



Challenging monogamy: a statement of intent

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The special issue you have in your hands arose from a somewhat peculiar premise: we preferred not to be very clear, beforehand, about what it was going to be about. It may seem a risky bet for a “thematic” issue, but the truth is that we only had a set of concerns related to the cultural imperative of monogamy that, on closer inspection, did not even seem to point in the same direction.

We knew, for example, that we did not want to focus on polyamorous relationships, open couples or free relationships, nor on ethical or political non-monogamy, consensual or non-consensual. Nor did we want to focus on the relational styles of swinger networks, kink sexualities or BDSM. Neither did we want to focus on the proposals of relationship anarchy. In the same way, we did not want to dedicate this issue to the legal life of monogamy, nor to the intimate relations between state, citizenship and mononormativity. We also decided not to limit our proposal to exploring the intersections - and tensions - that arise between resistance to monogamy and feminist, anti-racist or LGBTQIAPN+ struggles. Similarly, we did not feel it appropriate to devote this issue to something like the study of “non-monogamy” in Brazil, Abya Yala or the multiple souths of the planet, or to the possible coalitions between decolonisation and de-monogamisation of the world. It is true that we wanted to open up a space where we could talk about all of this, and other things. But, above all, we hoped that this issue would serve to raise a question that underlies these topics without ultimately being reduced to any of them.

Let us try, then, to formulate it as a chain of interrelated questions: whether monogamy privileges certain forms of relationship while signalling others as a threat and as the “other” of politics in the neoliberal framework (CARDOSO, 2014, p. 61) and whether it can therefore be considered a central element of biopolitics, straddling “between discipline and regulation” (BARBOSA, 2015, p. 16), whether it even operates as a “system of organisation” of our sexual



and affective lives (VASALLO, 2018, p.33), which sedimented its moral force in a Eurocentric-rooted public order (PÉREZ NAVARRO, 2023); and if it has extended its influence and even today imposes its weight as part of the colonial legacy (NÚÑEZ, 2023), is its hegemony absolute? Has it ever been? Or is it beset by multiple fronts, incapable of fulfilling its own ideals and resolving its internal contradictions? How can we understand the history of monogamy (even European monogamy, *strictu sensu*) as a complex history, in permanent instability and renegotiation, and thus avoid visions that redefine it while questioning it (FOUCAULT 2021; PHILIPS and REAY, 2011)? What would be, from this point of view, the spaces of dissidence or, indeed, of the ongoing revolution that announces another possible world, other modes of affection, alternative forms of kinship, another sexual culture and another legal order? What does defying monogamy consist of, today?

Critical non-monogamy studies

Revolution. The word makes us hesitate, and with good reason. We reiterate it here, at the beginning of this introduction, however, to point out that there seem to be deeper links than we usually recognise between the transformation of our relational cultures and the goals of a broad range of struggles for social transformation. As Wendy Z. Goldman (1993) observes, no revolutionary movement has at any time failed to consider, with greater or lesser success, the transfiguration of the everyday order of affects, of kinship relations, and of reproductive and child-rearing projects. We were reminded of this by revolutionary feminists such as Alexandra Kollontai (2020), when she urged us to reflect on how the emancipation of a subject called the “working class” depended on its ability to free itself from the domestic family order. How could we overthrow the ruling class if we were primarily concerned with the needs of our small reproductive unit? Emma Goldman (1993) asked a similar question, with crude irony: “Why should I join a union? I’m going to get married, to have a home”; several other authors from Eastern Europe made Marxist critiques of marriage and monogamy since the early 20th century (LÓRÁND *et al.*, 2024). In both cases, although with almost opposite assumptions about the role of the state and about the possibilities of reformulating kinship relations, the abandonment of monogamy is conceived as a way of reconstructing community life and, at the same time, as a condition for social transformation.

The opposite, unfortunately, is also true. The imposition of a single family model has been used as a way of limiting our possibilities of collective resistance; it is no coincidence that the far-right is obsessed with defending the “natural family”. The strategy is well known and dates back at least to the expansion of monotheism in Europe (EVANS, 1978) and to the processes of



colonisation, whose effects on the forms of kinship organisation in non-European societies are well known. As part of a civilising project, the binarisms of gender and sexuality even sought to delimit who could be considered human and who could not (NÚÑEZ *et al.*, 2021), in ways that continue, moreover, in clear contemporary circulation (CARDOSO, ROSA and SILVA, 2021).

Such effects often acquired a dual aspect, necro and biopolitical at the same time (BENTO, 2018), which manifested itself in a very eloquent way in the vicinity of the place where this issue was published. Indeed, in the territories of the present-day Brazilian state of Bahia, some ideologues of the slave regime argued that, after the systematic dispossession of ancestral ways of organising kinship for enslaved people, it was time to restore the gender ratio and thus encourage the formation of stable family ties between them, since their absence “made for a population that had less to lose by flight or other forms of resistance” (SCHWARTZ, 2020, p. 1297). Ironically, therefore, the multiplication of resistance communities such as those constituted in Palmares led to a defence of the family order as a “benevolent” tool to sustain the plantation regime and to combat, in passing, illicit unions, ephemeral ties, non-heterosexual practices and even masturbation (MAESTRI, 1996, p. 9). From this point of view, the *quilombos*¹ were also, along with many indigenous communities, spaces of resistance to the imposition of the monogamous and heterocentric model of organisation of sexuality and kinship that we know as the “nuclear family”. In this sense, they occupy a little-recognised place in the genealogy of the heterogeneous community experiences which, from very different historical, racial and class coordinates, have participated in the same leitmotiv: let’s make communes and not families.

In their own way, this was what happened with the beatniks, with the hippie movement, with psychedelia made flesh, with the legacy of May ‘68, among other utopian experiences of the twentieth century which, although all of them weighed down by their internal contradictions and, ultimately, by their belonging to reality, opened new horizons for the political imagination. As if they were pirate ships - to steal Foucault’s metaphor (2013) - adrift in an ancient world. A little later, local and transnational networks took part in the same impulse, which sought to make “polyamory” a way of recovering the potential of the radical sexual cultures of the sixties and seventies (EASTON and HARDY, 2013). They claimed for themselves, in the process, a mixture of Greek (poly-, meaning many) and Latin (-amor) roots that was popularised by the publication of a “glossary of relational terminology” by a neo-pagan community in California,

¹ Communities established by enslaved people who escaped from the plantation regime, often in remote or hard-to-access areas. In these communities, a rich blend of social, economic, and cultural practices developed, including Indigenous influences, creating spaces of resistance and autonomy. The term also highlights the historical and contemporary legacy of these communities in the struggle for social justice and cultural preservation.



which introduced it to refer to “people who had romantic and sexual relationships with more than one person simultaneously, or who wished to do so, and who recognised the right of others to do so” (CARDOSO, 2010, p. 11). Since then, driven by the wave of the internet and with the help of email distribution lists, first, and then social networks, a growing number of informal communities in the big cities of the United States, Europe and Latin America have transformed this term into a referent with an identitarian air and transnational reach.

Of course, like any heterotopia, none of these polyamorous communities, networks and communities was exempt from reproducing the multitude of norms, binarisms and hierarchies that pervade society as a whole. In some cases, they even invented new sets of norms that, according to some, made the relational styles of polyamorous relationships increasingly rigid. As a result, the turn of the millennium saw the development of a progressive critique of the lack of attention to power differentials associated with gender, race and class, among other factors, in the theory and practice of polyamorous relationships, which gained momentum with the incorporation of critical perspectives from intersectional feminism, decolonial studies and queer studies (HARITAWORN, LIN and KLESSE, 2006). Encouraged by these critiques, proposals such as relational anarchy, originating in Sweden, have emerged with the intention of bringing Goldman-style anarchist principles to the realm of interpersonal relations (BARKER and LANGDRIDGE, 2010). Discussions in this regard go beyond the problem of denominations, however, as they point to open, cross-cutting debates that traverse a multitude of groups and communities seeking to construct alternatives to the monogamous organisation of affections, desires and, not least, kinship relations.

Brazil: the South of monogamy

In this respect, each geography has its own stories to tell, which often bear little resemblance to those of their “peers” in the Global North. A good example is the case of Brazil, where non-monogamous forms of organising affects are still common among indigenous peoples who have survived the processes of evangelisation and state regulation of kinship relations. This is the case of the Zo’é, in the north of Pará, who practice both polyandry and polygyny, and of the Mehinaku, originally from Mato Grosso, who conceive of paternity as a process that requires the participation of several paternal figures, in the biological sense of the term, and who consequently recognise several fathers who reinforce the processes of upbringing (BECKERMAN AND VALENTINE, 2002). In the same vein, it is worth mentioning the living legacy of native peoples who, like the Guarani, establish and re-establish their affective-sexual ties in more flexible ways (NÚÑEZ,



2023) than the “until death do us part”, which so sinisterly resonates with the figures of femicides, so characteristic of hierarchical, patriarchal and monogamous relationships all over the world. We do not evoke these examples here, by the way, to romanticise the forms of relationship of any existing community. These are not models to be taken as new norms, nor as fuel for the exaltation of revolutionary subjects installed in the geographical centres of power. There are differences and specificities in the relational practices of the various communities that must, it seems to us, be recognised and honoured as such. In recalling them, our aim is rather to escape from anthropological narcissism, as proposed by Viveiros de Castro (2015), to remember that not only are there other possible worlds, but that they are often to be found in this one.

Another important particularity is the fact that, in Brazil, the space that polyamory occupied in other contexts developed in tension with the proposals of the Free Relationships Network (RLi), “the first organisation in the country to dedicate itself exclusively to the theme of love and sexuality in political and social actions of resistance to monogamous heterosexual hegemony” (BARBOSA, 2011, 54; our translation), which emerged in the context of the first World Social Forum and, therefore, closely linked to the search for alternatives to neoliberal policies. According to Marco Rodrigues, one of its founders, its influences ranged from libertarian feminism to the anarchism of Roberto Freire, including the sexual pedagogies of Regina Navarro Lins and the literature of polyamory itself. It is worth noting that, over time, their aims also included the formation of a community experience that was aborted by the change in housing policy following the 2016 conservative “coup” that ousted Dilma from power - exemplifying the strong impact that “anti-gender crusades” have had on relational dissidence.

This movement, which is still active in several cities, was one of the breeding grounds for the emergence of other associative proposals which, with “non-monogamies” as an umbrella term, now organise activities and meetings in many Brazilian cities. Finally, learning from these experiences but also responding to their shortcomings, collectives have emerged that have placed intersectionality, the particularities of the Brazilian Northeast, and anti-racist struggles at the forefront of their challenges to monogamy.

The State of the matter

Meanwhile, family law is all too often invoked to deny state protections to those who do not fit the monogamous assumptions of the nuclear family. This became evident, following the example of Brazil, when an association very concerned about the advances of “gender ideology” submitted a complaint to the National Council of Justice (CNJ) to prevent notaries’ offices from



continuing to publicly attest stable relationships between more than two people. The latter followed the CNJ's negative recommendation, thus interrupting the momentum of the first *triad*, which did so in Tupã, in the interior of São Paulo (PILÃO 2021; PORTO, 2022), and thus triggering a media debate that crossed borders.

Fortunately, antagonistic interpretations of the monogamous limits of the law are increasingly frequent and have served to expand the boundaries of state recognition. This happened in 2021 with the so-called “polyamory ruling” in the Mexican state of Puebla, which authorised marriage between more than three people (LEPPE, 2020). More recently, in Rio Grande do Sul, a stable relationship between three people was also recognised by a court ruling (IBDFAM, 2023). There are also, as if in dribs and drabs, in Brazil and elsewhere, birth registrations that include three surnames to reflect a parenting plan with three maternal or paternal figures, as well as the division of parental authority between more than two persons (IBDFAM, 2022). On other occasions, attempts have been made to address restrictions on access to health care, as in the case of a regulation in the city of Sommerville, Massachusetts, to extend health insurance coverage during the Covid-19 crisis to members of non-monogamous relationships (ELLEN, 2020), and which, in the meantime, has already expanded to nearby cities (MATSUMURA, 2022). In the chapter on exceptions, we would also like to highlight a historical regulation as a reparation for the imposition of monogamy during the colonisation process:

Art. 178, § 5º The stable union between *an indigenous insured person and more than one partner*, in a polygamous or polyandrous regime, duly proven before the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), shall be recognised for social security purposes (our translation, emphasis added).²

However, in practice, the implementation of this article encounters many barriers, starting with the fact that most indigenous lands in Brazil have not been ratified, which means that the identity of indigenous people living in these territories or in the cities is also silenced, which in turn makes it difficult or impossible to present the required evidence to FUNAI, as well as to access the corresponding rights (NÚÑEZ, 2022). In addition, religious racism continues to advance through catechisation and evangelisation in indigenous territories, which also has an impact on conversion to monogamy.

Generally speaking, however, non-monogamous relationships continue to be subject to rights discriminations that are reminiscent of the struggles that have been waged in recent decades, and are still being waged in so many places, for gay and lesbian relationships (cf. Rye

2 Instrução Normativa Pres/Inss N° 128, de 28 de março de 2022.



(2024). These include, to give a few examples, lack of protection in tax and property matters, lack of protections to care for partners in the event of accidents, illness, hospital admissions, or mourning for close relatives. In addition, people in non-monogamous relationships often face the impossibility of facilitating residency or nationalisation procedures for their relationships, not to mention the widespread criminalisation of the crime of bigamy for those who seek to circumvent such restrictions. Polygamous migrants are also regularly denied assembly rights, and in many countries deportation is common for applications relating to assembly rights or any other rights arising from family ties. Monogamy operates, in short, as a way of unequally distributing citizenship rights (PÉREZ NAVARRO, 2017; PORTO, 2018) and also, as Yarlenis Malfrán and Andreone Teles Medrado remind us in this issue, as an instrument for the surveillance of the nation's physical and symbolic borders.

We certainly do not believe that the fight against such discrimination can be waged in identity-based terms. The very close relations between the legal order and the moral order force us to build bridges and bonds of solidarity across diverse communities, sexualities and relational dissidences that conflict, with or without explicit legal challenges, with the imperatives of monogamy. Would we say, in this sense, that sex workers do not challenge the dictates of monogamy? Do they not bear and resist the effects of its historical weight, of its way of making us subjects of a familial moral order that finds in monogamy its structuring principle? And don't queer sexual countercultures, from cruising spaces to the queerification of kinship in vogue houses, also constitute the abject reverse of the monogamous and heterocentric family order? Or dyke dissidence? One need only read authors such as Monique Wittig (WITTIG, 1980) or Gayle Rubin (RUBIN, 1975) to discover that the distinction between heterosexuality and monogamy is very difficult to establish clearly. Not forgetting, of course, trans* and *travesti*³ resistance. As Dean Spade shows us in a beautiful text that we translated to close this issue, there are many more relationships than we usually think between gender dissidence and relational dissidence. From this point of view, the cannon that shattered the body of Xica Manicongo - claimed as "Brazil's first black transvestite" (NASCIMENTO 2021, p. 2) - was not only charged by whiteness and the binary conception of gender, but was also a weapon of the monogamous and heterocentric family order.

The heterogeneity of the open fronts in this regard is such that it seems to us that it requires

³ According to the National Association of Travestis and Transsexuals of Brazil (ANTRA), *travesti* is a term that refers to "people who experience a feminine gender construction, opposite to the sex designation assigned at birth, followed by a physical construction of a permanent nature, which is identified in social, family, cultural, and interpersonal life through this identity" (our translation).



more than a regime of exceptionality made up of *ad hoc* patches. Relational dissidence seems to be pushing in the direction of a profound transformation of the way in which the state relates to the relational sphere, leading, perhaps, to the conception of a true post-monogamous public order.

Synergies

These, then, are the questions that served as the starting point for this thematic issue. It seems that we were not the only ones asking similar questions, as the proposals for articles came in, despite the unexpected technical difficulties that accompanied the process, to the point of overflowing the peer review process. We would therefore like to take this opportunity to apologise to those whom we were unable to read due to the vagaries of the electronic age, and to thank all those who submitted papers that were not finally published due to space limitations. We would also like to thank the volunteers who responded to our request for help when it became evident that the journal's regular reviewers were overwhelmed.

In retrospect, we can think that the good reception of our call for papers was closely related to the events that, in one way or another, prepared the ground for this issue. This began to be conceived at the two-day symposium entitled “Defying monogamy: sexuality and kinship in times of crisis”, held at the 5th International Conference of the Ibero-American Network for the Socio-historical Study of Sexualities, held in Natal in September 2022, which was promoted by the organisers of this issue, with the exception of Daniel Cardoso, who joined shortly afterwards. Also important for its dissemination in Brazil was the I Seminário Nacional de Estudos em Não-monogâmias: Pesquisas e Perspectivas held in August 2023 in São Paulo, organised by the group Políticas, Afetos e Sexualidades Não-monogâmicas of the Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF), to which Mónica Barbosa belongs. The strong transnational character of this issue was further reinforced by the holding of the 4th Non-Monogamy and Contemporary Intimacies Conference (NMCI), which brought together activists, artists and researchers on non-monogamy from more than 15 countries and from native communities such as the Mapuche people, and whose objectives included shifting the focus of the discussions in its previous editions in Lisbon, Vienna and Barcelona to the South. Both Daniel Cardoso, as a member of the international committee, and Pablo Pérez Navarro, as part of the local committee, participated in the organisation of this event, where the preliminary versions of some of the works included in this issue were presented. This is the case of the text by Juan Carlos Pérez Cortés on relational anarchy, as well as those by Norma Mogrovejo and Christian Klesse. From different perspectives, these latter works explore decolonial perspectives on non-monogamy, which Geni Núñez, in Brazil, has also helped to explore in depth



-although she was unable to accept the invitation to attend the IV NMCI precisely because it coincided with the launch of her new book (2023) on these issues.

This issue

One need only glance at the titles of the texts gathered here to realise that this is a geographically, linguistically and theoretically promiscuous dossier that in no way aspires to consensus. Far from being a limitation, we hope that its heterogeneity will make it a contribution to the field of critical studies on non-monogamy, in which everyone can find tools to stimulate thought, intensify life and enable the most pleasurable and unexpected forms of collective resistance.

Even a summary description of all the articles in this issue would make this introduction too long. However, we want to show how the various theoretical contributions mentioned above are visible in the way the authors have structured their reflections and writings. Thus, we consider that five major sub-themes can be identified in this issue.

First (in order of quantity), we have several articles that present in some way the political potentials (and risks) associated with non-monogamy and dissident affects. In addition to the emblematic article by Eleanor Wilkinson, which we translate here for the first time into Portuguese, and another translation of a famous text by Dean Spade, we have the works of Guilherme Souza Prado et al., Gabriela Campos dos Santos, Kelvin Araújo da Nóbrega Dias, Ghabriel Ibrahim, Christian Klesse, Juan Carlos Pérez-Cortés, Pablo Pérez Navarro and Camila Ribeiro Castro Soares. Viewed as a whole, we can find in these texts a critical but positive stance that identifies central lines of force in the resistance to mononormative processes and situates them in a vision of kyriarchy (FIORENZA, 1993), which amplifies their analytical and political power. These articles, essays, reflections and studies are of particular importance for anyone seeking radical approaches to rethinking the political.

Secondly, we find several articles that analyse colonialism, the affective and familial practices of various ethno-racial groups, otherness in the face of white sameness - in short, mononormativity as inextricable from colonial processes. It is also here that we find an analysis of the processes linked to colonial racialisation from a perspective that does not focus on Anglocentric discourses, showing that knowledge and knowledge about racial otherness also need to be contextually situated and intertwined. We have contributions here by Norma Mogrovejo, Ana Gabriela Millaleo Hernandez, Thereza Queiroz Santos, Giovana Carla de Jesus Santos, Lidia Sousa Santos and Letícia Cardoso Barreto, Rhuann Fernandes and Júlia Fleury Ferreira, as well as Yarlenis Malfrán and Andreone Teles Medrado. If it is true that there is a clear bias in the academic



production on non-monogamy that focuses on the experiences of Western white hegemony, it is no less true that the counter-examples that are given tend to be almost exclusively by black authors from the United States, thus proceeding to a systematic erasure of non-English-speaking racialised experiences - we hope that this issue will serve to combat this erasure.

Third, there are contributions that focus, in various ways, on the role that the study of non-monogamy and the critique of mononormativity can play in the broader field of sexuality studies, especially from an intersectional perspective (CRENSHAW, 2008). These texts and studies range from empirical analyses of how people negotiate their lives and relationships, to more theoretical reflections on the specificity of analysing relational structures within the field of sexuality. In this grouping we find texts by Ana Luiza Morais, Antônio Pilão, Kaippe Arnon Silva Reis, Alice dos Santos Silva and Arthur Fiel, Saru Jorge Vidal, Rahil Roodsaz and Katrin De Graeve, in addition to the interview conducted by Ana Soares Teixeira et al. with Antônio Pilão. We believe that these texts may be particularly useful for those who conduct research and wish to incorporate this element, as well as for those who seek to understand the nuances of contemporary relational dynamics, in all their ambivalence.

Another area of analysis that is gaining relevance and attention is that of media systems and their uses. Some of the articles in this issue analyze literature, social networks, YouTube... These texts allow us to better understand how, in times of deep mediatization (COULDRY and HEPP, 2016), media cannot be thought of as a “mirror” of reality, but as a process of co-production of it, as a sociocultural activity, just like any other form of interpersonal communication. Basically, the media partially shape how we define “social” and, therefore, everything that happens socially. These articles, we hope, will advance studies on media and audiences and, like the seminal work of Mimi Schippers (2016, 2019), help us better understand the various facets of (non) normative relational lives. We are thinking here of the authors Arthur Lopes, Luiz Osório Xavier, Maria Luiza Lopes, Michele Escoura, and Ítalo Vinícius Gonçalves.

Less numerous, but no less important, are the works that focus on the role of monogamy in the context of gender-based violence and violence against sexual dissidence. The articles by Adriano Beiras and Camila Maffioletti Cavaler, and Dayane do Carmo Barretos *et al.*, are fundamental in keeping alive and present the practicality and materiality of everyday violence. A transversal and situated look at violence in intimacy, and femicide in particular, should lead us to analyse the role that compulsory monogamy plays in the construction of possessive relationships that limit autonomy. The study of violence in intimacy (or domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, depending on currents, countries and disciplines) has much to benefit from these theoretical and



empirical contributions. Finally, we hope that the result of the process of elaboration of this dossier - a laborious process for all the people who make *Periódicus* possible - will allow us to deepen, and to *queer*, our relations with affects (not only academic) and their effects.

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