

Critical social psychology in Brazil: politics, gender, and subjects of dissidence

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Abstract

This chapter aims at mapping some key aspects on critical social psychology in Brazil, particularly regarding the emergence of a number of critical approaches in psychology and the political context of this emergence. For this aim, a contextualization of psychology in Brazil and a view on the internal political debates are highlighted. Within this, specific critical theoretical strands emerged, which have had an impact into the way that psychology was thought and organised in Brazil. In this sense, it is important to point out that these perspectives and interventions are still under debate.

In this article, we point out the importance of politics, its relations to aesthetics, the role of social movements and the notion of political subjects for critical psychology. Examples are sought within feminist and queer studies, whereby it is highlighted the importance of social movements and the dialogue with European and North American feminisms. This analysis is based on feminist and queer authors, as well as critical theorists within and outside psychology.

Keywords: critical social psychology, politics, aesthetics, feminism, queer studies

The emergence of dissidence: critique and crisis in social psychology in Brazil

The history of psychology in Brazil is marked by tensions partly due to the ambiguity of its establishment as a subject area; that is, on the one hand, the heritage of philosophical traditions and, on the other hand, the scientific approaches that have constituted the so called natural sciences. Although analysis of socio-historical determinants of the psyche had been developed before the institutionalization of social psychology as a subject area in, in both psychology and in sociology (Sass, 2007), psychology as a professional body was initially regulated in Brazil in the 1960s, with a strong emphasis on psychometrics and the resulting

predominance of psychological tests. This praxis of assessments and measures within the context of the modern rationale for the conceptualisation and practice of science, was thus based on assumptions of objectivity, neutrality and the epistemological division of the subject-object, and assumed hegemony in the field of psychology alongside the process of its construction and subsequent establishment as a scientific field, and as an applied profession. It is important to bear in mind that the establishment of the profession in Brazil occurred within the context of a military dictatorship which lasted around two decades.

In general, the practice of psychology was marked by the search for normativity, adaptability, and the regulation of bodies and minds, which constituted an hegemonic perspective within the psychological sciences, despite several inherent tensions and challenges. Simultaneously, a range of alternative forms of treatment based on distinct traditions such as psychoanalysis, phenomenological-existential therapeutic approaches (including psychodrama, gestalt therapy, and Rogerian approaches), and behavioural analysis, started to emerge (Coimbra, 1995). Furthermore, significant sectors of social psychology were profoundly influenced by North American proponents of both functionalism and pragmatism. These views began to be challenged by civil social movements and by professional organizations, which thoroughly questioned the status quo, particularly the legitimacy of the hegemony of the modernist scientific paradigm based on positivism. Similarly to other countries, the crisis of social psychology in Brazil (in the '70s and '80s) was strongly dominated by the articulation of challenges to positivistic perspectives in the discipline, with the aim of configuring a new epistemological, critical standpoint. The political dimension of this critical standpoint gained particular importance during this period. This critical perspective has gradually become a viewpoint from which to conduct the analysis of power relations around scientific knowledge and for conceptualisations of social change via the repositioning of subjects within existing power relations, and for reading forms of social inequality. This has allowed for the study of emerging themes in social psychology in Brazil, which in this paper we identify as themes that concern dissidence, political resistance and diverse forms of oppression.

In response to the abovementioned critiques of the positivist paradigm in psychology, two main viewpoints were put forward: the reaffirmation of social psychology as a positivistic science, allowing for the incorporation of revisions; and the establishment of social psychology as a critical domain (Domenech & Ibañez, 1998). This critical standpoint in the field of social psychology has allowed for challenges to positivistic perspectives, although this has not necessarily been followed by alternative methodological approaches within this field, as evidenced in Brazil and in other countries (Bomfim 2004, 2003). Nevertheless the way that social psychology has been constituted in Brazil, and the emergence of critical perspectives offering alternative views to the dominant position, has resulted in the articulation of a hermeneutic of deconstruction and reconstruction. Lane's (1984) Marxist approach paper in "A psicologia social e uma nova concepção de homem para a psicologia" which has become a reference book for critical social psychology *Psicologia social – o homem em movimento* (Lane and Codo, 1984), denounced the dualistic conception of the subject, asserting that it could not account for the creative and transformative aspects of the subject; a new temporal-spatial dimension to apprehend the subject as constituted within socio-historical contexts being therefore necessary.

It was in the beginning of 1980s with the foundation of ABRAPSO (Brazilian association of social psychology) that these critical efforts gained circulation and visibility in the scientific field. However, it is worth mentioning that before psychology was recognised and legitimised as a field of knowledge and regulated as a professional area in Brazil, there were already

professionals and researchers arguing for social inequalities to be considered important categories in the analysis of processes of subjectivisation. From 1980s onwards, drawing particularly on Marxist theories, these studies gained visibility and constituted the new field of critical social psychology. A range of psychological perspectives emerged and were reinterpreted from this crisis, including psycho-sociology which articulated a combination of Marxism and psychoanalysis; community social psychology; social-historical psychology; studies on discourse and language; gender studies, and political psychology studies, among others. It is therefore not possible to present a complete account of this unique paradigm of the new social psychology that has emerged in Brazil, but rather, we highlight key contributions that have become important reference points in this field.

In this way, we interpret this period of crisis in social psychology in Brazil and its consequences from a critical ethos (Mayorga, 2007), that is, seen as a series of positions and orientations, and of epistemological and political standpoints that have served as the basis for critical studies in social psychology. Epistemology, here has been critically interrogated as constituting a form of absolute foundation and principle of knowledge; and for creating the dichotomy between subject and society, and the consequent individualistic perspective emerging from this separation; as well as for representationism and the assertion that knowledge is constituted as mirroring nature; and above all, the persistence in searching for universal laws, that are decontextualised and a-temporal, particularly stemming from viewpoints based on discourses of progress based on the history of the modern project, scientific methods of naturalist character, and the simplified application of this paradigm to the fields of social and human studies.

We highlight a particular aspect of the critical approach, that is, of the deconstruction of positivistic principles, and the consequent need for questioning and contextualising conceptualisations of knowledge regarding subjectivity within reconstructed epistemological perspectives, based on notions of historicisation and the hermeneutics of the both the deconstruction and construction of perspectives on reality, against the background of a unique foundation. The basic premise is that of the problematisation of the scientific paradigm and modern rationality within which the notion of subject is embedded. Polarities put forward from this perspective, such as nature-culture, individual-society, body-mind, external-internal, objective-subjective, which have characterized traditional scientific production have thus come to be analyzed from a critical perspective aiming to overcome these dichotomy systems, as well as to destabilize entrenched generalities and universalities. This ethos, therefore, argues for an epistemological deconstruction of the discipline.

Crisis and critique share the same etymological origin, however they have been separated by positivistic thought, as if it were possible to critically reflect without throwing into crisis that which has already been established, and is considered given at hand, therefore becomes subject to critique. Crisis is an important outcome of critique, whilst critique reveals its possibility of challenge, therefore provoking a crisis; what was previously given as a whole undergoes process of objectification.

The political dimension will now be articulated with the notion of critique and will be a fundamental aspect of the constitution of this ethos, reaffirming therefore, that the crisis of psychology is not exclusively epistemological, but rather, is fundamentally ethical and political. Initially, the central debate circulated around the model of society that should guide psychology in theory and in practice, and in this context ABRAPSO was a key entity for the establishment and dissemination of this debate, which was carried out during the final years

of military dictatorship, and the beginning of a process of political opening and democratization of Brazilian society in the years of 1984 and 1985. A range of themes were discussed and incorporated as areas of interest in social psychology, such as poverty, the plight of the working classes, exclusions, social movements, women and violence; -some of these themes had not been previously considered within the discipline of psychology in Brazil. These discussions are seen here as an important index to contextualize the tensions and political debates of this period. The acknowledgement of power relations inside and outside the scientific knowledge community became therefore paramount for the studies of psychosocial processes, and consequently for challenging and changing relations of inequality, oppression and exclusion that subjects of the dissidence had interpolated through their social practices.

The colonial and elitist dimensions of psychology were intensively criticized during this period, resonating with critical movements that emerged in social psychology also in other Latin American countries (Martín-Baró, 1983; Montero, 2000). Analyses of power relations, the debate around conflict, conscientisation and social change, became themes read through the study of their agents, with a particular emphasis on participative methodologies, and on action and intervention with social minorities. This allows us to highlight another aspect of the notion of critique, understood now as political questioning. This approach is seen in the choice of research areas, as well as in the recuperation of the idea of the political that incorporates antagonism and conflict not as deviant, pathologic or as crisis-provoking (as it was understood by positivist or functionalist forms of social psychology), but as a constitutive dimension of social life, and of the process of democratisation (Mouffe, 1993; Prado, 2007).

This debate continues to constitute power struggles in the field of Brazilian psychology, while it makes explicit that there is no unique and uncontested conception of psychology. We can identify a range of areas of social psychology that still resist the questioning of their universalistic assumptions in their search for fixed variables and the relativisation of the 'scientific method' (Siqueira, 1997). These continue to fuel the dispute over what should or should not be considered scientific and legitimate in the academic field, a dispute that has effects also in the financial distribution of sponsorships, academic positions, curriculum organization, assessments, and many other aspects of academic life. As Sass (2010) asserts, social psychology, as a product of the same society that aims at analysis and intervention, is characterized by tensions between contributing to the maintenance and reproduction of existing social relations, and an historical perspective of struggling for justice and diversity; as resistance to the current social order.

From the historical perspective of this trajectory, we aim to present important theoretical contributions to critical social psychology perspectives in Brazil, as well as to highlight themes that, in the last decades, have become of particular interest for Brazilian researchers. We point out some theoretical discussions that are in evidence and that compound a series of studies around themes concerned with critical and political aspects in critical social psychology in Brazil, such as studies on politics and aesthetics to enable the reading of forms of dissidence; the contributions of feminist and queer studies' to the approach of issues around gender relations, power and sexuality; as well as on processes of democratization.

Psychology and politics: collective subjects and democracy

Collective actions and social movements became subjects of scientific interest at the end of the nineteenth century and gained importance at the beginning of the twentieth century (Moscovici, 1985). We can argue that the emerging theme of collective action within scientific spheres was partly motivated by an attempt to gain social control. However, studies of collective actions also meant the beginning of an important debate from emancipatory perspectives of psychology, even though this term has become saturated with a range of ideological understandings.

Despite this range of understandings, the emergence of studies on collective actions into the scientific field allowed the further development of studies on forms of democratization of contemporary society, although their presence in the scientific field was initially from the perspective of pathologisation and moral regulation (Prado, 2007). Collective actions gained their own field of studies that also marks an exciting intellectual and political stimulation of great value to the studies of social relations (Klandermans & Staggenborg, 2002). Even though this excitement, as argued by Flacks (2006), can point to an ethical crisis in the scientific production of emancipatory collective actions, undoubtedly this field has been characterized by theoretical and methodological innovations. In the Brazilian context these concerns were present from the early years of social psychology, represented by the studies of the social character of the Brazilian people, and national identities.

Initially Psychology, as was the case in other disciplines, utilized collective actions to reflect on a group mind and on the individual mind, and exercised its power of pathologising human actions, inaugurating here a series of studies of collective behaviour (Turner and Killian, 1957; Smelser, 1962, Moscovici, 1985). Hence, the twentieth century was a laboratory not only of collective actions in the public sphere, but also for scientific interpretations that brought about a wide range of explanations for a phenomenon that constantly interpolates scientific knowledge. The obsession and rush for classification and hierarchisation of knowledge, as highlighted by Santos (2002) in his critique of the modern paradigm of science, made social movements and collective actions objects which it was possible to interpret using psychological theories, specifically, social and political psychology (Prado, 2001).

The role of social and political psychology in this field has been compounded by a certain conceptual and political ambiguity that is important to mention (Prado, 2001). At the emergence of the socio-psychological interest, the already known studies on masses and mobs emerged, and these were mostly aimed at highlighting the complexity of collective actions for the democracy of that time, and the dangers that were foreseen regarding the experience of the masses in public, and consequences for the so-called democratic development. If on the one hand, authors of the entitled psychology of the masses expressed at times suspicion and challenged the legitimacy of the experience of the masses, possibly due to the lack of concepts that could incorporate phenomena beyond individual experience, on the other hand, they also highlighted important issues that are relevant to current debates, and that express the importance of reflecting upon subjective experience within politics. Within the Brazilian psychological perspectives we highlight these concerns in thematic studies on race, national identities, and the pathologisation of social conflicts, among other issues.

Between the 1940s and the 1960s, new perspectives in the field of studies of collective actions marked the emergence of a scientific project constituting a rationalistic approach largely based on economic and systemic theories for the analysis of collective actions. Examples of these perspectives can be seen in theories on the mobilization of resources that, on the one hand, theorised the relation between collective actions and social institutions, and on the other hand, neglected the issues of why people participate in these actions, focusing rather on the way in which they participate, in terms of a binary relation between cost and effect, and effects of the participation (Gohn, 1997).

Contradictorily, however, the scientific position was not only exercised through control, rather, the study of collective actions in the scientific field also brought about important analytic perspectives regarding the meaning and signification of these actions in the contemporary context. Even though these studies received little legitimacy within the scientific field, the complexity of collective actions, their dynamics, meanings, and above all, their impact in society, have brought about important critiques to scientific knowledge, allowing also for a sort of decolonisation of the ideology of production of social psychological knowledge currently attempting to construct a post-colonial history for the emancipation of scientific thought (Santos, 2002).

Debates within this field of research in the twentieth century (Klandermans; Staggenborg & Tarrow, 2002) are relevant to the understanding that there is a relationship not yet conceptually apprehended between the constitution of subjects and identities, and the formation of systems and ruptures thereof. This has allowed for the emergence of a new social and political psychology, challenging the gaps produced by previous theoretical models; aimed at understanding the contradictions between the formation of subjects, and the ruptures or continuities, of systemic formations (Melucci, 1996; Domingues, 2004).

We highlight two key contributions of social psychology within current debates on collective actions and social movements: the crisis of the experience of the privileged and unified collective subject or as some authors identified, “the end of the model of unified actor” (“*o fim do modelo de ator único*”) (Sandoval, 1989); and the redimension of the political in the contemporaneity that has been identified beyond the processes of institutionalization, forms, discourses and political practices that interpolate the institutionality of politics, and thus question the total separation between the dimensions of the private experience and the public experience (Tejerina, 2005). These issues became central to the emergence of a critical social psychology in the context of crisis of the Brazilian social psychology.

Regarding the first issue – the end of the notion of a unified collective subject – we point out the emergence of movements of social mobilization that were not reduced to the “model of unified actors” (*modelo de atores únicos*), i.e. that were necessarily related to the position that they occupied in the social structure from the perspective of labour relations. Here, multiple subjects started to gain importance in psycho-sociological studies on mobilization (Melucci, 1996; Klandermans & Johnson, 1995). By accounting for other subject positions rather than those based solely on social class; as collective subject, analyses of social movements face new challenges regarding a range of issues that have recently been debated in the Brazilian academy (Camino, Lhullier & Sandoval 1997, Sawaia 1997, Maheirie 2003).

In this way, what is at stake are not only the critiques to the emancipatory project of the ‘unified actor’ (*ator único*) and the essentialist approaches in psychology and sociology, but above all, the critiques incorporate the process of the construction of the actor (Touraine,

1988). From this analytic standpoint, the process of the constitution of collective actions and their internal dynamics, and studies on the consciousness of collective identity became important for the consolidation of studies on politics in social psychology in Brazil (Sandoval 1989, Camino 1991).

Regarding the second issue – on the expansion of the political – the political has been reviewed in contemporary debates, as an outcome of the crisis of the model of “unique actor” (*único ator*) and the crisis regarding the institutionality of the political, due to a number of factors, such as: the crisis of modernity, crisis of the Keynesian state, expansion of mass media which brought a higher homogenisation of culture (Mouffe, 1988) and commodification of a range of aspects of social life (Offe, 1989).

These two issues were equally relevant for the emergence of a Brazilian critical social psychology concerned with the studies on processes of democratization in the country, on the dynamics of power relations and on forms of social organization that aimed, even during the military dictatorship, to build democratic spaces within the public and private spheres. A range of social movements and collective actions were studied in Brazil from critical perspectives, and these studies have also contributed to the constitution of a field of studies of political phenomena from the perspective of Brazilian social psychology. This is a dual dynamic process, on the one hand, the importance of studies on social psychology that focused on the construction of its critical and political perspectives for the new issues to be taken as valid areas of enquiry and, on the other hand, the claim of social movements’ perspectives that they constitute subjects of experience with the discursive resources to signify their own experiences. These two aspects have had an important impact on the conceptualization of the social sciences, particularly in relation to social psychology, aimed at constructing a discipline able to critically reflect on its own context where and while its knowledge is produced.

Contemporary debates reveal that scholars are aware of ambiguities and differences within social psychological perspectives; nonetheless, a dualistic view over collective actions is still prevalent particularly with regard to the ontology of political agents. Within this context, it is relevant to clarify our understanding of the emergence of subjects and the maintenance of identities. Here we will elaborate on two key concepts of social psychology, subject and identity, conceptualizations of which often appear indistinct in the studies of social movements (Javaloy, 2001).

The understandings of the subject put forward by Rancière (1996), is not only referred to transparency, temporality or the ability of consensual thinking. Subjects also emerge from the litigation of the consented. They are, according to Rancière, enunciations of the non-counted, discourses where previously we could only hear noise, voices where only sounds could be heard. In this way, and from this perspective they represent a disturbance to the order and organization of bodies, and a disturbance to the illusion of consent; producing changes in what is possible to be enunciated, counted as legitimate, and made visible. They are because “they only exist by their distinction in relation to any social group, to any part of society or function of the social body. What constitutes them is the litigation itself” (Rancière, 1996:377). They are acts of precarity and not of permanency, as they put into challenge the basis of consent, and entrenched forms of social legitimization.

“In these terms, political subjects are understood as subjects in act, as local and punctual capabilities to construct, in their virtual universality, those polemic worlds that unsettle the

police order” (Rancière, 1996:378). Rancière’s assertion on the notion of police order refers to that which organises the system, establishing a distribution of law that separates communities into groups and hierarchical social positions. Here, political subjects are therefore “always precarious, always susceptible to be mistaken by simple parts of the social body that merely demand an optimisation of their part” (Rancière, 1996:378).

Undoubtedly, there is a risk of mistaking the processes of political subjectivisation with aspects of identities. That is, the risk that the precarity of subject positions will be taken as fixed identities that merely seek the “optimisation of their part”, and do not create litigation in the world of the sensible, and of declassification. The subjects rather, capable of a virtual universality, can imagine a world that does not exist; and can therefore create names for what is unnamed, create territories for the unthinkable.

Subjects and identities are social historical experiences and organized from distinct yet complementing logics. The system of legitimation and normalization that Rancière (1996) understood as constituting a police order which inaugurates the experience of identities and of their maintenance, provides a reason for why these are positions and social experiences are more susceptible to be regulated; - as they are positions of temporary fixation, classified and yet permeable to the logic of the administration of the bodies. Identities, in this sense, negotiate their dissident by voicing positions, i.e., in the context of police and not of politics; the context of the speech is already constituted, as well as the identitary agents, and the possible social objects to be shared. That is, identities are the tip of the iceberg of a long process of constitution by a part of the public arena that is policed. As such, those policing the system also create systems of action, logics of belonging and political positions for the administration and functionality of governmentality.

Hence, subjects are understood as precariousities that, in recognizing local acts of declassification, create a virtual universality. However, they are, by virtue of the risk of politics itself, able to assume identities at any given moment (Rancière, 1996). Therefore, subjects could not exist on their own, as acts of precarity do not exist outside of hegemonic articulation, and exactly for this reason, they can constitute themselves into identities.

The development of these theoretical perspectives also intercedes in the valorization of that which should be the principle of a democratic society: the emergence of new political subjects, because they emerge from the acknowledgment of new forms of oppression and new sensibilities. These political subjects, according to their historical context, emerge and organize themselves in creating new forms of collective action that correspond to forms of social oppression; this is the reason why it becomes of paramount importance to conduct research into forms of contemporary activism from the perspective of the internal dynamics and contextualized logics of social oppression.

These perspectives in the field of social psychology in Brazil have been part of the development of studies on the aesthetics formation of social conflicts. Critical studies in this field aim at destabilising and challenging traditional systems of classification and naturalisation in the processes of subjectification and objectification (Vygotsky, 2001; Vazquez, 1999). These studies critically analyse aesthetical relations in different social practices, including educational and social movements and their impact in the political domain (Da Ros, Maheirie & Zanella, 2006; Zanella e Maheirie, 2010). Aesthetical relations are understood as the relationship of concrete subject with different objectifications, like works of art, objects, other individuals, nature, and so forth, proposing a deconstruction of

crystallized and hegemonic understandings and traditional systems of meaning production around these forms. This relationship is constituted via the mediation of the other and it implies, necessarily, an account of the specificity of social contexts where they are constructed.

Aesthetics is understood here not only as a field of studies specific to arts or philosophy, but as a relationship which includes the enlargement of the sensible, whereby a range of views and considerations are incorporated into the production of new perspectives. The concept of aesthetical relations is intrinsically related to the notion of affect, seen as to affect and to be affected by the other and by the context, in different forms of objectivation. From a range of diverse methods and approaches, aesthetical relations allow for the destabilization of regimes of truth, by demystifying the notions of impartiality and neutrality.

The cultural-historical psychology of Vygotsky was introduced in the field of critical social psychology in Brazil during 1980s, based on historical materialism and dialectical perspectives. This approach highlights the socio-historical view of the subject within the studies of arts and humanities. Vygotsky (1998; 2001), also an art critic, elaborates on the concepts of catharsis and aesthetics, showing how artistic objectifications are able to produce a “short circuit” in the emotions, provoking the possibility of overcoming feelings and allowing for the re-creation of the subject. That is, aesthetics relations allows for the possibility of the production of new ways of reasoning, thus generating open and unfinished processes of modes of subjectification and objectification.

The psychology of Vygotsky produces a critique to the scientificist perspective by viewing the subject as constituted through social relations, that is, the subject is constructed in relation to the other, and to their contexts, and through this dialectical relationship, meaning and signification are produced, in such a way that the subject’s constitution is given as semiotically mediated. In this way, the traditional division between the individual and the collective is challenged, opening up space for a conception of subject that is constituted through processes of subjectivisation and objectification in contexts which are necessarily collective.

Bakhtin (1997, 2003) also provides important contributions to the understanding of the aesthetic object and the relations embedded in their context as being dialogical, as well as for methodology in critical social psychology. For Bakhtin, every sign is ideological and is constituted in the collective realm. In this way, discourse – as the objectification of subjectivity – is a product of dialogical relations between subjects that both reflects, and creates, the multiple voices that are constituted by it.

From Vygotsky’s critical perspectives, Bakhtin’s contributions, and more recently, the studies of Rancière (2005), artistic objectifications have been considered useful tools for the understanding of aesthetics relations in politics. Traditional forms of doing politics have been challenged by the reinvention of the political in the everyday life, virtually and in person, through collectives that are transformed and interpolated by different mediums and discourses. Far from foreseeing a pre-given result, new collective formations rely on imagetic communication and other artistic forms, contributing to new types of struggles for collective rights, introducing aesthetics in the objectification and articulation of these struggles.

Analysis produced by such critical social psychological perspectives aims to incorporate the sensible and its shared understanding (Rancière, 2005). For Rancière (2005:13), “aesthetics is

understood as a form of articulation between ways of doing, forms of visibility of this doing and ways of thinking on their relations, incorporating a specific idea of effectiveness of thought”.

Collective groups unified in political actions aesthetically objectified, aim to expose the ‘invisible, to speak the ‘unspeakable’, and to reveal the ‘non-being’, denouncing the subtext points to a fiction of thought in sharing this experience; rendering reasoning sensitive to the common, and to the specific. To understand reasoning in the sensible is a possibility that is created when we become aware of these new experiences, since they capture, create and recreate multiple meanings, dislocating words, images and sounds which have been hegemonically crystallized in different social contexts.

These experiences allow for the possibility of a reading of the political domain separate from merely constituting its representation (Rancière, 2005). It is, however, an invention of a language that incorporates contexts of domination and oppression, communicating new rationalities that affect and are affected by the collective, denouncing and reinventing strategies for struggles and for emancipation.

Inventive images in aesthetic language are constituted in symbolic acts, polisemycs, which allows for new forms of comprehending domination; reinventing new forms of affecting and being affected; denouncing oppression; and transforming oppression into fictitious forms of empowerment. For Rancière (2005), this is the production of multiple truths that are based in fiction. Fiction is not understood here as separate from the real, as there are no boundaries between the reasoning of facts and reasoning of fictions. It is in this process that resides the “aesthetical revolution”, which rearranges the signs of language into a polysemy of facts.

In this way, politics and aesthetics in politics are seen from the perspective of aesthetic relations, and this view allows for the opening up of vantage points from which to understand multiple forms of collectives and their possibilities for struggle and empowerment. Collective formations embedded in aesthetics allow us to comprehend new forms of political arrangements in the contemporary. Research on these themes in politics has been developed from the study of the artistic production of social movements; of the relations between aesthetics and social mobilization; and in studies of new sensibilities of the dissidence that often have not been taken as relevant topics of concern within politics.

Perspectives from critical social psychology in Brazil for the analysis of these forms of dissidence brought a focus into studies on politics and the processes of subjectivisation central to the processes of the democratization of power relations, and to new forms of understanding social objectification. Critical social psychology aims at understanding the dynamics of social movements, which reveal the paradox between the universal and the particular approaches within the discipline of psychology.

From the perspectives presented above, we highlight some key aspects and challenges posed by and for critical social psychology in Brazil (and elsewhere), viz.:

- 1-Revisiting understandings of politics in psychology, where power is not only taken as a number of relations which are possible to overcome, but rather where power relations are understood to constitute our practices and discourses, and therefore, our subjectivities;
- 2-The inclusion of the theme of citizenship in research, however, the focus on citizenship should not be seen as dominant identities that overlap the other ones, or as an identity among

others (Mouffe, 1996), but rather, with the aim of understanding issues around rights and citizenship, and as an articulating principle that affects the different available subject positions (Mouffe, 1996). Citizenship, in this view, can be viewed as a question of political identification, i.e., an articulation within distinct struggles of different groups, aiming at the construction of an “us” – “a chain of equivalence between their demands, in a way of articulating them through the principle of democratic equivalence” (Mouffe, 1996:96). Citizenship, in this view, is not only the extension of the domain of rights – what is called social inclusion – but is the decomposition of identities and the constitution of a chain of equivalences that subvert the identitary logic of excluded-included;

3- The importance of constructing research questions that account for a historical perspective, recognizing the historical continuity that illustrates the extension of rights, in the sense of expansion of ideologies, as well as of the historical discontinuity that reveals the changes in forms of oppression and social organization, and the emergence of new political subjects. In this way, the study of articulatory processes of the emergence of political subjects, through the collective character of social life is seen here as fundamental for critical social psychology;

4- The understanding that social, historical and cultural contexts are not a kind of a mixture of elements in which we are simply immersed, and as such, there is a risk of relativistic uses of psychological instruments and practices, but rather, that these elements should be taken as fundamental aspects of the constitution of subjectivity, therefore we argue here for practices and theoretical perspectives that are incorporated by these understandings.

Gender studies, feminist theories and queer studies: impact on social psychology

Feminist research and queer studies are growing critical fields in psychology in Brazil. Although we cannot yet speak of a feminist psychology in Brazil, it is paramount to recognise the importance of gender studies, as well as feminist and LGBT social movements for the problematisation of inequalities in the field of psychology.

Feminism entails a political field that became organised at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, primarily concerning the struggle for equality of civil rights, political and pedagogical, which were then reserved only for men. The Suffrage was the cornerstone of this period. The suffrage in Brazil, starting in the end of the nineteenth century, had its specificities particularly in relation to the North American and English contexts, Alves and Pitanguy (1984, p. 44) highlight that “this has been a specific struggle that incorporated women of all classes; it has been a long struggle, demanding enormous skill of organisation and infinite patience. It lasted, in the United States of America and in England, for seven decades. In Brazil, for forty years, starting with the Constituency of 1891”, the struggle for the right to vote in Brazil had different characteristics from other social movements, as in the United States and England,

“It has begun much later, in the year of 1910, when professor Deolinda Daltro founds, in Rio de Janeiro, the Feminine Republican Party (*Partido Republicano Feminino*), aiming at reviving at the National Congress the debate over the right to vote for women, that has not been considered since the Constituent Assembly (*Assembléia Constituinte*) of 1891 (...) The right to vote was gradually growing in Brazilian states. It was in this context, in 1932, that Getúlio Vargas promulgated the right of suffrage for women, which was by then already exercised in ten states in the country” (Alves and Pitanguy, 1984, p.48).

Feminism in Brazil was initially aimed at the proposal of another logic regarding the production of knowledge that up to then incorporated women only as objects of research. Rago (1997) highlights a range of contributions of the feminist movement and its critiques of the traditional perspective of the medical discourse on sexuality, as well as on diverse aspects of the female context in the colonial Brazil, which in this case consists of excessively misogynistic perspectives on the feminine, from the exclusive perspective of male subjects “immersed in the problematic sexual fantasies, when imagining the body and the shape of the nude indigenous women in the Terra de Santa Cruz¹, or when reinforcing the sensuality of the Black slaves in the large land proprietaries” (Rago, 1997, p. 16) (see also Del Piore 1997). Feminism in Brazil, according to Rago (1997, p.16), denounced the “conservative and misogynist perspectives of scientific knowledge in the nineteenth and mid twentieth century’s, producing a specific version of femininity and an ideal of feminine identity.

Simultaneous to the advances of the abovementioned social movements, the feminist project has configured a theoretical-epistemological academic field, drawing on a number of critical traditions, such as, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and schools of thought known as post-structuralism. This feminist critical tradition focuses on questions regarding the notion of difference, the importance of experience, and the understanding of subjectivity as discursively constituted. These perspectives question the ways in which scientific knowledge was (and is) produced, denouncing the impossibility of neutrality, and challenging the essentialism and a-priori rules and assumptions of positivistic paradigms.

There are important debates and intersections between social movements and academic feminism, particularly regarding epistemological and methodological concerns, and in particular, the recognition and acknowledgment of the role of power relations within the arena of knowledge production; as knowledge is not neutral, but rather, it is always politically invested. Critiques of the notion of gender, with its limits and possibilities, demonstrates the (in)tense character of this perspective.

Feminism in Brazil has been influenced by European (Beauvoir 2009; Pateman 1993) and North American traditions (Scott, 1995; Haraway, 1988; Butler, 1998). Scott’s (1995) work has been considered a classic among Brazilian feminist researchers, by highlighting gender as constitutive of social relations, and the first way to signify power relationships, asserting that there is not a properly feminine subjectivity, but rather that subjectivity is “constructed for women, in a specific historical, cultural and political context” (Scott, 1998:116).

“The discourse of difference of sex refers not only to ideas, but also to institutions, structures, and everyday praxis, as well as to the rituals and to everything that constitute social relations. Discourse is an instrument of ordering of the world, and although not being previous to social organisation, it is inseparable from it. Hence, gender is the social organisation of sexual difference. It does not reflect the first biological reality, but rather it constructs the meaning of this reality. Sexual difference is not the originary cause by which social organisation could be derived. It is a changing social structure, which has to be analysed from the perspective of its different historical contexts” (Scott, 1998, p. 115).

¹ Brazil in 1500 was initially called Ilha de Vera Cruz, then Terra de Santa Cruz and in 1511 Brasil, after the pau-brasil tree.

This pos-structuralist approach understands the subject as discursively produced, fragmented, and fluid. In this sense, Haraway (1988), another source of inspiration for feminist scholars, understands gender within the field of power relations, stating that “gender is a field of structured and structuring difference, in which the tones of extreme localization, of the intimately personal and individualized body, vibrate in the same field with global high-tension emissions” (p.588).

Definitions of gender in psychology and particularly in social psychology problematise cultural comparisons of linguistic translations and political solidarity. Feminist and gender studies provide a political standpoint, challenging traditional positivistic understandings of neutrality, which separates the subject and the object of research. Rather, from a feminist perspective, the relationship between the researcher and the subject of research is questioned, and neutrality is replaced by engagement.

Ideological doctrines of neutrality as part of the rigour of the scientific method, as well as of the epistemology that legitimises it, end up sustaining scientific praxes that are alienating and disengaged from social, political and economic demands that are intrinsic to the phenomena that have been investigated. From this perspective comes the radical argument that science is eminently a form of rhetoric, an outcome of the praxis carried out by relevant social actors, and that the knowledge produced by them is a way to access a desired type of objective power. In this sense, “all knowledge is a condensed node in an agonistic power field” (Haraway, 1988, p. 577) and science has then to be seen in relation to power, rather than as direct translations of ‘truth’.

Feminist theories point out the importance of politics, transcultural translations, and the position of the subaltern and partial viewpoints with respect to the questioning of universality. Haraway (1988) claims for a feminist project that encompasses a corporified, or embodied, objectivity: “feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*” (ibid: 581). The promise of objectivity is not therefore the search for a position of identity with the object, but for a partial connection. It is not possible to be in all positions, or entirely in one privileged position for the observation of the scientific object, and this applies to the categories subjugated (or privileged), as well as for the studies of gender, race, class, territory, and generation. Situated knowledge presupposes therefore a recognition of the (partial) position of power/knowledge, however this is not a relativistic approach; “not just any partial perspective will do; we must be hostile to easy relativisms and holisms built out of summing and subsuming parts” (ibid 585), warns Haraway (1988).

The Portuguese psychologists Nogueira (2001a), Amâncio (2001), and Neves and Nogueira (2005), aware of this debate, strategically defend the existence of a feminist psychology that actively positions itself as anti-sexist, maintaining that “scientific” perspectives should equally recognised the experiences, worries, and concerns of men and women. Feminist psychology would then not only engage with the understanding of the so called “feminine condition”, but also with other hierarchical social structures of oppression such as race, sexuality and class, among others (Nogueira & Neves, 2003; Amâncio, 2001; Nogueira, 2001a). This critical reading allows us on the one hand to engage in the deconstruction of social categories (challenging for example notions of gender, class, race, sexuality, age), while on the other hand it highlights the need to look at these categories at their points of intersection (Mountian, 2011).

Analysis and deconstruction of what is understood by gender and sexuality are central themes for gender studies from the perspectives of both feminist research and queer studies in Brazil. Butler's work has provided important insights, particularly on the debate around the universality of the term "women". Here we find a challenge to the idea of a unique meaning for the categories "woman" or "women", whereby different femininities, different contexts and relations of power should be accounted for by the analysis of various forms of oppression. In this sense, Butler (1998) emphasises the need to work with "contingent foundations" in feminism. From this, it becomes of paramount importance to account for the contingent character of the theoretical perspectives and analytical categories constructed.

Within this epistemological and theoretical debate, we identify some important challenges for critical social psychology, rejecting some key assumptions of positivistic sciences, such as: 1- the independence between the scientist and the object of research; 2- the "de-contextualisation" of the field whereby the scientist is not historically located; 3- theory and practice are considered neutral; 4- the purported independence of "facts" in relation to the scientist, and; 5- the superiority of the scientist as an expert in relation to other people (Gergen, 1993; Narvaz & Koller, 2006; Neves & Nogueira, 2005).

We highlight the importance of reflexivity and the notion of situated knowledge for feminist methodologies, particularly regarding its different actions and processes of knowledge production in countries of the global south, as in Brazil, characterised by a peripheral economy in the context of global capitalism and, as a "new western nation", remains historically marked by sexism, racism, classism and colonial relations. There is a need for the researcher to situate her/himself in a reflexive way within the process of research, accounting for the understanding that processes of knowledge production are intrinsically constituted within the histories and situated experiences of both researcher and the subject of the research. In this way, feminist research should be sensible to differences and hierarchies based on gender, sexuality, generation, social class, race and culture. It should then depart from the perspective that knowledge is always situated and non-essentialist, and should be concerned with accounting for and including dissidents' and in this case, women's knowledges and life experiences, within institutionalised and legitimised forms of the production of knowledge (Arruda, 2002; Adrião, 2008), thereby giving voice to marginalised and socially excluded groups. The main objective is that of social change, which highlights the political engagement of feminist research (Nogueira, 2001b; Nogueira, 2001c; Von Smigay, 2005).

These methodological concerns and feminist debates have made important contributions to the scientific field, particularly in relation to the status of science in relation to other forms of knowledge production. These challenges are present for a critical social psychology which struggles for legitimacy within the scientific arena, which supports hegemonic and mainstream forms of psychology. Psychology in Brazil is still suspicious of gender as a category for analysis, and it is still the case that many studies that utilise gender as a category, utilise it as equal to sex (that is, categories of man or woman based on their biology) in an uncritical and decontextualised way. Aiming to achieve scientific status, psychology still advocates for neutrality and objectivity, resisting and having difficulties with the incorporation of other subject positions and constructions of subjectivity (Siqueira, 1997; Fonseca, 1997). Nevertheless, contributions from feminist researchers have been gradually incorporated within psychology in relation to a critique of positivistic science, producing politically engaged and compromised knowledge and praxis (Azeredo, 2010; Nuernberg, 2005).

Moreover, specific notions of gender, and the feminist critique have not been consensually and unanimously accepted within social movements in Brazil, where points of tension are apparent. We highlight a particularly important aspect within the current debate, that of the distinct interpretations that different social actors attribute to the political and analytical importance of the notion of gender, which is central to social movements concerned with feminisms, that is, how gender hierarchies can be recognised as relations of oppressions. For this, we argue for a notion of gender that translates strategies of de-naturalisation of processes of classification and hierarchical value that maintain the inferiority of certain social segments (Azerêdo, 1998; Strey, 1998).

Further, it is relevant for this discussion to problematise the relations between experience, social practice and performance entailed by the notion of gender, as well as political strategies of social movements that are divided between affirmative action based on sexual identity, and attempts to escape restricting hierarchical divisions based on “labels” and definitions. In this sense, it is worth clarifying how the notion of gender is a useful analytical category, and as such, gender can be employed for a critique of the social hierarchy between men and women, traditionally seen in science as a natural hierarchical social positioning of subjects. Nevertheless, the way that this theoretical construct has been employed is indicative of the current debate that is largely marked by a solely descriptive character, particularly seen in reports and analysis of the collective actions of social movements. Far removed from feminist standpoints, they perpetuate a binary approach, also in evidence when struggles emphatically claim, for example, based on the recognition of heterosexual only experiences, normative social praxis and performance.

The notion of gender, when understood in an essentialist manner, has been challenged by LGBT movements (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals), that highlight the reductionism of some claims made by a restricted and specific sector of the feminist movement, seen as a particular segment of white, heterosexual women, both elitist and intellectual. This critique increased the split between LGBT and the feminist movements which incorporated the notion of gender positively. However, this notion in both cases, has allowed for the deconstruction of the connection traditionally made between biological sex, and gender roles.

Further, it is noted that a political “emptiness” of the notion of gender is apparent in some studies which ally themselves with a certain “dichotomised” tendency regarding definitions of gender and the understanding of gender norms as fixed. That is, the a-political and uncritical use of the notion of gender, by some social movements, and also in scientific production, it is seen not only in the descriptive employment of gender, but also in the understanding of gender as a matrix of two – and only two – “sexed bodies”, upon which the social construction of one or the other gender is then imposed.

Collective actions carried out by feminist subjects have become more visible within Brazilian social psychology, and these feminist critiques have opened up a field within psychology for other critical views from emancipating movements, such as the LGBT movement. While feminist movements denounced and challenged sexism and gender inequality, the critiques from the LGBT militants turned against the heterosexualisation of society. If, on the one hand, this increasing proliferation of critiques coming from social movements prepared the terrain for the acceptance of gender studies by social psychology; on the other hand, these critiques allowed the struggles to become more plural: while for some militants and

intellectuals the social integration of diverse groups in a polymorphic, plural and democratic society was seen as a perspective for social transformation, for other groups (particularly for lesbian feminists) the main perspective was that of separation, of highlighting the specificity of identity demands, and increasing the differences within the notions and constructions of gender. At the end of the XX century, research in social psychology concerning gender studies has exposed the narrow and tense relationship between academic and social movements, and between science and politics (Louro 2001; Junqueira 2007).

It is worth mentioning that in the '90s the theoretical agenda of gender studies moved away from the analysis of inequality and of power relations between social structural categories (such as men, women, gay, hetero), and turned to question the construction of the categories themselves, problematising their fixity, separation and limitations. These studies aimed at understanding the power relationships established around these categories, deconstructing binaries in discourse and proposing a multifaceted approach. Identity politics that guided feminist and GLS (gays, lesbians and sympathisers)² movements in the '70s and '80s went into crisis during the '90s thus revealing its fractures and lacks. This is the context whereby contemporary post-identitarian proposals and theoretical approaches have been debated, including among other contributions, queer theories as having been the most prominent.

Queer studies are linked to contemporary disciplines that have problematised classical notions of subject, identity and agency. We highlight two important references in this field for social psychology in Brazil, Foucault's (1988) proposals on the discursive construction of sexuality and Lacan's (1998) studies on the processes of identification, particularly around the notion of the subject being constituted from the other's gaze. From this view the subject is not seen as stable and coherent, rather the subject is divided, interpellated by both culture and desire (Mountian e Lara, 2010).

Social psychology acquired important theoretical references when incorporating the notion of gender, challenging and denouncing the inherent power relations present in this category. Butler's approach to gender as a cultural fiction and as performative effect of reiterating discourses, produced a critique to the traditional notion of gender and to gender identity, intersecting with a notion well known for social psychology, that of identity construction. Analysing the process by which gender identity is naturalised by means of the discursive repetition and perpetuation of gender norms, Butler's claims allow psychology to elucidate questions that were before obscured either by scientificism and its history of experimentation, or by the inadequate account of gender as equal to sex.

Considering, therefore, that it is via discursive practices that are reiterated in everyday life that subjects are produced and gendered, a new demand is posed to social psychology, i.e. to incorporate and account for a complex notion of subjectivity. Studies on the performativity of gender in queer and feminist studies allow for the critical analysis of the debate on gender and subjectivity, incorporating awareness of power relationships in the production of truths and rights within scientific knowledge production. This proposal demands from psychology a critical positioning in relation to its own dispositive of the production of truth. In the Brazilian practice of scientific knowledge production, key aspects have been questioned and debated for critical understandings of the social construction of phenomena, more precisely around themes traditionally understood as natural, such as, the conception of family

² The acronym LGBT has been used in Brazil from 2008 onwards

(Perucchi, 2010), and the notions of gender and rights (Prado, Mountian, Machado e Santos, 2010).

Queer theory allows us to further the debate over the analytics of the experience of sexuality and the construction of gender identities, by highlighting the fictional and fluid character of identity, pointing out multiple performative possibilities imposed on sexualised bodies, and deconstructing the understanding of sexuality as exclusively related to sexual practice. Nonetheless, in politics, there is risk of relativising identity politics; that is, by constructing identity categories that group together diverse subject positions (such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender), thus putting into question one of the main strategies adopted by LGBT social movements in Brazil, which is that of organising their struggles around specific identity demands. However, by highlighting the illusory fixity and contingent aspects of identity, and ways in which these affect governmentality, because of how identity operates in each and every body, and how it functions for subjects that occupy these identity positions, queer theories expose some of the key debates within LGBT movements in Brazil, that also risk enclosing themselves in their own struggle, that is, they run the risk of again constructing the general and abstract demands for universal and homogeneous subjects (Prado et al, 2010) that they aim to resist.

The importance of the notion of gender in different social movements and in the academy is directly related to the relevance that political identities occupy within these movements. Feminist perspectives in Brazil allowed for a closer dialogue between LGBT social movements and the academy, even though this dialogue is always tense and contingent.

Conclusion

These current critical debates within social psychology in Brazil have important repercussions for the area. In this text we described the trajectory of critical social psychology in Brazil, highlighted the importance of social movements within this context, and explored the debate between critique and politics. We illustrated this discussion with contributions from gender studies, including feminist research and queer studies, as well as contemporary debates on aesthetics and politics.

There are differences in academic traditions and praxis in critical psychology, and we pointed out some of these perspectives and some key aspects that are important for a critical approach to psychology, such as, the importance of historical, social and political contextualisation, attention to the operation of power relations, and challenges to essentialist and naturalised categories.

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