



VIII CONGRESSO PORTUGUÊS DE SOCIOLOGIA

40 anos de democracias: progressos, contradições e prospetivas

ÁREA TEMÁTICA: Sexualidade e Género [ST]

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES AND ADHESION TO LGBTQ POLITICS

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Resumo

A presente comunicação é devedora da “grande mudança de paradigma” da história da(s) homossexualidade(s) que desnaturalizou a essência definidora da homossexualidade, abrindo caminho a uma linha inteira de historiografia construcionista e, em particular, a uma sociologia histórica não-linear. A nível metodológico, isto deveria possibilitar uma abordagem historico-sociológica que evitasse projetar sobre o passado as características da “homossexualidade tal como hoje a conhecemos”. Deveria ser antes o presente a ser desnaturalizado, de modo a tornar esta menos destrutivamente presumível, visto que ela é estruturada, não pela sucessão de modelos, mas pela sua irrefletida coexistência. Da desestabilização da noção de modernidade como processo finalista abre-se assim à Sociologia Histórica um horizonte inteiro de possibilidades que projeta uma luz crítica sobre a linearidade das mudanças sociais provocadas pela política LGBTQ. O argumento principal deste texto é que as formas históricas conhecidas de experiência sexual, e as correlativas categorias sexuais – a pederastia, a sodomia, a homossexualidade – longe de constituírem modos extintos de erotismo, permaneceram como Gestalts estruturais que subjazem às identidades LGBT/Queer contemporâneas e que deveriam ser consideradas como estratos históricos sobrepostos que continuam a desempenhar um papel considerável na determinação, tanto da adesão como da resistência à construção das sexualidades *queer* contemporâneas.

Abstract

The present paper stems from the “great paradigm shift” in the history of homosexuality(ies) that radically defamiliarized and denaturalized the continuous, defining essence of homosexuality, thus clearing out the path for the entire line of constructionist historiography that ensued and, namely, for a non-linear sociological historiography. Methodologically, this should enable a historical-sociology approach to avoid projecting onto the past the characteristics of “homosexuality as we know it today”. It is the present that should be denaturalized, to render less destructively presumable ‘homosexuality as we know it today’, since it is structured, not by the supersession of models, but by their unrationalized coexistence instead. An entire horizon of possibilities should thus unfold for Historical Sociology from the destabilization of the notion of modernity as a finalized process and shed a more critical light on the linearity of emancipatory social changes brought about by LGBTQ politics. This paper’s contention is that the known historical forms of sexual experience, and correlative sexual categories – pederasty, sodomy, homosexuality – far from being mere defunct modes of eroticism, have lingered as structural Gestalts underlying contemporary LGBT/queer identities, that should rather be regarded as superimposed historical layers that still play a considerable role in determining either adhesion and/or resistance to the construction of contemporary queer sexualities.

Palavras-chave: “Identidades; Sociologia Histórica; construcionismo; política LGBTQ.”

Keywords: “Identities; Historical Sociology; constructionism; LGBTQ politics”.

1. Theoretical guideposts

The controversy between essentialism and constructionism, somehow forgotten by now, had a particular bearing in gay, lesbian and queer historiography, in which scope it gave rise to questions that still need to be satisfactorily addressed and answered and which recur and re-surface surreptitiously and remain consistent as epistemological issues that are inextricable from the reconstruction of the gay, lesbian and queer historic past. In fact, the theorizing of queer sexualities from the standpoint of contemporary Western sexual realities, identities and forms of experience has produced strongly biased analytical models, thus having seriously jeopardized the historiography of queer sexualities, in that they have obscured the role of historical forces in shaping both pre-modern and modern queer sexualities. Those theoretical models not only tend to relegate to pre-modernity the subjects that do not conform to established definitions of sexual modernity, disqualifying them as archaic or residual, but they also distort, if not outright dismiss, the evolving of past forms of sexual experience into modern ones, based on the assumption that the latter simply erased and replaced the former. The present paper basically purports to sustain the opposite claim.

The point I wish to make is basically indebted to one of the most quoted of Foucault's claims, as well as to the discussions it has brought about: "As defined by the ancient civil and canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. (...) Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault, 1984). Foucault's assertion, in spite of suggesting a whole lot more than it actually explained, thus leaving us with unanswered questions that cannot be solved simply by getting back to whatever Foucault might have actually said or meant, is at the root of what was to be known as the "great paradigm shift" in the history of homosexuality(ies). It radically defamiliarized and denaturalized the continuous, defining essence of homosexuality, thus clearing out the path for the entire line of constructionist historiography that ensued. From then on, it was acquired that the alterity of the past, in Western culture and society, as well as the alterity of non-Western cultures and societies, made up for the contextual background, the basic caution and the guiding criteria of any serious inquiry into the historical forms that (homo)sexuality might have taken in the course of time. Once transposed to the methodological practice, they should enable the historian to acknowledge the inherent instability of sexed subjectivities and thus avoid projecting onto those forms the characteristics of "homosexuality as we know it today".

According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, however, the Foucauldian narrative is one of unidirectional supersession that, by making an overarching point about the complete conceptual alterity of earlier models of same-sex relations, assumes that one model of same-sex relations is simply superseded by another only to drop out of the frame of analysis. In other words, the Foucauldian analysis leaves unanswered the question of how exactly a model is replaced without trace and what mechanisms are at work in such a complete and definite erasure. Furthermore, although the Foucauldian endeavour has provided a rhetorically necessary fulcrum point for the denaturalizing work on the past by constructionist historians, it has somehow exempted the present – i. e.: "homosexuality as we know it today" – from such a denaturalizing and defamiliarizing critical approach. In counterpoint, Sedgwick states that her "first aim is to denaturalize the present, rather than the past – in effect, to render less destructively presumable 'homosexuality as we know it today'" (Sedgwick, 1991, p. 48). Accordingly, her basic counter-argument would be that: "(I)ssues of modern homo/heterosexual definition are structured, not by the supersession of one model and the consequent withering away of another, but instead by the relations enabled by the unrationalized coexistence of different models during the times they do coexist" (Sedgwick, 1991, p. 47). Commenting on Sedgwick, David Halperin acknowledges her claim and quite insightfully translates it into the terms of his own inquiry: "In

other words, what Sedgwick called ‘the unrationalized coexistence of different models’ of homosexual difference in the discourses of homosexuality today is the cumulative effect of a long process of historical overlay and accretion. If, as Sedgwick claimed, our ‘understanding of homosexual definition ... is organized around a radical and irreducible incoherence’, owing to this unrationalized coexistence of different models, it is because we have preserved and retained different definitions of sex and gender from our pre-modern past, despite the logical contradictions among them” (Halperin, 2002, p. 12). In fact, Halperin acknowledges what were Sedgwick’s concerns about the present and converts them into a whole program of inquiry that is grounded on the recognition that: “(T)he definitional incoherence at the core of the modern notion of homosexuality has effectively incorporated – without homogenizing – earlier models of same-sex relations and of sex and gender deviance, models directly in conflict with the category of ‘homosexuality’ that nonetheless absorbed them” (Halperin, 2002, p. 12). Having acknowledged that an entire horizon of research possibilities unfolds from the destabilization of the notion of modernity as a finalized process, Halperin resumes and radicalizes, in a most persuasive manner, the somehow forgotten archeo-genealogical project of a “history of the present” designed by Foucault in his day: “(A) notion of modernity that relegates to pre-modernity all contemporary subjects whose desires do not conform to established definitions of sexual modernity has already confessed its own inability to capture the experience of modernity as such. (...) Claims about the historical specificity of past sexual practices have a disconcerting tendency to deny the existence of contemporary sexual practices that bear some resemblance to supposedly defunct modes of eroticism. They sometimes have the effect of derealizing such contemporary practices by treating them as residual or archaic. Even worse, claims about the modernity of sexuality insinuate that contemporary societies in which other articulations of sexual desire or other sexual categories prevail are backward, less advanced, pre-modern, or primitive” (Halperin, 2002, p. 19).

2. Sexual Experience, Subjectivity, and Identity

My contention is that, in Latin countries for sure, as well as, to a large extent, in Latin-American cultures strongly influenced by Iberian (Spanish and Portuguese) colonization, and arguably in the Western world at large, the known historical forms of sexual experience between males, and correlative sexual categories – pederasty, sodomy, homosexuality – far from being mere defunct modes of eroticism, have lingered as structural Gestalts underlying contemporary LGBT/queer identities. Although they may have emerged consecutively, they did not simply disappear in the same way. Instead of having been simply replaced by the latter, they still play a considerable role in determining either adhesion and/or resistance to the construction of contemporary alternative queer sexualities, and non-normative gender (dis)identifications. Pederasty, sodomy, homosexuality, both as relevant and meaningful categories of inquiry and as forms of sexual experience, respectively construed by Greco-Roman standards of decency, Christian moral theology and modern biomedical power/knowledge relations, should rather be regarded as superimposed historical layers, and, consequently, LGBT/queer identities and forms of experience should be regarded as the more recent layers that retrieve, build upon, revise, re-appropriate and re-shape the preceding ones, but certainly do not abandon them to historical oblivion, as they strive to pursue disruptive forms of sexuality and identity. It must be stressed that, to claim that pederasty, sodomy and homosexuality have lingered as structural Gestalts underlying contemporary LGBT/queer identities, does not amount to say that each of them remains in some odd way untouched, and identical to whatever it could have been in its time, beneath LGBT/Queer forms of sexual experience. It would be a complete nonsense to believe that there is – and to endeavor to retrieve – such a thing as a Greek pederast, a medieval sodomite or a nineteenth-century-medical-textbook-homosexual beneath the contemporary urban gay militant of the affluent industrialized world ... as well as beneath the not least contemporary poorly literate peasant from the destitute rural areas of Southern-Europe and the Mediterranean basin. None of them is closer to, than the other, or more distant from, whatever a Greek pederast, a medieval sodomite or a nineteenth-century homosexual might have been in their time and life, if there has ever been such thing as a clear-cut type of pederast, of sodomite or of homosexual, of course. Therefore, it would be vain – to say the least – to dig below the (thinner or thicker) layer of contemporary LGBT/Queer lifestyles, identities and experiences of sexuality, for a “pederasty as it was known”, a “sodomy as it was experienced” or a “homosexuality as it was lived” that simply are not there: “Bearing this in mind,

it is no longer possible to talk of the possibility of a universalistic history of homosexuality; it is only possible to understand the social significance of homosexual behaviour, both in terms of social response and in terms of individual identity, in its exact historical context. To put it another way, the various possibilities of same-sex behaviour are variously constructed in different cultures as an aspect of wider gender and sexual regulation. The physical acts might be similar, but their social implications are often profoundly different. In our culture homosexuality has become an excoriated experience, severely socially condemned at various periods, and even today seen as a largely unfortunate, minority form by a large percentage of the population. It is this that demands explanation” (Weeks, 1989, p. 97).

On a decidedly non-essentialist line, and unless we resort to retrieving some kind of naturalized vision for each form of experience of same-sex relations, even while dismissing an essentialist view of homosexuality “in general”, we must make the conclusion, instead of regarding them as self-evident and self-founded historically, that a) each one is shaped differently by different forces prevailing in specific historical contexts, but b) those forces must also remain active to a certain extent far beyond their context of origin, since the forms of sexual experience they are thought to influence can also be detected outside the contexts they originated in. In fact, they remain as underlying Gestalts that have been recontextualized and acquired new contents in contemporary forms of sexual experience. From a hermeneutical standpoint, every human experience, sexual or other, is totally mediated by symbolic systems of meaning that allow for individuals to make any sense of whatever they may be experiencing. Thus denaturalized and socially constructed, experience both signifies and is signified. Elaborating beyond the hermeneutical tradition, Foucault has shown how the sexual experience is inextricable from a mode of subjectivation. As we know, he left a clear description of the form of subjectivity that corresponds to modern homosexuality, in *The Will to Knowledge* (Foucault, 1976), and he also characterized in detail the forms of subjectivity that are related to the ancient experience of the use of pleasure, in the second and third volumes of his revised project of a *History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1984a, 1984b). Roughly speaking, I would suggest that the pederastic regulation of sexual relations between free males, Christian confession (along with its concomitant practices of ascetic chastisement), and the modern *dispositif* (apparatus) of sexuality (along with its perverse implantation), all are encompassed by discursive and non discursive practices of subjectivation. From a denaturalizing perspective of “sexualities”, it is thus impossible to detach the multifarious historical forms of sexual experience from the modes of subjectivation that actually are intrinsic to them. On the other hand, we must also keep in mind that, according to the Foucauldian teaching, a specific (homo)sexual subject – someone who perceives himself/herself and is socially perceived as a homosexual, i.e., someone who has a homosexual identity – is virtually nonexistent before modern times. Jeffrey Weeks re-asserts this by stating that: “It seems likely that the new forms of legal regulation, whatever their vagaries in application, had the effect of forcing home to many the fact of their difference and thus creating a new community of knowledge, if not of life and feeling, amongst many men with homosexual leanings. There was clear evidence in the later decades of the nineteenth century of the development of a new sense of identity amongst many homosexual individuals, and a crucial element in this would undoubtedly have been the new public salience of homosexuality, dramatised by the legal situation” (Weeks, 1989, p. 103). In fact, our modern notion of “homosexuality” (in which cohere the notions of “homosexual orientation” and “homosexual identity”), may well be regarded as the greatest bias that blurs our understanding of the relation between pre-modern forms of sexual experience and the corresponding subjectivities. In a Foucauldian style, Arnold Davidson reminds us that homosexuality is a thoroughly modern notion and it is tied to the construction of sexual perversion by medical and psychiatric rationality: “The problem of perversion is a case in point. All of our subsequent reasoning about perversion is afflicted by the historical origins of the concept. Moreover, we cannot think away the concept of perversion, even if we no longer claim to believe that there is any natural function of the sexual instinct. We are prisoners of the historical space of nineteenth-century psychiatry (...) The archaeology of perversion is a crucial stage in understanding the history of the twentieth-century self” (Davidson, 2001, pp. 28-29). Sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular, are a product of the psychiatric style of reasoning that had a historically specific origin. Davidson calls (homo)sexuality a Wittgensteinian object, meaning by this that it would be unintelligible outside the language games in which it emerges: “In these terms, I can formulate my claim by saying that sexuality is a Wittgensteinian object and

that no one could know the grammatical criteria of this object before the emergence of the psychiatric style of reasoning, which is to say that before this time there was as yet no object for us to attach the name 'sexuality' to" (Davidson, 2001, pp. 39-40). Jeffrey Weeks confirms precisely this when he points out that: "What in effect many of the pioneering sexologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were doing was to develop the notion that homosexuality was the characteristic of a particular type of person" (Weeks, 1989, p. 104). Having acknowledged those remarks, we must nevertheless add that the construction of modern homosexuality by socio-medical power-knowledge relations, far from being a unilateral process mechanically shaping unidimensional, textbook homosexual subjectivities, entailed instead forms of resistance, as Foucault explained in his theory of power in *The Will to Knowledge*. In some cases, such resistances have even evolved to authentic resistance identities whose documented expressions are in the process of being retrieved by historians. Weeks is quite clear about it: "Social regulation provides the conditions within which those defined can begin to develop their own consciousness and identity. In the nineteenth century, law and science, social *mores* and popular prejudice established the limits but homosexual people responded. In so doing they created, in a variety of ways, self-concepts, meeting places, a language and style, and complex and varied modes of life" (Weeks, 1989, p. 108).

The feature that stands out in the history of homosexuality in the past hundred years is the fact that the oppressive definition of homosexuality and the defensive structures and identities went side by side. In this sense, and in a Foucauldian line, the control of sexual variation inevitably reinforced and shaped homosexual behaviour, more than it has simply repressed it, and the result of this has been a complex and socially significant history of resistance and self-definition that up until now historians tend to dismiss all too easily. Weeks stressed that the main critical concern in any approach of homosexuality is not the nature of the sexual acts, but the social construction of meanings about them and the individual's reaction to such meanings: "In any study of homosexuality the important point to observe is that there is no automatic relationship between social categorization and individual sense of self or identity. The meanings given to homosexual activities can vary enormously. (...) But it is vital to keep in mind when exploring homosexuality, which has always been defined in our culture in a deviant form, that what matters is not the inherent nature of the act but the social construction of meanings around that activity, and the individual response to that. The striking feature of the 'history of homosexuality' over the past hundred years or so is that the oppressive definition and the defensive identities and structures have marched together. Control of sexual variations has inevitably reinforced and reshaped rather than repressed homosexual behaviour. (...) But the result has been a complex and socially significant history of resistance and self-definition which historians have hitherto all too easily ignored" (Weeks, 1989, p. 117). What stands out in those insightful remarks is that there's no automatic connection between social categorizations of homosexuals and the individual sense of identity. In other words, if there is a link – and there certainly is one – between sexual experiences, their social categorizations, the subjectivities that respond to such categorizations and identities (sometimes even resistance identities), it's not a mechanical, deterministic one, but a dynamic, self-fashioning interplay, that is defined by its internal tension between compulsoriness and resistance. To retrieve whatever pederasty and sodomy, and to a certain extent even homosexuality, might have meant to the people concerned and to their societies at large, the historian of homosexuality would have to approach experience in its entirety: sexual experience, *plus* social categorization, *plus* identity (that results from subjectification practices). Since my purpose is to establish how the known historical forms of sexual experience between males have remained consistent as Gestalts underlying contemporary LGBT/Queer sexed subjectivities, I do not need such a broad and ambitious approach and simply couldn't make it fit the rather more limited scope of the present paper. Nevertheless, I'm convinced that it is relevant to engage, as I go along, in a brief, indicatively critical retrieval of the founding identity questions - the constitutive and self-interpretive "who/what am I?" - of the type of subjectivity that is related to each sexual experience corresponding to pederasty, sodomy, homosexuality and, finally, LGBT/Queer sexuality.

3. From Pederasty to Sodomy to Homosexuality to LGBT/Queer Sexualities

The pederastic relationship between males may reasonably be regarded as a Greek stylization of a previously existing sexual Gestalt, one that Halperin describes as an age-old practice commonly found in the

Mediterranean basin and which was hierarchically structured in terms of strict binary oppositions between penetrating and being penetrated, insertive partner versus receptive partner, superordinate versus subordinate status, masculinity versus femininity, activity versus passivity, mature versus youthful, or, in more concrete terms: adult free male versus young free male, free man versus slave, man versus woman. Pederasty was an institution that regulated same-sex relations between free males according to deontological criteria of social shame, which, if pederasty were to be translated into a contemporary identity question, might well take the form: ‘How do I do *this* (i.e., sex)?’ – the ancient Greek pederast having and identity, not as a pederast, but as a *citizen*. As a form of regulation of the relations between males, pederasty reproduced the protocols of Ancient masculinity guided by the golden rule of the avoidance of passivity both in the private and in the public sphere, expressed in the triple virility, in the relation to oneself, in the private or domestic relation with women, younger free males and slaves (in the *oikos*), and in the public relation with his equals in the organized political community (at the *polis*), virile homosociality thus being the model of organized society. Thus were set the definitional masculinist and male-centered lines and boundaries of what would be known, in later ages, as homosexuality, long before such name had started to make sense, establishing a correlation between its social marginality and its symbolic centrality: the homosexual is socially marginal to the extent he betrays – in himself – the constitutive symbolic centrality of masculinity in society, according to the well known claim by Jonathan Dollimore (1991). This might explain in part the longevity of the permanence of the pederastic Gestalt in Western society(ies). What remains from pederasty is not merely the rigid asymmetry, per se, between the active/insertive and the passive/receptive sexual roles, immutable and not interchangeable, among men who have sex with other men and that do not identify themselves as gay or as members of the gay community. It is that both traditional, asymmetric and hierarchical model of male sexual relations and its inextricability, as it is perceived both by the men concerned and by popular culture, from a polarized definition of the men engaging in each of those sexual roles as superordinate and subordinate in all aspects of their private and public lives alike. In the course of time, in Latin and Mediterranean cultures, the figure of the active pederast and the figure of the ancient *kinaidos* (in Greek culture) or *molles* (in Roman culture), the effeminate or “soft” male, disassociated in those days, have coalesced to form the Gestalt of the polarized roles of the partners engaging in sexual relations. Such polarization is directly reflected and prolonged in equally polarized definitions of: virile masculinity versus (non-masculine) effeminacy; social complacency versus high social stigma; secrecy and duplicity both in the private sphere (in the family) and in the public sphere (in social life), on the one side, versus, on the other side, unavoidable visibility and notoriety; conformity to ‘normalcy’ and ‘stereotypical’ gender failure; and, ultimately, an empowered ability to bend and deceive social and moral rules versus a disempowered vulnerability to social retaliation. In this sense, the active/superordinate partner doesn’t see himself as a homosexual and enjoys considerable social and even familial and marital complacency, to the point of being able to even conjugate sexual attraction to effeminate men with a (homo)phobic relation towards the perceived effeminacy of his sexual partners; in contrast, the passive/subordinate partner is the only one who is regarded as the real homosexual and himself tends to invert gender identity and identify with women’s sensibility and personal style, thus deliberately violating the sexual as well as the non-sexual protocols of masculinity in the construction of his identity. In brief, the pederastic Gestalt of male-to-male sex in the Ancient World could prevail trans-epochally to the extent that it doesn’t impugn the protocols of Latin and Mediterranean masculinities. The widespread (above all amongst Northern Europeans and North Americans) popular perception of the “bisexuality” of men from these cultures cannot but be understood against the background of such protocols of Mediterranean masculinity, much older than, and whose longevity repels, the modern definition of homosexuality along parameters of sexual orientation. These men are, to the full extent of the word(s), “men who have sex with men”, but nothing else, all the while refusing to perceive themselves as homosexuals, vehemently resisting any identification with a gay lifestyle and avoiding all contexts of LGBT sociability, to the sole exception of the ones that provide for inconspicuous, uncompromising sexual encounters.

Sodomy, in the discourses of moral theology, and namely of the Inquisition, refers to a set of acts that include both active/insertive and passive/receptive partners, as well as other types of sexual practices

besides penetration, and regardless of the sexes of the partners engaging in them (evidence from the archives of the Iberian Inquisitions thus rebutting the opposite assertion by Halperin). The discourses on sodomy have largely contributed to the historical transformation of the ancient system of regulation of sexual practices centered in social and deontological shame (decency versus indecency of sexual acts) into a new one centered in individual and ontological guilt (grace versus sin), but it is difficult to find evidence proving that sodomy has brought about radical changes in the erotic experiences, as such, of Latin and Mediterranean males which could be still easily detected in contemporary men. Furthermore, evidence piles up that sodomy, instead of standing for a uniform, homogeneous, self-identical entity, actually targeted different people with different practices, and in different ways, in different historical and geographical contexts. In fact, the system of guilt was instrumental in the construction of the self since medieval times: if sodomy were to be translated into an identity question, such question might take the form of: ‘Why do I do *this*?’ - the medieval sodomite having an identity, not specifically as a sodomite, but as a *sinner*. Also, the system of guilt certainly set in as a regulator of interpersonal relations; but still, in the highly unequal Southern European societies, its effectiveness and extension varies considerably from social layer to social layer (higher in the upper classes, lower in the rural areas) and from social setting to social setting (high in religious social contexts, low in secular circles). In Mediterranean rural areas, it is easier for the social researcher to retrieve representations of social disrepute and degradation tied to same-sex practices, and the corresponding feelings of social shame among the individuals who are the targets of those representations, as in Ancient Greece and Rome, rather than representations of moral remorse and feelings of personal guilt, as in medieval Christianity. Through the guilt/confession system of sodomy, overtly sexual acts (as in pederasty) could be converted in (wishly and mandatory) asexual friendship bounds that were statutory in monosexual institutions, such as the Church. In this sense, and until recently, sexual preference for the same sex could easily be acknowledged as an item of the overall weakness of the flesh, while: a) its practice would be the object of some intolerance and subject to a recurrent cycle of confession/penance, but rarely the object of the ultimate punishment, but b) its defence (in terms of a sensuous heresy) would be the object of utter intolerance and would put its advocate at extreme risk.

Unlike sodomy, homosexuality, as it was constructed by biomedicine, psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis since the nineteenth century, has been arguably more effective in shaping the erotic experience that Latin and Mediterranean males inherited from the Gestalt of ancient pederasty. While in both the cases of pederasty (i.e.: acts in the realm of the use of pleasure) and sodomy (i.e., acts of sin in the relation to one’s own flesh), identity could only be related to the pederast *qua* citizen and to the sodomite *qua* sinner, a sexual identity, in the full and proper meaning of the word, can finally be attached – really: cast upon – the homosexual. Both as differentiated individual subjects and as a clear-cut social group, there have never been “pederasts” in Ancient Greece and Rome, nor “sodomites” in Christianity, as there are “homosexuals” in Modernity, with both a self-shaping subjectivity and a self-defining subculture that both reverberates and resists a socially imposed identity. As a category, modern homosexuality is grounded on a primarily sexual definition of the individuals engaging in same-sex relations, while pederasty, and still, to a great extent, medieval sodomy, stem from a primarily social definition of such relations. In the latter, it’s the social definition that rules sexual contents, while in the former, it’s precisely the opposite that prevails. More to the point, the total homosexualization of the individual has, as its counterpart, the ghettoized and closeted construction of homosexuals as a social group. If homosexuality were to be translated into an identity question, such question might take the form of: ‘Why am I *like this*?’ Having been built upon the answer to that etiological interrogation, homosexual identity was the very first sexual identity and was constructed, to a large extent, through the incorporation of biomedical, psychiatric, psychological and psychoanalytic knowledge in the social and economic context of industrial urban environments in the western developed nations since the nineteenth century. In this sense, the modern homosexual was constructed as a totally biopolitical entity. Even if with a certain historical delay and within a more limited scope, this is also the historical context prevailing in southern European countries, in spite of the lingering presence of pre-modern features. In fact, the homosexual Gestalt has reinforced some of the traits of the Gestalt of pederasty, namely the rigid asymmetry, between the

active/insertive and the passive/receptive sexual roles, and the concomitant polarization of the men engaging in each of those sexual roles as superordinate and subordinate in all aspects of their private and public lives.

The categorization, by medical and psychological knowledge/power, of all men who have sex with men under the label of homosexuality had the effect of tying the lingering Gestalts of both the effeminate man (who was characterized in Antiquity by his inversion of gender, but not necessarily by his sexual preferences) and the ancient pederast (who was characterized by his sexual preference, but not by his inversion of gender) to sexuality, by defining them through the unifying category of sexual orientation. From different approaches, Foucault, Halperin, Sedgwick, Weeks and Davidson have shown how this unifying category is intrinsically problematic. Modern *scientia sexualis* attempted the impossible: to translate into the language of biomedical technoscience the already existing languages of social disapproval and of religious persecution, when the category of homosexuality, deviant or abnormal sexual orientation, on the one hand, and the notions of social (in)decency and of moral wrong, on the other hand, are simply incommensurable. To *describe* someone as a homosexual actually amounts to *prescribing* the very symptoms of the pathology or to *ascribing* to such an individual the very effects of the oppression of which he/she is the victim as if they were his/her own personal characteristics. Such is the performativity of the 'eye of power' so thoroughly described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975).

The homosexual Gestalt is very clearly apparent in contemporary Latin and Mediterranean men who have sex with men to the extent that they tend to perceive themselves as belonging to that category by force of their private, individually determined sexual orientation, rather than be aware of its social (medical, psychological...) construction. The modern construction of homosexuality as an entity with a strictly biological and/or psychological essence had, as its consequence, the privatization of the homosexual condition, to which the individual relates as something to which he/she only has the option of denying or "giving in". Both "masculine" and "feminine" homosexuals share in common the fact of centering their homosexuality in the (merely) sexual encounter with other men and the active refusal and avoidance of engaging in any other kind of socialization beyond the one(s) that are strictly necessary and instrumental to having sex, any other forms of sociability, and namely the ones that have developed in organised LGBT communities, being disqualified as useless, counterproductive and even impeditive of what their homosexuality is all about - sex.

The perverse implantation of the *dispositif* of sexuality, as described by Michel Foucault (1976), had the effect of multiplying perversions, multifarious, peripheral sexualities, in which the intensity of pleasures equates the obstination of powers. Under this light, one can understand how the notorious behavioural features of homosexuals in medical and psychiatric textbooks, which included low self-esteem (*and*) self hatred, (*and*) paranoid delusions of being threatened and discriminated against, (*and*) self-defeating compulsory search for sexual gratification, (*and*) sexual promiscuity..., actually constitute the circular stages that trigger the Deleuzian "machine désirante" (Deleuze, Guattari, 1972)' (desiring machine) of the typical medical and psychiatric textbook homosexual. The life style of most men who engaged in sex with other men was described by sociologist Michael Pollak (1988) as a schizophrenic management of life, with a desperate attempt to safeguard social integration, on one side, and, on the other side, a clandestine life of casual, non-defining and typically furtive sexual encounters in which the mix of excitement and danger was an incentive, as Weeks (1989, p. 115) has very well shown.

To a certain extent, we can speak of a kind of homosexual *habitus*, expressed in a paradoxical sex-appeal of the closet. The hyper-sexualization of the search for partners reflects the homosexual Gestalt in that it completely separates sexual gratification from equally gratifying, self-assuring emotional and social bonds with both peers and the community as a whole, therefore de-humanizing and de-socializing the individual's sexual experience. This, in turn, raises serious obstacles to the self-shaping of identity based on a work on the sexual experience of the individual, as was proposed by Foucault in his day. I would go as far as suggesting that this is precisely the main obstacle that prevents most gay men from productively queering the basic homosexual Gestalt that deeply structures their sexual experience, thus hindering adherence to alternative forms of sociability that have also developed in the historical process which, as

socially and politically awareness grew, set the basis for organized communities, cultures and associations, ultimately allowing for the successful confronting of legal persecution, as well as for the challenging of heteronormative structures and internalized homophobia inside the LGBT world itself.

4. Concluding remarks

It is not untrue that the pederastic, the sodomitic and the homosexual Gestalts tend to wear out and fade away to the extent that men who have sex with other men growingly identify with a gay lifestyle, and accordingly reshape theirs and pursue an alternative one that is not molded by heteronormativity, and/or engage in the multifaceted social and cultural activities of the LGBT communities, and/or participate in the political struggles of LGBT associations and movements. Having previously acknowledged that this is not simply a historically finalized process of accretion and supersession, and having also acknowledged that each form of sexual experience and the corresponding form of subjectivity is dynamically dependent on its contextual (social, symbolic) meaning, we should also be attentive to the fact that, therefore: a) each identity (sexual or not) is fundamentally relational, i.e., it refers and expresses the relation to oneself, the relation between sexual partners and the relation between the sexual partners as social agents and society at large; and b) the prevalence of an identity (sexual or not) over another is dependent on the meaning attributed to the sexual experience, which, in turn, is determined by the degree of social tolerance and the concomitant degree of freedom of interplay between partners, both as sexual partners and as social agents capable of constructing collectively a community and an identity.

If it is not untrue that the pederastic, the sodomitic and the homosexual Gestalts tend to wear out and fade away as LGBT/Queer identities develop, there's also empirical evidence that they tend to be re-activated and to re-surface when the conditions that facilitate the development of LGBT/Queer identities and communities disappear, for instance in the context of historical backlashes. It happens as if they had remained quiescent and as if men engaging in same-sex relations resorted to survival strategies more consonant with socio-sexual models thought to be dead and gone, but that prove being safer and more useful in hard(er) times. Identity being relational, dynamic and self-shaping, even the most overt, militant, gay person can resort to earlier forms of sociability, typical of times and places where permanent threat was on the order of things and whenever similar threatening conditions are reactivated.

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