

Gender performativities, kinship performativities: notes on travestis and their families in Florianópolis

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Sexuality, culture and politics A South American reader

Although mature and vibrant, Latin American scholarship on sexuality still remains largely invisible to a global readership. In this collection of articles translated from Portuguese and Spanish, South American scholars explore the values, practices, knowledge, moralities and politics of sexuality in a variety of local contexts. While conventionally read as an intellectual legacy of Modernity, Latin American social thinking and research has in fact brought singular forms of engagement with, and new ways of looking at, political processes. Contributors to this reader have produced fresh and situated understandings of the relations between gender, sexuality, culture and society across the region. Topics in this volume include sexual politics and rights, sexual identities and communities, eroticism, pornography and sexual consumerism, sexual health and well-being, intersectional approaches to sexual cultures and behavior, sexual knowledge, and sexuality research methodologies in Latin America.



Gender performativities, kinship performativities: notes on travestis and their families in Florianópolis*

Fernanda Cardozo**

Introduction

I summarize here some thoughts regarding the research I undertook to complete my undergraduate degree in the social sciences. This focused on contemporary family relationships, forms of parenthoods and conjugalities among *travestis*¹ in the city of Florianópolis / SC.²

The *subjects* who participated in the research were contacted through the Association of Travestis of Florianópolis - the ADEH Nostro Mundo, a nongovernmental organization that has conducted HIV and AIDS prevention activities. This NGO has also implemented policies oriented towards the region's trans population for more than a decade. The travestis interviewed represented four types of family groups, all belonging to the lower classes and generally inserted in residential circumstances that encompassed their extended families. Three of the interviewees help or helped raise their nephews and nieces. One helps her foster parents take care of their biological son. Another adopted, "in the Brazilian way" (Fonseca, 2002; Tarnovski, 2004), the son a sex worker who used to work for her.

My research focused on kinship relation and terminologies as well as relationships of care and/or affiliation between travestis and children. It relied on the Brazilian literature on the topic, especially that centered on the strong public presence of travestis and the activity of trans sex workers (Silva (1993), Florentino (1998), Oliveira (1994, 1997), Benedetti (2000), Patrício (2002), Pelúcio (2006)). My investigations preferentially focused on the private spaces of these subjects, namely their *homes* and *families*.

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¹ Revision note: Travesti is the current Brazilian category for a biological male engaging in female gender performance. The English "transvestite" is not an appropriate translation, as in English it refers to a non-permanent or semi-permanent gender performance, while a travesti generally lives as female permanently, and typically engages in some form of permanent body modification. Note local differences in the use of transsexual for persons who, unlike travestis, feel that they live in the wrong body and typically wish to have gender reassignment surgery.

² This research was supported by the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

Understanding travestis as the embodiment of gender ambiguity (Silva, 1993), my research aimed at identifying the places that travestis occupy in family structures according to the distribution of social roles by gender. Who do the subjects live with? What are their social functions in relation to children? Which gender are they referred to within their families? What terminologies are used to designate them? What are their roles in the distribution of family responsibilities? How are conjugal relations formed in this group of travestis and with which gender identities are they ordered and categorized?

Oriented by anthropological theories and methodologies, the nature of the research methods was qualitative. Data collection relied on semi-structured and/or open interviews with six travestis and, in some cases, with relatives. In field observations (Malinowski, 1978) relied on his research subjects' willingness to open up their private family life and their domestic environment. This was facilitated through visits including delicious and popular afternoon coffee-katches, which were used as an opportunity to bond through the reciprocity expressed in the offers and acceptance of food. Finally, Rivers' (1991) genealogical method was employed with the travestis who lived with relatives under the same roof, as well as other resources such as photo albums analysis. This was necessary in order to understand the family dynamics among the members of such groups and the logic which allows travestis to participate in the care of children and residential organization (which will be outlined below).

Ethical concerns were central throughout the research. The specificities of anthropological research require a careful and thorough view of the position of the subjects being investigated. Besides the risk of being seen as "exotic" or "comical", research subjects are also susceptible to forms of violence which make explicit their intimacy or symbolically violate of their integrity in the face of the power structures within which they find themselves oppressed. In other words, the risks of symbolic violence against my interviewees based upon my observations are quite real. Therefore, I needed to take into account ethical issues of profound importance upon entering the field, especially with regard to the political dimensions and the social responsibilities of the anthropologist, who has a moral and ethical commitment to the group she studies, both during fieldwork (in the articulation of her identities as a researcher and a social actor) and afterwards, during data management (Oliveira, 2004; Oliveira, 2004; Ramos, 2004).

In order to carry out my research, I decided to assume some risks regarding the social relations and negotiations between the researcher and the researched, since the implementation of the "term of free and informed consent" might represent a violent and invasive feature under the circumstances studied,. Among the interlocutors involved in this work, some had recently completed elementary school or high school while fighting for social recognition and being supported by the movement. One of the women interviewed is also allegedly illiterate. Thus, how was I to certify the subjects'

permission by means of a written document, elaborated in accordance with formal rules and language which they had never before encountered?³

Voices, interactions and images: the research subjects

Alice's House⁴

Alice has been living with her partner Adriano for nearly sixteen years. She takes or has taken care of many nieces and nephews as if she was responsible for them. This relationship was and is possible mainly due to values derived from the feeling of family belonging and family organization in territorial space, following what Rial (1988: 139)⁵ labels “residential segments”, that is, an organizing system in which “many houses are built within the same territory, all inhabited by nuclear families and bound together by kinship ties.”

There are therefore houses which unite the households of Alice's extended family, sharing the same space. This spatial configuration allows family members to move across houses, as well as permanently interact among themselves. Alice thus explained that she *helped raise* her nephews. However, what initially might have looked like the model of *movement of children* defined by Fonseca (2002) does not occur here. In the context under examination, the movement is physical—to the extent that the distribution of houses in the territory allows the free movement of children between them—and also diffuse and diluted, in terms of care (since Alice is not the legal guardian of these children, although she intensively participates in their upbringing). In other words, Alice is another participant in the upbringing process, educating and taking care of the children without, however, having the *status* of mother/father, as she would if she had adopted them. While in Fonseca's studies (2002), the *movement of children* allows multiple mothers, in this case, Alice is not treated as a mother/father, nor she is referred to as “mother / father”: she remains an *uncle*.

In the case of those nieces and nephews who are adults or adolescents, Alice says that girls treat her “as a real woman”, to whom they tell secrets, talk about relationships and “ask advice”, even though they call her by a “man's” name. As for the boys, although they perceive her as a “man”, they also end up treating Alice like a woman, especially with regards to taboos and the avoidance of certain matters which are supposed to be solely *men's* concern

³ Prof. Sonia Maluf also alerted me to a serious implication in the use of informed consent in this case: from the moment the subjects sign the document, they are symbolically placed in the hands of the researcher, giving this person full ownership and rights to use the information obtained in the field. It evidently sets up a relationship of oppressive power which can be harmful to the interlocutors.

⁴ All the subjects had their real names changed to aliases in order to protect their identity.

⁵ This spatial organization, which is very common among popular groups of “Azorean origin” in the island of Santa Catarina, was also noticed by Motta (2002) in his PhD research entitled *Gender and Reciprocity: An Island in Southern Brazil*.

The houses of Beatriz and of Eduarda and Eliana

Beatriz has nephews and, just like Alice, she lives in a territory occupied by the different households of her extended family. There are four houses: the first belongs to her sister Bianca, who lives with her three children (a 17-year-old boy and two girls, 15 and 12-year-old respectively). The second belongs to her mother, Mrs. Betina. A third belongs to two travestis, Eduarda and Eliana, who are Beatriz's friends and live as roommates, not as a couple. Finally, behind a small fence separating it from the rest of the territory, there is fourth house where Beatriz has lived with her partner Bernardo for almost 14 years.

Beatriz, like Alice, has participated in the upbringing of her nephews—Bianca's children, in this case. Moreover, just like Alice, Beatriz's contact with her nephews was possible and facilitated due to the free physical movement of children (and adults) from one house to another. Through her comments and discourses, it is possible to see that Beatriz cherishes the idea of an upbringing which imposes limits upon the excesses of children and places them solidly within the dynamics of the household. In her case specifically, she takes on the role of an authority. Her accounts indicate that this is a traditionally male role in the kinship structure, since she is called upon to “impose order” when the children exceed the limits agreed upon by the family group.

The house where Eduarda and Eliana live belonged to Beatriz's younger sister, Branca. She sold her house to a travesti and friend of Beatriz, who then rented it to the current tenants. The sale and later rental of the house creates emotional and solidarity ties between Eduarda and Eliana and the other members of Beatriz's family. Eduarda, in turn, not only considers Beatriz's family as hers but she also assumes that she and Eliana form a family as they've shared the house for some time and live together in a loving and positive way.

Both Eduarda and Eliana introduce in their biographical histories two elements problematized and addressed in recent Brazilian literature regarding travestis. On the one hand, both relate a femininity or effeminacy in their behaviors and tastes in the period before they realized they were travestis. They were also perceived as effeminate and oriented to feminine activities even before their first contact with the universe of *travestilities*⁶. In fact, Peres (2005), while working with the “existential cartographies” method, noticeably recalls the memories and narratives of four travestis. It is common, in these discourses, to find travestis' perception of themselves as effeminate since childhood or adolescence.

⁶ The term “travestilities”, instead of “transvestism”, is used to highlight positive travesti identities and to convey the plurality of the travesti universe.

The second common characteristic shared by Eduarda and Eliana which is also dealt with in the current literature regarding travestis is the process implied by feminization and by the search for places which are more tolerant to their gender identity and their transformation, as indicated by Vale (2005). In his thesis regarding the contexts of Fortaleza and Paris, this author explains the internal/external migrations undertaken by travestis from the moment they find themselves exposed to forms of injury and violence, typically moving to places where they are more accepted, even when this means insertion in sex work in order to make the move possible. In the cases of Eduarda (who left the family in search for her own dreams) and Eliana (who left home due to her brothers' disapproval) migration was confined to Brazil, only crossing state boundaries. Both were involved with sex work and sexual exploitation while living outside of their states of origin.

Cecilia

Cecilia has a biological child, the result of a heterosexual relationship she had in early adolescence and prior to the process of becoming a woman. She lives with her adoptive parents and shares with them responsibility for the child, both in the sense of childcare and in the sense of kinship relations. Cecilia, however, is the one in charge of providing for the economic needs of the child.

Cecilia asks the boy to consider her as a *brother*, arguing she does not feel comfortable being called *father*. For her son Carlos⁷, however, his father is also Cecilia's adoptive father. Because he has had little contact with his biological mother, Carlos also refers to Cecilia's adoptive mother as *mother*.

Cecilia's discursive difficulty in accepting paternity, however, opposes her naturalized conception of paternal love, which is similar, for instance, to maternal love (Badinter, 1985). From this perspective, the non-assumption of paternal social identity would not nullify the parent's love for his offspring, "the blood of his blood": "I do not think I have that father's love. I think I don't, but I know somehow I feel it, because if something happens to him, 'God forbid', right? "

Cecilia reveals fears regarding her son's sexual orientation in the light of the sufferings and prejudices she has experienced herself. She affirms that she'd prefer that her boy would adopt a masculine image and not a travesti one, were he to get involved in non-heterosexual relationships. Tarnovski (2004) observed a similar discourse among gay parents with whom he worked during his master's thesis. Tarnovski (2004) asserts that parents create the expectation that their children will engage in a heterosexual relationship and give them grandchildren. This is why masculinity and femininity are policed by tutors who mix gender identity and sexuality in their imagery.

⁷ Not the child's real name.

Cecilia's other fear consists of the stereotypes that psychological discourse imposes on the child's experience. "One day I read a report which stated that 'the father prostitutes himself to make a living.'" She says. "I found that heavy... So, what will this psychologist tell him [Carlos]?"

Daniela

In order to facilitate her transformation⁸, Daniela moved from Blumenau, a traditionally German town in Santa Catarina where her adoptive parents had social prestige, to Florianópolis. In this way, she protected her parents from speculation among acquaintances regarding her gender identity. Daniela also knows her biological mother, though she has maintained little contact with her. Similar to Eduarda and Eliana, Daniela thus also has a history of migration (Vale, 2005). Unlike the travestis interviewed by Vale (2005), who left their cities to escape from violence and the injuries they suffered, Daniela left her city to safeguard her parents from stigma and social prejudice.

Diego was adopted in "the Brazilian way"⁹ (Fonseca, 2002). He is the son of a sex worker who used to work as a housekeeper at Daniela's house. His biological mother was going to give Diego away but the travesti welcomed him in her house and registered him as her child. Daniela always wanted children and she had once given shelter to a girl who was returned to her mother a few days later. Diego had several health problems and Daniela took good care of him.

Daniela worked on the streets for a long time and kept this job when she opened her beauty parlor. She abandoned the streets upon Diego's adoption, however. As Tarnovski (2004) demonstrates in his study of gay parents, paternity usually operates in two "normalizing" directions. In one sense, the father's identity overlaps the homosexual identity, easing the aggression of sexuality; in the other sense, it operates in the direction of what the author calls "clean slate", with the child "purifying" the couple's life as they move away from social places stigmatized as promiscuous and construct a masculinized identity as opposed to the so-called effeminate gay image. In Daniela's case, Diego seems to have "saved" her and pushed her towards a "process of moralization" (Tarnovski, 2004).

Daniela had trouble with the Guardianship Council of the city of Florianópolis. According to her, the institution intervened after allegations that she was living with another man—

⁸ The terms used by travestis are often "come out", "discover yourself", "reveal your gender identity." The word "transformation" here has the same meaning given by Pelúcio (2005: 225): "(...) a *feminization* process that begins with removing hair from the face, legs and arms, making the eyebrows look thinner, letting the hair grow and then begins to wear makeup and clothes considered feminine in activities outside their houses."

⁹ Adoption *in the Brazilian way*, as stated by Fonseca (2002), references an adoption process that does not pass through the official procedures of national law, but instead happens when someone registers an hitherto fore unregistered child as his or her biological son or daughter.

which supposedly would have deprived her of the right to care for the boy. Diego was still hospitalized when Daniela received a notification that he would be taken away from her. However, she was able to keep him after requests from the doctor and nurses to the Guardianship Council and arguments that she was being a “good mother”. As in the case of the gay parents investigated by Tarnovski (2004), there is a separation between the spheres of parenting and sexuality and, in the Daniela’s case, there is a requirement for this distinction to be more explicit and institutional.

What fieldwork has revealed

The wealth of data provided by my research subjects allows us to create some problematizations and make room for new ideas. I will try to summarize these over the next few pages, although I run the risk of being superficial or evasive about some issues.

We can clearly see an *operationalization* of gender duplicity in travestis when we take into account the names, kinship terminologies and tasks assigned to them in the family environment. The gender *ambiguity* which Silva (1993) refers to while treating travesti body image and construction is transposed to the level of social relations, following representations and/or bonds of affection established throughout the construction of the subjects in question. In general, the travestis occupy a male position among fathers, brothers and nephews in terms of naming. They are usually referred to by male names and terminologies among family members. However, they are participants of a female universe: they prepare parties with their sisters and talk more openly with their nieces. The permission for travestis to take care of children seems to be especially linked to this insertion in the female universe. It is worth noting that the men of the family do not involve themselves in the upbringing of their offspring as much as the travestis, who claim an active and permanent role in the children’s education. In this sense, even though they are called by male names within the family, the roles travestis perform do not necessarily belong to the male universe. Their identity is thus recognized through a combination of the legitimacy of so-called female roles and male names.

This ambiguity is also reflected in the segregation between the public and private worlds regarding the possibility of female or male treatment—a segregation intersected by the idea of temporality with regards to who knew them before and/or after their assumption of the travesti identity. To be *he* or *she*, to be called by a female or male name, are situations that depend on the familiarity with the travestis and the socialization that occurred before or after the transformation process, as well as children’s questions with regards to the representations commonly used by other adults with regards to the travestis. Among relatives or close neighbors who did not know them “*like this*”, there is an implicit permission to designate the male gender, as long as these references are used “with respect.” Among unknown people or those who met them after the

assumption of female identity, it is politically compulsory to use female names and pronouns, since treatment as a male would otherwise constitute a form of symbolic violence against the right of being recognized as female. Thus, a logic exists which allows some people to call travestis by male names and, at the same, prohibits others this to others.

The possibility of referring to travestis in a masculine or feminine way, however, is not fixed. It becomes evident, especially in cases where a family member who is allowed to use a male name begins to refer to them as a woman in public places, such as the beach or a disco, through implicit or explicit negotiation¹⁰.

The children, in turn, are often central in the gender ambiguity and/or problematization involved in referring to travestis. They are the ones who create conflicts between the terminologies used in the family and the representations seized upon by the wider society. Mrs. Betina, Beatriz's mom, recalls the questioning of her granddaughter Betiane:

Betiane told me "Grandma, I want to ask you a question" - she will be eight soon - "Is my uncle a woman or a man?". Then I replied: "My daughter, do as I say: approach him and ask, because Grandma will not be able to explain (...)". "Or is he a faggot?". I said: "I do not know, dear. When you get home, just ask him: 'oh, uncle, what are you? Are you a man or a woman? '. He will answer you (...)". Because we are always left with a doubt in our minds, right? (Mrs. Betina).

In general, however, even if we admit the feminine *ethos* of travestis, they are called by their masculine names, especially if they are "uncles", by later generations in situations involving other family members who have been responsible for inserting the travestis in a male position since birth. When I arrived at Beatriz's house, for example, I heard her nephew calling her "uncle." Observing this, together with, Eduarda and Eliana, Mrs. Betina then said: "It doesn't matter, it will not change, my daughter! They will die uncles."

On the other hand, in the cases of the two travestis who have children, the terminologies with which their positions are defined in relation to children are not fixed, but subject to renegotiation. In this way, some of the travestis I studied eventually occupy different places in the kinship structure.

Cecilia has a biological son, but in relation to kinship terminologies and representations in the family environment, she presents herself as the boy's *brother*. Even though she acknowledges her biological paternity in relation to the boy, Carlos, she negotiates with him to consider her as a *brother*. Carlos considers Cecilia's adoptive father - his

¹⁰ The same has been observed by a fellow researcher, Antonio (2005).

grandfather - to be his father, since he is the one who raised the boy and took upon himself the public figure of a *father*. Cecilia, however, did not lose her legal, biological status as the child's father, nor her role as provider. She remains a paternal reference for him, especially in threatening situations in which the boy needs to legitimize the existence of a judicially and biologically recognized father. Cecilia has an active role in educating the boy, one that is reinforced through demands, punishments and rewards, according to her reports. In other words, she takes on the "father role" in Lacanian psychoanalytic terms.

He (Carlos) calls me by my name [male name]. But if someone says something to him, he says: "Oh, my father." I try to stop him from doing that and everyone criticizes me, but I do not like those words: FATHER, UNCLE (...). So ... anytime they say something, he refers to his father. Me or my father, who he also calls "father". Then... our relationship is like that. He's kinda rebellious, but I am too, right? I ground him, argue with him ... I make him stay there reading two, three books ... (Cecilia).

Daniela also provides an example of this mutability in positions of kinship, assuming a curious plasticity in kinship naming in relation to the child. She calls him *son*, plays the role which is traditionally given to the mother figure (thus being recognized by the individuals around her as or always compared with the image of the mother¹¹, as occurred when the doctor and the nurses defended her against the Guardian Council), legally registers as a *father* and relates to the child using her female name or nickname ("Daniela" or "Dani").

In these cases, therefore, we observe that not only gender is *performatized* (Butler, 2003), but the position in the kinship organization and structure is likewise *performatized*. To be a *mother*, to be a *father*, to be a *brother*, to be an *aunt*, are all *performativities* (Butler, 2003) updated by the individuals involved and contextually negotiated.

As for the identities relating to gender and sexuality (Grossi, 1998), on the other hand, there are different discourses, especially regarding social movements and the subjects themselves. Among travestis, it is common to self-identify as a homosexual in some cases, using the argument that before becoming travestis they were *gays* and/or using the concept of *homosexuality* as a catchall category that encompasses all "deviant" (Elder, 1974) forms of sexuality. According to the travesti movement, however, travestis should be referred to the same labels as non-travestis - heterosexuals, homosexuals and bisexuals. In this sense, according to the ADEH's president, Luana Cotroffi, travestis who date other women or other travestis are called, conceptually, *homosexuals* and may even be called *lesbians*. Meanwhile, travestis who are attracted to "men" - people who assume a male role and are generally active in sex - are considered *heterosexuals*.

¹¹ Looking from the outside, such an approach comes from a naturalized idea of motherhood and its expected conduct (Badinter, 1985).

Travestis who are sexually attracted to both men and women and/or other travestis, in turn, are categorized as bisexual. We observe that, according to the movement's current understandings, homosexuality and heterosexuality are not categories related to the classical distinction between *tops* and *bottoms*, nor to biological sex, but to *gender*. In the case of heterosexual couples, the man's performance as a *top* legitimizes him as man, however. There is thus a distinction between *gays* and *real men*, as Fry (1981) identifies in the nuances between *men* and *queers* and between *men* and *entendidos*¹² when it comes to relations involving men who have sex with men (considering, in this case, *man* in a biological / anatomical sense).

Finally, it is important to emphasize that research on travestis regarding kinship leads to new questions from a theoretical point of view, which, in turn, can cause an impact in the movement and in travestis' process of identity affirmation. The most significant of these questions relates to the *nature / culture* dichotomy used to categorize sex and gender and the possibility of its inversion.

According to the idea that sex precedes gender, in a way that the latter is understood to be built upon the representation of the former, femininity is an attribute seized by anatomical females (who *become* women) and masculinity by biological males (who *become* men). From this naturalization of sex and its connection with gender, it would be plausible to consider Patricio's (2002) view on travestis as neither feminine nor masculine.

(...) Travesti people display a gender identity that is neither male nor female, but that runs between these two, forming a new way of being in the universe of travestism, which I choose to call *gender mobility* (Patricio, 2002: 10).

There are two implications of the assertion that travestis are neither male nor female. On the one hand, it undermines the whole feminization process undertaken by travestis in the construction of their body, in the symbolic reworking of their attitudes and in the renewal of their wardrobe. Travestis feminize themselves, they are feminine and femininely characterized, they adopt female names, claim a female treatment, hope to use the women's toilet in public places and even sometimes claim to participate in the feminist movement; they are, for many, the exacerbation of femininity. To say they are not feminine is to deny them a status which they make daily efforts to achieve and that is a highly depoliticizing position. On the other hand, by characterizing travestis as a possible transit between masculine and feminine, we run the risk of crystallizing gender, denying the idea of performativity and linking gender identity with sexuality. Claiming that travestis are in a third place, a nonexistent place between the male and female, or are shifting from one pole to another, is like prohibiting men and women from doing the same, or naturalizing femininity in women and masculinity in men. This results in

¹² A Brazilian term roughly equivalent to "queer".

travestis, who are not one thing or another, not being classified as either masculine or feminine. What is important is to realize that men and women are transitioning between male and female, as much as travestis; such transiting is not exclusive to travestism. To think of this transiting as a travestis' exclusive characteristic is to naturalize gender and create a stagnant category that neatly encloses the characters of social life.

Based upon these discussions, it is possible to analyze the discourse of one of the subjects of my research, Alice, who argues: "Travesti, for me, is like the third sex, you know? Woman, man and travesti". Alice's statement opens space for debate regarding the existence of two genders¹³ (male and female) which are fluid and interchangeable and not simply two, but also more, according to the symbolic universe examined. In this sense, between the categories of sex and gender, there could be an inversion of the precedence of one in relation to the other. Under such a perspective, sex does not determine gender, but gender does speak about sex. Sex could thus be constructed as a result of the social construction of the subjects, their actions oriented by their subjectivity and the *gendered* discourse about themselves. The idea of a culturally constructed sex is also made explicit when Alice, in referring to the games of girls and boys, says that "children do not have a defined sex".

Butler (2003) assesses Wittig's theories, stating that "the category of sex is neither invariant nor natural, but rather a specifically political use of the category of nature that serves the purposes of reproductive sexuality" (2003: 164). Thus, sex "is a political and cultural interpretation of the body" (165). According to Butler (2003), Wittig sees the supposedly "natural" political category of sex as obscuring a series of discontinuities, placing them under the same category. Furthermore, in this understanding of the world, language has the power to institute the real: "concepts, categories and abstractions (...) can effect a physical and material violence against the bodies they claim to organize and interpret" (Butler, 2003:169). Thus, for Wittig, sex is a political discourse that classifies subjects according to a compulsory heterosexuality, so that even the idea of nature would be nothing more than an ideological construction, used to support such a mechanism.

Final considerations

Considering that travestilities are not limited to the tension between male and female, observed in the construction of the body or in the act of prostitution, but something that expands and unfolds through the daily routines of the subjects (whether within their family and households, in their relationships with children, in their religious beliefs, or in their stories about love and conjugal life) I believe it is necessary to "shift otherness"

¹³ Although I agree with Prof. Sonia Maluf's opinion about the importance of considering multiple genders, the general views and categorizations which order the opinions of the subjects of my research are defined according to the female/male dichotomy.

(Peirano, 1999) in studies *about* and *with* travestis in the same way this has happened with the history of anthropological research, moving the “exotic” to the “familiar” (Elder, 1981). The daily lives of travestis must be understood and visualized through the multiple instances of their social life so that the similarities between “them” (travestis) and “us” (non-travestis) overcome the aspects that threaten to place “them” in a distant dimension, in the unknown.

I also believe that the sum of studies in different regions and in distinct political and socio-cultural contexts on the kinship relations established by travestis may offer comparative elements that can subsidize a mapping of the *places* travestis occupy in family units, according to their gender identity and the representations used by family members to refer to them and to distribute household activities, for example. In this sense, the diversity of cases or saturation of data can be used in the deconstruction of stigmas and the denaturalization of family and gender models.

Regarding discussions about the social nature of sex (Wittig cited in Butler, 2003), scholars evidently must have a greater understanding of these ideas based upon the discourses of travestis and observations regarding their position in social practices, especially in kinship relations. Moreover, the ideas presented in this article need to be evaluated with care in order to avoid falling into cultural reductionism in an attempt to avoid harmful biological reductionism. In any case, I close by emphasizing the possibility of denaturalizing sex in the same way that we have already denaturalized gender.

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