

# On hues, tints and shades: subjects, connections and challenges in the Brazilian LGBT movement

**Regina Facchini**  
**Isadora Lins França**

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## Sexuality, culture and politics A South American reader

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

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## On hues, tints and shades: subjects, connections and challenges in the Brazilian LGBT movement\*

Regina Facchini\*\*

Isadora Lins França\*\*\*

In 2008, an unprecedented GLBT National Conference took in Brasilia, Brazil's Federal capital. The theme of the conference was "Human rights and public policy: the path towards guaranteeing the citizenship of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals". It was preceded by regional and state level meetings. At these state level conferences, which took place between March and May 2008, approximately 10 thousand participants were brought together, leading to the formulation of 510 motions which were evaluated and finalized at the National Conference. On the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> of June, the President of the Republic of Brazil (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva), federal ministers and representatives of the movement spoke at the opening ceremony of the National Conference, causing a stir in the media and within the movement itself. Brazil was the first country in the world to promote such an initiative, reflecting the development of the relationship between the State and the LGBT social movements. The event was made even more symbolic by the fact that it coincided with the Brazilian LGBT movement's 30th anniversary celebrations.

At the end of the 1970s, what was then called the "homosexual movement" emerged in Brazil. In recent years, this movement became one of the most visible social movements in the country. In 2008, the street events celebrating LGBT Pride (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals) took place throughout the whole country. The biggest—the tenth annual São Paulo gay pride parade, saw three million people taking to the streets, becoming the largest event of its kind in the world. There are presently nine national networks of organizations and/or activists in Brazil.<sup>1</sup> The largest of these, the Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians and Transgenders (ABGLT), had 203 affiliated LGBT groups and 58 allied organizations throughout the country's five regions in 2008.<sup>2</sup>

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\*\* PhD, researcher at Pagu – Center for Gender Studies, and lecturer in the PhD program in Social Sciences at Unicamp.

\*\*\* PhD, Researcher at Pagu – Center for Gender Studies.

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<sup>1</sup> The nine national networks presently active in Brazil are the Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians and Transgenders (ABGLT), founded in 1995; the National Alliance of Transgenders (ANTRA), currently known as the Alliance of Travestis, Transsexuals and Transgenders, founded in 2000; the Brazilian Lesbian League (LBL), founded in 2003; the Brazilian Lesbian Alliance (ABL), founded in 2004; the National Collective of Transsexuals (CNT) and the Afro-LGBT Network, both founded in 2005; the National Collective of Black Autonomous Feminist Lesbians (Candance), founded in 2007; E-Youth, which has been an ally since 2001; and the Brazilian Gay Association (ABRAGAY) founded in 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Data collected from ABGLT's website. <[www.abglit.org.br](http://www.abglit.org.br)> Accessed on the 18th October 2008.

The demands of the movement have become so visible that they have inspired legislation at all levels of the Brazilian state system, as well as the creation of national and state Parliamentary Groups. The movement's strategies have become diversified in order to incorporate demands for rights through the legislative and judiciary systems,<sup>3</sup> social control of the development and implementation of public policy, the production of academic knowledge,<sup>4</sup> churches for homosexuals, sections within political parties and even the development of alternative and/or playful politics (such as parades and the organization of soirées, festivals and art shows as well as the re-appropriation of pre-existing events such as "Miss Gay" or "Miss Trans" competitions).

The movement's organizations diversified during this period, including groups such as LGBT Jews, gay solicitors and students in favor of sexual diversity. Some groups began to specialize not only in protection or the mobilization of specific "sections" of the LGBT public, but also thematically. Today, there are groups that focus specifically on the organization of events that promote visibility, while others work on legal protection, on academic interventions, or advocacy. Finally, of course, there are those groups that prioritize HIV/AIDS prevention. Moreover, although there are groups that see themselves as "mixed", acting in a multifaceted way, there are also specific organizations that focus on LGBT families, homosexual parents, LGBT youth or black LGBTs.

This article will contextualize and analyze some of the predicaments this movement faces at present, contributing to a reflection about its potential, its limitations and other issues relevant to this and to other social movements. This investment also combines issues dealt with by the authors in recent research (Facchini: 2005, 2006, 2008; França: 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b). A perspective that emphasizes the connection between social movements and other social actors has been a common thread in this research, facilitating a collective discussion that we seek to sketch out in this article. Although a brief history of the movement is referenced here and the movement's current challenges inform the analysis, this article will focus most specifically on the period stretching from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s.

## From homosexual to LGBT: a brief history

*Somos* was the first Brazilian group that purported to politicize homosexuality as an issue. Founded in 1978, the group's creation took place within a context characterized by counter-culture, the military dictatorship, intense left wing activism, and the

<sup>3</sup> For a map of the situation of sexual rights relating to sexual orientation and gender identity in Brazil, see Vianna & Lacerda (2004).

<sup>4</sup> It is possible to identify a rapid incorporation of topics related to homosexuality in the agenda of Brazilian research centers and universities. Silvia Ramos (2005) reports that a search in the Plataforma Lattes (a CV database of researchers run by CNPq – the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) using the words "homoeroticism", "homosexuality", "gay", "lesbian" and "queer" retrieved 3520 projects, linked to 1420 researchers. A similar search carried out in June 2001 retrieved 490 projects linked to 212 researchers.

emergence of the modern versions of the feminist and black movements (MacRae, 1990). At its inception, *Somos* was marked by a polarization between the more general “left” and the “struggles” of autonomous minorities’ that would, subsequently, be responsible for some of its most serious internal conflicts. In the beginning, *Somos* was composed exclusively of men but women subsequently began to attend the meetings, organizing themselves in a separate group (the Lesbian-Feminist Group) from 1981 on. According to Edward MacRae, the ideology of the group was very much informed by the countercultural, contestatory and anti-authoritarian spirit of the times, producing a discourse that aimed at a broader transformation and understanding of homosexuality as a strategy for cultural change, capable of attacking the hegemonic social structure from its margins. The group also used a strategy of reclaiming terms seen as socially negative within daily usage, using words such as “bicha” (fag) and “lésbica” (lesbian) in a positive way. Incorporating the political trends of the time, the group also attempted to maintain a structure of horizontal relations, both in terms of its non-hierarchical political organization and in fighting the asymmetries between men and women, the active/passive polarization and what were seen at the time as effeminate/masculinized stereotypes.

Other groups emerged during the same period and phrases such as “the homosexual movement is revolutionary rather than merely reformist!” reflected an emphasis that was a characteristic of the period and in which many of the main demands of the movement (demands that are still relevant today) were developed. The fight against homophobic violence and discrimination, the struggle for “homosexual marriage” and for respectful treatment by the media, for sexual education in schools that rejected the pathologization of homosexuality all became key banners of the movement during this period.

This movement’s first phase ended in the mid-1980s, with a drastic reduction in the number of organizations and changes in the geographical distribution of the most influential groups, as well as transformations in the movement’s general political stance. Several factors explain this quantitative reduction: the appearance of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its power to demobilize proposals in favor of sexual liberation; the fact that many leaders had turned their energies to the fight against the epidemic; the end of the *Lampião da Esquina* newsletter, which had emerged in the same year as *Somos* and which had become one of the movement’s main means of communication; and the new democratic context in Brazil, which demanded a change in the groups’ profile, being that there was no longer an external “enemy” that united everyone against “the power of the dictatorship”. In fact, the demise of the dictatorship heralded the opening up of communication with the state itself. When it came to the homosexual movement, however, such channels only emerged when it became clear that the HIV/AIDS epidemic was a public health problem and not restricted to “at-risk groups”. In the time of AIDS, then seen as “the gay cancer”, the main question became the need to not “open up old wounds” and generate new “cancers” within the social body.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This type of argument is attributed by MacRae (1990, p.81) to João Silvério Trevisan—an influential leader at the time.

From the mid-1980s onwards, a change in the geographic concentration of LGBT groups took place, shifting from the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo axis, to the Rio de Janeiro-Northeast axis. Two significant activists also came to the fore during this period: João Antônio Mascarenhas (founder of the group of intellectuals who put together *Lampião da Esquina*, and founder of the group *Triângulo Rosa*) and Luiz Mott (founder of the Grupo Gay da Bahia – GGB).<sup>6</sup> The actions of the period engaged less with social transformation projects in a broad sense and more with pragmatic interventions, focusing on guaranteeing civil rights and fighting discrimination and violence against homosexuals. These were the models for action that, paraphrasing a GGB document, put “the gay cause in pole position”.

The strong negative association between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality that occurred at the beginning of the epidemic led several groups to decide to not focus primarily on HIV/AIDS prevention. Others managed to combine the work of legitimizing homosexuality and fighting the epidemic. Their interventions are recognized in the bibliography regarding “the construction of a collective response to HIV/AIDS”. During this period, often seen as a time of demobilization for the movement, several achievements took place, including the removal of homosexuality from the National Institute for Social Welfare’s code of diseases. The adoption and dissemination of the concept of “sexual orientation” was also significant during this period, along with a heated debate regarding the inclusion of guarantees against discrimination based on “sexual orientation” in the new Brazilian Constitution.

From the early 1990s onwards, the number of groups/organizations within the LGBT movement increased once more, spreading throughout the entire country, while its institutional forms and action strategies continued to diversify. Simultaneously, the movement’s social relations network became more developed. New actors became present in this field,<sup>7</sup> such as the media, state agencies related to issues of justice and health, politicians who began to include gay rights in their agenda, the gay-directed market, international organizations, and religious groups that were flexible or that focused specifically on issues of sexuality.

An example of the diversification of institutional formats and the transformation of the relations established between the movement and other actors are the links between

<sup>6</sup> For more information on the trajectory of the Brazilian activists and intellectuals linked to *Lampião* and the “first wave” of this movement in Brazil, see Silva (1998); for an account of the development of the group *Triângulo Rosa* and the adoption of the term “sexual orientation” in Brazil see Câmara (2002); and for a detailed analysis of the movement’s progress until the late 1990s, see Facchini (2005).

<sup>7</sup> Following Carlos F. dos Santos’ (1977) application of Marc Swartz’s (1968) concept, *field* applies to “actors directly involved in the process under study”. It is seen, however, as “sufficiently flexible, so it can contract or expand over the limits of the *arena*”, which refers to “a social or cultural area immediately adjacent to the field(...), where one finds those who are not involved in its defining processes, although they may be directly involved with those who participate in the *field*”. In this sense, then, the *field* of the LGBT movement includes all the social actors directly involved in the daily life of the movement such as activist organizations, state and public agencies with which the movement has established relationships and markets which directly target homosexuals. Within the *arena* we would find all those who identify or could be identified as homosexual, although they may also be directly involved in activism.

LGBT activists and political parties. Since the early 2000s, there has been an increase in the variety of parties that engage with LGBT related issues, public and parliamentary policies. Candidates from several parties now court the LGBT vote. This transformation probably became more significant with the return of democracy in Brazil. However, the first and strongest manifestations of the recognition of LGBT in public policy and government programs appeared in a more explicit form from 2000 onwards. These changes have not been limited to an increase in the numbers and types of LGBT groups or to the expansion of the movement's network of relations.

In the groups' internal contexts, we can identify an increasing approximation towards the NGO ideal model as delineated by Rubem César Fernandes (1985). This implies a decrease in the numbers of effective affiliates; development of formal internal organizational structures; development of funding proposals; the need to present results; the need to clearly express the aims and targets of interventions or of rights demands; professionalization of activists; greater capacity and need to communicate, as well as a dependency upon infrastructure such as offices, telephones, e-mail, computers; the need to include activists within pragmatic discourses; use of group dynamic techniques in meetings and actions; and the need for staff trained to establish relationships with the media, politicians, civil servants and international organizations.

Regarding the relationships between the groups, the quest for scarce state or international funding has begun to result in a highly competitive environment. Within this context, processes of alliance formation and tensions which had previously been defined by MacRae (1990) as characteristic of the movement have provoked open conflicts. This was sometimes accompanied by an exchange of accusations in the media or in forums that were not exclusively made up of activists, such as the increasingly numerous groups and discussion lists on the Internet.

Moreover, from the 1990s onwards, the movement has multiplied its categories of reference to its political subject. In 1993, it appeared as the MGL ("gay and lesbian movement"). In 1995, it became the GLT movement ("gays, lesbians and *travesti*"). From 1999 onwards, it became the GLBT movement ("gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender), having cycled through the variants GLTB or LGBT, according to various arguments regarding the hierarchies and strategies of visibility of the group members. In 2005, the XII Brazilian Convention of Gays, Lesbians and Transgenders approved the use of the acronym GLBT, officially adding the "B" to the then current acronym in order to denote bisexuals and establishing that the "T" now referred to *travestis*, transsexuals and transgenders.

In 2008, a new change took place at the national GLBT Conference. After some controversy, the use of the LGBT acronym was approved to denominate the movement. This decision was based on an effort to give visibility to lesbians. In any event, there is still no absolute consensus regarding the acronyms that define the movement's political

subject. Several denominations coexist and they vary from region to region or even from group to group. Moreover, these diverse strategies for denominating the movement's political subjects coexist and have to be thought of in relation to other acronyms linked to different social actors, such as the market, which has created GLS<sup>8</sup> (“gays, lesbians and sympathizers”), or the State, whose health policies adopted the term HSH (“men who have sex with men”).<sup>9</sup>

This process of constructing the movement's political subjects cannot be analyzed without taking into account the actors present in this field and the dynamics between them. We thus understand the movement as a complex social actor, relating to other actors who influence and are influenced by it. Likewise, we cannot assume that the movement is homogeneous: it is composed of different organizations that alternate between cooperating and clashing.

Some of these relationships with other actors are fundamental for understanding the movement's configuration from the 1990s onwards. The “re-democratization” of Brazil, the implementation of an STD/AIDS prevention policy based on the idea of a partnership between State and civil society, the adoption of a strategy of identity politics in order to reduce stigmatized groups' “vulnerability”, the development of market segmentation and the growth of a specific gay-related—or GLS—target population and even the impact of global processes: all of these things have some bearing on the way in which the idea of a politics of identity based on gender and sexuality has become possible in Brazil.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The acronym GLS was created by the market in the early 1990s in order to define a market segment focused on “gays and lesbians”, but which could also potentially include “heterosexual” consumers associated with these groups as “sympathizers”. This was to an extent an attempt to translate the term “gay friendly” into Portuguese, but it ended up inverting the original meaning. While gay friendly places are not directed towards gays but are happy to receive them, GLS denominates places or market initiatives directed towards “gays and lesbians”, but which are also open to “heterosexuals”.

<sup>9</sup> The acronym MSM—men who have sex with men—was introduced in Brazil during the 1990s, in the context of STD/HIV prevention policies. Its aim is to refer directly to specific sexual practices. Since practices and identities do not always coincide, categories such as “gay” or “homosexual” do not embrace all the individuals who could be included in prevention programs. Activists have challenged this acronym, criticizing the fact that it does not refer to an identity, making the movement's political subjects—who demand such policies—invisible. Thus, MSM and WSW (women who have sex with women) have been replaced in the last few years by “lesbians, bisexuals and other WSW” and by “Gays, MSM and *travestis*”. Researchers have pointed out the risk that categories such as MSM and WSW may “dissolve the question of non-correspondence between desires, practices and identities in a formulation that recreates the universal category ‘man’ on the basis of a supposed fundamental stability of biological sex” (Carrara and Simões, 2007, p.94 – footnote 35).

<sup>10</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between STD/AIDS prevention policies, the development of a segmented market and the revival of the homosexual movement in the 1990s, see Facchini (2005).

## The GLBT movement and the GLS market: shifting boundaries<sup>11</sup>

In the late 1990s, what was then known as the Sao Paulo gay “ghetto”, with its epicenter in the central area of the city (Perlongher, 1987), underwent an expansion. As MacRae (1990) emphasizes, each new establishment that emerged was seen as a “victory for the cause” by a significant number of those who frequented the “ghetto”.

This general effervescence had parallels in the then incipient homosexual movement that emerged with the foundation of the group *Somos*. Simultaneously, the relationship between the movement’s activists and the “ghetto” seemed significantly antagonistic, and *Somos* activists continually attacked the “integration of homosexuals into consumer society” (MacRae, 1990, p.300). Despite such criticisms, the movement’s relationship with the nighttime gay leisure economy continued, since this scene included the places that were considered to be the movement’s “base”. Instead of opposing the “ghetto”, the movement sought to play a role in the “conscientization” of homosexuals and, in particular, it explored the idea of a militant homosexuality (MacRae, 1990).

Despite the problematic way in which the movement related to the “ghetto” in the 1980s, the pivotal turning point of this relationship (at least in São Paulo) took place in the 1990s, when the idea of giving visibility to what was then called “GLT” and proposals for mass demonstration strategies emerged within the movement in clear contrast to previous tactics. As this view expanded, the combination of group meetings with leisure and social activities also developed. These two tendencies greatly influenced the development of the Gay Pride Parades, which would become the most visible events of the LGBT movement in Brazil, and also, in many places, the points of the Movement’s greatest interaction with the gay market.

More than ever, the idea of giving visibility to those who were then known as GLT (gays, lesbians and *travestis*) through the organization of mass demonstrations was present in the movement. These strategies were clearly different from previous strategies, which could be perhaps be classified as “victimist”.

Similarly, at least in the country’s large state capitals, spaces of GLS consumerism and sociability became, to a certain extent, part of activist’s discourse regarding “pride” and “visibility”. Such spaces openly targeted groups with a particular sexual orientation and shared symbols with the movement, such as the rainbow flag, which became ubiquitous in GLS establishments and at many of the movement’s activities.

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<sup>11</sup> In this article we have adopted the use of GLS as an emic category (regarding the acronym, see above). Although the use of GLS may have varied over time, it does embrace the market initiatives which established relationships with the movement from the mid 1990s to the mid 2000s, the period which this article is concerned with. During this time, there was both collaboration and conflict between the “GLS market” and the “GLBT movement”; there were approximations and differentiations between these two categories. Contemporary discussions about their borders illustrate these relationships (Facchini, 2005; França, 2006a; França, 2007b). It is worth noting that in our recent work, we have looked more closely at the ambiguities that surround the processes of inclusion and exclusion within “GLS circuits” (Facchini, 2008; França, 2009).

During the same period, entrepreneurs within the GLS market began to see themselves and be seen as vehicles of political action. They promoted “the self-esteem of homosexuals” and the development of a “positive identity” through the creation of cinema festivals, publishing houses and even spaces of leisure and sociability. They also circulated information among the people who went to these spaces, through websites and specialized publications.

Furthermore, while the increased visibility and strengthening of homosexual identity came about due to the activities of both the market and the movement, the idea of “community” itself, so dear to the movement, was also responsible for the close relationship between these two poles. In the same way that GLS establishments make homosexuality visible (to a certain extent), it is also through them that the “LGBT population” is exposed to the movement and where it can be accessed in a concentrated manner. The “community” is thus often referred to in terms of how it organized within a given set of GLS establishments.

These bars and clubs not only make the “community”<sup>12</sup> tangible: it is also there that processes of sexual stratification<sup>13</sup> and the production of difference on the basis of social markers such as class, generation, gender, sexuality and color/“race” reveal themselves. It is important to note that this new “GLS market” that emerged in the 1990s absorbed older spaces of homosexual sociability in a modified manner. Its development was permeated by power relations that pushed those who are “fatter”, “older”, poor, black, *travestis*, sex workers and overly “effeminate” or “masculinized” to spaces characterized by lower social prestige and lesser integration into global circuits (Simões and França, 2005; França, 2006a; Facchini, 2008; França, 2009).

However, although the expansion and diversification of the segmented market focusing on the homosexual public contains power relations that value certain categories and devalue others, it is significant that almost all of those categories are absorbed in the market in some way. Nevertheless, the excluding character of the market becomes obvious when we focus on the people at its most socially marginalized poles. *Travestis* are emblematic in this sense: they are often barred or badly treated by homosexual establishments, a fact that reveals the limits of the segmented market’s inclusivity.

Conflict occurs when the identities embraced by the movement are rejected by the market. This generates tension between the two social actors. A great proportion of the GLS market and its night time and pleasure economies does not consider bisexuals, *travestis* and transsexuals as part of the “community” they offer their services to. Meanwhile, the movement sees such categories as part of its political constituency and part of the “community” it seeks to address.

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<sup>12</sup> We refer to the emic category “community” by taking into account Benedict Anderson’s (2008) concept of “imagined communities”.

<sup>13</sup> The term refers to Rubin’s (1993) analysis of how erotic practices are classified and ranked, creating a scale that distinguishes between “good” and “bad” sex.

Another remarkable phenomenon is that the GLS entrepreneurs' affirmation of "positive identity" and "visibility" is occurring at the same time that consumers are adopting a new stance which situates the defense of the right to consume as a route to the achievement of citizenship. It is thus necessary to highlight the positions consumers take when they think that their rights are being disrespected on the basis of their sexuality and when they demand equality by means of actions relating to consumerism.<sup>14</sup> This is clearly reflected in reactions to bans on public shows of affection between same sex persons. "Kiss-ins" in bars and restaurants which are not explicitly gay but frequented by this public have become increasingly common since the mid 1990s.<sup>15</sup> This signals demands for equality of treatment in public spaces geared towards consumption.

The tendency connecting citizenship to practices of consumerism has been accompanied by a broader movement involving actions related to the State. In recent years, anti-discrimination laws have emerged at the municipal and state levels, penalizing public establishments that discriminate against citizens on the basis of their sexual orientation. Although many of these laws include non-commercial establishments and go beyond discrimination in public spaces, they have often been used against commercial establishments. Such broader aspects of the relationship between citizenship and consumerism create a context of interaction between the market and the movement that has been responsible for an increase in the reach and impact of activist discourses on homosexuality. However, these aspects also demand more precision in such discourses, which are situated amidst a set of initiatives led by other social actors. While such initiatives greatly influence the movement's contours, it is also critically important for us to consider the role played by the State, both in its role as opposing (as during the military dictatorship) and in promoting rights (following the re-democratization period).

## State and civil society: connections and permeability

Since the 1980s, we have witnessed a substantial transformation in the relationship between the State and social movements in Brazil, leading to another transformation in the field of public policy. In a retrospective look at gender and public policy, Farah (2004) delineates a process in which the re-democratization of Brazil (which involved the democratization of decision making processes and the inclusion of new population segments as beneficiaries of public policies) coincided with the strengthening of women's

<sup>14</sup> Miller notes an increasing tendency to transform consumerism into an arena of political action. A series of actions have emerged demanding "social responsibility" from the market, emphasizing consumers' power in exercising social control over the production and circulation of goods. Miller makes a proviso, however, that "there is no particular reason for optimism" when we look at this phenomenon, since "there is a considerable distance between sectional interest collusion between consumer societies and businesses on the one hand, and the formation of a responsible, moral citizenship concerned with the consequences of its demands on the other." (Miller, 1995, 49).

<sup>15</sup> The "kiss-in" is a type of protest that has become common in the gay movement since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A political strategy used by the movement in the U.S.A and Europe, the kiss-in involves the public manifestation of affection among gays in places where such practices are repressed, aiming at the increase of the group's visibility.

and feminist movements. Under a contradictory mandate from the 1980s onwards to produce “efficiency” (a key term in World Bank demands) while “democratizing decision making processes and access to public services”, the first policies specifically targeted at women emerged in Brazil. There was also an increase in the participation of women’s social movements in the development, implementation and control of public policies. Other equally complex processes, involving a wide spectrum of political actors at the national and international levels, took place with regards to other political subjects or population segments from the 1990s onward.

Even during the period of the “minimalist State” (Santos, 1997) at the dawn of the twenty-first century, demands for legal recognition and a role in the development and fine tuning of public policies were central to the LGBT movement. This incontrovertibly placed the State within the movement’s field of relations. Nevertheless, such relations became more complex and permeable from the moment civil society began to be seen as a “partner” in the tasks of proposing, implementing and evaluating public policy. The processes that unfolded from the production of a “collective response” to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Brazil were, undoubtedly, a paradigmatic example of the transformations within the State and social movements in the country, as well as the difficulties inherent in clarifying the roles of and borders between State and civil society.

Currently, the involvement of civil society in the development and implementation of public policies challenges the State’s role of the “other”. Following the “collective response” to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and other experiences of “partnership” between the State and civil society, several political subjects have found ways to voice and develop their demands, and even forms of making their structures sustainable. Nevertheless, the impacts of the involvement of civil society in areas seen as the State’s responsibility are not yet clear or predictable. In any case, they certainly go beyond impacts on the institutional format, modes of intervention and the internal dynamics of the movement.

Reflecting on the impasses and challenges posed by the process of constructing homosexuals as subjects with rights in Brazil, Sérgio Carrara (2005) shows that the post-AIDS relationship between the homosexual movement and the State highlights new modes of exercising political power in which the “minimalist State”, to a certain extent, organizes civil society by funding social intervention projects and meetings. Carrara urges a cautious analysis of the possible ramifications regarding power implied by this relationship, as well as the “clientization” of civil society and what this new relationship might mean for the establishment of support points for future pressures from the “bottom up”.

In her research about the Brazilian lesbian movement’s organizations, Glaucia Almeida (2005), demonstrates how a greater openness to LGBT demands in the field of STI/AIDS prevention in the mid-1990s helped a political subject to develop in an autonomous manner, even though it oscillated between relationships of collaboration

and dependency (either with or upon the feminist or the LGBT movement). Although the field of prevention mainly focused on AIDS and there was no epidemiological data to justify prevention actions among lesbians, such factors did not impede the incorporation of lesbians into the field of STD/AIDS prevention, which led to the development of a discourse regarding the “lesbian body” which shifted the themes of discussion from invisibility to vulnerability.

Although these public health policy initiatives (then at an incipient stage) that accounted for “women who have sex with women” were late to emerge, funding from the Health Ministry contributed to the strengthening of the lesbian movement—mostly by supporting the first National Lesbian Seminar (SENALE). When the movement shifted its focus to health issues, it also became stronger to the extent that its political subject became legitimated, and the focus of two national networks: the Brazilian Lesbian League and the Brazilian Lesbian Alliance. The movement was subsequently able to seek out other sources of public funding by focusing on the reduction of gender inequalities and promoting human rights—objectives that had never disappeared from the movement’s agenda (Facchini and Barbosa, 2006; Facchini, 2008).

In order to analyze the complexity of the relationship between the State and the LGBT movement in contemporary Brazil, we must look at some recent processes that have been hitherto mostly ignored by researchers. The State can simultaneously exert a certain level of control over the movement by their definition of funding policies and bids. However, it also seems to be increasingly dependent upon “organized civil society” for the proposal, legitimization and even implementation of public policies and to guarantee that state resources actually reach those they were originally intended for.

The HIV/AIDS prevention policies adopted in Brazil temporarily shifted the LGBT agenda to the health field, stimulated the expansion of the movement beyond the capital cities and middle class, and maintained the movement’s political focus on federal level policy. Other processes, however, such as the decentralization of health policy and the organization of GLBT Conferences (at municipal, state and national levels), have pushed for stronger social control at the local level, introducing a polarity between State and civil society and demanding greater capillary action from the movement. Under pressures from civil society and international political processes, state entities are being forced to specialize in increasingly specific groups (i.e to create policies for “blacks”, “women”, “traditional societies”, “anti-homophobia”). These feed back into the multiplication of “vulnerable subjects”. By contrast, the term “transversality” is also being increasingly mentioned in public policy circles.

These changes pose problems to which there are no obvious answers. The negotiations between the two modes of defining the target groups of public policy and the mode in which increasingly diverse populations relate to each other and are understood at the local level has attracted little in the way of research within sexuality studies. The

relationship between the State's demand for transversality and civil society's need to link different social movements is also underexplored. Little is known, moreover, about the ways in which these issues are translated into the development of complex subjects, such as "black LGBT" or "students who favor sexual diversity". We also know little about experiences of collaboration between movements which lead to the expansion of their demands. The political repercussions of the different strategies these movements adopt also need to be reflected upon.

Furthermore, little has yet been said about the impact of the conflicts between the networks that have been established and proliferated within the movement, about the state agencies that develop public policies, or about the policies generated in this context. We also do not know how the recruitment of public experts and managers takes place among a generation of activists who increasingly invest in specialization and professionalization, or how this has impacted upon public policies, relationships within the movement, and between the movement and the State. Another relevant question, related to this last, has to do with the ways in which changes in the profile of activists over the last 15 years and their increasing similarities with public policy managers and experts have impacted upon the relationship between the State and civil society.

Stuart Hall (2003) highlights the transruptive effects of the "multicultural question" in destabilizing the foundations of the constitutional, liberal State. According to this author, the "multicultural question" challenges two important foundations of Western liberal universalism: universal citizenship and the State's cultural neutrality. On the one hand, it exposes the fact that citizenship rights were never universally applied and, on the other, it makes clear that the State's neutrality operates solely within the presupposition of a "cultural homogeneity" among those governed and of a strict separation between the private and public spheres. The demand for women's and LGBT rights has led to increasing interventions in the private field, blurring the borders between the public and the private and increasingly politicizing the latter. This has forced the State and civil society to reconsider the limits of the public and the private, prompting in some sectors of civil society a reflection about the potentialities, limits and risks involved in state regulation of the guarantee of certain rights related to sexuality.

Nevertheless, the affirmation of identities promoted by movements such as the LGBT movement has forced the State to reposition itself around cultural neutrality in the management of conflicts between the different "communities" that make up the nation. While the nation can be defined as "imagined political community" and imagined as "inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 2008), the view that it can also be thought as being composed of a series of "communities" has also recently gained ground. Such "communities" are, in general, imagined through the essential differences that are shared by groups of citizens. In the language of public policy, each group corresponds to a "segment" that is more or less "vulnerable".

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Brazil was deeply affected by debates surrounding affirmative policies. One result of this was the creation of secretariats within Ministries, at several governmental levels, targeting particular “segments” of the population. Thus, the demand for transversality, still somewhat digressive, has gained ground among managers, academics and activists. For some of the actors within the LGBT movement, the idea that we have reached a limit has been gaining ground as well. These actors posit that it is not enough to add letters to acronyms or change the order of those letters: changing the movement’s name does not magically override gender asymmetries and does not lead lesbians, *travestis*, transsexuals or bisexuals to the position of “equals” within the movement. Ultimately, within the universe of acronyms there are internal power struggles and hierarchies that often clash with the aims of promoting equality, both within and outside the movement.

While the demand for “transversality” might suggest a critique of the essentialist, stable and homogeneous character often attributed to “communities”, the policies developed in the name of these communities and the competition for increasingly scarce resources encourage the emergence of political subjects—that is, of “communities”—that are increasingly specific. It may thus become necessary to avoid the traps that are present in adopting essentialist stances in which political subjects are understood as stable, homogenous and given, and in the increasing differentiation of subjects who combine different axes of social differentiation into a “sum of oppressions”.

### **Solidarity: A possible route?**

The creation of a new set of terms for subjects who possess certain desires and erotic practices emerged alongside an entire apparatus for sexuality (Foucault, 1979) during the nineteenth century. Some of the terms developed by this apparatus—“homosexual”, in particular—began to be used both to defend and to limit the rights of concrete subjects. The “homosexual movement” utilized this categorization to demand civil rights, inverting the signals commonly employed by the apparatus and giving them a positive character.

In this article, we briefly traversed the 30 year trajectory of the movement currently known in Brazil as LGBT, within the backdrop of the complex process through which its political subjects have developed among other social actors, especially those linked to the State and the gay market. Moreover, we have sought to contribute to the discussion regarding the development of this movement and its social impact in the context of the transformations that homosexuality—understood as a social locus—has gone through during the last few decades in Brazil.

There have been many advances during this period, but also dilemmas and difficulties. We started our description referring to the great achievement represented by the

National LGBT Conference, but we have also recognized that there are difficulties in advancing demands via the Brazilian legislative system. Partial acceptance of LGBT by the Judiciary, although significant, has not gone beyond the decisions taken by judges or in localities deemed “progressive”. Remarkable initiatives have been undertaken, such as the development and strengthening of LGBT parliamentary groups, the development and submission of bills, and the establishment of directives for professional associations that struggle against the pathologization of (and discrimination against) LGBTs. There has also been a very strong conservative reaction in Brazil during this period, however, which has been expressed in a hybrid language that combines elements of a religious fundamentalist discourse and dislocated fragments of academic or activist discourses. This movement aims at generating a moral panic centered on portrayals of “pedophile homosexuals” who either “choose” or want to get rid of their “perversion”.

Beyond these advances and difficulties, there are some dilemmas and challenges that are inherent to political action itself, which we will cover in more detail in our conclusions below, and which are certainly common to other fields of social and political action.

While the possibility of political action develops within a pre-configured field that includes other social actors (and which needs to become intelligible in this field) the paradox between equality and difference presents itself as a constant dilemma. How can one deal with inequalities that encourage the idea of differences without encouraging sectarianism, barring the formation of alliances with other political subjects? How can one treat difference without seeing it in an essentialist and static mode which contributes to new forms of normatization and exclusion? How can one avoid demands for recognition of “specificities” resulting in a process of “infinite segmentation”? How to achieve recognition, avoiding the logic of a “sum of oppressions”, when differences are seen in an essentialist and rigid manner? How to position oneself in a context in which evaluating and affirming the degree of a political subject’s legitimation (and its demands) on the basis of the number of boxes it “ticks off” on a list of common vulnerabilities? How to deal with the differences that develop in the universe of acronyms (gays vs. lesbians, homosexuals vs. bisexuals, sexual orientation vs. gender identity, *travestis* vs. transsexuals) without restricting the movement’s ability to act or contributing to its fragmentation, meanwhile avoiding turning a blind eye to hierarchies and inequalities?

In this field, in which “shifting borders” and “permeability” are evoked in reference to political actors traditionally thought of as separate and playing different roles, other dilemmas emerge. How to maintain the balance between proximity—facilitated by activists and technicians sharing an increasingly similar profile—and differentiation, which is necessary when referring to terms such as “social control”? What limits and potentialities evolve when we reflect on the permeability that characterizes many of the relationships forged between the movement and the State? On the other hand, how do we analyze the activities of a sexuality-related movement that accesses its “bases”

through spaces regulated by the market? How do we deal with the fact that, besides challenging the meaning of categories such as *gay* or *lesbian*, the market interferes directly in the constitution and diffusion of these identity categories?

Moreover, such questions combine with others against the backdrop of the configuration that the LGBT movement has assumed in Brazil, the processes of production of political subjects and the challenges and impasses that have emerged in recent decades. How is this subject informed by categories that originate in the vocabulary of public policies or in the strategies of the segmented market? How does it react to increasing accusations from religious fundamentalists? What is the political price of such reactions?

In this article, we have attempted to develop an analysis permeated by the above questions, based on the Brazilian literature regarding the topic. We argue that these impasses cannot be overcome by simple solutions and that solutions should not be seen as mere reflections of theoretical trends, since they respond to local contexts and demands that are necessarily connected to international processes.

The expansion of a modern classificatory system, the proliferation of categories observed in spaces of sociability and leisure in the composition of the movement's political subjects and the paradoxes related to the connection between equalities and differences seem, however, to allow us to bring together our analysis and that of certain feminist theorists that have faced parallel processes in other contexts (Butler, 2003; Brah, 2006; Haraway, 2004; Scott, 2005). Challenged by the critique developed by black women, lesbians and women of various ethnic and national backgrounds regarding the universality of "woman" as a subject and the idea that the same "oppression" is shared by all women, feminist theorists have generated analysis that may add to ours regarding the challenges faced by the LGBT movement.

A first step which needs to be taken is the denaturalization of the idea that political subjects simply describe given essences. We must recognize that any and all political subjects are constructed in specific contexts (Butler, 2003, 1998; Brah, 2006; Haraway, 2004). It is not a question of refuting the categories that refer to the movement's subjects, since these are necessary for political action. Demonstrations, legislative actions, or demands for public policy must be made in the name of specific subjects. The question is to remain alert to the inclusions, exclusions and possible limitations that are inherent within the everyday process of bringing these subjects and their demands into the public space. This awareness allows us to look at the movement's subjects in ways that are open to inclusion, embracing new and different demands and challenging hierarchies.

Another contribution highlights the need to understand how different axes of social differentiation and the sources of inequality are combined, recognizing that power and inequalities are not always linked by a sum of the processes (Brah, 2006;

Haraway, 2004). This implies understanding that “communities” or “segments” are not homogeneous, but are constituted and permeated by other “communities”. It also implies that differences should not be understood in an essential and rigid way. It is not a question of contesting the feeling of fraternity or the political need to group and make visible subjects that think of themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, *travesti* or transsexual. It is, rather, to emphasize the politically contingent character of “community”, since fraternity may at any moment—and through the equally legitimate needs of those who are limited—be reconstructed in terms of different axes of differentiation.

Finally, we would like to point out, following Joan Scott (2005), that in positioning equality/difference at opposite poles, we lose sight of their interconnections and we cease to recognize them as interdependent concepts in constant tension within a political process in which identities and the terms of difference between identities are negotiated. Following Avtar Brah (2006), we need to urgently face the complex and necessary task of identifying the specificities of “particular oppressions”, understanding their connections with other forms of oppression and thus unfolding possibilities for the construction of a *politics of solidarity*, while avoiding ranking different causes or allowing specific political subjects to become vulnerable through isolation or internecine strife.

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