

## Minorities and discourse in the digital public sphere: the case of the Gay Pride Parade

### Minorias e discurso na esfera pública digital: o caso da Parada Gay

### Minorías y discurso en la esfera pública digital: el caso de la Marcha del Orgullo Gay

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**Abstract** *This paper investigates the debates regarding the LGBT Pride Parade that took place in 2011 in São Paulo, Brazil. Discursive reaction to the event on the Internet was analysed, from news and digital conversation. Through these discourses, three main arguments were identified: the relevance of the event; civil rights for sexual minorities; moral, biological and religious judgments – regarding sexual diversity.*

**Keywords:** *Gay Pride Parade; Sexual Minorities; Discourse; Digital Public Sphere*

**Resumo** *Este artigo investiga a dispersão social dos sentidos sobre a Parada do Orgulho LGBT, ocorrida em 2011 na cidade de São Paulo. Foram observadas as manifestações discursivas sobre este evento na esfera pública digital, a partir de matérias jornalísticas e comentários postados sobre o tema. Da análise destes discursos, foram identificados três eixos centrais de argumentação: pertinência do evento; direitos civis de minorias sexuais; juízo moral – biológico e religioso – sobre a diversidade sexual.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Parada Gay; Minorias Sexuais; Discurso; Esfera Pública Digital*

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**Resumen** *El artículo investiga los debates cerca de la Marcha del Orgullo LGBT, que se pasó en São Paulo, Brasil, en 2011. Fueron analizadas las reacciones discursivas a este evento en la esfera pública digital, en materias periodísticas y conversaciones digitales. Del análisis de estos discursos, fueron identificados tres ejes centrales de argumentación: relevancia del evento; derechos civiles de las minorías sexuales; juicio moral – biológico y religioso – cerca de la diversidad sexual.*

**Palabras-clave:** *Marcha del Orgullo Gay; Minorías Sexuales; Discurso; Esfera Pública Digital*

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## Introduction

Social movements of black men and women, feminists, homosexuals: especially from the decade of 1960 on, the 20th century assisted an intensification of collective actions of minorities which were organised in order to affirm their identities and to demand their rights; they emphasised their demands in aspects that are quite different from those which were privileged by the analyses bearing the Marxist stamp. Before that, paradigms founded on the economic structures of society were the most used to explain the social conflict, which would be caused by the crises of the capitalist production system, in the form of “class struggle”. During the last five decades of the past century, although the collective mobilisation had not given up considering economic questions, it started to broaden its focus on spheres which until then had been relatively excluded from the debate, because they were considered as “private”, such as family, education and sexuality.

In this paradigm in which intimate topics become political questions, there are also the sexual minority movements, the most recent denomination of which is the acronym LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender). In this sense, the *Parada do Orgulho LGBT* [*LGBT Pride Parade*] is the collective action of the largest visibility of the group and, in its thematic issues, it emphasises questions and demands which are dear to sexual minorities.

The event configures an occurrence which was substantially discussed in the mediatic field and, in various segments of society, it proposes an agenda of questions and topics which interest sexual minority groups. Taking into consideration that one of the main characteristics of the mass media field is the mediation of the relationships between other fields, the topics related to the *Gay Pride Parade* are updated in debates and deliberations in which positions that derive from diverse social fields are presented in permanent conflict and negotiation. In this sense, this study sought to investigate the meanings which are produced on the basis of the event in São Paulo, in an effort to understand the elements

which found the social positions in dispute for legitimacy concerning not only the event, but also the minoritarian sexualities.

In this article, in general lines, we deal with the role the identities play in influencing the actions of minority groups and we rehabilitate some of the theories which discuss the potentialities and limitations of the world's computer networks in terms of participation in the establishment of a public sphere which is more open and porous to the democratisation of the information and to minority groups. In the end, we present the results of this research, which dealt with the mediatisation of the *Gay Pride Parade* and the dispersion of meanings in the discursive field of the internet.

### **About the Gay Pride Parade: identity, activism and discourse**

According to Facchini, it is in the decade of 1970 that the “Brazilian homosexual movement”<sup>3</sup> appeared, with the creation of the group *Somos [We are]*, in 1978, which would have been the first proposal of the politicisation of homosexuality. Nevertheless to the extent that the decade of 1980 begins, the groups of the defence of sexual minorities begin to approximate to the model of Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) outlined by Rubem Cesar Fernandes (1985) and present elements such as the militants’ professionalisation.

Another relevant characteristic which begins in the 1990s and is intensified at the beginning of the new millennium is the massive visibility strategy the activists were seeking. Mass media start to be seen as potential allied of the movement, although this is also a relationship which was very often permeated with conflicts. Another interlocutor whose relation with activism is broadening is the segmented market, which starts to dedicate more attention to the potential consumer of the LGBT public, providing services and products destined to homosexuals, such as tourist

<sup>3</sup> The nomination of the political subject of the movement was always the target of controversy, as Facchini illustrates it (2005). According to the author, some examples of acronyms which were already used to “demarcate” the movement are MGL (movement of gays and lesbians) and GLT (gays, lesbians and transvestites).

agencies and love affairs, discotheques, film festivals, sites, publications and sections about LGBT issues in big means of communication.

The origin of the Brazilian *Gay Pride Parades* is the street marches organised to remember the so called *Stonewall* events, in the United States. On June 28<sup>th</sup> 1969, in the *Stonewall Inn*, considered a gay bar, a group of customers refused to give a tip to policemen who frequently attacked them and made illegal prisons and extortions. The homosexuals reacted violently to the policemen's presence; the conflict lasted for three days and spread to other streets. Later, June 28<sup>th</sup> became the "world day of gay pride".

In Brazil, the existence of the *LGBT Gay Pride Parade* corresponds to the new relationships of the movement with mass media and the market, configuring, especially in the case of São Paulo, a quite lucrative event for the economy of the city. According to the study of the Observatório do Turismo [Tourism Observatory], in 2010 almost half a million tourists came to the city only to participate in the event.<sup>4</sup>

In São Paulo, the event reunited a heterogeneous public that does not only include lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals, but also heterosexuals who are sympathetic to the cause or to the demonstration. In general it configures itself as a festive march, in which *trios elétricos* [a kind of truck equipped with a high power sound system and a music group on the roof, playing for the crowd] execute electronic music for the male/female participants, who follow the route of the cars, dancing, singing and drinking, in an atmosphere which is quite similar to a street festival.

At each edition, the Associação da Parada do Orgulho GLBT of São Paulo [Gay Pride Parade Association of São Paulo], which organises the event, chooses a key-concept for the demonstration; in 2011, the theme was "Love each other: stop homophobia". Even if the participations and political appropriations of independent organisations and activists around this mobilisation are very varied, there is a common point in

<sup>4</sup> Report "SPTuris presents the profile of the participants of the Gay Pride Parade", site *Mercados e Eventos* [Markets and Events].

general: to fight against discrimination and violence with regard to the sexual minorities (CARRARA et al., 2006).

Although modifications have occurred on the formal level in Brazil, with the legal recognition of stable unions between homosexuals by the *Supremo Tribunal Federal* [Federal Supreme Court], on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2011, on the domain of the daily life of the informal relationships, the manifestations of numerous segments of society with regard to homosexual practices are very often violent, “combining elements of religious fundamentalist discourse (...) with the intention to generate a moral effect of panic around images such as that of *paedophilia* and of *perversion*” (FACCHINI, 2009, p. 140).

In order to understand the activism which is present in the *Gay Pride Parades*, we propose now to situate it in the broader spectrum of the social movements of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to shed light on the importance of the identities for the collective action, since, according to what Melucci<sup>5</sup> emphasised, the collective action cannot prescind from the capacity of the actors in “sharing a collective identity (that is to say the capacity to recognise and to be recognised as a part of the same social unity)” (MELUCCI, 1989, p. 57).

Identity as a category of the formation of the subjectivity of the social actor, reminds us Calhoun (1994), becomes the topic of debate only in modernity<sup>5</sup> – not because identity did not exist before, but because, from this historical moment on, the definition of who we are, as well as the possibility to sustain our subjectivity in the course of time, problematise themselves and a large multiplicity of identitary possibilities prevail.

Social constructivism gave an important contribution to the discussions about identity by emphasising that it is not an element which is “pre-given” to the individual, as well as it is not elaborated according to his free will. With these theories, the constructivists firmly oppose es-

<sup>5</sup> We are conscious that the concept of “modernity” has diverse definitions. By the term we understand the social transformations mainly provoked by the advent of the Industrial Revolution, which began in England in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and expanded in the world in the following century.

sentialist ideas, like those “that the individuals can have non problematic, harmonic identities on the whole, integer and singular” (CALHOUN, 1994, p. 13).

Taking this question to the social movements, the essentialisation is also a risk for the LGBT action. By questioning the necessary continuity between sex and gender, the *queer*<sup>6</sup> theory defends that the sexual practices surpass the opposition homosexual/bisexual, woman/man, since there is a range of relationships and particular forms of identity construction. In the case of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals, an essentialist treatment can dilute into a same category a series of possibilities in terms of experience of one’s own sexuality, as well as the different cases of violence and discrimination suffered by the subjects. You cannot always combine, in a same analytic category, the discrimination which is suffered by transvestites with that suffered by lesbians, for example. In order to be able to have access to some of the main significations of the LGBT activisms, it is important to work with a dimension of identity open to plurality, as well as to the conflicts which can emerge from the differences between the involved subjects – conflicts which can contribute to the construction of new significations.

The importance of collective identity for the action of the groups was well defined by Tarrow (2009) and Melucci (2001). According to Tarrow, the mobilisation occurs for the most part when social actors, who work in cooperation and collaboration, are successful in creating a consensus about questions of the group’s interest, on the basis of shared significations, socially communicated and culturally inscribed. This consensus is the so-called interpretative framework which is generated on the basis of interaction; it is also the elaboration of a “we” in opposition to a “they/men/they/women”, that is to say, of a collective identity which shares important definitions for the group, such as opponents, strategies and discursive resources.

<sup>6</sup> Although the *queer* theorists have divergences, there are some common points. In Seidman’s definition (*apud* LOURO), they “are favourable to a decentralising or deconstructive strategy which escapes from the social propositions and from the positive programmatic politics; they imagine the social as a text to be interpreted and criticised with the intention to contest the dominant social knowledge and hierarchies” (LOURO, 2011, p. 9).

The very “*sopa de letrinhas*” [literally: soup with small letters: a game in which you have to associate letters in order to form words] of the LGBT movement in Brazil, an expression which was originally created by the mass media to scorn the attempts to name the group and which Facchini (2005) appropriated for the title of her book<sup>7</sup>, indicates the actors’ heterogeneity, objectives and environment in which the action occurs, to use Melucci’s terms. Nevertheless this does not hinder the mobilisation; according to what Tarrow (2009) explains us, solidarity, the social bonds, created by (and experienced between) subjects on the basis of a same sense of appurtenance to the collectivity are primordial conditions for the action. In the *Gay Pride Parade*, many of the actors unite themselves although very often in a diffused or fragmented way, on the basis of some demands in common, such as the fight against discrimination and the conquest of civil rights.

The vagueness of the frontiers between the “political” preoccupations and the questions of private order is also one of the main elements of that which Offe (1985) will designate as a new paradigm of the social movements. Although his study focuses on the changes which are being observed in Western Europe, which intensified themselves from the decade of 1970 on, many of the definitions can be applied to the reality of the LGBT activists/men/women in Brazil, which also mobilised topics formerly considered as private in the public sphere.

Offe situates the “ancient paradigm” of the agenda of the social movements in the period between the post-war years and the beginning of the decade of 1970. The guide lines of the European politics had as central topics the economic growth, the distribution of revenue and security. The main collective actors were highly institutionalised organisations of interest and political parties; in order to achieve the economic growth and efficiency, they defended the freedoms of property and of investments with fervour.

<sup>7</sup> As the author herself explains in the Introduction of *Sopa de Letrinhas: movimento homossexual e produção de identidades coletivas nos anos 90* [Small letter Soup: homosexual movement and production of collective identities in the 1990s] (1995).



The new paradigm, in opposition to the anterior model, starts politicising the topics which “flew” from the division between the public and private spheres, characteristic of the liberal political theory. With this change, the movements started to locate themselves in a kind of intermediate position, demanding a specific kind of question “which is neither ‘private’ (in the sense that it does not belong to the legitimate preoccupation of other people), nor ‘public’ (in the sense that it is recognised as a legitimate object of official actors and political institutions)” (OFFE, 1985, p. 826).<sup>8</sup> Thus the space of action of the new movements starts being a “non institutional politics”, which even so does not turn to be of private order – but it is politics because the actors demand that the means of collective action are considered legitimate and that the objectives can involve the community and be incorporated by it in a broader way, surpassing the sectarian interests.

Another characteristic Offe (1985) observed in the recent social movements refers to an external specific way of action – which we can also observe in the updated activism in the *Gay Pride Parade* – characterised by demonstration tactics which use the physical presence of crowds, with the objective to mobilise the public attention by legal and conventional means; in the same way, the actors would conceive themselves as constituents of a kind of alliance *ad hoc*, instead of an ideologically integrated group, which would open much space to a “broad variety of legitimacies and beliefs among the protestors” (OFFE, 1985, p. 830). As we already mentioned it, the *Gay Pride Parade* aggregates extremely heterogeneous actors who temporarily conjugate forces around the universalist demands.

## Public sphere and the internet

During great part of his work, Jürgen Habermas analysed the emancipatory potentials of the communicative acting. A key-concept, in this

<sup>8</sup> “That is neither ‘private’ (in the sense of being of no legitimate concern of others) nor ‘public’ (in the sense of being recognized as the legitimate object of official political institutions and actors)”.

sense, was that of public sphere, which is fundamental to think about the possibilities of democratic action. The public sphere is essential to think about democracy because it is not only a space of negotiation, conflict and construction of meanings between diverse social actors, but also because in it the very relationship between the subjects is in continuous transformation, as well as in the way in which they view reality – the aspects must be maintained, modified, ascertained (PEREIRA, 2011).

The *Gay Pride Parade* proposes topics and questions which have repercussion in society as a whole, producing spaces in which the public conversation gains form. The most diverse social subjects see themselves convoked to elaborate opinions and interpretations with regard to the non hetero-normative sexualities and to the very event, constructing a mosaic of discourses which can help us to understand society's diverse positions concerning sexual minorities.

Nevertheless, we consider that to affirm beforehand that the internet corresponds to the criteria of a “public sphere”, in which a “public opinion” circulates, is quite a complicated task, since, for this, we need not only explicate the concepts of sphere and of public opinion we are using, but we must also approach some of the theoretical adjustments these concepts went through in the course of time and which are interesting for the present work. In the same way, we will briefly investigate the relationships between mass communication and communication mediated by computers and the transformations of the public sphere.

According to Jürgen Habermas (1984), the public sphere, in a specific meaning, only exists in the bourgeoisie of the England of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with reverberations in France and in Germany. Nevertheless its ideology has a repercussion beyond the spatial-temporal barriers, so that we have that “public opinions” became so popular, even if the very concept has been distorted and reconfigured. The German philosopher defends that this sphere refers to the private proprietors, always of male gender and with appropriate degree of instruction who meet in public in order to discuss categorically private questions by means of a critical-rational deliberation, but they are questions of general interest (generality here understood as the sphere of the bourgeois class).

Habermas defends that, to the extent that capitalism advances towards its mercantile stage, endowed with a permanent administration and army, the necessity appears that the bourgeois, already economically emancipated in relation to the State, also emancipate themselves politically – therefore they create their own space to debate topics such as the exchange of merchandises and the regulation of social work. It is also in this moment that the modern press gains force, “the very news becomes merchandises” (HABERMAS, 1984, p. 35) and the State begins to be interested in the press, seeing a useful tool for the administration in it. According to Habermas, only when the authorities use the press in order to make known the decrees and governmental orders the target of *public power* becomes authentically a *public*. This public, this must be clear, is not the generalised mass; on the contrary, it is a restricted group formed by readers. Nevertheless, this public, which the press addresses, is also critical; to the questions which are submitted to the judgment of a thinking public, Habermas gives the name of “publicity”. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, its critical face already gains the name of “public opinion”.

It is in this sense that we believe that it is fundamental to expose the criteria and requirements of public opinion in the way in which we propose to use the term. According to Habermas, not every opinion can be called public, to the extent that some principles guide this publicity; the most important of them is rationality. In Kant, Habermas finds the matured version of this orientation, in its opposition to the absolutist principle *auctoritas non veritas facit legem* (“Authority, not reason, makes law”). In this way, according to the *Kantian* ideas, there should not be any coercion, nor personal domination exercised by force; only reason should have power and superimpose itself upon the other criteria. By means of “publicity”, politics could, finally, reconcile itself with morals.

In the course of decades, the Habermasian concept of public sphere went through some criticisms and propositions of revision. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, the German philosopher had considered the multiplicity of public spheres as a risk, since it could provoke fragmentation and prejudice the quest for a rational consensus for the questions of com-

mon interest which were approached in the deliberation. Among other suggestions of critical revision, Nancy Fraser (1997) emphasises that Habermas failed by examining other spheres and therefore he ended up idealising bourgeoisie. The author cites as examples the ways the women of the 19<sup>th</sup> century found in order to have access to political life, although they were excluded from the official deliberation and from the organisations of parades and street protests.

Fraser alleges that the existence of a unique public sphere is not salutary for the democratic strengthening, especially in highly stratified countries. In these places, the spheres in which there is access to information and power of influence with regard to the governmental and official decisions are, very often, not very accessible to the subaltern publics, according to Fraser. Thus the author proposes a paradigm of public sphere different from that of the bourgeoisie Habermas theorises (1984), according to which there would not be only one public, but various public spheres; in these spaces, the minoritarian groups could find an echo for their voices, create new meanings and seek legitimacy of identities.

By studying the contemporary forms of democratic participation in the public sphere, we noticed that communication mediated by computer reveals itself as quite enriching, even if we take its limitations into consideration. At the end, due to the proliferation of voices which the internet favours, it provides resonance to diverse questions of society's interest, functioning like a privileged *locus* for investigation.

Our problematics was located in the moment in which society's responses regarding the LGBT projects increased: we sought to investigate and to understand the arguments and positions concerning the *Gay Pride Parade* in the public deliberation arenas which form themselves on on-line spaces. In the light of concepts deriving from Discourse Analysis, we aimed to know and to analyse the logic which permeates the discourses the event gave rise to, since they evidence society's viewpoints about minoritarian sexualities and about the very *Gay Pride Parade*. Thus the deliberations about the event provided important clues for the investigation of some social perceptions with regard to this moment of the LGBT activism and also about the demands and organisation strategies of LGBT groups.

## A discussion of results

### a) About the pertinence of the event

This category mainly evidenced the discussions about the legitimacy and/or relevance of the event of the *Gay Pride Parade* in itself. The opinions which, to a certain degree, were opposed to the event alleged that it stopped being a political manifestation and transformed itself into a big carnival, the stage of “libertine” acts. Besides this, according to these discourses, the gay cause would not be such a priority for Brazilian society, which had more serious and urgent problems to deal with, such as poverty and corruption. It is what the examples we enhanced below evidence:<sup>9</sup>

01. José Maia says:

**Dirt, nudism, use of drugs, drunkenness**, besides explicit **sex** as it was already caught in flagrante in the parallel streets of the Paulista [Avenida Paulista: the biggest avenue of São Paulo]. **Rights** are being conquered in **other ways**, for the moment it it's just **carnival!**

Comment about the news: “15<sup>th</sup> Gay Pride Parade expects to reunite 3 millions”, *Diário do Grande ABC* (Agência Estado) [daily newspaper of the metropolitan region of São Paulo], June 26<sup>th</sup> 2011.

02. Natvalle says:

The homosexuals, with this **chat** of homophobia and arrogance, are augmenting the prejudice and the intolerance...this is already becoming unbearable.

Why don't they organise a campaign for **QUALITY EDUCATION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION**. (...) **WAKE UP BRAZIL!!!**

Comment about the news: “Hackers invade site of the Gay Parade of São Paulo”, *Globo Online*, [O *Globo*: large Brazilian newspaper based in Rio de Janeiro] June 6<sup>th</sup> 2011.

The argumentations which seek to elaborate a defence of the *Gay Pride Parade* focused on the role the event played for the economy and the tourism of the city of São Paulo, due to the large number of participants and, on a smaller scale, due to the aspect of the demonstration as

<sup>9</sup> All the passages in the course of the analysis were used in their original writings, without corrections of orthographical or grammatical mistakes.

promoter of tolerance and equality. In this sense, it is interesting to note the contradiction of the opinions which at the same time as they criticise the *Gay Pride Parade* because of its supposed “carnival-like” and apolitical aspect, also effected an opposition to the very LGBTs’ demands (such as the PLC 122 – Projeto de Lei da Câmara 122 – [Law Project of the Chamber of Deputies]), thus emptying the political aspect of the demands. The discursive operations below illustrate these opinions:

### 03.

Economically the Gay Pride Parade is the second event which most animates the capital of the State of São Paulo, only behind Formula 1. Last year the Parade brought more than 400,000 visitors to the city and issued **not less than R\$ 188 million** in the tourism sector.

By Felype Falcão

Passage of the news: “Hotel occupation, in the district of the Paulista, maintains the same index of the precedent years”, *Mix Brasil* [Film festival – Gay and Lesbian festival], June 21<sup>st</sup> 2011.

### 04. EuropaNordeste says:

Brazil is not and it will never be a theocratic country. We will be and we are a **democracy** where there is **respect** and **freedom** through the differences. [...] The Brazilian gay community must openly manifest itself against intolerance and it must have representatives in **Brasília**. Gay Pride Parade of São Paulo, **the world congratulates you**.

Comment about news “Hackers invade site of the Gay Parade of São Paulo”, *Globo Online*, June 6<sup>th</sup> 2011.

As far as the most recurrent argument of defence, the relevance of the event for the economy and the tourism of the city, is concerned, we observe that, in the interpretation of the minoritarian groups, the market logic seemed more persuasive as a defence tactics, more sensitive to the social mentality than the political aspects of the event.

### b) About the civil rights of sexual minorities

The second category of analysis we identified in our study referred to the discussions about the civil rights of the sexual minorities. In this sense, in the course of the material we organised, the interpretations which opposed to the LGBT demands predominated. In the first place,

in these discourses, the PLC 122 is seen as a gay “muzzle”: by criminalising the discrimination because of sexual orientation, the project, according to these discursive operations, also restricts the preaching of religious leaders – going against the constitutional principles of freedom of expression and belief:

05.

With regard to the laws such as the PLC 122, which intends to criminalise homophobia, **he** (*the pastor Silas Malafaia*) **says that for this there is already a law**, and therefore he calls this kind of law the homosexuals demand, “**law of the privilege**”. [...] “They called me to speak about any topic of society”, he concluded **demanding his right as a citizen**. (We underline)

Passage of the news: “Silas Malafaia criticises Gay Parade and Media Coverage”, Site: *Christian Post*, July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011.

Another recurrent point which was debated was the anti-homophobia kit, which would be distributed in schools with the objective to make children and adolescents aware of sexual diversity, but in May its production was interrupted by President Dilma Rousseff. In these oppositional discourses, the set, composed of didactic material, was denominated “kit gay” and should be combated because it “would stimulate” young people to become homosexuals. The passage below evidences this perspective:

06. Mosart Aragão Pereira says:

If the Gay Kit were distributed in the schools today we would also have the organisation of the *1ª passeata mirim GAY* [1<sup>st</sup> children’s GAY parade]. **Congratulations to the Deputy Bolsonaro** who avoided such crime against the **Brazilian FAMILY**.

Comment about the column: “Is São Paulo more gay or evangelical?”, *Folha Online* [*Folha de São Paulo*: the largest daily newspaper in Brazil], June 24<sup>th</sup> 2011.

In the case of the PLC 122 as well as in that of the kit, the notion which prevailed in these interpretations was that the LGBT groups would establish a kind of “dictatorship”, associated with a supposed imposition of the minority rights.

The discursive strategies of the defence of the LGBT projects, on their turn, were based upon two interpretations. In the first place, that

the Brazilian State is secular, thus the legal decisions cannot be influenced by religious doctrines. In the second place, the opinion that the sexual minorities would not be seeking privileges, but a status of equality in the participation in society.

07. Eliezer Queres says:

PERFECT THE TOPIC OF THE GLBTs in these times of intolerance and of **religious interference**. Down with the **evangelical dictatorship**, the evangelical **muzzle** and the **evangelicism**!

I demand a **Secular State** in my country!

Comment about the news: "15<sup>th</sup> Gay Pride Parade of SP is launched with a letter against conservatism", *Folha Online*, June 6<sup>th</sup> 2011.

In these discourses, specific projects from and for sexual minorities – be it law projects, such as the PLC 122, be it raising awareness, such as the kit – were accepted and defended, inserted in a notion that, because of the discrimination suffered by LGBT, mechanisms, which seek a historical reparation of the injustices, would be necessary.

If in the discourses which were opposed to the LGBT projects, the constitutional articles, which were predominantly evoked, were those of freedom of expression and belief, in the favourable discourses, the constitutional principle, which dominated the argumentations, was that of the equality between citizens.

### c) Moral, biological and religious value judgement about non hetero-normative sexualities

The last category of analysis, which was established, dealt with the moral judgments about the homosexual practice, in the religious and biological fields. As far as the first is concerned, one of the most recurrent appeals of the religious discourse, which categorised and interpreted the homosexual practice as a sin, based upon specific biblical quotations, was that of nature: according to this perspective, homosexuality would consist in a sin because it would present itself contrary to the idealistic notion of a pure nature. This supposedly "sinful" aspect is illustrated in the passage below:



08. F@BIO says:

I would like to know what they [women] say about that which **GOD** says in this part of the bible: Romans 1.24: “This is also why God handed them over to the concupiscence of their hearts, to filthiness, to dishonour their bodies between each others”. And also of this one: **Romans 1.26-32**: “This is why God abandoned them to the infamous passions ... Because even their wives changed the natural use, contrary to nature...”

Comment about the news “LannaHolder and her companion will do evangelism in the Gay Pride Parade in SP”, *Gospel Prime*, June 16<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Great part of the arguments which condemn homosexuality, through the religious prism, elaborated a discursive memory of an immemorial time still in state of perfection, in which homosexuality would not have any space not to multiply the species because it contradicts a “natural order”. It was in this sense that we frequently observed, for example, allusions to the myths of Adam and Eve which were used to affirm the supposed legitimacy of heterosexuality. By means of wordplay, the fragment below evokes and affirms the biblical figures’ heterosexuality:

09. Flalemão says:

God did not create **Adam and Ivo** or did not create **Adama and Eve...**

Comment about the news “I am a transvestite who was already born operated”, says Preta Gil at the opening of the Gay Pride Parade in SP”, *O Globo Online*, June 26<sup>th</sup> 2011.

In our material there were four biblical passages which were used more recurrently to condemn the homosexual practice. Most of them are from the Old Testament (O.T), two from the book of Leviticus and one from Genesis. From the New Testament (N.T), one passage was quoted, from the Epistle to the Romans.

10. Sil says:

GOD detests, hates sin, when GOD sent two angels to the city of **Sodom and Gomorrah** it was to destroy why?? [...] It was because of the sin, the people of that city were homosexuals and they wanted Lot to expel them so that they could have contact with them, **this is real** it is written in the book of **Genesis chap 19**.

Comment about the news: “LannaHolder is going to preach at the Gay Parade, São Paulo”, *Baú Gospel*, June 17<sup>th</sup> 2011.

In this sense it is interesting to note that, although most part of the contrary discourses belonged to the evangelical denominations, that is to say, to religious institutions the focus of which is the interpretation and propagation of the Gospel, book of the New Testament, there were not the dogmas of the N.T which were predominant, but those of the O.T, the book in which more numerous direct condemnations of the practice of homosexuality appear.

Another contradiction we identified in our analysis referred to the very exaltation of nature, which appeared in these discursive strategies as supposedly heterosexual, supposedly directed at the multiplication of mankind. If, on the one hand, this state of “non corrupted” nature is defended and acclaimed in the defence of hetero-normativity, homosexuality being something sinful because it would go against that state, on the other hand, the same religious discourses recurrently combat the sexual instincts, inclusively the hetero-normative ones, when they do not obey the moral rules (it is the case, for example, of sex before marriage, which is still condemned by the majority of the Christian religions).

Thus we observe that in this framework, “nature” does not present a unique, stable meaning, but it goes through discursive operations which mould it: when the intention is the reproduction of mankind, it is evoked (although always according to determined rules of behaviour). When it deals with sexual practices, which do not fit in with what the dogmas prescribe, inclusively those practiced between individuals of the same sex, the instinct suffers interdictions.

With regard to the discursive strategies which, in the religious debate, did not condemn the homosexual practice, there were recurrences we evidenced in the study: the discourses confronted the credibility of the religious institutions (criticising aspects such as the payment of the tithes, for example), they questioned the interpretations of the Bible, above all the literal ones and had recourse to the biblical principle of charity to condemn prejudice. One of these argumentations can be exemplified in the passage below:

11. VANGUARD says:

Cheerfulness and freedom annoy people who are frightened. They think that God is observing the Gay Pride Parade, but what God is actually observing is what the **exploiters** of alien **ignorance** are doing, **promising places in Paradise**. Take care. There is no life after death, thus let's well enjoy this one, which is ending soon. Enjoy it as long as you can and don't walk into the trap of the evangelical "**tale**".

Comment about the news: "Hackers invade the site of the Gay Parade of São Paulo", *O Globo online*, June 6<sup>th</sup> 2011.

The discourses of defence basically configured previous reactions and attacks, founded in the Bible. One commandment which was evoked in this sense was the "love each other" in order to condemn the prejudices against homosexuals. It is not by coincidence that the verse was used by the official organisation of the *Gay Pride Parade* of São Paulo, which in an open letter, manifested the intention to "demand the end of the war waged between religion and human rights".

12. Eva says:

They speak much about Jesus but very few follow his example of **charity**, **they distort** all He said and afterwards they pose as good boys. May God in his mercy have pity on all of us.

Comment about the news: "Religious crusade combats the gays' civil rights", *Terra Magazine*, June 29<sup>th</sup> 2011.

The enunciations which composed the sub-category of the biological moral judgment on their turn, basically dealt with the concept of normativity. What seemed to be important, in these enunciations, was to argue if the homosexual practice is "normal", "healthy" or a "pathology".

In our material, the discursive strategies which pathologised homosexuality tended to reduce the subjects' sexual practices to physical characteristics. Gender identity and sexual identity were taken as a same element: in these discourses the affirmations that the "normal" would be the heterosexual relationship were recurrent, because, in the case of a male subject, for example, aspects of his anatomy (to have a penis) would be determinant to characterise him as a man and, consequently, to condition his sexual identity: to practice sex with women and not with other men:

## 13.

The Baptist is also against the union between people of the same sex. “I am not in favour. Do you have **uterus, vagina?** God made you a man. You must accept yourself as such”, the person added, pointing at a colleague of the group who says that she abandoned lesbianism after the contact with the church.

Passage of the news: “Evangelicals go to the Gay Parade in order to preach to homosexuals”, *HGospel.com*, June 20<sup>th</sup> 2011.

“Nature”, fundamental concept in the discursive operations of the religious framework, was also echoed in the biologic discourses in order to stress the notion of normativity. According to this perspective, since homosexuality would act against the rules of nature, it would not be a condition, something imposed on people, but an individual choice.

It is interesting to note that, in the discourses in defence of homosexuality on the biological domain, normativity was also the main element which was mentioned. Nevertheless in these cases, what was observed was an essentialisation of the homosexual desire – sexuality was not taken as something procedural, but as something which is given, pre-elaborated. From this perspective, homosexuality would have legitimacy not because all people are free to experience their sexualities, but because they would not have another option, they would not have another possibility. In the discourses of defence, sexuality was not elaborated as an option, but as a condition. The example below is one of those which evidence this essentialist prism:

## 14. Marcelo says:

If you ask a gay if the question of liking people of the same sex is a choice, promptly you will hear, it is a **condition**. . . . and not a **choice**!

Comment about the news: “Indians protest at the Gay Pride Parade against the construction of a plant”, *G1*, June 30<sup>th</sup> 2011.

In all the analysis categories of our study, what drew attention was the disproportion between the discourses, which, in a certain way, condemned homosexuality (about 87% of the comments) and those who defended it (a little more than 10% of the total of the comments we investigated). The discourses which were contrary to the homosexual practice and to legal

measures favourable to sexual minorities were agile in the publication of comments; the favourable enunciations occurred in a merely reactive way in the discussions, only in response to judgments and previous arguments, of accusatory and/or offensive tenor. In the case of the PLC 122, for example, although there are petitions on-line with the objective to pressurise the Congress to approve the measure, they were not quoted.

In addition to this, many of the discourses, which were contrary to the homosexual practice or to law projects these minorities defend, manifested their support to deputy Jair Bolsonaro's candidacy to presidency, in the sense to consider him a political representative able to defend the "Brazilian family", although most of these discourses had only be composed of expressions of acclamations, such as "Viva Bolsonaro!" or "Bolsonaro for president!"; the elaboration of political actions and/or mobilisations was absent.

It is interesting to observe that nevertheless the same kind of support was not to be found among those who defended the minority sexual groups, although the LGBT segments have representatives among the politicians, such as the federal deputy Jean Wyllys (PSOL-RJ Partido Socialismo e Liberdade – Rio de Janeiro [Party for Socialism and Liberty]), who acts in projects in defence of the LGBT citizenship, in favour of the PLC 122 and of civil marriage for lesbians and gays, among others. Thus, in our research material, it is possible to observe, on the level of the discourse, a problem of articulation of parts of the LGBT movement with the formal level.

One of the recurrences which most drew attention during the analysis concerns the use of the so-called "authority quotations" Maingueneau enhances, in which discourses are elaborated on the basis of quotations coming from a kind of "superlative speaker" (MAINGUENEAU, 1989, p. 100-101) who has great enunciative legitimacy in a determined collectivity. In this process, the "experts" play an important role, the term refers to the "expert system" Giddens (1991) describes and which designates the "systems of technical excellence or of professional competence that organise big areas of the material and social environments in which we live today" (GIDDENS, 1991, p. 35).

In the case of our study, independent of the position which the analysed discourses reveal about the event or about non hetero-normative sexuality, the analysed discourses mention two types of authority: the Federal Constitution – when the demands of the sexual minorities are being discussed on the legal level – and the Bible, which is quoted to condemn or defend LGBT groups. In this sense, the religious doctrines and the juridical field constitute the most used sources of legitimacy.

When the discussions that are situated on the domain of Law provide enunciative validity to the discourses, it was nevertheless the religious field that was the most mentioned, especially in the discourses which, in a certain way, condemned non hetero-normative sexuality. In the case of the category which referred to the biological debate, the mention of supposed “natural” norms, which aims to de-legitimise the homosexual behaviour, combined itself with the use of biblical quotations in which you would find a definition of the supposed sin of the homosexual practice due to the fact that it “contradicts nature”. With regard to civil rights, the constitutional principles concerning the freedom of belief were organised in order to de-legitimise some projects which were defended by sexual minority groups, specially the law project of the Chamber of Deputies 122, which intends to categorise as a crime the discrimination because of sexual orientation or gender identity. According to this viewpoint, in case it is approved, the PLC 122 would prohibit the action of religious leaders or of any other individual who would condemn the “sin” of homosexuality on the basis of the Bible – a “gay muzzle”, expression which was created to discredit the project.

The great recurrence of religious content as a discursive strategy seems to be an indicator that the complex relationships between homosexuality and religiosity configure an urgent topic within society, which is necessary to think about the relationships of non hetero-normative sexualities with the social texture – not only in the formal and institutional fields, but also with regard to that which Habermas (1987) called *lifeworld*, that is to say, the sharing of definitions, feelings and perceptions which are common in the practices of daily life.

## To conclude

The *Gay Pride Parade* brings questions concerning the power and gender relationships in Brazilian society to the public debate and in this sense it operates as a powerful element of mediatic agenda in the social field. Nevertheless the proposal of the LGBT question in the public mediatic arena provokes an intense reaction, as the data of the study evidence it. Such reaction is mainly characterised by frontal attacks to the carrying out of the event. In the data we analysed, 87% of the comments, which were published on the internet, adhere to this reaction of conservative stamp, against only 13% of favourable comments; even though they appear only as responses to the more exalted and aggressive positions.

In the tenor of the critiques, three basic lines of attack on the LGBT position were identified: a questioning about the pertinence of the carrying out of the event, about the regulation of the homosexuals' civil rights and about the value judgments of moral, biological and religious order against the homosexual practice. It is important to emphasise that the religious bias permeates the argumentation of all the categories, which evidences the entanglement between religion and sexuality politics: challenges for the Brazilian social movements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The data point out a significant diversity concerning society's opinions about sexual minorities and the power and gender relationships, in response to the topics brought about by the *Gay Pride Parade*. The divergence of positions and the contradictions we evidenced during the investigation show some of the difficulties we come across on the way to a full democracy and citizenship.

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