

9 Scandalous acts: the politics of shame among Brazilian travesti prostitutes

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In a small, dimly-lit hotel room, a man and a transgendered prostitute have just had sex. The price of this transaction had been agreed on before the couple entered the room, and the man, now dressed and anxious to leave, removes his wallet from his back pocket.

The travesti straightens her bra-straps and eyes the man. "No," she murmurs, as she sees him open the wallet and take out a few notes. "More. I want more."

The man is startled. "What do you mean, you want more?" he asks warily. "We agreed on thirty *reais*, and here's thirty *reais*. Take it."

The travesti slips towards the door, in a swift, resolute gesture. "Listen, love," she says calmly, blocking the man's exit. "The price went up. You wanted me to fuck you. You sucked my dick. That's more expensive. That's not thirty *reais*. It's sixty."

The man growls that the travesti can go fuck *herself* if she thinks she can rob him like that. He flings the notes in his hand at her and moves towards the door. But the travesti moves too. Practiced. Fast. She slams her purse on the floor and plants her feet firmly apart, in a stance that makes her seem thicker, stronger, more expansive. A pair of tiny nail scissors flash in her hand. Suddenly afraid, the man stops in his tracks. He stands in front of the travesti, staring at her and wondering what to do next. Suddenly, he sees her coral-red mouth open and he hears her begin to shout; to utter loud, harsh, venomous screams that fill the room, the hotel, and, horrifyingly, it seems to the man, the whole neighborhood:

Have shame you pig! You disgraceful faggot! You act like a man but you come in here and want to be fucked more than a whore! You sucked my dick and begged me to fuck you! Disgusting faggot! *Maricona* without shame! You're more of a woman than I am! Your asshole is wider than mine is! You're more of a *puta* than me!

In travesti parlance, what is occurring here is *um escândalo*, a commotion, a scandal. A scandal is an example of what ethnographers of communication call a performative genre: it is a named act that has its own structure,

dynamics, and intended consequences. Like all performatives, scandals have illocutionary force; that is, they announce a specific intention on the part of the speaker – in this case, the intention is the conferral of shame. Scandals also ideally produce a set of perlocutionary effects, namely the surrender by the client of more money than he had agreed to pay in the first place.

Scandals as performatives can only operate and make sense within structures of shame. They work to the extent that they elicit shame and channel it into service that benefits travestis. What is the specific configuration of this shame? In this case, it hinges on widespread and violently upheld sanctions against male homosexual relations. For the flame being fanned here is the fact that travestis are males. They are males who habitually consume estrogen-based hormones and who often have impressively feminine figures, due to those hormones and to the numerous liters of industrial silicone that they pay their colleagues to inject into their bodies. But they are males nonetheless. They have penises. These penises are usually kept tightly pressed against a travesti's perineum and well out of anyone's view. But in their professional lives as prostitutes, travestis remove their penis from concealment and frequently put it to use. And during a scandal, a travesti's penis is rhetorically unfurled and resoundingly brandished at anyone within hearing distance of her shouts.

The point of drawing dramatic attention to that part of the travesti's anatomy that she normally keeps concealed is to publicly reconfigure the social status of her client. The overwhelming majority of men who pay travestis for sex are married or have girlfriends, and they identify themselves as heterosexual. Even if these men are publicly revealed to have been in the company of a travesti (for example, on the relatively rare occasions when they go to the police to report that a travesti robbed them, or on the relatively more frequent occasions when police arrest them for having shot a travesti), the majority will steadfastly maintain that they were unaware that the prostitute they picked up was a travesti. Travestis, however, know better. They know that the men who pay them for sex come to the specific streets on which they work looking for a travesti, not a woman. They know that the sexual service requested by many of the men (travestis say 'most of the men') is anal penetration, with the travesti assuming the role of penetrator. Finally, travestis also know that the last thing one of these men ever wants revealed in public is the fact that he has paid money to have a transgendered prostitute insert her penis in his ostensibly heterosexual ass.

So in order to blackmail her client and scare him into parting with more money than he would ever agree to, a travesti will "give a scandal" (*dar um escândalo*). Scandals constitute one of the everyday, mundane means

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by which individual travestis see to it that they earn enough money to support themselves. They are not collective actions. Although scandals can turn into brawls, in which other travestis within hearing distance will come to the aid of their colleague and help attack a particularly violent or recalcitrant client, for the most part they are singular actions taken by individual travestis. Indeed, travestis actually prefer not to involve other travestis in scandals, since they know that they will have to split their takings with any travesti who helps them extract money from a client.

Despite their individualistic nature, scandals can be analyzed as a kind of politics – a micropolitics certainly, and one that produces only small-scale and temporary crinkles in the overall social fabric. But these little crinkles are not altogether without interest. Or irony. For note: in excoriating their allegedly heterosexual clients for being effeminate homosexuals, *travestis are drawing on the exact same language that is habitually invoked by others to condemn travestis and to justify violence against them*. What is perhaps most striking about scandals is that they do not in any way correspond to the noble “hidden transcripts” of resistance that liberal scholars like James Scott expect to find among oppressed groups (Scott, 1990). Scandals do nothing to contest or refute the sociocultural basis of travestis’ abject status in contemporary Brazilian society. Quite the opposite – instead of challenging abjection, scandals cultivate it. And with a skill that is nothing short of dazzling, travestis use scandals as a way of extending the space of their own abjection. A scandal casts that abjection outward like a sticky web, one that ensnares a petrified client, completely against his will.

But not only do scandals compel their recipient to explicitly acknowledge his relationship to a travesti (and listen as his own ontological distance from travestis is challenged and mocked); scandals also force the client to part with more of his money than he had intended. In this way, scandals can be seen as resolutely political actions that result in both recognition *and* redistribution – to use the two terms continually bandied about and debated in philosophical and political science debates about recognition struggles. Furthermore, despite their locally managed nature, scandals draw on large-scale structures for their intelligibility and their efficacy. The existence and salience of these large-scale structures suggest the possibility that scandals could be tapped and extended into larger, more organized, and more collectivized spheres.

Our contribution to this volume on recognition struggles concerns the relationship between scandals and the emerging political activism of Brazilian travestis. Since the early 1990s, Brazilian travestis have been forming activist groups and making demands for recognition and rights. These demands – which include protection from brutal police violence,

the possibility of using their female names on certain official documents, and the right to appear in public space unharassed – seem modest and even self-evident in our eyes. However, we want to argue that there is something fundamentally *scandalous* about travesti demands. In emerging as a public voice and asserting entitlement to equal citizenship rights with others, we see travesti activism as building on the same kinds of principles as those which structure scandals. In both cases, travesti politics is a politics anchored in shame. It is a politics that invokes and activates specific structures of shame, not in order to contest them, but, rather, in order to extend their scope, to imbricate others. In both scandals and their more recognizably activist modalities of political action, travestis transgress public decorum and civil society not by rejecting shame (and championing something like “Travesti Pride”), but by inhabiting shame as a place from which to interpellate others and thereby incriminate those others. In doing this, we want to argue that travestis are deploying what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has called a “shame-conscious” and “shame-creative” vernacular; one that inflects the “social metamorphic” possibilities of shame (Sedgwick, 1993: 13, 14). This means, in turn, that travesti demands for more money from clients or for uninhibited access to public space are not what Nancy Fraser (1997a: 23) has dubbed “affirmative” demands for redress. They are not demands that build upon and enhance existing group differentiation in order to claim additional recognition. Instead, travesti demands are *transformative*, in Fraser’s terms – they work to undermine group differentiation (between normal, upstanding citizens and low-life, perverse travestis) by foregrounding and challenging the generative structures that permit that differentiation to exist in the first place.

Travestis in Brazil

As already mentioned, travestis are males who refashion their appearance, their self-presentational styles, and their physical bodies in a markedly feminine direction. The word *travesti* derives from *transvestir*, or cross-dress. But travestis do not only cross-dress. Sometimes beginning at ages as young as eight or ten, males who self-identify as travestis begin growing their hair long, plucking their eyebrows, experimenting with cosmetics, and wearing, whenever they can, feminine or androgynous clothing such as tiny shorts exposing the bottom of their buttocks or T-shirts tied in a knot in above their navel. It is not unusual for boys of this age to also begin engaging in sexual relations with their peers and older males, always in the role of the one who is anally penetrated. By the time these boys are in their early teens, many of them have already either left home, or

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been expelled from their homes, because their sexual and gender transgressions are usually not tolerated, especially by the boys' fathers. Once they leave home, the overwhelming majority of travestis migrate to cities (if they do not already live in one), where they meet and form friendships with other travestis and where they begin working as prostitutes. In the company of their travesti friends and colleagues, young travestis learn about estrogen-based hormones, which are available for inexpensive over-the-counter purchase at any of the numerous pharmacies that line the streets in Brazilian cities. At this point, young travestis often begin ingesting large quantities of these hormones. By the time they reach their late teens, many travestis have also begun paying their colleagues to inject numerous liters of industrial silicone into their bodies, in order to round out their knees, thighs, and calves, and in order to augment their breasts, hips, and, most importantly (since this is Brazil), their buttocks.

Despite irrevocable physiological modifications such as these, the overwhelming majority of travestis do not self-identify as women. That is, despite the fact that they live their lives in female clothing, call one another 'she,' and by female names, and endure tremendous pain to acquire female bodily forms, travestis do not wish to remove their penis, and they do not consider themselves to *be* women. They are not transsexuals. They are, they say, homosexuals – males who feel "like women" and who ardently desire "men" (i.e., masculine, non-homosexual males). Much of a travesti's time, thought, and effort is spent fashioning and perfecting herself as an object of desire for those men.

Travestis occupy an unusually visible place in both Brazilian social space and the national cultural imaginary. They exist in all Brazilian cities of any size, and in the large southeastern cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, they number in the thousands. They are most exuberantly visible during Brazil's famous annual Carnival, but even in more mundane contexts and discourses, travestis figure prominently. A popular Saturday afternoon television show, for example, includes a spot in which female impersonators, some of whom are clearly travestis, get judged by a panel of celebrities on how beautiful they are and on how well they mime the lyrics to songs sung by female vocalists. Another weekly television show regularly featured Valéria, a well-known travesti. *Tieta*, one of the most popular television *novelas* in recent years, featured a special guest appearance by Rogéria, another famous travesti. Another widely watched *novela* featured a saucy female lead whose speech was peppered with words from travesti argot, and who sounded, everybody agreed, just like a travesti (Browning, 1996). But most telling of all of the special place reserved for travestis in the Brazilian popular imagination is the fact that the individual widely acclaimed to be most beautiful woman in Brazil in

the mid-1980s was . . . a travesti. That travesti, Roberta Close, became a household name throughout the country. She regularly appeared on national television, starred in a play in Rio, posed nude (with strategically crossed legs) in an issue of *Playboy* magazine that sold out its entire press run of 200,000 copies almost immediately, was continually interviewed and portrayed in virtually every magazine in the country, and had at least three songs written about her by well-known composers. Although her popularity declined when, at the end of the 1980s, she left Brazil to have a sex-change operation and live in Europe, Roberta Close remains extremely well known. A book about her life appeared a few years ago (Rito, 1998), and in 1995 she was featured in a nationwide advertisement for Duloren lingerie, in which a photograph of her passport, bearing her male name, was transposed with a photograph of her looking sexy and chic in a black lace undergarment. The caption read "*Você não imagina do que uma Duloren é capaz*" – "You can't imagine what a Duloren can do."

As it happens, famous individuals like Roberta Close, Valéria, and Rogéria are not representative of Brazil's travestis. Instead, they are more like exceptions that prove the rule. And the rule is harsh discrimination and vituperative public prejudice. The overwhelming majority of travestis live far from the protective glow of celebrity, and they constitute one of the most marginalized and despised groups in Brazilian society. Most travestis (like most Brazilians) come from working-class or poor backgrounds, and many remain poor throughout their lives – even though many, these days, also travel to Europe and earn enough money working there as prostitutes to return to Brazil and secure their own futures, and those of their mothers. In most Brazilian cities, travestis are harassed so routinely that many of them avoid venturing out onto the street during the day. And at night while at work, they are regularly the victims of violent police brutality and random assassinations by individuals or gangs of men who take it upon themselves to "clean up the streets," just like local governments periodically order their police forces to do – despite the fact that neither cross-dressing nor prostitution is criminal under the Brazilian legal code.

So the nature of the relationship between the Brazilian populace at large and travestis is hot-cold and love-hate: hot and loving enough to propel a handful of travestis to national celebrity, and also to sustain a thriving market in which tens of thousands of travestis are able to support themselves through prostitution. But cold and hateful enough to ensure that the majority of those travestis live in continual anxiety that their right to occupy urban space will be publicly challenged and perhaps violently denied. Jovana Baby, founder and president of Brazil's first travesti activist

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organization *Grupo Astral* (*Associação de Travestis e Liberados de Rio de Janeiro*), provided a pithy summary of popular Brazilian sentiments towards travestis when she remarked in an interview with Kulick that "Brazilians love travestis, as long as they stay on television or on the covers of magazines. A travesti on the street or, God forbid, in the family – that is another story altogether."

Deferred signifiers

Ambivalent public sentiments towards travestis are mirrored in ambivalent public perceptions about the precise composition of travesti identity. One of the most striking dimensions of the Brazilian preoccupation with travestis is that, despite the habitual presence of travestis in both what we might see as the "high" contexts of popular culture and the "low" contexts of seeing them on city streets and in the crime pages of the local newspaper (frequently in lurid close-ups as murdered corpses), there appears to be no clear consensus about what exactly travestis are. In the press, travestis are sometimes referred to as "he," and sometimes as "she." Some commentators insist that travestis want to be women; others insist that they self-identify as men. Still others, especially those commentators influenced by postmodernist ideas, claim that travestis reject identity altogether. They are usually depicted as homosexuals, but occasionally this identity is elided, and they are identified, instead, as transsexuals. Expressed in structuralist terms, the result of these various depictions of travesti identity is that the signifier "travesti" is continually deferred and never finally coalesces with a specific signified. This means that the Brazilian public can never be certain that it knows what "travesti" means from one context to the next.

All of this is evident from the language used to discuss travestis, and we want to examine one example in detail to illustrate the kind of indeterminacy to which we are drawing attention here. On January 7, 1996, the São Paulo-state-based newspaper *A Tribuna* ran a full-page story about an individual named Márcia Muller, who was identified as a travesti in the headline, in a head-shot photo captioned "The travesti Márcia Muller," and throughout the text. The story appeared under the headline "Travesti spends 45 days detained in Women's Jail" (*Travesti passa 45 dias preso na Cadeia Feminina*). In bold print and large lettering directly under the rubric, the following text appears:

What can have caused the police of [the city of] Diase to imagine that the travesti Márcia Muller was really a woman and put her (*a prendessem*) in the Women's Jail of Santos? Did the pseudo-hermaphrodite really look like a woman or was

there just a tiny resemblance? The terrible mistake committed by the police has already been cleared up, but there could be lasting disagreeable developments. The female prisoners, naturally, protested against the intimacy of having to use the same bathroom as Márcia, her being a man (*sendo era homem*). For the first time in this region, the Courts face such a problem.

The article reports that thirty-eight-year-old Márcia Muller was arrested with eighty grams of cocaine and taken to the local police station. According to the newspaper, "In the police station, during a body search conducted by a policeman, the male sexual organ of the accused was perceived (*foi percebido o órgão sexual masculino do acusado*), but because he was convicted (*porém como ele foi convicto*) claiming to be a hermaphrodite, and presenting documents plus check stubs with the name Márcia Muller on them, the end result was the Women's Jail."

"In the jail," the article continues, "there was a climate of speculation. The topic was discussed in all the jail cells. Some women believed that she was a hermaphrodite, but the majority doubted this and thought that their new colleague (*a nova colega*) was really a travesti."

One of the inmates who did not want Márcia in the jail contacted a criminal lawyer. This lawyer could do nothing, the newspaper explains, because "the girl (*a moça*; i.e., Márcia) was detained in the custody of Justice." In order to move Márcia out of the Women's Jail, a court order was needed. The lawyer brought the case to the attention of a judge, who had Márcia examined by a medical doctor.

"The doctor confirmed, after various examinations, including touching (*inclusive de toque*)," that *Márcia era homem mesmo* – Márcia was really a man. But at this point, Márcia's lawyer intervened and argued that if his client was transferred to a male jail, her life would be in danger. In the end, Márcia was moved to the Men's Jail, but placed in a cell in the male jail that contained "two more travestis."

The final paragraph of the article contains the following coda, which, given the outcome of the doctor's examination, does more to add to the mystery of Márcia's identity than it does to resolve it:

Márcia Muller has all the features of a woman [?!], but has big feet and coarse hands. If it weren't for a low voice and a light sashay when walking (*sua voz desafinada e um ligeiro requebro no andar*), her conduct could easily be confused with that of a woman.

So even by the end of this 1,400-word report, Márcia Muller's sexed and gendered identity remains unresolved. Despite the fact that the article makes an explicit reference to Márcia's "male sexual organ," and to the medical examination that concluded that Márcia was "really a man," she is referred to with a masculine pronoun only once throughout the

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entire text (in the context of having had her male sexual organ "perceived"). In all other cases where gendered grammatical pronouns, articles, and adjectives are used, Márcia is consistently referred to with female forms. At one point she is even called "the girl." In the series of questions prefacing the article, Márcia is called a "pseudo-hermaphrodite," even though it is later determined that she is, in fact, not one. And even though it would seem that the issue of Márcia's sex/gender is finally resolved with the Court order to transfer her to the Men's Jail, the closing coda of the article reopens the issue, ending on a note of provocative indeterminacy.

The public uncertainty about what travestis are and who qualifies as a travesti that newspaper articles like this promote lays the foundation for what scholars like Charles Taylor (1994) and Axel Honneth (1995a, 1995b) would identify as the "misrecognition" of travestis. In other words, by keeping the referent of "travesti" vague, articles like the one about Márcia Muller encourage people to not recognize their particular identity. And such a lack of recognition is not trivial or merely insulting – both Taylor and Honneth argue at length that it is pernicious and profoundly harmful.

When it comes to travestis, these scholars are, of course, in a sense, right. Uncertainty about Márcia Muller's identity led to her being subjected to invasive physical examinations, and had her lawyer not succeeded in getting her placed in a cell with two other travestis, she would have been in real physical danger by being transferred to a men's prison. A more politically significant example of the harmful nature of travesti misrecognition occurred not long ago in an interview with the then-mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Luis Paulo Conde, in the monthly gay magazine *Sui Generis*. In an otherwise generally affirmative and sympathetic interview about homosexuality, the mayor suddenly announces that he finds travestis "offensive" (*O que agride é o travesti*). The reason? "A travesti doesn't admit to being gay. He dresses in women's clothes to be accepted by society. When he puts on the clothes, it's to be accepted by society. Since society doesn't accept homosexuality, he creates a woman so that he will be accepted." Now, leaving aside the mayor's intriguing suggestion that Brazilians might be more tolerant of men in dresses than they are of homosexuals, here we have a case of misrecognition in which mayor Conde denies the homosexual component of travesti identity, thereby necessarily disqualifying them from any of the rights or protections that he might eventually be willing to grant homosexuals.

But while public ambivalence about travesti identity is indeed harmful in many of the ways discussed by Taylor and Honneth, it not *only* harmful; and this is a point that seems likely to be missed by the analytical frameworks elaborated by those scholars. For besides constituting damage,

public uncertainty about the precise nature (and hence, the precise boundaries) of travesti identity *also* generates a space of ambiguity that travestis can use to their advantage. If travesti identity remains fuzzy, it becomes possible to suggest that the identity, or at least key dimensions of the identity, are not specific to travestis, but are, instead, shared by others who do not self-identify as travestis. Hence, ambivalence provides travestis with a wedge that they can use to insert themselves into the identificatory constellations of others, and, in doing so, compel a reconsideration and perhaps even a reconfiguration of those constellations.¹

A forced realignment of identity is what we believe travesti scandals accomplish. Scandals publicly accuse a travesti's client of being a depraved effeminate homosexual, one who is so pathetically abject that he actually pays money to be abased at the hands of a person who herself is at the very nadir of sociocultural hierarchy.

The reason why scandals work (that is, the reason why they nine times out of ten produce the desired result of more money) is because travestis are right. Or, rather, scandals work because travestis *might be right*. The great majority of a travesti's clients would certainly hotly disagree with travesti assertions that they are depraved effeminate perverts. However, because the boundaries of travesti identity are not neatly demarcated or entirely clear-cut for most people, the possibility remains open that travesti ontology does not occupy the place of the absolute Other, in relation to the public at large. On the contrary, because the contours of travesti identity are ambiguously outlined in relation to others, there is a distinct possibility that travestis might be right when they point a finger and assert affinity with a particular individual. Especially if that individual did what the travesti says he did (and he may or may not have – who can know for sure?), public perception of the man will change, and he will be resignified by anyone who hears (or hears about) the scandal as someone who does indeed share an (until that moment) secret affiliation with his travesti accuser.

So travesti scandals raise a specter of ontological similarity between the travesti and her client. But they depend for their effectiveness on the simultaneous assertion of the shameful nature of that ontology ("Have shame you pig! You disgraceful faggot!"). Shame here becomes the channel through which identification flows, the contours within which it takes form. Eve Sedgwick (1993) has addressed this identity-delineating power of shame in her essay on the politics of performativity. Sedgwick argues that whereas guilt is an affect that focuses on the suffering of another (and the self's blame for that suffering), shame concerns the suffering of the self at the hands of another.²

Furthermore, shame is a bad *thing*, in experience not all. For, as Sedgwick phrases it, a turning away – the case of scandal – is a travesti's demand.

Sedgwick suggests that the overtly political nature of this suggestion has figured in the shame and politics of Axel Honneth's "missing psychology" – how economic change in political life can be moved – raised when one is to which one belongs – subject is brutal fact that it is different of self. The affinity Honneth's term identify specific target of political psychological and political struggle.

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Furthermore, while guilt is a bad feeling attached to what one does, shame is a bad feeling attaching to what one is. "[O]ne therefore is *something*, in experiencing shame," Sedgwick explains (1993: 12). But that is not all. For, conferred by another, shame always responds. It *performs*, as Sedgwick phrases it. Often, embarrassment, a blush, an aversion of eyes, a turning away – these are the responses, the performances, of shame. In the case of scandals, shame performs by compelling acquiescence to the travesti's demands for more money.

Sedgwick suggests that this performative dimension of shame has overtly political consequences. In order to better understand the importance of this suggestion, let us first contrast it with the way in which shame has figured in the work of another scholar who has recently discussed shame and politics. In his writings on recognition struggles, philosopher Axel Honneth (1995a: 256–60; 1995b: 131–39) identifies shame as the "missing psychological link" (1995b: 135) that allows us to understand how economic privation or social repression can motivate people to engage in political struggle. Shame, in other words, explains how a subject can be moved from suffering to action. Honneth argues that shame is raised when one's interactional partners refuse to grant one the respect to which one believes oneself entitled. When this occurs, the disrespected subject is brutally brought up against the normally unreflected-upon fact that it is dependent on the recognition of others for its own sense of self. The affronted realization that the other's view of the self is, in Honneth's terms, "distorted," constitutes the motivational impetus to identify specific others as the source of oppression, and, hence, as the target of political struggle. In Honneth's framework, shame is thus the psychological bedrock of political action. And the psychological goal of political struggle is the elimination of shame.

Sedgwick's view is different. Like Honneth, Sedgwick argues that shame in the self is conferred by others, and that the experience of shame is a constitutive dimension of the identities of oppressed people. Unlike Honneth, however, Sedgwick stresses that shame is a crucial component in *all* identity formation. "[O]ne of the things that anyone's character or personality is," she insists, "is a record of the highly individual histories by which the fleeting emotion of shame has instituted far more durable, structural changes in one's relational and interpretive strategies toward both self and others" (1993: 12–13). In other words, all of our socializing experiences in which our behavior and expression are controlled with sharp reprimands like "People are looking at you!" are important nexuses in the construction of our identities. This implies that forms of shame cannot be considered as "distinct 'toxic' parts of groups or individual identity

that can be excised" through consciousness raising or recognition struggles (1993: 13). Instead, shame is integral to the very processes by which identity itself is formed. This which means that the extinction of shame would be, in effect, the extinction of identity itself. Therefore, instead of fantasizing about the end of shame, Sedgwick proposes that shame be acknowledged, embraced, and put to transformative political use. In this framework, the goal is not the end of shame. The goal is the refiguration of shame as "a near inexhaustible source of transformational energy" (1993: 4), and its creative deployment in political struggles.

This creative deployment can occur in a variety of registers, many of them, Sedgwick speculates, as yet unimagined. But travestis certainly hit on one of them when they began to claim shame as a place from which they might speak and hail others, asserting power to resignify those others, and compelling them to respond in wished-for ways. In scandals, what gets redesignated are the public (and sometimes perhaps also the privately felt) identities of a number of individual men. It seems that, for a long time, this was enough for travestis. Nowadays, though, some travestis have decided that they have bigger fish to fry. Instead of contenting themselves with redefining the public perceptions of a few men who pay them for sex, these travestis are turning their attention to redefining the public perceptions of more consequential entities, such as the concept of Brazilian citizenship and the nature of human rights. These are the targets that get focalized in travestis' more recognizably activist modes of political activism, and it is to these forms of political struggle that we now turn.

Travesti political activism

The emergence of travesti political struggles in Brazil can only be understood in the context of the rise of Brazilian gay and AIDS activism during the past two decades, since these movements, although not always welcoming travestis or responding to their concerns, have heavily influenced the content and organizational structures of travesti activism (Daniel, 1989; Daniel and Parker, 1990; James N. Green, 1999; Klein, 1999; MacRae, 1990; 1992; Parker, 1994; 1999; Terto, 2000; Trevisan, 1986). Brazilian gay and AIDS organizing has in turn been strongly shaped by two larger political processes, namely, the redemocratization of Brazilian society during the late 1970s and 1980s (Alvarez, 1990; Skidmore, 1988) and the rapid expansion of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during the 1980s and 1990s (Fernandes, 1994; Landim, 1988; 1993). The following discussion traces the development of Brazilian gay and AIDS activism and highlights the various interconnections between the two movements. We then turn our attention to contemporary travesti political

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struggles and their complex blend of AIDS, gay, and specifically travesti-related issues.

In 1964, the Brazilian military staged a coup d'état and forced João Goulart, a leftist president, to flee the country. Over the next few years, an authoritarian regime was gradually institutionalized (Skidmore, 1988; Burns, 1993). Repression was particularly strong from 1968 to 1973, and many who actively opposed the dictatorship were imprisoned or forced into political exile. In the mid-1970s, a more "moderate" wing of the military assumed power and instituted the *abertura* – or political opening – thereby beginning Brazil's lengthy redemocratization, which was only completed in 1989 with the first direct presidential elections in more than twenty-five years.

The *abertura* generated an intense surge of political and social mobilization. In the late 1970s, movements such as workers' organizations, neighborhood associations, ecclesial base communities, women's organizations, environmental groups, and Afro-Brazilian groups sprang up throughout Brazil. Building on democratic principles and grassroots mobilization, this "revolution in everyday life" (Scherer-Warren and Krischke, 1987) represented a break from traditional Brazilian politics and its history of clientelism, hierarchy, and populism (see Burns [1993] for excellent summaries of these dimensions of Brazilian political history, and Scheper-Hughes [1992] for a vivid account of their continued existence in contemporary Brazilian life). Given the continued dangers of directly confronting the legitimacy of an "opening" but still authoritarian regime, the new social movements served as an important organizing arena for social and political sectors that opposed the dictatorship.

It is within this context of widespread political and social mobilization that the Brazilian homosexual movement arose (Green, 1999; MacRae, 1990; 1992; Trevisan, 1986).³ In 1979, Brazil's first homosexual newspaper, *Lampião*, was launched in Rio de Janeiro. That same year, *SOMOS – Grupo de Afirmação Homossexual* (We Are – Homosexual Affirmation Group) was established in São Paulo. During the same period, homosexual liberation groups were established in several other Brazilian states and, in April 1980, representatives from these organizations met in São Paulo at the first Brazilian Congress of Organized Homosexual Groups. The movement achieved particular public notoriety several months later through a historic protest march against police violence in São Paulo that brought together nearly one thousand people, including many travestis (MacRae, 1990).

In terms of its sexual politics, the early Brazilian homosexual movement stressed the subversive dimensions of sexuality, including sexual freedom, androgyny, and what today is often referred to as "gender fucking."

Rather than decry the social marginality of homosexuals, movement leaders argued that outrageous and "shameful" dimensions of homosexuality, such as camp, gender-bending, and promiscuity, should not only be celebrated at the personal level; those phenomena also constituted a creative, anti-authoritarian force that could work against the dictatorship and transform society. Although they focused on gender and sexual politics, the homosexual liberation activists also worked with the opposition movement more generally, and with movements such as those developed by feminists, Afro-Brazilians, and indigenous peoples. In these political alliances, homosexual leaders adopted a discourse that emphasized citizenship and democracy (MacRae, 1990; Trevisan, 1986).

It did not take long, however, for the marked gender, class, racial, and political differences among group participants to threaten the cohesion of the still-young gay liberation movement. For example, internal tensions within the São-Paulo-based SOMOS (We Are) group, which had become the most influential Brazilian homosexual liberation organization, reached crisis proportions in May 1980, when nearly all of its female members left en masse to form the Lesbian-Feminist Action Group. The remaining men then largely divided into anarchist and Trotskyite factions. Similar schisms occurred at the *Lampião* newspaper. By the end of 1981, with SOMOS in tatters and *Lampião* having closed its doors, the first wave of Brazilian homosexual mobilization had more or less ended. As Edward MacRae (1990; 1992) argues, this decline resulted from a combination of the internal conflicts noted above and a more general shift in political energy from social movements to party-oriented electoral politics in the multiple-party, democratic electoral system that was implemented in the early 1980s. These conflicts and the changing political landscape were compounded by significant transformations in the organization of Brazilian homosexuality during this period, including the rapid growth of gay identity politics and gay consumer culture, neither of which was easily reconcilable with the movement's anarchism and anti-consumerism (Green, 1999; MacRae, 1990; 1992; Parker, 1999).

The beginning of the AIDS epidemic in Brazil in the early to mid-1980s raised new challenges for an already fragile and fragmented movement. Was AIDS a gay issue? If gay groups worked on AIDS, would they be reinforcing the public perception that AIDS was (only) a gay disease, thereby potentially reinforcing the shame and stigma associated with AIDS and increasing discrimination against gay Brazilians?⁴ Given governmental apathy in response to an increasingly out-of-control epidemic, would taking on AIDS issues overwhelm gay groups and prevent them from working on specifically gay issues (e.g., fighting anti-gay discrimination and violence, supporting gay rights legislation, building a gay community)?

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Facing these dilemmas, Brazilian gay groups in the 1980s made different choices – some, such as the *Grupo Gay da Bahia* (Gay Group of Bahia) in Salvador and the *Grupo Atobá de Emancipação Homossexual* (Atobá Group for Homosexual Emancipation) in Rio de Janeiro, were among the first groups, gay or otherwise, to develop AIDS prevention and education activities in Brazil (see Daniel and Parker, 1993; Galvão, 1997; Parker, 1994; Terto et al., 1995). Others, such as *Triângulo Rosa* (Pink Triangle) in Rio de Janeiro, initially declined to work extensively on AIDS-related issues (Câmara da Silva, 1993).

With the founding of Brazil's first AIDS service organization – the Support Group for AIDS Prevention/GAPA – in 1985 in São Paulo, a new type of organization entered the Brazilian political stage and greatly influenced the shape of AIDS and gay activism in Brazil. Like many political groups formed in Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s, GAPA-São Paulo structured itself as an NGO. It sought and received considerable financial support from North American and European philanthropic organizations to work on AIDS-related issues (on the dramatic growth of NGOs and the “third sector” in Brazil during the past two decades, see Fernandes, 1994; Landim, 1988; 1993). With these resources, GAPA-São Paulo implemented a comprehensive array of AIDS-related programs and activities, including providing social services for people with AIDS, conducting AIDS education and prevention campaigns, countering media misinformation, criticizing governmental apathy, and attempting to mobilize civil society in response to the epidemic. This model of responding to the AIDS epidemic through semi-professionalized, internationally funded AIDS-specific NGOs (AIDS-NGOs) became the dominant paradigm for AIDS activism in Brazil (Galvão, 1997; Klein, 1994; 1996). Beginning in 1989, a national AIDS political movement began to articulate itself through a series of semi-annual and then annual National Meetings of AIDS-NGOs. By 1992, there were nearly one hundred AIDS-NGOs in Brazil (Galvão, 1997). Today, there are more than 400.

Not surprisingly, given the significant impact of the Brazilian AIDS epidemic on men who have sex with men, throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s many of the leaders and active participants at these AIDS-NGOs were gay-identified men, including some who had participated in the first wave of the Brazilian homosexual movement. Yet despite the involvement of many gay-identified men, these organizations did not consider themselves to be gay groups, and until the mid-1990s most AIDS-NGOs primarily directed their prevention activities towards the “general population.” This is not to say that gay-related issues were of no interest to AIDS-NGOs, as can be seen in the work of Herbert Daniel, a noted writer and leftist and gay political activist.⁵ In 1987, Daniel began

working at Brazil's second oldest AIDS-NGO, the Brazilian Interdisciplinary AIDS Association (ABIA) in Rio de Janeiro. At ABIA, Daniel played a leading role in developing some of the first sexually explicit and culturally sensitive AIDS prevention materials directed towards men who have sex with men. In early 1989, Daniel discovered that he was HIV+ (Daniel, 1989). Recognizing the need for an organization focused primarily on the political dimensions of living with HIV/AIDS, Daniel formed *Grupo Pela VIDDÁ* (Group for the Affirmation, Integration, and Dignity for People with AIDS) in Rio de Janeiro later that year.⁶

Grupo Pela VIDDÁ represented an epistemological and practical break in Brazilian AIDS activism and served as a critical reference for AIDS-related programs and politics throughout the 1990s.⁷ Unlike its counterpart AIDS-NGOs in the late 1980s and early 1990s, *Pela VIDDÁ* did not provide direct services to people with HIV/AIDS or focus on developing educational materials and activities. Instead, under the leadership of Daniel, *Pela VIDDÁ* articulated a political project that emphasized citizenship and solidarity in the face of the "civil death" (*morte civil*) experienced by people living with HIV/AIDS in Brazil. By civil death, Daniel referred to the then prevalent practice in Brazil – and indeed throughout the world – of treating people with HIV/AIDS as already dead even though they were still alive. This civil death was often internalized by people with HIV/AIDS. Facing the various shames associated with AIDS (i.e., its rhetorical links to promiscuity, contagion, and homosexuality), many individuals became either socially invisible or the passive subjects of sensationalistic media coverage (see Daniel, 1989; Daniel and Parker, 1990; Galvão, 1992; Klein, 1996; Terto, 2000).

A significant dimension of Daniel's political project was to openly assume the "shame" of AIDS, and to use it to formulate political goals. From the position of a person living with the stigma of HIV, Daniel asserted that *everyone* in Brazil was living with AIDS. This argument is not a new one – it had been powerfully formulated by gay groups in the USA and the UK as soon as the magnitude of the epidemic – and also the magnitude of government inaction – became evident. What is important about the argument, however, is that it reterritorializes shame, relocating it not so much in individual bodies, as in the political structure of society. It also importantly refigures people associated with AIDS as active articulators, rather than passive recipients, of shame. In other words, arguments like those deployed by Daniel and *Pela VIDDÁ* fashioned shame as a powerful position from which individuals could speak and demand hearing.

Despite the vitality and political possibilities of Daniel and *Pela VIDDÁ*'s vision of "living with HIV/AIDS" and its explicit incorporation

of both (homo)sexuality throughout the 1980s and AIDS-NGOs and gay & complex and often antagonistic, since during this period such as the Gay Group focused on promoting reterritorializing – the shaming practices were questioned, particularly as AIDS-related respects, eclipse gay group leadership of AIDS-NGOs between AIDS and gay positioning themselves as gay-group-based AIDS. In contrast, prominent gay leaders criticized activities directed specifically at AIDS & agencies of international groups who focused on

These tensions became prominent throughout the 1990s. In Brazil, receiving a loan in 1992 to develop an AIDS program (Galvão, 1997) over the period 1992 contributed to nearly 200 AIDS-related issues, including worker, and women's side AIDS-related funding organizations receiving funding for the creation of projects and that focused on specific sex with men and sex (travestis) as well as The availability of dialogue offered through competition between significant growth in prevention activities programs in turn h

of both (homo)sexuality and AIDS within a broader political discourse, throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s the relationship between AIDS-NGOs and gay groups – and gay and AIDS activists – remained complex and often antagonistic (Câmara da Silva, 1993; Vallinoto, 1991). Part of this antagonism resulted from different approaches to sexual politics, since during this period most of the more visible Brazilian gay groups, such as the Gay Group of Bahia, adopted a vision of sexual politics that focused on promoting gay identities and eliminating – rather than reterritorializing – the shame associated with homosexuality. But equally important were questions of money, expertise, and representivity, particularly as AIDS-related organizations came to outnumber and, in many respects, eclipse gay groups in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This ascendancy of AIDS-NGOs resulted in competition and at times antagonism between AIDS and gay groups. On the one hand, AIDS organizations, positioning themselves as the “AIDS experts,” questioned the quality of gay-group-based AIDS prevention activities. On the other hand, prominent gay leaders criticized AIDS organizations for not developing more activities directed specifically towards male homosexuals. They further resented that AIDS groups were receiving considerable funding from agencies of international cooperation which was largely unavailable to groups who focused exclusively on gay issues.

These tensions between AIDS and gay organizations diminished throughout the 1990s. One critical factor in this rapprochement was Brazil receiving a loan of more than \$150 million from the World Bank in 1992 to develop and implement a comprehensive National AIDS Program (Galvão, 1997).⁸ As part of this so-called “World Bank Project,” over the period 1993 to 1998 more than \$9 million dollars was distributed to nearly 200 community-based organizations who worked on AIDS-related issues – not only AIDS-NGOs, but also gay, travesti, sex worker, and women’s organizations who had previously been largely outside AIDS-related funding circles.⁹ This expansion in the types of organizations receiving federal AIDS funding was complemented by the creation of projects and subcommittees within the National AIDS Program that focused on specific “higher risk” populations, such as men who have sex with men and sex professionals (both categories explicitly referencing travestis) as well as injecting drug users and incarcerated populations. The availability of these funds and the opportunities for constructive dialogue offered through the National AIDS Program helped to decrease competition between AIDS-NGOs and gay groups and stimulated a significant growth in the 1990s of AIDS-NGO and gay-group-based HIV prevention activities directed towards men who have sex with men. These programs in turn have played important roles in the emergence of more

visible gay communities in Brazil.¹⁰ Cooperation between AIDS and gay groups has been further reinforced with the re-establishment of the *Comissão Nacional de AIDS* (CNAIDS/National AIDS Commission), which includes various gay and AIDS activists.¹¹

These shifts in the content of AIDS prevention programs and the patterns of AIDS industry funding must be situated alongside the changes in the landscape of same-sex sexuality that have been occurring in Brazil over the course of the AIDS epidemic (Klein, 1999; Parker, 1996; 1999; Parker and Terto, 1998; Terto, 2000). For despite much hyperbole predicting the demise of homosexuals and their supposedly "contaminated" ghettos in the early years of the epidemic, Brazilian gay-oriented commercial establishments expanded in both number and type during the 1980s and especially the 1990s, and male homosexuality – including travestis – became everyday topics within the mainstream media. This increase in gay visibility has been complemented by gay-oriented national magazines (e.g. *Sui Generis*, *G*), which have been critical nodes in the emergence of a vital and media-oriented national gay culture (Parker, 1999). At the same time, gay political activism grew dramatically in Brazil during the mid- to late 1990s. From a handful of groups at the end of the 1980s and sixty groups in 1995, there are now nearly a hundred gay groups in the *Associação Brasileira de Gays, Lésbicas and Travestis* (ABGLT, Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians, and Travestis). In addition, gay rights issues are being seriously considered in the national political arena. For example, a domestic partnership proposal was introduced in the National Legislature in 1998, where it initially faced little organized opposition. More recently, opposition to the measure from conservative and religious sectors (e.g., Protestant fundamentalist groups and certain sectors of the Catholic Church) has intensified, and gay rights activists have been working with legislators to mobilize political and popular support around these and other gay rights issues.

How do travestis fit within these emerging gay communities and the resurgence of the Brazilian gay movement? As discussed above, travestis occupy a complicated and shifting position within Brazilian (homo)sexual worlds. If travestis are sometimes admired and desired for their beauty and sensuality, many Brazilians – including a significant number of gays and gay leaders – consider travestis to be a shameful group whose ostentatious presence and frequently scandalous behavior discredit gay Brazilians and the gay political movement. This marginalization of travestis within gay worlds is further demonstrated by the relatively low levels of travesti involvement in non-travesti-specific gay activism. For example, despite the existence of a travesti-led "department of travestis" at the Brazilian Association of Gays, Lesbians, and Travestis (ABGLT), the

overall presence is limited. This gay movement Regional Meeting of the more than 100 are travestis gay market" (Klein, 1999). Cultural values (e.g., aesthetics) preclude travestis.

Facing these challenges and gay political activism grounded the Baby of *Grupos* travesti activists to the extent that and venues, in addition to the limits on how travestis can be. However, travestis have been enabling

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overall presence and influence of travestis within the ABGLT is quite limited. This lack of presence of travestis within the organized Brazilian gay movement also occurs at regional levels – at the 1994 Southern Regional Meeting of Lesbian and Gay Groups in Porto Alegre, only one of the more than thirty participants who attended was a travesti. Nor are travestis generally active participants in the growing Brazilian "pink market" (Klein, 1999; Parker, 1999), since its costs, middle-class cultural values (e.g., respectability), and emphasis on masculine gay male aesthetics present an inaccessible and often hostile environment for most travestis.

Facing these barriers to participation in Brazil's emerging gay culture and gay political movement, over the past decade and a half, travestis have grounded their political organizing around AIDS-related issues. Jovana Baby of *Grupo Astral* observed pithily in an interview with Kulick that travesti activism has "ridden on the back of the AIDS." In other words, to the extent that travestis have established formal organizations, programs, and venues, it has been entirely through AIDS-related funding, usually from the Ministry of Health. This kind of funding has placed specific limits on how travesti activism is articulated and how it is perceived. However, travestis like Jovana Baby have made sure that those limits have been enabling limits.

Scandalous citizenship

As sex workers, travestis were particularly hard hit by the AIDS epidemic. It is difficult to estimate the number of travestis who have died of HIV-related illness since statistics on AIDS in Brazil do not report on travestis – travestis are subsumed under the category "men" and "homosexual transmission." Travestis are agreed, however, that they have lost innumerable friends and colleagues to AIDS, and they are emphatic that the transmission of HIV continues to constitute a profound threat.¹²

Travesti involvement in the Brazilian response to AIDS dates to the mid-1980s, when the travesti Brenda Lee founded a support house/hospice for travestis living with HIV and AIDS in São Paulo. In most cases, travesti-focused AIDS-related projects and the travesti organizations they support have been established by charismatic leaders like Brenda Lee and Jovana Baby, although several important travesti groups are ongoing programs within AIDS-NGOs and gay organizations (e.g. GAPA/Belo Horizonte, GAPA/Rio Grande do Sul, Gay Group of Bahia). With the expansion of the National AIDS Program in the early 1990s, and its commitment to the distribution of condoms and safer-sex education within "special populations" such as men who have sex with men and sex

professionals,¹³ the number of travesti-led and travesti-related programs in Brazil has grown from a handful in the early 1990s to approximately twenty today.

Since 1993, the Ministry of Health, at times in collaboration with international philanthropic agencies that fund AIDS-related programs, has underwritten an annual national conference called the "National Meeting of Travestis and Open-Minded People who Work with AIDS" (*Encontro Nacional de Travestis e Liberados que Trabalham com AIDS*). These meetings usually gather together about 200 participants, and they have developed into crucial arenas where politically conscious travestis meet one another and discuss strategies and demands. However, even though travestis are thematically foregrounded at these conferences, they are numerically far outnumbered (by three to one) by the "open-minded people" who work with AIDS.¹⁴ Many of these "open-minded people" have little contact with travestis in their day-to-day work and seem to attend the conference because it is one of the more colorful of the AIDS-circuit conferences that occur throughout Brazil every year.

The focus on AIDS, in addition to resulting in travestis being outnumbered at these conferences, has also had a constraining effect on which topics can be discussed. A recurring complaint from travestis is that too much time is spent discussing condom use and safer-sex programs, and too little time is devoted to other issues that are of great importance to travestis, such as police violence or the construction and maintenance of travesti in-group solidarity. Nonetheless, despite having AIDS as their principal focus, travestis have been able to expand the agendas of these national conferences to include issues such as social exclusion, gender and sexual identity, violence, sex work, and citizenship.¹⁵

One of the effects of conferences like the "National Meeting of Travestis and Open-Minded People who Work with AIDS" is that they cement an association in the public mind between travestis and AIDS which dates to the beginnings of the Brazilian AIDS epidemic. One of the first published reports about AIDS in Brazil, for example, reported the research of a Brazilian clinician who claimed that the recently discovered epidemic could be traced to the injection of female hormones and "infected" silicone by travestis (Daniel, 1993: 33). As a result of this history, an already well-established connection between travestis and AIDS is reinforced every time a travesti group receives government funding, since these resources are inevitably tied to HIV prevention work. In political activist contexts, this continually foregrounded link between travestis and AIDS is restricting in some ways, as the travestis who want to talk about issues like police violence at the annual conference regularly point out. However, the fact that travesti claims are channeled and heard through an

AIDS discourse give potential in which to speak and demand change.

Much like Daniel discussed above, travestis are highlighting and retelling a protest march, which is a performance of Travestis and which local groups of travestis, with their brutality,¹⁶ many of them in drag attire – revealing lingerie while working the play-while-working-the-travestis play up, rather than fill public space with turns space inside of travestis walking down bodices and miniskirts an intimacy that reflects This kind of public intimacies is a striking calls queer politics argues, writing gender point we are making other imagined by a straight life but now

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AIDS discourse gives travesti political actions a particular character and potential in which shame emerges as a key position from which travestis speak and demand hearing.

Much like Daniel and *Pela VIDA*'s politics of "living with AIDS" discussed above, travesti political strategies have been centered upon highlighting and reterritorializing shame. Whenever travestis organize a protest march, which they do at the conclusion of every "National Meeting of Travestis and Open-Minded People who Work with AIDS," and which local groups occasionally do in their home cities to protest police brutality,¹⁶ many of the protestors take care to wear their most outrageous attire – revealing lingerie-style clothing that they would normally only display while working the street late at night. In other words, in these contexts travestis play up, rather than down, their difference from others, and they fill public space with their most scandalous avatars. Just like a scandal turns space inside out by making the most intimate interactions public, travestis walking down a city's main street in broad daylight in tight bodices and miniscule shorts resignify that space and saturate it with an intimacy that refuses to be contained by normative notions of privacy. This kind of public manifestation of normally concealed persons and intimacies is a striking example of what sociologist Steven Seidman (1997) calls queer politics. "Queer politics is scandalous politics," Seidman argues, writing generally, but in language that is highly felicitous to the point we are making here: "Queers materialize as the dreaded homosexual other imagined by straight society that had invisibly and silently shaped straight life but now do so openly, loudly, and unapologetically."¹⁷

In travesti protest marches, this loud unapologetic body of the homosexual other is significantly juxtaposed with a particular kind of linguistic form. What is interestingly absent from travesti street demonstrations is language and placards asserting things like "Travesti Pride" or "Proud To Be A Travesti." On the contrary, on the surface of things, the language of travesti public protests is not particularly outrageous: "Travestis Are Human Beings," a placard might propose, modestly. "Travestis Are Citizens," a chant might proclaim. Nothing seriously scandalous here, one might think. However, the scandal in this case lies precisely in the very straightforwardness and simplicity of the message. For if travestis are human beings, they deserve to be accorded respect and human rights, like other human beings. And if they are citizens, then the very concept of citizenship has been revised. Linguistically, what gets foregrounded in these activist manifestations is sameness with non-travestis. Non-linguistically, however, stark difference from non-travestis is conveyed through dress, demeanor, and the sheer fact that so many travestis gather together in one place at one time. So what is happening here is that at their most different,

their most shameless, travestis assert that they are most *like* everyone else.¹⁸

Once again, this brings us back to scandals. In the same way they do when they challenge the ontological difference between their clients and themselves by shouting that the client is just as abject as they are, travesti political activism refuses what Nancy Fraser calls "affirmative" demands for redress. That is, travesti activism refuses to build upon and enhance group differentiation in order to claim additional recognition without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them. Instead, travesti demands work to destabilize group differentiation (between normal, up-standing citizens and low-life, perverse travestis) by declaring sameness from a position of difference, thereby challenging the generative structures that produce particular configurations of hierarchically ranked differentiation in the first place. In Slavoj Žižek's (1999) terminology, this is a "political act proper."¹⁹

Conclusion

The question that remains to be asked is whether the scandalous acts of travesti activists constitute a politically effective strategy. Are travesti assertions of shared ontology politically transformative? Do they produce desirable results? Do they work?

That, alas, is difficult to say. Travesti political activism is still nascent in Brazil, and it is still far too bound up with the initiatives and actions of charismatic individuals like Jovana Baby to constitute anything even approaching a coherent political movement. The overwhelming majority of travestis have little political consciousness, and they are much more concerned with being beautiful, earning money, and traveling to Italy to become what they call *européias* (that is, rich and sophisticated "European" travestis) than they are in participating in activist protest marches or travesti political organizations. Furthermore, despite the enormous visibility accorded them in the Brazilian press²⁰ (which is sometimes positive, even though it remains heavily slanted towards images of travestis as vaguely comic, but hard-nosed and dangerous criminals), travestis continue to face grave discrimination from politicians like the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, who, it will be recalled, is of the opinion that travestis are confused cowards who dress in women's clothes only to be accepted by society. Travestis are also openly disparaged and discriminated against by Christian churches of all denominations, and by large segments of the Brazilian population who find them scary and shameless.

Equally problematic for travesti political organizing is the grave discrimination travestis experience from one of their seemingly most likely

The politics of

political allies, gay men of Brazil's emerging government, but, as we have and lesbians are hostile homosexuals a bad name travestis disregard this, if not within – gay rights of the National Network People defines itself as citizenship of female travestis and transsexuals who we call open-minded

This 1995 Constitution through which to work

actions [undertaken] together prejudice, with the intent the right to exercise their organizations.

Given the often antithesis described above, it remains to be seen if the difference and the goal of reconciliation can be reconciled. If travestis find themselves with whom they share common ground, is the likelihood that they will establish relationships with other socially marginalized groups in even more disdain? And in ways which respect their organizations, might they not be downplayed – the very question (acts) that are central to

Despite all these challenges, travesti political activism might be seen as a force and in some circles. For example, in the country's capital) between the Ministry of Health, it was travestis published by the press.²¹ before it went to press.²¹ would break with Portuguese grammarine grammatical article travestis – so instead of using the grammatically

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political allies, gay men and lesbians. Not only are travestis at the margins of Brazil's emerging gay culture, pink economy, and gay political movement, but, as we have mentioned previously, many Brazilian gay men and lesbians are hostile towards travestis because they think travestis give homosexuals a bad name. In their formal political statements, however, travestis disregard this, and they typically position themselves alongside – if not within – gay rights discourses. For example, the 1995 Constitution of the National Network of Travestis, Transsexuals and Open-Minded People defines itself as a "non-profit, civil organization fighting for the full citizenship of female and male homosexuals in Brazil, giving priority to travestis and transsexuals, encompassing as well sympathizers and friends who we call open-minded people."

This 1995 Constitution also identifies at least one political strategy through which to work towards this objective, namely, the promotion of:

actions [undertaken] together with groups that suffer discrimination and social prejudice, with the intention of guaranteeing Travestis, Gays and Transsexuals the right to exercise their full citizenship, always respecting the autonomy of their organizations.

Given the often antagonistic nature of travesti/gay interactions described above, it remains to be seen whether the realities of travesti difference and the goal of political sameness (i.e., full citizenship) can be reconciled. If travestis face major challenges in working with gay groups with whom they share certain affinities and previous collaborations, what is the likelihood that they will be able to reach out and form new partnerships with other socially oppressed groups, many of whom hold travestis in even more disdain? And even if these political alliances could be formed in ways which respect the autonomy of travestis and travesti activist organizations, might they not require travestis to renounce – or at a minimum downplay – the very qualities (i.e. gender/sexual ambivalence, scandalous acts) that are central to travesti social identities and scandals?

Despite all these challenges, there is some indication that travesti political activism might be making some headway, at least in some contexts and in some circles. For example, at a July 2000 meeting in Brasília (the country's capital) between travesti representatives and officials from the Ministry of Health, it was decided that all future material pertaining to travestis published by the Ministry would be examined by a travesti before it went to press.²¹ It was also decided that in future the Ministry would break with Portuguese grammatical convention and employ feminine grammatical articles, pronouns, and adjectives when referring to travestis – so instead of writing *o travesti* (singular) or *os travestis* (plural), using the grammatically prescribed masculine articles, future texts will

write *a travesti* and *as travestis*, using the feminine forms. These may seem like purely symbolic concessions, but the travestis present at the meeting regarded them as significant victories.

And then there is Lair Guerra de Macedo Rodrigues, former Director of Brazil's National Program on Sexually Transmissible Diseases and AIDS. Guerra de Macedo Rodrigues is one influential individual who seems to have understood and appreciated the message that travesti political actions strive to convey. In a speech delivered in 1996, the Director referred to travestis as model citizens. "Our society is one that can no longer live with fears and taboos that certainly only impede our objectives," she asserted,

[We must] involve ourselves in this ceaseless battle against discrimination and violence. Even if it means that we must fight against the intolerance of more conservative juridical and religious postures. *The organization of travesti groups, especially following the advent of AIDS, is evidence of the beginning of the arduous task of defending citizenship.* (quoted in Larvie, 1999: 539, emphasis added)

Just as Brazil is one of the few countries in the world where a travesti could be declared the country's most beautiful woman, so it is perhaps the only one where travestis could be held forth as beacons of civil responsibility that other citizens ought to follow. In the eyes of those who do not like travestis and wish they would just shut up and disappear, this, perhaps, is the biggest scandal of all.

10 Mobilization on behalf of travestis against discrimination

Celia Valim

Disadvantaged groups experience marginalization and discrimination. According to Axel Honneth, recognition, in which all groups are shared by others, is being able to speak for a group in political action. The exclusion of the group is a problem. In this essay, I am presenting a motherist movement. It is a very complex examination of the experience and disrespect from mothers. They see themselves as those who struggle of mothers that they experience.

Perhaps, the groups for others are the issues to speak for the group. The claims against the mothers made by their relatives. Mothers against discrimination. They suffer maldistribution of resources. Those who lack discursive resources. The stigma against the rehabilitation. Taking (1995), one could move society, these groups.

The case of mothers regarding the issues on what basis, but it also