

Anthropology and the Process of the Construction of Homosexual Citizenship in Brazil*

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Abstract

In order to contribute to the more general reflection on the links between science and politics, I discuss in this article how, in practice, social anthropologists build their knowledge. Moving continually through the fluid boundaries between LGBT activism and academic reflection, Brazilian social anthropologists became important actors in the process of promoting “homosexual citizenship” in Brazil. I focus in more detail on two different historical contexts: the late 1970s and mid-1980s, when the homosexual movement began to be organized in Brazil; and the first decade of the 2000s, when I began to develop my own research.

Keywords: Anthropology, Homosexuality, LGBT Movement, Sexual Politics, Brazil.

* Received February 16 2016, accepted February 24 2016. Translated by Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette. The ideas presented in this article were originally presented at the 29 Reunião da Associação Brasileira de Antropologia (Natal, 3-6 August, 2014) and at the seminar commemorating the 20th anniversary of Pagu (Campinas, 10-12 September, 2014). An initial version was also published in French (Carrara, 2013).

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Introduction

During the first two decades of my trajectory as an anthropologist (1980-1990), I dedicated myself to thinking (using concrete cases, as is the discipline's praxis) about the relations between scientific theories, social concepts and forms of exercising power. These reflections did not contemplate the theories and practices of anthropology itself, however. At least not more than what was minimally required by ethics and methodology after authors such as Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu stripped us of our positivist innocence regarding the separateness of the subject and object of scientific investigation, of scientific facts and social representations and, consequently, of politics and scientific knowledge.

During this period, I sought to engage anthropologically with the conceptions and practices of the different sub-disciplines of the biomedical sciences (forensic psychiatry, criminal anthropology, forensic medicine, syphilis studies and, finally, sexology). Aside from this, my didactic activities took place alongside doctors and other health professionals. In discussions with students about different concepts of the body, health and illness, I often found myself confronting ethical dilemmas. I feared that I might expose students to an excessively relativist approach and that this would cause them to lose the confidence that they needed to maintain regarding the biomedical knowledge that oriented their daily practices. Bit by bit, I had to critically reconsider my own approach, which in the anthropology and social sciences of the times was called simultaneously "constructivist" and "deconstructivist".

Much of what was being done at the time under the label of "social deconstructivism" understood science as a form of language and supposed that the relationship what it represented and its mode of representation was of the same order as that which existed between signifiers and the signified. In other words, it was believed that this was a relationship that was arbitrary or conventional by definition. One might say that this approach

placed itself under the sign of the *sign*. Seeking to establish a more balanced relationship between my discipline's perspective and those of the disciplines I researched or was engaged in (and which were shared by my students), I began to argue that when the scientific discourse was conceived of in this fashion, it was reduced to a form of ideology, which left out any possible analysis of it in terms of its technical dimensions, efficacy, or practices (Carrara, 1994).

My point of view at that time was that the practices of science could be better understood through the classical analyses of the French school of sociology dealing with magic and techniques. E. Durkheim, M. Mauss and (following along the trail blazed by them) C. Lévi-Strauss postulated that through techniques, social representations (singular and relative by definition) mixed with things, making these ever more precisely adjusted to the order of nature.¹ That meant that societies could transcend themselves, developing an increasingly rational, objective and therefore universally valid knowledge. Such analyses appeared to have been put aside because they fit poorly with the relativistic perspective that, after World War II, would become hegemonic in anthropology. But for me, the most interesting aspect of this approach was less its possibility of contemplating a universalist utopia and more the proposition that, in general, scientific or magical techniques (like any symbolic activity) were a mixture of things and representations, of matter and concept. And this, to a certain extent, was what ensured their relative efficacy.²

I do not intend to return to this specific discussion here. Rather, the present article seeks to revisit it based upon the experience I gained in the early 2000s redirecting my work beyond

¹ With regards to M. Mauss and E. Durkheim, this reflection can be found spread throughout several texts whose main themes are religion (Durkheim, 1990 [1912]) magic (Mauss, 1991 [1902-3]) the subdivisions of sociology (Mauss 1969 [1927]), the symbolic efficacy of rituals (Lévi-Strauss 1949) and the meanings of totemism (Lévi-Strauss, 1962).

² This is an idea that Bruno Latour would engage with, in his own way, through his reflections upon hybrids (Latour, 1991).

the limits of scientific knowledge about sexuality in order to enter into discussions regarding contemporary Brazilian sexual policies. To this end, I have taken as a privileged observation post the process of constructing homosexual citizenship³ – or, to use an expression that's less committed to medical categories (and to the identities expressed by the acronym LGBT: Lesbians, Bisexuals, Gays and Travestis/Transsexuals), the citizenship of “non-conventional sexualities and gender expressions”.

In order to contribute to a more general reflection on the links between science and politics, in the present article I discuss how, in practice, the knowledge of anthropologists has been created, focusing specifically on those colleagues of mine who, through continuous transit across the fluid boundaries between LGBT activism and academic reflection, should be considered important actors in the process of the construction of homosexual citizenship. To this end, I investigate two different historical contexts: the first between the late 1970s and mid-1980s, when the LGBT movement began to be organized in Brazil; the second in which I began to develop my own research experience, roughly corresponding to the first decade of the 2000s.

I begin with the assumption that, given its complexity, the role anthropology has played in the process of constructing homosexual citizenship can be taken as prime material for a more general thinking on the “commerce” carried out along the border between politics and science. In this space of intense “traffic” of people, ideas, languages, concerns and (principally) mutual legitimation, different forms of conflict and cooperation take place.

³ The term *cidadanização* [here imperfectly translated as the construction of citizenship: N.T.] was laid out by Duarte et al. (1993) in an article that analyzed the activities that non-governmental organizations developed in poor neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro during the 1980s. It deals with an ample process of social and political incorporation of certain marginalized social categories which is supported upon a triple process of individualization, rationalization and responsabilization. It seems to me that the concept can also be applied to what has been happening since the 1960s in different western countries with non-conventional sexualities and gender expressions.

Through these negotiations, the social experiences we collect or record and which are the basis of anthropological knowledge blend not only into our theoretical perspectives (whose political dimensions cannot be underestimated), but also with the perspectives of other actors, located in what we might conventionally designate as the “political” universe -- activists and militants, certainly, but also public policies managers, legislators and legal operators and enforcers.

As we shall see in several cases, the different actors involved in this process can only be distinguished as “activists”, “academics” or “policymakers” *a posteriori*. This is not only because the same people circulate frenetically between different locations, but also, more importantly, because they confer different meanings upon their actions depending upon where and when they are situated at any given moment. Just as in the relationship between the LGBT movement and the so-called GLS market (France, 2012), where entrepreneurs sometimes attach a political meaning to their commercial activities focused on the “pink” market “segment”, researchers can also judge themselves to be “making policy” even as they develop research work in the field.⁴

I have never defined myself as an activist, nor have I systematically participated in any group that is part of the LGBT movement. However, I have sought to develop my work in dialogue with many groups and actors: activists, government officials, or state representatives linked to the LGBT theme. I think that because I’ve never hidden my own sexual/affective preferences and have researched such themes as violence, politics and rights within this field, I am often seen as a sort of “engaged intellectual” or maybe even an “organic intellectual”, an honorary title that I once received (much to my chagrin) from a national leader of the Brazilian LGBT movement.

⁴ This view of things seems to be even more intensified by the fact that being interested in the study of non-conventional sexualities and gender expressions which still carry strong social stigmas implies taking on a publically stigmatized identity. In this sense, to research these themes is something that can acquire the political value of being “outed”.

The emergence of a delicate relationship

In Brazil in the late 1970s, anthropological studies of sexualities and non-conventional gender expressions – and especially studies about how these were organizing politically – began right about at the same time that the movements that are today understood as LGBT were being born. Looking at what are generally understood to be these movements' inaugural events (the creation of the *Lampião da Esquina* newspaper in 1978 and, in the same year, the foundation of the Somos - Homosexual Affirmation Group in São Paulo⁵) we can easily descry the involvement of anthropologists or students of anthropology. At the time, the scholars freely circulated in the movements that were forming around the fight against social prejudice, both in the press and in the first organized groups, even as they created academic reflections on the theme of homosexuality⁶. One fruit of this intense involvement can be seen in the fact that one of the oldest Brazilian LGBT activist organizations, the Gay Group of Bahia, was founded in 1980 by an anthropologist.

This circulation between academia and activism had different impacts, some of them very curious. The first of many “cracks” that marked the Brazilian homosexual movement in its

⁵ These events have been narrated and discussed by a series of diferent authors, including Fry and MacRae (1983); MacRae (1990); Trevisan (2000);Figari (2007); Simões and Facchini (2009).

⁶ These “inaugural dates” obviously correspond to a certain view of political activity, ignoring those events defined as “merely cultural”, such as the shows of the theatrical group *Dzi Croquettes*, which were an enormous success at the beginning of the 1970s, mixing high drag style, irreverent humor and camp (see Newton, 1972). It is interesting to note that anthropologists were already circulating in these “pre-political” events as well. This was the case of Rose Marie Lobert, for example, who wrote her master's dissertation about the *Croquetes* (Lobert, 2010). These anthropologists did not only collect data for their theses, either. Some, like Regina Müller, became part of the *Croquetes* (in Muller's case, a *Croquetta*, part of the group's female theater troop).

initial phase involved the presence in the Somos-RJ Group⁷ of an anthropology student who had “no homosexual experience and who was reportedly there **just** to gather material for her master’s thesis”, according to Leila Mícollis and Herbert Daniel, who were politically active in the group (Mícollis and Daniel 1983:100, my emphasis). The resulting schism occurred in December 1979, on the eve of the First Meeting of Organized Homosexuals. Part of the group protested the presence of an anthropologist and left to form the AUÊ Group for Free Sexual Choice.⁸ Justifying this decision, Mícollis and Daniel remark that:

This was not the result of intransigence or of a discriminatory or contrary attitude towards heterosexual people: it was simply that people didn’t see any sense in questioning the repression of homosexual practices when this sort of critique was formulated by those who didn’t themselves suffer from this discrimination (Mícollis and Daniel, 1983:100).

The fact that the anthropologist was there “just to gather material” must also have certainly weighed in the decision of the dissidents.⁹ This interpretation of the researcher’s “real motives”

⁷ Founded in 1979, Somos-RJ’s name indicated its union with the Paulista group and the two organizations had a similar structure, with various subgroups devoted to organizing activities, welcoming new members and organizing meeting to reflect upon “the development of individual conscience in the face of social repression” (Mícollis and Daniel, 1983:99).

⁸ The AUÊ Group was clearly opposed to the positions of other groups of the time. According to its founders: “One of the things that makes AUÊ different from other Brazilian groups was that it was the first to not accept a homosexual “identity”, deepening discussion and critique of the false dichotomy that divides [human] beings in two [heterosexuals and homosexuals]. People should be able to behave however they like without having their masculine or feminine identity questioned. **The group thus began to use the word ‘homosexual’ as an adjective that referred to behavior and never as a classification for people**” (Mícollis and Daniel 1983:100-101, my emphasis).

⁹ According to *Lampião’s* coverage of the incident, the same female anthropologist participated in the First Meeting of Organized Homosexuals as a

laid out, at the beginning of the movement, the perennial suspicion that activists have in relation to researchers who are interested in the subject, but do not identify themselves as homosexual or do not participate in groups as activists (which, in some respects, meant the same thing).

Although remarkable, this circulation between academia and activism is not surprising. In the beginning, the movement was strongly rooted in the intellectualized middle classes of Brazil's major cities. It maintained close links with university spaces where it was linked to the opposition of the military dictatorship through various themes that had been introduced in the country over the previous decade. As Simões and Facchini (2009) have stated in reference to the members of the Somos-SP group, the consolidation of this group crucially took place during a debate in February 1979 which took place at the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Sciences of the University of São Paulo. According to these researchers, the "general conduct [of the group] was not very different from what you saw at a student assembly" (Simões and Facchini, 2009:99).

Given that homosexuality was officially considered to be a mental illness in Brazil up to 1985, it is understandable that the movement initially viewed scientific discourses with some degree of distrust – especially those of psychology and psychiatry. The decision of the First Meeting of Organized Homosexuals (which took place at the Oswaldo Cruz Academic Center of the Medical College of the University of São Paulo) to conduct an intervention at the 32nd Meeting of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (which took place in 1980 in Rio de Janeiro) occurred

member of the Somos-RJ Group. Her presence was approved in the final plenary session, given that she was a member of the group. It was remarked, however, that she "should have told us about the research project that she was engaged in during the Meeting as part of her thesis" (*Lampião da Esquina*, 2(24), 1980:07). According to the testimony that Veriano Terto (then an activist of Somos-RJ) gave to researcher Cristina Câmara (Câmara, 2015:377), it is very probable that the anthropologist in question was Carmem Dora Guimarães, one of the pioneers of anthropological studies of homosexuality in Brazil (Guimarães, 2004).

because, according to journalist and activist Antônio Carlos Moreira...

...it was obvious that Science, in almost all its forms, is primarily responsible for the current marginalization and oppression of homosexuals. One only needs to look at the theories applied by **anthropologists**, sociologists psychiatrists, etc... (*Lampião da Esquina*, 3(27), 1980:07, my emphasis).

It is remarkable how the circumstances surrounding this event and its recording as history reveal the ambivalence that marked the relationship between activists and academics at this time. If anthropologists could be singled out as a source of oppression, however, they could also be very useful. In fact, if it wasn't for the presence of an anthropologist in the audience at the Meeting, Antonio Carlos Moreira's own account of the event would surely have been different. According to the journalist himself, he was able to write a thorough and complete report of the incident because "To help me in putting the facts down on paper, I have an *aide-memoire* prepared by Peter Fry who, as a true scientist, wrote everything down, even the applause and the catcalls". Moreira concludes with a telling phrase: "What therefore is truthful and realistic in detail in this report is all due to Peter Fry. The fantasies are mine. The enthusiasm and emotion belong to both of us." On the one hand, this sentence shows that the Moreira relied on conventional representations regarding the nature of political activity (situated as "fantasy") and scientific activity (understood as the plane in which "truth" and "realistic detail" dominate). On the other hand, the sentence provides important clues for understanding what would be the basis of the possibilities for passage between the two worlds: namely shared feelings of "excitement" and "emotion" that would have the power

to protect some “scientists” from the movement’s doubts concerning science in general.¹⁰

Several of the First Meeting’s main resolutions formally questioned scientific disciplines and professional associations. Among them, I’d like to highlight the proposal to create, in each activist group, a committee which would study measures to push for changes in the International Classification of Diseases (WHO), followed by Brazil, and which included “homosexuality” as a mental deviation under code 302.0. The Meeting also decided to send a letter to the Brazilian associations of psychiatry and psychology, challenging the treatments that homosexuals were forced to submit to, and it even complained to the Federal Council of Psychology about discrimination in the recruitment and selection of candidates for jobs¹¹. In the following years, the struggle for the depathologization homosexuality was led by the Gay Group of Bahia and its founder, anthropologist Luiz Mott. It would mobilize different scientific societies, such as the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) itself, as well the Brazilian Society for Progress (SBPC), the Brazilian Association of Population Studies (ABEP) and the National Association of Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences (ANPOCS) (Facchini et al., 2013).

In this confrontation with the theories and practices that were then dominant in psychiatry and psychology, it was therefore crucial for the movement to publicly articulate a competent discourse regarding homosexuality. And it was precisely here that social anthropology, then being inaugurated as a discipline in Brazil’s major universities, appeared to offer strategic support. A key manifestation of this support would materialize in 1983 with

¹⁰ The “sincere” nature of these feelings, which was fundamental for their having a positive effect, depended to a certain degree on how the homosexual experiences was more-or-less shared by activists and academics. Because they publically took on a homosexual identity, certain researchers or “scientists” weren’t subject to the same suspicions as the young female researcher and member of Somos-RJ who was “living a heterosexual life”.

¹¹ Regarding this, see *Lampião da Esquina*, 3(27), 1980, pp.07.

the launch of the book *What is Homosexuality?*, authored by Peter Fry¹² and Edward MacRae. Both authors were anthropologists and quite close to the homosexual movement, with MacRae actively participating in the Somos-SP group, about which he was writing his doctoral thesis¹³.

What is Homosexuality? proposed an alternative view of homosexuality, relativizing it and drawing on anthropological about the subject. Adopting the term “homosexuality” which, as we shall see below, is currently on the way out in political and academic discourses, the book can be considered as something of a “curiosity of the 1980s” (at least with regards to its title), just as its authors prophesied in its introduction. Echoing what appeared to be the movement’s fundamental points at that time, the general objective of Fry and MacRae was to:

...tear homosexuality out of the field of psychology and medicine, which has increasingly taken control of the subject since the mid 19th century, and place it into the domain of the study of culture and politics in its widest sense (Fry and MacRae, 1983:10).

Throughout the book, psychiatry appears, on the one hand, as a set of practices that employ the notion of disease to attempt to control or eradicate homosexuality. This view aligned itself with the authors’ understandings regarding what was being generally defended by the rising homosexual activism. On the other hand, however, psychiatric thinking was also presented as part of a much broader social process of creating essentialized and restrictive

¹² Aside from being one of the editors of *Lampião da Esquina*, Peter Fry had been studying the topic since the beginning of the 1970s, through his work with the African-Brazilian religious associations of Belém. Regarding this, see the interview at www.clam.org.br/uploads/arquivo/entrevista%20peter%20final_trajetorias%20intelectuais.pdf.

¹³ This thesis was defended at the University of São Paulo in 1986, with the title “O Militante Homossexual no Brasil da Abertura, uma etnografia a respeito dos movimentos sociais na década de 70”.

sexual identities that postulated a natural division of humanity into homosexuals, heterosexuals and “marginal” bisexuals. Questioning this division, Fry and MacRae confronted it with “reality”, built upon the apparently solid statistical basis elaborated by A. Kinsey, which postulated a continuum of sexual practices that were more or less homosexual or heterosexual. The author’s views thus opposed a social taxonomy made up of discrete and watertight categories and psychiatric discourse was understood by Fry and MacRae to be only one particularly powerful development of such a social taxonomy.

Fry and MacRae’s first proposition could be widely incorporated by the gay movement as legitimating one of its main claims. The author’s second proposition, however, played upon a much more sensitive issue on which the militants themselves were divided. In Brazil, the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s was not characterized only by discussions that opposed those activists who felt that the issue of “minorities” (blacks, Indians, women, homosexuals) should be subordinate (at least for the time being) to the broader issue of democratization and social revolution. As MacRae clearly recorded (1990) in his work on the Somos – SP Group, the gay movement itself was also divided as to whether or not it should rally around a homosexual identity (Carrara and Simões, 2007). The dilemma between “being” (*ser*) or “being” (*estar*)¹⁴ homosexual was so intense that (as MacRae remarks in his ethnography of the group) it ended up being one of the causes that led to Somos-SP’s fragmentation (Carrara and Simões, 2007:59).

Interestingly, the clash between those styles of activism¹⁵ that valued homosexual identity and those that saw identity as a source

¹⁴ Here the author references Portuguese grammatical structure which has two words for “to be”: *ser*, which indicates a more permanent and essential state of being (to be tall, for example) and *estar*, which indicates a more transient and contextual state of being (i.e. to be sleepy). [T.N.]

¹⁵ As Facchini shows (2005:118-119), the movement initially contained different styles of militancy, such as that of João Silvério Trevisan, inspired by the more

of oppression had polarized the movement in other countries as well. As Fry and MacRae point out (1983), the first activist organizations opposed “moderates” and “radicals”, especially in the United States. And if the “moderates” or “homophiles” treated homosexuals as a discriminated minority and “wanted to prove that [they] were simply decent citizens, perfectly able to integrate into existing society”, the “radicals” wanted to “call into question the inevitability of hetero / homosexual dichotomy” (Fry and MacRae, 1983:99). For the latter group of activists, the movement shouldn’t aim at the social integration of a category of people, but direct its struggles against prejudices that fell upon a form of shared sexual desire that was potentially available to all human beings. Perhaps thinking of themselves, Fry and MacRae finally said that in the wake of the “radicals” would have arisen

...new intellectuals [arose] who articulate a point of view that emphasizes the social, cultural and political aspects of the historical construction of sexuality in general and of homosexuality in particular. According to these thinkers, the division of the world into “homosexuals”, “heterosexuals” and “bisexuals” is not natural (Fry and MacRae, 1983:99-100).

In this way, Fry and MacRae’s “relativist anthropological approach” didn’t prevent them from aligning with certain types or styles of activism which were not uniform throughout the movement itself. Implicit in this was the view that those people who worked with a homo/heterosexual dichotomy and who saw the world divided between “sheep and goats” were reproducing psychiatric, oppressive and prejudiced forms of thought.

Other activist anthropologists worked with other ideas, however. This was the case of Luiz Mott, the founder of the Gay Group of Bahia, for example. Mott tended to incorporate in his analyses and political action a more essentialist view of homosexuality, following what Carole Vance called the model or

radical *Gay Liberation Front* and that of João Antônio Mascarenhas, who followed the more moderate *Gay Power*.

paradigm of “cultural influence”.¹⁶ In an interview which he gave to historian Cláudio Roberto da Silva¹⁷ in 1995, Mott made his theoretical divergences quite clear. As he put it, he took an “extremely critical position” with regards to Fry’s views “on the so-called social constructivism of homosexuality, with which I don’t agree, given that I am an essentialist” (*apud* Silva, 1998:469-470).

Fifteen years after the debates that rocked the nascent homosexual movement regarding identity, Mott reaffirmed his position and claimed to speak in the name of “millions of gays and lesbians”:

His [Peter Fry’s] works on homosexuality in Brazil demonstrate a lack of political vision to the degree that he believes a person is [*está*] homossexual and is not [*ser*] homosexual. The homosexual being does not exist: one is only being homosexual. I think this is an error! If he has doubts about how much homosexuality can define one’s existence, for [me], as for millions of gays and lesbians, **the homosexual being implies a distinct existence**, not separate from... [but] an alternative to this heterosexist society (*apud* Silva, 1998:469-470, my emphasis).

Mott’s perspective is constructed based upon a particular social experience that, although it does not encompass millions of individuals,¹⁸ as he affirms, was certainly shared by a growing number of people at the time, especially those originating in the

¹⁶ For Vance (1995:18), “the cultural influence model presumes that sexual acts possess a universality and stability in terms of subjective identity and meaning. In general, the literature considers sexual contact with members of the opposing gender to be “heterosexuality” and contact with the same gender as “homosexuality”, as if similar phenomena have been observed in all societies in which these acts occur”.

¹⁷ Published in its entirety in Silva (1998:455-483).

¹⁸ In this field of study, the fact that many anthropologists share, too a degree or another, the same identity as the “natives” they study or speak about, imposes a particular dynamic upon the play of representations, intensifying the emotional appeal for political engagement.

urban middle classes, who were more exposed to psychiatric discourses and the discourses that predominated within the movement itself. We cannot, however, claim that Fry and MacRae didn't recognize the importance identities have for certain social groups who experience homosexuality as a "distinct existence". Regarding this point, the authors made some quite explicit comments towards the end of *What is Homosexuality?*

Many people would prefer to not submit themselves to these new social categories [homosexual or heterosexual], which tend to push them into stagnant "ghettos". They prefer that these categories themselves be questioned and struggled with. They enter into conflict not only with medical science, but also with certain "conscientious homosexuals" who, for different reasons, are interested in maintain these distinctions. After all, to erase the border that separates "homosexuals" from "heterosexuals" is something that would question the notion of a homosexual identity which, **for many people, is something that gives order to their lives, is full of possibilities for gratification and has often been quite difficult to publicly proclaim** (Fry and MacRae, 1983:120, my emphasis).

What seems to be at question here was not only the validity of the essentialist identity and perspective, but the fact that it was presented in political terms as a universal truth to be imposed on "others" who did not share it. Fry and MacRae therefore warned that it was possible that the movement could reproduce an authoritarian or paternalistic relationship of the type that many people did indeed think appropriate between a revolutionary vanguard and its masses, with the second group being "made aware" of their real interests and rise up against oppression.

But before the movement began to organize in Brazil, these "masses", these "people" who did not submit themselves to the new sexual categories Fry and MacRae describe, had already been visited by social anthropologists interested in race relations and African-Brazilian religious practices (Landes, 2002 [1947]; Leacock & Leacock, 1972; Fry, 1982 a and b; Ribeiro, 1978). What they saw,

particularly among the people who made up the popular classes, was another mode of organizing sexuality, based more on gender performances and the position taken during sex – the crucial moment these gender performances – and not so much on one’s partner’s sex. From the point of view of some of these scholars, the world divided into homosexuals and heterosexuals, as proposed by many movement activists, was therefore an intolerant way of oppressing a world that had been previously organized by such oppositions as “queers/studs”, “fairies/butches” or, more simply, “faggots/men” and “dykes/women”. It was also on behalf of the inhabitants of that world (hysterical fags, travestis, hustlers, drag queens) that they spoke. I would venture to say that the anthropologists were not just talking about these people or for them: by incorporating the social experiences of those subjects into their own approaches, they spoke *with* them.

So, in a way, these anthropologists looked at the political process that were forming around homosexuality from a perspective that, in addition to dialoguing with certain theories and certain styles of activism, was also built upon other social experiences, more or less distinct and distant from those of the intellectualized middle classes from which “homosexual activists” and “respectable gay citizens” emerged.

Certainly, Fry and MacRae’s concern with this topic (and that of other anthropologists who followed them, such as Guimarães (2004 [1977]), Perlongher (1987), and Heilborn (1996), was not limited to identity imprisonment, but also with the very particular way in which class differences were formulated in terms of adhesion to the model of homosexuality as it was understood in the movement’s ranks. In other words, what was important for these anthropologists was the hierarchical relationship that was established between the models of organizing sexuality themselves, given that these were converted into signs of class distinction. This hierarchy not only left untouched the stigma and social disapproval that fell upon faggots, masculine women, feminine men and travestis, it actually deepened it, marking these types of

human beings as “backwards”, politically incorrect, retrograde and etc.

Therefore, underlying the conflict between “being” (*estar*) or “being” (*ser*) gay was a much more general struggle over representation in the public spaces of a certain collective project. This project, object both of theses and manifestos, was the source for the legitimacy of both political and scientific discourses. When, as in the case of MacRae’s doctoral research, this collective was reduced to the activist group itself, such conflicts could take the form of an ethical-moral drama. MacRae’s work lays bare the anguish of a researcher who knew he was working with analytical assumptions that could undermine the principles of organization of the group he was investigating – the very group which made the research possible and legitimized its results. At one point in his book MacRae boldly reveals that:

I confess to feeling perplexed and uncomfortable on many occasions when my academic colleagues urged me to discuss the concept of social roles, as I felt that I would be simply adding a little more prestige (which I had gained through the aid and trust of the members of Somos) to an idea that could only tend to weaken the group’s solidarity (MacRae, 1990:41).

At this inaugural moment of the movement, anthropologists – even those who did not see themselves as activists – were located at the center of both political conflicts (between “moderates” and “radicals”) and theoretical conflicts (between constructionists and essentialists). Over the following decades, the *ad hoc* resolution of this conflict would lead activism and the academy in different and, in a sense, divergent directions. The construction of this resolution would once again involve anthropologists. This time, however, instead of anthropologists imposing themselves upon the activists in the name of research, they were actively mobilized by the movement scientifically legitimize a particular category, through which the movement sought to capture the very “nature” of homosexuality.

In the mid-1980, the carioca¹⁹ group Triângulo Rosa – Grupo de Defesa dos Direitos dos Homossexuais (Pink Triangle – Homosexual Rights Defence Group)²⁰ took upon itself the leadership of the struggle to include in the new Brazilian Constitution (then being discussed) an explicit denunciation of discrimination against homosexuality. There were doubts within the group, however, over whether the proposed text should condemn discrimination based upon “sexual preference”, “sexual choice”, or “sexual orientation”. The movement seemed to favor “sexual orientation”, although many still preferred the expression “sexual choice”. This question had already been raised by Pink Triangle in 1986, during the struggle to change the Journalism Ethics Code. On that occasion, the activist group claimed that “sexual orientation” was the correct term for journalists to use, given that “this is the expression employed by social scientific language in order to encompass the **only** three types of human sexual identity and behavior: heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality” (MacRae 1990:96, my emphasis). Other movement groups then active in the debates also agreed that “sexual orientation” best described homosexuality.²¹

But even having achieved this partial consensus, activists led by Pink Triangle decided to formally consult a number of intellectuals, mostly anthropologists. Apparently, these supported

¹⁹ “Carioca” is the adjective form used to refer to people and things from Rio de Janeiro. (N.T.)

²⁰ The conflict the establishment of the group’s name, as retrieved by Câmara, is itself deserving of discussion. Initially, the group was called Pink Triangle - Gay Liberation Group, a clear call-out to the movement’s more radical currents. In February 1988, however, after an internal discussion, it was renamed the Pink Triangle – Homosexual Rights Defense Group. Among the losers, several had defended the use of the term “liberation” as this pointed to the “natural extinction of ghettos”. This group accused their opponents of being too “legalistic” (cited in Câmara, 2002:80). The victory of the “legalistic” in the debate should be considered as a sign of the direction the movement as a whole would take in the coming decades.

²¹ Apparently, eleven of the thirteen groups that were active at the time had already agreed to use the expression “sexual orientation”.

the use of “sexual orientation” and anthropologist Mariza Correa’s response deserves to be highlighted in this context. Emphasizing the paradoxes of the relationship between anthropology and politics Correa stressed that “the designative terms of a collective identity are always best defined by the members of that collective which is what gives said terms legitimacy” (cited in Câmara, 2002: 101). In other words, according to Correa, anthropology had withdrawn from the view that it was capable of representing “the native point of view”, a fact that made it a bit bizarre that the “natives” were now demanding that anthropologists clarify their very “nature.”

In any case, what is important here that the expression “sexual orientation” had the ability to unite the movement’s various factions because it did not clearly either situation homosexuality as a condition (*ser*) or an option (*estar*). Many different styles of activism could thus use it to rally around a common project: working towards getting the new constitution to condemn discrimination against homosexuals. As Facchini so cogently observes, due to the consensus built around the use of the expression:

The polemics around whether homosexuality is an “option” or an “essence” are no longer very much present in the day-to-day lives of groups. “Sexual orientation” was an expression that affirmed a certain concreteness to the homosexual experience without necessarily entering into its deeper causes or “essential” character (Facchini, 2005:117).

Facchini notes that because the movement was focused on the struggle to gain rights for a despised minority, the style of activism that would predominate within in it over the following decades was centered on identities and political pragmatism. This, in turn, progressively pushed the movement to clearly name each of the collectives it represented: lesbians, gays, bisexuals, travestis and transsexuals.

What seems most interesting to me, however, is that this ambivalent meaning of “sexual orientation” has perhaps made it

possible that the same language can be used by both activists and researchers, although with different meanings. Thus, while in anthropology, constructivism became hegemonic, the movement incorporated a language that was ever more essentialist and identity-based, if only for strategic political reasons. Shared language, however, has created a situation in which the conflicts between different anthropological perspectives, between different forms of LGBT activism, and the links between those perspectives and those forms of activism have remained more or less hidden. Everyone speaks the same language, apparently, and the legitimacy of this language has roots in both science and LGBT politics.

Two decades later...

As I stated in the introduction, my research interests underwent changes in the early 2000s. The more general political scene had deeply transformed and was no longer what it had been during the movement's origins. Under the impact of AIDS, the former homosexual movement reorganized (Facchini, 2005). Groups multiplied in the form of NGOs and were now nationally represented by the Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Travestis and Transsexuals (ABGLT), founded in 1995. In the streets of the big cities, LGBT Pride Parades gather thousands of people. The old ideals of "(homo) sexual liberation" gave way to more pragmatic political activities based on the idea of creating massive public visibility for a discriminated minority as a strategy for gaining social respect and civil rights. The federal, state and local governments began to implement public policies in order to combat discrimination. They also financed various intervention projects under the control of activist groups. Despite difficulties in approving national laws guaranteeing such rights²²,

²² The 1988 Constitution did not include an explicit condemnation of discrimination based on sexual orientation and defined marriage as a contract between a man and a woman. But if gays, lesbians, travestis and transsexuals can be considered "orphans" of the 1988 Constitution, the impact of this new charter

the courts at various levels were beginning to show greater sensibility to specific demands for rights (Vianna and Lacerda, 2004). In 2011, this led to recognition by the Brazilian Supreme Court of affective-sexual relations between persons of the same sex as a marriage partnership. In the scientific field, the conflict between “constructionists” and “essentialists” was renewed in the poststructuralist approaches inspired by Foucault's work, in so-called queer studies²³, and in different attempts to express the terms of this opposition²⁴.

It was at this moment of consolidation of the struggle that I began to investigate “lethal violence against homosexuals” in the city of Rio de Janeiro. This project was part of a wider investigation involving researchers linked to the university and to an important carioca NGO.²⁵ This research was undertaken in strict cooperation with both public organs and local activists who

has not been negligible for them, given the number of important decisions taken by judges and courts that have been based on the “spirit” of this Constitution (Carrara and Vianna, 2008).

²³ The ways in which these approaches impact upon anthropological studies on homosexuality in Brazil deserves a separate reflection. From a certain point of view, they converge with social constructionism, which has not ceased to be a more radical variant of anthropological theory. Perhaps for this reason, they have seemed to be more innovative for educators and sociologists than for many Brazilian anthropologists. On the other hand, however, the theoretical commitment to the deconstruction of sexual and gender identities sometimes creates tense and confrontational dialogue between academics who embrace this perspective, those movement members whose political identity has become increasingly defined as a clearly discriminated minority, and public policy makers whose target has gradually become understood as a population, the “LGBT population”.

²⁴ This has been the case, for example, for the discussion around the concept of “strategic essentialism”, which emphasizes the importance of identities for political action without, however, giving them ontological status. For a debate on this concept in the field we are discussing here, see Vale de Almeida (2009).

²⁵ This was ISER – Instituto Superior de Estudos da Religião (The Superior Institute for Studies of Religion), where the project was coordinated by Sean Patrick Larvie. We received financing from the Heinrich Boll Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

worked together to create the first Brazilian public service for attending to victims of homophobic violence, a hotline called “Disque Defesa Homossexual” (“Dial Homosexual Defense”, or “DDH”), which was established within the Security Secretariat of the State of Rio de Janeiro (Ramos, 2001).

We discussed the research project with different activist groups in the city, interviewing many of their members who told me their life histories and experiences with violence. One of these organizations, the June 28th Group, gave to us access to an archive containing media stories about murders of gays, lesbians and travestis that had taken place in the State of Rio de Janeiro. These were the kind of stories that regularly fed the national statistical database of homosexual murders, organized and maintained by the Gay Group of Bahia and distributed by its founder, anthropologist Luiz Mott (Mott, 2000; Mott and Cerqueira, 2001). Utilizing the June 28th Group’s archives, and with the support of the Security Secretariat and the Justice Tribunal of the State of Rio de Janeiro, we were able to access the police reports and court cases for the criminal processes that these murders generated.

This initial incursion into the theme later split into two directions. First of all, I began to develop a more general investigation into politics and sexual rights in contemporary Brazil. Secondly, I became involved in a series of surveys undertaken during the LGBT Pride parades. These sought to collect data about discrimination and violence suffered by those people who came to the event and who identified themselves as non-heterosexuals.²⁶

As I entered into this research, the use of the category “homosexual” was itself being criticized by activists, in Brazil and abroad. They were increasingly organizing themselves around

²⁶ These two initiatives were carried out under the auspices of the Centro Latino-Americano em Sexualidade e Direitos Humanos (Latin American Center for Sexuality and Human Rights), in the Instituto de Medicina Social (Social Medicine Institute) of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) with the support of the Ford Foundation. One of its main goals was to push for greater dialogue between researchers, activists and public policy formulators or managers.

“LGBT activism” and this acronym was understood to be more inclusive and politically correct.²⁷ From the late 19th century on, homosexuality had embraced all subjects and collectivities that today organize under the LGBT banner. Its implosion as a category took place in a specific theoretical and political context. From a political point of view, the category is seen by many activists as being excessively linked to the medical discourses that generated it, thus invoking the stigma of disease and degeneration. Additionally, disputes over visibility and resources have reinforced the segmentation of the several collectives that had earlier become stratified according to class and gender markers, through use of the homosexual category. Lesbian activists began to point out that the generic category of “homosexual” used (homosexual) men as its implicit reference, making lesbians invisible. When they could make themselves heard in public debates, travestis refused to be classified as “homosexuals” because they did not identify with a movement that had initially marginalized them. For the travestis, what was at stake was not the prejudice that they suffered because of their “sexual orientation”, but their freedom or right to express a “gender identity”²⁸ that was at odds with what was socially expected, given the “sex” that had been assigned to them at birth. This political process combined with theoretical transformations brought about by increasing feminist and queer critiques that shook the epistemological base upon which homosexuality was built, which presumed a necessary relationship between sex, sexual orientation and gender identity. This fragmentation of

²⁷ Although there is no space here to follow the various currents through which this field of study became reconfigured, I’d like to emphasize that the choice of terminology used to label the field – homosexuality studies, gay and lesbian studies, queer studies – reflects positions that are simultaneously theoretical and political and which are situated in a tense web of relationships which confront activist and academic perspectives, placing them in constant interaction, conflict and cooperation.

²⁸ Note that, in a process similar to what occurred with “sexual orientation”, “gender identity” was initially coined as a scientific category and then later incorporated as a political tool.

homosexuality, as a classificatory category and social identity, made visible and/or conceivable various combinations of bodily appearances, gender identifications and sexual orientations. A series of curious and sometimes enigmatic expressions began to spring up in the wake of homosexuality's decline: "LGBT public policies", "LGBT rights", "LGBT population", "LGBT subjects" and even "LGBT persons". These are today used by activists, public policy makers and researchers (Simões and Carrara, 2014).

In my research on violence and murder, there was a certain amount of dissonance between the data that the team managed to collect and militant expectations (whether of activists or of the researchers themselves). From its beginning, the movement understood violence to be a central issue, even if there was no consensus regarding how to the present the political subject that was being constructed as a victim and a discriminated minority. The idea of research that could add new data to that which had already been extracted by activists from the press was generally well received. Additionally, part of the management of public security policy had been given over to an anthropologist who, under the auspices of the Rio de Janeiro State Security Secretariat, brought together a group of professionals from university research centers. This group was linked to different activist groups on the policy execution front, and also collaborated with the research team that I was part of.

In our project, I was in charge of coordinating the research that analyzed police records and the criminal cases that involved the investigation of the murders and the prosecution of the responsible parties. We began with two premises, also shared by activists: that homophobic violence is present in the classic form of hate crimes, where people are victimized simply because they identify or are identified as gays, travestis, lesbians etc.; and that, in such cases, bias would lead to a marked tendency towards impunity for the authors of these crimes. But when the documentation was consulted, we found we could not easily say any of these things.

Roughly speaking, what we found was a very complex reality. On the one hand, the cases of “violence against homosexuals” took place in very different contexts, ranging from the execution of travestis on the streets, through armed robberies in which gay men were killed inside their apartment (allegedly by hustlers or sexual partners) and on to cases of “crimes of passion” which occurred in the context of loving relationships. On the other hand, the reactions of the police and the justice system varied greatly according to the social status of the victim. In many cases, especially those involving victims from the middle and upper classes of carioca society, impunity was not the rule. From our point of view, the homosexuality of the victim weighed quite differentially, according to other aspects of their identity such as gender, race, class, profession etc. In this sense, our own approach was aligned to the constructionist perspective as previously discussed: if homosexuality was a social space of stigma and abjection, some victims appeared to us to be “more” homosexual than others, regardless of their actual sexual practices.

The “facts” we discovered put into question at least part of how the movement had been building statistics collected from the media. They also problematized the “double victim” perspective of things, in which homosexuals were understood to simultaneously be victims of homophobic violence and neglect and of the hostility of the police and judges.²⁹ But we also discovered that there *was* impunity in many cases and some murders (especially of travestis) did indeed clearly demonstrate the characteristics of hate crimes. Furthermore, we did find that the police and other justice system members could indeed be prejudiced and that, finally, because of this widespread prejudice, many times the police and judges did not try to find and condemn the people responsible for these crimes.

²⁹ Although this was not very clear to me at the time, the movement leaders had supported the research because they believed it would reinforce the political strategy then being adopted that constructed LGBT people as a discriminated minority engaged in a struggle for justice.

If the “facts” complicated things (without entirely ruling out the different perspectives that were at stake), this was probably not due to their hard materiality or the cold objectivity with which they were analyzed. Rather, they became problematic fundamentally due to the way they had been built and the series of commitments that made it possible for them come to light. In order for the facts to become visible, as I mentioned above, the cooperation of multiple actors had been necessary (as well the persistence of research team in locating and registering data). First of all, the activists who provided us with the press files were part of the process, as were the police, who had given us access to incident reports. Finally, the judges and justice system operators who were active in the criminal cases were also stakeholders in the research. What gave specific form to the data was the intermixture of the research team’s perspectives with those of the multiple actors that had made the work possible. If we were to disregard the perspectives of these “political” or “practical” actors, we would run the risk of making generalizations and gross simplifications.

When the final report was ready, we were afraid of a backlash from activists, but this did not happen. An activist to whom we sent an initial draft, merely noted that we used the word “travesti” in the male instead of the female form, as the movement preferred. If we were to talk to the movement, we had to adapt to their language, despite the fact that many non-activist travestis continue to refer to themselves using male pronouns, seeing themselves as homosexuals. In the later articles derived from our report (Carrara and Vianna, 2004 and 2006), this *faux pas* would be “corrected”.

In 2003, soon after ending this initial research project, I was invited by the organizers of the LGBT Pride Parade in Rio de Janeiro to coordinate a survey on victimization among parade participants.³⁰ The questionnaire was thoroughly discussed with

³⁰ The Project involved two research institutes: o Centro Latino Americano em Sexualidade e Direitos Humanos (the Latin American Center for Sexuality and Human Rights), to which I am connected, and the Centro de Pesquisa em Segurança e Cidadania (Center for Security and Citizenship Research) of Cândido

militants, who not only wanted data on homophobic violence, but also information about sociability, loving relationships, political participation etc. From this experience, I learned more about how issues, categories and themes can be negotiated in the construction of scientific data.³¹ Furthermore, recognizing the difference between the time scales of political action and academic reflection, we also had to agree to the preliminary release of some of our results, given their strategic character for the movement. We sought to make sure that these would always be accompanied by all relevant methodological caveats (that they were taken from a convenience sample restricted to Parade participants and not the Brazilian LGBT population entire, etc., etc.), so that this data could not be unduly generalized.

Initially conducted in Rio de Janeiro in 2003 and 2004 (and later in several other Brazilian capitals), the surveys involved negotiations with activists that revealed, on the one hand, the rapid transformation of the process of homosexual citizenship and, on the other, tensions between political and academic discourses regarding the legitimacy of representing certain collectives. In the first version of the questionnaire, for example, the second question concerned respondents' identities. It was formulated as follows: "With which of these categories do you most identify with?" The possible answers were: "gay", "lesbian", "travesti", "transgender," "bisexual," "understanding", "homosexual," "heterosexual", in addition to more disturbing alternatives "other", "none" and "do not know, no answer". Thus placed, the question was intentionally ambiguous because was not clear if we asked with which of those categories respondents had greater affinity or which one they used for self-identification.

Mendes University. Also participating were the Grupo Arco-Íris (Rainbow Group), which organized the pride parade in Rio de Janeiro. As an indication of the sort of transformations being discussed here, this group was originally known as the Rainbow Group for Homosexual Consciousness, but later changed its name to the Rainbow Group for LGBT Citizenship.

³¹ This is perhaps more obvious in surveys, because questions can be included or excluded, making it easier to accommodate different interests.

In 2004, when the survey was repeated in Rio de Janeiro, the question was changed as follows: “With regards to your *sexual orientation*, with which these categories do you most identify?”. The use of the term “sexual orientation” to encompass collectives that the movement saw as principally involving questions of “gender identity” (“travesti” and “transsexual”, for example) would prove problematic. This became clear when the questionnaire was discussed with the activists and researchers in São Paulo³² with whom we established a partnership the following year. As transsexuality or *travestiality* was increasingly being presented as phenomena disconnected from the supposed (homo)sexual orientation, we chose to ask: “With regard to your *sexuality*, with which these categories do you most identify?”. Given its more general nature, this ended up being the way the question would be placed in later versions of the questionnaire. But this, of course, did not resolve the problem since the term “sexuality” does not any longer necessarily encompass gender identifications. Although the question now asked which category respondents “most” identified themselves with (opening up the possibility that they maintained more than one identity) they could only choose one answer. The difficulty seemed to lie in the fact that when the questionnaire was formulated, researchers and activists clearly had not yet conceived of the existence, for example, of gay transgender men (that is, someone who was considered a woman at birth, had subsequently taken on a male identity and who desired other men sexually).

The intricate intertwining of gender and sexuality during the completion of the surveys also made another “variable” rather problematic: the “sex” of the respondents. In the first questionnaire in Rio de Janeiro, the “sex” of the respondent was not asked because it was believed that categories such as “gay” and “lesbian” would refer to men and women, respectively. The data

³² This dialogue was moderated by anthropologist Regina Facchini who, throughout the 2000s, linked her professional activities with intense political militancy in the city of São Paulo.

showed, however, that a significant number of women preferred to identify as “gay” or “homosexual”, for example. Given that in any statistical analysis, all women would be grouped together regardless of their self-identification (“gay”, “lesbian”, “homosexuals” or “understanding”), it was crucial to know the “sex” of the respondents. In the two subsequent surveys in Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, it was up to interviewers note the “sex” of the respondents. However, aside from the ethical problems involved assigning a “sex” to individuals regardless of their opinion, many interviewers simply forgot to make this annotation. The question then needed to be asked: what does it mean in certain contexts to ask what someone’s “sex” is? In the case of people who had transitioned through sex/gender categories (such as travestis and transsexuals for example), this question could have multiple answers, depending on the point of their personal trajectories that the researcher was referring to, the way the respondents’ perceive themselves, or the ways in which they were socially perceived. Because of this, it was decided that from São Paulo on, question would be formulated in the following manner: “With what sex were you registered at birth?” For obvious reasons, asking this question of someone who considered their masculinity or femininity to be self-evident caused a certain amount of embarrassment, but it was the only way we could find to account for the problem. Any way you want to look at it, in the particular context being researched, it turned out one of the least controversial variable in quantitative research, “sex”, ended up being one of the most complex.

Interestingly, even though this sort of categorical precision plagued researchers and activists alike, the results of the surveys indicated a wide dispersion of categories. As exemplified above, although women mostly identified themselves as “lesbian”, some also said they were “homosexual” or “gay”. Travestis could also identify themselves as “gay” or “homosexual”. Thus, from the eight alternatives offered to respondents for self-identification, we drew up six analytical categories: “homosexual man”, “homosexual woman”, “trans man”, “trans woman”, “bisexual

man” and “bisexual woman”. In the absence of a better term, we labeled these “aggregate sexual identities”.

The problem with such terms was soon revealed in the second survey in Rio de Janeiro, when the report we prepared was analyzed by a young consultant, hired by the group that organized the parade. She insisted that in our final report, we should replace these “aggregate sexual identities” with the terms “gay”, “lesbian”, “travesti” and “transsexual” because that was how the movement designated the groups it politically represented. The research team pointed out that like “gay” and “lesbian”, “homosexual” was also a term used by respondents for self-classification and that other words could be chosen to compose “aggregate sexual identities”. Faced with the consultant’s insistence, we argued that changing the categories of analysis in each version of the questionnaire would hinder comparisons. But what was really at stake here was to what extent researchers should shape their language according to that which had become hegemonic in the field of politics. In this case, researchers and activists differed on the best way of naming the subjects to which - and about whom - they spoke. As the research itself revealed, respondents designated themselves in many ways. Apparently then, if activists and researchers have the same perspective on some occasions, on others, they affirm their own specific perspectives and views about the best way to present (and thus construct) reality.

Final Considerations: “A certain dose of ideology”

I want to end this article by revisiting two classic anthropological texts dealing with this discussion, which were first published in the mid-1980s. Written by Ruth Cardoso and Eunice Durham, both appeared in the collection *A Aventura Antropológica* (Cardoso, 1986). In their respective articles, both authors dealt with a similar problem, the result of a process that Durham referred to as “the growing politicization of our social universe” (Durham, 1986:27), which was affecting the sciences in general and anthropology in particular. They were writing at a

time when criticism of “academic isolation” was becoming common and calls were being raised for the “political engagement of scientists”, emphasizing their “social responsibility”. As Durham affirmed, these criticisms were often made by the very “objects of research” themselves, who called upon anthropologists to “politically identify” with their causes. For Durham, in that context, participant observation ran the risk of being transformed into “observant participation” which “slid into militancy” (Durham, 1986:27). According to Cardoso,

The defense of political engagement and the demonstration that knowledge cannot break free of a certain dose of ideology has made it almost a requirement for researchers to define themselves as allies of the discriminated groups and minorities who were have been targeted as objects of study (Cardoso, 1986a:99).

It is important to emphasize that neither of these two authors were denying the importance of researchers’ subjectivity with regards to the “data” produced or of researchers’ social responsibility. The concern of both anthropologists was with regards to the confluence that they saw between fascination with empirical data (an inheritance of positivism), which was then driving anthropology, and these new demands for researcher involvement. Cardoso and Durham were worried about the absence of theoretical and methodological reflection on the epistemological problems posed by this process of politicization of anthropological work and not about the process itself, which they saw as a necessary approach for the construction of knowledge.

For Cardoso especially, in the “engaged research” that emerged in the 1980s, this “uncontrolled” identification (which was not submitted to any reflection or method) between the researcher and the researched impeded estrangement (from oneself and from the other). In other words, it complicated the necessary contextualization of this relationship, obstructing the study of the “social conditions of the production of discourses” (Cardoso, 1986a:103). Cardoso believed that no interesting form of

knowledge could be produced by this process. “The tacit demand for researcher identification with the political proposals of the researched runs the risk of transforming research into ‘denunciation, with the researcher as the group’s spokesperson’,” warned Cardoso (1986a:100). She formulated a critique of this trend, stating that “the object of knowledge is something which neither party (researcher or researched) know and, therefore, it can surprise.” Thus, “novelty is the discovery of something that was not shared [between researcher and researched] and not - as the usual notion of empathy would have it - something found in communion” (Cardoso, 1986a:100).

As we know, these reflections were formulated before the enthronement of Foucaultian theories, before “situated knowledge”, “strong objectivity”, “the reflexive turn”, and the various trends of social constructionism. And yet in some respects, these old clues found in Cardoso and Durham’s articles seem to go further than many of the more contemporary approaches to the theme. What was at stake for these authors was not just the need to assume the position of the “other” in order to understand their perspective, but also the need to estrange one’s own perspective as a researcher and – principally – to be able to present it to this “other” so that they could understand it as well.

Thinking about the relationship between those who are mainly dedicated to reflecting upon the cidadanization process of non-conventional sexualities and gender expressions and those who are mainly dedicated to promoting this process through activism, I stated in an article published a few years ago that the first group (of which I consider myself a part) have acted as Cassandras, alerting the second group to the many dangers involved at every step of this process (Carrara, 2010). This position reveals the discomforts discussed by Cardoso and Durham, created by the tensions between putting oneself alongside the groups one works with, legitimizing their points of view, and critically considering their practices. When I wrote that article, I had the feeling that there was a gap between the theoretical and conceptual instruments that I (like most of my colleagues in the

academy) worked with and the perspectives of the activists. In a sense, it seemed that the more academics became (de)constructionist, pointing out the arbitrary and culturally defined natures of different brands or identity markers, the more movements, policies and rights tended to be organized around “identities” constructed on “essentialistic” assumptions. Generalizing my own concerns, it seemed to me that researchers and intellectuals were being dragged along by a political process that we had paradoxically helped to consolidate, even while we questioned it.

In the light of the reflections developed above, these initial ideas should be redrafted. Relations between science and politics are, of course, much more complex than the dilemma that opposes criticism (on the one hand) and engagement (on the other). It is important to consider the heterogeneity of these two worlds and how different perspectives located within each end up approaching one another and separating, sometimes leaning upon and legitimizing each other, sometimes entering into fierce competition. Different styles of militancy and thought are constantly interacting, disputing the power to pronounce upon what is social reality and what are, therefore, the best means to transform it. Moreover, the perspectives of multiple stakeholders that enables anthropological research work and participation in this web of negotiations and which opens certain fields to observation are incorporated, in one way or another, in the “facts” we produce, configuring our discourses about them.

If these are general observations, which apply to various topics or fields of reflection, they are especially visible when it comes to studies of sexualities and non-conventional gender expressions. The still marginal character of these objects of study, which are often still understood as stigmatized or abject, makes the policy implications of any sort scientific discourse just that much more obvious. Although it is not always easy to develop research in open dialogue with activists and public policy makers/managers, doing so can allow us to deal with the political dimensions of this sort of research without wearing any blinders. At the very least, as

Howard Becker has said, it will allow us to have some idea of which side we are on (Becker, 1977).

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