THE COLONIAL NECROPOLITICS OF "GENDER IDEOLOGY" IN BRAZIL: THE QUEER AS A QUESTION OF NATIONAL SECURITY

A NECROPOLÍTICA COLONIAL DA "IDEOLOGIA DE GÊNERO" NO BRASIL: QUEER COMO UMA QUESTÃO DE SEGURIDADE NACIONAL

Banu Bargu[1]
Marina Segatti[2]

ABSTRACT*:* Given that the so-called "ideology of gender" has recently become prominent in contemporary discourses and public debates in Brazil, this paper considers the biopolitical presuppositions that those discourses animate in the context of queerness. We aim to examine how queerness, in the Brazilian context, has historically been articulated as a question of national security. Drawing on Foucault's notion of security, critical queer, biopolitical, and feminist decolonial thought, we unpack how mechanisms of embodied power are articulated and how those articulations support and reinforce the traditional concept of the family, enabling the (con)figuration of certain subjects as proper citizens while constituting gender non-conforming subjects as "threats." As two sides of the same coin, biopolitics (the governance of life) and necropolitics (the politics of death) are fundamental for this analysis.
KEYWORDS: Biopolitical; Necropolitics; Queer; Brazil

RESUMO*:* Dado que a chamada "ideologia do gênero" tornou-se recentemente proeminente nos discursos e debates públicos contemporâneos no Brasil, este artigo considera os pressupostos biopolíticos que esses discursos animam no contexto do Queer*. Nosso objetivo é examinar como a questão queer, no contexto brasileiro, historicamente tem sido articulada como uma questão de segurança nacional. Baseando-se nas noções foucaultiana de segurança, críticas biopolíticas e o pensamento feminista decolonial, procuramos desvendar como os mecanismos de poder corporificado são articulados e como essas articulações mantêm e reforçam o conceito tradicional de família, possibilitando a (con)figuração de certos sujeitos como cidadãos adequados, enquanto sujeitos não conformes de gênero são constituídos como "ameaças". Como dois lados da mesma moeda, a biopolítica (o governo da vida) e a necropolítica (a política da morte) são fundamentais para essa análise.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Biopolítica; Necropolítica; Queer; Brasil

Introduction

As possibilities for queer citizenship are currently being proposed in Brazil, there has also been a strong public and political backlash. While queerness in Brazil has been articulated as a question of national security, one that is configured as a threat

---

[1] Associate Professor of History of Consciousness at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC), USA. E-mail: bbargu@ucsc.edu
[2] PhD. Student in Feminist Studies at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC), USA. E-mail: msegatti@ucsc.edu

since the beginnings of colonization and constantly renewed through practices of governmentality, this articulation has taken a novel turn with discussions around so-called "gender ideology." In analyzing the implications of this recent turn in public discourses and debates, we draw upon questions of governmentality, intersectionality, and the coloniality of gender in order to pinpoint the longstanding mechanisms by which the current situation remains continuous with the role of gender, sexuality, and race within historical processes of colonization and modernization, while also attending to its specifically neoliberal and novel features. Considering the formations of queer citizenship in the context of (neo)liberal citizenship, we explore how the sovereign state both enables and disables citizenship by simultaneously activating mechanisms of inclusion and othering.

Michel Foucault's conception of biopolitics and Achille Mbembe's critical intervention of necropolitics guide our analysis. For Foucault, the emergence of a new form of governmentality coincides with the constitution of the modern nation-state and the beginning of capitalist mode of production. Modern societies are characterized less by the absolute rule of the sovereign than by impersonal and pervasive mechanisms of discipline and biopower, which place great concern in regulating and ensuring life itself. In addition to laws and regulations produced by democratic processes, there are also societal norms and expectations that are articulated through power relations that undergird the juridical form and act as fundamental forces that constrain and shape the comportment of individuals.

Foucault's genealogy of power is well known, so we only note what we consider to be the hallmark of his intervention concerning the historical transformation of power relations here. In the *History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault dramatically announces the replacement of the power of the sovereign, "the ancient right to take life or let live" by "a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death" (p. 138). As he further suggests, "it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its dominion" (Foucault, 1978, p. 138). Thus, according to Foucault, this new form of governing through power over life marks the process of the entrance of life into political history, that is, the transformation of life into an object of knowledge and as intrinsic for the calculations of power. Now we have "the old power of death that symbolized sovereign

power" being "carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault, 1978, p. 139). Even though Foucault has offered different (and, at times, inconsistent) formulations about whether disciplinary and biopolitical power actually displace and replace or reconfigure and reanimate sovereign power (Bargu, 2014, pp. 43-54), his insight about the shift of focus in mechanisms of power and knowledge toward processes related to human life, seeking to control and modify them in order to optimize life itself, remains crucial and invaluable for political and social analysis.

However, as our study aims to show, at stake in this new configuration of power is not simply a generic conception of human life, but, in fact, a very specific one. In order to ensure, support, and enrich life, social norms are created and promoted. Even more, institutions – "the family and the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies" – as points that condense power relations and as instruments of the state become invested in the enterprise of guaranteeing the regulation of life, molding subjects that fit dominant social norms. In reference to the techniques of power employed by institutions, Foucault indicates that "they also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony" (Foucault, 1978, p. 141). In such a power regime, it is clear that those who do not fit the mold of dominant subjectivity will be subject to a social hierarchy. Simultaneously, as Foucault acknowledges, the power of death continues to be exercised even in a political system that is centered on biopower (Foucault, 2003, pp. 254, 260). The problem, then, is to interrogate the relationship between the constitution of social hierarchies and the subjects who are those most vulnerable to the power of death. Foucault's perspective reminds us to be attentive to how the line is drawn between those who must live and those who must die and to ask what forms death can take in a biopolitical domain.

As a correction and complement to Foucault's conception of biopolitics, necropolitics, as proposed by Achille Mbembe (2003), highlights the lethal aspects of biopolitics as it asks not only who has the right to kill but also how the logic death continues to be operative within biopolitics, a point that Foucault largely left

unexplored, except for brief references to racism as the connecting tissue between biopolitics and sovereignty. In Mbembe's terms, necropolitics manifests itself as the submission of life to the power of death. In addition, he posits that "sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (p. 11). In a neoliberal era of insecurity and terror, marked by death as surplus, Mbembe sees the power over life and death being articulated through spaces of exception. In other words, it is through the creation of zones of death that the power of sovereignty is exercised in tandem with the logics of biopower and necropower in a novel "terror formation" (p. 22).

As two sides of the same coin, biopolitics (the governance of life) and necropolitics (the politics of death) will allow us to observe in the Brazilian context how gender norms are mobilized to constitute a normative hierarchy of subjects and, more importantly, how the convergence of biopolitical and necropolitical logics works to normalize the violence against queer subjects. In line with Berenice Bento's (2018) concept of "necrobiopower" – "a set of techniques for promoting life and death based on attributes that qualify and distribute bodies in a hierarchy that removes from them the possibility to be recognized as human and therefore must be eliminated and others that must live.[3]" – we understand that governmentality is in fact only viable when it is accompanied by death zones that are constantly reproduced. Insofar as the techniques of governmentality depend on the existence of zones of death, necro and biopower are inextricable and inseparable. Hence, we are not faced with a choice between how to "make live and let die"; rather, current power regime seems to operate on the basis of "make live" and "make die."

As we seek to unpack how the queer body is constructed as socially marginal and outlawed in the Brazilian context, we focus on the different ways that violence takes place in the public sphere. Queerness, in our understanding, is informed by Eve Sedgwick's formulation as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of

---

[3] Our translation. The original reads as follows: "um conjunto de técnicas de promoção da vida e da morte a partir de atributos que qualificam e distribuem os corpos em uma hierarquia que retira deles a possibilidade de reconhecimento como humano e que, portanto, devem ser eliminados e outros que devem viver."

anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (1993, p. 8). We take queer to signify the subjectivities that the dominant normative social formation pertaining to gender and sexuality transforms into the abnormal, the strange, the abject, and the subaltern. Queer designates the gays, the lesbians, the trans people and the transvestites, the intersex people, and any gender non-conforming individuals on the social margins. The analysis of how power operates in the Brazilian context necessitates a study of both the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion employed to regulate, manage, and domesticate queerness and to tame it by mechanisms of violence when necessary, as well as the ways in which the multitude of queer bodies challenge the dominant construction of gender and the heteronormative regime in place.

We start our analysis with a brief overview of the historical formation of the Brazilian nation-state and the significance of gender throughout this process. Our reconstruction is guided by the concept of coloniality – of power and gender – which allows us to underscore how the matrix of power promoted the "modernization of gender" during the process of nation formation, without really challenging gender inequality, by renovating but not radically transforming structural hierarchies in force since the period of colonization. Next, we discuss how the discourse of "gender ideology" in its current articulation has been mobilized to oppose the recent gains of the LGBT community. We situate recent cases of queer violence in Brazil against the background of important events that took place in the last ten years, both in the domain of civil society and in the sphere of the state, events that are clearly linked to limiting the possibilities of queer citizenship. Unpacking the ways in which mechanisms of "embodied power" (Hawkesworth XX) are articulated and how those articulations keep in place and reinforce the traditional concept of the family, we hope to show how risk management/elimination is incorporated into the logic of Brazilian governmentality as a means of securing life – the "good citizen" citizen" life (cidadão de bem)[4].

Coloniality of Gender and Governmentality in Brazil

---

[4] The "good citizen" is an expression that has currently popularized in Brazil and refers to a conservative assumption of what it means to be a proper citizen. This individual follows the rules, has a moral conduct, is religious, and belongs to a traditional heteropatriarchal family.

In order to account for the multiple and overlapping ways that power shapes and intersects with gender and sexuality in a postcolonial context, we draw on Maria Lugones' (2007 and 2008) conceptualization of the coloniality of gender and her systematic understanding of the colonial/modern gender system. Lugones advances her theorization of coloniality of gender through her critique and elaboration of the coloniality of power as proposed by Aníbal Quijano (1991 and 2000), by combining it with the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995). Quijano sought to understand the colonial facet of capitalist expansion as a project of modernity. For Quijano, global capitalism can only be explained if we take into consideration the division between the colonial and modern worlds and the uneven and racialized distribution of labor, which allowed for the development of capitalist domination centered in Europe. This domination went beyond labor and capital. In fact, it incorporated the production of knowledge and subjectivities as well. Quijano calls this process an epistemic suppression, that is, the colonization of cognitive perspectives. Modernity and coloniality are not separated processes, but rather constitutive of one another – coloniality is the "dark side of modernity." In short, Quijano emphasizes that the racist division of labor, the Eurocentric perspective on knowledge and culture based on a teleological view of history (evolutionism) and a dualistic conceptualization of "natural" differences, as well as the ethnocentric understanding of modernity worked all together in the constitution of global capitalism and became what today we conceptualize as the "coloniality of power." We find the concept of the coloniality of power extremely useful in showing how colonialism transcends historical colonization and continues to shape societal dynamics in multiple ways.

Lugones critiques and expands Quijano's framework. For Lugones, Quijano "accommodates rather than disrupts the narrowing of gender" (Lugones, p. 9). In other words, for Lugones, Quijano's coloniality of power framework, while it takes a critical approach on the question of race, fails to do the same regarding gender and sex, holding on to these two categories without comprehensively examining them as byproducts of colonialism and global capitalism and neglecting them as constitutive of the matrix of power of coloniality. Building on this critique, Lugones puts forward an analysis of the modern gender system and questions its naturalized dimorphism. Intersectionality

reveals how specific processes of violence, struggle, and domination can remain hidden insofar as gender categories are seen as homogeneous and biologically determined. For Lugones, it is important to understand how gender was configured in the Americas prior to colonization in order to appreciate the extent of the violence with which the binary gender system was imposed along with colonial/modern capitalism.

The coloniality of power and gender in combination with the dual forces of bio- and necropower allows us to understand the historical and continuous relationship between the Brazilian state and the abject(ified) LGBT population within Brazil. During colonization, the documents produced by the ecclesiastical institution and the first chroniclers showed that homosexuality was treated as a sin, as a *pecado nefando*." The historian Ronaldo Vainfas (2010) analyzes the complex relationship between sexuality, morality, and the Catholic church in the context of the installation of the Holy Inquisition in Brazil. During the Holy Office period, from 1591 to 1595, there were 130 cases of homosexuality that resulted in trials for the crime of sodomy: 101 committed by men and 29 by women (Vainfas, 2010, p. 212). The Church sought to impose its morality and model of family.

With the proclamation of the Republic and the abolition of slavery, the crucial question of forging a nation gained strength and a "new" social and political era was initiated – the era of homogenization. The newly emergent bourgeois society felt the necessity of expunging "the undesirable" Other in order to maintain national cohesion and unity, thus welcoming the new period. Race became central since "the racial plurality that was born during the colonial process represented, in the head of this elite, a threat and huge obstacle in the path of building a nation that saw itself as white" (Munanga, 1999, p. 51). According to Kabengele Munanga, there was a common belief in the inferiority of the non-white races. Forging whiteness ideologically was fundamental to avoid racial conflicts and guarantee the place of the white population as the ruling class (1999, p. 78). Furthermore, as Bruno Almeida (2015) has argued, the development of the city and the need to plan, organize, and regulate this incipient urban environment gave rise to a new social model of administration. Through the concern to restructure urban space, medicine and public health become part of the governmental repertoire of the state.

If the colonial and imperial eras were marked by plundering, genocide, and overt persecution, the "new" Republican era saw an increase in the techniques of population control. Brazilian medical knowledge, highly influenced by European science, continued to promote the hygienist and eugenicist projects elaborated by the state. According to Gabriel Ignacio Anitua (2008), the hygienist discourse signaled the rise of a new conception of society – the "sanitized society" as the ideal society - as part of the process of establishing a new order (p. 283). Meanwhile, homosexuality, which used to be considered as either a sin or a crime from the point of view of religious and legal discourses in previous centuries, was transformed into a mental illness, which should, therefore, be submitted to different treatments, including hydrotherapy, electricity, and hypnosis, with the ultimate goal being to heal the "degenerate" (Freitas, 2015).

In the 1920s and 1930s, the emphasis was on the formation of the identity of the newly independent nation-state. Discourses on "Brazilianness" and modernity become prominent during this time, unfolding through the discussion of miscegenation (Oliveira, 2014). The debates on identity brought forth a greater need to theorize and explain the racial situation in Brazil. The seminal work of Gilberto Freyre, *Casa grande e senzala,* dislocates the debate on miscegenation from its origins and reframes it in a positive way, seeing it as a double process, both biological and cultural, through which each racial group contributed positively to Brazilian culture. This new perspective led to the emergence of the myth of a racial democracy with significant consequences since it made possible for all to recognize themselves as Brazilians. There were no Blacks, no Whites, no Indians. Everyone was mixed race. It entailed a new and uniform idea of "race" – *mestiça* –, which, however, took away the possibility of cultural awareness from the subaltern groups, preventing the construction of an identity of their own (Munanga, 1999, p. 80). A remarkable element of discussion on *mestiçagem* was how the idea of sexual excess as a pathology was taken to be inherent to the Brazilian racial situation (Oliveira, 2014). Following this line, such prominent intellectuals as Paulo Prado and Gilberto Freyre could go back to seventeenth-century documents and reinterpret them via the new medical discourse – sexual psychiatric discourse – as revealing a "Brazil that originated from a sexual disease" (Oliveira, 2014). Although

those interpretations had their differences, what is clear is that the debate was now reframed as part of a scientific and cultural discussion. Thus,

> this discourse, by instituting sexual hyperarousal linked to miscegenation as a hallmark of Brazilianness, justified – in the political plan of Brazilian modernity – a set of intervention programs of a hygienic and eugenic nature, to ward off the social propagation of madness, crime, venereal diseases, and alcoholism, signs of what was considered social degradation at the time (Oliveira, 2014).

During the dictatorship (1964-1985), non-conforming sexualities increasingly became perceived as a threat by those who cultivated the traditional values of the Brazilian family. Although more of a historical continuity than a rupture, the military coup intensified the repression of gender identities and deviant sexual orientations in favor of traditional moral standards. The military regime of exception was thus accompanied by a rigid process of control and normalization in gender and sexuality. Individuals were "persecuted, arbitrarily arrested, extorted, and tortured because they display[ed], in their bodies or in their behavior, the signs of dissident sexuality or gender identity" (Quinalha, 2018). As Renan Quinalha argues, norms of behavior and conduct became objects of raison d'état after the 1964 coup:

> Sexuality became a matter of national security for the military as recorded and documented by the work of the National Truth Commission. Same-sex desires and affections also came under the weight of an authoritarian regime with the aim of morally sanitizing society and creating a new subjectivity in tune with the binary and heteronormative principles so dear to the conservative moral policies (Quinalha, 2018)[5].

Despite the repression of the coup, the 1970s and 1980s were marked by a growing search for visibility and equal citizenship on part of subaltern communities. During this process of the struggle for democratization, there emerged a variety of social movements that aimed to forge greater political participation. It is during this time that a Brazilian LGBT social movement was born. However, concurrent with the struggle for a democratic regime, the irruption of the AIDS epidemic enabled the sensationalist media to cover it as the "gay pest." Such propaganda, combined with the

---

[5] Our translation. The original reads as follows: "A sexualidade passou a ser tema afeto à segurança nacional para os militares conforme registraram e documentaram os trabalhos da Comissão Nacional da Verdade. Os desejos e afetos entre pessoas do mesmo sexo também foram alvo do peso de um regime autoritário com pretensão de sanear moralmente a sociedade e criar uma nova subjetividade afinada com os princípios binários e heteronormativos tão caros às políticas morais conservadoras."

public's general lack of information about the epidemic, contributed to the rise of homophobia (Green, 2000). In the 1990s, the LGBT movement started to have a greater institutionalized presence, and it collaborated with the state, through the work of NGOs. Currently, the LGBT movement fights for the Bill of Rights (PLC) 22/2006 that would criminalize homophobia and guarantee the recognition of the right to have a free sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as the right to life.

As this brief historical overview indicates, hierarchical power relations and their forms of renovation/renewal have been fairly constant over many decades, despite periodic changes in emphasis and object. Coloniality as an analytical tool "allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structure in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system" (Grosfoguel, 2008, pp. 55-56). The combination of coloniality with an understanding of the biopolitical modes of governance and their concurrent necropolitical strategies demonstrates how the development of modern society has allowed for the emergence of new capitalist relations of production that needed a whole new technology of power in order to manage and control human plurality, while also preserving the predominant effects of the colonial system. In this new, hybrid regime, the Other as the non "white heterosexual male" is continuously invoked as a threat, a risk to the process of the homogenization of the nation. This process is far from over; with the intensification of neoliberal globalization, the renewal and reproduction of both whiteness and heteropatriarchalism continues unabated, though in modalities specific to the present. To these, we now turn.

Moral Panic and the Criminalization of "Gender Ideology"

"Gender ideology" is an expression coined to assert—and at the same time attack—the idea that gender and sex are social and cultural constructions. This expression serves political interests and is used to protest and negate the sexual and gender revolutions that have taken place in the last decades. Opponents of the so-called "gender ideology" put forth the understanding that the patriarchal family and its traditional roles, responsibilities, and rights are currently under attack due to the non-biological configurations of gender. One of the proponents of this ideology, Jorge Scala (2012) in

Ideologia de Gênero: o Neototalitarismo e a Morte da Família, argues that if sex is biological and gender is the cultural and social construction of sex, then it can be concluded that,

> there would be no difference between man and woman - except the biological ones; any kind of union between the sexes would be socially and morally good, and all would be matrimony; each type of marriage would lead to a new kind of family; abortion would be an inalienable human right of the woman, since only she becomes pregnant; etc. All this is so absurd that it can only be imposed with a kind of global brainwashing ... Gender destroys the anthropological structure of the human being …[6].

In this light, seeking unrestricted sexual freedom is seen as an anathema against traditional and religious norms. Even more, sexual freedom is equated with the end of the family itself. "Gender ideology" is the reworking of Christian morality with regard to gender and sexuality in the "secular" era of neoliberal capitalism. As such, it is easy to understand its appeal for both religious individuals and liberal conservatives:

> A prevailing moral grammar has brought secular interest groups like the Free Brazil Movement (MBL) and Schools Without [Political] Parties together with religious groups (be they Catholic, evangelical, neo-Pentecostal, or otherwise). These alliances reinforce the tendency of attributing concrete social problems to imaginary enemies, whether communists, gay people, feminists, or trans* people. This type of political practice is founded in a worldview divided between those who represent "Good" and others who represent "Evil." From politics to morals, interest groups demonize the human rights claims made by women, homosexuals, trans* people, *travestis*, and intersex people, among others, concatenating them into a singular ghost that they denominate "gender ideology." (Miskolci and Pereira, 2018)

The proponents of the so-called "gender ideology" argue that this ideological apparatus functions to indoctrinate children and destroy the institution of the family in its traditional understanding. Thus, the traditional concept of the family is mobilized to invoke moral panic and frame queerness as a threat that can be addressed either through violence or assimilation, depending on how cooperative the queer subject is willing to be.

---

[6] Our translation. The original reads as follows: "Não haveria diferenças entre homem e mulher – exceto as biológicas; qualquer tipo de união entre os sexos seria social e moralmente boas, e todas seriam matrimônio; cada tipo de matrimônio levaria a um novo tipo de família; o aborto seria um direito humano inalienável da mulher, já que somente ela é que fica grávida; etc. Tudo isso é tão absurdo, que só pode ser imposto com uma espécie de "lavagem cerebral" global [...] O gênero destrói a estrutura antropológica íntima do ser humano…"

The pervasiveness and effectivity of these discourses can readily be identified in Brazil. Brazil ranks first in the world in the number of LGBT individuals murdered (ILGA, 2017). According to international human rights agencies, more homosexuals are killed in Brazil than in the 13 countries of the Middle East and Africa, where there is the death penalty against LGBT people (Souto, 2018). On top of the already high murder figures is the impunity of perpetrators. It is a striking fact that the offender was identified only in less than a quarter of these homicides, while less than ten per cent resulted in legal proceedings and punishment (Souto, 2018). As consequence, it can be argued that existing practices of impunity motivates and emboldens further attacks.

Nonetheless, the debates around the "ideology of gender" intensified in 2010 when the Educational Ministry (MEC) proposed a new National Education Plan that sought to incorporate content related to gender equity and sexual diversity. The new educational plan would impact the whole country by making it mandatory to incorporate human rights topics in the national curriculum. In *Ideologia de Gênero: Uma Falácia Construída Sobre os Planos de Educação Brasileiros*, Toni Reis and Edla Eggert (2017) offer an account of the main events that have led to the presentation of the National Education Plan in 2010. Even though Brazil had ratified several documents and international treaties about education as well as human rights in general since the Human Rights Declaration in 1948, with positive impact in the country, the authors note, the backlash has been strong and often violent.

In 2012, National Guidelines for Education in Human Rights was ratified, emphasizing that education is everyone's right regardless of gender, sex, and sexual orientation. However, the document led to an intense debate. There were two main points of heated contention. First, one of the explicit goals of these guidelines was to overcome educational inequalities, emphasizing the promotion of racial, regional, gender, and sexual orientation equality and the aim to eradicate all forms of discrimination. Second, the text of the document itself employed gender-neutral language instead of using the generic masculine form, demonstrating, therefore, an awareness of and sensibility to the importance of gender equality. In 2013, the Senate approved an edited version, deleting from the previous text "gender and sexual orientation equality" and changing the gender-neutral language in the document to the

generic masculine. As expected, the revised document generated even greater debate and protests. Meanwhile, the "ideology of gender" had become increasingly popular, mobilized as it was by a whole swath of traditionalist and conservative groups who defend strict gender roles based on the man-woman binary. Hence, "gender ideology," the authors conclude, "aroused a kind of moral panic, regression and demonization of the 'enemy' when the aim of 'promoting gender and sexual orientation equality' was simply to contribute to 'overcoming educational inequalities'" (p. 20)[7].

As is well known, philosopher Judith Butler, who organized a conference on democracy in São Paulo, faced an aggressive protest during her visit to the country in November 2017. Part of the demonstrations included the burning of an effigy of a witch with Butler's face. The protesters, a far-right Christian group, asserted that they were mobilizing against her theory of the performativity of gender, claiming that Butler was the founder of the "ideology of gender." In the same year, an art exhibition named QueerMuseu [*QueerMuseum*] exploring issues of identity was canceled after continuous protests from conservative and religious sectors of society.

Still in 2017, a brutal murder case went viral in Brazil. Dandara dos Santos, aged 42, a transgender woman was beaten and shot to death in Fortaleza, Ceará. After being violently lynched in the middle of the street, she was shot dead. The murder shocked the world when the video of the execution went viral in the social networks. The video showed her bleeding body on the floor being kicked and cursed at by at least four men. According to the report of the Civil Police, the crime involved the participation of twelve people, eight adults, and four adolescents. The trial took place in April 2018. The verdicts were individualized according to the participation of each defendant in the crime. Only five of those charged for the death of Dandara dos Santos were sentenced (G1 Ceará, O Globo, 2018).

However, the punishment of the murderers of Dandara dos Santos had no real impact on the number of homophobia cases in Brazil, which continue to be alarmingly high. Cases like Dandara dos Santos are not an exception. In fact, they are emblematic of the dominant homophobic sentiment and the necropolitical techniques adopted to

---

[7] Our translation. The original reads as follows: "despertou uma espécie de pânico moral, retrocesso e demonização do "inimigo", quando o que se pretendia com a "promoção da igualdade [...] de gênero e de orientação sexual" era simplesmente contribuir para "a superação das desigualdades educacionais."

serve this sentiment. Common to these murders is the excessive use of violence, a type of violence and brutality that continue even after the body is dead. Eric Stanley (2011) uses the concept of "overkill" to reflect on this type of cruelty associated with anti-queerness. The term overkill allows Stanley to question how certain subjects are reduced to nothing, to a category less than human, for those who unleash extreme violence upon them. Thus, "*overkill* is a term used to indicate such excessive violence that it pushes a body beyond death" (p. 9). Being less than a human means residing in a space of nothingness, deprived of rights, of "compromised personhood and the zone of death" (p. 10).

Although there has been some progress in terms of LGBT rights since the 1980s, the lack of national legislation that criminalizes hate crimes has been associated with increased violence toward LGBT communities. In addition, the lack of legislation that stipulates crimes against LGBT communities as hate crimes fails to assert LGBTphobia as a structuring phenomenon of society and further contributes to the impunity associated with most cases of violence. The only bill aimed to criminalize LGBTphobia was created in 2006 and shelved in 2015, after nine years of discussion. The proposal was defeated by the Evangelical and conservative wing in the government, known as the "Biblical Bench" – the same group that was responsible for preventing the debate on gender and sexuality from being part of the mandatory content in schools, as proposed by the National Education Plan. The law, had it passed, would have at the very least had the effect of denaturalizing LGBT violence, even if it might not prevent it. The fact that hate crimes have still not been understood as such makes it difficult to show that LGBT individuals share a condition of extreme vulnerability.

Another consequence of the lack of much needed legislation that deals with crimes against LGBT individuals is that violence directed at LGBT citizens continues to be framed as individual acts rather than a structural, even systematic, phenomenon. Added to this is the arguments about the privacy of domestic life. Insofar as violence against the LGBT population is seen as a function of private-domestic space, this contributes to the vulnerability of these individuals and the impunity of the perpetrators of these crimes. Similarly, Stanley observes that "yet even with the horrific details, antiqueer violence is written as an outlaw practice, a random event, and an unexpected

tragedy" (p. 7). Antiqueer violence is thus understood as a form of privatized violence, in which "violence is something out of the ordinary" (p. 7).

Sexuality and the Necro/Biopolitical Practices of Security

The cases discussed here demonstrate how risk management/elimination is incorporated into the logic of the state and civil society as a mean of securing life, although at stake is a very specific life, the life of the "good citizen". These examples demonstrate how certain groups have their humanity recognized differentially by the state, occupying historically different social positions in the normative hierarchy. Of course, the concept of the human has been in dispute since colonization, with only certain lives deemed worthy of rights and protection. In contrast to the lives worthy of protection and bearer of rights, we find lives that need to be monitored, disciplined, and controlled. The queer subject takes issue with forms of naturalization and the standardization of identities by vehemently opposing the binary system and the hierarchical gender system as a social institution. As a non-monolithic register, queerness is marked by multiplicities. Queer multitudes as proposed by Paul Beatriz Preciado (2011) appear at the center of politics and governmentality. Preciado reinterprets Deleuze's expression of "deterritorialization" in the context of the queer body. As the deterritorialization of heterosexuality, the queer subject impacts both corporeal and urban space. "This process of 'deterritorialization' of the body forces it to resist the processes of becoming 'normal'" (p. 14). As the queer body subverts traditional gender roles and disaligns from the normalcy associated with the (neo)liberal subject, it upends the governmental regime that operates by distinguishing "normal" bodies from those deemed "abnormal." The queer body resists definition and becomes a threat to social cohesion. However, this is not without consequences. As Stuart Hall et al. (1978) have shown, moral panics can be interpreted as social phenomena that index an ongoing crisis in which certain real fears and anxieties are mobilized in the service of the construction of an authoritarian neoliberalism and specific social divisions, such as those along racial lines, become points of condensation. In the context of Brazil, the moral panic around gender functions in a remarkably similar way, signaling broader social transformations in the making of an aggressively neoliberal era, which certainly

maintains its continuities with the colonial and early republican periods but also assumes new modalities of domination.

If, as Foucault and Mbembe have convincingly shown, the modern state functions by reinforcing the split between the right to kill and the right to let live, it is important to investigate how the construction of the queer subject as a deviant and criminalizable body works in ways that render it vulnerable to violence. As Mary Hawkesworth (2016) argues, "the state does far more than 'manage' a diverse population, it produces *group* identities in and through exclusionary political processes and substantive policies." In exploring how queerness gives rise to new security concerns and new modes of subjectivity, it is important to note multiple governmental mechanisms: 1) Prevention: to prevent children from being diverted into perversion; 2) Protection: to protect the existence and survival of the "traditional family"; 3) Assimilation: to gain back, when still possible, the rehabilitatable perverse; and, lastly, 4) Exclusion: to cast out the already-lost perverse. These mechanisms are justified through the invocation of moral panic.

Currently, through the discourse of "gender ideology," queerness becomes legible predominantly through a moral panic, and is, therefore, coded as a question of security. Hence, the way the "ideology of gender" is mobilized as a discursive apparatus contributes to the constitution not only of individual subjectivities and selfhood but also to gender norms and sexual representations. On the one hand, the opposition to "gender ideology" works to regulate and legitimize practices and modes of heteronormative conduct and behavior, while, on the other hand, the queer as an abject deterritorialized body is transformed into a security threat. However, the process of governmentalization through routines of discipline, conduct, and behavior are not simply enforced by the state. The queer body also becomes the target of society at large.

In stark contrast to the queer subject, the "good citizen" in Brazil is a euphemism for the white heterosexual man who has money and power. The configuration of the homosexual subject as an aberrant, deviant, and dangerous human being goes hand in hand with the constitution of the "good citizen", who is someone "authorized" to ensure normalcy and the perpetuation of the (neo)liberal subject, even in the absence of state technologies of security. The heteropatriarchal family assigns

complete authority to the father. Moreover, keeping queer issues in the private realm, as a family matter, adds to the negligence of the state and creates a greater field of action for the "good citizen" to take the protection of the family into "his" hands. Consequently, much of the power associated with the "good citizen" follows from the targeting and repression of those who live a non-conventional form of sexuality in the absence of the direct intervention of the state, though often implicitly sanctioned by its policies. The construction of certain figures as disposable renders violence unavoidable.

Targeting the queer body becomes particularly fundamental for the preservation of the traditional family. Richard Miskolci (2018) quotes Luis Felipe Miguel (2016) to demonstrate how the moral crusade in defense of the family, in fact, creates the condition for the establishment of a state of exception:

> the alliance between defenders of the market against the State (led in Brazil by the Instituto Millenium), those who struggle against the Political Left (such as the Movimento Brasil Livre) and those who are engaged in the defense of the family and children (who have among their sources of support Escola sem Partido/The Non-Partisan School Movement) create a " sui generis program, according to which the state should abstain from interfering in economic relations and from providing services, but strongly regulate private life" (2016:594). This phenomenon attests to the current Brazilian situation of criminalization of politics and its reduction to a moral agenda aimed at policing behavior.

This State of exception is nurtured and commanded by fear. As Berenice Bento (2018) also suggests, fear and its intensification through moral panics supplement the operation of both necro- and biopower. If biopolitical mechanisms promote the traditional family, fear creates the conditions that justify the necropolitical persecution and elimination of the Other, in this case, of the one who threatens the ideal traditional family. Moreover, in Miskolci (2018) words, "this fear makes the Other an enemy to be fought by supposed 'good people' who have acted performatically as members of a type of moral crusade." Thus, fear and panic pave the way for the justification of widespread expressions of hate, discrimination, and violence.

In Brazil, the logic of governance is thus shared by the "good citizen," who, in the absence or silence of the state, acts as a substitute sovereign power in order to ensure the normalcy of the (neo)liberal subject. Since queerness is perceived to threaten the continuity and preservation of life, the control, management, and even elimination

of this threat cannot be relegated to the state alone. Thus, the "good" individual, as a benign citizen, is often the one in the position of guiding the not-yet modern Other and is encouraged to adopt risk-mitigating action, since their lives and their freedom, growth, and ability to self-realization are hanging by a thread.

As Bento (2018) argues, the combination of necro and biopolitics allows us to "understand the abysmal differences of State action in relation to certain groups and the differential distribution of the right to life." The Brazilian state, by not guaranteeing the life of certain individuals, in fact, promotes death. Although progressive changes in legislation can be noted, laws are not being enforced and equality is not being promoted. The moral panic serves to limit the actions of the State even further, revealing its conservative tendencies and alliances. In addition, Quinalha recognizes,

> we live a conservative reaction against the achievements of this period, with the weakening of public policies of the Executive and a Legislative dominated by a fundamentalist religious group that prevents the advance of sexual and moral guidelines. This is because the political representation of LGBT is still very precarious and insufficient. Thus, the recognition and enforcement of LGBT rights have often been in the hands of the judiciary, which is not always the case (2018)[8].

By consigning certain groups of individuals to second-class citizenship, the state ossifies the meaning of being human. It actively censors inclusive language, offers de facto impunity for the perpetrators of hate crimes, and thus pursues an authoritarian form of politics that necropolitically manages the queer body where it cannot be rehabilitated and brought into the biopolitical fold. In response to social forces that challenge the limits of the concept of the "human" – the white, heterosexual, male subject, whether in terms of race, gender, or sexuality, the response is invariably the dissemination of moral panic as a means of establishing a state of exception. This leads to the creation of "zones of death" whether directly by the state or indirectly by the participation of the population at large. Attempts to expand sexual rights or racial

---

[8] Our Translation. The original reads as: Além disso, vivemos uma reação conservadora contra as conquistas desse período, com o enfraquecimento de políticas públicas do Executivo e um Legislativo dominado por uma bancada religiosa fundamentalista que impede o avanço das pautas sexuais e morais. Isso porque a representação política de LGBT ainda é muito precária e insuficiente. Assim, tem cabido, na maior parte das vezes, ao Judiciário um reconhecimento e efetivação dos direitos LGBT, o que nem sempre acontece.

equality are met with resistance and fear. As queerness becomes a national security issue, the panic instigated around the image of a threatened child – who might learn about homosexuality at school – and a threatened family in danger of dissolution due to alternative forms of kinship works to relegate queer bodies to the position of the enemy, distort facts, and, ultimately, justify violence.

References:

ALMEIDA, Bruno Rotta. (2015): *Biopolítica e mecanismos de limpeza social no Brasil: a influência do discurso eugênico-higienista no controle do crime na virada do século XX*, Revista Contribuciones a las Ciencias Sociales, n. 27. En línea: http://www.eumed.net/rev/cccss/2015/01/biopolitica.html

ANITUA, Gabriel Ignacio. (2008). *Histórias dos pensamentos criminológicos*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Revan.

BARGU, Banu. (2014). *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons*. New York: Columbia University Press.

BENTO, Berenice. (2018). *Necrobiopoder: Quem pode habitar o Estado-nação?* Cadernos Pagu (53), Campinas, SP, Núcleo de Estudos de GêneroPagu/Unicamp.

CRENSHAW, Kimberlé. (1995). *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, in Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (eds) *Critical Race Theory*. New York: The New Press.

FOUCAULT, Michel. (1978). *The History of Sexuality*. (OKS Print.) New York: Pantheon Books.

FOUCAULT, Michel. (2003). "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*. Ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. Trans. David Macey. New York: Picador.

FOUCAULT, Michel & SENELLART, M. (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics : Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. Basingstoke [England], Palgrave Macmillan.

FREITAS, Cláudia Oliveira. (2015). *A Homossexualidade feminina na história do Brasil: do esforço de construção de um objeto histórico ao desdobramento na construção da cidadania*. Les Online, [Lisboa], v. 7, n. 2, pp. 2-19.

BARGU, Banu; SEGATTI, Marina. The colonial necropolitics of "gender ideology" in Brazil: the queer as a question of national security. Cadernos Discursivos, Catalão-GO, Edição Especial, v. 2 n 1, p.12-33, 2018. (ISSN: 2317-1006 - online).

G1 Ceará, O Globo. (2018). *Cinco dos acusados pela morte da travesti Dandara são condenados*. Retrieved at: https://g1.globo.com/ce/ceara/noticia/cinco-dos-acusados-pela-morte-da-travesti-dandara-sao-condenados.ghtml

GREEN, James Naylor. (2000). *Mais amor e mais tesão: a construção de um movimento brasileiro de gays, lésbicas e travestis*. Cadernos Pagu, Campinas, n. 15, pp. 271- 295, jan./jun.

GROSFOGUEL, Ramon. (2008). *Para descolonizar os estudos de economia política e os estudos pós-coloniais: transmodernidade, pensamento de fronteira e colonialidade global*. Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais, Coimbra, n. 80.

HALL, Stuart; Critcher, Chas; Jefferson, Tony; Clarke, John; and Roberts, Brian. (1978). *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.

HAWKESWORTH, Mary. (2016) *Embodied Power: Demystifying Disembodied Politics*. New York and London: Routledge.

LUGONES, Maria. (2007). *Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System.* Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy, 22(1), pp. 186–219.

LUGONES, Maria. (2008). The Coloniality of Gender. Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise, 2 (Spring), pp. 1-17.

MBEMBE, Achille. (2003). *"Necropolitics,"* Public Culture 15, no. 1: pp. 11-40.

MIGNOLO, Walter D. (2002). The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference. South Atlantic Quarterly, 101(1), pp. 57–96.

MISKOLCI, Richard. (2018). Exorcising a Ghost: The Interests Behind The War On "Gender Ideology." Cadernos Pagu (53), e185302. Epub. https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/18094449201800530002

MISKOLCI, Richard, & Pereira, Pedro Paulo Gomes. (2018). Who's Afraid of Judith Butler? The Moral Crusade against Human Rights in Brazil. Cadernos Pagu (53), e185300. Epub. https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/18094449201800530000

MIGUEL, Luis Felipe. (2016) *Da "doutrinação marxista" à "ideologia de gênero" – Escola sem Partido e as leis da mordaça no parlamento brasileiro*. Direito & Práxis vol.7, nº15, Rio de Janeiro, pp. 590-621.

BARGU, Banu; SEGATTI, Marina. The colonial necropolitics of "gender ideology" in Brazil: the queer as a question of national security. Cadernos Discursivos, Catalão-GO, Edição Especial, v. 2 n 1, p.12-33, 2018. (ISSN: 2317-1006 - online).

MUNANGA, Kabengele. (1999). *Rediscutindo a mestiçagem no Brasil: identidade nacional versus identidade negra*. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes.

OLIVEIRA, Cristiane. (2014). The discourse of sexual excess as a hallmark of Brazilianness: revisiting Brazilian social thinking in the 1920s and 1930s. História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos, 21(4), 1093-1112. https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0104-59702014000400002

PRECIADO, Paul Beatriz. (2011). *Multidões queer: notas para uma política dos "anormais"*. Revista Estudos Feministas, 19(1), pp.11-20. https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0104-026X2011000100002

QUINALHA, Renan. (2018). Dossiê | *O movimento LGBT brasileiro: 40 anos de luta*. Revista Cult.

QUIJANO, Anibal. (1991). *Colonialidad, Modernidad/Racionalidad. Peru Indigena*, 13(29), pp. 11–29.

QUIJANO, Anibal. & Ennis, Michael. (2000). Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. Nepantla: Views from South 1(3), pp. 533-580. Duke University Press.

REIS, Toni & EGGERT, Edla. (2017). *Ideologia de Gênero: Uma Falácia Construída sobre os Planos de Educação*. Educação & Sociedade, vol. 38, n. 138, enero-marzo, pp. 9-26 Centro de Estudos Educação e Sociedade Campinas, Brasil.

SCALA, Jorge. (2012) *Ideologia de Gênero: o Neototalitarismo e a Morte da Família*. Editora Katechesis. [3. ed.].

STANLEY, Eric. (2011). "*Near Life, Queer Death: Overkill and Ontological Capture,*" Social Text 29, no. 2/107: pp. 1-20.

SEGATO, Rita Laura. (2016). Patriarchy from Margin to Center: Discipline, Territoriality, and Cruelty in the Apocalyptic Phase of Capital. The South Atlantic Quarterly 115:3. Duke University Press.

SEDGWICK, Eve K. (1993). *Tendencies*. Durham: Duke University Press.

SOUTO, Luiza. (2018). *Assassinatos de LGBT Crescem 30% entre 2016 e 2017, Segundo Relatório: Levantamento Mostra que Maioria das Vítimas Morre com Armas de Fogo e na Rua*. O Globo. Retrieved online from: https://oglobo.globo.com/sociedade/assassinatos-de-lgbt-crescem-30-entre-2016-2017-segundo-relatorio-22295785#ixzz5QfpObTjsstest

BARGU, Banu; SEGATTI, Marina. The colonial necropolitics of "gender ideology" in Brazil: the queer as a question of national security. Cadernos Discursivos, Catalão-GO, Edição Especial, v. 2 n 1, p.12-33, 2018. (ISSN: 2317-1006 - online).

VAINFAS, Ronaldo. (2010). Tró*pico dos pecados: moral, sexualidade e Inquisiç*ão *no Brasil*. [3. ed.]. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.