DECONSTRUCTING ‘MACHISMO’: VICTIMS OF ‘MACHISMO IDEOLOGY’ DOMINATING IN BRAZIL

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José Batista Loureiro De Oliveira Psychology Department University of Bologna Casella Postale 404 40100 – Bologna – Italy j.loureiro@bo.nettuno.it
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Abstract

This paper is a discussion of machismo present massively in the Brazilian culture, as this culture is mainly patriarchal and chauvinist. This talk is drawn from research in progress on social representation of machismo in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, by means of an ACL (Adjective Check List), and supervised at the Psychology Department of the University of Bologna. This discussion aims to argue that the study of gender in Brazil is long-overdue. I would also state that the points of view in this paper are personal and empirical visions.

Introduction

Men are changing – not, perhaps, with the bang of transformation, but also not simply with a whispered hint of a slight nudge in a new direction. New role models for men have not replaced older ones, but have grown alongside them, creating a dynamic tension between ambitious breadwinner and compassionate father, between macho seducer and loving companion, between Rambo and Phil Donahue. (Kimmel 1987:9)

In beginning a discussion about gender issues, we cannot forget to refer to our historical and territorial roots, which surround and define us with different and outstanding vectors. Since the word gender seems almost unknown in Latin cultures, I refer particularly to those aspects in which I am primarily interested: the social construction of male gender in the cultural and multiracial Brazilian context, with special focus on machismo and its attributes.

I will primarily use the works of Robert Connell and Michael Kimmel as the theoretical approach in my presentation as well as in my research in progress in Rio Grande do Sul (this research intends to be a qualitative one, dealing with statistical data, but without falling into the social science positivistic model).

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1 This research project was presented first at the 19th Annual Institute Of Latin American Studies Student Association Conference on Latin America – University of Texas at Austin - February 26-28, 1999.
2 The considerations in this paper mainly refer to Brazilian context; where not, it will be stated.
3 The research main framework is still under construction.
When we refer to Brazilian culture (see Freyre, 1965), we must bear in mind that this society is situated within the *Latin American context*; so that its territory, atmosphere, religion, sexuality and love cannot be considered outside *the geographical and historical context*, which defines and inspires us on a large scale. Regarding Latin America and its roots, Wiarda says:

The Latin American systems have their roots in the ancient Greek notion of organic solidarity; in the Roman system of a hierarchy of laws and institutions; *in historic Catholic concepts* of the corporate, sectoral, and compartmentalized organization of society based on each person’s acceptance of his or her station in life; in the similarly corporate organization (*Army, Church, towns, nobility*) of Iberian society during the late medieval era; in the warrior mentality and the walled enclave cities of the period of the Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors; in the centralized bureaucratic systems of the early modern Spanish and Portuguese states; and the absolutist, scholastic, *Catholic*, political culture and institutions of Spain of the Inquisition and the Counter Reformation. Of course, in the vast empty and “uncivilized” Western Hemisphere, which was under the constant threat that the win veneer of Spanish and Portuguese culture and institutions would be submerged, and which had huge Indian (ten times larger in Latin America than the in North America) and later African populations, the institutions transplanted from Iberia underwent various changes and permutations. *The amazing thing is their capacity to survive, persist, and adopt even into contemporary period.* (Wiarda, 1982:7 – emphasis added)

Brazil was discovered and colonized by the Portuguese in 1500, and we are now celebrating 500 years since our discovery. The fact that we were colonized by the Portuguese and Spanish, and have suffered slavery, domination by the Catholic church, and decimation, has, in sum, left *signals, visible traces and deep-rooted behaviors* in our cultural identity, so that some culture of ours remained untouchable. The colonization left us values that defined us, but at the same time *enslaved us*.

Gender is not ahistorical, not stagnant, but per definition, it is living (constructed through individual and institutional social relations), and evolves alongside the human being. Consequently it can be transported, pushed, redefined, reshaped and instigated from the colonizers to colonies, as it is clearly explained by R. Connell:

In the colonies where conquered populations were not displaced or massacred but where made into a subordinated labour force on the spot – most of Latin America, India and South-East Asia and parts of Africa – *the gender consequences involved a reshaping of local culture under the pressure of the colonizers*... It is familiar suggestion that *Latin America machismo* was a product of the interplay of cultures under colonialism. The conquistadors provided both provocation and model, Spanish
Catholicism provided the ideology of female abnegation, and economic oppression blocked other sources of authority for men. As Walter Williams has shown, Spanish colonialism also involved a violent and sustained assault on the customary homosexuality of native cultures. This has influenced contemporary expressions of masculinity. In Mexico, for instance, the public presentation of masculinity is aggressively heterosexual, though the practice is often bisexual. (Connell, 1995:198 – emphasis added)

In Brazil, also, masculinity is aggressively heterosexual, but the practice of homosexuality, bisexuality and transexuality is highly common. It seems to be a big contradiction that, where the hegemonic patriarchal model is very dominant, there are multiplicities of gender forms. The dilemma is not this multiplicity of gender forms but how the historical patriarchal hegemony and homophobia will allow for and deal with all manifestations of plurality of voices of gender forms.

As far as I am aware, gender studies in Brazil (very scarce; for the latest works see Denizart, 1998) are formed within a framework of psychoanalysis, sex-role theory and Catholic dominating models (mainly ‘marianismo’ – promotion of the cult of Virgin Mary in the Catholic church - and chauvinistic women), and the media and powerful institutions can disseminate and confirm the dichotomy between men and women: stiletto heels for women, mustaches for men, perfume for women, sweat for men and so on. This framework renders things extremely conservative and overconformed.

It seems that psychologists have underestimated the historical background in the personal and collective fate, as it is easier to push the models of psychoanalytic interpretation (I am not doubting the values of psychoanalysis, but saying that, when used as a political ideology, it can be harmful) everywhere as it might correspond to the prevailing and demanding trends of dominating classes, especially where a large portion of the national population are breadwinners who fight for material supplies in everyday life. Kimmel explains in an elegant and clear way the psychoanalytic constructions:

A psychologist might pose these questions differently, but our analyses are easily compatible. Freud argued that gender identity for men is perilous accomplishment, achieved only after a traumatic separation from mother and identification with father, who was perceived as a distant, often frightening figure. Of course, once the young boy links his sense of masculinity to being separate from mother, can he ever get far enough away? How much distance from the feminine is enough? Psychologically, his sense of masculinity becomes a constant test to demonstrate the fact that separation. But how does he prove it? And to whom? Such psychological theories of child

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4 A very worthwhile work on gender issues in contemporaneous Brazilian context (of course it is only one of many possibilities of gender issues in Brazil).
development often assumed an ahistorically transcendent family constellation of homebound mother, distant working father, and children, as if the nuclear family of the late nineteenth century was eternal. But why the father absent? When did he leave? Didn’t he have to prove his manhood also? A more historically informed analysis of these processes suggests that Freud’s brilliant dissection of the fin-de-siècle middle-class gendered neuroses may have mistaken consequence for cause. (Kimmel 1996: ix,x – emphasis added)

Grasping the meanings of psychoanalysis is important in order to distinguish the different position that it occupies in many different psychological practices. In Latin America, psychoanalysis plays a very important role in private and institutional practices. All this is to say that gender is constructed close to the psychoanalytic setting around Latin America.

**Machismo: Honor and Shame**

But few men are calling into question the basis for all the resistance and retreat; few are examining the hinging of men’s definitions of themselves as men with our position in a homosocial, competitive arena of the market. Current men’s movements are often like psychological first aid, applying a salve to the wounds and then sending the men back out into the fray again. No wonder the men keep coming back – the cures aren’t treating the root cause of the malady. (Kimmel, 1996:331)

I do not mean to divide gender into the ‘Latin’ or ‘not Latin’ world. Rather, I would approach machismo and its attributes especially in the ‘Latin ambiance’, so that it is easier to be compared with something else, which is ‘not Latin’ (I did not choose any other particular culture to do so).

At this point, I would briefly present two basic concepts in gender studies framework, that is, sex-role theory (see Connell, 1985, Kimmel 1987,2000) and the social construction of gender (see idem), as I would argue that in Brazil, gender issues are mainly addressed in the sex-role framework.

Sex-role theory is the most spread out and the oldest in the social sciences: it is alive and still dominating in many fields in academia and in institutional levels. It has a very reductive and narrow vision of what it is to be a man or woman. The notion of men and women stereotypes in this framework is clearer:
Further, the sex-role paradigm is based upon the traits associated with the role—a kind of laundry list of behavioral characteristics—rather than their enactments. This makes sex roles not only more static than they might otherwise be but posits an ideal configuration that bears little, if any, relation to the ways in which sex roles are enacted in everyday life. In addition, the sex-role paradigm minimizes the extent to which gender relations are based on power. Not only do men as group exert power over women as a group, but the historically derived definitions of masculinity and femininity reproduce those power relations. (Kimmel 1987:12-13—emphasis added)

The social construction of gender has another starting point and a new wider vision and understanding of gender. Better: men and women are not reducing to XX and XY sex-roles configurations, and they are probably beyond the Adam and Eve predictions:

In contrast to these biological arguments, many social scientists understand our sexuality to be a social construction, a fluid assemblage of meanings and behaviors that we construct from images, values, and prescriptions in the world around us. The social-constructionist perspective examines variability and change in sexual behaviors and attitudes. Specifically, sexuality varies (1) from culture to culture; (2) within any one culture over time (historically); (3) depending upon the context in which it is presented; and (4) over the course of an individual's life. (Kimmel 1990:4)

Sociology, the academic home of some of the earliest sex role work on masculinity, is the site the sharpest break from the sex role framework. In the last years field studies in the industrial countries have multiplied and new theoretical languages have been proposed. There is no settled paradigm for this new work, but some common themes are clear: the construction of masculinities in everyday life, the importance of economic and institutional structures, the significance of differences among masculinities and the contradictory and dynamic character of gender. (Connell, 1985:35—emphasis added)

The machismo’s conceptions and expectations are extremely close to the sex-role theory: it turns men into a rigid, conservative and traditional conception of masculinity. The sexual stereotypes in the ‘Latin world’ such as the macho men and chauvinistic women (one recalls each other) bring about some typical troubles: heterosexism and homophobia. Worse: when a man or woman does not properly correspond to required profiles, the personal identity could be in serious trouble and could face discrimination.

Folkloric assumptions about macho masculinities lay at the heart of the manly presentational strategies. The term “macho” implied overconformity to the traditional male gender role. This role was generally regarded as more masculine than modern male gender role (Stearns 1979). (Levine 1998:57)
David Gilmore presents a definition of machismo in Andalusia: it is identical to a photographic negative of the Brazilian macho situation (of course gender is regional, local).

First, and of central importance, is virility, the Andalusian ideal of macho. This means being sexually potent in a physiological sense. For married men this includes fathering many children (probably boys), in the process satisfying one’s wife, frequenting brothels, and publicity displaying lecherous intentions (though not necessary actions) toward nubile women. Mistresses, if they are discretely maintained, are appropriate. For young bachelors, this would naturally include actual attempts at seduction, frequent masturbation, a sexual bravado (usually more impressive in word than deed), and generally, as men say, obeying the peremptory commends of the testicles (cojones). A ‘macho’ (that is, a real man) is a ‘guy who thinks with his balls’. (Gilmore 1987:98)

There can be many types of victims of machismo, each context having different configurations. I would stress that machismo is strong where the law of the father defines the regime (it varies according to class, race, literacy and geography). The masculinist father (also the masculinist mother) is the most responsible for spreading machismo and it attributes.

In families the consequences of machismo are higher than supposed, especially regarding masculinist point of view towards female sexual initiation (in some cases where the machismo is in extremes the girls are tortured or massacred because they do not follow the machismo-established sex roles such as no sexual relations before their met their prince). Boys, however are forced to have sexual relations with women earlier in order to prevent their becoming homosexual. In Latin countries, having a homosexual son or daughter can be shameful and offensive and can have negative consequences for the society; according to the Latin heterosexism sex between men and women must only be like that between Adam and Eve, in that it serves only for heterosexual sexual reproduction.

Of course, this can happen in any culture; what I want to stress is that where democracy is omitted or under construction, are lower incomes, illiteracy is high and so on, then the apology of machismo can be very dangers for men, women, girls and boys and for all sexual orientations.

I consider the presence of machismo (machismo is one of many possibilities of gender studies in Brazil) in Brazilian culture, and in its manifestations (from institutional dynamics to picturesque everyday life to be predestined). I think that gender issues are no longer an item of concern for Brazilian psychology and sociology as far as I am aware; however I am sure it is a fundamental question, that should be considered more deeply. Gender is essential for
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further understanding machismo, gay and lesbians, abortion, sex tourism in girls and boys from Brazil, abuse violence, criminality, birth-rate control.

Everything that can confirm the virility and power (el poder, o poder, il potere) is a motive of honor, whereas everything that cannot confirm, or that things doubt, provokes a crisis in terms of stereotypes and is a motive of shame. The honor and shame of being a macho is based only in external elements that can categorize a man or woman, like trousers for men and skirts for women.

As elsewhere in Latin America, notions of power – el poder – are part of the male discourse. Power is usually assumed to be a male prerogative. It glosses all the attributes denoted as masculine and represents a contested space for the articulation of masculine identity. It belongs to the realm of machismo and is associated with the violence and aggressiveness, a particular form of self-assertion which more than anything implies being in control, being in command, having authority not only - or primarily - over women, but also over other men. Machismo, derived from the generic term macho, meaning male, is used synonymously with masculinity; it implies above all, the ability to penetrate, and is associated with being active, closed, unyielding. (Melhuus & Stolen 1996:240 – emphasis added)

One of the good things in the social construction of gender framework, is the possibility to look outside all dominant, hegemonic and dichotic definitions of men and women in the social sciences, and rethink the issue. Psychology, history, race, ethnicity, and gender relations, as to be a man or woman implies identification of many social items, more than establishing profiles from Adam and Eve.

First, the use of the idea of role has the curious effect of actually minimizing the importance of gender. Role theory uses drama as metaphor - we learn our roles through socialization and then perform them for others. But speak of a gender role makes it sound almost too theatrical, and thus too easily changeable. Gender, as Helena Lopata and Barrie Thorn Write: ‘is not a role in the same sense that being a teacher, sister, or friend is a role. Gender, like race or age, is deeper, less changeable, and infuses the more specific roles one plays; thus, a female teacher differs from a male teacher in important sociological respects (e.g., she is likely to receive less pay, status and credibility)."

Second, sex role theory posits singular normative definitions of masculinity and femininity. If the meanings of masculinity and femininity very across cultures, over historical time, among men within any one culture, and over the life course, we cannot speak of masculinity or femininity as though each was a constant, singular, universal essence. (Kimmel 2000:89)
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Media Performance: Machismo in Construction

Given that gender is socially constructed, research can specify the materials from which it is constructed and suggest how it is organized. Images of gender in the media become texts on normative behavior, one of many cultural shards we use to construct notions of masculinity. (Kimmel 1987:20)

The media plays a very large role in the communal and individual arenas. It has the function of ‘informing’ us. Of course, media is a very vast concept, but I am essentially concerned with TV and its power, construction of ‘realities’, machismo, domination, and establishment of models of masculinities, especially through sports and soap operas in everyday people’s life.

The device bridging the contradictions around masculine violence and social control was organized sport, especially rugby football. The premier of the country met the national football team when their ship returned from 1905 tour of England, amid well-orchestrated mass enthusiasm. Team sport was being developed at this time, across the English-speaking world, as a heavily convention-bound arena. The exemplary status of sport as a test of masculinity, which we now take for granted, is in no sense natural. It was produced historically, and in this case we can see it produced deliberately as a political strategy. (Connell 1985:30)

Gender is represented in a wide range of possibilities and different contexts: TV shows, music, films, sports, sex-tourism, army, church, school, soap opera and so on. Gender is not neutral, it comes from institutional and individual settings which are engaged in the social system and its ideologies.

The export of European/American gender ideology can be seen in the mass media of the developing world. A notable example is the promotion of Xuxa in Brazil as an icon of femininity - a blonde model who has become remarkably popular, and remarkably rich, through television programme for children. (In the same country, street children who don’t have television sets have been murdered by male death squads). (Connell, 1985:199)

TV programs have a big impact on collective lives and can act on a very subliminary level. The soap opera has an impact on many lives and instigates models and plots. It does not necessarily mean what the minorities (actually majorities in the national population) reach for their ‘real’ lives. The media problems arise when the public is seen only as receivers of knowledge.
If we see social institutions as constructing expert knowledge as a form of social control then the dissemination of knowledge for popular consumption plays a key role in this process of control. (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994:95)

In the Brazilian context the machismo manifestation in sports are very clear. It is quite an imposing model that all macho boys should watch sports, identify themselves with it, and should fight, and the media can build up a self image or can also demolish it.

Incidentally, in the Mediterranean culture (not equal in whole parts) the construction of machismo is also very emphatic through soccer players. It is a quite big contradiction, that men are watching men for long hours daily on a color screen or live. However, the homophobia increases when regarding gay and lesbian issues such as Gay Pride.

In Brazil, the soap opera is a ritual and takes up a large space in the collective mind. The worse is the fact that many plots or personages do not correspond to the ‘reality’ of everyday life. They are a creation, an invention that instigates a national model (gender models that imply a typical response) for people. Even minorities are not able to reach out or catch what TV promotes. The ‘game’ is to attract the attention of the public and make a dream within a dream.

The fact that the meanings of gender, and hence the imagery evoked, will vary according to the context does not detract from the overall trust of the significance of gender. Rather, it appears that gender is central to an understanding of Latin America reality, past or present, whether we are concerned with economic, political or cultural process. In many ways gender seems to bridge these different spheres of society, representing a nexus around which various experiences can be grafted and represented. Thus gender can seen as a significant carrier through which meaning is constructed. Gender is not only reflected in the division of labour and at the different levels of political expression and organization, but it is also underpins cultural representations. Nevertheless, only additional research will disclose whether gender and discourses on gender represent the subtext linking moralities and identities, and only more research will be able to reveal to what extent gender relations represent the nexus through which differences are constructed and perceived class to those of gender. (Melhuus & Stolen 1996:9 – emphasis added)

The most intelligent, updated and sensitive portrait of Brazil nowadays, is the work of Walter Salles (Central do Brasil, 1999). In his work we have a very clear example: machismo, patriarchy, marianismo, gender relations, Catholic church power, illiteracy, poverty, misery, violence, humiliation and disregard to girls and boys from Brazil. The impressive images
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through Salles’s eyes are an accurate vision of Brazilians and their existence. I would dare to say that it is also a portrait of the whole of Latin America in the end.

The Salles’ film is brilliant because he has not shown sparkling things: fashionable cars, computers, chic clothes, web pages, libraries, supermarkets, shopping-centers, schools. Even more, Salles has exposed exactly the opposite: the Brazilian ‘minorities’ (again the true majority of the national population) and their predestinate lives.

As gender and sex pass through the media, perhaps the artist’s eyes can alleviate the pain and injustice of majority hegemony and its dominating sex-role in sports, soap operas and even some children programs.

Minorities: Difference Is What Makes It Original

A young gay man arriving from the Northwest is doomed because he’s poor, a homosexual and from the countryside: three unspeakable crimes. How can he expand this such limited horizons? By making a career as a transvestite, because then he guarantees desirability, acquiring a value that “no ordinary women has …Men, contrary to what my father said, pay to be with me, gorgeous men…”. (Denizart, 1997:167)

The term ‘minorities’ is not well understood in developing countries such as Brazil. I would add here the concept of minorities according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary as ‘a relatively small group of people differing from others in the society of which they are a part in race, religion, language, political persuasion, etc.’

Minorities in the Brazilian culture (see, Parker 1991) can be many: breadwinners, black people (see, Davis 1999), gay and lesbians (see, Ramos & Pereira Junior, 1999), illiterate people, homeless, and so on. Of course I am not stating that it exists only in Brazil, but at least where does not exist, a democratic access to basic necessities (foods, schools), oppression and domination can be massive and devastating for all minorities. I do not intend to make foolish considerations about my own country, but Brazil is a very large nation and has so many cultural differences in itself. We do not know each other well, perhaps because the historical and social constructions of the country beneath the patriarchal and catholic domination has sterilized for centuries the social development of the

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5 I do think that the relations between gender and religious background are worth further consideration, especially regarding developing countries (in the whole paper, when I refer to religion it should be understood as institution, not related to personal faith issues).
country. All this is to say that, being a man in the north, south, northeast and west of Brazil might be quite different in itself.

Perhaps in the patriarchal hegemony, the minorities can be another victim of machismo dogma. Machismo does not have a strong impact only on the minorities but also between man and man. It seems to be taken for granted but it is somehow very skipped over, at least where the heterosexism and intolerance to diversity defines the regime.

Regarding minorities in Brazil, I will take an example: gays and lesbians. These minorities are seriously discriminated against and ill-treated. Throughout, the ‘Latin world', there exists a stiff intolerance for and prejudice against gays and lesbians.

The minorities in the Mediterranean culture might not necessarily be so different. Lately, we have experienced quite an ‘earthquake’ in Italy, because of the Gay Pride 2000 uproar. At first, it was set to take place in Rome and despite of protests of the church the final decision was to allow the march to proceed. The media has promoted many headlines regarding this aspect of gender politics.

Gender and sexuality go together with the cultural development of the country. If gender and gendered things are embedded in illiteracy, control of information, sexual discrimination, slavery, heterosexism, homophobia, sex-tourism, sex-role dichotomy, and conformity, it would require quite lot of time to overcome them.

Here I would introduce the most updated examples of gender politics in Rio de Janeiro regarding the State Assembly voting on recognition of gay rights groups. Some politicians from Rio de Janeiro have stated the following regarding homosexuality:

“I am not against homosexuals, but against homosexuality”. Mario Luiz (PFL)
“For years we have heard that there are ex-deputies, ex-husbands, and other exes. Never, however, in whole my life, have I heard about the existence of one ex-gay, ex-homosexual”. Wolney Trindade (PDT)

“In the average masculinist mind, a person who holds an active sexual relation as homosexual is not considered ‘homosexual’: they consider homosexuals the one who is ‘eaten (penetrated)’, the man who holds a passive role”. Carlos Minc (PT)

“Sex is not an option, it is determinism. Nobody was born male or female because they have chosen so (...) what they wish, indeed, is to admit as natural what is against nature for their own human relationship”. Carlos Dias (PFL)

“If God, whom I questioned so much, accepted a gay, he would not have created Adam and Eve but Adam and Ivan. To conclude, I was told by the chairman of Arco-Iris (a gay group)
that 10% of society is gay. We are 70 deputies; therefore, there are 7 gays here. I wish to know who they are”. Sivuca (PPB)

(excerpted from Jornal do Brasil, Cidade – December, 1999 – Rio de Janeiro)

Clearly, the institutional power is massive and decisive for collective fates. Sexual stigmatization and prejudices are all well set and protected against social disorder. It seems to be easier to instigate and reproduce a ‘laundry list of behavioral characteristics - rather than their enactments (Kimmel 1987: 12).

The narrow and bigot definitions of sexual stereotypes do not help in any way the development of individual and institutional dynamics. The sex - role stigma preserves the fixed roles, the static and monotonous repetition of a list of behaviors. The social construction of gender is open to follow the dynamic formation of gender, such as the notion that ’masculinity is not just an idea or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged in organized social relations. To understand masculinity historically we must study changes in those social relations.’(Connell 1985:29)

Gender prejudices are quite large and have numerous consequences. I would like to underline that for gays and lesbians these prejudices are spread in many fields in daily life: employment, sexual harassment, family bias, school, university, and AIDS treatment (AIDS is still a gay stigma in developing countries, probably because the basic information is missing.)

One of the cruelest ironies of the AIDS epidemic is that its primary target – younger, urban gay men in late twenty-century America – is probably the most independent group of individuals in the history of the world. Here were men who lived alone, without families (many of which had distanced themselves or even repudiated them), with virtually only same-sex peer relationships to sustain them. And yet here is a disease that progressively erodes precisely that independence, which makes the sufferer ever more dependent on both technology and social support, where the body literally disintegrates, decomposes, while you’re still inside it, while you’re still young enough and conscious enough to understand what’s happening to you.(Kimmel, 1998:xi)

Adam and Eve’s mythology has priority where the access to the social power, literacy, information is denied and every man and woman must fit this archetype. Of course, the problem is not Adam & Eve in itself, but how institutions and individuals use them as pragmatic form of heterosexism and cliché against gays and lesbians and other oppressed minorities.
Today, popular stereotypes about homosexuality continue to rely on Freudian theories of gender development. Many people believe that homosexuality is a form of gender nonconformity; that is, effeminate men and masculine women are seen in the popular mind as likely to be homosexual, while masculine men’s and feminine women’s gender-conforming behavior leads others to expect them to be heterosexual. (Kimmel 2000:69 - emphasis added)

I would briefly mention the newest project (unique in Brazil, as far as I am aware) in gender politics in Rio de Janeiro. The project (see Pereira Junior & Ramos 1999) was established on July, 1 1999 and supported by the Rio de Janeiro Government. It consists in a hotline information service (DDH - Disque Defesa Homossexual) where gay and lesbians can denounce violence, discrimination, and abuse.

I do believe that this project is revolutionary in the Brazilian context and it was certainly difficult to be established. According to the statistic data the project is achieving very good results. Thinking about minorities might be an insightful thing in the homophobia management.

The message of Davis fits clearly the Brazilians disregards to its minorities. Perhaps the next future will bring into consideration the plurality of voices in gender, information, power and literacy.

The Brazilian government should urgently prioritize special measures to facilitate the full participation of minority and indigenous groups in all aspects of political, economic, social and cultural life, as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistics Minorities and in the article 2.2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Particular consideration should be given to discrimination and marginalization in access to employment, land tenure, the right to health and shelter, and law enforcement. (Davis 1999:34)

CONCLUSION

I look forward to the day when a majority of men, as well as a majority of women, accept the absolute equality of the sexes, accept sharing of childcare and all other forms of work, accept freedom of sexual behavior, and accept multiplicity of gender forms, as being plain common sense and the ordinary basis of civilized life. (Connell 1987:xii)
As I have said at the beginning, the visions in this paper are very personal and empirical. I have stressed the main characteristics of machismo in the patriarchal context. Machismo cannot be understood outside gender, and gender relations evoke class, race, and ethnicity (see Connell, 1985 and Kimmel, 1987, 2000) as gender is much more than XX and XY genetic combinations: it has its own roots in the historical and societal constructions of relations.

To understand gender, then, we must constantly go beyond gender. The same applies in reverse. We cannot understand class, race or global inequality without constantly moving towards gender. Gender relations are a major component of social structure as a whole, and gender politics are among the main determinants of our collective fate. (Connell 1995:48)

Gender and gendered things in the ‘Latin world’ are almost inflexible: men should be a macho and women should be a passive otherwise, it can be very suspicious and can become a motive for inquisition (at personal level and/or institutional control). It seems that the borders between men and women are not very flexible, but all the worse they are a biological code of distinction (concerned primarily with external phenotypes as the genotype is a code of biological reductionism).

In sex role theory, action (the role enactment) is linked to a structure defined by biological difference, the dichotomy of male and female – not to a structure defined by social relations. This leads to categoricalism, the reduction of gender to two homogenous categories, betrayed by the persistent blurring of sex differences with sex roles. Sex roles are defined as reciprocal; polarization is a necessary part of the concept. This leads to a misperception of social reality, exaggerating differences between men and women, while obscuring the structures of race, class and sexuality. It is telling that discussions of ‘the male sex role’ have mostly ignored gay men and have little to say about race and ethnicity.(Connell 1985:27)

Historical background can define a very wide range of effects and facts in any cultural-social-economic context. I refer, in particular in the Brazilian context to the studies of masculinity which is not open, not concerned. Worse, it seems that we have become ashamed of speaking about men, gender relations, and machismo (or at least view these discussions as offensive). For Latinos, men who are interested in studying men sound quite suspicious, as ‘real men’ should not take into consideration other men.

We study men as scientists, as authors, as presidents or the other government officials, as soldiers or kings. But rarely, if ever, do we study men as men; rarely do we make masculinity the object of inquiry as we examine men’s lives. If men have been traditionally the benchmark gender (and women the “other”), then studies of men and masculinity have never made masculinity itself the object of inquiry. Men’s studies
takes masculinity as its problematic, and seeks to explore men’s experiences as men not in some social roles. While our experience is structured by its social structural location – social roles define individual enactments of them - it is also equally true that gender structures the dimensions of those roles. Other factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and age will mediate the generalizability of our explanations, but masculinity as problematic opens up entirely new areas for social scientific study. (Kimmel 1987:11)

I do not want to make of gender a flag, but it is a very important social element and has influence in so many important decisions from schools to family setting. It is important to stress that gender is practice at an individual and institutional level.

The institutions are not neutral. The gender goes through institutional ideologies and power, and it all plays an important role in constructing social configurations. Machismo is not an isolated fact: it is constructed in so many different fields of society such as media, family, school, army, university, and politics and so on.

It is quite difficult for the ‘Latin world’ to consider machismo. The institutional power is huge and different religious backgrounds occupy in a large scale the collective conceptions of gender (see Central do Brasil, Salles 1999).

It is difficult to pass from sex-role approach to social construction of gender, especially when the democracy is under construction, because of militarism domination and low recognition of national culture (‘throughout history, many white and black people shared a lack of appreciation for Brazilian culture in general, looking towards Europe, particularly France and Great Britain, for validation.’ Davis 1999:6)

If men are changing at all, however, it is not because they have stumbled upon the limits of traditional masculinity all by themselves. For at least two decades, the women’s movements (and also, since 1969, the gay liberation movement) has suggested that the traditional enactments of masculinities were in desperate need of overhaul. For some me, these critiques have prompted a terrified retreat to traditional constructions; to other it has inspired a serious reevaluation of traditional worldviews, and offers of support for the social, political, and economic struggles of women and gays. (Kimmel 1987:10)

According to media, machismo, heterosexism and homophobia in Brazil are changing. However, I would say that what a screen or headlines show about men might be a construction. Gender can be different in the same territory, from a metropolis to the countryside, where being a man or woman can be either oppressive, tough and stereotyped or very adaptable.
Like sex role research, this is concerned with public conventions about masculinities. But rather than treat these as pre-existing norms which are passively internalized and enacted, the new research explores the making and remaking of conventions in social practice itself. On the other hand this leads to an interest in the techniques used to construct them. (Connell 1985:35)

Men and masculinities in ‘Latin culture’ are still stuck by different sex-role frameworks based on the stereotype of what must be a ‘real man’. In this context, men have been feeling ashamed of taking themselves into consideration as men.

Men’s studies responds to the shifting social and intellectual contexts in the study of gender and attempts to treat masculinity not as the normative referent against which standards are assessed but as a problematic gender construct. Inspired by the academic breakthroughs of women’s studies, men’s studies address similar questions to the study of men and masculinity. As women’s studies has radically revised the traditional academic canon, men’s studies seeks to use that revision as the basis for its exploration of men and masculinity. Men’s studies seeks neither to replace nor to supplant women’s studies; quite the contrary. (Kimmel 1987:10)

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