

Critical considerations about the theories of Raewyn Connell and Judith Butler for the study of masculinities

Consideraciones críticas acerca de las teorías de Raewyn Connell y Judith Butler
para la investigación de las masculinidades

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Abstract: We will carry out an unpretentious critical balance of some theoretical possibilities on the issue of masculinity from a dialogue established by us between the sociologist Raewyn Connell and the philosopher Judith Butler. We will start our text with some doubts about the way we study masculinities contemporaneously, in a set of reflections of epistemological foundation that, in our view, have few answers, but which cross the problems raised by the debated researchers. We will move on to a critique of Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinities and then present some possibilities for analysis that can be appropriated from Butler's *queer* theory. Therefore, we will try to trace some points of confluence between the most recent readings carried out by Connell and his epistemologically tense but politically parallel relationship with Butler's studies.

Keywords: masculinities; theory; genre.

Resumen: Realizaremos un estudio crítico poco pretencioso acerca de algunas posibilidades teóricas acerca de la cuestión de la masculinidad a partir de un diálogo establecido por nosotros entre la socióloga Raewyn Connell y la filósofa Judith Butler. Empezaremos nuestro texto con algunas dudas con relación a la manera con que estudiamos las masculinidades contemporáneamente, en un conjunto de reflexiones de fundamento epistemológico que, a nuestra perspectiva, poseen pocas respuestas, pero que cruzan las problemáticas lanzadas pelas investigadoras debatidas. Pasaremos

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a una crítica a la teoría de las *masculinidades hegemónicas* de Connell para entonces presentar algunas posibilidades de análisis que puedan ser apropiadas de la *teoría queer* de Butler. Por consiguiente, tentaremos trazar algunos puntos de confluencia entre las lecturas más recientes realizadas por Connell y su relación epistemológicamente tensa, pero políticamente paralela con las investigaciones de Butler.

Palabras-clave: masculinidades; teoría; género.

The problem of adjectives – doubts

The essential book by Pedro Paulo de Oliveira entitled: *A construção social da masculinidade* (2004) sought to conceptualize the term masculinity as “a symbolic/imaginary place with a structuring meaning in the processes of subjectivation [...] a social meaning, a culturally elaborated ideal or relational system that points to an order of behaviors socially sanctioned” (2004, p. 13). In this sophisticated position, the symbolic-discursive question is given prominence but, equally, constitutes an interpretative field of masculinity apart from other gender studies. From this conception, we can already perceive an inherent tension in the theoretical and epistemological options offered to understand the phenomenon of masculinity: on the one hand, a more sociological perspective of conceiving gender based on social practices and engenderings, and on the other, a more sociological perspective. linguistic, philosophical and psychoanalytic that conceives the masculine as a discursive-symbolic construction, named by the reiterative webs of power-knowledge. This tension, already present in Oliveira's text, will be one of the great impasses regarding the oppositions between the two theories studied here. We will not seek to unite both concepts when proposing a synthesis, in the way that Oliveira did when covering both practices and discourses, before that we would like to understand some intricacies of this discussion that may be of some relevance to the theoretical reflection of studies about the masculinities.

So, we understand that working in advance with a concept of masculinity, even if plural, as masculinities is already, elementary, a task with great chances of interpretive failure. This is because the term *masculinity* itself, if taken as an evident social fact, points to a list of characteristics, attitudes, personality traits referring to people, actions or ideas, which are usually we adjective as virile, masculine, potent, manly, etc. – but with little explanation of its phenomenal or epistemic origin.

Currently, the great gains that can be achieved by describing the characteristics of masculinity in the humanities and social sciences are these *adjectives*: qualities, models of what would be understood as what is pre-defined as masculine. This makes the research person's work easier but makes it difficult to define a more precise scientific concept that avoids the appropriation of what would already be popularly conceived as *masculine*.

The opposition made by Simone de Beauvoir when placing the feminine as the second sex (2012), since the masculine would be the first, opened up great prospects for a critical understanding of gender, especially the difficulty of theoretical approximation to a concept such as masculinity that has already it would have to be considered as previously given, universally accepted, established by itself, incapable of being reflected, conceptualized, thought about and, consequently, criticized. This difficulty of conceptual approximation justifies Robert/Raewyn Connell's¹ choice of pluralizing the term and always dealing with *masculinities*, since in the absence (and perhaps even opposition) to a centralizing concept of meanings, it is preferred to work with the insignia of plurality. In this way, Connell conveys the notion that *masculinity* would be an existing phenomenon in the field of practices, actions, experiences and actions in their social effectiveness. In this sense, the processes of hierarchy, violence and gender exclusion would occur from the economic and historically delimited social practices that would legitimize sexual positions of superiority and inferiority. On the other hand, the very notion of masculinity as a unifying set of values and social experiences relatively comprehensive to all societies, even if their pluralities are respected, is not exactly an object that has its existence in a theorized way, it is not delimitable or palpable prior to the practice contextually analyzed by the researcher, it does not adapt to a conceptual identity or even a characteristic. Even with all these contingencies and contextualisms, nothing prevents us from continuing to group these practices under the banner of the macro-concept *masculinity*, whether in the singular or in the plural. This may raise some doubts as to the epistemological status of the very conceptualization of *masculinity* as a unifier of all social experiences in the world related to distinct and diverse gender experiences, without there being a substantive behind this agglutinator but a set of adjectives, which, by themselves, are already

¹ Robert William was Connell's masculine name, prior to his transformation to the feminine gender, then being called Raewyn. In the difficulty of normative adequacy, we chose to use Robert's name to refer to publications concerning the time when Connell signed her texts with such nomenclature and Raewyn in the texts in which she assumed her feminine name.

culturally established and incapable of responding to universalist concepts.

Taking this into account, we often feel discouraged from using the concept of *masculinity* in our research, precisely because in the heuristic analysis, everything we were able to achieve started with an appeal to a set of adjective characteristics that previously delimited a set of attributes of what would be theorized by the researcher as *masculine* (manly, macho, strong, manly, etc.) than by a noun that could define in advance the constitution of what would be understood elementary as masculinity. More than that, it is possible to ethically question whether the very researches that sought to conceptualize and construct a role and a scope for masculinity were not, at the moment of their criticism, making possible and tangible a noun of masculinity – previously non-existent – that in its own conceptualization would unify this set of adjectives in a previous identity (*being-masculine*) reinforcing unequal gender patterns and affirming a certain homogenization of masculine practices without taking into account the plurality of these practices and the previous impossibility of defining what would be precisely understood as *masculine*.

It seems like a vicious cycle: masculinities are conceptualized as a set of games of practices in society in order to understand this game of practices, in a similar way to an *empirical-transcendental double* in which there is no external anchor to the self-referential formulation itself (FOUCAULT, 2007). Even more problematic is when the concept tends to accept, in advance, a male-female dichotomy in a naturalized way, which is far from being accepted by gender studies. After all, founding a concept of *masculinity* polarized on one side of the dichotomous sphere of the sexes would, a priori, validate a direct opposition to *femininity*, consequently accepting not only the dichotomous system of modern sexual dimorphism (LAQUEUR, 2001) but also the very essence of specific qualifiers that would designate what would be understood as *masculine and feminine*. Against such a perspective, at first essentialist and dichotomous, one could work for an anarchic perspective that states that:

masculinity does not exist as a characteristic, character trait or aspect of the identity of individuals. This means that trying to define one or more masculinities is a fruitless task [...] It exists only as varied ideologies or varied fantasies” (MACINNES, 1998, p.2).

Even if it is a theoretically sensible position given its critical and deconstructionist character, we believe that few people who research the subject would be willing to simply abandon the intention of using the concept to the point of taking some effective meaning, beyond the *varied fantasies*, even because, even fantasies have their impacts and consequences on collective experiences. From these questions, we will have to admit that until now there is no prefigurative materiality or extra-empirical element in the idea of *masculinity* or *masculinities* that assures it as a theoretically self-evident social fact. In this sense, there is no substantive apart from adjectives, every approach will be specific, without any possibility of contextual invariants (geographically or historically speaking) which would make it impossible to conceptualize masculinity as a universally applicable phenomenon. Being aware of this kind of epistemological *weakness* of the concept is perhaps the first step in trying to strengthen it as something scientific – which as such is aware of its epistemic limits, but which understands its assumptions. In doing so, we would avoid using the classic strategy of citing a couple of passages from Bourdieu's *A dominação masculina* (1997) and Connell's *Políticas da Masculinidade* (1995) as references and, thus, taking the theoretical question for granted, feeling authorized to proceed with the study. of virility, machismo, hegemonies or supremacy in historical, sociological, ethnographic methodologies and in other manifestations of social practices/meanings.

This does not mean that we demand a transcendental concept of *masculinity*, which maintains a universally applicable theoretical presupposition as a previously established datum. Nor can we anticipate a specific interpretation of masculinities in relation to the empirical analysis of the object of study, at the risk of simply proving the theory already established without understanding the internal particularities in each context. It is in this more interrogative and questioning sense that we intend to bring a brief appropriative critique of Robert/Raewyn Connell's theories of *hegemonic masculinity*, allowing that some of its flanks can be protected if thought from Judith Butler's theories as a possible theoretical support to the delicate question of adjective masculinity, since the author understands gender from an anti-identity perspective which conjugates through the concept of *performativity* both the presuppositions of a comprehensive theory of gender/subjectivity regarding the effective positivity of the acts and exercises of making, remaking and unmaking gender and the masculine. Even through this interpretative proposal, we are aware that most of the doubts raised here remain and will remain in abeyance.

Masculinity and hegemony – critiques

Getting in touch with Robert Connell's theory of masculinities is inevitable for anyone who intends to research the subject. The book *Masculinities* (1995)² is certainly the first text to be recommended for students who intend to start their studies on the subject, not only because it is a classic and its approach pluralizes masculinity(ies), but also because it was an empirically in-depth and pioneering study, it broke with the theory of social roles – predominant in the psychological approaches of the time – and merged in an interdisciplinary way Marxism, psychoanalysis, gender theory and, later, post-coloniality, to forge a very powerful conceptualization, capable of establishing contrasts between what was treated as *hegemonic masculinity* in opposition to what it came to understand as *subaltern masculinities*. From this theorization, *men studies* were propagated intensely and worldwide, established as a new paradigm for gender studies. Since the seminal publication of Connell (1995), many criticisms have been leveled at them, most of them rebutted in the review article entitled *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*, which he had written in partnership with James Messerschmidt (2013). In any case, even after such replies and rejoinders, there is still a certain main scope that permeates the theory of *hegemonic and subaltern masculinities*, of which we will also carry out some specific criticisms to make room for the description of other theorizations and hermeneutical perspectives.

According to Connell, the concept of *masculinity* means “un lugar en las relaciones de género, en las prácticas en las cuales los hombres y las mujeres ocupan ese espacio en el género”³ (2003, p. 109). The amplitude of this definition is its best mark, it works in a relational way and applies all focus on the notion of *practices*, delimiting its evidently empirical and sociological. Still, a possible weakness of this conception is that it defines masculinity as a position in the gender relationship but does not explicitly define what it means by *men and women*, in a way we can say that, in order to value the empirical, it dispenses with a gender theory as a guide. It seems that nouns are taken as previously established elements, without taking into account that gender is precisely prior to and formulator of what we know and categorize as *men and women*. Evidently, this does not affect his theory as a whole, since the concern does not seem to be necessarily to define a conception, but rather to establish an epistemological-sociological ground in which bodily practices, relations of domination and violence

² Translated into more than 13 languages (HAMLIN; VANDENBERGHE, 2013).

³ T. do A. “a place in gender relations, in the practices in which men and women occupy this space in the genre”.

can be understood analogously by researches that intend to unravel the practical manifestations of individuals in these gender territories, built within a given society. However, this did not prevent some theorists from establishing some criticisms, such as the following:

It is exactly at this moment, when the sociologist intends to establish a relativist position that, paradoxically, ends up returning to the essentialization of masculinity, now anchored in the pre-discursive place of conscious social actions. By locating masculinity in individual [and social] practices, Connell ends up mixing the empirical and the transcendental in favor of the second [...]. It is evident that such a mixture is effectively exercised in the field of social practices and masculinity, even as an invention, has its positivities in this area. The point is that by theorizing in this model Connell ends up reaffirming this confusion between an abstract and normative concept [masculinity] and individual social practices. In this Connellian theorization masculinity starts to gain its own position, it still remains in the structural field and, precisely because it is a practice, it becomes fundamentally material, real, identical, representable and analyzable in its legitimate expression from human actions, whether of men or women. The Connellian strategy seeks functional implications in the political sphere, since it removes masculinity from the field of the natural and inserts it into the field of individual actions. From a noun and adjective, masculinity became a verb, which gives it better dynamics and fluidity: this makes masculinity multiply its meanings from individual actions, starting to be treated in its plural format, as masculinities. The question we pose is that this theory does not seem radical enough to us, since the researcher did not unfold his theory of multiplicity until the moment when masculinities ramified more and more, which ultimately would dissolve it completely in the infinitesimal bulge of mundane actions. On the contrary, from this *sorvo das ações*, Connell recreates just four categories to classify, order and encompass all male social existences in their practical connotation (BOTTON, 2011: 52-53).

This two-pronged and quite dated critique, from the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, seems to have intended, in the first place, to question the taking of the concept of *masculinity* from the *practices*, due to the fact that this ends up legitimizing the first by the second. Second, it seemed to question the categorical sociology in which Connell enclosed masculinities in the *tags* of: *hegemônicas, subordinadas, cúmplices e marginais* (CONNELL, 2003: 109-115). It is important to emphasize that, as much as this criticism points out certain inflexibilities in Connellian theory, it is less operative today because it conceives its concepts as monolithic, static and with little dynamics. On the contrary, Connell neutralized much of these criticisms when he presented new responses in more recent writings (CONNELL; MESSERDCHMIDT, 2013) that, in the first criticisms, could not be taken into account. Quite emphatically, Connell firmly maintains his position around the issue of masculinity as a *practice*, an element of the *real*, moving away from any pretense of dialogue with symbolic, linguistic and/or post-structuralist readings, such as those of Judith Butler. On the other hand, she affirms the variability of her theory, pluralizing it in an open way, bringing not only new contributions regarding the malleability of her concepts, but also advancing the discussion in the sense of thinking about masculinities not only historically – in fact with a somewhat historicist tone – but also spatially, at which time he sought to understand interesting games of scales between local, regional and global masculinities, which reflect on social, gender and power structures from no longer universalist categories, but that comprise the specificities of other regionalities (CONNELL; MESSERDCHMIDT, 2013).

This new breath present in his theory makes his research still a great spearhead in studies on masculinities, however, it continues to be a theoretical-methodological tool more appropriate for more empirical-sociological research, providing a reasonably malleable interpretive grid for the understanding of power structures, especially effective for modern-capitalist societies. On the other hand, it still does not respond as a theory harmoniously integrated to gender studies to define what is conceived as a *man* precisely because for Connell man is given prior to the practices of gender construction, with masculinity being a product of men's actions, and not the constitution of their own existences. This is easily defensible, but it conveys the impression that feminist studies and its theorizations are deprecated and separated from *men studies*, so that the citations of research supporting the theory of hegemonic masculinities empirically support everything that a long tradition of

questioning the latter and third feminist waves responded for other discussions, quite heated, about the constitution of gender – beyond pure social practices.

We assert that this criticism does not call into question the theory of hegemonic masculinities, from the point of view of social constructionism Connell's position is absolutely coherent, since it conceives the existence of individuals of action and conscience that through their experiences and practices establish collective and hierarchical gender standards: *the masculinity(ies)*. The criticism raised here only makes sense if considered from a poststructuralist perspective, since it understands as a risk the affirmation of a *man* prior to the performative practices of gender constitution. For the Butlerian perspective, conceiving such a man in a pre-discursive way would epistemologically make possible the existence of an original and natural materiality of what is taken as a *man*. In this sense, masculinity would become just a supreme identity that would collectively confirm dichotomous, individual, unalterable and pre-established gender positions. Under such a post-structuralist critical view, it would be possible to criticize not only the hegemonic character of masculinities, but, before that, the very concept of *masculinity* would be criticized as a grouping of individual practices that would flow from within the actions of preconceived individuals in society, without there being a symbolic, linguistic, epistemological and discursive structure that constituted the subject-man. What would be at stake in this criticism is the rigidity of gender definitions, since the Connellian conception understands masculinity as a practical manifestation of the action of these men in the social sphere. By poststructuralist criticism, such men would not exist previously constituted and established, since this social constructionist position would place them as incapable of being deconstructed, reconstructed or stripped of their positions, hierarchies and gender patterns.

Finally, even if we consider Connell's definition of *masculinities* as one of the most theoretically in-depth and, certainly, the most cited, we consider that it should not – like no other theory – be considered definitive with regard to the effective establishment of an ontological-political concept of the term, not only because it avoids contemplating linguistic, symbolic and discursive elements in its scope, but also because the identification of hegemonic masculinities and subalterns also does not resolve all the dynamics that the notion of masculinity can assume. It is evident that the concept is readily operational since the very practical manifestations of what researchers call *masculinities* are defined through hierarchical social stratifications, so

there will always be positions of power and subalternity. On the other hand, little is said about the pre-practical symbolic locations of the notion, that is, an *a priori locus* from which the constitution of the logics of this genre structure would be derived, which would point out its assembly and disassembly manuals. Although this question remains open in Connellian theory, the criticisms made here do not detract from a comma of his research, much less of those who rely on his theories to make them. The concept of *hegemonic masculinity* continues to act as a possible theoretical guide: any ethnography demonstrates that such practices can be considered related to or constituting masculinities in certain societies. Such an approach serves, above all, the sociological and, to a lesser extent, anthropological epistemology that have certain empirical proximities (in temporal and/or spatial spheres) between the researcher and his object of study. On the other hand, if we want to think about the concept of masculinity(ies) in a transdisciplinary and also historiographical way, it is necessary to resort to other theoretical itineraries, not only in the sense of expanding its scope but also to find points of contact between the Connellian theory of masculinities with the other lines of gender studies, especially linguistic feminism and *queer theory*.

Thinking about masculinity from Butler - Possibilities

At no time did the philosopher Judith Butler intend to carry out an interpretation or theorization on the issue of masculinity. His few writings dedicated to the genre, especially the books *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"* (1993) and *Problemas de Gênero: feminismo e subversão da identidade* (2019) – originally published in English in 1990 – refer more specifically to a post-structuralist critique to the feminist epistemology, especially identity, aiming to guarantee spaces for reflection beyond liberal or radical feminisms⁴. It is precisely through the appropriation and derivation of these criticisms by Butler that we will use to propose other theoretical possibilities for the studies of masculinities. These are understandings anchored in some Butlerian concepts to reflect on the relationship between gender and masculinity, perhaps remedying some of the theoretical

⁴ Although it is not the purpose of this article, it is important to note that the original publication of *Gender Trouble: Feminism And the Subversion of Identity* (1990) predates the publication of Connell's (1995) text. Even though at that time his researches were little linked, both were very important to influence a whole generation of intellectuals who practically inaugurated the theme of masculinities in the Brazilian context, among many we can mention the researches of OLIVEIRA (2004), CECCHETTO (2004), MATOS (2001), MONTEIRO (2000), SOUZA (2003), ALBUQUERQUE JÚNIOR (2003).

gaps left by Connell's early research. Such an approximation between Butler and masculinity is not new, other researchers have already done it (BRICKELL, 2005 and KELLER; ARAUJO, 2017), but we believe that raising some of its essential points is important to establish contrasts and approximations with the theories connellianas, presenting new perspectives on the study of masculinities.

Butler sought his theoretical tools in philosophers/linguists such as Jacques Derrida (1991) and John Austin (1955), among many others, to create his diagnosis of the production of the sexes⁵ as *performativity* (RODRIGUES, 2012). Austin made a major shift in the field of linguistic studies in the 1950s by proposing that prayers as they are uttered can be considered actions. In his book *Cómo hacer cosas con palabras* (2016) Austin delimited a series of sentences that he considered performative precisely because, in addition to expressing things, they are, in themselves, [*speech acts*]:

to issue the expression is to carry out an action and that is not normally conceived as the mere decision of something. [...] to express the words is, without doubt, for the common, a main episode, if in the main episode, in the realization of the act (of betting on what is sea), whose realization is also the finality that pursues la expression⁶ (AUSTIN, 2016, p. 06-08).

For the philosopher, pronouncing something already produces the linguistic effect of an act, this is similar to Derrida's formulations when he announces that "to write [and to enunciate] is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine, producer" (DERRIDA, 1991, p. 20). It is the act of writing or citing something and of reiterating this quotation as the institution of the act itself, which for the philosopher is not the result of an individual will, but is a derivative of language: "In this typology, the category of intention will not disappear, it will have its place, but from this place, it will no longer be able to command the entire system and the entire scene of enunciation" (DERRIDA apud BUTLER, 2010, p. 167). In these formulations, Austin and Derrida do not define a mentoring subject for these language acts, but, on the contrary, a mentoring language for the speaking subject. Not that your decision is not effective, but this subject does not have full control of his enunciation in the face of the

⁵ For the author, as there is no neutral, pre-discursive biological place that guarantees the naturalness of sex, both terms can be taken as synonyms (BUTLER, 1993).

⁶ "Issuing the expression is performing an action, and this is not normally conceived as a mere saying something. [...] expressing the words is, of course, commonly a main episode, if not the main episode, in the performance of the act (of betting or whatever), the accomplishment of which is also the purpose that pursues the expression" (T. do A.).

discursive order in which he enunciates, since such a subject is already previously inserted in it, in the conditions and rules of what can and cannot be said or accepted.

Based on these premises, Butler demonstrates that “discourse acquires the authority to produce what it names through the citation of conventions and authority” (2010, p. 176). Through her readings about the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the author understands that the power of norms is directly related to the citation of the law that performatively institutes it as a *speech act*. This is a vicious circle since “the law is no longer given in a fixed form, *prior* to its citation, but is produced through the citation, as that which precedes and exceeds the approximations [...] made by the subject” (BUTLER, 2010, p. 169). In other words, the very norm that institutes heterosexuality, as heteronormativity, is given through a linguistic and discursive process of citation, naming or even enunciation. This is how, for Butler, sex and gender are constructed: from a *speech act* or a *performativity*, understood as “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names” (2010, p. 154). Such action becomes political and creative from the moment that “the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative way to build the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative” (BUTLER, 2010, p. 154).

In this context of performativity, the notion of nature loses its position of truth or of being pre-discursive, since “the social acts unilaterally on the natural and invests it with its parameters and its meanings” (BUTLER, 2010, p. 154). Thus, the differentiation between the natural field and the social/cultural field is imploded, especially if we deal with the hierarchical conceptions and sexual in modern society. In other words, thinking of nature as a constructed part of culture means that the very dichotomy between gender (as the difference between the sexes produced in a social/cultural way) and sex (as the difference between the sexes produced in a natural way) loses all its validity, since the first absorbs the second and demonstrates its inconsistency as a universal truth:

When the sex/gender distinction is joined to a radical linguistic constructionism [...] “sex” [...] will itself be a postulation, a construction, offered within language, prior to construction. But this sex posited as prior to construction becomes, by virtue of being posited in this way, the effect of that very positing: the construction of construction. If gender is the social construction of

sex, and if there is no access to this “sex” except through its construction, then it seems not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that “sex” becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively installed in a pre-linguistic location to which there is no direct access (BUTLER, 2010, p. 158).

Once the sex/gender, nature/culture distinction is abolished, so they can be used almost as imbrications, both can be understood as a performative formulation that produces sexual differences in modernity.

This understanding has a political counter-face of great relevance to our study, namely: from the moment we suspend the true predominance of the sex and nature poles in opposition to the gender and culture poles, we begin to perceive how norms and laws are artificially constructed. of heterosexuality. We understand that such norms are constructed from a *linguistic imperative*, that is, from discursive, scientific and epistemological structures that induce the subject/subject to understand himself as a *Man* or a *Woman* (with capital H and M), precisely those taken by Connell in his conceptualization of *masculinity*. Such induction takes place from the moment the idea of the nature of the body – and consequently of sex – is assimilated by the subject/subject in order to constitute itself subjectively. In Butler's words:

The regime of heterosexuality works to circumscribe and circumvent the “materiality” of sex, and this “materiality” is formed and sustained through – and as – a materialization of regulatory norms that are, in part, those of sexual hegemony [...] the materialization of norms requires those identification processes by which norms are assumed or appropriated, and these identifications precede and enable the formation of a subject (BUTLER, 2010, p. 170).

With this, Butler distances biologicalist theories, purely materialist or essentialist of a man or a woman that are universal and prior to the discourses that constituted them. By such procedure, western modernity produced and stimulated a regime of heterosexuality and made to emerge and oppose – together with the aberrant figures of sexuality – two subjectivities and practices, considered socially ideal: man

and masculinity; and woman and femininity.

Through this conceptualization, Butler allows us to understand the procedures by which gender hierarchies are established, not necessarily explaining their internal symbolic functioning, but rather allowing the establishment of the main lines of their construction and, consequently, opening the horizons for their deconstruction. It is important to remember that Butler's concept of *deconstruction* is tributary to that of Jaques Derrida, who does not refer to it as mere destruction or implosion, but rather as a sequence of rules, comprising the internal structuring of the constitution of a textual game of writing and meaning (SALLIS, 1987). In this sense, understanding the construction and deconstruction of masculinity, as a subcategory of this subjective structure listed by the sex-gender pair, means perceiving the ways in which it is built - whether through literary, historical or political analysis - in order to make explicit the inexistence of elements of eternity, naturalness or unquestionability.

The first question addressed by him refers to the methodological question of *reiteration and citationality*, as already established by Jacques Lacan (2005), if the law is established from its citation or naming (the *father's name*) then for it to be established it needs to be constantly reinforced, reiterated and cited infinitely, until the lie told a hundred times becomes the truth and assumes the character of *force of law* (DERRIDA, 2018), in this way the reiterated naming of a subjectivity constitutes it as a standard, standardization, standardization and conduction of conducts. In this sense, masculinity is not presented as something pre-linguistic, but rather as an effect of this naming. In other words, there is no social experience that crosses all male individuals in a society, except the relationship of acceptance or denial of the norm/law that names him as a man. This naming is not a simple moment of baptism, but rather a sequence of serially repeated statements that allow a process of self-insertion to take place within that linguistic fabric. It is a symbolic membrane that covers corporeality, thoughts, ways of acting and speaking that shapes them on an individual and collective scale, to each and every one, *omnes et singulatim* (FOUCAULT, 1990). The linguistic norm in this sense would precede the practices, since its conception would already be rooted within the symbolic and cognitive perceptions of those who are spoken by the words that speak. Thinking about masculinity in this way allows us to understand the importance of discourses and the reiterated citation of its norms as a constituent of its own basic principles, and, in this sense, a form of construction of the sexes is staged, according to

Butlerian theory. On the other hand, this construction, when understood in these terms, demonstrates unique fragility, since that meaning that we believed eternal and structural turns into something absolutely brittle, like a fabric made of transparent words, which constitute a king-masculinity that has always been naked, but no one dared question her nudity given her authority and fear of symbolic and material punishment.

The linguistic perception of sexuality entangles a very active, agency, political and politicized continuity of understanding of hierarchies and power relations within the sexes and sexual subjectivities. Once sexuality as corporeality is linguistically named, this means that the practical experiences of the body, mind and male behavior would be forms of interpretation, based on the introjection of the norm, compatibility with its *ideal of self* and subsequent identity calcification, such as a rigid mask. In this sense, nobody better than Fernando Pessoa to summarize this process in a brilliant stanza of the poem *Tobacaria*:

*O dominó que vesti era errado
Conheceram-me logo por quem não
era e não desmenti, e perdi-me
Quando quis tirar a máscara
Estava pegada à cara
(PESSOA, 2016, p. 246)*

This mask held to the face shows how a man's own individual face becomes a model, signifies the model, identifies itself with the contours of the *pattern* or the *man's pattern*. This is the moment when the process of subjectivation bends *from the outside to the inside*, from a simple physical and fleeting image to internalize that image along with the gaze that defines it – Lacan's *Outro* (SAFATLE, 2007). In this sense, we live in a great masked ball in which several faces are staged in a kind of theater with uncertain scripts and tragicomic performances. We consider that the central theme of violence and masculinity, when thought from this matrix, can gain new contours, since this terrifying collective staging of possession and jealousy is increasingly reified by the assertions of power and strength to the characters acting under this macabre. paper, obviously that doesn't take away the guilt or the power of denial - where there are powers there are resistances (FOUCAULT, 1979) – however, this demonstrates the

most resolute character of the Butlerian theory and which can also become one of the most promising possibilities for grooves and *lines of flight* within this normative system, it is the concept of *performativity*.

According to Butler's theory, gender is not identity-glued but is staged, dressed, undressed and rediscovered in every act, including the speech act. If in our narrative it seems that a straitjacket emerges from a mask pre-fitted on the face, from a role ascribed to pre-defined scripts, then we need to understand the counterface of the concept of *performativity*, which can also be performed in an absolutely arbitrary way by such sociosexual norms. The example most worked by Butler is precisely the image of the *drag queen*, since her performance strains the boundaries of what is considered *masculine and feminine*, subverting this dichotomy with her hybrid body. The *drag* cannot be excluded from the theater of masculinities, perhaps the most deviant and extravagant of them, but this constitution is also valid for us to reflect on normatized and normalized masculinity, after all, if there is no place of neutrality in this theater, the masculine is also a *costume* or a role to be interpreted and performed theatrically, in which staging games and appropriate body-expressive performance are required in order to convince the audience of their values and attributes considered hierarchically superior.

In this way, it is not necessary to reach extra-social examples to understand *queer* (those averse and even excluded subjects from social normativities), Eve Segdwick (2008) in her brilliant essay on the *epistemology of the closet* raises the question that there is no space of normality in the field of desires. All beings have their deepest perversions, inspirations and oddities in general, so that no one is ascribed to a sphere of complete normality, so we live in a society completely placed *inside the closet*, which cannot free itself and *come out of the closet*. That is, *queer theory* is not just about specific minority subjects who do not fit into the sex-body-desire continuum, on the contrary, it operates on a massive scale by the overwhelming majority of the population (not to say the entirety) – physically shaped men and women. and psychologically by hiding their desires relegated to the sphere of *obscenity*.

We can also allude to the readings of Sigmund Freud and his *mal-estar na civilização* (2010) or to Norbert Elias in his *Processo Civilizador* (1994) when they postulate that the western understanding of civilization/culture is based on the capacity – especially male – to know how to restrain. and repress their instinctive impulses -

which for both thinkers are violent, natural and inherent to the human species - but Freud himself tells us that it is an indigestible schema for that psyche since the repressed element incessantly returns. It is not a question of psychologizing or sociologizing the argument, rather, these Freudian theses of the social, questionable on many points, allow us to understand that heterosexuality and its defense also depend on processes of repression, self-annulment and drive control – regardless of whether they be natural/innate or artificial and linguistically constructed. Despite the fact that *queer* theorization serves greatly to conceive the intricacies of the *trans* population, socially seen as the other of the other, such sentences can also, and should, be applied to male subjectivations, after all, what Robert Bly and his warriors did on weekends (1990) was nothing more than a genre performance absolutely close to the *drag queen*, with the notorious difference of the misogynistic and prejudiced load that the first had in relation to the second.

This is really interesting for the analytical possibility of comparing metrosexual turns, muscles from gyms, mustaches from shooting clubs with false nails, lush wigs and lipsticks of vibrant colors used by *drags*. Understanding masculinity as *performance* is, in itself, a way of deconstructing the masculine. However, we reinforce that we cannot use the concept as a common bargaining chip that can be used in all contexts, there must be an empirical sensitivity of adaptation. For example, perhaps masculinity for a Micronesian Aboriginal does not (certainly does not) have the same Western performative connotations as Western norm-based subjectivation.

Therefore, we reinforce that in a post-colonial world there is no master key to understand gender and performativity, the notion can be used through its flexibility and deconstruction, being more malleable than the equally adaptable concept of *hegemonic masculinity*. It is important to understand the contexts of contextual production and their harmony with the contexts of the research objects.

Connell's transformed return and Butler's structures – Confluences (not admitted)

As a proposal, our article proposes some possible points of dialogue between the authors – of a dialogue that does not exist in practice – without the pretense that there is a confluence of ideas from both theorists that communicate little. We are more interested in creating theoretical convergences, folds of thought so that studies of

masculinities can appropriate interesting elements of both without rejecting, in advance, one or the other.

Perhaps the big mistake in criticizing the fixity of Connellian categories earlier was due to the attempt to carry out an identity reading of a literal and figuratively trans author, that is, an author who, at least biographically speaking, is not at all attached to structures of fixed identity or binary crystallizations. This becomes very clear in his most recent studies that, in addition to expanding the spheres of action and understanding of the masculine as a mutable and relational theory – historically and geographically, – is also interested in other transversalities that constitute different gender structuring in the contemporary world. In this sense, Raewyn Connell in her most recent studies (2015 and 2016) focuses on three main axes of action that bring new breath to the disciplinary field, beyond that *adjective and categorizing* conceptualization of which we outlined earlier criticisms. Such axes are: the post-colonial critique of the genre from the epistemologies of the south; the criticism of financial capitalism through the global expansion and universalization of its cultural structures (which as such are always political) as well as the imposition of male patterns constitutive of a new contemporary patriarchy and, finally, the issue of transsexual women in its delicate relationship with the modeling/exclusive capitalist society and also with regard to identity feminism, which often insists on the tonic that *trans* women do not have female gender experience and cannot share the agendas and demands of feminism. Through these three perspectives, all absolutely pertinent to redefining an agenda on men's and women's studies of gender as a whole, allows us to understand the constitution of a certain political and theoretical deepening that superimposes the structuring of an interpretive scheme focused on *hegemonic masculinities*. Furthermore, even without denying the previous perspectives, Connell considers that

We need to improve the way gender analyzes have been done. Much of the research on gender is based on a fundamentally static and categorical approach. According to this approach, gender involves two categories, male and female, and talking about gender is talking about the difference between these categories [...] we need to go beyond unitary conceptions about the subject of feminism. [...] What gender theories still do not understand well is that gender dynamics take specific forms in colonial and post-colonial contexts, as, as Lugones points out, they are intertwined

with the dynamics of colonization and globalization (2016, p. 29-31).

This growing interest in understanding epistemology from the perspective of the South and of *trans* women brings Connell closer to a global, but not universalist, perspective, being particularly interested in the experiences of displaced people, surplus people, subjectively questioning the established norms of power, gender and hierarchy. More than that, her own concept of gender begins to expand and encompass feminists beyond the Euro-American margin, considered the founder of the main pillars of feminism. In this sense, her position is one of quite extreme contextualism, reinforcing the inability of feminist theories from the north of the world to answer questions from poor and developing countries in the world south – ironically, Connell's Australia can be considered an exception to this rule, for even though it is a country geographically located in parallel alignment with South America and Africa, it is economically in a position of great superiority. It is precisely from the post-colonial perspective that Connell assumes a more anthropological condition in his research, enriched by the multiplicity of contextual approaches to masculinity exercised in different cultures, on the other hand, his proposal still does not give up the concept of identity, perhaps the biggest target. politics of Butler's polls. It is in this sense that Connell weaves his criticisms:

Butler's work continues to demand attention and guide current work on transgenderism. However, the conditions of Butler's involvement with transsexuality are problematic, as Namaste's critique demonstrates. It relies on the appropriation of the experience of transgender and transgender people that, to focus on the subversion of identity, obfuscates the economic realities of *drag* and prostitution, the gender-specific character of violence, and the devastation of the lives of transgender women (2016, p. 232).

This criticism appears to be practically fallacious, since Butler's research is considered “problematic” based on the work of other researchers inspired by the author's theoretical perspective. More than that, it is clear that the *critique of identity*

does not present any relationship of obfuscation of *economic realities, prostitution and violence*. On the contrary, the symbolic and discursive element being perceived as performative allows one to question precisely these *realities*. In fact, the whole problem consists of the prejudice that researchers assume to the post-structuralist field as a sphere of the purely discursive, as if *discourse* were dichotomously averse to *reality* (ALBUQUERQUE JÚNIOR, 2006) or as if *subjectivity* were dichotomously averse to *identity*. We can say that Butler's theory is not pure poetry or "an unremitting antibiological linguistic determinism that would consist in maintaining that everything, including the body, is language or that there is nothing more than the substance of words" (DÍAZ, 2013, p. 411). Before denying the existence of the body and the subject, Butler seeks to understand how they are constructed, not as flesh, but from norms and symbolic-discursive mechanisms that are absolutely productive of what they name, in the extreme, they are also social (f)acts. In this sense, Butler's concern is not to sterilize or obfuscate gender violence, on the contrary, it is to understand how the constitution of a limit between the normal and the unacceptable, the human and the barbaric, the moral and the immoral are traced, constituting subjectivities. marked with the insignia of exclusion:

The debate between constructivism and essentialism thus misses the point of deconstruction altogether, for the point has never been that "everything is discursively constructed"; that point, when and where it is made, belongs to a kind of discursive monism or linguisticism that refuses the constitutive force of exclusion, erasure, violent foreclosure, abjection and its disruptive return within the very terms of discursive legitimacy. (BUTLER, 1993, p. 8).⁷

Again Lacan is invoked so that such subjective structures are understood not by a libertarian way of poetizing experiences, but, on the contrary, by a normative understanding of the establishment of *foreclosure*, that psychotic attitude that rejects a signifier to the outside of the symbolic universe of the subject. or of society. It is not simply a question of repression since, psychoanalytically speaking, the repressed

⁷ Author translation: "The debate between constructivism and essentialism completely overlooks the essential issue of deconstruction, because the essential issue has never been that 'everything is discursively constructed'; This essential question, when it is proposed, corresponds to a kind of discursive monism or *linguisticism* that denies the constitutive force of exclusion, suppression, *foreclosure* and violent abjection and its destructive return within the very terms of discursive legitimacy.

always returns. The forcluded is pure abjection, to the point of oblivion, which from a biopolitical perspective can be understood as the one left to die, legitimate *homo sacer* (AGAMBEN, 2012). Not only that, Butler works with another mechanism in the meantime, in which normality or heteronormativity itself is constituted precisely by the exclusion of this norm. *Embarrassment* is a constitutive element not only of exclusion, but mainly of the norm and normal subjectivity from the symmetrical opposition to what it denies. It is clear that Butler is guiding the very construction of *trans* subjectivity and its existence as a blurring of these discursive limits of gender. But, again, if we consider gender as a performative and social production, we can understand the masculine as a direct reference to *trans*, precisely because it is constituted within exclusion, denial, rejection. Evidently, from a different hierarchical perspective, since, in Freudian language, the masculine introjects the object opposite to the denied one into his ideal of self, while the *trans* woman denies, satirizes, mocks and mocks precisely because of her existence.

It is precisely these mechanisms of rejection of the other and reinforcement of the masculine self/we that, in Connell's own theories, constitute masculinity as a gender structure in which men model themselves through the denial and removal not only of femininity but also of that other little masculine. or not virilized (2003). Whether from the linguistic perspective of performativity, or from the social perspective of hegemonic masculinities, both Butler and Connell are concerned with establishing a scathing critique of the construction of gender structures that make *western-white-capitalist-cis-hetero-bourgeois* male subjectivity the greatest psychosocial disaster ever known, precisely because it institutes models of relationship with the other, the Other, the other and the other objects of opposition, exclusion, violence and even extermination. It is not by chance that Butler is an ethical thinker, a commentator on Hannah Arendt and Theodor Adorno: her perspective on social interaction is evident, it is not simply about tolerating differences (BROWN, 2008), or marking an automatic relationship between masculinity and violence, it is a matter of inserting alterity within an ethical game so that it is constitutive of subjectivities founded on an identity that does not operate under the banner of pure exclusion of difference, violence or vexation but, on the contrary, that opens up possibilities of constitution and biological and subjective existence of other subjects, that can assume fluid experiences without being previously labeled or morally categorized, that are not necessarily based on the pure nominal mark of heteronormativity. This perspective is

not opposite, on the contrary, it is absolutely dialogic with Connellian positions when it demands new policies of inclusion and dialogue with the different expressions and experiences of bodies and gender symbolizations.

New ways of learning activism can happen. Marginalized groups mobilize within different traditions of popular activism and face different environments of religion, state power and gender practice. [...] To speak in these terms of “other policies” is optimistic; but we need some optimism from determination. The old identity and exclusionary politics caused a division between feminism and transgender women that has not yet been completely overcome. [...] The suggested policy direction [...] has the prospect of engaging transgender feminists with other active feminists who can achieve practical gains for gender justice, and enrich feminism as a whole (CONNELL, 2016, p. 253)

It is clear that Connell's perspective is more *engaged* while Butler's is more *reflective*, even though the engagement of the former does not escape reflection and the reflection of the latter does not dispense with the engagement. However, if taken to the extreme, both perspectives are – in their own way – politically potent and ethically necessary to avoid the wave of transphobia, homophobia, lesbophobia, machismo and misogyny that is currently being experienced. It is not just a matter of dichotomously defending trans feminism against the identity feminism – which is one of the main arguments of the work *Problemas de Género* (2019), is a collectivist bet on the construction of new political meanings and reproductive structures of the meanings and practices of gender, whether in its performative perspective or from the perspective of actions (BUTLER, 2018). Both theories establish a belief in the political possibility of dialogue and the resolution of subjective problems through politics, in its Aristotelian sense, of discussion between peers (BUTLER, 2019). In this sense, the methodological discussion between the (pre)discursive and performative understanding of gender or the post-discursive readings and gender practices becomes less important in view of the sharing of a common political agenda.

Final considerations

Both Butler's and Connell's theories seek, implicitly or explicitly, the institution of new narratives, which constitute subjects through different matrices from which we experience in the western capitalist context. Even Connell's sociology, which criticizes linguistic positions, does not shy away from stating that "recognizing alternative narratives of masculinity, and different ways of being a man, is a crucial step towards respectful ways of working with boys to reduce violence" (CONNELL, 2016, p. 156) and concludes, based on a commentary on research by discursive psychologists Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley, that "masculinities exist not as consolidated structures of roles, but as imaginary positions in a discourse. In practice, men use these positions strategically, sometimes they adopt them, sometimes they distance themselves from them" (2016, p. 157). Even if for Butler there would not be a *man* prior to his (self)formulation who would take actions from an already constituted self, it is possible to find similarities in a perspective that calls for non-violent and more hospitable male subjectivities and sociabilities in relation to difference. This resolves some of the main points of our initial questions about an adjective masculinity, perhaps Butler proposes to us the possibility of thinking about one or several subjectified masculinities, and thus we can understand adjectives from a sociological point of view and subjectivations from a philosophical point of view, so that we can get closer, albeit in an incipient way, to a concept of *masculinity*.

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