


Brazilian travestis, sex workers and migrants. Body, culture and performativity; Epistemology of the political production of transgression and subordination

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ABSTRACT

Borders, as symbolic delimitations that filter relations between subjects and groups of subjects, always fulfill a political function; to delimit, within the scope of these relations, the hierarchization of social actors/actresses and their bodies, according to a certain policy of sexes, genders, social class, race, color, ethnicity or geographical origin. The aim of this text is to demonstrate how body and culture, through performativity, are simultaneously objects and agents of their production as illegal or normalized, giving rise to the emergence of subjects in interaction. To this end, we will resort to an analysis that establishes a parallelism between gender and geographical migrations, seeking to demonstrate how the processes of border crossing, in both cases, present similarities that allow us to apply their analytical grids to both with a character of symbolic reciprocity.

Keywords: Gender Migrations, Geographic Migrations, Body, Culture and Borders.

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INTRODUCTION

DISORDERED IDENTITY AND GEOGRAPHICAL FLOWS.

Based on my doctoral thesis and consequent book (LUÍS, 2018), entitled *Brazilian Travestis in Portugal, Transmigrations and Globalization; the Transnational Sex Industry*, we generally verify that it is in a globalized socio-historical context that the need for social actors/actresses to communicate emerges exponentially from a context that is not always peaceful, between local, regional or global, which often places them in identity confrontation. This recalcitrant agonism is a form of survival and a condition for their emergence as political subjects. It is from this bio-cultural need, resized by multi-structured power relations and object of various intersectionalities, that multiple and geographically diverse performativities gain prominence, operating in various dimensions and moments of interaction. To communicate is to attribute meaning to something or someone and, in this sense, corresponds to the search undertaken by the social actor for the finding of a performative and discursive self/hetero-intelligibility. This is only achievable in the reflection of light that emerges from the interaction, which illuminates its subjects, while its hierarchical political participants, central in its dynamic and symbolically coded structuring. At the same time, we found that there is no performativity without discourse, just as there is no discourse to which performativities do not correspond. It is in this dialectical and multi-segmented structuring of the social (GIDDENS, 1984, 1991, 2000, 2004 and GIDDENS ET AL., 1997)² that the processes unfold at various scales, namely, within a dominant culture (always political) or at a certain point, diverging and contradicting it. This often happens by resorting to the same socio-transformative tools through which bio-powers sustain this structure, as a cultural, political, hierarchical and culturalized manifestation of a normalized and dominant nature, symbolically incorporated as such. See, for example, the case mentioned by João Dantas in his doctoral thesis, on the pathologization/subordination of gay bodies, when the AIDS pandemic appeared in the twentieth century (DANTAS, 58).

It is in this framework of naturalized authorizations and subordinations that we will seek in this exercise - in which we invite the reader to participate - to focus on the Brazilian travestis that we have worked in the context of immigration and prostitution³ in Portugal, as social productions of Brazilian cultural idiosyncrasy. In this sense, we will try to delve into their performativities and ways of communicating, questioning how this strategic negotiation is carried out inside and outside the heteronormative culture. Concretely, we will try to scrutinize how they do it alternately within the

² Structuring corresponds to the social process that encompasses structure and subject with reflective capacity, in the movement of social transformation, instead of polarizing dominance at the pole of the structure or the subject's capacity for agency.

³ The academy preferentially uses the term sex work, however, linguistics teaches us that words have a special and concrete weight, and this is what Brazilian Travestis feel in their flesh and skin.



scope of these socio-normative boundaries (TURNER, 1974), which in some way structure and restrict - not only symbolically - the agency and strategic possibilities of viability of each travesti social actor/actress, as a Brazilian and world citizen. (BOURDIEU, 2002, GIDDENS, 1984, 1991) In this context, it is essential to determine the reason for listing the hypothesis that travestis are effectively a Brazilian sociocultural production, exposing to this end, what we believe to be the foundations that validate this hypothesis, namely, the relationship they establish with their bodies and with the discursive statements produced about it and those of others. In another moment, we will try to determine the relationship that is established between discourse and behavior, crossing for this purpose, the symbolic production of the foreign and illegal body in a geo-migratory context - by the action of bio powers and by the symbolic and mediating capacity of borders - with the production of the body structurally perceived, as out of order; which is the case of Brazilian Travestis in both geographical and gender migration. How does the illegality of the body and the subject is produced, how does culture and structure act through its ordenating power, in order to impose multiple and diverse scales of citizenship, selectively restricting them? Are there, therefore, in mobility bodies that are not authorized and that only exist as such? Are Brazilian travestis so segregated and marginalized that they reactively close themselves off to the structure that assaults and punishes them when they dare to express a form of gender or engage in sex work? In this context, the foreigner may not only be the one who arrives and is a stranger to us, but also the one who, living next door, assumes cultural practices and chooses life projects that apparently subvert our *habitus* (BOURDIEU, 2002), critically questioning the stability of social fields where we find the fictional process of subversion which unsettles us and the structurally authorized and naturalized self-legitimation of our actions, behaviors, social expression or sexual orientation?⁴

For this reason, being an undocumented immigrant in times of massive and often semi-disordered flows in a world system in upheaval, unquestionably assumes an evident – and concomitantly active – parallelism with socially expressed gender self-determinations, when these pinch the heteronormative structure on which most of today's hierarchical institutions and relational systems are, structured. Marriage, kinship, church, morals, guilt, division of labor, in short, a varied panoply of potentially excluding imbrications. Borders, as geographically mediating elements of relations between people and countries (MEZZADRA, 2005, 2013, MEZZADRA and NIELSON, 2015) or between authorized and subversive bodies, take on a symbolic dimension that generates taxonomies that are essentially discriminatory. Body, culture/structure and performativity; they are assumed as the trilogy of an announced exclusion, yet silenced, generating asymmetries and hierarchies, through the selective attribution of the non-place to alterity (AUGÉ, 1994) - monstrous or illegal - in a process that sends it to an *undeclared or assumed refugee camp* - but margins of the

⁴ Cf. on the correspondence between norm/culture and nature, FOUCAULT, 1978.



world -where the State does not exist, nor its protection and as well, these unauthorized bodies are rendered invisible. they symbolically inhabit a dystopian space, only scientifically referenceable (Cf. AGIER, 2002 – Aux Borde du monde – Les refugies), emerging - under the watchful eye of the structure - only as heterotopic subjects and out of order. (FOUCAULT, 1967). As some authors point out;

It is enough to think of the prominent position that the figure of the "illegal" or "clandestine" migrant has assumed in migration policies, in official rhetoric and in the popular imagination since the beginning of the seventies of the last century to begin to understand the absolutely concrete effects of labels and taxonomies that concern migration. The "illegal" migrant has become the most important place of production of what Étienne Balibar has recently called the "foreign body", the monstrous (and internal) figure of otherness that confirms the stability and validity of the code of citizenship and the "body of the citizen" The language and spectrum of race continue to be mobilized in many parts of the world in order to offer a kind of supplement to this production of the "foreign body" of the "illegal migrant" which – it is important to emphasize – is not a mere figure of "exclusion". As an "internal other," the "illegal" migrant is first and foremost the product of what Nicholas De Genova, in an important work on migration from Mexico to the United States, defined as "an active process of inclusion through illegalization. (MEZZADRA, 2015:14)

Therefore, we hypothesize the existence of a power that, through its political-cultural seal, produces authorized bodies in different mobilities, or, on the contrary, illegal/clandestine/marginal bodies – travestis, migrants and prostitutes. However, this form of exclusion is contradictorily based on the inclusion by illegality of their bodies and migrations, in a process similar to that which generates the exclusion of migrants, symbolically subordinated and imagetically represented as illegal, undocumented or undocumented. It is in this sense that, through performativities - only possible in interaction - individuals emerge, as integrated or disintegrated political subjects - in their encounter with power (FOUCAULT, 2003) and their taxonomic seal of the "fictional natural" (FOUCAULT, 1978) - in an unequal struggle, but to which, even so, they do not renounce, against the taxonomies that structurally produce them, only insofar as they are dangerous people without a social place or ontological/anthropological legitimacy, illegal ones, monsters, or mere pathological anomalies. It is in this way that we intend to demonstrate the applicability of the analytical grids used in the analysis of geographical migrations to the gender and geographical migrations of Brazilian Travestis.

In this context, we must emphasize that performativity, within a given sociocultural context, allows us to glimpse the power relations that condition the agency possibilities of the bodies of social actors/actresses, and those who migrate and naturally positioning themselves, with greater fragility before the political and cultural seal of power (FOUCAULT, 1978, 2003), which symbolically produces them as out of order. In an epistemology of transgression, the natural questioning arises about who produces it, the social actor/group, the political and heteronormative macrostructure or both, in the process of co-production of illegality and social/symbolic non-place, through the creation



of borders with their selective porosities? To this end, we based ourselves on the ethnographic study with Brazilian travestis, sex workers and migrants - mostly undocumented - living and working in Portugal. Using participant and non-participant observation, through the realization of twenty semi-directive interviews carried out with the collaboration of social actors/actresses, travestis and non-travestis, in multiple transits and transitivities, defined by the lack of definition of a global agenda, which sometimes inadvertently grants opportunities grant them, although, apparently do not recognize them as political subjects and citizens.

Participant observation and the ethnographic method were developed through alternating stays of a few months at Verónica Vellaskes's house in Porto and Lisbon, where countless other travestis passed through in transit. We will start with the procedural and theoretical equivalence of gender and geographical migrations. We draw attention to the fact that the use of terms such as prostitution, prostitute or illegal, intend to underline the social weight of these nomenclatures - which mark bodies and individuals, real people and not mere rhetorical figures - which we do not intend to whitewash through the use of academically elaborated and sophisticated expressions, which remove from words the coercive function that they effectively perform within the scope of a system that discriminates infra-hierarchizes, them.

TRAVESTIS, IMMIGRANTS AND PROSTITUTES

It is our purpose in this article, not only, but also to unravel the ways in which discourses of subordination of migrants are socially produced, resorting to racial, sectarian and xenophobic arguments that associate, for example, illegal/informal practices to certain nationalities/classes, thus triggering processes of hierarchization between the *us* and the *other*, from multiple perspectives. Discourse appears in this context as a way of hierarchizing social actors/actresses and, simultaneously, as a mirror of this hierarchization, in a way in which discourse and its object seem, from the outset, to be one.⁵ It is up to us to deconstruct this appearance of uniqueness as if it were something of natural/biological. To this end, we observed travesti immigrants of Brazilian nationality, who migrated and continue to emigrate to Portugal since the year 2000. From this approach, we aim to reach and produce an essay that allows us to discover public and heteronormative discourses, as strategies oriented towards their integration through an imposed

⁵ Cf. Em diversos contextos migratórios: CALAVITA, Kitty, 2005, "Immigrants at the Margins; Law, Race, and Exclusion in Southern Europe, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. Carrera, Sergio e Guild, Elspeth 2016, "Irregular Migration, Trafficking and Smuggling of Human Beings Policy Dilemmas in the EU", Centre For European Policy Studies (Ceps): Brussels. DANCYGIER, Rafaela *Immigration and Conflict in Europe*, Review by: Sara Wallace Goodman in "The Journal of Politics", Vol. 74, No. 3 (July 2012), Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Southern Political science association. GENOVA, Nicholas, 2010 "Deportation Regime; Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement", Duke University Press: Londres. MACHADO, Igor. 1999, "A Invenção do Brasil Exótico entre Imigrantes Brasileiros no Porto, Portugal", Apresentação no GT Migrações Internacionais, XXIII Anpocs, Caxambu, Brasil 19 a 23 de Outubro.



illegality, structurally and symbolically. Either from the perspective of subversion to the docile heteronormative body, or from the perspective of the foreign and immigrant body and subject.

The analytical perspective underlined above involves apprehending the subjectivity of the gender and geographical migrant, as a universe of study, through analysis, not only of their behaviors, cultures, strategies and performativities, but also of the conditions that are provided to them structurally - in order to make their life projects viable - or, on the contrary, the daily difficulties that derive from an imposed and coercive illegality, created by a fiction that is based on the existence of a hypothetical correspondence between nature and culture, that is, between nature and dominant culture/power, which apparently dare to subvert and question, paying a price for that, becoming illegal. This is the case, for example, of the heteronormative paradigm and its ability to sanction "deviations" from the nature of gender, which only conceives of the binomial, masculine and feminine, hiding its political and politicized essence. This presupposes the deconstruction and consequent integration of concepts such as nation, migration, globalization, host country and *homeland*, male and female, natural or unnatural, legal or illegal. In this way, it is imperative to structure them discursively, not as mere abstractions devoid of individuality and life, but rather as nomenclatures that reflect multiple relationships and interdependencies that are often embodied in feelings of belonging or disidentification. These socializing ambivalences are also expressed by the performativities, through which these concrete subjects emerge as political and social actors/actresses, mostly infra-hierarchical and, in practice, deprived or restricted in their citizenship. (Cf. On performativity KULICK; 2003 in CAMERON and KULICK, 2006). This leads us to consider that we are facing a human rights problem, when our reference for study is the life, lived and suffered of Brazilian Travestis in multiple transits, also guided by the transnational universe of prostitution.

This perspective stimulates an approach that encourages the rescue of this sanctioning and coercive invisibility over the subjects, underlining the role of history and stories in the establishment of new connections, relations and social interdependencies. It is these different stories – multi-situated and multicultural – that, in agonistic coexistence, bring to visibility the space of social relations, as an arena where authentic battles for survival and identity struggle are fought (ORTNER, 1984). As Victor Turner concluded, for individuals or groups, the social arena is a kind of dialectical process that includes the successive experience of the high and the low, of *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, or equality and inequality. The passage from a lower situation to a higher one, in terms of social hierarchy, is done through a limbo of absence of "status". In such a process, in which, the opposites, so to speak, coproduces each other and are reciprocally indispensable, in order to be each of them (1974:120). In other words, there is no hierarchy between equals, but between different people, even if this different at a given time does not even have a social



place. This process occurs with the geographical migrants deprived of their history when crossing the border, which, therefore, doubly befalls the Brazilian Travestis in context of geographical and gender migration, in the framework of the migratory and sex work project they develop in Portugal and Europe. However, and following from what we have been saying, this does not mean that this paradigm will not be surpassed by the agency capacity of the subjects and the activity of an academy committed to deconstructing these processes.

We reiterate, therefore, that in this context, it is our objective to underline the various intervening subjectivities (Cf. GENOVA and PEUTZ, 2010, DIAS, 2008, MAPRIL, 2012, MAPRIL in LECHNER, 2015:475, BOCAUYVA, MEZZADRA, 2005, 2015), in a process of encounter between cultures and alterities, which oscillates, dialectically, between the encounter and its reciprocal creation/transformation (SAYAD, 1999,2014).

The relative social and economic stability in Europe, the United States and Brazil in the post-World War II period - which lasted until the end of the twentieth century - as well as the staggering of a list of enemy countries, equally stable and easily represented as such, facilitated this ambiguous look at migrants, simultaneously illegal and paradoxically useful, and often – while, unskilled or skilled - associated with inherently cheap labor. Moreover, how do Brazilian Travestis in the process of gender and geographical migration reveal, mostly as undocumented and sex workers in Portugal and Europe. This stability – characterised by a slower pace of social transformation and in which socialisation operated more successfully in the cultural production of subjects, who tended to be one – promoted the production of a taxonomy, which was also stable, on migration, namely, and by way of example, asylum seekers or economic migrants (Cf. MEZZADRA and NIELSON, 2015:11).⁶ In this generic framework, Harvey underlines the compression of two fundamental categories of organization of human thought and action - space and time - relating it to postmodernity (1989), where the multiple belongings and the growing identity defragmentation of the subjects stand out, when equated by comparison with the single and classic subject of pre-modernity.

In this context, the boundaries designed as geographical limitations, assume the aforementioned dimension of mediators of social relations between individuals from different countries, demarcating geographical/symbolic limits, from which a semi-uncontrolled and, therefore, selective porosity of flows emerges, however, surreptitiously consented and interested. It should also be noted that these taxonomies emerged at a time when the mobility of populations and individuals had nothing in common with the current situation, in terms of size and intensity, so that, currently, mobility and migration are concepts that intersect, giving the social new temporalities and spatialities

⁶ Nowadays other concepts emerge, such as climate migrants, asylum seekers for gender discrimination, etc. At the same time, postmodernity brings with it, in terms of gender and sex migrations, a profusion of classifications at this level as well; Transvestites, Crossdressers or Transsexuals, in which the social actors themselves claim, in a dialectical and performative process, the belonging to each of these or other conceptual nomenclatures. (LUIS, 2018, 30-43)



(Cf. LÉDRUT, 1979 and RÉMY and VOYÉ, 1994), which converge in torrents in the form of numerous social landscapes, of which we will highlight the landscapes of gender/sex and geographical migrations. (the *APPADURAI Escapes* , 1990).⁷

GENDER JOURNEYS

In the context of gender migrations or tourisms – analytically distinct processes – although both integrated into the concept of identity mobility, certain key concepts stand out, such as those of substitution, conciliation, implication/insinuation, redefinition or erasure (EKINS and KING, 2006). What culturally evidences a gender is replaced by primary characteristics (chest and/or genitals, depending on the circumstance) and secondary characteristics (hairstyles, haircuts, nail treatments, ornaments),⁸ which reflect belonging to another gender, reconciling disparities, erasing incongruities, replacing or insinuating, signaling and redefining roles to be played accordingly (GOFFMAN, 1993). According to the terminology used by these authors, gender oscillation (which is opposed to a tendentially permanent change, mostly characterized by substitution), is equated to tourism, insofar as substitution,⁹ being generally irreversible, therefore has an irrelevant weight in trans-tourism, being supplanted in this case by erasures, implications, insinuations or contextual conciliations.¹⁰ closely associated with the performance of roles in private spaces and never in the public sphere, which is therefore followed by a return to the original gender sphere in public spaces. This is the case of crossdressers, who live a feminine perfectly delimited in space and time, who are distinguished from dragqueens, because they perform their artistic shows in a public space –equally delimited – but in front of an audience. Both, however, in a different process, return to the expression of a heteronormative masculine, in the private/public sphere of their lives.¹¹

Ekins and King also draw a parallel between gender migrations and the concept of travel (2006), and the notion of oscillation between a home (bio-socio-cultural gender) and an out-of-home

⁷ Analogy with the various landscapes/*scapes* referred to by Appadurai.

⁸ Objects may be neutral, but they are not always neutral, taking on a gender connotation. Pierre Clastres, in *Society Against the State*, and based on the observation of the Guarani, verifies that the bow and arrow are the symbol of masculinity and the basket where the food collected or hunted is placed, symbolically represents the feminine. Any man who turned out to be a bad hunter would suffer the sanction of carrying the basket instead of the bow and arrow, and his manhood would be publicly affected. This example reveals how culturally and circumstantially objects signify something more than their immediate utility, they carry culture, values and social hierarchies.

⁹ For example, replacing the male breast with the female breast through the application of silicone.

¹⁰ In fact, these concepts express only an observable tendency, since in gender/sex migrations there are also erasures and reconciliations. The act of insinuating can in certain cases translate into the action of deceiving or pretending, namely when transvestites, in a pre-surgery phase, put soaks on their breasts or buttocks (ALENCAR, 2007). As they say in slang, learning to do the trick. (PETULL, 2005)

¹¹ Everything that indicates belonging to the political category of men and consequently socially structured gender must be reconciled and/or erased, and everything that indicates belonging to the category of women must be implicated/insinuated. (EKINS and KING, 2006, 100). In this case, we are faced with different dimensions of public and private space. The public space of the artistic performance does not fail to reveal a relative preservation of the private space of intimacy with regard to the Drags, while the private space of the crossdressers is fully so, since their performance is not artistic.



(metaphorically a welcoming context), underlining the differentiation that is established between migration and tourism. The first involves a mobility, with no foreseeable return home; the second, a transitory journey that assumes as its precondition, an implicit return home.¹² A house, which in fact was never abandoned. In the first dimension, you move house, in the second, you pack your bags and leave with a round-trip ticket, perfectly situated in time and space. From this second perspective, gender tourism implies extraordinary practices that provide new experiences – desirable for social actors/actresses – as opposed to a migration in which these extraordinary practices become everyday practices, replacing the original ones that gradually tend to erase (EKINS and KING, 2006, 98 -99). They are, therefore, forever made public and an affirmative expression of an identity that assumes and reinvents itself. As in geographical migrations, also in gender mobilities, tourism is, as a process of invasion and crossing of borders by foreign bodies and subjects, better tolerated than gender migrations. In the case of Brazilian travestis, this process is accentuated by conceiving in their penis a primordial agent of their sexual and social performances – breaking the cissexual paradigm. In this way, they exponentiate the impact of the heteronormative incongruity evident in the discontinuity between sex and gender. Transgression implies a consequence, the application of a sanction, on the unnatural and unacceptable. The norm is cissexuality and not the discontinuity between sex and gender.

As we can see, there are certain regularities in this area that we can point out in gender and geographical migrations. Leaving home and crossing borders, beyond an objective and physical scale, contains symbolic valuations that pre-exist it and that befall the social actors who in some way dare to undertake this Transposition/Transgression - in the form of social sanctions of a system that reduces their agency possibilities through evident coercions in their citizenship. The truth is that before being citizens, they are symbolically and socially produced as illegal and transgressive. This process, in practice, translates into a situation in which this citizenship, as a social resource, is forbidden to them from in reason of the migration they have decided to undertake. Apparently, they can challenge the structure and its borders, fighting even for symbolic, identity and financial resources, which are by definition scarce and the object of power relations that determine who can access them, stratifying groups and individuals, and on another scale, societies (Cf. COLEMAN, 1990 and BOURDIEU, 2002).¹³ Nevertheless, inclusion as a process/category of exclusion seems evident to us. When we establish this parallel between migrations, it seems curial to us to integrate Brazilian Travestis in the illegal migrations, of the undocumented or undocumented in both meanings addressed here, geographical and gender. For this purpose and based on the testimonies provided to us, the travesti is the one who keeps the penis, and therefore there is no sex migration, which is

¹² The anthropological house, center of historical, cultural, relational and affective references.

¹³ For Coleman, social capital resides in social relations, for Bourdieu in individuals.



generally better accepted, because it is mediated by social actors who tend to have greater financial capital and who communicate to the outside world the "coherence" between sex and gender, somehow reinforcing the norms and the "nature" of the heteronormative system. Even so, Pelúcio and Miskolci argue that there is more than just subversion or confirmation of heteronormativity, as they reflect the subjection to heteronormative parameters that also allow them self-intelligibility, as human and social beings (2007, 264). It is, therefore, from this need to "make sense" that Travesti performativity emerges as a vehicle for identity viability, for themselves and before society. In Kulick's words, "Performance is something that the subject does. Performativity, in turn, is the process through which the subject emerges" (2003 in CAMERON and KULICK, 2006, 286).

TRAVESTIS; BODY, CULTURE AND PERFORMATIVITY - THE STRATEGIC AND NEGOTIATED EMERGENCE OF THE SUBJECT

In line with the argument we have been tricotting, performativity is everything that subjects strategically elaborate to produce themselves as such, and to position themselves in a social space and time, before themselves and others. Discourse, posture, gestures, speeches, languages or symbolic boundaries are essential means for this process of affirmation. The discursive actions of social actors, more or less concerted, more or less legitimizing and legitimized, more or less evident or implicit, authorized or prohibited, constitute themselves as performativities and, simultaneously, as forms of language that elevate the individual to the level of the community, promoting the orphanhood of the restricted scope of mere isolated performance, disconnected from a vast social context. It is only a sign of a certain individual socio-anthropological position, which does not benefit from its political and collective affirmation. Performativity in our work presupposes, therefore, a community and political context, which dialogically confers meaning to the practices and intelligibility to the social actors who put them into practice, through reiterated relations and practices – although fluid and transitory – in a more or less restricted framework of individuals, who are therefore united by common identity traits and discursively oriented towards a sense of belonging. An individual who, in his/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 and a political actor. It is, therefore, at this point that the political dimension of individual identity requires a social group or community – through identification, sharing or denial/contestation – and mirrors a process of public externalization, claiming this same group identity, although distinct from the individual identities that form it. Thus, the body signals and legitimizes the aspirations of the subjects before the structure, other subcultures, or before themselves and their group. Some aspects stand out from this dimension of the legal or illegal body:



1. The use of technological mechanisms that act on the body – transforming it – thus allows individuals to be integrated into one or another structural classification and, at the same time, provides them with the referents to understand themselves and be adequately perceived as subjects with a *social topus* in their relationship with themselves and in their relationship with others.
2. The legitimization of a certain conceptual classification of transsexuality by medicine makes the fact that this category is in this perspective stand out, framed in the structure, because authorized by it and macro socially created, as a category that promotes the continuity between sex and gender.
3. The illegitimate/illegal nature of a travesti gender construction in the way they cross borders – in which sex and gender do not correspond – discontinuity – nor are individuals interested in it – even constituting an essential part of the exercise of sex work – collides in an evident way with power, demonstrating the agencyal viability of the social actors who thus, they confront secular institutions such as patriarchy, heteronormativity, misogyny or androcentrism.

In this sense, the body, as a cultural expression and language, is an agent of vindication, struggle and transformation, so Brazilian Travestis are not passively represented as illegal bodies and unnatural subjects. They claim their right to a *social topus* and do so by alternating cycles of opening and closing to a structure that will inadvertently provide them with opportunities; identity and financial. This political context, in which differences are discussed, may involve negotiating, claiming and implementing strategies for the pursuit of common social and cultural goals (institutional recognition, struggle for rights, etc.), from which emotions and expectations, suffering or pleasure are not excluded.¹⁴ In this sense, performativity can produce group idiosyncrasy by discursively instituting the expected gender performances of the individual before the group. It is in a globalized context, which enhances various transnationalisms, that Travesti performativities achieve, from a theoretical perspective, greater richness and from a symbolic and normative dimension, an imagery of polysemic representations. In this context and from a structural perspective, the profusion of multi-situated interactions of Brazilian Travestis is highlighted, which through this process, imprint¹⁵ various instabilities, both to the structure and to the practices which are dialogically related to it, by opposition, confirmation or, simply, through strategic fluctuation. In this sense, the

¹⁴ Any analytical framework to be used in the social sciences should not deny the relevance of emotions, desires and frustrations.

¹⁵ The structuring of Anthony Giddens is situated between structuralism and agencyism, insofar as he attributes to both the ability to co-produce themselves socially. The postmodern subject, of whom we consider the Brazilian Transvestites to be a paradigmatic case, uses their critical capacity and reflexivity to question the structure (1983), unlike the traditional societies on which Bourdieu seems to focus when conceiving a *habitus* successfully forged, through successive socializations in social fields previously authorized by the structure, which, it greatly conditioned the possibility of change. (2002)



constructivism that reveals itself in Butler (2007) as a linear mimicry of practices (Cf. Namaste, 2000), unequivocally assumes for the author, the invented, reinvented and naturalized fictional character of the gender, as a product and social expression that emerges within the scope of structural limits, anchored to a given space and instituted at a certain time in the form of discourse.¹⁶ Attentive to this theory of performativity, Kulick contextualizes it within specific groups, paying special attention to the production of discourses (slang), as well as to their imbrication in performances and subsequent performativities, integrating this language of each group (slang), within the scope of the social behaviors covered by it and respective identity strategies (1998). This concept of performativity is a condition for the emergence of social actors/actresses as political subjects (KULICK 2003 in CAMERON and KULICK, 2006).

PERFORMATIVITY, BODY AND OBJECTS. THE PRODUCTION OF GENDER

In the travesti context, the incorporation of models of subjectivity – which ideally coherently link gender, sexuality, personality and emotions – resurfaces when travestis self-elaborate as people and subjects in multiple relational contexts, reinventing meanings and instituting efficiencies that collectively legitimize their practices and performativities (LUÍS, 2018). This multiplicity of relational contexts demands from travestis a plasticity and fluidity of performances (even in the use of the body in sex work - alternately framing it in the symbolic language of passive and active) - which reflect an ambivalent relationship, developed and maintained with the structure,¹⁷ in which, despite everything, they find the resources and capital necessary for its viability. while Trans subjects, doubly migrants. These performances, found in language and in their transformed bodies, referents that organize the concrete experience by structuring their practices in a way that they intend to be credible, for themselves and for others, in varied contexts and circumstances – travestis, Brazilians, gender migrants, economic migrants and sex workers. It should also be noted that most of our interlocutors come from families where material resources are scarce (KULICK, 1998, 38, PELÚCIO, 2006, 524). This constraint may explain the appetite in the future evidenced in the desire to achieve material success, as geographical migrants and trans social actresses. As we were confided in by two Brazilian travestis we interviewed; "I also have my goals, I want to have my house, my

¹⁶ When we argue that this invented character of gender, as a social construction, may have transpired involuntarily in Butler, we do so because discursive and rhetorical figures do not construct or invent something, those who do so are real subjects and these are present in Kulick (1998), but can hardly be unveiled, in Butler (2007). Moreover, gender as *a social doing* involves not only concrete social actors, but also the interaction between them. (KESSLER and McKENA, 1978 and ZIMMERMAN AND WEST, 1987)). This observation does not detract from Butler's enormous merit in his work.

¹⁷ For Garfinkel (1967) and for socially dominant thought schemes today, social viability is only possible when there is a correspondence between sex and gender. From a structural point of view, the process that leads someone to become a transsexual is basically a process that seeks to match sex and gender and eliminate incongruities. In another sense, and as we have seen before, there are authors who frame transsexuality outside their production as a medical category, and in this sense, genital surgery is not a condition for someone to express a transsexual gender identity. (Cf. SALEIRO, 2013)



things, you know?" (Julia Vellaskez) Or in the words of Armanda Parllatori when describing the moment she left home: "*I want to have my little house, my things!* I won't have anything here!" Thus, like other migrants, when Brazilian Travestis emigrate, they intend to improve their lives and ascend socially and economically, and, if possible, help their families - once again revealing affinities with other migratory segments.

Financial independence and emancipation is something that arises at the level of the achievement of adulthood, an adulthood that is deeply associated with sex work, most of the time the only way to achieve it and a condition for overcoming the situation of generalized poverty in which most of them are immersed (Cf. Pelúcio, 2006, 527 and Luís, 2010 and 2018):

I lived in a house that only God knows what it was like... Half of the door existed upwards, below it did not exist. Rats and more mice, frogs, water on the floor... a wooden shack, it wet everything when it rained, when *the tiles* flew away... Huge terrain... and so on and I'm here! (Feline)

However, prostitution privileges those who have a made body, imprinting observable regularities in their practices. Namely, a travesti profile of constant action on the body that Lopes called "a metaphor of transitivity and fluidity inscribed in contemporary sexualities." (2002, 68). This form of social affirmation also reflects an endless search for an ontological coherence, even if it is based on highly mutable practices – which, precisely because of that nature, generate performative instabilities, both in the self and in the non-travesti interlocutor, with whom they interact on different stages and multiple geographies. Such framings - in which sometimes some ambivalence prevails - are resolved by travestis, resorting to verbal and non-verbal language, through which they seek legitimacy and authenticity for their identity and performative specificities. However, contradictorily, this mutability of practices, which rests on fluid discursive statements, becomes a stable identity trait on which their strategies of action and survival are based. While, for example, in drag-queens or crossdressers, we detect a reversible mutability by definition, given the socially extraordinary character of their journeys, in travestis mutability and transitivity are an ordinary practice of everyday life, since they become irreversible - substitution.¹⁸ Somehow, part of the foundational, ethos of this new identity house are made possible by this fluidity. Thus, the unfinished character of the "making" and "remaking" of the body,¹⁹ as a vehicle of language, reflects these instabilities and generates a double efficacy. The body is not only a language in itself, it is also the object and condition of the production of a discourse about itself. In this sense, the body does not only frame

¹⁸ The established marginality of transvestites as deviant women underlines and reinforces social gender norms, but at the same time highlights the constructed character of gender by challenging boundaries or redesigning them. (Cf. JENSSEN, 2003, 97)

¹⁹ Cf. Zimmerman and West (1987) and the *doing gender*. For these authors, gender is a structure and not a social role. In our view, gender is a structuring principle, as a social construction/expression it also has a structured dimension that corresponds to social roles and statuses.



experiences as a language that reflects and organizes them. It becomes itself an experience structured by language.

(...) The body is a construction on which different marks are conferred in different times, spaces, economic conjunctures, social and ethnic groups, etc. It is not, therefore, something a priori, or even universal: the body is provisional, mutable and mutant, susceptible to innumerable interventions according to the scientific and technological development of each culture, as well as its laws, its moral codes, the representations it creates about bodies, the discourses that are produced and reproduced about it. (GOELLNER, 2003, 28)

From this art, body and language emerge as basic elements in the construction of the travesti identity narrative or, in the words of Ekins and King, *gendering, an unfinished and continuous process of gender-making, managed in and by the multiplicity of daily interactions (2006) – the family, the husband, the sisters or the client*. As Verónica Vellasquez told us:

Silicone... Silicone is like a drug, we never feel good as we are, whether we want a little bit there, or a little bit there, we don't want to look like women, we want to look better than women... "Guys" want to have perfect legs, a perfect ass, beautiful hips, a small waist, beautiful breasts. I mean, we don't want to be like women, we want to be better! So when I say that there has to be a touch up here, there has to be a touch up there, always giving some touch-ups.

Somehow, the travesti socially produced identity, implies an unfinished process (DANTAS, 2018) – a gendering process (EKINS and KING, 2006) – a task in which the body evidently assumes its culturally manipulated and simultaneously biographical dimension - present and future - and, at the same time, reveals a phenomenological component expressed in the subject's relationship with his own body and with the body of the other. In this context, to cite the practices is to make them emerge as actions of political subjects (COATES, 1998, 301), in a given *social campus* (BOURDIEU, 2002) and, in this way, to produce them, as travesti social actors/actresses - real and not mere rhetorical or discursive figures. This socially produced character of gender collaterally points to the same processual and socially/discursively constructed nature of heteronormativity, mirrored in the way they reverse adopt the dominant heterosexual discourse. In the same vein, Eckert and Mc Connell-Ginet maintain that language is a vehicle of symbolization; It invests or disinvests the subjects of power, connotes them and arranges them or, on the contrary, destabilizes them, through this same connotation or denotation, hierarchizing, stratifying, illegalizing or subordinating. Performativity exists, therefore, because discourse and structure give it intelligibility (1992, 483). In turn, this discourse emerges in a system of concrete interactions, which, when cited and performed, place the subject on the plane of social and political existence - reinforcing in parallel, a certain scheme of relations and thought instituted, although apparently through its subversion. In short, they institute, reproduce or produce a model, updating it contextually, through a fluctuating hierarchy of people and values.



In the course of this process, language can be used as a marker of inclusion of the "other" in the group or of self-exclusion of groups constituted by the other/s. In a framework marked by openings and closures to majority socio-structural contexts, Marcos Benedetti, when working with travestis in Porto Alegre (2005), considered that they, in the course of this process of search for an ontological self-legitimation, they have sought to operationalize, through language, an attempt to naturalize their transvestility, meeting a biological cause for their gender expression and erotic desire. "It's not an option, it's something that is born with us", says Júlia Vellaskes, converging, involuntarily, to society's representation of them, as suffering from a psychosis, pathology or anomie – a deviation from nature.²⁰ Nevertheless, and at the same time, there is the elaboration of one among many other strategies, conceived and activated by Brazilian Travestis in order to prevent the stigmatization of which they are targeted. It becomes evident that "The body of the Travesti is a *becoming*" (Dantas, 2018, 124).

In this context, the use of naturalization – which they seek, also when making the *body* – intends legitimation in the same way that heteronormativity is based – the norm fictitiously elevated to the plane of nature – which brings us back to the starting point of this topic; language and the made body are constituting catalysts of this naturalized expression of gender.

On another scale, it is the transsexuals who - in the testimonies collected - conceive in naturalization a way of differentiating themselves from travestis, stating that being a travesti is an option, unlike what happens to them, who were born that way. In this biological/naturalized perspective, a woman is born a woman – contrary to Simone de Beauvoir's argument, according to which no one is born a woman, but rather becomes a woman (in BUTLER, 2007, Cf. SANTOS, 2006). Contrary to Simone de Beauvoir's constructivist argument, the naturalist perspective assumes that being is not an option. In the first case, we are witnessing a strategic redefinition and a pragmatic operationalization (although it may be unconscious) of identity instruments, explainable in view of the fact that both identities and experiences are variable and positional concepts (HALL et al, 1996, HALL in SILVA, 2000, KULICK 2003 in CAMERON and KULICK, 2006). The contextual identification of the position of the subjects in the interaction allows us to unveil the repertoires summoned for the construction and affirmation of their identities. As such, individuals are organized discursively and in their practices in a contextual way (SCOTT, 1994, 18), according to symbolic and non-symbolic normativities – mostly not represented as such, but rather as nature – seeking to achieve a social *topos*, an "objective" intelligibility for the subjectivity of the concrete. There is, therefore, in the case of Travesti a distortion of heterosexual law/normativity, which ambiguously and reversibly constitutes itself as a referent of this subversion (Cf. FOUCAULT, 1978 and the reverse discourse). This ambivalence depends on the circumstantial execution of strategies and their

²⁰ In May 2019, transsexuality is no longer considered a mental disorder by the World Health Organization.



concrete and situationally structured positioning in relation to the structure, before which they are intended to legitimize at various levels and at different scales of the agency of the concrete. In this sense, Kulick claims to have documented:

How travestis think and strategically organize their lives, in terms that invert, distort or reorder gender configurations, in a way that for the non-travesti is unimaginable. (1998:191).

However, the existence of referents that make gender what it is, at a given moment – also in the cultural aspect of the body – is for some authors that we subscribe, due to historical/political facts which institutionalized and socially integrated performance of the gender category (Cf. SCOTT, 1994, 1995, 1998). Gender identity, as a cultural construct and social expression, thus becomes richer and more polysemic than sex identity, confined to the genitalia. For this reason, some authors point out that psychoanalysis "as we understand it, deprives the anatomical sex of the guarantee of unequivocal direction for the psychic constitution." (LIONÇO, 2006, 2). To this end, the aforementioned technological actions on their bodies become essential to travestis, as a way of signaling and communicating their differences or convergences:

In this sense, the psychic and symbolic dimensions become vectors that give a framework to the experience of the body, to the history written and inscribed in it (BUSSINGER, 2008), attributing to the actions and discourses a remarkable plasticity, which can be seen in the fluidity with which the travestis elaborate themselves narratively on various stages. (LIONÇO, 2006

SEX AND GENDER SYSTEMS; REFERENCES OF THE PERFORMATIVE LANGUAGE TRAVESTI

For Gayle Rubin, the psychosocial structure of individuals is shaped by experience, experienced in the relationship with others – especially in a more puerile phase of the individual's development – just as the experience itself is conditioned from the outset by the system of communications and neuronal information processing, which experiences, knows and recognizes it, according to its bio-neuronal – dynamic – pattern of appropriation of the objects with which it interacts. In the cultural aspect of sex and gender policies, the author referred to this process as sex and gender systems.

Through which, a set of conventions shapes biological material in its raw state, through the action of intervention and social interaction, transforming and culturally and politically shaping facts such as human sexuality or procreation. Such processes make their satisfaction possible in conventional ways, regardless of how bizarre these forms of satisfaction and the conventions that legitimize them may be. (RUBIN 1975 in LEWIN, 2006:90)

In recent history, the continuity between sex and gender has been broken, which has had two immediate consequences. Gender can be socially expressed in a non-cissexual way and sexuality as



part of human behavior has become independent of both the socially constructed and expressed gender and the sex one is born with. This externalization of discontinuities was and is socially fracturing, so that, as we have been verifying, it implies that in performativities there is an analytical element of greater relevance; identity (and a sense of belonging).

Kulick's argument, which emphasizes the difference between identity - which in sociolinguistics and anthropological linguistics is translated to us, as a greater or lesser awareness of a certain sociological position - and identification - which reflects a process or set of operations through which the subject is constituted as such in interaction (KULICK 2003 in CAMERON and KULICK, 2006, 293) - seems to us to be somehow equivalent to that of performance and performativity, in which the second allows us to glimpse, how the speeches and behaviors of Brazilian Travestis in the relationship between themselves and with other social actors/actresses, allow us to unveil the process as anthropologically, the subject produces himself and is co-produced by others. In this way, it is also the performativity that, in this interaction, reflects processes of identification and disidentification as well as, in parallel, the normativities that regulate these relations and the omnipresent power dynamics. The other becomes, therefore, essential in the construction of the different self. In other words, identity passes at some point through the incorporation of the otherness that it rejects, sometimes annihilating it.

In this panorama of secularly instituted social relations and interactions, in which gender is mostly the social division of the sexes and a process of differentiation from other transgender categories, as well as their positions towards the structure, we highlight the fact that travestis affirm themselves in the first person as a non-cissexual category, reflecting in their practices and gender expressions – androgynous – the autonomization of the sex and gender systems conceived in the plan by Gayle Rubin (in VANCE, 1984). Transsexuals, on the other hand, defined and sometimes self-defined based on medicine, seek reconciliation between sex and gender through surgery, while crossdressers or dragqueens²¹ intend to live the two structural genders in a compartmentalized way, somehow recognizing them as independent and non-mixable in terms of identity. As we have already said, these Trans categories are also negotiated and renegotiated by the individuals themselves, never fully corresponding to the category that arises from the dialectic maintained with the structure and that results in a conceptual abstraction or rhetorical figure that classifies them.

Thus, what we highlight in the Brazilian Travesti community that we address is the fact that they are not just a group with minority gender expression or sexual orientation, a fact that gives them identity traits that emerge from multiple social planes and allow us to listen to them well-marked regularities in various aspects. On the one hand, they are based on an androgyny that does not mean

²¹ The drag queens, although in their performances present themselves in an ambiguous way, return to their masculine identity outside this scope, not mixing what is artistic performance and what is identity.



wanting to be a woman or, in a certain sense, wanting to stop being a man, but rather being both or even more than both.

BODY AND SILICONE. THE BODY IS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, AND THE DREAM IS EUROPE

Silicone plays a central role in the travesti narrative and, being largely the reason that triggers its mobility, from the outset between Brazilian cities, it also constitutes a hierarchical marker in the relationships established between them and between them and the structure. In 2011 Day L. tells us about another travesti. Namely, Kamila Garcês, used to *riding* on the streets of São Paulo and according to Day L. much more aggressive in dealing with other travestis and clients. Here, we explain, with due prior permission – as in all cases – the initial dialogue he had with Kamila, when they shared a house for the first time in Portugal:

Kamila Garcês –Let it pinch your ass!
Day L. –Belisca Mulher!
Kamila Garcês –You have silicone on your butt and legs!
Day L. –I don't!
Kamila Garcês –Travesti
without silicone, she is not a travesti!
Day L. - I've been taking hormones since I was a little girl, this was born with me!²²

This discursive statement reveals not only the search for authenticity in gender expression through cultural signs in the body, mediated by the application of silicone, but also, on the part of Day L., the naturalization of discourse (Cf. FOUCAULT, 1978 and the reverse discourse) in order to justify being a travesti in biological terms. According to this naturalistic position, which, as we have seen, contradicts the constructivist arguments, everything was born with her and she only takes female hormones – which, in most cases, corresponds to periods of their lives that precede the application of silicone, but which nevertheless constitute cumulative resources in a post-silicone phase; by changing the tone of the voice or causing the chest to grow slightly.²³ Both female hormones and silicone are usually obtained from illegal and parallel markets. Techno-mediated action on travesti bodies has been carried out, tending outside medical sponsorship and legitimacy, contrary to what happens with the bodies of medically "authorized" transsexuals.²⁴ In the travesti

²² "The law is not simply a cultural imposition on an innate social heterogeneity, it also demands conformity to its own notion of nature." (BUTLER, 2007:143 -144)

²³ That is why some transvestites in the sex industry (in their advertisements) refer to the fact that they have hormoneized breasts, as opposed to silicone breasts; However, most of them, and at an early stage of their assembly/transformation, hide the fact that they have hormoneized breasts, while the mounted transvestites appear in the ads with their breasts bared. The hormoneized breast in advertisements is usually the subject of deletions and innuendos. They erase a male breast by insinuating the existence of a female breast, usually using underwear suitable for the circumstance, the bra. (Cf. Ekins and King, 2006)

²⁴ We are witnessing a certain medicalization of the social.



context and outside the scope of the medical seal - during the completion of our doctoral thesis - we noticed the recurrent presence in Verónica Vellasquez's home,²⁵ in Porto, of a pharmacist or her constant telephone calls, looking for new travestis to provide sexual services in exchange for facilitating access to hormones, condoms or lubricating gels. This predominance of clandestinity means that in the field of sex work the majority resort to pumpingsilicone "in the hand" of pimps and bombadeiras, not only as a condition of admissibility in the group, in the city (when they are still in Brazil), on the street or in the category of legitimate travestis, but also because they do not have the necessary economic resources to carry it out in other conditions. There are, however, exceptions; they occur in other phases of their careers as travestis and sex workers, mostly corresponding to moments in their journey when they are already in Europe and only with those who have achieved some success. The use of surgeries in the context of legality or illegality therefore operates stratification, also resulting from a previous socioeconomic differentiation. Fernanda, who has lived in Porto since 2005,²⁶ travelled to Miami in 2011 to perform a series of surgeries on various parts of her body, including her face. However, she did so when he had already been established in Portugal for a few years and after having achieved success with the clientele (and not at an early stage of his career). This option coincides with a phase in which aesthetic medicine had reached an unobservable degree of development, for example in the 80s of the twentieth century, when the first *bombings began* in Curitiba (KULICK, 1998). In the same vein, Vanessa Nobre tells us how, while traveling through Europe, she performed 3 plastic surgeries in 20 days. There is, therefore, an observable difference: the transformation, when initiated in Brazil, tends to be carried out in the field of clandestinity, whereas, if this transformation is initiated in Europe, it tends - from a certain moment of the gender and geographical migratory project - to take place with the use of plastic surgery, cumulatively with clandestine interventions on the body, These predominate, at a time when there is still a small amount of financial capital. The reason for this difference lies essentially in the economic means available to them in one place or another. Nevertheless, it seems to us that the use of plastic surgery has been gaining ground to the industrial silicone bombs, especially with, regard to younger travestis, who continue to arrive in Portugal in 2020. Some of them, who arrive in Europe still without a body and very young, immediately assume as their goal prostitution in order to begin their transformation. Something, which a few years ago, and still in the twentieth century, did not happen. At that time – in the 70s – travestis arrived in Europe via Italy and France, with their bodies

²⁵ Adriana was our main ally in this incursion into the world of Brazilian Transvestites in the context of sexual and migratory work. He died on January 19, 2019 after a fall that caused the displacement of the silicone that he had applied for decades, culminating in a generalized infection that made his early death inevitable.

²⁶ He still lives and works in Porto.



made exclusively in an artisanal and illegal way. However, in 2020 the silicone bombs did not disappear and it can be said that they still coexist with plastic surgeries.²⁷

With regard to *pumpers*, generally those who apply silicone have already undergone this same process and under the same conditions (Cf. ANDRADE and MAIO, 1985), reproducing a social dynamic in which being *pumped* means the beginning of learning to one day become a *pumper*. In many cases, a *pump* also starts by applying silicone to herself, "I've already put it on myself on my buttocks, on my legs. You have to be cold-blooded, don't you?" – Laughter – "but we go through so many more difficult things in our lives and survive, that's nothing!" (Verónica Vellaskez). Access to these resources is selective in the Brazilian context and is generally associated with being a pimp/cafetina and/or street boss, being able to charge a fine – exercising the toll – to other travestis or clients, that is, being the holder of a certain social capital of prestige within the group. In short, an asymmetrical and supra-hierarchical positioning in the interaction – therefore with implicit power relations – with other travestis, also an indicator of a different status in the group resulting from contextual alliances established on the street and from the access and activation of a wider and more varied range of social resources available and, above all, accessible (BOURDIEU, 2002). This manipulation of social capital, which is only effective in the domain of interactions, brings individuals closer to the management of selective resources that are not available to all. Thus, Verónica Vellaskez, by raising *sisters* through the exchange of information about a surgeon she knew in São Paulo to whom she herself resorted to be *pumped*, learned through the observation of silicone applications performed on her friends and on herself. In Porto, she tells us: "To this day, if a friend comes here, I do it, because in the past it made a lot of money, until today it does, when they look for "us" to do it." However, she states that in Portugal there is no liquid silicone²⁸ for sale, but that in Brazil or Spain it is easily accessible. During the time we spent at her home in Porto, the existence of this type of silicone and syringes for veterinary use for large animals was visible. In Portugal, Verónica Vellaskez charged between €250 and €350 per liter of silicone applied, depending on the parts of the body where it would be administered. To give you an idea, a breast can take more than 3L. Jota Joyce, says that in Brazil being *pumped* can cost the travesti between 1000 and 2000 reais. (LUÍS JSA, 2018)

The importance of the body, not only as an object of experience, but also as an agent of experience itself, is therefore undeniable, insofar as its markings express a macro culture and a culture of specific gender and sexuality in dialogue. This multiplicity of contexts and consequent

²⁷ At the beginning of the emigration of transvestites to Europe, prostitution was assumed as the purpose of this mobility, at this time, with more and more migrants, prostitution carried out in Europe, being seen as an end and a means to start the transformation. Let's say that the new global contexts and their interdependencies have not only determined new mobilities and paths, but also the activation of new strategies in the legitimate transvestite process.

²⁸ Silicone for non-medical use and sado, for example, in the cleaning of aircraft fuselages.



plasticity of elements and variables involved in the process of legitimizing "doing oneself" and being a travesti is clearly expressed when Pelúcio uses the example of Fabiana. In the midst of his "lesbian" relationship with Verónica (another travesti), she wore underwear at home and in the context of prostitution –street – she wore "panties". This prop sustains, therefore, an entire construction of gender that develops in specific and differentiated interactive contexts: on the one hand, the "house"; on the other hand, the "street" and the client, managing in each of the contexts, what is expected of the individual. If, in relation to the relationship with Veronica, one of the markers of the construction of a legitimized identity is the "panties" versus "underwear", within the relationship with the client this signaling function can be contextually altered and subject to search for other intelligibility, when, for example, a client asks to be the one to wear the panties (Verónica Vellasquez) or when a travesti is sought by a woman (Vanessa Nobre).²⁹ In this sense, in the context of the travesti universe, what seems to confer the status of heterosexual or homosexual/lesbian relationships is the expression of gender and not sex/sexual orientation, although several interdependencies can be revealed between both dimensions. A man who has sexual relations with a travesti is not necessarily seen as homosexual, just as a relationship between two travestis can be conceived as a lesbian relationship and not a homosexual one in the strict sense. Therefore, in the cultural production of the body, we find an intimate connection between objects of non-neutral symbolic valuation and their contextual performativity, in a process that confers specific intelligibility to the subjectivity of concrete interaction.

Heterosexual classifications in relation to sexual orientation are absorbed and restructured by travestis with reference to gender construction/expression. For example, and as we have seen, the relationship of a travesti with another travesti can be perceived as lesbian within the group, since it takes place between two feminine constructions. However, on another scale, it will always require the presence of a male and a female for sexual intercourse to occur in intelligible ways: one will be the penetrating agent and the other the penetrated/passive agent (Pelúcio, 2005, 2006). In this line of argument, an active man who maintains a relationship with a travesti is heterosexual, since in this relationship both male and female are present (in which he is the masculine/active element). On the other hand, a passive man, participating in a sexual relationship with a travesti, may be perceived as homosexual. Although the travesti does not identify with homo-oriented individuals, her performance of the passive role in a relationship is not represented in the same way, compared to the context of the relationship involving a passive man and a travesti, since this "man", having a sexual orientation, did not elaborate another gender expression connoted with passivity. Thus, the passive travesti is

²⁹ However, it should be noted that prostitution can determine the existence of sexual relations with women who seek them for this purpose, although not all transvestites make themselves available for this type of service. In this sense, prostitution further destabilizes the way in which they produce and represent themselves as subjects.



feminine and the passive man is homosexual. From the perspective of a transsexual, the travesti, by preserving her genitals, is relegated to the field of homosexuality.³⁰

Sexual orientation is, from this point of view, much more objective and, at the same time, less susceptible to generating role entropy. When the construction of gender incorporates the heterosexual criterion of sexual orientation and operates the ordering of subjects and their relationships, everything becomes more ephemeral, moldable and complex. In these cases, the filter of the phenomenological body operates,³¹ since the body acquires a symbolic dimension that can distance it from the hegemonically structuring classifications and translate a specific position of the subject, in relation to his body and that of the other. From this perspective, people who live in a gender outside the hegemonically original sex tend to conceive of their sexual orientation based on the gender expressed. However, in travesti prostitution the facts are never linear. This justifies the fact that travestis do not publicly classify the men they seek in the paid relationship with them, the passive side, as homosexuals. This could result in a reduction in their clientele, while undermining the group's widespread representations that those who seek a travesti for sex are not looking for a man. On the other hand, in prostitution, secrecy and discretion are one of the keys to its success.

Even so, in this fluidity of practices and consequent classifications, we can capture some influences of the man/gay model, identified by Fry and McRae (1993, 43-44, Cf. GREEN, 1999, 6 and KULICK, 1997) in northeastern Brazil, in which in a relationship between two men, only the one who plays the passive role is considered homosexual.

In this way, in this Brazil that we are calling "popular", as among the Guaiaqui, the boy is called "" not simply because he is supposed to like to have homosexual relations, but because he is "effeminate" (plays the feminine role) and because if he maintains a homosexual relationship, he will play a "feminine passive" role. The boy who plays the male role and who could be the sexual partner of the (therefore maintaining a homosexual relationship), is called a "man" or a "macho". (1993, 43)

It is, however, above all in the context of prostitution that the travesti gendered language reveals itself from heterosexual normativity itself, even when it apparently subverts or performatively distorts it. In fact, in the process of constructing practices and discourses that mark and signal their daily lives, travestis discover men/clients who "look for the passive side" and "pay them to take on an active side". As Loise (2006:19) points out, the penis then becomes a work tool. What in other contexts constitutes a factor that invests the subject with masculinity, in the specific context of prostitution, confers on them an added value in the market of sexual exchanges and, at the same time, performs the collateral function of classifying these men who seek the passive side, as

³⁰ We note the permanent negotiation between identities with the aim of achieving legitimacy and, at the same time, how all of them tend to express themselves as subcultures in identity struggle among themselves, having as an archetype the heteronormative macrostructure, which considers them a deviation, which reinforces its norm.

³¹ The sublimated perception of bodies, which goes beyond their materiality.



mariconas/fagots (PELÚCIO, 2006, 2007), emphasizing once again the presence of a heterosexual symbolic system, based on the active and passive elements. If, in the private sphere, travestis adopt the feminine role of passivity and receptivity at the level of sexuality, in prostitution they may be circumstantially summoned to play the male role, expressed in being active (LOISE, 2006:20). Once again, the body reveals itself not only as an object of experience, but also as a structuring agent of experience, signaling the shared culture and, therefore, thus making it understandable to the participants in the interaction, assigning it roles, defining situations and clarifying circumstantial intelligibility.

In this sense, travestis expect "real men" to be masculine, active, enterprising, penetrating (Cf. in the same sense LOISE 2006, 20, PELÚCIO, 2005) – a man will always be the one who assumes the active role (KULICK, 1998, 124). This construction of gender (and consequent contextual performance of corresponding roles) is not structured in a rigid way. The act of oppositional differentiation of the two terms, masculine/feminine, results in the consolidation of each of them and the respective coherence between sex, gender and desire, through processes that maintain a dialogical and dynamically positional relationship with the structure. However, not in a discursive way unilaterally dictated by the structure (BUTLER, 2007, 31). In addition to their own private sexual experience challenging them to particular reconfigurations and re-significations of their sexual performativities, in relation to gender identities, the contexts of sex work force them to renegotiate, according to the needs and expectations of their clients (LOISE, 2006:67), the relationship between gender identity and sexual orientation. As the late Verónica Vellaskez explained to us, the fact that "a man seeks out a travesti for a sexual relationship... it doesn't cause a man to lose his masculinity." In the view of the travestis involved in this research, as well as from their discourse on sexuality, these men would not be less men just because they seek sex with travestis, but, above all, because they seek a certain type of sex, the passive side of the relationship. "With us, they don't want anything conventional." (Cf. In a confluent sense PELÚCIO, 2005, 239). Ambiguously, Kulick found that for Brazilian travestis in Salvador, the penis is an element of pleasure and that the possibility of surgery scared them tremendously, fearing that it would drive them crazy. (1998)

CONCLUDING NOTES

The Brazilian Travestis, referred to as such for their specificity that we consider to be unique, also, as an idiosyncratic dimension of Brazilian culture, are primarily gender migrants, thus experiencing all kinds of discriminations that begin at home, at school or in the neighborhood. Leaving home is the only solution and the street is their replacement home, in which they find a new family made up of their *sisters, mothers, godmothers* or on another plane their *husbands* – *A travesti doesn't have a boyfriend, she has a husband!* (Verónica Vellaskez). However, it is also on the street



that the street bosses/donas da rua and pimps/cafetinas are found, who impose duties on them, coercively, in a process that we could call a second and alternative socialization.

On the streets, the bodies made are more successful and in order to do so, they start a process of mobility between Brazilian cities, usually from the smaller ones to the large cosmopolitan centers. This crossing of gender and even sexuality boundaries entails discrimination and exclusion on the basis of a body socially perceived as illegal, in a process analogous to that of geographical migrants. At some point, they experience emigration, that is, they cross the Brazilian geographical borders and decide to emigrate to Europe. Arriving in Portugal, not only is her travesty body illegal, but her stay for three months, renewable for another three, also becomes at some point the symbolically illegal body of the undocumented immigrant. Still, they prefer to be illegal immigrants in Europe than legal citizens in Brazil, because, in fact, in Brazil they find themselves relegated to the streets and to the night, where they do nothing more than survive in a society that reveals itself to be intensely transphobic. Rather illegal outside Brazil than legal in Brazil. Unfortunately, the scenario seems to have worsened with the unusual election of President Bolsonaro.

In the essay that we have now concluded, the universe of study is apprehended through an analytical grid that necessarily has to cross two types of migrations, which, independently of this grid and at the level of practices, cease to be dissociable from a given moment. Since Brazil, mobility has been a condition for making the body, usually with the resources made available by sex work. And so they continue in Europe. In fact, it must be said that it is difficult for Brazilian travestis to fit into Brazilian society as citizens. The reason is her body and what it represents as resistance to a sexist and discriminatory society against sexual and gender minorities. Keeping the penis in a body full of heteronormatively feminine references is the climax of this resistance, calling into question secular institutions and centuries-old power relations, from which their agents do not want to disconnect - either because they are unaware of cultural relativism, or simply because they want to perpetuate relations of power and domination.

The Brazilian Travestis actualize an apparent subversion of the heterosexual law/normativity, which, however, is ambiguously constituted as a referent of this subversion (FOUCAULT, 1978). On the other hand, if it is a fact that for travestis the real man condenses a series of attributes implicit in being active, it is no less true that in the exercise of prostitution (in addition to the income earned), another of the reasons reported is the sexual pleasure obtained in its exercise, which leads them to roughly exclude the possibility of sex reassignment surgery. Evidencing, once again, the ambiguity of the hierarchies that emerge from the circumstantial character of the interactions. The man who is not a real man and who therefore positions himself in a hierarchically inferior way, can be sexually considered as a source of pleasure, although discursively produced as a *maricona*, being subject in this context (to at least) two different valuations. The intelligibility achieved in the relationship



between gender and sexual performance/sexual orientation therefore depends on the context and the way in which the variables intersect. The multiplicity of experiences generates instability in the referents that frame it, so that the search for factors that can be circumstantially generators of some stability, in instability, find in language and also in the body - as such - an equally privileged vehicle for this purpose. The body of the Brazilian Travesti is this language and, at the same time, a structuring condition of this same language. Her body somehow condenses observable gender relations and her performativities contextualize them.

We also found that between gender and geographical migrations, many theoretical crossovers can be established and that this can definitely enrich our studies. We also conclude that this migratory double meaning in which they are integrated, as well as the sex industry to which they are dedicated – mainly this one – prevent them from being at the forefront of associative or academic objectives and interests. Being a travesti, being an immigrant without papers and a prostitute,³² condenses in a single subject, symbolically infra-hierarchical attributes, even in the context of relations with other sexual and gender minorities that are more politically organized within the LGBTQI+. At the same time, this process not only proves to be essential to the construct of identity elaboration of those who conceive them in this way – the other – and in a more pernicious way, in the way in which Brazilian travestis, migrants and prostitutes are faced in their lives with a very conditioned spectrum of possibilities of full experience of a citizenship, which has always been theirs, coerced. In any case, we have in common, as a sanction, the probable illegalization/subordination of bodies, as a consequence of the TRANSpassing of limits and borders gender-compatible sexuality, paid sex and undocumented immigration. As Verónica Vellasquez confided to me at one point - who died in January 2019 due to the industrial silicone she had in her body, when she fell down of the stairs at home. O silicone moved and entered the bloodstream, causing septicemia – there is always a price to pay –the subordination of bodies and subjects:

It saddens them all... clear... You get to a certain age where loneliness squeezes... Loneliness affects "people", loneliness... We are human beings... We have heart, we... We like people, we have feelings, we're a normal person like any other. We're no different from anyone else, so I mean... There comes a certain point in our lives when loneliness comes and squeezes... And when it presses... Look... It's sad, "we" suffer, cry and... but you can't do anything! It's a one-way trip, it's what "we" have to pay for the change we've made and what we can take away from it is to move on with life and try to take advantage of it.

The journey has come to an end. Thank you for the anthropological gift - dádiva/marcel Mauss - Verónica Velasquez. How handy it would be now to be a believer and simply say, rest in Peace.

³² The term prostitute is used here in a non-derogatory way, however, in order to reflect all the negative weight that surrounds it.



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