

DOSSIER

THE SIGN OF RELATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF JOURNALISTIC NARRATIVES ON THE LGBT COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT - In this article, we present the challenges faced by journalists who interviewed lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders and intersexuals (LGBT) to construct narratives and understand the vulnerability that these people must live with, as well as the listening challenges that this process represents. We present a field investigation based on the method of reporting and interview three journalists, understanding their renditions of reports and books they have written on the issue, and elaborating a discussion on the “Sign of Relation”; in other words, how alterity, complexity and complicity can be achieved in journalistic practice; elements that are capable of stimulating authorship and recognizing the differences and inequalities built around gender and sexuality in our societies.

Key words: Sign of Relation. Narratives. LGBT. Journalistic Practice. Gender.

SIGNO DA RELAÇÃO E OS DESAFIOS DAS NARRATIVAS JORNALÍSTICAS SOBRE AS LGBT

RESUMO - No presente texto, apresentamos os desafios de jornalistas que vão ao encontro de lésbicas, gays, bissexuais, travestis, intersexuais e homens e mulheres transexuais (LGBT) para construir narrativas com o devido respeito e compreensão das dimensões de vulnerabilidade em torno da vida dessas pessoas e os desafios de escuta que esse processo representa. Apresentamos uma investida de campo, por meio do método da reportagem, na qual assinalamos as interpretações de três jornalistas sobre seus livros-reportagem com temática LGBT para elaborar uma discussão sobre o “Signo da Relação”, isto é, quais são os caminhos possíveis para alcançar alteridade, complexidade e complicidade na prática jornalística, elementos capazes de estimular a autoria e o devido reconhecimento das diferenças e desigualdades construídas em torno do gênero e da sexualidade em nossas sociedades.

Palavras-chave: Signo da Relação. Narrativas. LGBT. Prática Jornalística. Gênero.

SIGNO DE LA RELACIÓN Y LOS DESAFÍOS DE LAS NARRATIVAS PERIODÍSTICAS SOBRE LAS LGBT

RESUMEN - En este artículo, presentamos los desafíos de periodistas que van al encuentro de lesbianas, gays, bisexuales, travestis, intersexuales y hombres y mujeres transexuales (LGBT) para construir narrativas con el debido respeto y comprensión de las dimensiones de vulnerabilidad alrededor a la vida de esas personas y los desafíos de escucha que este proceso representa. Partimos de una investidura de campo, por medio del método del reportaje, en la que señalamos las interpretaciones de tres periodistas sobre sus libros-reportaje con temática LGBT para elaborar una discusión sobre el "Signo de la Relación", o sea, cuáles son los caminos posibles para alcanzar alteridad, complejidad y complicidad en la práctica periodística, elementos capaces de estimular la autoría y el debido reconocimiento de las diferencias y desigualdades construidas en torno al género y la sexualidad en nuestras sociedades.

Palabras clave: Signo de la Relación. Narrativas. LGBT. Práctica periodística. Género.

Introduction

What strategies and postures would a journalist need to take in order to characterize LGBT¹ people as human beings with personalities, as citizens and significant subjects, and perceive the social meanings of current history? Which conditions allow for the creation of dialogues from the different? In an attempt to address the obstacle of a journalist's personal and relational contact with LGBT people interfering with producing narratives that convey solidarity (a concept that we will discuss later), a Master's level study was developed at the School of Communications and Arts, University of São Paulo (USP) between 2015 and 2017, taking a special look at these issues of authorship and journalistic responsibility as they pertain to LGBT people.

The research drew on the experience of three journalists who have each written reporting books on LGBT people. Attention was paid to the ways in which information was obtained, the commitment of each journalist to understanding the dynamics of the fragility and vulnerability of LGBT life and the narrative elaboration based on LGBT experience and listening. For this, the researcher focused on the elements of senses and the way the reports were built, but also conducted a field investigation through

the methodological subsidies derived from the report. Thus, we will present the dialogues from this study below.

It is important to emphasize that the 'I and You' relationship (Buber, 1982) is an epistemological concern about the journalistic practices in constant research by Cremilda Medina (2003, 2006, 2008, 2016) and other researchers who are members of the Epistemology of the Social Dialogue, a research group with more than 30 years of experience at USP. Medina (2006, 2016) gives us hints that the subtle operation of journalism is not to explain and publicize human events, as this alone does not account for the experience of the Other, but of what can arise, mainly, in the transformative elaboration of the encounter and the experience of being affectionate to the Other.

From the field experience in journalism and communication to the transit of interdisciplinary areas of knowledge and epistemology, the subject-object relation has shifted to the subject-subject².

The concept of the Sign of Relation emerges as a result of this displacement, and, therefore, Cremilda Medina (2006) places an emphasis on the journalistic capacity to produce mediation-authorship; in other words, to be a professional articulator of multiple voices and historical-cultural meanings. Journalistic work goes beyond disseminating or propagating information and opinions across traditional media and new digital media. The journalist operates in the dynamics of symbolic production, in producing the sign of the relation rather than the sign of disclosure.

Thus, in the task of producing meanings, the contemporary desire for a more diverse journalism that broadens worldviews and articulates different voices without placing subjects, groups and identities in positions of distinction is indispensable. It is necessary to emphasize that journalists carry world interpretations that may be sexist, racist and discriminatory towards LGBT people in the same way that other social subjects do, but journalists elaborate transformative narratives with an emphasis on unique experiences while intertwining a dialogue with collective contexts (Gonçalves, 2017).

The methodological experience of reporting and dialoguing with journalists producing contemporary meanings about LGBT is shared here. (*In the authorship of the books "The art of weaving the present" [A arte de tecer o presente] (1973), in co-authoring with Paulo Roberto Leandro, and "The art of weaving the present, narrative and quotidian" [A arte de tecer o presente, narrativa e cotidiano] (2003),*

a methodology, a worldview and a stylistic of the authorship in the interpretative reporting were constructed).

In the dialogue with the authors we identified, as indicated in the text by bold font, the notions and obstacles that emerge in the journalistic work facing the problems of gender. Therefore, it becomes possible to construct readings on the challenges of weaving stories about generalized subjects, subjects with a perspective which places them in destinies of poverty, vulnerability, restriction of fundamental rights and violence from other bodily uses, from the recognition of self to the exploitation of the affective-sexual desire.

Dialogues on journalistic authorship and gender

In August 2016, after a visit to Rio de Janeiro during the Olympic Games, I went to Recife, Pernambuco where I met with Fabiana Moraes, the author of *The birth of Joicy: Transexuality, journalism and the limits between reporter and character [O nascimento de Joicy: Transexualidade, jornalismo e os limites entre repórter e personagem]* (Moraes, 2015).

In this book, Fabiana puts together a series of reports she had previously presented to the newspaper *Jornal do Commercio (JC)* describing the life experience of Joicy Melo da Silva, a transsexual woman from Alagoinhas, a poor area of Pernambuco state, who had genital re-adjustment surgery (neovaginoplasty) at the Clinics Hospital of Recife.

My conversation with Fabiana took place on August 9, 2016, in her house in Espinheiro, Recife. In addition to being a journalist, Fabiana is also a sociologist from the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE). She has worked as a special reporter for the *JC* and is currently working as a professor of Social Communication at UFPE where she conducts studies on poverty, celebrities and visibility. Her book was awarded the Esso Prize of Reporting and was a finalist for the Jabuti, the most-respected literary award in Brazil.

We began to reflect on the intricacies of what it means today to construct sensitive narratives about fragile groups and on subjects that are not recognized within Brazilian journalistic circles.

After reading her report there were two movements that Fabiana Moraes clearly experienced in relation to Joicy: 1) Understanding the fragilities of the lives of transsexuals, recognizing

the poverty and the precariousness of the life of a human being and, apart from her role as journalist, helping her to buy food and pay medical bills. 2) At the same time, she had to understand that Joicy did not offer a proportional return to her. At many points during the relationship, Joicy discouraged professional contact and overcame ethical and intimate barriers through accusations that the journalist would have profited from her life.

Because of Joicy's behavior, such as moments where Joicy spoke her mind regardless of whether that meant the journalist's feelings would be hurt or whether it was unfair, Fabiana created a definite distance. However, the media progression from a story to a book, and now to a documentary, has created mechanisms which do not allow the reporter to produce a happier life for the transsexual, something which Joicy continuously mentioned in phone calls and messages.

— It is something I worry about because we are responsible, especially when you were in the person's house for nine or ten days with a team of nine people. It is attention all the time. Suddenly, you leave, you go away. It is a feeling we have with our characters. We approach them, talk to them and then say goodbye. You rarely see them again. It is a conflict that every journalist or researcher goes through when dealing with people, yet at the same time, I cannot escape it. In fact, the attention we give her, and the way she reiterates and repeats her name in a media fashion is something she can appropriate and use to benefit her life, but it turns out that she ends up undermining all her relationships. She establishes a very utilitarian relationship.

In addition to Joicy, and staying with the topic of transsexuality, Fabiana has produced narratives on other groups. In 2010, she wrote a story on transvestites in Recife. The text was titled "Talk to Them" [Fale com Elas] and accompanied the daily life of transvestites. She approaches subjects ranging from the difficulties of being laughed at on the streets and prohibited from using public toilets, to engaging with t-lovers; men who prefer to have relationships with transvestites.

— **There are classic mistakes in this story regarding transsexual women, transvestites and the differentiations of these identities.** Everything we know we have learned in recent years, the information has become more democratized, as well the errors in here [in the report, *The Birth of Joicy*]. From that moment on, **it has become very striking to me, and still is, that there is a body that is questioned**, there is an existence that is in question.

As for transsexual women, transvestites and transsexual men, I kept thinking about this matter of the apparent simple choice you make between being something or not.

Social rejection of the transgender body was something Fabiana Moraes recognized, and was also the motivation for her to write a story about Joicy. In Fabiana's words, it was disquieting to realize how differences are judged and punished. This is what happens with a fat body and a colored body. A fat body is associated with laziness and disease, and the skin is associated with deeper aspects of Brazil, such as slavery and the process of miscegenation.

— With "Talk to Them" [Fale com Elas], there was something I had wanted to do for a long time which was just to watch a transvestite walk down the street, observe the surroundings in relation to her. I wanted to understand what happens every day at certain moments during this walk. In this story, I did just that. I went on a bus with Claudia, I walked around with her, and sometimes I just followed her around. It was awful! Not in her neighborhood where she was known, but in other places. In the city center, she said that people called her Satan, that there were people who approached her with a Bible in hand and started reading it in an attempt to stop her from being that way. She was questioned all the time. What is it like to be questioned all the time about who you are and who you want to be? It is very embarrassing and occurs constantly.

For Fabiana Moraes, the stories about Joicy and other transvestites were comparable to anthropological and sociological experiments: they help to understand how recognition of social problems occurs; in this case the social problem is a gender one and something that motivates her to produce other works:

— **The writing of both "Talk to Them" [Fale com Elas] and *The Birth of Joicy [O Nascimento de Joicy]* was about analyzing why we, as a society, have such tremendous difficulty relating to transgender people despite the whole discourse of modernity.** For me, it was something much more than writing about women. **I write about women constantly. What I realize, especially with transvestites, is this rejection of the male. How do you reject your penis? Not just the penis, but how do you deny your physiognomy, your dress code, all the codes of masculinity? How do you change that for being a woman?** Being a woman is the big question, it is the great shame. How do you adhere to the feminine code? The feminine is not good;

the masculine is good. **Discussing Joicy and transgender women means discussing women; they are women who experience specific violence, neither bigger nor smaller, but certainly more violent.**

Fabiana Moraes' next question was about the recent controversy over identity categories (cisgender/transgender) and the perspective of localized knowledge and speech. How is it possible to work with the otherness and the voice of the Other in journalism without restricting the right of speech of those who experience vulnerability?

— We are in a very pedagogical phase and have to be patient. For example, Daniela Andrade and Neon Cunha³ [at the book release] came to me and said “you wrote about the biological woman”. Today this is a term under discussion. All these are disputed speeches, categories that circulate and change; biological woman is a term that medicine uses and now we are questioning medicine as well. I told the audience at the book release that there was a term there that is debated today, that Neon and Daniela called my attention to it, and I think they are right. Some feminists do not believe the term ‘biological woman’ is a legitimate one, and others believe it is.

Fabiana then illustrated that the discourses on transsexuality are not cohesive. **The interpretation and recognition that Joicy has of transsexuality is similar to what some transsexual people have with genitals, in the idea of surgical intervention, what can be considered violent and normative for other transgender experiences.**

— There is a video of Joicy on the website which published the story⁴ asking the doctor if she would have a clitoris. The surgery was scheduled for two days after and I thought it would be rescheduled due to the lack of mutual understanding between her and the doctor. It is a very interesting conversation. I recorded it: “They said I was going to have a clitoris, I want to be a normal woman.” I realized that it is a transgender speech that goes against the idea of the transsexual, even against the definition of trans women who have more access to information, who are in debates at universities, which is not her case. **Joicy does not deal with these issues. She articulates other gender references of a binary, heterosexual transsexuality, normative in this sense, but not in terms of the presentation of the body.** She says “I’m trans, I’m trans” and wears shorts and short hair. It is very ambiguous for our notion of a transgender woman.

The journalist suggests that current debates about gender, race and sexuality are embodied in subjects, the only ones who can know and speak for themselves.

— What I fear is the embodiment of discourse. If suddenly only indigenous people can talk about indigenous issues, or if only blacks can talk about blackness, then we will be playing along with those people who want to diminish rights, who want to hinder access. By this, I do not mean that we cannot disagree, because without dissent there are no improvements, but at the same time, it is dangerous in this political moment. **Of course, I understand that the transgender woman experience is not my experience. I am not talking about her, but with her. I hate the idea of giving a voice. I do not give voice to anyone.**

It is considered, in the Sign of Relation, the decisive meaning in the experience of the subjects in relation, often, in conflict. Only the observation-experience can account for the encounter / mismatch of the subjects of the art of weaving the present.

Fabiana continues with the idea that a social mediator could be someone who holds a position of advantage in revealing and knowing the speech of the Other.

— **I do not want anyone to speak on my behalf, but I want people to be supportive** of me being a woman, of me being black and born in the northeast of Brazil. How can I give this all up? We can't know the pain of the Other, we can only come close, share and help. This is not charity, it is politics all the time. I do not think Joicy needs me to be her mother, to take care of her. **To look at Joicy and to talk about Joicy is political. It means bringing a respectful and thorough look. It means looking at her as a complete human being, not as folklore. This is the approach I have, even if it does not always work.**

I question what leads her to build the idea of subjectivity journalism:

— I think of subjective journalism, to make room for the goal, which I prefer to think of in the subjective to understand the limits of my relationship with the character.

She goes on criticizing the behaviors stimulated by values in the journalistic community:

— Prior to my PhD, I was already bothered by the superficiality in writing, by the ways in which the journalist fosters and reproduces prejudices. That was something that moved me a lot. **One thing**

that journalism does is report on stories that matter, as a rule, those of the Olympians. One needs to suffer and to fight a lot to in order to obtain something, which I think is a pity for people of color, for women, and for transgenders. I have to destroy my emotional, my psychological and my physical to get to something in which I am recognized. What kind of speech is this that we encourage so much? It is something that casts many people aside.

At the end of the interview with Fabiana Moraes, the journalist talks about how writing the story about Joicy had an effect on how her colleagues thought about transvestites and transgender men and women:

— **Back when I started writing about transvestites I realized some changes, not because I was writing about transvestites, but how I was writing about transvestites. I did not want to portray transvestites as prostitutes, some of them are, but I did not want to show that side. I wanted it to be from another perspective**, a place that the middle class might understand. This new place causes a short circuit, from a place where it usually appears. It is very easy to see the transvestite in the aesthetic and media place given to them. I really like to mess with this. What happens when they are not shown like this? Once you do that, it affects the way fellow journalists see it. How they appear is fundamental. Just appearing does not say anything, since they can appear in a totally distorted way. How representation is made is essential if these issues are to be overcome.

Fabiana Moraes ends by saying that the journalistic work, when carried out with interest and care, can create deeper approaches, rework world views and, therefore, observe potentials which have yet to be practiced:

— For a long time, we were taught to write in order to maintain the status quo and the stability of thought, not the opposite. We all grew up with imagery and discursive repertoires, journalists are no exception. The process of questioning why things are the way they are is a recent one. It takes a lot of work to break barriers; you are questioned inside and outside the newsroom. **I strongly believe that this book is not just about Joicy, it is about journalism, and about how journalism treats what is understood as different. It is about my limits as a person and as a reporter. It is about my experience with a transsexual woman.**

...

On February 3, 2017, I had the opportunity to schedule a meeting with writer and journalist Karla Lima. She was born in 1971. She had been in advertising for 16 years and graduated in journalism at the age of 40. However, the world of writing has always been close to her; she has been a reviewer, adult literacy teacher and reporter. Today, Karla has five books published on her trajectory which began in 2006 with her wife Pya Pera (Patricia Yury Assumpção).

The reason for the meeting was to talk about the book *It is a Pleasure - Voices of Diversity* [*Muito Prazer – Vozes da Diversidade*] (Lima, 2013), in which the author profiled 23 people in 20 stories. The purpose of the work is to present the lesbian visibility in Brazil throughout different periods and contexts. It is a panel of voices which, apart from different sexual orientations, also come from different locations, generations, professions, social classes, religious beliefs and political beliefs.

Our conversation occurred in a cafeteria in a famous North American coffee shop chain on Avenida João Jorge Saad, in the south zone of São Paulo. I was greeted by Karla's beautiful smile. Her gray hair (it was a mix of white and dark) was swaying in the wind. With warm coffees in hand, we began our conversation:

After telling me about her trajectory and how her decision to study journalism came to her late in life, Karla explains how she came up with the title of the book:

— What motivated me to write the book *It is a Pleasure* [*Muito Prazer*] **was the possibility that I could share the stories of others.** What we realized was that there are very few titles directed to the LGBT public, and an overwhelming majority of them were tragedies, stories where homosexuality is punished with death, stories of murder, suicide, or social death; there was so much sadness, so much misery. That is fine. These works were a reflection of the time in which they were produced, but we did not have many references of stories written by and for successful, happy homosexuals where people are socially productive, integrated into the family, and as common as other citizens.

She further added that the journalistic format contributed to finding and exposing other voices and experiences similar to those that her wife lived:

— The journalistic report that was born from this work is the result of the **desire to enlarge our history, which could be taken by someone of ill will as well as taken as an exception. What**

we wanted to say is ‘no’. There is still discrimination, there is still a lot of violence, and there are still millions of problems, especially among the more religious, less-educated and more peripheral layers. However, not only are both of us happy, well resolved, accepted and well integrated, but also there is an entire population that feels the same way. Let’s show that.

Later in the conversation, Karla Lima points out that the relationship between journalist and protagonist reflects their responsibilities with the Other, which is not always recognized by those who decide to tell their story:

— There was a person from Rio de Janeiro who I interviewed and it was sensational. I spent an entire afternoon and a half an evening at her house. In the end, after she received the first draft of the chapter, she decided she did not want to participate in the book. It was extremely frustrating. You go to another state, you she welcomes you in her home, she sees the tape recorder, she gives her consent, and then she speaks; she opens herself up in a dream interview, you know what I mean? Then you write the chapter with that raw material, there was no information invented, there was no artificial fact. The person reads the chapter and does not like what she sees there. I found that to be irresponsible on her part. There had been financial costs, energy and emotional distress.

— With those who did participate in the book I had no difficulty. They were extremely kind, receptive and friendly. I am very grateful to all of them. I did not keep in touch with all of them, but my gratitude remains. They all liked it very much. All these people approved their chapters before I published them. I do not know if where you studied journalism someone told you this, they did not tell me, and I discovered a lot after graduation, I discovered that **it is not less journalistic to submit the material to the interviewee**. Of course, we are not talking about investigative journalism here. This type of biographical journalism is endorsed by *The Paris Review*, in which the person profiled approves all profiles. **That is also why I got into this book, because I did not want to get upset with people, I did not want to embarrass them.**

Throughout the story, Karla brings to the reader the mosaic of meanings and recognitions that distinct women give to the affective-sexual experience of being with another woman. I ask how she sees this game of identities.

The awareness of identity pluralities stems from an

experience of contact with the Other, and his or her culture, history and circumstance. This challenge is put before the object-object authoritarian mentality; hence the laboratory of the sign of relation, subject-subject.

— On one hand, I do not believe that being a public person compels anyone to raise any flag. On the other hand, and with the same intensity, I believe that if you are a public figure, you are in a privileged position to do something in favor of the group to which you belong. It ends up being a weird omission to hide behind the statement “I do not raise flags”. Especially if, besides being public, these people are in positions of power. And what I mean by power is, if they have fans then they are artists, if they have voters then they are politicians. They are in a position to do something for the community, and the fact that they neglect that bothers me although I understand and respect their right to do nothing. Some of the people I interviewed were very much attached to militancy; of course, they are the first to talk about the importance of declaring themselves homosexual, of acting in a public way consistent with what they are in their private lives. There is also the case of an interviewee who says that for her the issue of sex is very fluid. She does not necessarily feel lesbian, but she makes a point of declaring herself lesbian because she understands that this is an important political position. Note that she is not a militant, she only has a militant awareness, other people have a great history in militancy and from them I did not expect anything different. They always declare themselves, even before they are questioned, which I always do, too. **I understand that this is a political position. I understand that there is importance in this gesture.** I make a point of declaring myself in context or without context as some of the interviewees do. Others do not think it is so relevant.

I asked Karla how she conveys the idea of bonding with the protagonist of the narrative to the writing process.

— Listening is something that interests me. I do not have to make an effort. The interest I have for the person I am interviewing naturally transpires in textual production. It is not a case of thought, although I am not always an empathic person. Interviewing people is a context that makes me very malleable, supportive, very “I am all ears”. This is born of genuine interest.

Could the author's proximity to experience help?

— For me, **being LGBT does not increase or decrease**

the empathy I may have with LGBT respondents. Being a woman does not mean talking to a man or a woman is easier or more difficult, just as me being of German descent does not change how I interview Germans. The other categories I may fit into and characteristics I have that I may share with the interviewee do not bring me closer to him or her. **What makes me approach them is my interest in what they have to say, whoever they may be. The trajectories are so unique,** I may have this in common with someone, but the rest is so different.

I am intrigued by whether the lack of familiarity does not end up resulting in disrespect for the Other. Karla Lima helps me think that perhaps disrespect is more related to the lack of being prepared for dialogue, and not for not knowing the perspective of the Other:

— **The question may not be strangeness or familiarity, but perhaps it is about how willing you are to plunge into that universe.** Familiarity does not enhance my empathy. I would not find it aggressive for a male and straight reporter to ask me “what’s it like being a lesbian?” I would understand that 1) he is admitting he does not know anything about it, which is a good start, and 2) that he wants to hear my opinion. I sometimes think people get too fussy about things that are not that bad. **It is normal to question strangeness, what matters is how you put it in the text, what level of welcome and support you are offering to the story that the person was willing to share with you.**

...

The opportunity to discuss the work of *Between the cross and the rainbow: The complex relation between Christians and homoaffectivity* [Entre a cruz e o arco-íris: A complexa relação entre os cristãos e a homoafetividade] (César, 2013), by the writer Marília de Camargo César, took place on April 7, 2017, at the headquarters of the newspaper *Valor Econômico*, the journalist’s workplace, on Francisco Matarazzo Avenue in Água Branca, São Paulo. It was a gray and rainy day in the capital of São Paulo, the climate and the option for a conversation in the meeting room of the economic newspaper would suggest that everything would be extremely impersonal, which was not the case.

In the book, the journalist produces an investigation about the situation of Brazilian Christian homosexuals and shows how churches, theologians, psychology, science and politics are treating

these people or how they are omitting themselves in relation to them in some cases.

Born in São Paulo, Marília works as an assistant editor, she is responsible for special subjects in the areas of business, culture and religion. She is married, has two daughters and wrote the first book in 2009, called *Wounded in the name of God [Feridos em nome de Deus]*. Marília is evangelical and decided to write about religious abuses after witnessing some of her friends' experiences in her former congregation. Without generalizations, because there are good pastors and good churches, she investigated emotional abuses committed by shepherds with radical meddling in the lives of the faithful, who take place in the wake of the fast-growing population of evangelicals in Brazil.

Then, also in the reporting format, Marília produced the biography *Marina: Life for a cause [Marina: A vida por uma causa]*, in 2010. The book tells the trajectory from the rubber field in Acre, until the conversion to the evangelical faith of the ex-presidency running candidate, in 2010 and 2014, Marina Silva.

— When she was a candidate, LGBT activists began to question her about gay marriage and the more liberal agenda that always comes up when someone is running for president. The media gave prominence to this and indicated that it was against it. What happens is that Marina separates things; she says that she is in favor of civil union and equal rights, but that the churches should not be forced to anything, since the State is secular. I began to pay attention to this debate and I had never been interested in this homoaffective question. I began to wonder if there were too many gays inside the churches, if they could open up and tell who they are. Is there an area of freedom? Would they be well received?

The subject is identified as a taboo within the churches and, in the face of the publisher's concern, followed by a negotiation; the subject became a reporting book project.

— It is a topic that the churches are not prepared to discuss. There is a slight opening to the theme of the book today. Last week, I was in a church, the Baptist Convention of Piauí, nothing more traditional than that, and they invited me to talk about it. What happens is that inside the churches you learn and read Bible passages that have to do with homosexual practice. These are always passages which declare in all letters that homosexual practice is a sin. You learn only one sentence and you know nothing about the constitution

of that person. Then you repeat this speech for the rest of your life. **As I am curious and I identify with issues that involve human suffering – and there is much suffering, a lot of rejection, a lot of exclusion. This interests me as a person and as a writer. I wanted to dive into this universe and get out of the theological question.**

Continuing our dialogue, the journalist says that the strategy to start the investigation was to consult some reliable religious leaders. Pastors indicated psychologists who often receive, within the evangelical public, people who had some degree of discomfort or question about homosexuality.

Among the professionals, psychologists who did not deal with “gay cure” therapies were heard, but otherwise, and among the patients, Marília found the characters who shared their life and faith trajectories in reporting. Finally, the journalist went to meet and listen to people in the inclusive denominations and North American pastors who have been discussing this agenda for a longer time in the United States.

— The people I talked to were very open to talking, perhaps due to the indication. In some cases, I realized I had a little trap ahead. Depending on the person, he or she had already elaborated his or her experience of conversion and the life he or she was leading now. Apparently, the person was trying to give me an agenda so I could reproduce it in the book. It is something that after a lot of reporting time, you have a greater sensitivity to knowing when the person wants to use you to reproduce a speech.

The journalist emphasizes, in more than one moment, how much exploring the subject in a reporting book helped her to settle rooted prejudices:

The research process that is dedicated to cultural reading involves, as this approach reveals, the discovery of the Other and the deconstruction of the preconceptions that govern the “formatting” of the researcher’s/journalist’s culture.

— All this work was a great discovery. People will only want to know something when they have a close person who is homosexual. Most people are indifferent. It is not for me to judge, anyone does what one wants with one’s sexuality. Apart from radical religious, fundamentalists who have an obsession and even persecute homosexuals, most people do not care much. Every interview, every book I read, everything was new. I was surprised

many times, even when I went into an inclusive church. I imagined they were people who had started attending because they went there out of curiosity. There I discovered that most came from other churches, from denominations from where they were expelled or despised within the church.

Marília agrees that **part of the access to the Other comes from the development of competences such as a curious look, a childlike look, which allows to hear much more and to know the Other instead of making use of frames from ideological questions**, which happens a lot in the media, where one leaves with a thesis in the head ready to collect statements that prove it.

— **I approached this subject like a child, with an open heart, without defense.** Like a child asking the dumbest questions. This is how the great scientists discover the great things. Determined to learn and to know what was happening. I consider that I did a good research that involves several aspects: the historical, the sociological, the psychological and the theological. Of course, **it is not a conclusive thing, not at all, but I think I managed to have a nice result.** If I wanted to work on some kind of ideology, I would just edit a few sentences. It is easy to do that.

In our conversation, Marília debates whether sexuality is a social construction. We indicate that part of the interpretations of gay cure goes through the recognition that sexuality is a construction and could be deconstructed. If the defense of faith says that sexuality is a construction, could not all forms of sexuality be redefined? The ex-gay's existence may be symmetrical to the ex-heterosexual's experience. However, Marília alerts me to what her interlocutors say:

— What I saw were homosexuals who were genuinely converted. They had a very remarkable experience with Jesus and from that moment on, they understood that the Bible says that homosexual practice does not do any good for man. What is sin? It is all that is not cool for you. What happens is that the person tries to abstain from it and, for that, the person lives as if he or she were heterosexual. That is what I found, that is what they told me. “Marília, I live a heterosexual life, I married, I have a son, I have a daughter. This is my position. I believe this is to be consistent with my faith. I want to live a coherent life, but if you ask me if I am heterosexual, I will respond I am homosexual.”

Marília de Camargo César makes a point of demarcating that her work is journalistic. In this way, the work done in the book, and in events as a speaker, is not about imposing a gender perspective or defending the position of LGBT movements. The journalist indicates that it is fundamental to recognize that the debate is complex and that we live in a context in which inclusive theology and the new family configurations are great discussions of society.

— **Each one reads the book in the perspective of what is inside of them.** Folks that are more militant read the book and said something like this: “You are defending people who live a life pretending they are heterosexual. This is what religion does; it annihilates people and makes them have a false life”. Radicalizing, you are not respecting the experience the person had with Christ and the rule they see in the Bible was a stronger experience than the practice they may have. That was more shocking in their lives than sexuality. You are talking about a conversion, a spiritual fulfillment that perhaps you have never experienced before. That to the person is much more important.

In the conversation with Marília, I become uneasy about the fact that LGBT militants are radicals. The journalist argues that there is radicalism on the part of all rejected social groups, as if a reaction of intolerance on the part of the weakened groups occurred.

— That is what I say in the book: the extremes meet. The subject of militancy is also intolerant. They do not accept that a person can convert and that the experience of faith is superior to the one of sexuality. They are extremes on both sides.

I tell Marília that, in reading the book, I was surprised by the statement that the LGBT movement is radical.

— This is what I saw, what I realized was the fact is that these excluded people, so persecuted, are filled with anger, in a defensive position. They are angry with the other who wants to oppose them with another idea. You spit in the face of Bolsonaro⁵. You cannot balance, hold on. What I think is: I disagree, but I can keep my peace. This balance is lacking in both parts for different reasons.

There is an interpretation of the prominence of intolerant political figures that has introduced a confrontational discourse between LGBT and evangelicals so that in the contemporary world it is growing among LGBT people to find people who define faith as irrationality and intolerance.

At the end of our conversation, Marília says that if it were

possible to do a new edition of the book, she would include in the report a chapter with the perspective of the spouses of those who have lived part of life as homosexuals and, currently, are in heterosexual affective relationships. It would tell the dilemmas and acceptance of the wives of ex-gays and husbands of ex-lesbians. She concludes with comments on what strategies she applies to tell a meaningful story:

— **The good reporter hears what the person is not saying and is often the most important in the story. It is a look, a gesture, a speech with special meaning.** I have always worked in newspapers and you do not have that space there. The materials are small, you have to be objective, and that is all, especially in economic journalism that has to deal with figures, with how much a company has earned, the percentage of growth, how many people a company is hiring or is firing, how much it is investing. It is all very objective. The space I have to exercise my sensitivity is the book. Unfortunately, today there is no such space in journalism. When something comes out, usually on Sunday's special issue, you are delighted to read. **The journalist's role is to convey to the reader what he or she is seeing and what he or she cannot see, not only to describe data.** Unfortunately, we no longer have that kind of space in daily basis journalism. It shifted to literature.

In contemporary narratives, no matter the technical or technological support, traditional or digital, the authorship of social mediation (journalism, social communication) is inspired by art (literature and other expressions), ethical complicity and aesthetic creation. It only differs in reference to the contemporary real.

Final words

The three cases provide us with subsidies to show that journalism plays a fundamental role in the ways in which we access the recognition of sexual and gender diversity, of who can be read and recognized as living beings worthy, respectable and with access to the same rights. Journalism leads narratively ways of knowing and understanding human existences; in other words, if gender is conditioned to the norms and the exercise of re-elaboration of gender reality (Butler, 2003, 2009; Preciado, 2011, 2014), then

journalism is able to indicate which realities will be intelligible (limit of comprehension and insertion) and with what and how it will be possible to cultivate solidarity. Thus, when writing journalistic content about LGBT there emerge some resources and open notions, as indicated in bold in the speeches of the authors of the reporting books, regarding the process of relationship between journalist and social protagonist:

- The desire to exercise the plural gaze in everyday life as a way of understanding social inequalities through the search for diversity and the crossing of different markers of difference (race /ethnicity, nation/locality, social class, gender, generation/age, disability).

- Take care to identify that the LGBT population and other people who experience non-hegemonic experiences of gender and sexuality share experiences of injury and experiences that impede the free expression and use of the body.

- Look beyond the identity armor, hoping to access other experiences and complexities, at the same time, being supportive and respectful of the gender identity and the sexual orientation of the Other, through the use of the name and the other forms of treatment that the person it claims for oneself.

- The construction of a sincere and sensitive dialogue, without invading intimacy, without judging, diminishing or disqualifying the experience of the LGBT person, that is, allowing oneself to know the Other, to listen and to dialogue, as a means to disarm ideologies, beliefs and dogmas.

- The attention of checking the content with the LGBT people involved and asking if the content contributes in a positive way to the recognition of the dilemmas of that person and to the respect and dignity of the LGBT population.

- The critical posture of showing that there is no normal, natural or legitimate sexuality, that heterosexuality itself is a construction of meanings that begins many times before birth.

For us, it seems fundamental to add that in many of the existing impasses between journalists and LGBT people, part of the inefficiency of communication is due to the hypertrophy of gendered conceptions as cultural values and worldviews held by the journalist and those surrounding them, in a way that these conceptions affect the organizational and hierarchical structures of the company and the journalistic content itself. But it is not only that. It is also due to the capacity of the permeability of the Other and the deconstruction of a

sign of disclosure. However, the journalist is not born done. Paths of ruptures must be traced in order to produce a sensible, solidary and complicit narrative. Journalistic coverage with attention to gender issues means more than producing new content. It is responsible for the tone given to the narratives, the visual aspects, who is writing, who is photographed, who are the sources and the experts consulted. Techniques and manuals do not guide this mentality, but perhaps it is drawn by the sympathetic humility of each reporter who envisages in contact and social listening an inspiring and critical narrative of power relations and inequalities based on relationships and dominant senses given to gender and sexuality.

*This paper was translated by Tariana Brocardo Machado and reviewed by Lee Sharp.

NOTES

- 1 LGBT refers to the group of people marked by experiences of gender and sexuality considered deviant from a compulsory cultural order. Namely, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people and intersex. In this work, the LGBT acronym reunites these and other people whose sexual orientation or gender identity is not imprisoned in the heterosexual matrix applied to the bodies.
- 2 As an exercise in the meeting, the pedagogy of affection and the experience of the relationship, this article presents excerpts demarcated in *Italic* in which there is the presence of the voice of the coauthor and supervisor of the master's researcher, who is Professor Cremilda Medina.
- 3 They are famous trans feminist activists of the Brazil's LGBT movements.
- 4 The last medical appointment before the surgery and the question of the clitoris which are in the video gallery can be seen here: <<http://www2.uol.com.br/JC/especial/joicy/videos.html>>.
- 5 Marília alludes to the episode where Congressman Jean Wyllys (PSOL-RJ) spat at Congressman Jair Bolsonaro (PSC-RJ) during the vote on the admissibility of the impeachment of President Dilma

Rousseff (PT) in 2016. The spit would have been devolved to a homophobic insult that Congressman Jean Wyllys had already heard. It is important to point out that Bolsonaro, in the same vote, paid a tribute to Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, former head of DOI-Codi (the Brazilian government's intelligence and repression organism, the scenario of prisons and torture during the regime inaugurated with the military coup of 1964). Ustra was recognized by the Brazilian courts for committing torture, including that suffered by Dilma Rousseff.

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