

The Good Life vs. the Frontlines: the problem of translation in coalition-building between activists and scholars in the implementation of an anti-homophobia agenda in the Americas¹

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The agenda to fight homophobia in the Americas is facing a new moment. As scholars in the field of Cultural Studies have argued, we are living in a period of fragmented identities (HALL, 2005), in which different communities articulate their agendas in order to build more inclusive technologies of governance. If in the recent past (particularly the 1970s and 1980s) lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people (LGBT) fought “against” the State for civil and political rights (MACRAE, 1990; DUBBERMANN, 1993; GREEN, 1999), the struggle today often involves coalitions between state officials, social movements, and in some instances (particularly in the area of education policy), universities. These new forms of coalition-building were influenced by the responses to AIDS in the 1990s, especially in countries (like Brazil) where the main strategy was to reinforce non-governmental organizations and establish organic relations between the state and society through these efforts (BASTOS, 2004; TERTO-JÚNIOR, 1996).

Feminist research on policy-making processes contributed to the fight against gender violence in Brazil (particularly in the 1990s) where important relationships were established between academics and social movement organizations. As Miriam Pillar Grossi and Rozeli Porto (2005) have observed, academic research on violence against women and public policy had a significant impact on the discourses of the feminist movement, making it possible for the category “gender violence” to unify a coalition

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behind the country's "Maria da Penha" Law against domestic violence, approved in 2006².

Coalitions between feminist scholars and activists were done in the past twenty-five years. The main strategy used was to organize seminars, colloquiums, workshops and conferences, in which both scholarly and activist "voices" were put in the spotlight to be heard with the same authority. Miriam Pillar Grossi and Sônia Malheiros Miguel (2001), for example, analyze speeches performed in the Seminar "Woman in Politics" that occurred in Brazil in 2001, particularly speeches by women lawmakers at all levels of government as well as women working in the United Nations (especially in the United Nations Development Fund for Woman – UNIFEM, which sought to empower women in this seminar using "thematic workshops" and "networks"). The authors show how politicians, scholars and activists working with the feminist platform used "Gender" as a political and academic category throughout the 1980s when academic feminism and the feminist movements started to work together as a coalition aiming at better qualifying the position of woman in politics. In this sense, in order to achieve these qualifications, activists and scholars produced knowledge about their alliances, conflicts and discourses.

As my thesis supervisors and I have observed in a former paper (FERNANDES; GROSSI; PEDRO, 2009) the category "homophobia" was introduced into Brazilian public discourse by the LGBT movement, particularly in the late 1990s, seeking public policies such as the federal program Brazil Without Homophobia and drawing on "international repertoires" (DEHESA, 2007) strongly influenced by Europe and North America. The category later migrated from the movement to the academy, not the other way around. Unlike the case of violence against women, movement-led public policies and discourses have led to the creation and expansion of a field of study on homophobia and violence against LGBT people, at least in Brazil (FERNANDES; GROSSI; PEDRO, 2009).

Taking this context of policy-making processes and research about it into account, this paper seeks to offer some new ideas about the kind of strategies that contribute to productive coalitions between activists and scholars. Potential divisions between activists and scholars became evident in an e-mail discussion that happened in the web group of

2 Free translation by the author of this essay: Law No. 11,340, August 7th, 2006. | Creates mechanisms to curb domestic violence against women, pursuant to § 8 of art. 226 of the [Brazilian] Constitution, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, provides for the creation of the Courts of Domestic and Family Violence against Women; amending the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Penal Code and the Penal Execution Law, and other measures.

the Brazilian National LGBT Association (ABGLT) about the Brazilian Human Rights Award.

The Brazilian Human Rights Award was created by a Presidential Act in September 8, 1995 (in Fernando Henrique Cardoso' term) and honors people and institutions recommended by citizens and chosen by a special committee with a sculpture and certificate. The Award is given in a pompous ceremony around December 10th to celebrate the adoption by the United Nations (UN) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. There are sixteen categories in the Human Rights Award such as "gender equality", "race equality", "guaranty of rights for elderly people", among others. In 2009, for the first time, the Brazilian government included the category "guaranty of rights for the LGBT population" under which a citizen was awarded for the contribution given to promote and defend the citizenship and human rights of LGBT people.

The Brazilian Special Secretariat of Human Rights³ at the Executive Office of the President released on October 2009 the new edition of the Brazilian Human Rights Award. On October 07, the Special Secretariat of Human Rights (SEDH) sent a widely publicized email in which the content was propaganda of the Award and had links to get the forms to indicate a citizen or an institution to be honored. Anybody in Brazil could suggest anybody they wanted. Although the indication is individual, the president of ABGLT suggested that the association indicated a name of one of its affiliated. As a member of their virtual web group and a researcher of educational policy to fight homophobia, I sent an email saying that in my point of view the association could indicate a professor that had played an important role in the implementation of educational policy to fight homophobia in Brazil⁴. That was a political stand point as I was thinking that honoring the professor would be a strategy to strengthen the educational policy and legitimate the actions of the Ministry of Education. Wrong I was! The lesson I learned then is that the distance between activists and scholars evolves an exchange of gifts. It is hard for an activist to celebrate a scholarly award that is not organized by themselves.

But the importance of this fact is not the experience I had. Rather, a closer look at the many responses sent to the group made evident the divisions between activists and

3 www.sedh.gov.br.

4 Content of the message sent: "I think a good name would be [Professor vinculated to CLAM] for his contributions, participation in the Ministry of Education implementing the continuous education course of Gender and Diversity in Schools".

scholars as separate groups. There were a total of 22 email responses to the ABGLT' indication for the Human Rights Award in the virtual web group and I will focus here in some relevant responses to argue about the strategies to coalition-building in this field. The first response received was from an activist from Sao Paulo, in which he stated:

[The President of ABGLT'] suggestion is more than fair. [...] [The activist suggested] is one of the greatest [...] constructors of our movement. Nobody has to agree 100% with his ideas or style, but we must recognize his wit, timing, historical commitment to human rights, the AIDS movement, the LGBT movement, and to a better world. [...] And don't be modest: it is important that the work we do is recognized as we still alive to be able to at least have the joy to see our efforts paying off. [...] You battle every day. Without hypocrisy, without attachment to positions and structures. Without flattering those with a pen in their hand. [emphasis mine].

This first response set the tone for later responses, which similarly reflected a sort of rivalry between activists and scholars. Brazilian activists did not seem to talk strategically about rewarding an scholar and an academic institution that would advance the anti-homophobia agenda but rather emphasized the importance of recognizing those they interpreted as being on the frontline. The second response, instead of awarding only the frontline leader, tried to illustrate that the one indicated by ABGLT had accomplished many victories throughout his life.

I also support the indication [...] over [his] name [...]. I will not even account for his actions in 2009, but just remember that this is someone who has struggled all his life for the LGBT community. [...] He could be taking care of his own life, in any career where it would be successful for sure, but gave up the stability to be a fighter. A concrete example for all of us. Carry on, fellow. [emphasis mine].

Those references of a better life are connected to the interpretation activists have about scholars. If the frontline leader must be awarded it is because he chose to fight for a better world instead of struggling for his own "quality" of life, what I would call here the Good Life. If all of those were responses to the indication of ABGLT but also to my proposal to indicate the professor, the successful career possible to LGBT individuals evolved in the anti-homophobia agenda is to be a scholar. To be a scholar is to choose the good life in LGBT activist' voices. This argument was supported by another response:

I believe the history of fight of the fellow is unquestionable. I get worried when we value most among us the scholars and parliamentarians, and the day-to-day activist is not recognized. So we need to reward one of us. [He] is a great name. Let's start the campaign [for him to be awarded]! LGBT Greetings! [emphasis mine].

Many other responses were sent stating things like: “nothing more just than to honor those who fight for an ideal”. The “fight for an ideal” or a “better world” is part of the activist's way to face the Award. Is there such a thing as an activist way of facing the Award? In other words, how identifications between activists and/or scholars are built in order to the indication to the award achieve a point of unity? If the Award made me reflect about the construction of points of unity at least in the indication of the movement's representation is it possible to think of these two groups (activists and scholars) as two different cosmologies guided by different logics that adopt different strategies in the anti-homophobia agenda? Which cosmologies are those?

This essay is an interpretative text based on my fieldwork and offers reflections that draw on the Human Sciences (particularly Anthropology and History). My fieldwork led to the research of the agenda implemented by the Brazilian Ministry of Education, where policies have articulated various actors and institutions, including social movements, civil servants, and universities. The effective articulation of scholars and activists to fight homophobia cannot be achieved using only the strategy of organizing activities and putting activists and scholars together in the spotlight. According to feminist history mentioned above, in order to achieve the goal of articulating scholars and activists, knowledge and reflections about the alliances, conflicts and discourses related to those activities must be made. The feature of positioning scholars and activists together in those activities should be interconnected in the planning of actions that take account on articulating the actors with other features singular to each group such as the sense of timing, the sense of justice and judgment, the work style, the relationships of alliance, among others.

In order to contextualize the choice of working with the facts presented here, all of them played an important role during my doctoral training in Gender Studies (and even before that). These contributions can be related to courses, colloquiums and events that I attended and participating in virtual web groups. If the action of participating locates me in the field, it also provides me with some qualitative sources that will be used in this essay. The sources are mainly field notes, pamphlets, informal conversations, e-mails and

academic/activist sources (such as books, texts, films, etc.). I am talking here not only about countable material sources. I am talking about an incorporated and lived experience (TURNER, 2005), a certain habitus (BOURDIEU, 1998) re-interpreted about social movements and policy-making processes.

As James Clifford (1986) mentions, knowledge production in the field of anthropology happens (in a certain way) through allegoric artifacts. The ethnographic allegory is composed by sources that make it possible to elaborate an argument. This form of argumentation does not regard sources as more or less valid but rather underscores the subjective features of knowledge production. Besides that Adam Kuper (2003) states that when the once called “native” start to occupy the field of knowledge and policy production and begin to contest and respond to what scholars once produced, the academic concepts used must be re-thought. This re-thinking of theory and politics happens because there is a confusion between the native discourse and the analytical concepts. Both the academic discourses and the activist knowledge will be rethought under other theories such as the alliance relationships, the reflections about conflict and discursive analysis.

The British anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard (1969), in his classic book entitled “The Nuer” presented the problem of anthropology as that of “cultural translation”. Its task should be to acquire enough elements of the “strange” into the anthropologist' own language. About half a century has passed since Evans-Pritchard's statement. The “strange” does not occupy that place in contemporary theory. The once called “native” or “distant” has left the fetishistic place of the “Other”. Although post-colonial theorizing has called for thinking beyond western centered analysis, the problem of translation gains particular relevance when thinking through how globalized discourses are used by various actors to fight inequalities. As those inequalities often evolve marginalized groups the negotiation of rights is done when social movements try to make intelligible the marginalized experience to “majorities”. One first assumption in this essay is that activists and scholars have different “cosmologies”, each linked to global discourses, making the challenge of their articulation a problem of “translation”. I presume that the question of translation can be thought of in two ways:

1. In which it refers to the process of thinking or making “different things” understandable to the Other – what Evans-Pritchard (1969) stated as being the role of the anthropologist – and;
2. In which it refers to the articulation between “two cultures”.

It is in this second sense that new actors are occupying roles as facilitators or mediators, articulating possible “interactions” between two (or more) social actors, mediators who often transit between two different modes of action, perspectives, or worldviews. These actors create frameworks of intelligibility between two different moral communities, in the Durkheimian sense (Durkheim 1995), that inform the same agenda (and society) but may not share the same goals or “cosmologies”. Homophobia, for example, is a category present in the cosmologies of activists and scholars, but it means different things to each group.

The different cosmologies of activists and scholars could be conceived as two different “cultures” (or systems of logic) that are expressed in different conceptions of time, space, language, content, work style, sense of judgment and justice, etc. But this could also be thought in terms of identity, as this concept is seen here as a collective process of producing identifications and different ways of seeing and being in the world (which is, as I could say, constructed by/with the social movements and academic life).

Clifford Geertz (1983) presents us with a concept of culture as a network of interpretable public symbols that are articulated in the public/collective spheres and that produce constitutive effects in the communities that share them. Arguing that the human being is tied into symbolic networks that they themselves build (as cultural beings), Geertz (1983) stresses that it is in this process that identifications and differentiations among individuals take shape. Moreover, Geertz (1973) shows that this symbolic complex constitutes patterns in the globalized contemporary society, suggesting that this misencounter of cosmologies is indeed one of the greatest challenges of contemporary globalization. It is in this sense that activists and scholars can be seen as participants in two different cultures, producing and living with different symbolic networks, which they may or may not share.

Marlene Wayar is a transvestite leader from Argentina. She just graduated from social psychology at Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA). She was the mentor and actual director of the first Transvestite’ Latin-American journal called “El Teje”⁵. In the Editorial of the first issue of El Teje, Wayar presents some features that we could suggest as being of a cultural mediator. As she states:

El Teje quiere ser la punta de una red de acción conjunta para evitar caer en las otras redes, las de la policía, las del gobierno de

5 <http://www.rojas.uba.ar/publicaciones/revistas/index.htm>.

turno, las de los que creen que sólo hay dos maneras de ser: hombre o mujer. [...] El Teje se propone como el espejo de nuestro sentir y pensar, de las formas en que reaccionamos internamente y ante el mundo exterior y nuestra propia percepción de qué y cómo somos: no somos hombres. [...] El Teje quiere ser el lugar desde donde decir y actuar en este sentido: traduciendo en representaciones culturales y acciones políticas transformadoras del afuera/otro/a colectivo/a estos discursos internos de sentir y pensar. Travestis. Desde El Teje queremos aportar a esta traducción del pensar y sentir travesti a través de herramientas teóricas, espacios de discusión, diálogo entre compañeras, reflexión conjunta y también, por qué no, la risa en voz alta. Nuestro objetivo último es transmitirnos unas a otras nuestras diversas experiencias y conocimientos para combatir aquello que nos oprime⁶ [emphasis mine].

A close look at Wayar' statement in the first issue of "El Teje" shows that the concern of the magazine is the one of translation. El Teje wants to be a place in which representations and political action can be thought in a conjoined form making the magazine a place of cultural mediation. More than presenting different aspects of academia and activism, the magazine addresses the importance of articulation between different cosmologies.

Marlene Wayar, as a member of several "science-friendly" networks (co-founder of the Latin-American and Caribbean Trans Network; president of the NGO Transgender Future in Argentina) is constantly evoked by students and scholars to participate or indicate informants for all sorts of researches. In November 19 2009, she was asked if she could indicate some prostitutes for a research project. Wayar was a bit nervous in her answer, once she said: "Que raro me resulta que no puedas encontrar personas que por su estrategia de sustento económico 'están, para ser encontradas'"⁷. Although the answer was a response to a researcher that we could suppose is a bit dislocated of the field, the final paragraph of Wayar' response interests the matter in focus:

6 Free translation by the author of this essay: El Teje wants to be the tip of a network of joint action to avoid falling into the other networks, the police, the government in power, those who believe that there are only two ways to be: male or female. [...] El Teje is proposed as the mirror of our feeling and thinking, of the ways we react internally and to the outside world and our own perception of what and how we are: we are not men. [...] El Teje wants to be the place where words and action in this regard: translating cultural performances and political actions of the outside/other collective these internal discourses of feeling and thinking. Transvestites. From El Teje we want to contribute to this translation of transvestite thought and feeling through theoretical tools, forums for discussion, dialogue between partners, joint reflection and also, why not laugh out loud. Our ultimate goal is to convey to each other our different experiences and knowledge to fight what oppresses us.

7 Free translation by the author of this essay: I find it odd that you cannot find people whose economic livelihood strategy "are to be found".

He sido prostituta, posiblemente sea en unos meses Psicóloga Social. y como persona entre los dos mundos me sigo cuestionado el papel de la Academia cuando "baja" a indagar el mundo de las "otredades", "Cool" solo para ustedes y con ese bajo fondo capitalista de capitalizar solo para un lado de una línea impuesta desde ustedes (generalidad ficcional, claro). [...] Son ustedes quienes detentan poder y lo ejercen sobre esas subjetividades y otras muchas más. son ustedes quienes pueden transformarse y transformar el concepto y sentido del poder. al menos con mayor incidencia, no?⁸ [emphasis mine].

Wayar classifies herself as a person between “two worlds”, academia and social movement. But in this dialogue she is not only differentiating or integrating herself to the “otherness” or positioning herself on either side. She doesn’t claim any cosmology as her own but the cultural translation among the both. She is stating some conceptions of how to re-build the anti-transphobia agenda but also stating some theoretical framework in which scholars should work in order to “combine” the categories of the coalition between activists and scholars in the anti-homophobia agenda.

The Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Velho (1999) points to the importance of “cultural mediators” in the contemporary context. Drawing on Geertz (1983), Velho (1999) illustrates how such individuals (or institutions) are actually needed, to some extent, in a globalized world, and how they articulate different “cultures” or symbolic systems. As Velho states:

Outro papel que assume importância extrema dentro da complexidade sociocultural analisada, é o de mediador cultural. Trata-se do papel desempenhado por indivíduos que são intérpretes e transitam entre diferentes segmentos e domínios sociais. Desta forma, é o oposto sociológico do homem marginal esmagado entre dois sistemas culturais. Esses brokers, mediadores, tornam-se especialistas na interação entre diferentes estilos de vida e visões de mundo. Embora, na origem, pertençam a um grupo, bairro ou região moral específicos, desenvolvem o talento e a capacidade de intermediarem mundos diferentes (VELHO, 1999: 81)⁹.

8 Free translation by the author of this essay: I've been a prostitute, possibly within months I will be a Social Psychologist. And as a person between the two worlds I still questioned the role of the Academy as "low" to explore the world of "otherness," "Cool" just for you and with that under capitalist fund to capitalize only one side of a line imposed from you (general fiction, of course) why not tackle a research with customers, you're surrounded by them, they are there, and without suffering the many opportunities for transformation. It is you who hold power and exercise it on those subjectivities and many more. is you who can change and transform the concept and meaning of power. at least with the highest incidence, no?

9 Free translation by the author of this essay: Another role that assumes utmost importance in the sociocultural complexity considered is that of the cultural mediator. | It is the role played by individuals

A different but related example would be of Sarah Schulman, an Assistant Professor of English at the City University of New York and also a novelist and early Act Up activist (United States). I got in touch with her work when she was awarded with the 2009 Kessler Award by the Center of Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS) at the City University of New York (CUNY). According to the CLAGS newsletter (Fall, 2009), “the Kessler Award is intended to honor a scholar, artist or activist who has, over a number of years, produced a substantive body of work that has had a significant influence on the field of LGBTQ Studies” [emphasis mine]. Previous awarded scholars were Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig. An awarded individual would be – in the voice of the coordinator of CLAGS Prof. Sarah Chinn at the Award Lecture¹⁰ – a person who has had a life time commitment to LGBT Studies. When presented by Prof. Chinn at the lecture, Prof. Schulman was positioned as a person that embodies the categories that keep CLAGS functioning, that is to say, scholars, activists and artists. Furthermore, Prof. Schulman wouldn’t just “embody” those categories, but would represent the combination of those. Taking Prof. Chinn’ analysis of Prof. Schulman, I would suggest that the “combination” that is not just a juxtaposition of identities is actually what puts Prof. Schulman as an important example of mediators between activists and scholars. It is importance to notice that Prof. Schulman does not assume for herself the place of mediation but is assigned by others this role. If we presume, according to what we said above, that we nominate and award those understood as “us”, Prof. Schulman was acclaimed by scholars. In this sense she is part of a specific cosmology. Prof. Schulman “embodies” the presuppositions of the Center that nominated her and in this process is enacted worldviews.

Another example that helps us complicate the cultural mediation process is that of Prof. Angelique V. Nixon, who is a Professor in Residence in the University of Connecticut's Women's Studies Program (United States). I had a chance of attending a colloquium organized by IRN (October 5th) called “Neither Heaven Nor Hell: The Realities of Sexual Minority Organizing in the Caribbean” with Professor Nixon at the

who are interpreters and move between different sectors and social domains. | Thus, it is the sociological opposite of the marginal man crushed between two cultural systems. | These brokers, mediators, become experts on the interaction between different lifestyles and worldviews. | Although in origin, belonging to a group, district or specific moral region, they develop the talent and ability to mediate different worlds (VELHO, 1999: 81).

10 2009 Kessler Lecture | “Ties That Bind: Familial Homophobia and Its Consequences” with Sarah Schulman | Thursday, November 12, 2009 | Graduate Center | Proshansky Auditorium | 6:30-8:30 PM | New York, NY, United States.

LGBT Center in Greenwich Village, New York. This colloquium was part of the project “Seminars in The City”, which I will speak something below. Every colloquium on fall of 2009 had some pre-reading assignments that were composed mostly of academic journal published articles. Prof. Nixon’ was a bit different. We read for her presentation letters, blogs and entrees in which Caribbean activist’ voices were actually struggling in some immediate responses, what is a characteristic of the sense of timing in social movements (“an hour matters”, they would say). One of these responses, for example, referred to the boycott of Red Stripes beer (a Jamaican brand) by American homosexuals in order to “fight homophobia” in Jamaica. The Jamaican movement then was stating that this boycott harmed the relation of the LGBT movement in that country by frightening away possible partners who could grant the fight against Aids and Homophobia. In other words, the local movement was concerned with how international activism built local agendas without establishing alliance with the local institutions. But is giving authority to activist voices enough to position Prof. Nixon as a cultural mediator? I don’t think so. That is why a look at her Blog “Conscious Vibration”¹¹ is important. At the same time that Prof. Nixon is producing knowledge in the field of Lesbian and Gay Studies, she is giving immediate responses to fight for gender and sexual justice. As she presents herself in the blog:

I am woman, Black, feminist, Caribbean, and queer. I am a writer, scholar, cultural critic, teacher, and poet. I have been womanish, long time, and so I dare to imagine a world where people of color can be human and free. I dream and breathe revolution and liberation on many fronts — sexually, spiritually, economically, socially, and radically. I see hetero-sexist patriarchy and white supremacy as preventing movement and advancement for humanity. [emphasis mine].

The way in which Prof. Nixon gives tone to her résumé she is performing a mediator discourse using the timing of the text to present different cosmologies that subjective her persona (character). First an activist (and the political subjects that she claims for herself – woman, black, feminist), then a scholar (positioned in certain fields of Human Sciences and Literature – scholar, writer, cultural critic). First the principle of her personal agenda (the goals she wants to reach with the paths taken) and what she is fighting for (revolution and liberation) and; then the theoretical framework in which she

11 <http://consciousvibration.blogspot.com/>.

is working (Gender Studies). Taking the presentation written by her we can suppose that she is “well conscious” of the differences between activists and scholars and she is investing in a textual tone to make possible the alliance between the two cosmologies.

The alliance between the different cosmologies, as we can presume from Nixon' discourse, is not done throughout worldviews but throughout the cultural mediators. The cultural mediators translate worldviews to this or that cosmology (activist and scholar). The translation of worldviews create the possibility of coalition between activists and scholars however it is needed the presence of cultural mediators or the presence of networks that assume this role. When individuals that play the role of cultural mediators are not present in the field, other ways of coalition-building between activists and scholars are enacted. The efforts implemented by three projects granted by Ford Foundation are important to be reflected about.

The three efforts are: (i) Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights (CLAM)¹²; (ii) Red Iberoamericana por las Libertades Laicas¹³ (RILL)¹⁴ and; (iii) The International Resource Network (IRN)¹⁵. CLAM is located at the Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) under the Social Medicine Institute that holds a Post-Grad Program in Gender, Sexuality and Health. IRN is located at the City University of New York (United States) under the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies (CLAGS). RILL is located at the El Colegio Mexiquense (Mexico) under the Interdisciplinary Program of Religion Studies.

According to its website¹⁶, Ford Foundation exists since 1936 as an institution concerned with areas in which “life depends”. Those areas would be linked to social and economical justice, environmental sustentability and human welfare. The foundation work could be reviewed as granting other institutions around the globe that stress the areas mentioned above. Each granted should, in return, produce knowledge and contribute to social change. In this sense, one of the foundation' mission would be working with “networks”, the same category seen in the goal of UNIFEM for woman in politics.

12 http://www.clam.org.br/publique/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?infoid=148&sid=1&UserActiveTemplate=_EN. Accessed in November, 10, 2009.

13 Iberoamerican Network for Secular Liberties, free translation by the author.

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<http://74.125.95.132/search?q=cache:MagVu8gRQCkJ:centauro.cmq.edu.mx:8080/Libertades/1quiennes.htm+qui%C3%A9nes+so+mos+Libertades+Laicas&cd=4&hl=pt-BR&ct=clnk&gl=br>. Accessed in November, 10, 2009.

15 <http://www.irnweb.org/index.cfm?contentID=222>. Accessed in November, 10, 2009.

16 <http://www.fordfound.org/about>. Accessed in November, 10, 2009.

Although the three efforts are funded by Ford Foundation but each also has its own legs. So they must be located in a broader sense and seen as part of a global agenda to fight sexual and gender inequalities across Americas (and in some cases around the globe). Another point that must be said here is that all the efforts are mainly coordinated by scholars, located in different universities and occupying the place of articulation between scholars, activists, and also other actors involved in the implementation of those agendas such as public servants, artists, judges, among others. In this sense, networks granted by Ford Foundation are in some sense aspiring to be contemporary cultural mediators.

CLAM is mainly concerned with producing, organizing and disseminating “knowledge about sexuality from a human rights perspective, in order to help fight gender inequality and contribute to the struggle against the discrimination of sexual minorities in the region” (CLAM, 2009). In this sense, CLAM publishes contemporary research in the areas of its concerns, organizes events, participates in congresses and other events and publishes a newsletter. CLAM has one of the most successful websites concerned with the sexual and gender agendas, offering constant updates of new information and an easy to use platform.

RILL is mainly concerned with producing a network that provides information about secular liberties to actors working in the areas of religion, gender, sexuality, intolerance, and discrimination. The main features of this effort involve the organization of an annual course called “Secular Liberties,” which provides scholarships for those attending; the publication of a printed and virtual newsletter; a website; and advocacy efforts with governmental and supra-governmental judicial institutions in the area of secular liberties. Their stated primary goal is to build a network (again, the same category used by the Ford Foundation and UNIFEM). RILL is an effort that mostly invests knowledge in the mission of articulating activists and scholars, as we will see below.

The IRN is mainly concerned with producing spaces in which the flows of sexual and gender knowledge could run more freely. It is a network of subjects involved in the fields but also a publisher and broker of knowledge. The IRN also organizes events and congresses. One of its actions would be the Seminars in The City, a monthly colloquium in which diverse themes according to gender and sexuality worldwide are stressed. The IRN is the broadest effort geographically, since it works with all areas of the world. What is worth mentioning is that IRN is a virtual network of scholars and activists in which the subjects can create a personal profile, built newsletters, share work, among others.

I would like to bring into discussion the differences of the categories used to address the mission of articulating activists and scholars in order to implement the anti-homophobia agenda across Americas. CLAM talks about “bringing together” activists, scholars and other partners. IRN talks about “connecting” researchers “both academic and community bases”. RILL talks about building a solid structure for “different actors”, “a network of actors” to establish “contact between scholars and activists”. In the sense presented above we can assume that all of the efforts presume some “distance” between the various groups they seek to connect. If I showed in the beginning (when talking about the Brazilian Human Rights Award) that the activists are the ones investing in the process of differentiation, the distance presumed by the scholars acknowledge the communities as different but work with the goal of integration.

Conclusion

As we have seen above, efforts are made to constitute possible encounters between activists and scholars. In one side there is “two groups” (activists and scholars) that constitute themselves throughout relations that produce particularities. Those particularities are specially anchored in similarities. Activists and scholars indicate “theirs” to be awarded (taking the award as one strategy of fighting homophobia nowadays). To indicate “theirs” each group argue towards a historical, sociological or political difference that establish the polarity. “To indicate one of ours” concerns to put in vogue (or in the stage if we take it literally) the one’s cosmology, the one’s worldview and, why not, the one’s myths (like a better world, for example). To be “equal” or “alike” is necessary to differentiate oneself of those that, for some reason, “fight”, “think” or “act” in a different way.

The constitution of those particularities of viewing the world, constantly reinforced by activist, scholarly and policy discourses, summarized in this essay as cosmologies, expose social processes that concern to repertoires that categorize different actions and refer to certain individuals. As an activist or a scholar, they are a wide process of forcing and reinforcing both identifications and differentiations. As Evans-Pritchard (1969) states that one can only be a Nuer because one is not a Dinka, the activists and scholars constitute themselves mutually in those agendas to fight gender and sexual inequalities. This constitution happens both in a process of “looking inside” or a process of differentiation. The relationality established throughout this constitutions,

especially because the different cosmologies, seems to create some impasses that are solved with/through the cultural mediators.

The cultural mediators are the features that provoke (or make possible) the translation between the two cosmologies, inserting intelligible elements from one group to another. Traditionally positioned in one specific culture, the cultural mediators are linked to other cosmologies (through self-appointment caused from a particular experience of being in the world, or through the denomination of someone else which is also guided by certain historical or sociological “cosmology”) and exercise the role of articulating the two segments “traditionally” separated.

Somehow the cultural mediators using their “translation politics” are the ones that create the possibility of binding (articulating) the two cosmologies together but, at the same time, are the ones that “plaster” the two groups throughout the categorization that they make of them. When the cultural mediators speak of their double role they are, in some sense, determining ways of being in the world for the activist or scholar cosmologies. One can either be an activist or a scholar but, in any sense, there are some features (or specific ontology’s) that guide the two possibilities. Acting in the articulation of different “worlds”, the cultural mediators support the construction of these same “worlds”.

Besides this “nationalist astronauts” that constitute and are produced by the process of separation between activists and scholars (as stated by Geertz, they are prisoners of a symbolic network that they built for themselves), other institutions may appear with the promises of a possible articulation between the different cosmologies.

I used in this article three efforts constituted and granted by Ford Foundation, arguing that those efforts, even though with some semantic-conceptual differences among them, have the goal of “uniting” the different cosmologies. With similar features of the cultural mediators, the “networks” self-nominate for themselves the role of coalition-building between different segments. One more time it presumes that there are two different worldviews and there is the need to bind together different cosmologies.

Anyway, the native categorizations made around the anti-homophobia agenda seem to obey to a logic of differentiation but, at the same time, are filled with interactional subterfuges between activists and scholars. A relational process par excellence, constituted mutually.

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