

Sexuality, Culture and Politics: The Journey of Male Homosexuality in Brazilian Anthropology*

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ABSTRACT

The present article inquires into the ways in which a presumed Brazilian “managing” of sexual categories or identities (mainly related to male homosexuality) has been conceived of in anthropology since the end of the 1970, sometimes becoming an axis for building and maintaining a national identity characterized as exotic, backward and non-Western. We also trace parallels between two historical moments of reflection regarding the links between sexuality, culture and politics, briefly reviewing some of the early theoretical and empirical contributions that prefigure the central concerns and conceptualizations of today’s sexuality studies: the instability and fluidity of sexual identities and the entanglement of sexuality with dynamic and contextual power relationships and social hierarchies.

Key Words: Homosexuality, Brazilian Anthropology, Sexual Identities, National Identity.

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Dedicated to Professor Peter H. Fry

At a certain point in his ethnography of the world of *travestis*¹ in Salvador Bahia, the anthropologist Don Kulick analyzes the relationship his informants maintain with their boyfriends or “husbands”. His main informant claims that, if the truth be told, the fact that travestis “support” their boyfriends with money and presents demonstrates the power that the travestis’ exert over their boyfriends. Different from what might appear to an uninformed observer, this situation demonstrated that travestis were not exploited in this relationship. According to Kulick:

A foreigner who **comes from another culture in which sexual relationships are supposedly based on reciprocal feelings of love and in mutual efforts to generate income and maintain a household** can easily see in the travestis’ words and practices [in which the claim to economically support their companions by their own free will] fantasies of power which they salient to hide the harsh reality that they are exploited by manipulative and self-interested gigolos (Kulick, 1998:112, our emphasis).²

Though the travestis’ relationships with their boyfriends and the meanings that they attribute to these relationships are interesting in terms of discussing the character of domination in structurally asymmetrical relationships, what attracts the readers’ attention is the explicit comparison between the “culture” of the foreign observer (and the “foreigner” here is no doubt Kulick himself) and that of the travestis under observation. In speaking of the reciprocity and egalitarianism of his “culture”, is Kulick referring in a loose way to certain European or North American middle-class values or to a western individualist and modern culture from which travestis have been excluded? It’s hard to say with any degree of certainty, but given that, when it comes to the universe of homosexual and homoerotic relationships, Brazil in particular and Latin America in general have been systematically described as not belonging to the western world, the second hypothesis seems to us to be the more probable.

If “Brazilianess” has been constructed for over a century using sexuality as a privileged reference³, then we should not be surprised that the problems inherent in the process of (re)constructing national identity are also reflected in studies of Brazilian homosexuality. In the present article, we do not intend to provide an exhaustive analysis of the set of ethnographies that deal with male homosexuality or travestis in Brazil. Rather, our objective here is to explore in a more particular way how the supposedly Brazilian “jeito”⁴ or “way” of organizing social-sexual identities has been thematically constructed since the end of the 1970s, becoming in certain cases, an axis for the construction of a

¹ “Travesti” is generally glossed as “transvestite” in English. Here, we’ve chosen to keep the original as we feel that it better preserves certain specificities of this unique Brazilian formulation of gender.

² Translators’ note: all citations in this text are translations from Portuguese texts, some of which may be versions of earlier English texts. The English used here may thus be slightly different from that used in the original quotes in those cases where the translator did not have access to texts in their original language.

³ On this point, see Carrara, 2004; Moutinho, 2004.

⁴ Translators’ note: “jeito” is an untranslatable emic term, commonly in countered in Brazil and understood to mean an amalgam of “way” and “spirit”.

national identity understood as non-western and often marked by the appearance of the exotic and/or by backwardness. Before we begin however, we must emphasize that even though we recognize the “orientalizing” effects of this operation, our analysis is not simply an attempt to achieve “Western” status for Brazil. Instead, our goal is to point out the problems that denying this status have created for attempts to better understand Brazilian society, as well as those societies that are unconditionally understood to be Western.

The numerous works undertaken in Brazil over the last few decades which deal with gender and homosexuality are quite diverse in nature and we will not go into them in depth here, at least as a cohesive set. With regards to this production, we shall highlight the works of anthropologist Peter Fry, mainly elaborated during the 1970s and published at the beginning of the following decade. In particular, we will analyze his article, “From Hierarchy to Equality: The Historical Construction of Homosexuality in Brazil”⁵, a crucial text for understanding the configuration of this area of study and required reading for all those who enter into it. In particular, we are interested in exploring the ways in which this production was incorporated into subsequent works.⁶

Accompanying this dialogue will necessarily force us to analyze two distinct moments of reflection regarding the relationship between sexuality, culture and politics. In particular, we seek to retrospectively evaluate the reach of an important set of authors and studies which were crucial to Fry’s reflections. In this way, we shall be able to reveal and trace some of the central problems and concepts of today’s works which, influenced by post-structuralism and queer studies, have emphasized the instability and fluidity of sexual identities, as well as sex’s insertion in power and social-hierarchical dynamics and contexts.

Homosexuality caught between tradition and modernity

In his article regarding the historical construction of homosexuality in Brazil, Peter Fry describes three taxonomic systems which are differentially disseminated throughout the country, following the beliefs of distinct social classes. The first of these, the gender hierarchy (which is connected to the opposing sets masculinity/sexual activity and femininity/sexual passivity), systematically encompasses all sexual identities. In this system, the category “man” embraces all individuals of the masculine sex who supposedly maintain an “active” position in their sexual relationships with both men or women. Sexually “passive” men, who are treated as *bichas* (fairies), *viados* (fags) and etc., are understood to be a sort of hybrid in which masculine anatomic attributes mix together with the behavioral or spiritual characteristics attributed to the feminine gender, creating the famous category of “female souls in male bodies”⁷.

5 This is the published version of a text that, according to the author, has had a long story: it was written in 1974 and circulated among a restricted circle of academics, receiving later modifications and additions (Fry, 1982:87-115, see p.112, note 1).

6 Given its importance on more recent studies regarding homosexuality, its influence on foreign and Brazilian authors and its praiseworthy efforts to understand local contexts as linked to global contexts, we shall especially focus on anthropologist Richard Parker’s book, *Beneath the Equator* (1999 [2002]).

7 Fry’s characterization of this hierarchical model is based in large part on the ethnographic research he undertook in *candomblé terreiros* [translator’s note: African-Brazilian religious temples] along the outskirts of Belém in 1974. In doing this, Fry was taking advantage of the door opened by Ruth Landes (2002 [1974]) in the investigation of the links between homosexuality and African-Brazilian religions. Cf. Fry, 1982:54-86 -

The second model has been formulated principally by doctors and psychiatrists and it has increasingly disconnected sexual orientation and gender.⁸ In this system's terms, men who maintain sexual relations with other men are considered to be "homosexual", regardless of whether they are "active" or "passive" during coitus. Here, a certain hierarchy is maintained based upon the opposition between *normality* and *abnormality*, concepts which are further linked to *disease*, given that homosexuality is understood to be a sick or anomalous deviation in relationship to heterosexuality, which is institutionalized as a norm.

Finally, the third model represents a sort of reaction to the second, though it is also historically derived from it. This model maintains the disjunction between sexual and gender orientation and sets up another dualism, this one based on the opposition between hetero- and homosexuality. In this way, a hierarchical model (the first) and an egalitarian model (the third) of constructing social-sexual identities exist which are both mediated by the psychological-medical model.

The genesis of the egalitarian model is located in turn of the century medical thought in Europe and Brazil. This formulation is ultimately at the base of the gay movements which rose up in Europe and the United States during the 1960s, inverting the values attributed to homosexuality and, according to Fry, creating a "crushing legitimacy" for the model: "In one fell swoop, the medical model was consecrated by its own creature, the homosexual subculture" (Fry, 1982:104).

After describing this process from a more general point of view, Fry continues: "**And** this is also what happened in Brazil" (Id. *ib.*, our emphasis). The conjunction "and" is crucial here because, without discarding social and cultural differences, Fry makes explicit his refusal to see gay or homosexual identity as just another example of "cultural dependence":

I want to believe that a satisfactory interpretation of the history which I have outlined here will have to incorporate that which is common to all modern capitalist societies and that which is specific to each (Id. *ib.*:109).

In spite of all of its singular characteristics, Brazil is thus fundamentally a part of a wider process through which all countries of the so-called western world are passing. The emergence of the egalitarian model is, according to this author, related "to the social transformation of the country's metropolitan middle and upper classes, if not to the constitution of these classes themselves".⁹ In this way, Fry demonstrates that he believes that this model is not merely more disseminated among the Brazilian upper classes, but is in fact an important element in the cultural construction of these classes' identities.

Fry is exceedingly careful when he connects systems of representation of sexual identity to given classes and regions. He observes that the classifications which are appropriate to the hierarchical model, though "hegemonic" in the areas and populations that

"Homossexualidade masculina e cultos afro-brasileiros". This article was first presented at a meeting of the *American Anthropological Association* in 1974. See also Fry, 1986 and Fry, 1995.

8 Initially, the medical-psychological model at least partially incorporated the hierarchical principles of gender, dividing homosexuals into "active" and "passive" categories with the later being classified as "true homosexuals". Afterwards, throughout the 1940s and on up into the 1960s, this model shifted towards a more homogenous representation of the different types which was based upon a supposed homosexual "condition".

9 Fry (1982:95) adds that "the same class fraction also produced new identities regarding 'the woman' during this same period"

he mentions, also appear “throughout Brazilian society, coexisting and often competing with other systems” (Id. ib.:91). In this endeavor, Fry is not simply recognizing that several different understandings of male sexuality exist which vary according to region, social class and history, he is also situating these understandings as integral parts of religious cosmologies and ideologies regarding race, age and other social markers. In particular, he is paying careful attention the power the language of sex has to express concepts of hierarchy and equality within the wider context of political disputes.

We can thus say that the hierarchical model does not point to any singular or non-western characteristic of Brazilian society, though Fry does not clearly say this. To the contrary: this model is what firmly anchors us within the western tradition, given that this model of organizing practices and identities was present throughout Europe in ancient times¹⁰ and that it is identified by historians as having been recently active in both Europe and North America¹¹. Even Dennis Altman, who firmly believes that Brazil is non-Western claims that:

In the century preceding the birth of the contemporary gay movement, the dominant understanding of homosexuality was characterized by **confusion** between sexuality and gender. In other words, the “traditional” view of things was that the “true” homosexual was a man who behaved like a woman. Something of this **confusion** still remains in popular perceptions of homosexuality today (Altman, 1996:82, our emphasis).

Though Altman does not quite comprehend the logic of the underlying hierarchical model (which he understands to be “confusion”), he attests that it was present in the United States at least until the 1950s and that even after this date it could continue to be found among the masses. He thus identifies a process in the United States that is quite similar to the process Fry is simultaneously describing in Brazil. Before we continue, however, we need to explore some of the characteristics of that “moment” and of the social, political and intellectual context in which Fry’s text was produced.

A great uneasiness...

It’s a common opinion that the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the ‘80s in Brazil were characterized by arguments about whether or not the interests of “minorities” (i.e. blacks, Indians, women and homosexuals) needed to be subordinated (at least initially) to the wider question of democratization and social revolution. Other, lesser known

10 See, for example, Veyne, 1985.

11 The works of British social historians are important here and we will speak of these further below. As George Chauncey (1994:16) also emphasized in his historical study, before World War II, gender hierarchies were also central to the systems set up to classify male urban homosexual cultures in the United States. According to Chauncey, *fairies* and *queers* were emic terms used to designate gradations between ostentatiously “effeminate” homosexual men and those who were more discrete. But both *fairies*’ and *queers*’ ideal partner was the *trade*, a “real man”, preferentially a soldier, sailor or manual laborer who could sexually relate to *fairies* and *queers* without being labeled as one, as long as he preserved his masculine appearance and “active” role.

discussions also occurred during this period, however. As Edward MacRae (1990) has clearly shown in his research into the Somos/SP group, the first homosexual movement in Brazil was deeply divided on the question of whether or not to adopt a homosexual identity. Many people were worried that assuming such an identity might result in the essentialization (or “reification”, to repeat the term most commonly used at the time) of hetero/homosexual opposition and the consequent institution of new forms of labeling, stigmatization and marginalization. As MacRae points out, the debate over being essentially or contextually¹² homosexual was one of the reasons the Somos/SP group finally fragmented (Id. Ib.:59). The group initially “believed in the principle that humanity was divided into heterosexuals and homosexuals (and maybe a few bisexuals)” (Id. Ib.:40), but later moved towards more “relativist” positions, such as those of MacRae himself and a few other militants. MacRae’s work is shot through with the anguish of a researcher who knows that he is working with analytic suppositions which might weaken the principles upon which the movement which he studies were based. At one point in his book, MacRae courageously admits the following:

I confess to having felt perplexed and uncomfortable many times when colleagues in the academic world push me to discuss the concept of social role. I felt that this would simply give a bit more prestige (prestige which I had, after all, gained through the Somos group members’ trust) to an idea that would only weaken Somos’ group solidarity (Id. ib.:41).

Fry’s work itself must be read in this context of valuing ambiguity, criticizing essentialism and deeply suspecting the social impact of binary systems of classification (what’s today known as “binaryism”). As Fry and MacRae clearly explain in the end of their 1983 book *O que é homossexualidade*:

Many people prefer to not submit themselves to these new social categories which tend to push them into restricted “ghettos”. They’d prefer to see these social categories themselves questioned and end up entering into conflict not only with scientific medicine, but also with those “politically conscious homosexuals” who, for whatever reason, are interested in maintaining these distinctions. After all, if one denies the inevitability of the border separating “homosexuals” from “heterosexuals”, one calls into question the very notion of a homosexual identity that has given meaning and happiness to many peoples’ lives and which has often been assumed at great personal cost (Fry e MacRae, 1983:120).

Authors such as Fry and MacRae and those who have followed them such as Guimarães, Perlongher, Costa and Heilborn¹³ (among others) are not simply looking at how

¹² “Ser” or “estar” in the Portuguese original.

¹³ Guimarães, 2004 (originally a masters dissertation defended in 1977, presenting a pioneering ethnography of what Fry denominates as the “egalitarian model”); Perlongher, 1987; Costa, 1992; Heilborn, 2004 (originally a PhD thesis defended in 1992). Later, James Green (2000) presented an overview of the general move from a “hierarchical model” to an “egalitarian model” during the course of the 20th century. He also

identity can “imprison” people. They are also concerned with the very particular ways in which class differences can now be formulated in terms of a more or less complete acceptance of either a hierarchical or egalitarian understanding of homosexuality. In their view, a hierarchical relationship was being established between the two models themselves and this relationship was being converted into symbols of class distinction. This “hierarchy” did not simply maintain the stigma and social repression attached to “effeminate” men and travestis, it actually intensified them, marking such individuals as “backwards”, politically incorrect and etc.

Without wishing to sound nationalist, it seems to us quite surprising that the very recent practice of treating as linked different social markers (such as gender, sexual orientation, race and class) was already established in Brazil at the end of the 1970s. It is also quite interesting to note that today’s worries regarding the naturalization of difference and the restriction of identities (ideas associated with influential post-structural thinkers such as Judith Butler) were already being voiced in Brazil in the late 1970s. Furthermore, it was quite clear to these authors that the study of sexuality and the analysis of the hetero/homosexual dyad (which today would be considered a “great division”) in particular were much more than means of revealing “hidden” or silenced experiences: they were they keys to understanding wider cultural conventions and power structures. This point of view is today understood as having originated in the revolutionary works of Eve Sedgwick, who spliced literary and sociological theory together in order to create a theoretical and epistemological revolution in several disciplines in the human and social sciences.¹⁴

The above observations have not been made in an attempt to claim for Brazil the banner of intellectual vanguard in the social sciences, or in order to obfuscate the brilliance of later thinkers’ ideas regarding the social, political and cultural aspects of sexuality or other regimes of knowledge. We believe, however, that an intellectual genealogy which seeks to look beyond the production of the great metropolitan centers should definitely recognize the importance Brazilian socio-anthropological thought regarding homosexuality, highlighting its original character as a precursor of the kind of critical thought which would later be labeled *queer theory*.¹⁵

suggests that there exists evidence of identities within the Brazilian urban scene, from the beginning of the century on, of identities which went beyond the active/passive binary split.

14 See Sedgwick (1990).

15 Brazil has not institutionalized “gay and lesbian studies” and so the area of “queer studies” also does not properly exist, at least yet and not at all in the sense it is understood in other national contexts, most particularly within American academia. *Queer* is an extremely difficult word to translate into Portuguese and, beyond the general circle of specialist types such as ourselves, it generally comes “prepackaged” and not translated (i.e. *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* or *Queer as Folk* remain with the English originals as titles). Here, we understand the expression to refer, in particular, to those men who transgress gender conventions (who are “effeminate”), being that it is also can be stretched to cover a wide variety of practices and identities which are situated at the base of social hierarchies of gender and sex. *Queer theory* emphasizes a certain marginalized heroism, an anti-assimilationist posture and a strong critique of political strategies that seek to conquer civil rights and liberties for gay and lesbian people. It also encompasses a radical anti-essentialism and refuses to believe that sexual and gender identities are closed and restricted entities. For this reason, “inter-“ and “trans-“ are two prefixes commonly associated with this theoretical position in Brazil (as in intersexual, transsexual, transgender, travesti, etc.). *Queer theory* and *queer politics* are, in any case, expressions which refer to a wide range of connotations which are sometimes ambiguous or contradictory. In this respect, see Epstein, 1996, esp.152-157. For a more general view of the political and intellectual contexts of queer theory’s emergence, see Jagose, 1996.

Our goal is not to dispute precedence, but to highlight affinities between certain analytical and political preoccupations during those times and today. This requires a brief overview of the set of references used by Brazilian authors or by those foreign scholars who “acclimatized” themselves in Brazil and who were interested in sexuality and homosexuality as objects of study and reflection. It also requires that we look at these references with an eye towards the theoretical contributions which characterize today’s studies of sexuality.

Taking stock of old dialogues

Within Brazilian academia during the 1970s and ‘80s, the discussion of homosexuality was accompanied by critique of the identity concept itself, which was based on a series of theoretical references. To the contemporary reader, what is immediately apparent are the affinities these ideas and concerns maintain with the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault was certainly a great influence on the formation of a denaturalizing view of sexuality, given that he underlined the role medical knowledge played in the consolidation of modern sexual identities. Above all, the work of the French philosopher offered a compelling conceptual frame which characterized the wider process of the constitution and dissemination of a capillary and disciplinary modality of the operation of power and the exercise of social control which produced new social characters and new political challenges. Foucault’s impact would become more obvious and intense beginning with the second half of the 1970s, when the author visited Brazil and works like *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Vol. I: The Will to Knowledge*¹⁶ were read, translated and incorporated into university debates. This process coincided with the intensification of the movements in opposition to the Brazilian military dictatorship and the growing politicization of those questions linked to race, gender and sexuality. Referring to the political and academic contexts of Brazil during this period, Fry and MacRae wrote in 1983:

Up until about 1975, the opposition political parties considered the feminist, Black and homosexual movements to be irrelevant to the overall struggle, which was seen to be dominated by the question of inequality between social classes. What has marked more recent years in these so-called minority areas is the fact that they have also become recognized as “political” within a vision of society that sees power not only in the State, but also in the street, the office, the hospital, inside the home and even in bed [...] It is precisely this period in which Michel Foucault has begun to compete with the old heroes for primacy within the bibliographies of human science courses in the universities (Fry and MacRae, 1983:117).¹⁷

16 These works which were published in France in 1975 and 1976 were both translated and published in Brazil in 1977. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* was published in English in the U.S. in 1978 and in the United Kingdom in 1979.

17 For a reflection on academic provincialisms, compare the views of the authors with those expressed more recently by British sociologist Ken Plummer (2003:518), who believes that the impact of *The History of Sexuality* on sexual studies “only became evident during the 1980s, mostly after Foucault’s death”.

The influence of Foucault, however, must be situated within the several references which have stimulated research and reflection regarding sexuality among Brazilian anthropologists during this period.¹⁸ Foucault is not included in the bibliography of Fry's first article regarding homosexuality and African-Brazilian cults, in which the author presents his first version of the system of sexual classification which makes up the hierarchical model and in which he formulates an interpretation of the meaning of sexual categories in the definition of what is socially considered to be "central" or "normal" and what is considered to be "marginal" or "deviant". Fry's discussion here evokes, in part, symbolic interactionism and, more specifically, Howard Becker's version of "labeling theory" (1973) and its ethnographic applications in the study of masculine homosexuality, most notably the pioneering and controversial study *Tearoom trade*, authored by Laud Humphreys. Published in 1970, Humphreys' book dealt with the social organization of impersonal sex between men in public spaces, meticulously describing the interactions and classifications of men who engage in sexual contact in public bathrooms (Humphreys, 1970).¹⁹ A surprisingly radical product of its time, Humphreys' ethnography dissolved conventional presuppositions regarding a stable linkage between sexual practices and identities. It showed public men's' rooms were not a meeting point for "typical homosexuals", but were in fact "a kaleidoscope of sexual fluidity"²⁰. In this way,

18 In personal communication with the authors, Mariza Corrêa – an active participant of the Brazilian academic and political scene which we focus on here – reminded us that when she was producing her master's dissertation on juridical representations of sexual roles as represented by legal processes involving intra-couple murders (written in 1975, later published under the title *Morte em família* [1983] and hailed as a pioneering study regarding "gender-based violence"), all that she had read of Foucault were the conferences brought together in the book *A verdade e as formas jurídicas (Truth and juridical forms)*, published in 1974 originally in Portuguese. Because of this, Corrêa's analysis derives from a creative appropriation of different theoretical influences, most notably the anthropological contributions of Mary Douglas and the first Victor Turner. Foucault would only become an important influence on these sort of questions in the immediately following period. Interview with Mariza Corrêa, 2003:114.

19 The book gained notoriety at the time due to ethical questions regarding its author's research techniques, which almost lead to his doctorate being revoked. Humphreys rounded up almost 100 people who engaged in sex in public bathrooms and interviewed them while claiming that he was studying something else entirely. In this fashion, he was able to discover that the majority of these people were adult married men, with families who were religious and politically conservative. For a careful re-evaluation of the context and substantial contributions of Humphreys' work, see Irvine, 2003: esp.441-446.

20 Another important ethnography which focused on aspects of homosexual life, accentuating the separation of practices and identities, was that written by Albert Reiss Jr. in 1961 (published in 1967), regarding the sexual and social transactions among hustlers (*peers*) who did not consider themselves to be "homosexuals" and their clients (*queers*). Reiss demonstrates the conventions which ordered these relationships. The *peers* needed to always maintain a masculine role (that of "insertor" as Humphreys would later classify it) and both they and their older clients should always be motivated by money and never by emotions such as love or friendship. Humphreys' ethnography went relatively far than that of Reiss in dissolving presuppositions regarding fixed sexual identities, interpreting sexual roles instead based on how they actually occurred in the context under study. As Irvine observes (2003:444), while "Queers and peers" "portrayed a sexual system organized according to the rigid maintenance of sexual roles", *Tearoom trade* was "a kaleidoscope of sexual fluidity, where men easily moved from the role of "insertor" to that of "receptor" often during the course of a single encounter".

Humphreys anticipated today's emphasis on performances and on the destabilization of sexual categories.²¹

Humphreys' work was itself the result of a series of tendencies within North American sociology during the 1960s which included Becker's reconceptualization of "deviance", Goffman's social drama approach and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. It was also influenced by the pragmatic, denaturalizing and anti-psychiatric approach developed by John Gagnon and William Simon, which conceived of the "sexual" as an ordinary social process, the fruit of a complex set of negotiations and social definitions that were played out in different niches of daily life. The work of these authors was marked by efforts to comprehend the contingent and historical ways through which people assimilated life styles and put them into practice, thus producing and modifying their own perceptions and presentations of themselves. This style of approach was expressed in the use of the metaphor of the "career", which took on an important role in the reflections of many of these sociologists.²²

Though these authors do not entirely share the same theoretical background and affiliations, what they had in common was a view that any human behavior, including the sexual, was always submitted to moral evaluation and was thus a social undertaking. This distanced them from both the psychoanalytical approach and from that of Alfred Kinsey which, even though recognizing the social genesis of the homo- and heterosexual categories, continued to focus on sexuality as individualized and objectively measurable body behaviors which were linked to excitation and orgasm. The sociologists, by contrast, not only distinguished practices from identities, but also sought to comprehend the ways in which sexuality was regulated and reinvented in the social interaction dynamic by means of the operation of structuring categories which (borrowing jargon influenced by classic French sociology) we can call "social representations".

In his article on the historical construction of masculine homosexuality in Brazil, Fry proposes a similar approach, but one that places greater emphasis on "representations" and less on the subtleties of everyday behavior. To do this, he draws upon the pioneering

21 The evaluation of the theoretical, empiric and political implications of sociological research into homosexuality from a symbolic interactionist perspective and from the perspective of labeling theory and stigmatization theory is still quite controversial. According to Steven Seidman (1996), although "a large part of this sociology seeks to portray homosexuals as victims of unjust discrimination", it has also contributed at the same time "to the public perception of the homosexual as a strange and exotic type, in frank contrast to normal and respectable heterosexuality". By contrast, other commentators cite these works as important (and unjustly unrecognized) precursors of today's sexual research. See, for example, Janice Irvine's revision (2003); see also: Epstein, 1996 and Rubin, 2002. All the articles published in the *Social Theory and Sexuality Research, 1910–1978* special edition of *Qualitative Sociology* magazine (26), 4, 2003, are also extremely relevant to this discussion.

22 See John Gagnon's references (2006:403-424) regarding the concept of "career" as a long-standing contribution of the Chicago School, published in an interview with Gunther Schmidt – "Revisiting sexual conduct". In order to illustrate this point, we remind readers of Becker's notion of the "deviant career" (1973), described in his pioneering study of marijuana users, as well as Goffman's "moral career" (1975), which describes how people threatened with loss of social standing construct and/or learn to participate in alternative values and social affiliations. We also point out Garfinkel's concept of "*passing*" (1967), used to analyze the strategies of gender identity production and manipulation which were put into practice in the famous case of Agnes, a young transsexual who wished to undergo sex change surgery and managed to obtain permission for surgery for such in 1959, the first case of its kind in the United States. The concept of career was also applied by Plummer (1975), amongst others, in order to analyze the development of homosexual identity in the face of social stigma. For further commentary regarding this topic, see Simões, 2004.

question formulated by Mary McIntosh (1968) regarding the social conditions that make it possible to think about “homosexuality” as a singular human state and the “homosexual” as a category which expresses a fundamental attribute of identity and a correspondingly adequate conduct. McIntosh brought together the sociological and historical evidence available in 1968 in order to suggest that, although homosexual desires and behaviors could exist in different periods and societies, only in some of these would a specific homosexual identity be produced. This would occur according to concerns regarding the definitions and limits of what was acceptable in terms of sexual conduct and it was what McIntosh saw as occurring in England since the 17th century. McIntosh’s next step was to re-examine Kinsey’s data regarding the gradations between homosexual and heterosexual behaviors in order to suggest that the greater concentration of men classified as behaving in an exclusively homosexual fashion was due to the coercive effect of the historical existence of a more developed homosexual role for men in Anglo-American societies. As Fry comments:

McIntosh argues that the existence of a strongly developed label constricts behavior by pushing it to conform to the social and sexual expectations generated by the label. In this way, in a certain manner, taxonomies are self-fulfilling prophecies. One postulates, for example, the existence of a certain natural type – the homosexual – with its given essences and specificities and this type springs into existence (Fry, 1982:89).

Fry then goes on to incorporate the work of British social historians such as Jeffery Weeks and John Marshall who, following McIntosh’s insights, salient the role scientific discourse has had in the production of the “homosexual condition”, reuniting proof of social concerns regarding the control of the masculine libido, which the medical theories of the time believed to be at the root of both homosexuality and extramarital sexual relations in general, including prostitution. In this way, the male libido was seen as a threat to the integrity of the family and the physical and moral health of the nation itself.²³ These authors provided important inspiration for Fry’s comprehension of the specificities of a similar process in Brazil, which has been on-going since the beginning of the Republic and which made the same linkages between homosexuality, madness and crime. The British social historians offered up evidence that the classificatory systems of masculine sexuality which were the equivalent of the “hierarchical model” and which followed rigid conceptualizations of “masculine” and “feminine” associated with the active/passive dichotomy, were still in vigor throughout the industrialized western world at the beginning of the 20th century.²⁴

23 Cf. Weeks, 1977; Marshall, 1981. Regarding McIntosh’s influence on these works, see Weeks, 1998. The work of these historians tends to be obfuscated by Foucault’s research and reflections, which were developed at the same time, and it is often unrecognized as having been equally important in formulating what would become known as the social construction theory of human sexuality. This problem has been pointed out in several recent revisions of the sexual studies field in the human sciences. See, for example,, Vance, 1995; Epstein, 1996; Rubin, 2002; Irvine, 2003.

24 Aside from recognizing the influence this has had on the theoretic orientation of his essay, Fry (1982:112-113) informs us that the conceptualization of sexual affective identities as having four basic components (biological sex, gender roles, sexual behavior and sexual orientation) used in his elaboration of classificatory models was also taken from the work of John Marshall.

We must reserve a special place for social anthropologist Mary Douglas in this brief overview of old dialogues and most notably for her concern with the role played by ambiguous and anomalous categories in the organization of social experience, due to the challenge these pose to the control and coherency of classificatory principles.²⁵ In Douglas' view, societies express a formal structure with well-defined ideas and areas that separate order from disorder and which punish transgressions. Ambiguities and anomalies situated along the borders and interstices of classificatory systems create disorder which destroys patterns but which also furnishes the raw material for new social forms. Disorder itself thus has an ambiguous status in that it not only represents destruction, but also creative potential. Disorder symbolizes power and peril and thus can't be simply expunged without also undoing all sense of symbolic and social order (Douglas, 1976:117). These ideas had been explored by Fry in order to interpret the correlation between homosexuality and Afro-Brazilian religious groups, categories which were both considered to be "marginal", dangerous and thus gifted with special powers. In the discussion regarding the historical construction of masculine homosexuality, Douglas' ideas reappear in order to corroborate a view which sees dualist classification systems – such as the homo/heterosexual or man/fag oppositions – as the means by which an "expressive super-systematization" is created in order to control an "inherently disordered" experience (Id. ib.:15). And thus reduce ambiguity and anomaly, the "sources of power and poetry which, by their own nature, inhabit the spaces which limit the 'normal' and quotidian" (Fry, 1982:109).²⁶

It is interesting to note that Douglas' ideas reappear in Judith Butler's theories regarding the embodiment and performance of gender and that these theories have had enormous repercussions on today's study of sexuality from within a *queer* perspective. For Butler, the categories of gender operate as social taboos which exaggerate sexual difference and seek to naturalize it, thus securing heterosexuality by means of the ritualistic and reiterated institution of the body's borders (Butler, 2003, 1993). Butler's reflections initially sustain themselves on Douglas' observation that the body's borders (orifices and surfaces) symbolize social limits and are dangerously permeable regions which require constant policing and regulation. This, in turn, leads to the observation that homosexuality (and above all masculine homosexuality) is dangerous and polluting. Following Douglas, Butler takes up the notion that the body, understood as something distinct and naturalized,²⁷ is itself a product of these regulations. "Aside from this", says Butler:

...the rites of passage which govern the various bodily orifices presuppose a heterosexual construction of exchange, of positions and of erotic possibilities that are marked by gender. The deregulation of these exchanges consequently ruptures the very borders which determine what a body is. In fact, any critical investigation which reveals the regulatory practices which are used to construct the outline of the body constitutes a genealogy of the "body", in its singularity, which is capable of radicalizing Foucault's theory (Butler, 2003:190).

25 Cf. Douglas, 1976 [1966], esp. Introduction and Chap. 6.

26 He continues by mentioning Walnice Galvão's work on the novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas* and R. Lobert's ethnography of the Dzi Croquettes group as examples of studies that appropriate ambiguity as a source of artistic creativity. Cf. Galvão, 1972; Lobert, 1979.

27 Cf. Douglas, 1976: esp. caps. 7, 8 and 9.

Space prevents us from continuing with this digression.²⁸ We believe, however, that we've demonstrated enough evidence to prove that the academic dialogues and discussions regarding homosexuality in Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s were quite rich and fertile and engaged in connecting sexuality to other forms of social hierarchy. The brief retrospective presented above not only shows that these concerns paralleled the intellectual production of the great metropolitan centers quite closely – and even skipped ahead of them in its exposition of the topics and concerns which would later underpin queer studies and certain lines of today's feminist thought – it also suggests that there were certain advantages to “native” production. Even the most sympathetic reviewers of the Anglo-American socioanthropological traditions of the 1960s and '70s study of sexuality criticize these for their lack of attention to institutional structures and for their lack of a wider analysis of power and inequality. The same criticisms most certainly cannot be leveled at the Brazilian-oriented thinkers which we are analyzing here.

Homosexual identity / national identity

The reflections developed in the 1970s and divulged in the beginning of the 1980s would be reviewed by many anthropologists in the 1990s. In this context, with the advent of AIDS as a backdrop, studies of masculine homosexuality in Brazil multiplied. These were carried out by both Brazilians and foreigners, but the work of Richard Parker deserves special mention in this respect. In his book *Beneath the Equator*, Parker sought to systematically approach the interaction of the homosexual “subculture” that was being consolidated in post-AIDS Brazil with the trajectories of similar communities in the “center” nations²⁹

In many aspects, Parker accompanies Fry's argumentation, contributing importantly to the maintenance of an anti-essentialist position throughout the 1990s, one which was tuned to possible dissonances between sexual practices, identities and classificatory categories. Parker, however, also significantly shifts the hierarchical model's position in his scheme of things. What Fry earlier attributed to the popular classes, Parker situates as “tradition”: the product of Brazil's distinctive and singular culture and society in opposition

28 A wider look at the environment of the 1980s, which exceeds the limitations of the present article, must take into consideration such authors as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1972) who were important for the political debate of the time and influenced the work of Perlongher (1987). Likewise, Louis Dumont (1983) had an impact upon Heilborn's study (2004) and Richard Rorty (1979) became a somewhat later reference for the reflections of J. F. Costa (1992).

29 Cf. Parker, 2002:23. The book's approach is defined according to a brief and critical discussion of the structuralist/constructivist polarity: “both in researching essential identities and in affirming radical difference, we are pushed to superficial extremes which basically cannot grasp the almost always confusing reality of life in the contemporary, post-modern, globalized and globalizing world – a world [...] in which a series of complex relationships exist in fact and which is marked by processes of social, cultural, economic and political change that essentially connect the West and the Rest as part of an interactive system”. By tracing a wide panorama of the emergent Brazilian gay community, Parker's proposal explicitly goes beyond such simplistic approaches which oppose “the West to the Rest” and it is thus interesting to analyze how he does this in light of the discussions being undertaken in the present article.

to a world which Parker designates as “Anglo-European”. For him, the model based on gender hierarchies and the active/passive opposition is rooted in a social and cultural system formed “around a very concrete mode of production: the economy of the rural plantation”. This supposedly dominated Brazilian life for almost four centuries, only partially disappearing in the country’s most recent historical period (Parker, 2003:54).³⁰ Although older, the cultural grammar of plantation life supposedly continues to strongly influence Brazilian sexual experience, generally stigmatizing the sexually passive and socially feminine.

For Parker, the notion that homosexuality as a distinct sexual category is a relatively new concept and the ideas that are linked to gay identity have only emerged during the last decades of the 20th century, as the Brazilian tradition confronts “a wider set of cultural symbols and sexual meanings in an ever more globalized world system”. (Id. ib.:53). In this shift, processes which were earlier understood to be parallel and which contained both common and singular characteristics are now organized under a model which postulates cultural “influence”, “importation” and “exportation”. This model is made explicit when Parker claims that it is his intention to contribute to filling a gap in the study of homosexuality, given that while the process by which the categories relating to a new emphasis on sexual orientation in the western medical and scientific discourse has been well described by several authors, the processes of “**importation and exportation** of these categories out of the Anglo-European world has received hardly attention at all”. (Id. ib.:66, our emphasis)

Parker also connects the appearance of sexual identity based on sexual orientation to such processes as urbanization and the emergence and professionalization of the middle classes. But in his analysis, there is no internal linkage between the constitution of the middle class or bourgeoisie and the homo/heterosexual system initially created by medical thought.³¹ According to Parker, during the passage from the 19th to the 20th centuries, the emerging Brazilian specialist professionals (professors, lawyers and doctors) were studying in the great European centers. This, in turn, caused “the importation and incorporation into the Brazilian reality” of a new set of scientific disciplines, rationalities and new modes of conceptualizing sexual experience:

In particular, a new medical-scientific model of sexual classification was initially introduced into Brazilian culture via medical, psychiatric and psychoanalytical texts, which were gradually translated into wider popular discourse. This process appears to have marked a fundamental change in cultural attention, which shifted from distinguishing between passive and active roles, supported by hierarchy and gender, to recognizing, **along Anglo-European lines**, the importance of sexual desire and, in particular, of the choice of sexual object as being a basic part of the definition of the sexual subject (Id. ib.:65-66, our emphasis).

30 In support of this affirmation, Parker cites Gilberto Freyre’s classic *The Mansions and the Shanties*.

31 Parker observes that the rising Brazilian bourgeoisie, which was linked to the appearance of a new world of specialized professionals, may perhaps be considered “decadent, given that it can be understood, in many of its aspects, as a reworking of the plantation class” (Id. ib.:65), once again citing Freyre’s classic work in support.

In Brazil up until the 1960s and '70s, these categories were restricted to the highly educated elite who were in contact with and influenced by "Anglo-European" culture. Afterwards, the confluence of certain economic processes (the emergence of a *pink market*³² in the country) and socio-political pressures (such as the activities of the anti-AIDS groups³³ and, less crucially, the gay movement which Parker classifies as "also based in important ways upon Anglo European models" (Id.ib:71)) led in the 1990s to the constitution of an exuberant national gay community.

According to Parker, aside from its slower speed of emergence (explained by the theory of dependent development which supposedly retarded the growth of the national "pink market"), the Brazilian gay community's main difference is the fact that it continues to harbor "traditional" (active/passive) hierarchies. This, Parker explains, is due to the fact that the country's economy maintains and deepens social inequalities and thus reinforces the hierarchical character of Brazilian society. This continued permanence of the "old", mixed with new "imported" categories, creates a profusion of categories and sexual types (Id.ib:82) which, due to globalization, are now being exported to the U.S. and Europe. Parker sees virile male prostitution and travestis as two of these "made in Brazil" categories. It is precisely here, in the glorious figure of the travesti, that the author pinpoints the impact of Brazilian culture upon the international gay scene.³⁴

Conclusions

Richard Parker's work is definitely intriguing and stimulating, but from our point of view it also reveals the continued reproduction of a problematic analytical scheme. First of all, it is risky to transform the "popular" into the "national" or "traditional", rooting Brazilian "tradition" in the plantation mode of production. As we've seen above, the active/passive opposition and its associated sexual categories were present in places where there were no plantations, such as Western Europe and the greater part of the U.S., as well as in many parts of Latin America. The affirmation, then, that these roles are based upon a

32 In the Brazilian edition, the term is expressed as the "gay market" (cf. Parker, 2002:82 e 128-129). According to Parker, "this is a commercial circuit and the specialized economy that sprung from it and rapidly grew. They have become fundamental for the construction of a wider gay world in Brazil. Even more clearly than the cultural forms of cruising and prostitution (which are, in many ways, transnational), the gay commercial circuit simultaneously connects Brazilian reality to a more inclusive set of international economic and symbolic exchanges while it adapts this international system to the particularities of local customs and contexts" (Id. ib.:130-131).

33 As Parker mentions (2002:136), "in Brazil (as in many other developing nations) AIDS preceded the gay movement's growth". "The incorporation of AIDS prevention models and financing (originating with organizations such as USAID, the WHO, or the World Bank) for projects directed towards specific populations such as "men who have sex with other men" were some of the more visible ways in which conceptual structures and sexual meanings developed in other, usually quite different, social contexts were incorporated into Brazilian social life, configuring the developing gay world into several very specific forms". (Id. ib.:139)

34 According to Parker (2002:275), "This movement [of travestis] between Brazil and southern France became a major population flow... It connected the gay Brazilian world to a wider international universe and has played an important role in the growing globalization of Brazilian homosexualities over the past few years".

particular mode of production is at best a very vague ideal typification and at worse something of an economic fantasy.

Secondly, by postulating a particularly Brazilian tradition into which new and imported terms are supposedly incorporated and transformed, Parker makes Brazilian and Latin American cultures appear to be essentially different from those of the metropolitan North (or, at the very least, they are understood to be partaking of an essential difference).³⁵ Brazilian society “confronts” and “interacts” with the West as if the one had never been a part of the other. Parker’s attempt to go beyond the simplistic approach to the “north/south” or “center/margin” divide should be prized, but in his analytical model, peripheral cultures are only “active” within the greater limits of an imposing structural “passivity”. The initial movements occur in the “center” and are independent of the “periphery”, which imports, incorporates and processes these movements but which only re-exports them under very limited and specific conditions. Movement, in this model, always begins in the center and moves outwards.

We feel that the activity of the “peripheries” is much more complex. “Active” or “passive”, they are always co-producers of metropolitan trends and not simple understudies, even though their role is not often recognized. They co-produce not only because they “export” (and we are not simply talking here of sexual categories but also of theoretical elaborations), but because it is through them, or in their name, that the “center” is maintained. One needs only to imagine how the “central” countries would be different without the network of researchers, financing agencies and government and non-government agencies which are constituted within “the West” and justify their existence due to “the Rest”, which needs to be studied, understood and aided.

Aside from this, by not dealing with the discontinuities and conflicts within the Brazilian homosexual movement, Parker ends up not exploring the impasse which initially was created around the question of homosexual identity and the refusal to treat homosexuality as a form of quasi-ethnicity.³⁶ In this way, he obscures the importance of intellectuals such as Fry, MacRae, Guimarães and Perlongher, as well as that of many of the activists who worked to ensure that the legitimacy of the new categories would never become truly crushing. The activities of these people do not seem to us to be less important than the effects of economic determinants in understanding why travestis and virile male prostitutes were not completely demonized by the nascent “gay movement” in the 1970s. It’s worth lingering a bit more in our examination of this point.

The death and violence created by the AIDS epidemic dramatically changed the norms of public discussion regarding sexuality and left an unprecedented legacy of visibility of and recognition for the socially disseminated presence of homosexual desires and practices. AIDS prevention mobilization in Brazil was organized against a backdrop which consisted of a refusal to compartmentalize sexualities. Organizations such as the Brazilian interdisciplinary AIDS Association (Associação Brasileira Interdisciplinar de Aids, or ABIA) played a fundamental role in criticizing the idea of risk groups and in

35 To further illustrate this point, we observe that, for Parker, terms such as “bicha”, “viado”, “boiola” etc. have “a different ontological status from their English equivalents” because “they are produced in a distinct sex/gender system. The circulation of stigmas associated with these symbols (in Brazil or in other Latin societies) is qualitatively different from the stigma and oppression that mark ‘*queer*’ or ‘*faggot*’ in English” (Id. ib.:60).

36 Regarding homosexuality’s quasi-ethnic identity, see: Murray, 1979; Epstein, 1987.

promoting alliances between homosexual activists and hemophiliacs in such a way that AIDS was constructed as everybody's problem. In this process, the experience of the first wave of gay activists from the 1970s (who had dialogued with academics and problematized the question of gay identity) was as important as the establishment of partnerships and alliances with governmental agencies and international organizations.

We must also point out that the Brazilian homosexual movement in the 1990s emerged transformed into a polymorphous configuration which embraced more communitarian-oriented groups sectors of political parties, NGOs, student associations and even religious groups³⁷. In this context, the movement's intensified connections with state agencies and the segmented market does indeed contribute to reinforce adhesion to a classificatory system based on distinct sexual orientations. However, it is also true that the multiplication of categories which seek to name the subject of the movement, codified in today's LGBT acronym ("lesbians, gays, bisexuals, travestis and transsexuals") has been proposed in a critical dialogue with other options such as GLS (gays, lesbians and supporters) which reiterate classificatory ambiguity in order to widen inclusion, or HSH ("men who have sex with men" - "homens que fazem sexo com homens"), which has sprung up in health policy and which seeks, perhaps erroneously, to overcome the perceived gap between behavior and sexual identity.³⁸ In any case, it is important to recognize that the tension between inclusivist and pluralist aspirations on the one hand and compulsory adhesion to a list of identities recognized as the targets of movement action, on the other, has not lead only to bitter and self-destructive conflict, but also to such successful initiatives as the "GLBT Pride Parades". These parades are expressions of an inclusive politically active space which is harbored within a celebration of the tolerance of sexual diversity.³⁹

Finally, it seems to us that the problems we have pointed out regarding some sociological approaches are linked to the difficulty they demonstrate in accessing the properly cultural dimensions of the construction of sexual identities in Brazil and the transformation of these over the period we have analyzed here. Towards the end of "Da hierarquia à igualdade", Fry asks in an almost melancholy tone if we are fated to remain in

37 For an analysis of the Brazilian homosexual movement during the 1990s, see Facchini, 2005.

38 HSH is part of an epidemiological strategy that seeks to contemplate the specificity of those men who engage sexually with members of their own sex, yet who do not recognize themselves as "homosexuals", "gays", "out of the closet" or etc. The HSH category is also linked to the promotion of the concept of "homoeroticism" as preferable to "homosexuality". In this sense, Jurandir Freire Costa (1992:11) has argued for a break with "moral customs which are imprisoned by symbolic systems that name certain subjects as morally inferior due to their inclination for members of their own biological sex". Costa warns that prejudice contained in terms such as "homosexual", "homosexuality" and "homosexualism" is so deep the use of these terms inevitably creates negative moral consequences independent of the intentions of those who uses them. On the other hand, the efficiency of HSH has been questioned by activists such as Luiz Mott (2000:14) who believe that the term HSH "does not reach" either the 'men' who have sex with gays and travestis (and who believe that their partners aren't men) nor the 'fags and travestis themselves, who also do not believe that they are 'men'". One problem with the HSH category is that it dissolves the question of the non-correspondence of desires, practices and identities in a formulation that recreates "man" as a universal category, supposedly founded on the bedrock of biological truth. At the same time, however, it permits the evocation of well-known representations of masculine sexuality as inherently degrading and perturbing.

39 For more reflection regarding the situational and political character of the emphasis on stabilization and the multiplicity of collective identities, see Gamson, 1995. For an analysis of the São Paulo GBLT PriodeParade, see França, 2006.

dualistically orientated societies (built around dyads such as gay/straight, man/fag and etc.). What was probably unclear to him at that time, however, was that the refusal of said dualism was not simply an academic affair: it encountered key echoes in Brazilian society itself. What perhaps has truly marked Brazilian singularity over the years, after all, was less an emphasis on an active/passive dualism and more a refusal to operate with incommensurate, intransitive, dualistic and essentialized identities of any kind.⁴⁰ Even this refusal, however, cannot be understood as part of our non-Western tradition: rather, it is a fruit of the peculiar way in which Brazilians have elaborated Western tradition.

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40 For an analysis of the particular way in which the refusal to assume a standardized and fixed sexual identity is linked to the wider cultural values of the Brazilian urban middle classes, see Heilborn, 1996.

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