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FROM THE EDITORS ISSUE # 21

Sexuality and gender: tensions and displacements

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The works in this issue of *Sexualidad, Salud y Sociedad –Latin American Journal* are good examples of how discussions of sexuality, an apparently restricted subject, have the virtue of problematizing and, most of all, dislodging important issues and classical concepts in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

A first set of articles could well be gathered around the notion of “cognitive dissonance” (Festinger, 1957), highlighted explicitly by Eli Damian Setton in his instigating analysis about the discourses of Jewish LGBT organizations in Chile and Argentina. Setton shows how fundamental aspects of the construction of Jewish identity and its ethnic, national, and religious dimensions (relatively dissonant one with each other) become more evident in the effort by those organizations to conjugate at first sight contradictory belongings: “to be Jewish” and “to be LGBT”. Analogous tensions are the ones that arise in the trajectory of a man who has sex with men outside the great metropolitan areas, explored in the article by Guilherme Rodrigues Passamani, who conducted his research in the Pantanal region, in the Brazilian Midwest. In his discussion of the life narrative of one single person, it is the very metropole/outback or center/periphery opposition, so used in sociological analyses, that is displaced, to explore the possibility of different “outbacks” (and, supposedly, different “metropolises”), which resist any simplifying reduction.

The conjugation between “being gay” and “being a man,” that is, removing from one’s public presentation any feature connected to the feminine (bordering misogyny) is the tension or dissonance that motivates Gibran Braga Teixeira’s reflection on online cruising and matching websites. The author discusses a variety of ways in which that tension is expressed, dislodging the antinomy between “traditional” and “modern” ways of organizing socio-sexual identities, explored in a classic piece by Peter Fry (1982). Using Gregory Bateson’s formulations about complementary and symmetrical schismogenesis, the author discusses how the so-called modern model, in which sexual intercourse between two men qualifies them as equally homosexual (regardless whether they take an “active” or “passive” role), is built on the rigidity of performances ever more masculine (therefore, heteronormative). The abjection of “effeminate” men is thus (re)produced, deepening a gender divide that, at first sight, the modern gay model would have contributed to make more tenuous or uncertain.

In its detailed analysis of Federal Supreme Court and High Court of Justice decisions between 1989 and 2012, the article by Thiago Coacci in its own way also addresses the dissonance in “being homosexual” while “being a citizen.” He identifies an important democratizing thrust in Brazilian courts during that period. However, Coacci points at how the inscription of homosexual citizenship carries the constitution of a new lexicon—that of “homo-affectivity”—perform-

ing a sort of heterosexualization of gay conjugal architectures, now subject to the same criteria and values as heterosexual conjugality: monogamy, fidelity etc.

With the aid of other methodologies and empirical references (juridical, police, and public administration practices), another set of articles included in this issue can be read under the key of heteronormativity. By following the pilgrimage of travestis in the sex trade in the city of Buenos Aires over the past ten years, Martin Boy addresses the challenges of a context where, while paid sex and trans bodies can no longer be simply “jailed” (in prisons and brothels), neither can they be visible in the urban texture. Although, paradoxically, as the author points out, the public conflict that their presence in certain neighborhoods generated, when it reached the pages of the main Argentine newspapers, made them hyper-visible.

The moralization (read heterosexualization) of urban space is also the background for a careful historical study by Laura Natalia Milisenda, on the police edicts that set order in another Argentine city (Córdoba), from the end of the 19th Century until 1940. The article evokes a period when “sexual and gender difference” was outright criminalized by the formal prohibition, for example, of wearing clothes of the “opposite sex” in public, or the criminalization of scandal and obscene provocation. Nevertheless, her most important contribution is showing how a set of norms targeting certain acts ended, in the mid-1940s, explicitly naming “homosexual”, when focusing on urban disorder. Homosexuality emerges, in that way, as a political identity, by becoming the focus of police repression, before its status as a psychological identity became widespread.

Boy’s and Milisenda’s papers speak quite directly to each other, showing a heteronormativity that rules the conformation of the public space, and that relegates certain practices and certain bodies to the shadows. Indeed, all the articles so far commented, using the key notion of heteronormativity, condense a series of discomforts related the ideal of “sexual democracy”—formulated in scientific and political fields since the 1960 (Weeks, 1985), and profusely promoted in contemporary times. That notion, as appropriated by the philosopher Judith Butler (2002), is in fact an unavoidable reference for a majority of the texts in this issue.

Finally, a third set of articles goes back to topics this Journal has been keen on, related to the connections between sexuality, health, and broader vital processes, like death and reproduction. The article by Fabiula Renilda Bernardo and Luciana Patrícia Zucco analyses the scientific discourses of the mother-infant field on a “Humanizing Care for the Low-Weight Newborn” policy, adopted in Brazil since 2000, known as the “Kangaroo Method.” The authors highlight how, in the name of de-hospitalization and “humanization” of care in the case of premature

babies, the literature on the subject ends up making the mother responsible for the method's efficacy. This is how, among those engaged with the humanization of healthcare, the ideal of women as mothers, and mothers as caregivers by nature crystallizes as *doxa*--an ideal feminism and gender studies have been trying to contest for decades now.

The originality of Juan Cruz Esquivel and Juan Pedro Alonso's article is to treat simultaneously topics apparently dissimilar: the "humanization" of death, and sex education. Their focus is placed on religious discourses, mainly that of the Catholic Church, along the deliberation and approval, by the Argentine National Congress, of the Integral Sex Education Act (2006); and of the piece of legislation that came to be known as Death with Dignity Act (2012). By problematizing the ways politics and religion interpenetrate and antagonize each other, and specially by exploring the different strategies utilized by Catholic activism to keep vital phenomena under their control, the authors make a significant contribution to the understanding of a process that certainly affects and modulates the way a sexual and reproductive rights agenda has been implemented in different Latin American countries.

The difficulties of implementing a sexual and reproductive rights agenda are but the main issue in the article by Yanine González Gómez, on the one hand, and in the one by Jimena Luz Silva Segovia and Leyla Carolina Méndez Caro, on the other. González Gomes conducted research with young men and women attending high school in Antofagasta (Chile). Their papers explore the regulatory ideals (of age, gender, religious, and family) through which "premature pregnancy" is materialized, surrounded by negativity and disapproval. Among the authors' findings is the fact that religious regulatory ideals are widely upheld by youths, even those attending public schools. Also about the youths' discourses on sexuality and teenage pregnancy is Jimena Luz Silva Segovia and Leyla Carolina Méndez's article. They interviewed university students in Colombia, where sex education has been mandatory since 1993. One of their main contributions might be showing, based on what their interviewees said, that the formal existence of laws, norms and programs does not guarantee that the dissemination of information on sexuality would cease to be fundamentally bound to fear and risk. Nor that it would promote gender equity, or break with the biological, naturalizing paradigms that still dictate what (little) has been taught in this area at school.

From an editorial point of view, starting with this issue, *Sexualidad Salud y Sociedad - Latin American Journal* adopts a series of changes, seeking to improve its quality and its capacity to circulate in Latin America cutting-edge reflections on the area and topics it privileges. The different editorships (Associ-

ate, Executive, and Book Reviews) have been expanded, diversifying the national background of their members even more. We have also introduced important changes in our editorial policy. We transformed the manuscript modality of “Book Review” to “Critical review” (which includes specific submission and peer-review norms); and, most of all, we have aimed at increasing the number of articles included in each issue.

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