"Alguém a fim?"[1]: an Online Ethnography in Chat Rooms in the Brazil-Bolivia Border

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ABSTRACT

This article shows part of the results of a research on gender, sexuality and differences, from a socio-anthropological perspective, in the area of the Brazil-Bolivia border. It seeks to analyze experiences of users' interactions in the chat rooms of the online service provider Universo Online (UOL) Corumbá. The methodology is mainly online ethnography, but also presents part of the offline fieldwork done in this border region in Mato Grosso do Sul. The theoretical perspective is poststructuralist, especially subaltern studies (queer, feminist, postcolonial). The focus is on the relations of dissenting genders and disparate sexualities in this virtual environment, without, however, failing to understand it from the offline context. The reflections point to the eroticism present in this virtual space, as well as discuss the experience of the production of a devalued "Other". It also seeks to contribute to the reflections in the methodological field of research in Internet environments and in border regions.

"Alguém a fim?": uma etnografia on-line em salas de bate-papo na Fronteira Brasil-Bolívia

RESUMO   O presente artigo apresenta parte dos resultados de uma pesquisa sobre gênero, sexualidade e diferenças, em uma perspectiva socioantropológica, na área de fronteira Brasil-Bolívia. Ele busca analisar experiências de interações de usuários/as das salas de bate-papo do provedor Universo Online (UOL) Corumbá. A metodologia é, principalmente, a etnografia on-line, mas também apresenta parte do trabalho de campo off-line realizado nessa região fronteiriça em Mato Grosso do Sul. A perspectiva teórica é pós-estruturalista, em especial, estudos subalternos (queer, feminista, pós-colonial). O enfoque é para as relações de gêneros dissidentes e sexualidades disparatadas nesse ambiente virtual, sem, contudo, deixar de compreendê-lo a partir do contexto off-line. As reflexões apontam para o erotismo presente nesse espaço virtual, assim como discute a experiência da produção de um "Outro" desvalorizado. Busca, ainda, contribuir para as reflexões no campo metodológico das pesquisas em ambientes da internet e em regiões de fronteira.

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INTRODUCTION

This article is the result, mainly, of an online ethnography in the chat rooms of the online service provider Universo Online (UOL) Corumbá, which sought to analyze the interactions of users with regard to gender and sexuality in the area of the Brazil-Bolivia border. It also presents data obtained during the offline ethnographic field of the research "Gender, Sexuality and Differences: Social norms and conventions in the area of the Brazil-Bolivia border²", started in 2014 and finalized in 2019.

Considering the recent Brazilian political scenario, in which researchers of the Human Sciences, especially those who produce knowledge about human relations in their intersections with gender and sexuality, are being attacked and de-legitimized, it becomes a political act of resistance to demarcate that what we produce is not "ideology", or mere opinion about a context/reality and about experiences of the subjects. In the face of these attacks,

> We need to find a balance between, on the one side, the affirmation that the knowledge we produce is necessarily situated - politically and epistemologically - and therefore never 'neutral'; and, on the other side, the defence of the autonomy (relative for sure) of the scientific field and the conventions that govern it. (Carrara, França and Simões, 2018: 75, authors' translation).

In this sense, we demarcate the theoretical and methodological field scientifically based through readings and reflections from other productions within a perspective that criticizes the universality and essentiality of gender and sexuality. Thus, the experiences of dissenting genders are those that do not correspond to the so-called matrix of gender intelligibility (Butler, 2003). It is structured in such a way that those which does not fit, are considered to be dissident, strange; meaning that, the matrix produces those who are "normal" and those who are not, according to the restricted possibilities of relationships presented in it, that is, those of male "sex³" = male gender = desire for the "opposite sex" or female "sex" = feminin gender = desire for the "opposite sex". The non-conformity of this matrix in relation to the desire for someone of the "opposite sex", which escapes certain disciplinary controls of pleasures, produces a kind of disparate sexuality (Foucault, 2007).

However, we must pay attention to the dynamics of what it is to be of a dissident gender and/or disparate sexuality. For this, we must be clear that the body experience is one of the dimensions for the production or not of this "rebellion". This means that, even having an opposite identification to which the person was classified at birth, including experiencing of sexuality outside the expectations, there are cases/situations in which the dissidence is invisible because the person performatizes an identity according to the most conservative expectations in terms of gender

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and sexuality or even does not reveal such differentiation. However, "rebellion" is not exclusively expressed in bodily experiences, "political consciousness and transforming agency are not determined by biological structures, by experience that can be localized exclusively in the body" (Bento, 2011: 105), and subversive discourses are also producers of these dissidences.

The methodology used in this article was mainly online ethnography for four months (August to October 2015), in the UOL Corumbá chat room, and offline ethnography for a longer period (April 2015 to December 2017), in different contexts in the Brazil-Bolivia border region, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. From the fragments of "public"[4] online chats and "private" messages[5] destined for the author of this study, it was sought to understand what the sociability relations of users are like in this chat, without, however, failing to understand it from the offline context.

The fact that most users of the UOL Corumbá chat room are looking for off-line meetings (outside of the virtual environment) means that their visitors possibly live in the region characterized by the title of the chat room (since this would facilitate the meeting). In this sense, it is very likely that they live in the Bolivian cities Puerto Quijarro and Puerto Suárez, or in the Brazilian cities Corumbá and Ladário, or that they are tourists visiting or passing through the region and are looking for meetings.

Of these cities, Corumbá is the largest one. It had an estimated 108,899 residents in 2017[6]. It is on the right bank of the Rio Paraguai. It is known, especially, for fishing tourism in the Pantanal rivers. In addition, concerning this city, we can state that

> It is a territory of strategic configuration because it is the main point of contact between Brazil and Bolivia. The gas pipeline and a bunch of other goods pass through there (arriving or departing) using the river, highways and railways that approach each other (Oliveira & Esselin, 2015: 127, authors' translation).

This economic context is only a fragment of the Brazil/Bolivia border relation, after all, "the multiplicity and richness of the Pantanal socio-cultural scenario is such that it is home to people with different languages, with their own stories and economic activities, with particular customs that distinguish them in the context of the plains" (Banducci Junior, 2012: 21, authors' translation). However, no different from what commonly is, the relations of intercultural sociabilities (in this case Brazil/Bolivia), even when reciprocal, at one time or another also cause "strangeness", and, as we will discuss in the course of this article, create the "others" in positions of hierarchy.

In turn, the online environment, which composes this ethnography, has also been taken here as a platform incorporated into this flow of sociabilities that is not restricted to the technical limits of the program, site or apps. In other words, "within the same platform, for example, different environments are identified, as they exist not only for their characteristics in terms of software or hardware, but for the

4 | When the user chooses to type "publicly", that is, in the "public" mode, it is because the message typed to a user can be seen by everyone. There is also the option to send messages to "everyone" present in the chat room, which makes the message also "public".

5 | When the user chooses to talk to another user "privately", that is, in the "reserved" mode, differently from what was said in the previous note, it is because he does not want anyone else in the chat room to view the conversation.

6 | Data from Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE), Directorate of Research, Coordination of Population and Social Indicators, Estimates of the resident population with reference date of July 1, 2017.

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different ways of being inhabited" (Leitão, Gomes, 2017: 62, authors' translation). In this sense, those involved in intercultural relations, through exchanges, statements, comments and various other forms of interactions, can also be perceived in these virtual environments, since they connect in a *continuum* with offline spaces.

In general, Magnani (2002) realized that "global cities" are producing new forms of communication, a feature of modernization. They are understood by different authors as those that have a network of international standard hotels, selective transportation system, in addition to cutting-edge information companies and specialized service agencies.

But through Corumbá, we see that it is not only the "global cities" that have these types of productions, including relations via online space. Thus, even "small" cities, when compared to "global" ones, do not have in technologies a form of weakening either. As Magnani (2002) points out in relation to the larger cities, we can affirm in relation to our study context: on-line communication/interaction is a facilitator for the interactions in the cities and even in this article we can show that, for those who want to make meetings, meet people and look for sex in a more "discreet" way, digital technologies are a facilitating option of interaction in the city.

ONLINE ETHNOGRAPHY: THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

With the increase in the use of the Internet and the expansion of sociability via digital media, new ways of doing ethnography have emerged, what some researchers have called "netnography". It "is born because of the academy's need to approach a 'new' space, the virtual, the online" (Noveli, 2010: 109, authors' translation). It emerges as a specialized ethnography, adapted to the specific contingencies of today's social worlds, mediated by computers (Kozinetz, 2010). Virtual ethnography is also one of the terms used in this methodological field. What differentiates the uses of the different terms is the disciplinary issue of the areas of knowledge production.

> The term netnography has been more widely used by researchers in the field of marketing and
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> administration while the term virtual ethnography is more used by researchers in the field of
>
> anthropology and social sciences (Amaral, Natal, Viana et al., 2008: 34, authors' translation).

Here, as we are committed to demarcate that online and offline are not in separate worlds, and as we conduct observations and interactions in these two environments, we will use online and offline ethnography to refer to these methodological practices, understanding that online experiences are a continuity of off-line life:

> "online" or "virtual", is not a space separate from the "offline" or "real" world; these
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> classifications should not be thought of as absolute, nor do they form a dichotomy. They are not

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radically apart planes, but contexts that interpenetrate and influence each other. The Internet does not form an autonomous space, which exists parallel to physical spaces; the online/offline distinction is circumstantial and precarious, "real" and "virtual" are constantly articulated. The network is part of the world, not a "world apart" (Braga, 2015: 228, authors' translation).

In other words, in relation to online observations and interactions, according to Miller (2013), we recognize Internet technology as a cultural genre, and such as, it does not allow us to create something radically new, but rather to fulfill a desire that was already present in the past, but which could not be fulfilled, since the means were lacking. But there may be a consequence in its use, which is the possibility to explore new things, to experience new freedoms, "but this also induces anxieties about the control over how these freedoms and abilities will be employed" (Idem: 173, authors' translation).

Also about this environment, the vision about the virtual, within some perspectives, represents a space where there is the possibility for a person to introduce herself as "a body", that is, an avatar. In this chat room it is common for many users to describe their bodies and physical characteristics, regardless of being requested to do so. A "virtual identity" is then created, once "identification within the network has gained a relative autonomy from identity outside the network and has become the basis for the construction of a virtual identity" (Ramos, 2015: 65, authors' translation).

However, even though this identity may be considered something fictitious, and the actions in these environments are foreign to the practices that people have of "real" life, what Ramos (2015) called "identity convergence", we cannot disregard the agency of these people when elaborating/building/being this virtual avatar, this imaginary "other person", because we see that this "other" is still part of the identity constitution, even if not verbalized/performed off-line. In this sense, the agency is concerned with the "possibilities regarding the capacity to act mediated culturally and socially" (Piscitelli, 2008: 267, authors' translation). Or, as Beleli (2015) rightly said, the creation of the profiles cannot be thought of as the removal of a "reality", but as a strategic manipulation of itself.

On this statement, we see another point, that there is no actress/actor acting, investing in avatars, creating roles, because even if these are randomly chosen with pre-characters available through the online platform, there are processes of subjective choices of real people, who interact, through these "other bodies", with others also real, in the border context in question. This justifies the understanding of this environment as a continuity of off-line places, and not as an invention, a world apart, as previously pointed out.

With the advances in technology, which with its new communication tools, such as the Internet, allows contact between people from different places in the world, in

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different contexts and temporality such as ours, it is almost indispensable to do research today taking into account the social relations that people establish in digital media.

> In the social sciences, our gaze usually turns to the relationships between people and between them and society. If these relationships now begin, are expanded or maintained by the use of digital media we must begin to recognize their role in the experience of ourselves in both social and subjective terms (Miskolci, 2011: 13, authors' translation).

Therefore, the use of the Internet, especially sociability via social networks, allows us to connect and interact with other people, contributing to a reach on either side of the Brazil-Bolivia border, without necessarily crossing it geographically. Furthermore, it allows us to have more contact with the interlocutors when they present the need to remain anonymous, or even a resistance of an off-line encounter. However, these new techniques bring us quite pertinent questions from an ethical point of view, as well as the advantages and disadvantages in relation to what it allows us to know in the field.

In this direction, as a methodological choice, the researcher during the whole field, contained herself in only observing what was publicly posted in the chat room in the conversations, and did not communicate with the users, although there were people, mostly with males nicknames, trying to communicate with her. In turn, her presence in the chat room already configured some intervention in the online environment, after all, her different nicknames that were used in the field were, themselves, a form of interaction in that space. As it will be demonstrated later on, this has already provided us with much information regarding the types of relationships that the users of the chat room were looking for. But, here, we must ask ourselves: without identificating as a researcher, would the data gathered be possible, from an ethical perspective, to be worked on in this study?

We reinforce that no interviews were made with people in the chat room, not even the attempts of dialogue with the researcher, in its several moments and nicknames, were reciprocated. We understood that this was a participant observation because she was inserted in that environment, and people "saw" her and sought interaction. In a still provisional way, we imagined that the chat room could be like a public square. Many people who pass by, whether or not they remain in the square, see her, but no dialogue is established, although the way the researcher presents herself, as well as the others, composes the scene.

There are various interests of people who pass through or are in a square, like what happens with the online chat room, although our focus is a specific theme. The researcher, in this hypothetical public and offline image, does not present herself to the people in the square as a researcher, even though she is ethnographing the relations that take place there. She does not even greet those who politely try to approach her,

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but she interferes by being there: she is one more person who attends the environment.

Therefore, considering this provisional comparison, of the chat room as an imagined public off-line square, we thought that there would be no ethical problems in ethnographing the online chat room, without the author of this study identifying herself as a researcher. In a previous study, one of the authors of this article, ethnographed a square with the characteristics that were presented here for the association with the online environment. The previous fieldwork in the square not only made possible to characterize it briefly, but also the experience of being among many people, but not necessarily maintaining some kind of dialogue, or even to understand that one should not shout in a public square that one is a researcher and is there developing a study and that, for this reason, is asking the authorization of all the passersby (Duque, 2011).

After these considerations, we will describe the UOL chat room. It is an online social space where people from different places in the world can communicate with each other. The chat rooms are divided by "Friendship", "Ages", "Dating", "Serious Chat", "Sex", "Cities and Regions", and "Created by subscribers", and subdivided. For example, the "Friendship" chat room has the subdivisions "Virtual Friendship", "Colorful Friendship", "LGBT Friendship" and "Venting". Each of these options contains 35 other numbered chat rooms to choose from, with the possibility of a restricted number of users subscribers and non-subscribers per chat room[7].

The UOL chat room "Cities and Regions" has a variety of cities available from several states in Brazil, besides having two chat rooms for "Brazilians abroad" and "Foreigners in Brazil". Among this diversity of chat rooms available for variety of intentions, we focus on the "Cities and Regions" chat rooms, where the UOL Corumbá chat room is allocated. The number of chat rooms per city varies: in the case of Corumbá, at the time of the online ethnography there were three, but according to our observations and access, we always found people in only one of the chat rooms, because the others had no users on the days and times we accessed them. After the end of the on-line fieldwork, by the time of the completion of this text, we noticed that changes had occurred in the UOL chat rooms, resulting that, for example, in Corumbá having only one chat room available.

The UOL chat, especially when referring to local chat rooms, such as chat room groupings by city, as is the case with the chat rooms in Corumbá, can be considered a facilitator for scheduling offline meetings in the city. This was noticeable from the first moment of immersion in the field, when it was possible to observe the "public" conversations inside the chat room, that is, those that the users did not restrict to "private" (between only two people). Or, still, when, even having chosen "private", they sent the messages to "all" of the members of the chat room, an option that favoured the researcher, as any other person in the room, to receive them as well. The dynamics of interactions observed in the chat room will be discussed below.

7 | The description of this space refers to the period in which the field occurred, already described in this article.

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THE INTENTIONS VIA NICKNAMES: EXPERIENCES OF (IN)VISIBILITIES

When users enter the chat rooms, they type in a nickname, which corresponds to a name, nickname (nick), that other people will have as a reference in that environment. In the chat rooms, since the first incursions, when paying attention to the nicknames, one notices how much the space is erotized. Let's see the case of the acronyms "PG" and "$". Their meanings vary according to other characteristics of the surname or the conversation itself in public.

Some impressions we had at first were that the letters "PG" could refer to a "Big Dick" ["Pau Grande" in Portuguese], but we understood, with the development of the fieldwork, that it was a reference to users who performed sex work ("PG" = Program [Programa in Portuguese]). We quote two examples: "Menprograma.32 speaks to Everyone: PG only with women". (Monday, 12/10/2015, entrance time at 15:11) and "boy d pg hxh[8] (reserved) speaks to All: somebody only white height 1 74 kg64 I am 21 years old I am discreet I make program if somebody is up for it just call". (Thursday, 08/27/2015, entrance time at 20:52). The figure ("$"), which is one of the representations of money, highlights the offering or searching for sexual services, for example: "$$olive skin" ["$$morena" in portuguese].

Other nicks, without the use of these codes, are also accessed via interactions with intention of sex /money-mediated encounter, as in the case when a user named "Jorge" said to "Carolzinha": "do you want to go out and have sex? How much do you charge?". (Thursday, 09/24/2015, entrance time at 09:23). Or when the user "I PAY Girl$secrecy" said to "Lukinhas": "hi how old?" (Friday, 09/25/2015, entrance time at 10:45).

There's also the advertising for the site "acompanhantesms.com.br" and the sale of erotic products, for example: "Loyra23 speaks to POLICE CHIEF: ## No more premature ejaculation! Have sex for as long as you want! Meet our lube gel ⇒ www.gelmaisXXX" (Sunday, 11/01/2015, entrance time at 4:46pm).

From this initial observation, tests were made to enter the chat room using different nicknames, among them: "Aninha", "Carolzinha", "Carlão", "Flor", "Leandrinho", "Marcão", "Laura", "Lukinhas", "Carlos" and "Zeus". These first tests, purposefully, were made with nicks that could not reveal the kind of affective-sexual relationship supposedly sought. With each of them, the researcher stayed in the chat room for approximately one hour, on different days and times of the week.

It was possible to notice that a greatest number of users with male nicknames got in touch with the researcher when using female nicknames and diminutive, such as when "Carolzinha" was used, which did not occur when "Laura" and "Flor" were used. A characteristic also observed was that "Carolzinha" was commonly accessed by male nicknames in the "reserved" mode more frequently than the other female nicknames not in the diminutive.

This becomes evident when the field data shows that of the thirty three

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occupants in the UOL chat room, at the time of the researcher's entry using the nickname "Carolzinha", twenty six users got in touch with her, twenty five of them with male described nicknames and only one female. At another time, when the same nickname was entered at a different time, out of the thirty nine occupants of the chat room, thirty two of them contacted the researcher, thirty of them with a male nickname.

In the case of the nickname "Laura", which was not in the diminutive, out of thirty seven users, nineteen of them got in touch with the researcher, being sixteen with a male nickname, one with a female one and two who expressed being of dissident gender and/or disparate sexualities. One possible interpretation is that the marker of difference that expressed generation was highly accessed by male users, who very often sought to talk to a woman who described herself as younger.

Of the male nicknames used by the researcher, the most accessed one was also put in the diminutive, in this case, "Leandrinho". The field showed that of the sixteen dissident gender users and/or disparate sexualities (with males nicknames), eight of them got in touch with the researcher while using the nick "Leandrinho", and only one female user, out of all thirty one occupants of the chat room. Unlike with the "Carlos" nick, which out of the thirty eight occupants of the chat room, only three got in touch, two with female "nicknames", and one who expressed being of dissenting gender and/or disparate sexuality. In the field, the search for users who express the generational social marker of youth was recurrent, especially when it was articulated with the female gender.

According to UOL chat rules, users under 18 cannot attend the chat rooms, so among the chat rooms that are grouped by age, the youngest age group available is from 18 to 20. However, the technological and virtual tool does not disable a minor person from entering any of the available chat rooms. In this case, it is not possible to know for sure how "Carolzinha" could be understood, whether it would be as a young woman or simply as a small/short woman, even if older. However, after continuously accessing the chat room, we evaluated that the probability of the diminutive in the nicknames being related by the male users to stature alone, disassociated from low age, would be much smaller.

In another moment, more descriptive nicknames in relation to affective-sexual practices and gender performances were tested: "ATVO.MADURO"[9], "H Ativo"[10], "Pass Discreto"[11], "Passivinho"[12], "Afeminado qr Macho"[13], "Gay quer dar"[14] and "Quero Ativo"[15]. Nicks with profiles such as these are refered here as indicating dissenting genders and disparate sexualities. In the chat room there are many users who, by their nickname, it is possible to interpret what they are looking for, especially regarding dissident genders and/or disparate sexualities. There is also the possibility of, differently from what is communicated with the nicknames, perceiving this by observing the "public" or "private" dialogues.

9 | "Active" is a man who, in anal intercourse with another man, prefers to penetrate his partner. "Mature" is an older user.

10 | "H" is the same as man.

11 | "Pass" is a man who, in anal intercourse with another man, prefers to be penetrated by his partner. "Discreet" is a man who is not effeminate or who does not appear to be gay.

12 | "Passivinho" is a young or small man who in anal intercourse with another man, prefers to be penetrated by his partner.

13 | "Afeminado" is a man with a voice, trejects and/or clothes considered feminine. "qr" is the abbreviation, in the language of the internet, of "want", that is, "seek" or "desire". "Macho" is a manly, masculine man who identifies himself as heterosexual.

14 | "Gay wants to give" is a gay man who wants to be passive in anal intercourse with his partner".

15 | "Quero Ativo" is a man who wants another man who, in anal intercourse, prefers to penetrate his partner.

An example of this is when the user "SEXOJA" does not describe in the nickname about sexual orientation and what is wanted in terms of sexual practice, but we understand that he is an "HSH" when, through contact via the message "reserved" for the nick "Lukinhas", which this researcher used to use, he said: "I'm a passive gay do you enjoy penetrating ass? (Sunday, October 4th, 2015, entrance time at 5:39 pm). The same occurred, for example, when the nick "H Ativo" was used. In this situation, the users who accessed the researcher were "Ryan 27", "Gabriel", "Big White Guy ["Brancão" in portuguese], "Raphael". All with nicks that, before making contact with "H Ativo", went unnoticed as people with dissident genders and/or disparate sexualities.

Another example was when "H Ripped" ["Sarado" in portuguese] asked this researcher who was in the chat room as "ATVO. MADURO": "just active?" (Monday, 10/26/2015, entrance time at 7:18 pm). Also "Grisalho Karinho" asked "Afeminado qr male": "hello, do you want a husband?" (Sunday, 01/11/2015, entrance time at 14:52). All those are users who, only in dialogue with the "nickname" used by the researcher, could be identified or not as a chat room occupant in search of homoerotic practices. The field showed that when the researcher entered with male nicknames and those presented above that express an expectation linked to homoafetivity, the greatest number of interest/demand was expressed by users who nicknamed themselves in the male.

These nicknames present, at some moments, a dynamic of interaction that Braga (2015) pointed out as one of the normative models of homoerotic partnership, for having an approximation of the traditional heterosexual practice, in which passive/female and active/masculine pairs are associated, that is, the masculinity of one depends on the feminization of the other. Moreover, in this erotic issue, men who identify themselves or are read as effeminate tend to be less appreciated.

This also occurred in the off-line ethnographic work of this researcher, who heard from one of the male interlocutors who refused to maintain a relationship with effeminate men in offline and online environments; that "discretion" in public spaces outside the Internet also had to be present in the online environment, especially when choosing the nickname in the chat. He said: "You can't choose a very flashy name that apeears as you like men or are gay. You have to choose a normal male name, like André, Paulo, João, if you want to find sex with discreet men on the internet" (notes in the field notebook). Thus,

> In the age of digital desires, the images on the screens measured searches for face-to-face encounters. Although they technologically dodge the impediment of the expression of sexual interest by people of the same sex, they do it within terms that allow the off-line encounter with security, which, in the case between men, demands that they be 'discreet'. Thus, no matter how it is expressed online, where it remains under unequal and discriminatory conditions (Miskolci, 2017: 286, authors' translation).

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Therefore, online ethnography in the UOL Corumbá chat room does not allow us to state that it may be easier to be approached by a certain desired user profile when using a description in the nickname that already informs the sexual preference and interest in the search for partners, than using a generic nickname, "a normal male name", for example. In other words, the interaction is more complex than it seems. These various plots of desire and online search, however, do not shake the practicality and objectivity in interactions with affective-sexual interest. "But probably the greatest attraction lies in the possibility of entertaining multiple and simultaneous 'flirting' by widening your chances of finding someone without exposing yourself in the same way as in offline life" (Miskolci, 2012: 4, authors' translation).

Considering this, some UOL chat rooms are focused on relationships between people classified as same-sex, such as "GLS[16] Friendship", "GLS Dating", "Gays and Related" and "GLS by location". "GLS" chat rooms are separated by "Bisexuals", "Crossdressers", "Gays", "Lesbians", "Transexuals" and "Transvestites". But, as we have seen with the analysis of the data presented here, the existence of these "specific" chat rooms is not an impediment for these users to enter and interact in local chat rooms like the ones in Corumbá, also because the local chat rooms, as previously mentioned, are facilitators for scheduling off-line meetings. About the possibility of meetings, especially with Bolivian men, living on the other side of the border, we will discuss below.

16 | GLS are acronyms that refer to gay people, lesbians and sympathizers.

CORUMBÁ ONLINE AND OFFLINE: A MEETING PLACE
THAT TRANSCENDS GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES

There is a border feature of the region that deserves to be emphasised as it has a special implication with regard to the subject of this article.

> The boundary in its most common sense is linked to prejudice because of its state of margin, and therefore marginal to a notion, arising from historical and political issues. It is a place where one can assimilate negativity, attributed by several factors such as illicit, clandestinity, miscegenation, among others. (Oliveira e Campos, 2012: 17, authors' translation).

Therefore, starting from this "negative image of common sense" built from the "state of margin" we believe it is important to problematize the evaluation that Corumbá is not a city prejudiced against the experiences of dissenting genders and disparate sexualities, different from the Bolivian side, according to the widespread local logic. A recurring phrase in the off-line ethnographic work among interlocutors living in Corumbá is that "here there is no prejudice".

This, however, has not been confirmed in online ethnography, as for example in the comments highlighted in the dialogue fragment in the chat room that we transcribe below:

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[...]

(09:22:19) carinhosorj[17] speaks to nayara: there are only faggots in this shit

(09:22:39) carinhosorj speaks to nayara: these corumbaenses[18] do not lose the habit of giving ass

(09:22:42) junior enters the chat room...

(09:22:42) NEGRO DOTADO[19] enters the chat room...

(09:22:47) carinhosorj speaks to nayara: bunch of buttfuckers

(09:23:03) carinhosorj speaks to nayara: that's why I bang your wives

(09:23:10) Amala speaks to Everyone: Are you looking for a relaxing massage?! ... EscortsMS.com.br

(09:23:14) carinhosorj speaks to nayara: you faggots

(09:23:24) junior (privately) speaks to Everyone: does anyone want to suck a dick righ now?

(09:23:28) raphael leaves the chat room...

(09:23:36) carinhosorj speaks to nayara: my bad nayara

(09:23:45) cachorra q macho[20] enters the chat room...

(09:23:49) carinhosorj speaks to nayara: there are some guys bugging me here

(09:23:50) Tarado[21] enters the chat room...

(09:23:59) carinhosorj speaks to nayara: and I typed in the wrong window

(09:24:08) carinhosorj speaks to nayara: a thousand apologies

(Friday, 02-10-2015, entrance time at 8:56 pm - authors' griffonts)

17 | In "carinhosorj", "carinhoso" is a man who seeks to be affectionate with his sexual partners, "rj" is the abbreviation of Rio de Janeiro (it is common for the users of the room, due to the presence of many people from Rio de Janeiro in the city, especially due to the presence of the Navy, to use this reference).

18 | "Corumbaenses" are people who were born in the city of Corumbá - MS.

19 | "Negro dotado," in this erotic scenario, is valued. It brings to the imagination a black man with a large genital organ.

20 | "Cachorra q macho" in this context refers to someone of the female gender who wants to relate sexually to a masculinized/virile man.

21 | "Tarado" is used to denominate a person with strong and/or uncontrollable sexual impulses.

Besides the strong sexual content of the nicknames and text messages present in the fragment, we draw attention to the fact that the user "carinhosorj" talks to "nayara", accidentally in "public" mode, directing repeated offenses to users who sought sex with other men, exposing not wanting to be "bothered" with flirting. On this aspect, the user "carinhosorj" affirms that "that's why I bang your wife", giving the impression that men who are in search of affective-sexual relationships with other men are married to women. Another characteristic of the user is his description "rj", which characterizes him as being from Rio de Janeiro, which further substantiates the space of the chat room as a place of searches for affective-sexual encounters, for those who are in the region.

In a study aimed at a chat room for gay men in the city of São Paulo, Miskolci (2009) presents some of the reasons for creating links on these online sites, whether they are homoafetive relationships or friendships, which seems appropriate to us to also think about the border reality here under discussion:

[...] most of them never wanted (or were able) to expose themselves in a way that was clearly gay or lesbian. These individuals, who for the most diverse reasons (geographic, economic, pure and simple prejudice), consider themselves "out of the way", found on the web a way to meet partners and even make friends without the burden of exposing their erotic interests in public space (Idem: 176, authors' translation).

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In the context of Corumbá, according to the study of elderly men with homosexual conducts in the Pantanal of Mato Grosso do Sul, Passamani (2018) corroborates this same analysis in relation to off-line visibility. According to this author, these men are interested in how the visibility of a certain sexual orientation or gender identity will be interpreted by others and, in addition, what can result from this interpretation, especially with regard to forms of violence, prejudice, and discrimination. According to him, because of this, there is a recurrent "mapping" of bodies and behaviors, which makes people control and manage degrees and strategies of visibility according to the places in which they are circulating and interacting.

To better understand the "control" and "administration" of visibility in Corumbá, it is necessary to understand that gossip is an omnipresent phenomenon in the place, it "is part of social learning in the city and is widely recognized as a local phenomenon of high intensity" (Costa, 2018: 403, authors' translation). According to Costa,

> Gossip is not only about a moral judgment on conduct that is not "correct" or "normal", or a dominant moral model, but mainly gossip seeks to achieve an end, which may be the dismissal of a rival, the removal of a person from the city, or the separation of a couple, for example, using, for this purpose, a "grammar" of the moral values in force, to achieve personal reputation. Thus, to achieve a practical end, gossip is used as a tactic or strategy, which uses the normalizing and moral standards in force to reach certain people or groups (Idem: 415-416, authors' translation).

This corroborates the fact that the use of online media, such as social networks and the chat rooms themselves, are ways of enabling "safer" transits of these users; a strategic form of self-protection, which can be read as a question of problematizing the idea that in offline relationships there is no prejudice in the city when the issue is gender dissent and/or disparate sexuality.

Rubin (1984), although in relation to another period and historical context, has already stated how "dissident sexuality" is rarer and, at the same time, more closely watched in small towns or rural areas when compared to large centres. In this study, although we can understand Corumbá as an "inland" city of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, we find an intense interaction (such as the border and fishing tourism) that allows us to think how much it differs from other "inland" cities. More specifically, we have to think about how much being a border city marks these relationships.

The phrase 'there is no gay there[22]', addressed to the border towns on the Bolivian side, is very recurrent among many gay, transvestite and transgendered men, or effeminate men, living in Corumbá, and can, together with the phrase 'there is no prejudice here', also be seen as a mechanism for producing differences in terms of nationality. It is as if the border had only the side of the "Other" and there were different "from here" in terms of living without prejudice around dissenting genders

22 | Gay, according to what we have seen, both online and offline, is anemic category that generally refers to a varied set of identity experiences, including those of transvestites and transsexuals

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and disparate sexualities. There is, therefore, a certain "strategic" invisibility that characterizes part of the discourse about the "Other". We use "strategic" here in the sense of what this invisibility makes possible, in terms of the production of differences, not necessarily conscious and calculated, but as highly productive of meanings in the contexts of local power relations.

Gay visibility in Corumbá is high, for example, due to the leadership present in the production of the samba school parades at Carnival, the performances of bands and fanfares from public and private schools, the June parties and their very well choreographed quadrille, the dance performances and contests of Miss Gay and Carnival Gay Muse. All these events put the city in a valuable spotlight in the state. This visibility, however, does not seem to threaten the "heterosexual culture" - where "a set of sexual practices is confused with the amorous plot of intimacy and with family values that constitute of deep and visible significance belonging to society" (Berlant and Warner, 2002: 237, authors' translation). A sign of this is that the chat room itself is so often and mostly frequented by men in search of sexual affective relations with other men under "discretion" and "secrecy", as already discussed here.

The assessment that there are no gays on the other side of the border, both online and offline ethnography, has shown that this is not the case. According to what we could observe, part of the users who were from other locations than Corumbá, used in the description of the nickname the place where they were from, for example, "travesty bolivi"[23], "travesti boli"[24], and "***boliviano***"[25]. It was through the nicknames that we were able to identify users from Bolivia, but it is not possible to say which city they are from. In the off-line ethnographic experience we were also able to find gays and transvestites who lived in the border cities on the Bolivian side and had contacts with Brazilians in Corumbá, including affective-sexuals, many under "secret".

However, even though the city of Corumbá is a place of attraction for residents of neighboring Bolivian municipalities, the number of Bolivian users in the chat room, identified as such, is very small. "Publicly", even being in the chat room, "public" dialogues between them and other users cannot be observed. We believe it is because of the problematic common sense about the border cities and some prejudices on the part of the Corumbaan population, as characterized by Costa:

> The presence of Bolivians in Corumbá is seen as a "social problem", above all by the local
> elite, but with a prejudice spread by other sectors of society, and there is, in speech and
> in practice, the reproduction of prejudice and stigmatization towards Bolivians and their
> descendants. These conflicts that emerge in the region reveal processes of exclusion and
> social construction of social stigma, which are reinforced by the common sense negative
> image , referring to the border as an area of drug and arms trafficking, smuggling and
> product counterfeiting. (2013a, p.144, authors' translation).

23 | "Travesty bolivi" is a user who identifies with the female gender, but at birth she was designated by the male "gender", and lives in Bolivia.

24 | "Travesti boli" has the same meaning as the user "Travesty bolivi".

25 | "bolivian" is a man born in Bolivia.

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It is known that, commonly, many Brazilians discriminate against Bolivians, and this type of relation happens in the interactions in different orders, both economic and marketing (Costa, 2013b), but, as part of the ethnography performed by this researcher outside the chat room shows, this also occurs in the field of affective-sexual desire, as denying the existence of gays in Bolivian cities bordering Brazil in the region of Corumbá and pointed out that, unlike the Corumbaenses, they are prejudiced in terms of gender and sexuality. It is quite common the evaluation of Brazilians who seek sex with men that they, the Bolivians, are not beautiful and attractive. This type of discrimination occurs even though there are many cases, especially among people of a lower social class, of marriages and the formation of heterosexual families among people of these two nationalities (Costa, 2013a; Esselin [et al], 2012).

Thus, we can think that the hierarchical classification between "good sex" (normal, natural, healthy, sacred) and "bad sex" (abnormal, unnatural, sick, sinful) pointed out by Rubin (1984) is still profitable for us to think about the relations between dissenting genders and disparate sexualities in contemporaneity, however, the border issue (here, also in relation to geographical space, and not exclusively symbolic), seems to be a contextualizing and updating factor of such reflection. In other words, in the region of Corumbá, besides the "good sex" being heterosexual, monogamous, reproductive, between generations of close ages, it is also necessary to be of the same nationality.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results of the analyses show how important online ethnography is when we propose to study socioculturally mediated human relations in Internet times. It shows us how much online environments are also discursive places and, in this case, to a certain extent, produce effects of subjectivations in the social groups that observe it and are inserted in it, in *continuum* with the off-line spaces, that is, in consonance the spaces are producing prejudice and discrimination.

We have seen that generational performance is a social marker of difference that stands out in users within the field presented in online ethnography. That is, it was observed that there is a greater demand for people who put their nicknames in the diminutive and, in general, this demand comes from the male nicknames, especially when the nick expresses being of the female gender. In other words, when the researcher used nicknames that described her in the feminine and diminutive, as when she used "Carolzinha," the access by male users increased.

However, the UOL Corumbá chat rooms, in erotic terms, mainly involve a large number of male users seeking sex with other men, if we compare it with the total number of its members on the different days and times that we could observe. These male users seem to seek the "safety" and "protection" from the

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online environment for interacting; this is a sign that the city has, as characteristics, prejudices regarding the experiences of people with dissenting genders and disparate sexualities. This kind of prejudice appears in prejudiced reactions in the chat room, and can be a data that problematizes the local perception that the city has no prejudice.

Also, we found transvestites in the chat room who are Bolivian. This, added to the experiences of the off-line field, which allowed us to find gays who live on the other side of the border, shows that the phrase "there's no gay there" is, together with "here there's no prejudice", a mechanism of production of a devalued "Other". After all, the gay visibility in Corumbá is a valuable differential not only in relation to Bolivia, but also in the Mato Grosso do Sul context. In no way does this mean, however, that "heterosexual culture" is being threatened. Rather, they point out that the norms and conventions involving the "discretion" of those who are somehow not corresponding to the gender intelligibility matrix have reinforced national belonging experiences in border contexts in the face of a disqualified "Other".

In this context, it can be concluded that the online environment provides different possibilities for people to experience the same and/or other forms of experimentation of their gender and sexuality. As Leitão e Gomes (2018) stated, digital platforms can be seen as laboratories for new experiments of their own. These experimentations as presented throughout the article were present in the attempts of dialogue with the researcher, through the choices of the user's "nicknames", or even through the conversations sent to the "public" of the chat room. These expressions showed non-normative practices of desire, that is, that transgresses a heteronormative norm, evident mainly in the search of men for sex with other men.

Finally, chat rooms cannot be considered a "world apart", because sexual practices, or even just meetings, take place in different regions of the city, in off-line spaces, that is, the chat room appears as a mediator of desires. In addition, it has been realized that a city characterized differently from the so-called "global" cities, is also producing new forms of communication, characteristic of modernization.

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CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORSHIP:

Carla Cristina de Souza contributed to the conception and analysis of data, writing, discussion of results, realization of the online ethnographic field and review of the article. **Tiago Duque** contributed to the conception and analysis of data, writing, discussion of results, realization of the off-line ethnographic field and review of the article.

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