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FROM REDUCING TO EXPANDING: A REFLEXIVE VIEW ON HOMOSEXUALITY

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Abstract: Homosexuals and homosexuality have been treated as minor in the Western society. A review of the meaning[s] of the terms is necessary in order to come from a reducing approach to one that expands the perception of the individuals and their realities. Through defining those terms under analysis and comparing them with the treatment given to heterosexuals in the Western quotidian, and analogies, a new terminology that can provide a fairer portrait of the homosexuals and their various potentials is searched. The cultural evolution within History that has brought others and those nomenclatures and to them meaning[s] which do[es] not correspond to what the universe of the homosexuals comprehends since the upcoming of the term until today, as well as their implications. A new denomination is suggested, and a possibility for others with the purpose of containing the various meanings that constitute homosexuals and that are present in homosexuality.

Keywords: Homosexuals. Homosexuality. Meanings. Reducing. Expanding.

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Gender studies have contributed to evaluate and re-evaluate concepts in our social milieus. Debates bring to light considerations that show individual and group interests. One of the relevant discussions is related to the so called **homosexuals** and their multiple manifestations in our current Western societies. Compared to heterosexuals, that group has been treated as minor, so that a frequent need of reviewing their position in culture has been significant.

In order to review it, my concerns in this exposition are to open an argument on how that terminology has been used to reduce, and how it can expand the meaning[s] the word **homosexual** can contain. I also intend to elicit the aspect[s] and consequences of the use of the term **homosexual** in the Western society. Jurandir Freire Costa (1995) in his *A Face e o Verso* alludes to sexual attraction and practices among same sex individuals in ancient Greece. He reports that was not known as a homosexual the same way s/he is today. It is comprehensible due to the social prerogatives in that 'ancient' society where a man, after his military service, was expected to get involved in sexual relations with another younger. In those sexual encounters the older was always the one who should penetrate the partner as a form of supremacy.

Different from the Greek, at the turn to modern times a move to title individuals found in homosexual relation began to be usual. Societies started to exert a heavy control over their members by segregating those whose sexual involvements were considered contrary to man-woman, under the excuse of securing the perpetuation of the species. Through defining and labeling their sexual acts, they set a limit and a burden on them. They also established a margin where transgressors should stay away, attempting to make things easy to themselves and their group. Reducing served a proposal of stratifying society as they set up boundaries not to be trespassed. Their view was stressed from time to time because they classified beings whose complexity has not ever fit inside that single circle.

Later in History in the 19th Century, the term **homosexual,** which is medical, came out and remained in our Culture so far. Used to name who either **feels** sexual attraction, or **has** feelings to same sex individuals, and to refer those who **declare** being so. Alan Sinfield (2002) in "Lesbian and Gay Taxonomy" shows us that this act of cataloging individuals, who feel sexual attraction for another individual of the same sex, is not recent. He cites David Halperin who gives the reader a view of the phenomenon in the second half of the nineteenth century Europe. In that time sexologists like Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal wrote about that attraction identifying it as "sexual inversion". Halperin also puts forth that other names have occurred since then: effeminacy, pederasty, active sodomy, friendship or male love, passivity or inversion.

Both in Westphal's nomenclature and in Halperin's list of nouns to portray homosexual and homosexuality, the words show a flow that follows the politics of the streamline. Effeminacy points a negative meaning connected to the feminine sex. Pederasty reminds the readers the awful sexual abuse against children. Active sodomy declares the usual act of having forms of sex condemned by the Judeo-Christian religion. Friendship or male love, although sympathetic, lays on it a negative meaning as it exposes the common sex exerted by/among men in History. Passivity or inversion elicits the negative view of the sexual position a man takes when having sex with another, whose positioning at the bottom, resembles the submissive role of woman. These names and phrases render a clear view of prejudice in opposition to homosexuals and homosexuality as their meanings hold a weighty load of pejoration.

As we throw our view to the 19th Century until now and have a close view of the term **homosexual**, we will realize that it is reducing. Etymologically as: **homo** from equal, and **sexual** from genital excitement. An individual has sexual hormones that give him/her sexual maturation and that activate sexual interest for another, and as homosexuality is concerned, of the same sex, and

searches one to copulate and/or to get involved with in a physical exchange that both members decide for.

Going deeper in the analysis of the sexual encounter, we see that in our Western society the **sexual** act brings forth something commonly played between two individuals in their intimacy. That is, our society's precepts dictate they should choose to stay in a closed place where both of them can wish to do anything related to their bodies, and specifically genitalia, in order to get a very definite pleasure that only sex provides.

However, as we look at heterosex, we observe that it requires a man and a woman to go to sex. It is said and spread in the Western society that it is 'natural'. By **natural** it means that it has a biological origin that leads both individuals to an end that is known as reproduction of the species. This 'natural' aspect given by the powerful class and accepted by the lower classes safeguarded the continuation of humans, until late 1970s when artificial reproduction started to be recurrent, and along with that a relative control of the society. Such naturalness has constructed families that have been formed by a man and a woman and their consequent offspring. Family ties have been granted under the natural quality that sex between a man and a woman has been seen.

On the contrary, in homosex that does not presuppose reproduction since the individuals involved share the same genitalia and gametes. An alleged sort of perversion against Nature, according to what opponents state. That is, the biological purpose of human bodies that would be reproducing the species alone. And naturally the species has never been safe under homosex. Families were also made impossible between a man and a man, or a woman and another for many centuries under the allegation of unnatural link. No man and woman, no children, and so no family. No family, no maintenance of the social ties. And no social control, an always threatened society and its economic system that would be lost in mess.

As we expand the definition of **homosexual,** that is the adjective to qualify, and/or the noun to specify and/or emblem individuals who feel a sexual attraction for another of the same sex, and/or those of the same sex who are linked for a sexual encounter. A profound debate has come up in relation to this. I mean, some experts say that the relation is homosexual, but the individuals are not **necessarily** homosexual.

It is so because one or the two individuals involved in homosex may not believe [see] him/herself/themselves homosexual. To be a homosexual means more than being found in homosex. This statement leads us to understand homosexuals as those who consider themselves and are socially recognized as such. Homosexual is a practice involving two same sex individuals, but becomes a political position as one or the two individuals see him/herself/themselves as such in his/her/their society.

Deepening that issue, for a long period homosexuality was seen as transgressive, dissident, destabilizing the status quo. A sexuality that did not obey the demands of the power élite that has always determined the model of a heterosexual white man in power as the right one. By disrupting society, homosexuality has proposed another pattern of community. Such positioning has been seen as antagonist to the millenary Judeo-Christian structure on which Western society has set itself.

Having the word **homosexual** explained in accordance with the current social meaning it has, we can continue our debate by seeing how it is spotted to a specific human act that is characterized for its dimension to obtaining pleasure. In the human case sexual intercourse goes beyond due to its extrapolation that also requires enjoyment[84]. Moreover, reducing sexual encounters to reproduction should not be set to human case. It is known that Bonobos, great monkeys in Africa, solve their conflicts with any member of

[84]It is known that in the Western society there are many forms of sexual intercourse that target not only sexual excitement but a number of acts that can provide partners more than pleasure. See example of sadomasochism where pain is searched so pleasure can result.

their group through sex. In their turn, Humans go to sex in order to acquire something that is yonder the restrictions of perpetrating the species. Michel Foucault (1990) in his *History of Sexuality I* tells us that sex exerts a huge power in humans, so that societies have created methods to limit it. His exposition leads us to believe that sex has the power to destroy a society if not controlled.

But why classifying someone as homosexual? Would those people knock down all that has been built by the élite in History through their sexual practices? What is in this word that makes the élite assemble individuals under it? Turning to the medical use of it, we see it as pathology and as such something to be treated until a cure is found out. It would prevent other individuals to acquire it just like those who had a contagious plague in other times. The powerful class detects it, afterwards defines/reduces it, and puts it at the margin, that is, makes it marginal to finally control it.

To illustrate it, we must go back in History and bring up the Nazi persecution against homosexuality and homosexuals. Considered as non eugenic, the Nazi pursued them and threw them into concentration camps under the pink star label on their striped clothes. That star carried an evident mark that would speak out the reason they were imprisoned and later killed. Such a persecution is still present in our midst in the hands of neo Nazi groups and other homophobic individuals. This way, the centre is protected from contamination and an epidemic is avoided. Humankind is safeguarded, protected until the 'disease' is banned[85].

But such a view has evidently reduced humans by emphasising their **sexual** behaviour. That is, homosexuals are first of all *seen* as **sexual**. And that reduction comes out too minimal as we observe humans and all his/her possibilities. However, reducers have turned the alleged homosexuals into low creatures. From the 16th Century on, in Henry VIII's time laws were stipulated

[85] It is interesting that the viruses or bacteria of some diseases are kept in total control away from everyday life in order to avoid epidemics.

to prevent the spread and liberalization of homosexual practices. The punishment against partners found in homosexual act was death by hanging. The names used were **sodomy** or **buggery**[86]. In that epoch only heterosexual act[87] was recognized 'natural' and legal.

This doing, the Renaissance legislation in England extrapolated the dominion of individuality so that the State came up to determine what was lawful or illegal as sex practices [individuals' intimacy] were concerned. That attitude of legislating is an evident intervention of the public into the private realm. As humankind has evolved, things have been redefined or received other definitions. Besides, polysemic forces reconsiderations so a thing does not stay reduced as its plural meanings make it to adjust to the numberless meanings it acquires in time. But we should observe that one thing is giving name to the act: homosex. Another is calling people after this act. You locate the act so you recognise it. As to people you are saying that at least they are to be known according to their sexual practice or desire. Their intimacy or privacy becomes public not only because the individuals decide to expose it, but also because they are stigmatized by their society.

In using those terms or the medical to mention persons that like/practice homosex, in bringing out their sexual interest, the users of that expression put forth their limiting and discriminatory position. If we recur to a religious term such as **sodomy**[88] or we pick up the medical word **homosexual**, on the one side we have individuals who did not follow the religious creeds of their communities, and were expelled from their milieu. Sodomy was a wide word that included anal, oral, auto fellatio, between a man and a woman, man to man, and woman to woman, sex with animals etc. In those biblical times, individuals

[86] See Bray, Alan. *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*. 1982.
[87] That is, penis-vagina sex.
[88] Sodomy originated after the name Sodomy, a city in the Old Testament of the Bible, punished due to its inhabitants' acts considered perversion against the Law of the Jewish god.

found in homosex were considered sodomites, taken out of the margins of the tribe, and at last stoned to death[89].

On the other side, we have individuals being seen as diseased. We can understand an illness as an unbalance that a person suffers for one or many causes. In their turn, homosexual practices were understood as an infirmity that should be banished from the midst of the community. Its limiting aspects have gathered a large number of individuals under a single area, while humans behave and have various interests and abilities. So as to say: homosexuals are homosexuals because they only think about/want sex, and a "pervert" and "ill" way of sex.

As we see, the reducing process did not start in the 19th Century. It has ever since made the lives of those who controlled societies easier so they could point out transgressors, and in segregating, finding them a place out of society, either in prisons or in graveyards. Since Robert Cook's invention of the microscope to recent inventions of electronic microscopes that show nano sizes, humankind has had the possibility to examine objects at atomic dimensions. As a method of analysis, its reach is unimaginable. Scientists are now trying to get to smaller particles such as the particle of god[90] by moving protons to shock against others, so others are [re]created. Curiously the machine that is trying to find out the unthinkable small particle of god is measured in kilometers[91].

If reducing brings us a more genuine view of the elements that form the matter at stake, it also and still guarantees mathematicians to continue to calculate negative numbers that lead to endless tiny dimension; physicists to see Nature on quantum level; chemists to perceive transformations on a minimum world, and biologists to try to find out a satisfactory definition of life. All of these and others bringing statements related to their experiences that beings

[89] See Bredbeck, G. W. *Sodomy and Interpretation. Marlowe to Milton*. 1991.
[90] Also known as Higgins boson.
[91] What an irony!

have their genesis on explainable levels. On top of that, reducing is a system that safeguards a sort of discourse that gives Science the basis for explanations that satisfy *some* human thinking.

How does reducing work? First you disconnect parts that form the being. You have to dismember to reach the core, or the basic component. But you may come to disintegrating so much that you end up with a non identifiable thing. The meaning that you used to have with the whole is likely to be lost. Illustrating: you find a finger. You know that it is finger because you previously know the hand, the arm, the body, and what the brain can do with it. If you eliminate the other parts, the finger may mean but nothing. A so called homosexual individual is not only sexual. S/he has a brain, thinks, feels, uses his/her reason to do anything s/he decides. Although George Moss' studies have shown the cultural discredit towards homosexual' capacities to lead and rule society (1996), exactly the same or better/worse than a heterosexual does, when it is the latter, his/her sexuality is not accounted.

While homosex and homosexuals have been reduced and set aside away from the centre, heterosexuality has been so privileged, and therefore hyper valued, that heterosexuals are not named after their practice. It has notably become inherent to individuals in general as if it was the common sense of a society made of humans. People say: "I met a man. He is a journalist. He is gay." In the same situation we hear but the following: "I met a man. He's a journalist." No need to say more. Heterosexuality has been so expanded in our culture that anything that is not exalting it is taken to an 'unnatural' or incomprehensible stage. It is enormously spread and enlarged every time in the Western world through the diverse available media. Instances as the following cultural and economic products figure the situation: language, street panels, television commercials, industry products, motion pictures, songs, fashion, school text books, sports, literary works, etc.

In addition, heterosex is so much emphasized that people do not realize its artificial 'naturalness', and mechanisms of empowerment as well. Contrarily, in the every day cultural process in the Western society there is a regular work to reduce homosexuality to disgust, pejoration, exceptionality of Nature, genetic anomaly, mistake, or a rare variation at the genes distribution level when meiosis happens. The power élite's constant work is: enlarging heterosex, reducing homosex. Consequently exalting the 'natural' course of heterosex, and taking down the 'mistakable' and anomaly working of Nature as homosex is regarded.

As we leave the invariable discourse of the power élite, and return to the size of things in Nature, we have another landscape cast from their various possibilities. Their still undiscovered or uncovered aspects bestow beings a proper extent or even a larger one; we have a better view and others they radiate and get. That is, entities have other causes for their constitution rather than what their material structures alone present. They can also have other elements, that is, a social reason and significance that extrapolate their physics. One of them is the cultural wherein they are inserted from birth and from where they evolve [or not]. Such an expansive observation provides viewers a wider proportion which we may not be used to. Other meanings are likely to come up and offer them a background that may be fairer, given that beings can be seen from other perspectives and focused on in other points.

We can say that as humans are the object under analysis, we are expected to reflect on variants, or various angles that entail them. Why is that so? We are complex beings, not only biologically but also socially, and that complexity requires analysts to be responsible before conclusions. Due to that, reducing may turn out an irresponsible act that leads to many delinquencies such as violence against homosexuals that ends up in numerous deaths, and every day enriches statistics in many Western countries.

Differently, expanding a being may also be a try to see more than conventions and cultural forces have done through time. As we confer beings

a larger size, we can go over one distinct aspect that includes him/her/it. We see him/her/it as part of a larger specter of paradigms. For instance, as we perceive a man that is considered a homosexual in his community, we notice that he is not only sexual. He is also emotional; he is able to feel different emotions that characterize him as good or bad, honest or dangerous, etc. Besides, he is also rational. He thinks. He sees the world around him and formulates values from the ones he has received in his life. He can change his thinking as he exerts his mental capacities, and compares himself to others that are [or not] part of his world.

Furthermore, expanding is fair, as we see more than appearances show. It seems to be contradictory since reducing also shows other layers that are not visible on the surface, or that are on the normal[92] size. I mean, layers such as the social and cultural. Why looking at those layers? In addition, leaving the borders that give but individuality, external layers can give him/her an outlook that does not invade his/her integrity, they let out that someone is more than sex, body. Such a view gives someone a social and cultural reason as his body [and sex] is [are] both relegated to individual realm and management, and body [and mind] is [are] set to social interests as the individual contributes with his/her milieu.

Expanding is also fairer as the individual is seen and valued from and for other reasons rather than his/her sexual interest. The sexual labeling of the 19th Century can be debunked as we grant individuals a wider importance in History. Although we assume that Foucault was right when he affirmed the power of sex in our Western Culture, individuals and sex come to have another magnitude as our society evolves to upper levels such as those that technology has presented lately.

What to do in such circumstances? Another *via* should be found to humanity tread on, so variants in society can be appropriately balanced and

[92] Normal means the variant that is constant in Nature.

regarded. A name such as **homogender** is thus an attempt to give individuals called homosexuals another value as their bodies, minds and actions present more than their sex explains or contains. But we face a problem as we turn our eyes to **gender**. In languages that are gender marked like the Latin ones, gender is an issue that goes beyond sex. In English it looks a little simple since gender follows the sex cut that joins masculine sex beings under the masculine gender, and feminine ones under the feminine[93], and those which are sexless are neuter[94].

The mark of gender creates in the gender marked languages a complexity that must be considered. Languages like Portuguese have masculine and feminine and not a neuter gender. Thus **almost all** the nouns, articles, some adjectives, pronouns, numbers are either masculine or feminine or applied to both. For this reason, sex and gender are two different things. Exemplifying, the object **mesa**[95] is feminine, but is sexless. The word **mulher**[96] is feminine, and because **woman** [the entity] is feminine, too. Another aspect is that Portuguese follows the gender that words used to have in Latin. That is the explanation why **mesa** is feminine in Portuguese[97].

This complexity is not perceived in languages that are not gender marked. In English **table** is neuter because it is sexless. The word **woman** is feminine because it is of the feminine sex. How to understand and put things together so our mind can work properly in all cases? The only possible explanation here is that languages try to put things "in peace", disconnecting gender from sex, or connecting gender to sex and giving sexless things a neuter gender. In any case, all is beneath the wide umbrella of gender. Sex is thus under, or inside the circle of gender.

[93] I do not consider here the polemic case of the hermaphrodites.
[94] But some Germanic languages like German and Dutch do not solve the case of Mädchen and meisje [respectively, girl in English] which is considered neuter.
[95] Table in English.
[96] Woman in English.
[97] In some cases the gender in Latin is not the same in Portuguese.

The question that arouses from the term homogender is, perhaps, pertinent: will it not reduce people the same way **homosexual** has done? Well, in a way or another, individuals are discriminated in our world. They are classified as men, women, titles that are but social roles we play in our social structure. Thus, homogender can take the heavy weight off homosexuals. It may bring them a wider value that will consider their sex and sexuality as it comes to have relevance, but will also consider other aspects that do not stress their intimacy and individuality as far as it requires respect to all citizens. Individuals and society can find out other strata that may convey [a] new order[s]. And as expanding goes on, it can transform society through time so evolution can keep on as appropriately as possible.

In relation to it, **homosexual** is not only reducing, and invasive but incompatible to humans since too limiting and low leveled as we regard human nature. On this line, many studies have also shown that a woman does not exist, that is, there are many women as paradigms such as ethnicity, sexuality etc. are regarded. The same can be said about those we call homosexuals today, and that tomorrow can be called homogender or something that will not only fix value on genital use.

Expanding provides a constant recreation and reevaluation of all that composes our world. Something similar to what redefining does in relation to a word that has come out and acquired a totally different meaning its etymology and epoch of its birth had. But the words **gender** and **homogender** may not be as fair as the individuals under them deserve. In this case, we should supply a wider meaning to this word, once it contains others that currently are not, or find another. As we notice individuals more widely, that is, beyond their physical constitution, the more complete their composition can become, or show.

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