

Unlearning Queer of the Tropics
Dismantling the Queer Caravelle

By Jota Mombaça

It cannot be said that the problem of colonialism has passed unnoticed in Brazilian academic queer studies. In the same year (2012) that Hija de Perra published their essay, cited in the first text in this series, an interesting movement of anti-colonial critiques started gaining force in official Brazilian queer production. I highlight two texts from this series that gained popularity among scholars of the subject. "Queer in the Tropics" by Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira and "Subaltern Who, Pale face? Notes on the margins of Post-colonialisms, feminisms and queer studies" by Larissa Pelúcio, both publicized in the Dossier of Contemporary Subaltern Knowledge – Contemporary Sociology Magazine of UFSCAR (2012).

These two texts share a critical perspective in the ways that given its marginalization, regarding global scale geopolitics of knowledge, the Brazilian theoretical queer production should challenge the assumptions designated by colonialism of knowledge as truth. Colonialism of Knowledge is a regime that guides definitions – following a hierarchy in which knowledge produced by the "Global South" is included by a necessity of sub-alternity, meanwhile productions from the United States are over-stimulated and overvalued – defining "cutting-edge theory".

Such reflections are important to situate terms defined by the global queer canon, questioning their universality while simultaneously affirming (since the context is set in a Brazilian queer theoretical production) a singularity in the generalizations made by United States authors. It is in this regard that the propositions of Paul B. Preciado, especially those in *Testo Yonqui*, are critically evaluated and confronted in both texts. It is not however, an attempt to invalidate the contributions of the author, rather a problematization of these propositions universal character in

respect to the insufficiency of these analysis models when applied to a Brazilian context.

Of the two texts mentioned, “Queer in the Tropics” goes deeper into the problematization of Preciado's work. Critically reviewing “farmacopornopoder” – which roughly speaking, posits the preponderance of medical devices (biotechnology) and porn (**technical-semiotic**) in the processes of subjectivation and contemporary genders - Pedro Paulo Gomes Peirera evokes the experience of Cida, a travesti which lived in an AIDS shelter in the vicinity of Brasília when the ethnography took place in 2004.

After briefly presenting Cida's life story, drawing a parallel with that of Preciado, the author devotes attention to the relationship “**from its source**” with Umbanda. Emphasizing how Umbanda's mythic-religious knowledge and rituals implicate an interaction of a series of other elements - techniques, discourses, performatives – in the production of Cida's body. The text demonstrates the relationship between Afro-Brazilian religiosities while illustrating the processes of subjectivation-corporification of trans women and travestis, utilizing various academic references on the subject. Taking into account the narratives of travesti Umbanda, Candomblé or Quimbanda devotees; Pedro Paulo seeks to problematize the centrality given by Preciado (and other European authors deemed important to the development of queer studies, such as Michel Foucault) to the array of bio-technological elements in the production of bodies. This reinforces the insufficiency of having universal models when analyzing the complex framework that composes the interaction of mythical and ritual elements with a flux of images, silicone, hormones, etc. of Afro-religious travesti bodies in Brazil.

Photo

“*Queer in the Tropics*” intended to inspire a potential reconfiguration of the theoretical *queer* framework, consolidated in the studies of trans experiences,

reclaiming a *queer* analytic sensitive to the way that different contexts influence different mediators in the production of gender and sexuality. As a result, the author is able to dethrone the geopolitical power relations formed by global centers of knowledge production, opening up the possibilities of defining analytical models applied in marginalized areas. However, to fully accomplish this depends on the recognition and reconstruction of the experiences of Cida and other travestis using their own voices.

For example, in comparing Cidas story to that of Preciados, the author at no moment alludes to his own history or assumes the implications that his body has certain type of conceptual production that guides him in writing his text. Pedro Paulo articulates the experience of Preciado, narrated in the first person, as a counterpoint to the experience of Cida, narrated in the third person. In this way, he fails to debunk the universalizing Eurocentric tradition of knowledge production, taking a view singularized by the influences of the Brazilian context. This text incorporates and is supported by the systematic deletion of the body-politics of its author – reinforcing the inconspicuous continuity between what the author does and what he criticizes.

Critizing the colonial dimension of queer in the sudaca world, Hija de Perra evokes their experience, stemming from their sexual and gender dissidence, to interrogate the queer knowledge matrix. Therefore, offering effective resistance to queer interpellation as a result of academic power; using academics gender theory in Brazil to indicate hierarchical scales in different academic contexts (those of the North and those of global South), done while ignoring academia– with its theoretically normalized language, its schematization of peoples lives, and its hierarchies consolidated in rigid systems of institution evaluation – as the installation of queer as a non-dissociable reference to the colonialism of knowledge in the Brazilian Context (sudaca and third-world).

Photo

Thus the theoretical queer elite in the tropics lack of recognition in the ways of queer colonialism does not only stem from the “outside looking in” – that is, from the United States looking at peripheral contexts - but also from “within to within.” The “within to within” is an affect of “internal colonialism” carried out by the same gender theorists who question the supremacy of the queer North over the queer South. In this sense, the presence of the macro-structural North and South opposition erases the South-South tensions and contributes to the perpetuation of epistemological, ethical, and political domination unforeseen by authors such as Pedro Paulo Gomes Pereira.

Unlearning the Queer in the tropics has the sense of a radical denaturalization of procedural academics, including the problematization of subject-object relations, which helps consolidate the Brazilian queer theoretical elite, as well as a critical review of the effects of interpellation that the use of queer has caused in our territories. At the same time, I cannot help but recognize that this text does not necessarily escape what it sought to critique, since it is yet another queer theoretical exercise, produced from the position of a fat-non-binary-academic-Bicha¹ and is not a plan of action for sexual and gender dissidents. The intent of this text, if it does challenge something, is the queer elite and their critical procedures, making those objects, who did not participate in those debates except as subjects until now: researchers.

P.s. When I say the “Brazilian Queer theoretical elite” I am referring to the consolidated network of gender and sexuality theories, well positioned in the formal rankings of the production of knowledge, employed by renowned universities, and mostly white/cis-gendered. I’m talking about people like Richard Miskolci, who during the Queer Seminar of SESC (which not by chance became known as the

¹ Bicha is a local Brazilian category, historically used as an insult against gay men. Recently, the term has been reappropriated to reference non-binary gender performance.

Cisminario) asserted that the absence of trans* people, radicals and sexual dissidents in the events programming was a result of a “lack of vocabulary” that he and the group that he created, were trying to bring forth with their research, presentations, and publications.

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