

“Every jack to his trade?”: power, identity and market segmentation in the homosexual movement

Isadora Lins França

ABSTRACT

The present article aims at exploring the relations between the homosexual movement and the segmented consumption market directed at such public in São Paulo. Starting with the social drama analyzed in the text, which involves militant homosexuals and transvestites, the so-called actors of such segmented market, and the attending public, we intend to delineate ways to understand these relations, as well as some processes related to the constitution of the political subject of the homosexual movement in a context of both multiplication of identifying categories and destabilization of this subject.

Keywords: Sexuality; Gender; Collective identities; Homosexual movement; Segmented market.

Introduction

The present work aims at exploring, by means of a case study, possible ways towards the understanding of the relations between the homosexual movement and the segmented consumption market whose target public are homosexuals in São Paulo. It is about analyzing the discussions on the role played by transvestites in the movement, by means of an action addressed to a portion of the segmented consumption market, in a situation that seems to destabilize the foundations on which the homosexual movement in Brazil has been based. With that, I seek to raise questions that are pertinent to the understanding of the contemporary homosexual movement within a scenario in which a specific market oriented to homosexuals is strengthened.

It is important to emphasize that what we use to call homosexual movement is, nowadays, a very complex political subject, comprised by multiple identity categories, not always driven by the same discourses. Without considering this problematic aspect, it becomes difficult to understand many of the positions within the movement on what concerns to the segmented market or even to the relation with other social actors that integrate its field of activity.

The birth of the homosexual movement in Brazil is placed in 1978, with the creation of the Somos Group, in São Paulo (MacRae, 1985). The group followed a political strategy of strengthening the homosexual identity and positively valuing the “faggot” and lesbian categories, associated to a politics that was strongly antiauthoritarian, critical of the State and of the hierarchizing of roles between partners of the same gender (MacRae, 1985; Fry, 1982). The eighties, in their turn, were marked by a rearticulation of this movement, which sought paths of cooperation with the State in the struggle against Aids and slackened the criticism to the authoritarianism, without ceasing to assign a positive value to the homosexual category (Facchini, 2004).

The nineties emerge in a different context, in which the panic associated to Aids is assuaged, enabling the reinvigoration of a homosexual militancy supported by other discourses and strategies. There is an increase in the number of the categories named as political subjects of the movement: in 1993, the expression “Gays and Lesbians Movement” appears; in 1995, we have the GLT (Gays, Lesbians and Transvestites) movement; and finally, in 1999, a portion of the movement, from São Paulo, adopts the

expression GLBT (Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgenders) (França, Facchini, in press). There is also the more recent initiative of utilization of the formula “sexual diversity”, with the purpose of creating an expression that is quite distant from the identity disputes, and which has been strongly embraced by an incipient movement that stands in the intersections between students’ movement and homosexual movement.

The incorporation and displacement of segments in the names indicating the movement’s political subject bear within themselves an inclusion intent, but do not nullify the conflicts between the categories grouped in the abbreviation, which relate to each other within a complex game of political positions and strategies.¹ Up to the middle of the nineties, the homosexual movement concerned only to gays and lesbians, and, if the lesbians were not comprised by its more current denomination until 1993, as we have seen, they were recognized as integrating the movement since its beginning.² The transvestites, in their turn, promoted their first encounter in 1993, conquering visibility in the movement and being incorporated to its denomination in 1995. The transsexuals made their first organized appearance in a national encounter held in 1997 (Facchini, 2002).

However, the inclusion of the categories “bisexuals” and “transgenders” (term that intended to encompass the transvestites and transsexuals) did not happen under those groups’ demand, but followed an international trend (Facchini, 2002, p. 205). In the beginning, the transvestites and transsexuals were not much happy to be called transgenders,³ and still nowadays the National Association of Transgenders counts on twenty entities / centers that are specific for transvestites and eleven that call themselves associations of “transgenders” or of “transvestites and transsexuals”. On the other hand, the presence of bisexuals has always been a controversial matter in the movement, and many militants would rather use the abbreviation GLT (Gays, Lesbians and Transgenders), since they associate bisexuals to “closet queens”, and consider that they have no organized movement and no specific demands, for that matter. In 2004, the first initiatives to form groups with periodical meetings to discuss bisexuality appeared, forcing the inclusion of the theme in regional and national forums of the movement.

In addition to the big categories comprised by the GLBT abbreviation, there are also subgroups, encouraged by the proliferation of forums and discussion lists in the Internet and pertaining mainly to the segment of the gays, such as the group of the bears,⁴ gay Jews, gay college students, gay lawyers, *barbies*,⁵ homosexual youngsters, etc. It is also in this environment in which there is an ensemble of identities living together within the homosexual movement and scene – virtual or not – that a powerful market designed for homosexuals in São Paulo⁶ gets stronger and stronger, and of which the most visible expression is a circuit of commercial establishments of leisure that extends from the *Centro Velho* (“Old Downtown”), a traditional redoubt for this circuit, to the richer areas of the city, such as the Jardins – Paulista axis, with wings that spread towards neighborhoods such as Moema and Vila Madalena.

In addition to the expansion of this circuit – which was then already known as GLS⁷ -, the nineties brought with them a different configuration of the homosexual “ghetto” of yore: the consumption and sociability spaces started to incorporate, in a certain extent, the political discourse of pride and visibility, making explicit their focus on an public with a determined sexual orientation and incorporating symbols that were made popular by the militants, such as the rainbow flag. Thus, the great differentiation established by the movement based on the “invisibilization” of the homosexuals by the “ghetto”⁸, as well as the boundaries of which may or may not be regarded as political action, lose their strength. Actors that would usually constitute the segmented market also started to be seen – and to regard themselves – as articulators of a political action, stimulating the “homosexuals’ self-esteem” and the formation of a “positive identity” – by means of initiatives such as movies festivals, publishing houses and even spaces for leisure and sociability – and making information circulate within the “community”, by means of sites and specialized magazines. The tensions with the movement would still remain, but under a much more ambiguous form than in the previous period.

Another novelty introduced by the last decade was the segmentation of consumption spaces designed for each subgroup of this public: there are not only specialized bars for lesbians and gays, but also for “modern” lesbians, for MPB (Brazilian Popular Music)-affectionate lesbians, for bears, for older homosexuals, cruising bars,⁹ establishments that receive fetishists and sadomasochists, among others

(Simões, França, in press). Within this spectrum of the GLS circuit, we can find some dozens of saunas destined to the sexual interchange between men, a scenario from which the case that is discussed here develops. The claim by transvestites from the Transgenders' Office of the São Paulo Association of the GLBT Pride Parade, demanding to be allowed to enter in one of those saunas, has resulted in the dramatic social event analyzed in the third section of this work. It was an occasion in which the tensions between the categories comprised by the "GLBT movement" and the segmented consumption market became explicit.

Collective identities associated to the political activity

The construction of collective identities associated to the political activity causes the surfacing of the core problem of the processes by which certain social actors emerge under the guise of political subjects. We have seen how the processes of multiplication, disputes and re-accommodations of segments have become a commonplace in the Brazilian homosexual movement. The emergence of new actors demanding to be recognized as constituents of the movement's political subject – as attested by the recent organization of transvestites, transsexuals and bisexuals – is an evidence of the fragility of theoretical perspectives that deal with the collective identities as stable and internally homogeneous elements. These processes, provided by the movement in general and by the segmented market, should be construed as a portion of an ampler context, demanding an approach to the power arrangements that expresses the dynamism with which positions of "superiority" and "inferiority" alternate, and the possibility of a same social actor to be the protagonist in relations in which he / she simultaneously appears as "dominant" or "subordinate", depending on the adopted referential.¹⁰

For Judith Butler (1998), the subject positions always exist with reference to more comprehensive discursive structures, and it is precisely this that confers the political dimension to those subjects' action: the possibility of, by means of displacements and overlappings, transforming structures that were previous to them and of which they are also an effect. Those transformations cannot be construed as mono-linear or predictable ones: they expand beyond the subject's control and intent. It happens, therefore, that a given political subject "is not the base, nor the product, but is the permanent possibility of a certain process of re-signification, which is deflected and blocked by means of another instrument of power, but is the possibility of reworking the power" (Butler, 1998, p. 31). The same author states that "[...] if the politics ceased to be construed as an ensemble of practices derived from the supposed interests of an ensemble of ready subjects, a new political configuration would certainly arise from the ruins of the old one" (Butler, 2003, p. 213).

Based on the delineated dilemmas and criticisms, Joshua Gamson (1998) outlines some of the debates that are currently present in the homosexual movement of the United States – and it would not be difficult to trace some points of coincidence between the North-American and the Brazilian processes. In the wake of the discussion on the construction of collective identities, the author addresses the recent constitution of the queerness idea:¹¹ an "umbrella" term that seeks to destabilize the identities of "gay" and "lesbian", and even those of "man" and "woman", diluting group boundaries, in sheer opposition to what Gamson calls an "ethnic / essentialist" politics (*Idem*, p. 589).

One of the weapons of the queer activism has been working based on the demands made by "bisexuals" and "transgenders", segments that can potentially destabilize a stanch division both between "heterosexuals" and "homosexuals" and between "men" and "women", because they do not fit exactly in none of the two extremities of the pairs that were culturally established and incorporated by the movement. Gamson devotes himself right to the controversies caused by the active presence of "bisexuals" and "transgenders" in the North-American movement, getting to the conclusion that both the politics of affirmation of essentialist identities and the politics of constant criticism and destabilization of those identities are important for the movement, in addition to possessing a different profitability in accordance with the situations in which both strategies may be employed. According to the author, the movement simultaneously deals with two forms of oppression: the cultural and the institutional ones. In order to fight the first one, the strategy that destabilizes boundaries and identities would be more adequate; in its turn, the oppression resulting from institutional elements, which would generate discriminations against every "sexual minority", would demand the establishment of fixed categories and safe boundaries.

Based on the previously described aspects, how should we think on the possibilities of political activity presented to a social movement that has the affirmation of collective identities as foundation for the establishment of its political subject? If the process of constitution of collective identities works by the demarcation of differences and exclusions, how should we deal with the possibility of this process, instead of being a means by which the destabilization of the power regimes is pursued, becoming another instrument for the establishment of norms? These issues grow even more complex if we consider that the homosexual movement is not an isolated actor in the context to which it belongs and in face of the public to which it is directed. If the construction of collective identities has always been a core aspect of the homosexual movement, which sought to revert the stigma and the social depreciation that used to befall on the persons that had relationships with persons of the same gender, it should be taken into consideration that those constructions have never developed isolatedly, but always in communication with other social actors. I described, in the introduction to this work, the presence of a segmented market designed for homosexuals, and pointed how the directions generated by that market have been actively participating in a process of construction of identities by means of the constitution of specific consumption spaces.¹²

The issues raised by the analysis of the case that I am about to expose are similar, in a certain extent, to Gamson's reflection; but they introduce new elements, for we are dealing here with a situation in which the institutional discrimination results from the dynamics of the movement itself and the segmented market with which it is connected.

Disputing consumption spaces: the transvestites' place in the "GLBT movement"

According to the observation executed in-field, the obstruction to the admission of transvestites in several commercial establishments has been a trivial event in their everyday life.¹³ Facing this scenario, the Transgenders Office of the Association of the GLBT Pride Parade started, in November 2003, a series of visits to establishments in the city of São Paulo, which was denominated Blitz Trans. The visiting groups were always composed by the transvestites, a majority in the Transgenders Office, and by a militant from the Parade Association, who acted as an advocate.

The idea for the name adopted for the visiting groups is part of a pun that, in a certain way, inverts the idea of victims of the police blitzes that the transvestites use to be subjected to in the streets. This reasoning becomes clear in the interview¹⁴ held with one of the militants, when she tells how the Blitz Trans idea had arisen.

[...] one day Vanessa¹⁵ said: "I would like to make a blitz, to go around arresting everybody that discriminates us". [...] She just doesn't know how to tell us that in a serious way, she does it as a joke, but what she says is super valid. [...] And Carla: "Awesome! But we can go out; we can go out visiting establishments and stuff". Then we took the law 10,948¹⁶ that protected us and started visiting establishments all around the place".

What conferred an ironical character to Vanessa's "joke" was the very disparity between the subject that is the victim of an action and his / her supposed impossibility to present himself / herself as the author of the action, generating a contrast of meanings that makes you laugh. Taking this idea seriously provoked an effect of inversion that took the transvestites out of the quality of victims and placed them in the quality of agents against the very prejudice they suffered.

One of the few establishments that refused¹⁷ to receive the transvestites after the presentation of the law and a brief negotiation was a sauna destined to the male homosexual public, which resulted in a great mobilization over the matter, giving rise, within the homosexual movement in general and among the users of the segmented media website MixBrasil, to heated debates that are the focus of the present analysis.¹⁷ The sauna at issue, with an extensive presence of prostitutes among its frequenters, is one of the oldest of the kind¹⁸ in São Paulo, founded in 1982 (Trindade, 2004, p. 179). The owner of the place had refused to receive the transvestites, claiming that "their presence was an aggression to the other frequenters of the house, causing discomfort and embarrassment".¹⁹

It is important to resort to the argumentation on which the transvestites' demands lean, so that it is possible to understand how they fit in the homosexual movement's claims. With regard to those claims we can read, on the Transgenders Office website:

[...] we are fighting for the right to wander about, which is being taken from us. [...] Think over the Law 10,948, more specifically the Article Two, which reads: "It is regarded as an offensive act, discriminatory of the individual and collective rights of the homosexual, bisexual or transgenders citizens, on what concerns to the application of this Law: to prohibit their entrance or stay in any public or private ambience or establishment that is open to the public".

We can infer from this passage that the militants' actions demand rights of full citizens, such as the right to wander about, which is denied to them, for they are not allowed to enter in every place that is open to the public. What confers substantiality to this political claim is the demand to be allowed to freely enter in commercial establishments, in the capacity of regular consumers.

I could observe that the impediment of access to commercial establishments of leisure and services causes a great deal of frustration to the transvestites, making their quotidian life very difficult – even when performing tasks that are the most commonplace to others. A transvestite that participated in the GLS list, a virtual discussion space for militants, makes the following comments:

Have you ever been struck with a shotgun between the legs because the police think your car is much too good for a faggot and should be stolen? Have you ever been embarrassed and humiliated in a public place where you have paid to get in?? [...] The events I've mentioned are our trite problems.

Thus, the transvestites from the Transgenders Office saw, in the protests and in the negotiation with those establishments, a political strategy that would not only obtain visibility in the media due to its character of novelty,²⁰ but would also have the potential to agglutinate other transvestites around a political proposition.

One of the main articulators of the transvestites protest, in a message in the MixBrasil website forum, expresses the idea that the power of consumption can be a marker of equality in rights and duties:

The house lives out from the admission tickets (the *boys* pay it as well) and the consumption in the bars. And would you think transvestites are going to enter without paying? NO! Aren't transvestites good consumers? [...] Here, the great majority of us own apartments and imported cars. So I ask you: as a transvestite, haven't I the right to be a regular in a prostitution sauna and to pay my good whore in order to have pleasure?

In a meeting of the Transgenders Office, I heard statements that "when the Blitz Trans are made, the Office gets full of transvestites, because they are much too immediatist and come to the movement in search of immediate advantages", "they saw the possibility of entering in places in which they were previously forbidden" and "the life objectives of a transvestites are a husband, tits and money". Despite the transvestites' interest in the Blitz Trans being qualified as "immediatist", it is possible that this strategy attracts the transvestites also because they are regarded as citizens that are protesting precisely for being in a position that is socially esteemed, that of consumers, and not only as victims of discrimination.

In the previous paragraph, it is also important to put in relief the colors with which the transvestites' aspirations of social inclusion are described: a husband, tits and money. Don Kulick (1998), in his ethnographic study about the transvestites' universe in Salvador, describes in detail how those aspects are crucial for them, involving the indiscriminate and hazardous, from the perspective of health, use of the industrial silicone and hormones, with which the transvestites acquire a feminine appearance, which also increases their chances of making money out of prostitution;²¹ the complex relationship of power that they develop with their "husbands", playing simultaneously the roles of "submissive wives" and "providers of the family";²² and money, another fundamental concern for the transvestites, not only because, like everybody else, they have to care for their needs to "eat, dwell and dress", but

also because money enables them to keep up their husbands, grants them their families admiration, and confers them a higher status, socially including them as consumers.²³ Those three aspects eventually stimulate one another, constituting references that are essential for the transvestites.

Butler states that the reference to the dominant norm, expressed by the transvestite's figure, does not necessarily

[...] displaces such norm; instead, it becomes the means by which the dominant norm is more painfully reiterated, as the wish itself and the performance of those subjects. It's clear that the denaturalization of the sex, in its multiple senses, does not imply a release from the hegemonic constraint: when Venus talks about her wish of becoming a "full woman", of meeting a man and having a home in the suburbs with a washing machine, we could ask ourselves if the denaturalization of the gender and the sexuality that she performs, and performs well, culminates in a re-elaboration of the normative structure of homosexuality (Butler, 1993, p. 133).

It happens, however, that in the case analyzed here (in a dynamics similar to the case interpreted by Butler), if the transvestites' demand of being integrated to the dominant norm in such a way that reproduces and reiterates the norm itself by means of the subjects that it marginalizes cannot be exactly regarded as challenging the "consumption culture" and the "heterosexual hegemony", on another analysis level the transvestites' demand establishes the calling in question of the gays' hegemony within the homosexual movement and scene themselves, as I intend to demonstrate farther on.

The gay saunas owners and goers (among whom the militants of the movement are not excluded), the direct interlocutors to whom the transvestites' demand is addressed, belong to a circle that is very close to them. The interdiction by an establishment destined to the homosexual public, naturally construed by the transvestites as an ally, intensified the transvestites' perplexity in face of the case, as we can observe in the Transgenders Office website:

[...] at times, it was hard to believe we were talking with the owner of a GAY establishment. We would like to register here our repudiation to THERMAS X...²⁴ and also our request for support so that absurdities like that do not occur again in *the GLBT sphere* (italics by me).

Thus, at times, the transvestites also apply to the sauna an expression from the movement – "GLBT sphere" -, while an expression that segments the establishment public and reduces it to a "gay sauna" with an exclusive attendance would be better applied to the owner's logic. In the case of the saunas, what is construed by the transvestites as discrimination works as what defines the consumer target public and offers an appeal to a reduced clientele, making of the exclusivity and the promise of finding almost instantaneously what one is seeking (the possibility of sexual interchanges between men) its commercial advantage. We have, therefore, a typical situation in which the segmented market designed for the homosexual public conflicts with the logic and the discourse of a portion of the movement.

The market destined to the homosexual public has been responding to, and encouraged, a logic of multiplication of identities within the great "homosexual" category, by means of the segmentation of sociability spaces, as described in the introduction to this work. Within this logic, the saunas work as a specific space for sexual interaction between men that make sex with men, enhancing the divisions between male and female and excluding the transvestites, regarded as belonging to another group, not to the "real" men's group. Since there are no leisure spaces especially destined to the transvestites, they usually attend "gay" or "GLS" spaces, identifying such spaces as the most adequate to them, for sharing a same "community" or "sphere". When I sought to investigate the transvestites' leisure habits, that aspect appeared repeatedly and intensely, like in the interview with Diana:

I love to go out; I usually go to gay nightclubs. [...] I love the gay public, I think they're our public, we have to identify ourselves with what belongs to us, you know what I mean? This thing of hanging out in hetero spaces, spaces where people are not going to respect us, spaces where we're going to be disliked... I'd rather be among the gays, not that among the gays

there is no disrespect, or we're not sometimes going to be disliked, but anyway, I'd rather be among the gays, for I am among *my people*.

"My people" are the components of the GLBT abbreviation, in which transvestites and gays appear as portions of the same public.

However, even within the movement, the use of the GLBT abbreviation does not dilute the differentiations, conflicts and hierarchizations between the groups that constitute it. The political articulation between the four letters in the abbreviation has been constructed based on the discourse that all categories are under the sign of discrimination and social exclusion. This was the starting point for the claim of solidarity between such categories for constructing a political subject that could demand rights for all segments, and for making the achievement of rights for each one to be construed as an achievement by *all* the others. This is the relation idealized by the movement militants, and which, far from the ideal formula, ends up expressing conflicts between compartmentalized identities.

In the midst of these disputes, the GLBT Pride Parade appears as an event in which the movement's claims have a massive visibility, and which promotes, intentionally or not, the dilution of those categories among the diversified crowd that spreads out in the streets (Facchini, 2002). The Parade Association is also one of the few organizations in the movement that keep groups representing the four GLBT letters in continuous activity. It is understandable that this is the discourse reiterated by its Transgenders Office.

The perspective of diluting the boundaries between gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders when it comes to joining forces for the political action also appears in other occasions, constituting the major focus of argumentation of those that have supported the transvestites in this episode. Therefore, the conflict occurs between those that adopt this discourse and those that base their reasoning on the axis of segmentation and affirmation of each one of the categories. Let's observe a passage from a message posted in the MixBrasil website forum:

[...] what could be worse than prejudice? The answer is easy: the prejudice coming from those that claim to be prejudice victims. There is no acceptable reason to restrain the transvestites from going to the sauna. [...] At the gay pride parades we see phrases asking for acceptance and equality, but how can we take them seriously when those asking for them often act in an even more reactionary fashion? How can homosexuals claim rights when they still act this way with people that should be their partners in the struggle for freedom?

Let's also observe a message from one of the leaderships of the homosexual movement in São Paulo, in the GLS list:

Unfortunately, I feel that we still have an immense difficulty in recognizing the differences existing between the segments that constitute the movement for the sexual diversity – lesbians, gays, transvestites, transsexuals, and bisexuals – as factors of enrichment for our cause, and not as motivators for segregationist postures. Well, I'm not sure about the others, but I've got no doubts on what concerns to my place in this fight: I'll be together with other persons that really believe in *sexual diversity* in front of the Thermas X... establishment, protesting against the obstruction to the ingression of transvestites and transsexuals. *WE ARE ALL TRANSVESTITES AND TRANSSEXUALS!* (Italics by me.)

Our problem grows in complexity when, within the same GLBT movement, we see the action of a logic of segmentation that is similar to that of the market, weakening the transvestites' claim and reducing it to the particularism of a marked group, which invades the gays' space. This posture can be construed as a strategy of reinforcement of a hegemony threatened by the transvestites' demands, even if it is not consciously articulated as such. Let's now observe the argumentation that supports it.

One of the issues that function as subtexts to those that criticize the transvestites is what can and what cannot be claimed, what is legitimate as a political action. Let's keep in mind that the transvestites' manifestations against the police brutality, for instance, are embraced almost unquestionably by the homosexual movement. In a contraposition to the protest against the saunas, regarded as "populist" by

militants, the protests against brutality are regarded as a serious matter, maybe because they emphasize the aspect that the transvestites are “victims of homophobia”, they address the State (a more traditional field for the political struggle than the market), and, finally, they establish an opposition between heterosexual homophobia and human rights of homosexuals / transvestites, differently from the saunas protest, which questions the inclusion potential of the gay scene.

Of the raised hypotheses, the latter issue is the one that appears more clearly in the argumentation used by the militants. Calling in question the political validity of the transvestites’ claim, the idea that the sauna frequented by homosexuals is a space of male interchange, regarded positively by the militants, and which should be preserved as such, appears initially, and as a point of agreement. In the words of a historical militant of the movement, in the GLS list:

[...] I regret not to agree with this manifestation against the existence of saunas exclusively destined to men that have *sexual fantasies with other males*. [...] Honestly, my experience as a militant leads me to consider that this protest is about a manifestation / posture that is mistaken, populist, invasive of the erotic / sexual diversity of the gays – or of the “she-gays” or “faggot boys”, or “macho faggots”, or “frustrated faggots”, or “poofters”, as we are many, so many times called by our transgendered sisters (italics by me).

It is clear that the sauna is construed as a space that can strengthen the identity affirmation of men that enjoy making sex with other men by means of the exclusivity, which would make of the transvestites’ presence an “invasion” of this space designed for the male homoerotism. We have also detected this trend of marking spaces and affirming identities by the differentiation in the speech that criticizes the depreciative terms employed by the transvestites to designate the gays.

Jeffrey Weeks (1985, p.221) states that, as a reaction to the prejudice and discrimination deeply rooted against sexual practices between men, there was a concentration of the gay men about the sexual act itself. The author situates, in the seventies, a great proliferation of saunas and other commercial establishments specifically destined to sexual interchanges, as the expression of a personal need, representing the search for the affirmation of a denied sexuality. Week’s approach matches the position of a parcel of the gay militants, which expresses a similar view regarding the saunas and correlate places: they are spaces for the affirmation of homosexual wishes and practices. In a message from a militant to the GLS list, it is easy to detect that a problem of preservation of identities and their descriptive content is under discussion:

Well, it’s a gay sauna, with a male identity. We must discuss it in detail. I also uphold that everybody should be allowed in public places, regardless of gender. However, when it comes to private places, designed for categorized customers, things get rougher. [...] We must discuss the limits, identities and spaces in depth; we must go all the way to the core in this discussion.

It is clear that, while the transvestites demand to be allowed in the commercial establishments destined to the sex between men with the justification that there should not be exclusive spaces within the homosexual scene, the gay militants that criticize this demand go through a diametrically opposed path: it is necessary to establish limits, identities and spaces. Based on the definition of these terms, another recurrent phrase in the message forum of the MixBrasil website would be, possibly, “every Jack to his trade!”.

It is precisely for the purpose of dissecting categories that the other set of arguments against the presence of transvestites in the saunas is constructed. The most intricate taxonomies are applied to transvestites. The strict spaces of the socially established feminine and masculine characters, demarcated by the heterosexual matrix, are utilized by the homosexual militants in the attempt of situating the transvestites in one or other terrain, determining the spaces where their presence would be permissible. Some militants from the GLS list talk about the “presence of men with women’s tits”, and comment that “all of them want to be treated as women, to be looked at as women, to seduce the men as women”. Or yet: “what is the gender identity of the transvestites? Would they like to be mentioned as *he* or *she*? Would they like to use the men’s room or the ladies’ room? In the mall, do they visit the section of women’s clothes or men’s clothes?”.

When it comes to the discussion forum of the MixBrasil website, we have other comments of the same kind: “I’m not against the attendance of gay transvestites in gay saunas. But there are heterosexual transvestites... What to say about those?”; “I wouldn’t feel comfortable in the presence of men wearing make up, dressed in skirts, and stuff like that”. In this passage, once more, we detect tensions generated by the destabilization promoted by the transvestites on the adequacy between gender identity and sexual identities, and the bodily configurations that should work in consonance with both. As political strategy, the transvestites have made a conscious use of this destabilization potential, threatening to attend, dressed in bathrobes, the protest organized in front of the sauna, which was eventually called off, for the establishment owner allowed them in after such a big polemic. According to Diana: “I told [the owner]: “I’m coming in a bathrobe! Because I want to get in the sauna, everybody here is wearing a bathrobe, so I want to come dressed in a bathrobe. Then he panicked!”. Initially, the transvestites played with the shock that the use of the same garment as the customers, associated to a female body, could provoke. Subsequently, Diana tells that she and other five transvestites went to the sauna “all wearing bikinis. *The people just panicked*”. We can realize that the issue of the bodily configurations and appearances associated to the gender conventions are also crucial for the transvestites, but they have made a strategically destabilizing and provocative use of those norms. The configuration of panic that this destabilization could cause and its politically strategic use have shown quite clearly in their speeches.

Final considerations

The issue being analyzed here constitutes a game of complex relations which this text has attempted to approach, inspired in the afore-exposed theoretical perspective. In this case, there is an interweaving of the logics of a group of transvestites, which demands the right to attend establishments destined to the homosexual public; of actors of the segmented market, who refuse to allow their presence, for the purpose of preserving a niche of consumers; of a parcel of militant and non-militant gays, which is in favor of the transvestites’ claim and adopts the discourse of the sexual diversity and non-segmentation; and of another parcel, which defends the establishments that are exclusive for the interaction between men, as a means of affirmation of the homosexual identity. The theoretical instruments presented in the second section of the text has enabled the understanding of a political action, considering the several levels on which it develops power relations and socially articulates itself. If we keep in mind that these relations are not static, but dynamic and inter-communicable, it is possible to understand that, in different contexts, the transvestites’ claim can be interpreted in different ways, acquiring also different political meanings.

This orientation also extends to the composition of the political subject of what is conventionally known as “GLBT movement”, as the movement articulates itself under the logic of the negotiation between different identities. The situation of political dispute has not been restricted to changes of position between given and defined subjects, but expressed the contingent character of the alliances that are established within a given political subject. While a portion of the movement, constituted by the gays, embraced the transvestites’ demand and elevated it to a status of claim of civil rights, another portion strived to throw it on the terrain of the particularisms, regarding it as invasive of other rights. It was very easy, then, to detect the issue of what can or cannot be regarded as a legitimate claim, and of how varied and unequal forces determine what will or will not be recognized as such based on a set of contextual norms.

If, on one hand, the transvestites’ aspirations can be construed as a reiteration of the norm, demanding rights by means of the consumption and the reiteration of a given “woman’s” position, on the other hand their claims bear a subversive character as well, by establishing the questioning and the criticism within the “GLBT movement” and destabilizing its normative structures. It is particularly important for this work to investigate the hypothesis of what happens when a socially marginalized group claims rights by means of a specific practice, and of how this becomes complicated when such demand has to be negotiated between the “natural allies”.

The transvestites were capable of establishing the internal questioning of the norms that rule the movement’s action, utilizing the discourse about equality and sexual diversity propagated by a portion

of the militants and a strategy that destabilizes the structures connecting gender identities and sexual identities by means of bodily markers. By doing so, they originated a situation that forced the very limits of the movement, promoting the discussion and re-articulation of such forces that, by themselves, could be regarded as subversive of a previously established domination relation. This is the kind of political action that Butler regards as “performative”: the potential of generating, within a same discursive form, effects that displace and destabilize this very norm, that do not deal with the power structures as if they were outside them, but work these structures from within and against themselves (Butler, 1993, p. 241). I tried to demonstrate that the element that was common to the categories constituting a political subject does not present itself as a datum resulting from the position that is inherent to this subject, in the ontological sense of the term, but as an articulation and accommodation of different internal demands concerning the established focus of claim, generating unique arrangements that may be as effective from the perspective of the directed political action as instable from the perspective of the politics of identity.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- BUTLER, J.; LACLAU, E. & ZIZEK, S. (2003), *Contingency, hegemony, universality: contemporaneous dialogues in the Left*. Translation by Cristina Sardoy and Graciela Homs. Buenos Aires, Economical Culture Fund.
- BUTLER, Judith. (1993), *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of “sex”*. New York, Routledge.
- _____. (1998), “Contingent groundings: the feminism and the issue of the ‘post-modernism’”. *Cadernos Pagu*, 11: 11-42.
- _____. (2003), *Issues of gender: feminism and subversion of identity*. Translation by Renato Aguiar. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira.
- FACCHINI, Regina. (2002), “Alphabet Soup”? *Homosexual movement and generation of collective identities in the nineties: a study based on the city of São Paulo*. Master’s degree dissertation, Campinas, University of Campinas, IFCH (mimeo).
- _____. (2004), “Homosexual movement and construction of collective identities in times of Aids”, in A. P. Uziel; L. F. Rios and R. G. Parker (orgs.), *Constructions of sexuality: gender, identity and behavior in times of Aids*, Rio de Janeiro, Pallas.
- FRANÇA, I. L. & FACCHINI, R. (in press), “Homosexual movement in Brazil and identity politics: possibilities and limits”, in P. Ortellado (org.), *Thought in motion*, São Paulo, Conrad.
- FRY, Peter. (1982), *Just for show: identity and politics in the Brazilian culture*. Rio de Janeiro, Zahar.
- GAMSON, Joshua. (1998), “Must identity movements self-destruct? A queer dilemma”, in P. M. Nardi and B. E. Schneider (orgs.), *Social perspectives in lesbian and gay studies*, London, Routledge.
- KULICK, Don. (1998), *Travesti: sex, gender and culture among Brazilian transgendered prostitutes*. Chicago, University of Chicago.
- MacRAE, Edward. (1985), *The homosexual militant in the Brazil of “openness”*. Doctorate dissertation, São Paulo, University of São Paulo, FFLCH (mimeo).

- MILLER, Daniel. (1995), "The consumption as vanguard of history: a polemic by way of introduction", in D. Miller (org.), *Acknowledging consumption: a review of new studies*, London, Routledge.
- MOUFFE, Chantal. (1992) "Feminism, citizenship, and radical democratic politics", in J. Butler and J.W. Scott (orgs.), *Feminists theorize the political*, London, Routledge.
- SIMÕES, J. A. & FRANÇA, I. L. (in press), "From the 'ghetto' to the market", in J. Green and J. R. Trindade (orgs.), *Looking at the male homosexuality in São Paulo*, São Paulo, Unesp Publishers.
- TRINDADE, José Ronaldo. (2004), "Construction of homosexual identities in the Aids era", in A. P. Uziel; L. F. Rios and R. G. Parker (orgs.), *Constructions of sexuality: gender, identity and behavior in times of Aids*, Rio de Janeiro, Pallas.
- WEEKS, Jeffrey. (1995), *Sexuality and its discontents: meanings, myths and modern sexualities*. New York, Routledge.

Sources

Field notes.

GLS List: listagls@yahoogrupos.com.br.

MixBrasil website: http://mixbrasil.uol.com.br/extra!/travs_sauna/travs_sauna.asp
access in July 15, 2004.

Website of the Transgenders Office of the Association of the GLBT Pride Parade in São Paulo: <http://www.transgeneros.blogger.com.br/>. Access in July 15, 2004.

Notes

1 Regina Facchini (2002) describes in detail the disputes and displacements of categories that occurred, in the nineties, in the homosexual movement. Her work investigates the processes of construction of the movement's political subject in the last decade, providing a quite comprehensive overview on those developments.

2 The lesbians were already present in the movement's first group, Somos ("We are"). After an internal dissension, they founded the first Brazilian group focused exclusively on lesbians, GALF (*Grupo de Ação Lésbica-Feminista* – Group of Lesbian-Feminist Action), in 1981.

3 The transgenders category was propagated in Brazil for the purpose of receiving both transvestites and transsexuals. The difference between transvestites and transsexuals constitutes a controversy within the movement: some state that the difference resides on the wish for the transgenitalization surgery; others, that it resides in the performance of an "active" or "passive" sexual role; others yet emphasize the psychical suffering that a genital organ identified as belonging to the opposite sex to which one believes to belong would cause to transsexuals, while transvestites would deal "well" with this aspect.

4 Male homosexuals that identify themselves with masculinity codes and oppose themselves to *barbies* for valuing fatness and hairs.

5 Male homosexuals that display muscular and often waxed bodies.

6 Daniel Miller (1995) emphasizes the importance that the consumers' demand streams have taken on in the process of merchandise production. According to Miller, the manufacturers have been urged to

create new versions of existing products, answering to specific needs and crystallizing market niches. In its turn, this operation would respond to a global change towards the pluralism of “identity politics”, “regionalisms”, “lifestyles”, among others, which appeared as of May 1968.

7 The GLS abbreviation means *Gays, Lésbicas e Simpatizantes* – Gays, Lesbians and Sympathizers. It was created in the first half of the nineties, and is used mainly to designate the leisure circuit of the city, although it is nowadays applied to other services and even to a certain “GLS spirit”. For further information, see Facchini (2002, p. 125).

8 According to MacRae (1985), the first homosexual militants of São Paulo established a tense relation with what they called “ghetto”. Many regarded it as the invisibility place, which enabled the creation of an universe where one could “experience one’s sexuality” without having to “assume it” in one’s quotidian life. On the other hand, the “ghetto” was one of the spaces in which new militants could be recruited, and even this space of “experience of sexuality” was regarded as important for the homosexuals’ self-esteem.

9 *Cruising bars* are bars destined to the sexual interchange between men, with a structure especially adapted for this purpose and a nightly attendance. Some of them subject the customers’ admission to the condition of using a given *dress code*, that is, the obligation of dressing in accordance with the house norms. Wearing leather clothes, blue jeans and white T-shirts, among others, may be required as *dress code*.

10 Concerning to this, see Mouffe (1992).

11 The term *queer* may be construed both as “weird” and as something close to the Brazilian terms “viado” or “bicha” (fag, faggot). It has been used by a parcel of the North-American and European movement for the purpose of embracing all those that regard themselves as “outsiders” of the heterosexual norm.

12 The growth of this market is particularly strong in São Paulo and exerts an impact on the expression forms of the local homosexual activism. The GLBT Pride Parade of São Paulo stands out due to the extensive and varied presence of cars with big loudspeakers playing loud music, from the nightclubs, saunas, websites and other initiatives of the segmented market, and the many participants that agglomerate around the cars that play their favorite songs.

13 The application of surtaxes for the admission of transvestites into the establishments is also a regular practice: the price for their admission may be of up to tenfold the usual prices charged to other customers.

14 Interview held in December 2004. One of the major hindrances on what concerns to the ethnographic investigation for this article was the difficulty to interview the transvestites. The majority of the transvestites that participated in the case reported here traveled to Europe soon thereafter – and one of them did it right during the course of events. Sheer luck made it possible to hold this interview with Diana Sanders when she visited Brazil for the Season Holidays.

15 The names of all characters mentioned in this article are fictitious.

16 The Law 10,948, approved in 2001, in force in the State of São Paulo, establishes the penalties to be applied to practices of discrimination against gays, lesbians, transvestites, transsexuals and bisexuals.

17 The sources to be used for the analysis will be the messages sent to a virtual discussion list of the movement, the coverage by the media specialized in the GLBT segment, the messages posted in the debate forum of the MixBrasil website, field notes and the very website of the Transgenders Office.

18 José Ronaldo Trindade sorts the saunas destined to the sexual interchange between men as follows: there are the “private saunas for faggots and the “whore” saunas, attended by homosexuals that prefer to have sex with *bofes* (men)” (Trindade, 2004, p. 179, italics by the author). The whores are male

hustlers that do not necessarily identify themselves as homosexuals, and that, most often, adopt a quite virile look. According to Trindade's assortment, the sauna at issue would belong to the second category.

19 See the website http://mixbrasil.uol.com.br/extra!/travs_sauna/travs_sauna.asp.

20 It is important to emphasize that the transvestites made a wise use of the issue's potential in the media, handling very well the several forms of disclosure offered by several media. According to Diana, in her interview: "I scattered this protest throughout the whole Internet, I went to Superpop [TV variety show, broadcasted on the prime time] of Luciana Gimenez and advertised the protest, and the sauna owner just panicked: 'what kind of faggot is this that I have defied, and now she's on TV talking about my establishment?'. And I said the establishment's name, and the day and time of the protest. On the next day he called, wanted to meet us and stuff...".

21 "Our luck is that we can count on silicone". I've heard transvestites stating that many, many times. For the transvestites across the whole country, silicone is a miraculous product – some of them mention it as "revolutionary" – that enables them to acquire feminine bodily attributes that, in many cases, they say, are more beautiful than those of the women." (Kulick, 1998, p. 66).

22 "Living with transvestites in Salvador, I soon found out that the boyfriends (usually called husbands, [...] but also called *bofes*, *ocós*, men and machos) are a constant and central concern in their lives. The boyfriends take an enormous portion of the mind, time and conversations between transvestites – not to mention their money" (Kulick, 1998, p. 97).

23 Kulick observes that "the lack of skill to make money is a devastating misfortune for a transvestite, both in material and in emotional terms. I have seen individually sad transvestites in many occasions [...], but the only time in which I witnessed any of them succumbing to a state of lethargic and self-piteous depression was when they were not making money out in the streets." (Kulick, 1998, p. 183).

24 The real name of the establishment was replaced, in this article, by the fictitious name "Thermas X...".

Article received in March 2005

Approved in May 2005

Translated by Arlete Dialetachi

Translation from **Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais**, São Paulo, v.21, n.60, p. 104-115. Feb. 2006.