual relation with a same sex partner, only because he is active.²³

These procedures show us that language which imbues sex and gender of secular ideologies, prescribes what is proper and inherent to a man and to a woman (Freire, 1987). As we see, according to this model - man/fag-man -, gender roles of activeness and passiveness are the key elements largely operating in this classification, and not the fact of being a sexual relation between two social actors of the same sex. Nevertheless, sexual orientation socially marked by the sexes of participants in a sexual relation, is greatly present in these symbolic and thought schemes. So, the homosexual is the partner that performs the feminine role and its proper attributes imbued (structurally) with naturalized characteristics. By an extensive interpretation of this model and by collecting an emic point of view from travestis interviewed, even when they perform the active role with a man, they do not consider themselves as the masculine partner, because they also show and signalize in their gendering doings the predominance of feminine qualities. This fact also highlights the positional perspective of the subject (Hall, 1996), which reveals us that in a social interaction, there are many more symbolic elements presents, besides the social actors participating can achieve.

²² Fag.

²³ What is incorrect by heteronormative sexual orientation criteria.

Picture 2 – travesti's scheme to classify their and the others – non-travesti - sexual relations. Essentialist constructivism



As argues Pelúcio (2006: 526), these dialogues maintain with structure, which sometimes travestis distorts, reveal us that Brazilian travestis expect from "real men" that they are masculine, active, enterprising, penetrators (see in the same sense Loise 2006 : 20). In this perspective the man will always be the one which assume the active role (Kulick, 1998: 124). This construction of gender and sexual performance roles, therefore, is not a rigid structure, however, the act of differentiating the two oppositional terms of the binary male / female, resulting in the consolidation of each term, tries to operate an approach to the paradigm that conceives an unidirectional flow of coherence between sex, gender and desire, (Butler, 2007: 31), although changing contextually values, hierarchies and valuations of sex, gender and desire. Roberta advertising her sexual services at a specialized sight, underlined : *Skin color : white. Sexual orientation : Active, passive, complete. Accept men, women and couples.*

By this angle of analytical approach, heterosexuality is present as a reference, but when it comes to classify sexual practices using heteronormative criteria, travestis distort and reorganize that structural agents and do it by stretching gender elaborations efficiency, till it turn possible the emergence of their own spectrum of identity possibilities, in which they produce a specific gender and sexual identity narrative. Procedure which reversely floats to an original operation oriented by sexual system, when it classifies the other in a desirable and coherent sexual relation between non-travestie. Two men having sex are undoubtedly gays in travestis point of view, which at this point converges with the structural social judgement.

Like Rubin argues, there are two different systems operating at the social level, one is the sex system, by which the sexual performances developed by travestis and at the same time prostitutes/sex



workers, are seen and classified as perversions and *queer* sexual doings, the other is the gender system that constrains and socially acts upon their gender construction. Those two systems, which Rubin considers analytically autonomous (in Vance, 1984)²⁴, although exercising reciprocal influences on the practices level, seems to be the base of travestis classifications, although, somehow, distorting and subverting their original structural meaning. This procedure result in what Kulick considered an essentialist constructivism. (1998)

HETERONORMATIVE DISCOURSE AND ITS SOCIAL EFFICACY

LANGUAGE, STRUCTURATION AND BEHAVIOR

This heteronormative guidance is well revealed by Paula Velasques, a brazilian travesti who arrived in Portugal on May 2007, that inadvertently showed us, like discourse may situate individuals also in different emotional and religious spaces. Talking about God she told us: “Christ that was ... that is Christ! He came ... he was broken, he was not accepted! He reached the point of being killed on the cross, why will I feel defeated by being discriminated in some way!” In Portuguese the verbs has grammatical gender and when Paula used the verbalization «defeated», she did it in the male form. We asked her why in that context she used that verbal form (see Borba, 2006). The answer was clear:

Because in this case, I'm talking about the religious part, you know? In this case I have great respect (...) I do the same with family, my family until today calls me Paul(o)²⁵, you know? In this case i do this way, and the more i try, i will not be able to change it! In relation to religion, i also do the same way. (Paula Vellaskez interview in Luis, 2018)

Persisting on travestiis affections and how they are cited or discursively produced, they were first socialized in heteronormative boundaries in which roles and gender performances appear clearly demarcated. Adriana says:

The friendship was more with women, I had that prejudice of friendship with men ... because i knew that from that I could expect what? Let's play ball ... and I did not want that child's play for me in my childhood! I liked to play with dolls, not with balls! hahahahah (Adriana in Luis, 2018)

This socialization process suggests a hierarchical conception of gender relations and their effectiveness in practical social terms, defining social and discursive fields of legitimated and anthropologically structured actions. Thus, also in their love relationships, travestis reproduce the structural roles of the woman / wife, expecting their partners who also fit this heteronormative paradigm (Pelúcio, 2006: 527) – they have to be real men, true men! So when a travesti refers to her boyfriend, she produce him discursively as “husband/*marido*,” again reproducing by this expedient

²⁴ After arguing that sex and gender systems were not autonomous between them. (Rubin 1975 in Lewin, 2006)

²⁵ The name used by family is not Paula, the feminine grammatical gender of her name, they call her Paulo.



and with more symbolic charge the naturalization of relations structurally established between man and woman. The “husband” – *marido* - is usually someone who starts being a client and that day-by-day gets closer to the anthropological space of home/*casa*, while the client belongs to the street. This woo process doesn't require the same time that *common* men and women usually needs, it only takes for them having had a pleasure full sexual relation with that man and if he wants presents and money, he becomes her husband. On the other hand, these relations usually finish fast, in a question of days or weeks. Anyway, the word *marido*/husband is a strategic approach to the heteronormative model, trying to legitimate their social doings as being naturals and not abnormal or *queer*.

Many times, we heard that being a travesti is not a matter of choice, it was born with them (Paula Vellasquez in Luís, 2018), statement which inadvertently constitutes the structural base to classify them as *queer*; abnormal or gender troubled people.

CONCLUSIONS

First I will justify why I use the word travesti – they are a specific production of Brazilian culture and embrace a dimension of resistance and fight for being who they want to be. Than, explanation made, I consider travestis performative and discursive productions of gendering, are very much produced within prostitution/sex work context and based on the dominant gender system, which relies on heterosexuality and as a consequence in kinship, from which results the majority of cultural and institutional human productions. Male and female, something that seemingly transcend (trans), are constituted like necessary elements for executing their strategies, manipulating both terms of the binomial in function of ambivalent and adaptable sexual practices and gender performances in the light of clients demands or, in parallel, in function of home affections. That ambivalence and plasticity seem to establish some bridges between their discourses/sexual practices and the identity construction of homosexuals in Brazil - the model man vs fag-man. (Green, 1999, Kulick, 1997, 1998)

The construction of a desirable female identity with naturalized features on a male body, that keeps its genitals, very much connected with unstable contexts brought up by post-modernity and its reflexive capacity of questioning structure - although, being constrained by it - undermines at our point of view the possibility of a third gender path (as argued Kulick, 1998). Realistically, travestis live in a state of liminality, based on models of acting masculinity and femininity which emerge from biological sex and cultural constructions, made up throw the basic observation of differences between men and woman genitals. Discursively and politically, those genitals acquires and incorporates symbology of penetrating or being penetrated, being active or being passive, being socially active or passive, dominant or dominated, which means, that more than sexuality, heteronormativity orders society, instituting the dominance of ones, above others, of men upon women (Ortner, 1984), on the



same basis that for example racism or social classes difference is socially structured and produced. At this sense, more than only a normative system operating upon sex and gender divergence, heteronormativity is an ideology that orders and ranks all society, heterosexuals also.

It also follows from this investigation that travestis phenomenon incorporated in prostitution transnational market is included in a process commonly known as globalization, in which the flows of people, ideas, images, capital, facilities and information are processed at a speed never seen or felt before, providing the encounter or clash of cultures and sub-cultures, languages and slangs - good and bad languages - good or bad practices, generating parallel processes which encouraged the emergence of difference's markets convergent with capitalism and fetishization of commodity. (Harvey, 1989)

Thus, by migrating, travestis move and act strategically in relation to multiple structures at different levels, in a geographical perspective when they undertake multi-oriented and situated migration projects, but also at a prostitution level, within which their construction of gender requires malleability regarding different performances contexts in which they act - clandestine / institutional, male / female, active / passive, etc. In fact, these various contexts are social fields which are also included in structure, constituting substructures in which travestis dynamically derive, depending on the strategies they perform in order, to pursue their interests, consciously oriented. For example, when they discursively elaborate concepts of homosexuality or lesbianism determined by gender construction although, we know that at a structural level these referents are shaped by sexual orientation/sex system, mainly. Now, I will also say why sometimes i use the word prostitution; that derives from the fact that words have symbolic charges and a punitive function. I did not want to hide the fact that the word prostitute is what they really feel from society as a social punishment for their identity and practices. So, Brazilians travestis in a context of prostitution use heteronormativity as a reference, however they do it in an ambiguous way that allows them to build and preserve their hybrid identity. Also is a fact, that this survival repertoire is very much connected with prostitution, which constitutes, the only labour activity available for them. All this plasticity of practices, although with effective coherence among the group - which also has its own control social devices that assures group behaviours, discourses and practices reproduction or its controlled transformation - becomes translated in words and discourses, that express relations and hierarchies within the community and outside it.

As we have seen all slangs have its production context. Only an existing social fragment can generate a word that classifies it and only a collection of social fragments may result in a discursive enunciation that frames them, however, always related with an existing and concrete power relations system. Travestis slang frames and it is dialogically, shaped by prostitution, streets,



colleagues/manas/sisters, clients, violence, discrimination, mobility (of gender and geographic), sex and gender constructions performed under a coercive supervision of structural heteronormativity, etc.

That slang reveals openness to structure when for example they reproduce, although in a creative way, speeches and words that nominates some institutional figures; husband, masculine/active, feminine/passive, masculine/passive/fag, mother, godmother, etc. It also reveals the interactive context of discourse production, only possible in a communicational process in which people are involved and willing to understand the other (Zimmerman and West, 1987), conferring at a certain level legitimacy and intelligibility to their communal social doings.

In our point of view there isn't a third gender path, on the contrary we argue that there is a reinforcement of the binary male/female, although resulting in something different from them, something that incorporates both and that changes hierarchical relations between sex and gender heteronormative systems. This dual incorporation allows them to build a specific identity, based on structural binomial, but, at the same time in rupture with it, since it does not constitute a polarized binomial. Inversely these two terms become mixed, being, classified by structure discourse as gender perturbations. Structure that produced discourses and social facts, creating identities like travestis or transgenders on a medical context, as a way to discriminate their non-conformity with it, implicitly acknowledges the non-natural correspondence of sex and gender and its social – naturalized - produced meanings, achieved through politic maneuvers in the context of systemic power relations.



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