

FROM BRAZIL TO SWEDEN TO BRAZIL: GENDER TROUBLE IN FERNANDO GABEIRA

DO BRASIL À SUÉCIA E DE VOLTA AO BRASIL: PROBLEMA DE GÊNERO EM FERNANDO GABEIRA

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ABSTRACT: In light of Judith Butler's insight, including her theories of gender trouble and performativity, this article investigates Brazilian journalist and activist Fernando Gabeira's trajectory against machismo, homophobia, and gender presumptions. That trajectory spans his formative years (1940s and 1950s), armed resistance to the military dictatorship (1960s), activism during exile, mostly in Sweden (1970-1979), and another 35 years of sociopolitical engagement, after his return to Brazil. Key to this essay's central inquiry are Gabeira's thoughts and experiences in his autobiographical trilogy (1979-1981).

KEYWORDS: Butler, Gabeira, homophobia, identity, gender trouble.

RESUMO: Sob a luz de alguns conceitos de Judith Butler, inclusive as teorias sobre problema de gênero e performatividade, investiga-se a trajetória do jornalista e ativista Fernando Gabeira contra o machismo, a homofobia e as presunções de gêneros. Tal trajetória percorre os anos de formação (décadas de 1940 e 1950), a resistência armada à ditadura militar (década de 1960), o ativismo no exílio, principalmente na Suécia (1970-1979), e os posteriores 35 anos de engajamento político, após o retorno ao Brasil. O questionamento central recai sobre sua trilogia autobiográfica (1979-1981).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Butler, Gabeira, homofobia, identidade, problema de gênero.

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Pre- amble

Departing from Judith Butler's insight in *Gender trouble*, this essay aims to examine how Gabeira's personal and intellectual path contributes to a "dogged effort to 'denaturalize' gender," as she puts it (BUTLER, 2007, p. 21). The purpose is to explain how Gabeira also shares her "strong desire both to counter the normative violence implied by ideal morphologies of sex and to uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality that are informed by ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality" (BUTLER, 2007, p. xxi). More specifically, this study attempts to clarify how two of Butler's major concepts, "gender trouble" and "performativity of gender," help us understand the core of Gabeira's ideas, especially those developed in his famous autobiographical trilogy, *O que é isso, companheiro?* (1979), *O crepúsculo do macho* (1980), and *Entradas e bandeiras* (1981).

In the last few decades that followed the cultural and political turbulences between the Cuban Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall, various theories in the humanities have observed a gradual transformation. There has been a shift in the way social agents and cultural critics approach political discourses, especially those carried out in the name of the nation's well-being. Among the reconsideration points she develops in her "Preface" to a 1999 edition of *Gender trouble*, Butler is compelled to revise some of her positions in light of the acumen obtained from her hands-on political engagements, especially after serving as board chair for the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission between 1994 and 1997. From that experience with an organization "that represents sexual minorities on a broad range of human rights issues," she realized how the assertion of universality "can be proleptic and performative, conjuring a reality that does not yet exist, and holding out the possibility for convergence of cultural horizons that have not yet met" (BUTLER, 2007, p. xviii). Butler's amended concept of universality is one she defines as "a future-oriented labor of cultural translation" (ibid.p. xviii).

Gabeira's writings and performances of sociopolitical activism can function as pieces of such cultural translations. Butler believes that poststructuralism does not entail "the death of autobiographical writing" (BUTLER, 2007, p. xxvi). What it does is to draw attention to the complexities of the first-person narrative, with its language characterized by a "bind of self-expression," which she explains whi-

le employing that narrating “I”: “I am not outside the language that structures me, but neither am I determined by the language that makes this ‘I’ possible” (BUTLER, 2007, p. xxvi). Much of Gabeira’s writing confirms that possibility. Within the purview of Brazilian cultural studies, the use of autobiographies (particularly those coming out since the 1960s) acquires a particular degree of significance.

Gabeira’s Critical Reception

Initially a somewhat unknown editor and journalist for the Rio de Janeiro newspapers *Última hora* and *Jornal do Brasil*, Gabeira becomes nationally famous as a free-lance essayist, autobiographer, novelist and politician in the 1980s and 1990s. In the first decades of the twentieth century, he has been prolific as nonfiction book author, blogger, congressman, television reporter and cultural program presenter.

Gabeira is best known for his three-volume memoirs. *O que é isso, companheiro?* (*What’s that, comrade?*) has appeared in several languages. It chronicles his personal and intellectual growth during guerilla activism against the Brazilian dictatorship and the beginning of his long exile experience. Here his narrative technique displays an outstanding rhythmic and pictorial craft: a swift pace and a well-balanced collage of scenes moving from one part of the world to another, from Chile to France, from Cuba to Germany, or from Algeria to Sweden, for example.

The momoirist was one of the militants engaged in the kidnapping of the United States ambassador to Brazil, Charles B. Elbrick. That type of political action, to repeat several times in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was a new strategy by which militants sought media attention to the repression, imprisonment and torture of Brazilian citizens by the Brazilian military regime. The September 4, 1969 episode – conducted by the MR-8 (the October 8 Revolutionary Movement) and described in detail by Gabeira’s first memoir, *O que é isso, companheiro?* – became the central theme in the homonymous 1997 feature movie by Bruno Barreto. It was launched internationally by Miramax as “Four Days in September”.

The two subsequent books of Gabeira’s trilogy continue the same success of the first. In *O crepúsculo do macho* (*The macho man’s twilight*) he narrates his

cultural, existential and political transformations in Algeria, Chile, Cuba, France, Germany, Sweden, and other European countries. His return and adaptation to a Brazil undergoing slow re-democratization are the subject of the third volume, *Entradas e bandeiras (Exploratory expeditions)*.

A media celebrity since he took his first steps in Brazil after nine years abroad, Gabeira was wholeheartedly engaged in a wide range of causes, most of which were concerned with the environment, economic inequality, starvation and death in Brazil's remote areas, women's rights, sexual liberation, and an integral sense of democracy. Gabeira may have been, in fact, the first feminist male writer of Brazil to achieve fame and outstanding influence over a very large number of young readers, even though, in the 1970s and the 1980s, other distinguished authors, such as João Gilberto Noll and Caio Fernando Abreu, had pertinent and poignant discussions of akin themes, such as masculinity and homosexuality.¹

In his struggle against machismo and homophobia, Gabeira explores both issues as a collective ordeal within national and regionalist realms, a major factor in society at large, by any means. In *Sinais de vida no planeta Minas (Signs of life in the Planet Minas, 1982)*, for instance, he investigates the remarkable powers of historical women of very different social and racial backgrounds. He tells the stories of Dona Beja, Xica da Silva and Ângela Diniz, among others, who dared to confront highly oppressive male figures, at high costs, in order to assert their rights and lifestyle choices in different eras, from the 1700s to the 1980s, in his home state, Minas Gerais.

All of Gabeira's writing, including a historical 1979 interview to the political tabloid *Pasquim*, but particularly the 1979-1981 trilogy (the core of his writing, for this essay), has caused strong responses: either contempt or enthusiasm. Robert Krueger, for instance, points out Gabeira's "puerile attraction" and ironically targets him as "a sexy, intellectual, romantic, contemplative, somewhat repentant *ex-guerrilheiro*" (KRUEGER, 1983, p. 177). Gabeira's alleged soft take on the dictatorship and his so-called egocentrism also bother other critics, some of whom contribute articles to a 1997 book called *Versões e ficções: o sequestro da história* (c.f. RIDENTI, 1997). People who read and enjoyed Gabeira's memoirs but did not have their critical spirit atrophied, writes João Quartim de Moraes on the cover of *Versões e ficções*, needed to read the testimonies gathered in this

¹ For an intriguing comparison and contrast among these three writers, see AVELAR (2014).

volume: “They constitute an excellent antidote against the banalization and pasteurization of the revolutionary resistance to the military dictatorship” (RIDENTI, 1997, n.p.).

For Idelber Avelar, Gabeira’s case is one in which the autobiographical narrative gains importance exactly to the extent that it exaggerates the author’s role in history. It happens to be so because that exaggeration has become fundamental to the readings of a text that occupies a dominant spot among those evoking the changes in the concept and practice of masculinity in Brazil at the turn of the decade, from the 1970s to the 1980s (AVELAR, 2014, p. 51). Interestingly enough, Avelar himself adds that it is also “correct to say that that exaggeration, in a way, ceases to be it, when the narrative produces a performative effect that generates its own weight – the character’s centrality that the narrative had hyperbolized” (p. 51).

Gabeira’s work has received much more positive than negative reception among average readers and critics alike. The first volume of his trilogy, for example, received the prestigious Jabuti Award for the Memoir/Nonfiction Book of the Year. For Rebecca Atencio, *O que é isso, companheiro?* is “one of the iconic narratives of Brazil’s military dictatorship” (ATENCIO, 2015, p. 110). Ignácio de Loyola Brandão actually calls that memoir “the bible-book of a generation and the link of that generation with the following ones” (MORAES NETO, 2009, p. 8). Despite the passage of time and the publication of other influential works, it “will likely always remain a key cultural reference of the late 1970s and early 1980s,” concludes Atencio (2015, p. 111).

Critic Dulce Maria Viana sees no problem with Gabeira’s approach to socio-political history or his alleged self-centeredness, which Krueger criticizes as a “manageable alternative to armed struggle in a society whose leftist activists were deeply wounded by state terrorism” (KRUEGER, 1983, p. 77-78). What Gabeira does, adds Viana, is to transfer social dilemmas into the written word by confronting them rather radically at the personal level of experience” (VIANA, 1984, p. 78). Critic and poet Affonso Romano de Sant’Anna argues that Gabeira’s autobiographies are “pivotal in the movement toward a new Brazilian Left” (SANT’ANNA, 1984, p. 19). Rather than dogmatically marxist, the new Left “should be more humorous and less messianic, more Eros and less bureaucracy” (ibid., p. 19).

In Gabeira's memoirs, a shrewd and trusty center of consciousness is in charge of sharing remarkable experiences, some of which are nearly epiphanies about gender and other sociopolitical dynamics. As Davi Arrigucci Júnior clarifies, his writings convey a sense of self that narrates and reveals itself within its human vulnerability and sexual ambivalence, "without seeking subterfuges" (1987, 131).

Guilherme Fiuza claims that "Gabeira is too free to belong in the Left" (FIUZA, 2009, p. 8). It is true that the Left is learning, bit by bit, the importance of freedom, adds Fiuza. The question, he explains, is that when we look for Gabeira among the Left's banners, he is no longer there. He has moved on to another challenge. People see him as an ex-guerrilla, an environmentalist, and a Leftist politician, who often talks about sex and drugs, but, most of all, argues Fiuza, people should know he is a "thinker and a narrator" (ibid., p. 9). He is "sufficiently original and poignant to transform his words and ideas into politics. Not the other way around," adds Fiuza (ibid.).

Gender Trouble

Gabeira's penchant for freedom pulls him away from any strategically designed consensus that disregards the right to respectful dissidence. He wants and fights to be himself, to be free from any static position on the political spectrum. A major example is the open discussion of non-traditional sexual orientation and feminism that Gabeira brings to the fore in the mainstream media and in various other venues upon his return from Sweden in 1979. It may have made him look like an extraterrestrial to many Brazilians, but that did not bother or deter him. As he recalls it on an interview with Geneton Moraes Neto, in that country he had encountered in 1979, men still killed their wives in case of alleged infidelity and got away with it. Society still accepted the thesis that men could do it in "legitimate defense of honor," against which Gabeira promoted, in the early 1980s, a nation-wide campaign entitled, *Quem ama não mata*, or *Those who love don't kill* (MORAES NETO, 2009, p. 176).

Willy-nilly, the issue of his own masculinity had become a national obsession. So be it, he seemed to be saying or implying it in his calm, cool attitude of patience and tolerance for discord. In a Brazil that stunned him with its backward

state of affairs, Gabeira would not only discuss porous gender boundaries but also perform them in his quest for understanding himself – the topic, in one way or another, in all of his writing.

Among other theoreticians, Butler understands that “the foundationalist reasoning of identity politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated, and subsequently, political action to be taken” (BUTLER, 2007, p. 194-195). She counter-argues that, “there need not be a ‘doer’ behind the deed” (p. 195). She is not resorting to an existential assumption of the self as constructed by one’s actions, since existentialism maintains a “prediscursive structure for both self and its acts” (BUTLER, 2007, p. 195). What interests her and proves to be fruitful to reading Gabeira is the “discursively variable construction of each in and through the other” (ibid.).

Contemporary feminist debates over the meanings of gender, writes Butler in the 1990 preface to a new edition of *Gender trouble*, “lead time and again to a certain sense of trouble, as if the indeterminacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism. Perhaps trouble need not carry such a negative valence”. She underscores the contrary, actually, that “trouble is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it”. One of her central questions in that book spells out, “What best way to trouble the gender categories that support gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality?” (BUTLER, 2007, p. xxx). Gabeira has a few answers.

Arguably, Gabeira’s “gender trouble” had come a long way, throughout childhood and adolescence in Juiz de Fora, southeastern Minas Gerais. It reached its peak in 1979, though, when he prepared himself psychologically and then finally moved back from Sweden to his native Brazil. For many Brazilians, his gender trouble was nearly a scandal. How were they to conciliate the highly publicized image of an ex-guerrilla’s eternal status as *the* kidnapper of the American ambassador to Brazil and the image of that same ex-guerrilla wearing a pink string bikini bottom about the beaches and waterfalls of Brazil? Who was that person coming out in the early 1980s as a pioneering figure in Brazil, one among few chiefly heterosexual men who would question the changing make-up and permeable boundaries of their sex and gender identities? Who would talk and write in the mainstream media, then, about their homosexual experiences and homoerotic desires (heat for transgender individuals included)? What males would share their own personal transformations in light of their gradual feminist

awareness? And what other males would, then, openly and ostensibly criticize animal abuse, environmental neglect, gender presumptions, homophobia, machismo and racism?

Nine years after the release of *Gender trouble*, Butler criticizes her own book as something that sometimes reads “as if gender is simply a self-invention or that the psychic meaning of a gendered presentation might be read directly off its surface” (2007, p. xxvi). That self-invention takes the form of speech acts in autobiographical writing, like Gabeira’s famous trilogy, but one can hardly deconstruct it as superficial. It is heartfelt, it is deep inside, and it is powerful enough to cause him to relate it to his life as a whole and to an entire generation progressively revising their takes on gender and sexuality, among other horizons of change.

Gabeira’s sense of gender trouble runs concomitantly with certain predicaments that result from the conflicting convergence of his loyalties to multiple communities, particularly those associated with gender and sexuality, and to social and intellectual tasks to which he assigns himself as a writer and lecturer. In the 1970s Brazil, and further back in time, of course, a man who spoke candidly and incisively (but also softly and amiably) and cared about details in clothing and eating, or a man who had no shame in being openly affectionate toward other men, was considered by a large portion of Brazilian society as a form exoticism (at best). For the most radical defenders of traditional values, he was an abominable deviation of the social norm.

Many people, for instance, seemed appalled by the ex-guerrilla’s habit of going to beach wearing that pink swimwear, and because of it, journalists would press him to elaborate on his view of his own masculinity. To a reporter from Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Última hora* who confronted Gabeira on those terms, the autobiographer replied that he would not defend his “masculinity” by resorting to an old liberal argument that states that no one should mess around with other people’s personal matters. “My masculinity is a problem for *Última hora*, not me,” added Gabeira (1981, p. 85-86).

Regardless of the pervasive character of patriarchy and the prevalence of sexual difference as an operative cultural distinction, “there is nothing about a binary gender system that is given,” argues Butler (1988, p. 531). As a corporeal field of cultural play, she clarifies, “gender is a basically innovative affair, although it is quite clear that there are strict punishments for contesting the script by

performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations” (BUTLER, 2007, p. 531).

Masculinity is a problem for those who care about it, as Gabeira elucidates, and there are certainly many individuals with that type of concern. His gender trouble among Brazilians actually takes place even before he returns from exile. In Sweden, he has ballet classes, and some of his socialist friends had an issue with this and other aspects of his leisure. He realized he had indeed a different set of values from those of most members of the Brazilian Committee for Amnesty International, in Stockholm. With them, he had nearly nothing to share but “memories of their struggle in Brazil and wishes to go home” (GABEIRA, 1980, p. 212-213). Pledging alliance to the minorities of blacks, environmentalists and GBLT within the Committee, he contemplated, with them, the upcoming rights to move back to Brazil. He confessed to them his optimism: “In the beginning, we will hesitate to join in (a little surprised by what we see), but we will soon find our own crowd and forget the dark ages in exile”. To the other members, he said, “There will be one Brazil for you and another for us” (ibid., p. 213).

The narrating voice in *Crepúsculo do macho* also informs that the Parisian branch of the Brazilian Committee for Amnesty was no less bigoted. Once in the late 1970s, they refused a generous offer by a pop music group to perform at a fund-raising event. The Committee initially declined the offer simply because Les Etoilles was a band of black gay artists. Under pressure, though, a second debate on the issue would take place in Paris, which Gabeira was going to attend while living in Stockholm. The Committee would also have a discussion on homosexuality itself (GABEIRA, 1980, p. 232-233).

Gabeira started to raise his suspicions regarding the paths that several members against accepting Les Etoilles would take: the overall defensive tone, the appeal to categories academically recognized and to a list of celebrities who were gay, apart from the extensive Marxist-Leninist digressions on homosexuality. The activist’s pessimism proved wrong, though. The memoirist informs us of his mistake: that second debate with the Amnesty Committee was a remarkable success. Many militants confessed that such talks helped them erase what remained of their prejudice while others redefined their position on gay and lesbian issues (GABEIRA, 1980, p. 233-234).

Furthermore, Círculo, a group of women, developed new concepts and strategies that could help combat machismo upon their return to Brazil. Gabeira hi-

himself shares that he had been dealing with an unexpected dose of guilt. He also feared what the other members would say to him, there, since he had started practicing ballet, back in Stockholm (GABEIRA, 1980, p. 234-235). Joseph, one of his closest friends in Sweden, was the one who had helped Gabeira the most in understanding homosexuality's complexities and limitations. Gabeira came to grips with the gay and lesbian perspectives, according to which patriarchy is the starting point in the understanding of prejudice against them. Joseph had moved to Sweden after being tarnished in Goiás, shunned by the myth that people of the same sex could not love one another (p. 215-216). The memoirist also discloses his concern, though, that Joseph might be living out a symmetric counterpart in Sweden: the radical assumption that "love was possible only between people of the same sex" (GABEIRA, 1980, p. 215).

In a way, Joseph's claims echo Butler's assertion that the understanding of *Gender trouble* may lead readers to think that it is not possible "to oppose the 'normative' forms of gender without at the same time subscribing to a certain normative view of how the gendered world ought to be" (BUTLER, 2007, p. xxii). In her 1999 preface, the revisionary impulse urges her to suggest that the positive normative vision of *Gender trouble* "does not and cannot take the form of a prescription: 'subvert gender in the way that I say, and life will be good'" (ibid., p. xxii).

Gender Performativity

Drawing from theatrical, anthropological, and philosophical discourses, but mainly phenomenology, Butler shows, in "Performative acts and gender constitution: an essay in Phenomenology and Feminist theory," that what is called gender identity "is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo. In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status" (BUTLER, 1988, p. 520). One of the preponderant aspects of that notion of gender performativity that Butler highlights is the anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning. That anticipation is the means by which that authority is "attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object". The anticipation of a gendered essence, adds Butler, "produces that which it posits as outside itself" (BUTLER, 2007, p. xv).

Several thoughts and scenes included in Gabeira's autobiographies illustrate his gender drama and its performative acts and speeches. Already in Brazil, in 1980, shortly after his ten years of exile (most of which, in Sweden), he reflects on his developed self-invention abroad and fears falling back into old habits in his native culture.

Initially, he draws the big picture. On the social level, one huge window of opportunity had appeared to criticize machismo: "My own photos, one where I'm wearing a string bikini bottom, and another, showing me at Klaus' studio getting ready to dance a ballet, were themselves a critical statement, considering the limitations in Brazil at that time" (GABEIRA, 1981, p. 110).

On the personal level, he knew that every step back, away from his premises, would make him sad and less likely to love his new experiences. However, his optimism would prevail. His survival depended on it. "The internal mechanism of one's heart shows the way ahead, especially when the intellectual crossroads is a bit ambiguous. So I decided to live my life openly and, from time to time, to stop to tell the story" (*ibid.*, p. 110-111).

In that same passage, Gabeira links his new attitudes to gender and class structures. In Rio, he started living with two friends in the upscale district of Barra da Tijuca, where they had a domestic servant, Dona Carmem. He, who took care of his own food and everything else abroad, now would start to depend on a maid for the management of his personal life: "where were my clothes, when would coffee be ready?" (*ibid.*, p. 111). One episode in particular leads him to realize the uncomfortable danger of becoming a boss to Dona Carmem: "One day I left a fish on top of the table and asked her to cook it for me before I returned home. I realized she had forgotten about the fish and I panicked. How was I going to eat it?" (*ibid.*).

He, who had cooked his own meals for so many years, freaked in front of an abandoned fish that he knew how to prepare in so many different ways. That tumble back upset him inside out: "I even dreamed of a visually impaired man strolling through the beach. He was guided by Carmem" (*ibid.*, p. 112). Interestingly enough, Dona Carmem became his friend and for a while assumed unprecedented agency in his intellectual life. He read his writings to her and had a clue whether his words made sense. What he was soon to conclude, though, was that their professional relationship had to stop and that he would never ever have a maid again (*ibid.*, p. 112).

Butler also contends that her theory “sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical” (BUTLER, 2007, p. xxvi). Ten years after writing *Gender trouble*, she admits she has come to think that the two are invariably related and that “a reconsideration of the speech act as an instance of power invariably draws attention to both its theatrical and linguistic dimensions” (ibid., p. xxvi). While dialoguing with Monique Wittig, Butler confirms the power of language to work on bodies, as it is “both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond that oppression”. Language “assumes and alters its power to act upon the real through elocutionary acts, which, repeated, become entrenched practices and, ultimately, institutions” (ibid., p. 158).

Even small gestures can testify to these notions. For Gabeira, eye contact practices turned out to be a clue to gender trouble. Curiously enough, the Brazilian guerrilla, who had gone to Cuba to learn military skills and subversive revolutionary tactics, ended up changing himself after lessons on machismo from nobody but Kate, Margareth and Martha, American women living in Havana. They contributed to his understanding that, by hanging out with them, he could perceive the long way ahead before he could overcome the distortions that machismo had created in his thinking and life-style. Margareth, a leader of a political organization based in California, for example, once observed, and he took note of it in *O crepúsculo do macho*: “Every night you meet someone from a different country and talk politics. How is the situation in Guatemala? How is the Dominican Republic doing? And every night, when you talk politics to friends, you only look at the males of the group. It is as if I did not exist in those moments. Why?” (GABEIRA, 1980, p. 58).

Butler also resorts to Wittig’s essay “The mark of gender” to pinpoint the fact that the asymmetrical structure of language, that identifies the subject with the male (who speaks as if he knew “the universal”), and that identifies the “particular” and “interested” with the female, is, in no sense, intrinsic to particular languages or to language itself (BUTLER, 2007, p. 158). Butler adds a punch: “These asymmetrical positions cannot be understood to follow from the ‘nature’ of men or women, for, as Beauvoir established, no such ‘nature’ exists” (ibid., p. 158). Wittig’s blow is even mightier: “One must understand that men are not born with a faculty for the universal and that women are not reduced at birth to the particular” (BUTLER, 2007, p. 158; WITTIG, 1985, p. 5). That appropriation of the universal carried out by men does not simply happens: it is done purposefully.

It is an act, a criminal act, argues Wittig, “carried out at the level of concepts, philosophy, politics” (BUTLER, 2007, p. 158; WITTIG, 1985, p. 5).

Margareth, Gabeira’s friend in Cuba, also prompted him to rethink how men, and Brazilian men, in particular, used to see men’s and women’s roles within their social and political movements. In the clandestine enclaves of the armed resistance in Brazil, there was recurrent criticism of the males who did not want to partake in the domestic chores. That was not enough, though, says Gabeira. In the United States, women and men sharing intellectual work was a custom already widely practiced in the 1970s. To round up the lesson in female agency, he adds what Listz, his close Brazilian friend there in Havana, confessed to him about Margareth: “She was the first woman who took the initiative of asking me to go to bed with her” (GABEIRA, 1980, p. 60).

Another distinct aspect of Butler’s look into gender performativity shows that gender is not the revelation of an internal essence or a singular act. Rather, our idea of gender is “manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (BUTLER, 2007, p. xv). It is, that way, “a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of the body”. We may think of it, in part, as “a culturally sustained temporal condition” (ibid., p. xv).

In Gabeira’s autobiographical trilogy, temporal conditions of thoughts and deeds, or Butler’s concepts of repetitions and rituals, span approximately four decades, from the late 1940s to the early 1980s. They account for numberless incidents and insights on the performativity of gender with the intent of denouncing the narrow-mindedness and abuse of power perpetrated by the pervasive and detrimental ramifications of machismo and other gender-based politics, including the politics of the body.

From the 1940s and 50s, nearly all scenes take place in Minas Gerais, where taboos abounded. Vera Figueiredo highlights the aversion to joy and pleasure at the Gabeiras’ home. The narrator describes it as a place occupied by women, his mother and grandmother, whose existence is, to a great extent, unfulfilled, “because it’s dominated by a fierce, moralist patriarchal male figure” (FIGUEIREDO, 1988, p. 266). The occasional source of pleasure came from the couple’s old days. “Father and mother once had a honeymoon,” writes Gabeira: “They kept their photos of that trip in a safe. Every time they wanted to have some sexual excitement, they unlocked that safe and gazed at them – father wearing a hat, mother in an elegant dress” (GABEIRA, 1981, p. 47).

With room neither in the feminine world, circumscribed by the house, nor in the masculine one, represented by his father's grocery store or the religious school, the young boy performs the transgression of that rigid model feminine vs. masculine, says Figueiredo, by hanging out with individuals of marginalized groups, such as gay men and prostitutes (p. 266). Gabeira suggests he escaped the oppressive domestic and religious scenes of his childhood by enjoying the back hills of Juiz de Fora, where he had his first sex exploits, with both animals and male friends. The narrator evokes, with words of endearment, one of those friends, Cavalo Preto, who had to fake a heterosexual status behind a funny little lie. He was "an enormous black man with a beautiful nose of wide-open round nostrils. He pretended to fall asleep on the soccer field grass, and we climbed up on his back. We rubbed ourselves against his bottom, and we whispered on his ears" (GABEIRA, 1981, p. 47). All of a sudden, he would rise and tell the boys: "Oh gosh, little brats – you are in real trouble if any of you took advantage of me just because I was asleep" (*ibid.*, p. 48).

Where they focus on the 1960s temporal conditions, Gabeira's memoirs describe gender politics at Rio and São Paulo jail facilities, where female prostitutes, trans and travesties were forced to carry out the cleaning of the cells and other chores. Their "crime" had simply been to break gender and sex expectations prescribed by law or naturalized by prejudice and hatred. The good thing, though, was that they were allowed to sing and enjoyed to dance provocatively to the other inmates, many of whom had been locked up for their political ideas. Gabeira, one of the political prisoners, recounts his joy and sexual desire while gazing at the performers, some of whom displaying no typically female markers, such as breasts.

Gabeira's images of gender performativity from the 1970s have much to do with learning from and changing himself through his exposure to different social and sexual paradigms in disparate societies, such as those of Algeria or Cuba, Chile or Germany, Greece or Sweden. A major component of that string of changes results from having internalized the downfall of the socialist utopia. Gabeira sees, then, the need to adopt new external looks, which could help himself leave behind the sad and disturbing past associated with the political and ideological defeat of the Left in Latin America: "Latin American dictators' supreme victories did not condemn us to exile only, but to unhappiness, too. We accepted that sentence without necessarily having to" (GABEIRA, 1980, p. 192). Initially, it was

time to wear earrings, colorful scarfs, and alternative clothes. Then, a modern haircut dispelled the attachment to a long hairstyle turned into an icon of *fraternidade latino-americana*, an option made very popular in Brazil by the visual legacy of Che Guevara. Finally, the moustache had to go, “the last remnant of the image I boasted about in Latin America” (ibid., p. 202).

While adjusting to a plethora of cultural shocks within his own country in the early 1980s, he writes assiduously as a free-lance journalist. In *Entradas e bandeiras* he describes the embarrassing “repetitions and rituals” at the payroll office of *Pasquim*, a popular and respected tabloid of the Left with supposedly progressive agendas. On the wall, a huge image of a lilac-colored woman exposing herself. In the genital region of her body, a rectangular cut through which writers received their paychecks (GABEIRA, 1981, p. 91-92).

In some of his most memorable articles of that period, the 1980s, Gabeira discussed the 1976 death of Ângela Dinis in the hands of her boyfriend, Raul (Doca) Street, whose trial went on for years. In 1980 the author was appalled by the media coverage of those hearings and, even more so, by the popular support given to the killer, abominable repetitions and rituals of gender oppression. Street had learned about Dinis’ affair with Gabrielle Dayer, a German woman. He assassinated Dinis after shooting her four times with his Beretta pistol, but initially the court declared him not guilty of that homicide. The legal system in Brazil and part of the population still ran by the notion that it was acceptable for a man to kill his unfaithful wife in order to save his honor. The crowd who witnessed the court sessions applauded Street in earnest: “It was a national *mise-en-scène* to glorify machismo”. For Gabeira, “that was key-element of our culture” (GABEIRA, 1981, p. 89).

Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, argues Butler, and yet, “one is compelled to live in a world in which genders constitute univocal signifiers, in which gender is stabilized, polarized, rendered discrete and intractable” (BUTLER, 1988, p. 528). Gender is actually “made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control” (ibid., p. 528). What Dinis and Street’s case suggests is that, “performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all” (ibid.).

Gabeira's outspoken performance against machismo and normative sexuality has had its cost. Left wing supporters, in general, and both the PC do B (Communist Party of Brazil) and the PT (Workers Party), in particular, for instance, rejected his proposed partnership as candidate for vice-president on a hot ticket with Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva in 1989. In an interview to Geneton Moraes Neto, Gabeira himself declared, "They decided to jettison me" (MORAES NETO, 2009, p. 180). "I was rejected," he adds, "because I was not 'macho' enough" (ibid., p. 187).

Gabeira helps and hopes for what Butler calls the coalition of sexual minorities "that will transcend the simple categories of identity, that will refuse the erasure of bisexuality, that will counter and dissipate the violence imposed by restrictive bodily norms" (BUTLER, 2007, p. xxvii). On a long struggle toward what she considers a "necessity for survival," Gabeira performs and reinvents himself as an icon of counter-discourses who "recognizes his status as a sexual minority within reigning discourses of law, politics and language" (ibid., p. xxvii). The memoirist had distanced himself from an ideological approach to a socialist macro transformation of reality through an armed revolution. He steadily embraced a new journey based on the individual effort to change reality by day-to-day deeds. From that purely socialist pursuit of societal improvement, as a male-dominated and homophobic ideology without respect for pluralism and dissent, which Gabeira abundantly criticized in his trilogy, he turned to gender activism, environmentalism, and racially informed feminism.

Conclusion

Fernando Gabeira's triple autobiography sets out to help people by calling their attention to the elements of personal happiness obliterated mainly by widespread constraints imposed by religious or political views and gender-normative traditions. Among the distinct lines of his self-portrait as a memoirist, his battles against some of the evils and illnesses resulting from such restraints within or beyond Brazil run hand in hand with his own search for a new sense of identity as a male and as a Brazilian. His gender trouble runs parallel to his nationality trouble, one intrinsically feeding on the other, not as binaries but as dynamics of concomitant practices of signification.

“Male” and “Brazilian” (or Latin American, by extension) are two of what Butler would call “inert pieces of entitative language”. Identities can appear as “many inert substantives,” she clarifies. Epistemological models, she adds, “tend to take this appearance as their point of theoretical departure” (BUTLER, 2007, p. 197). However, the substantive ‘I’ only appears as such “through a signifying practice that seeks to conceal its own workings and to naturalize its effects” (ibid., p. 197-198). To qualify as a substantive identity, continues Butler, “is an arduous task, for such appearances are rule-generated identities, ones which rely on the consistent and repeated invocation of rules that condition and restrict culturally intelligible practices of identity” (BUTLER, 2007, p. 198). Well, more drastically than expected, sometimes, living abroad may offer a wide realm of experiences that challenges one’s person fossilized sense of identity, identity that had not been previously taken as a signifying practice.

To understand identity as a practice, and as a signifying practice, in particular, “is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life” (ibid., p. 198). In a foreign country, like Gabeira in Sweden or in many other parts of the world where he survived as an undocumented or falsely documented individual, those rule-bound discourses vary quite deeply and widely. As a result, one may suddenly notice more clearly that the subject is not really determined by such rules, whether they prescribe gender normativity or a national/ethnic ethos.

Echoing some of Butler’s notions on collective identities, a friend in Stockholm once tells Gabeira that “our country is where we are happy” (GABEIRA, 1981, p. 169). That friend’s comment in the late 1970s seems to apply to the way he feels months later, when most of his idealized expectations are at odds with his down-to-earth frustrations at re-integrating into and improving Brazilian society in the early 1980s. “I simply did not manage to land in Brazil. Neither could I get into a day-to-day life there that didn’t scare me for its limitations,” he admits at the closing of the trilogy’s third volume (ibid., p. 169).

Gender and nation are communities, and as such, symbolic entities that, evidently, existed very strongly in Gabeira’s mind before his visions of himself turned fuzzier and more intriguing through nearly a decade in exile and through his first years back – from Brazil to Sweden to Brazil. What Gabeira probably did not know at first was that it is not possible simply to situate certain processes and

activities within a state, as if a “state,” augments Butler, were a pre-given entity, “already bounded, identifiable, and knowable”. If such notions of the state are produced through state effects, she concludes, “then we must rethink the basic ontologies with which we operate” (BUTLER, 2010, p. 147).

Gabeira’s quest resorts to that rethinking, and it baffles him. It leaves him with no definite explanations or definite views of what had been the utopia he had designed abroad, especially in the last years of his living in Sweden. Forty years later, he has evidently changed. He tells Moraes Neto that these questions had always occupied his mind, “What is like to be a Brazilian?” and “What’s an identity?” (MORAES NETO, 2009, p. 215). In 2009, he understands that “identity is something, to a great extent, invented. It’s something one creates” (ibid., p. 215). Watching a discussion in Brasília, in which congress members defended the creation of a state-sponsored public television channel in order to disseminate and strengthen “the national identity,” he pondered, “What in the world is that identity in each person’s head?” (MORAES NETO, 2009, p. 216). He went on reflecting on the issue. “Is nationality a person’s ‘second skin’? Would it be possible to be happy without this condition?” (MORAES NETO, 2009, p. 216). Gabeira suggests he thinks so: perhaps, in the same way “a person may realize that his/her individual’s destiny “does not have to be bound by the collective one” (MORAES NETO, 2009, p. 216). Understanding gender fluidity has certainly aided Gabeira in reaching that awareness.

Overall, Gabeira seems to remain enticed by the desire to know better his diverse and relentlessly changing country. He thus uses that process of national and personal cognizance as metaphors for multiple activism and self-assurance. While venturing deeper and deeper into the sociopolitical debates of his time, whether through books, newspaper, rallies, internet, radio or television, the appeal to the symbolic community of Brazil survives in Gabeira to this date. The core of his political actions and discourse illustrates the social and personal realms of various society’s ills, but mainly homophobia, machismo, and xenophobia. Performing the powers and pitfalls of gender trouble and performativity, he embodies a sociopolitical persona that bends toward a feminist and humanist critique of the myths and problematic interplay among men and women at various domestic and public spheres of actions.

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