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Foucault and Homosexuality: From Power Relation to Practice of Freedom*

Foucault y homosexualidad: de la relación de poder a la práctica de la libertad

Julia Sandra Bernal Crespo**
Carlos Andrés Orozco Arcieri***
Viridiana Molinares Hassan****

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** Doctor of Law of the Universidad Nacional a Distancia, Researcher professor of Law of the Universidad del Norte. Barranquilla (Colombia). sbernal@uninorte.edu.co

*** Doctor of Law with specialty in sociology juridical-criminal of the Universitat de Barcelona, Researcher professor of Law of the Universidad del Norte. Barranquilla (Colombia). corozco@uninorte.edu.co

**** Doctor of Public Law and philosophy juridical-political of the Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona, Researcher professor of Law of the Universidad del Norte. Barranquilla (Colombia). vmolinar@uninorte.edu.co

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Abstract

Thirty years after the death of Michel Foucault, this article seeks to vindicate the work of the well-known philosopher and psychologist. Specifically, we discuss the advantages of Foucault's method, the ways in which he obtained results, his opinions and his critical analyses of the history of sexuality in the West. To this end, we present a brief biographical introduction to Foucault in which we link his theoretical and existential concerns. Subsequently, we review Foucault's method, goals, results and proposals for research on sexuality.

Keywords: Foucault, homosexuality, genealogy, sexuality, normalisation.

Resumen:

A 30 años de su muerte, en este artículo pretendemos reivindicar la obra de Michel Foucault, en particular evidenciar las ventajas de su método, las formas a través de las cuales obtuvo sus resultados, sus opiniones y sus análisis críticos sobre la historia de la sexualidad en Occidente. Para ello realizamos una breve introducción a los aspectos biográficos de nuestro autor, con el fin de enlazar sus preocupaciones teóricas con sus preocupaciones existenciales. Posteriormente revisamos su método, su objetivo, sus resultados y sus propuestas en torno a la investigación sobre la sexualidad.

Palabras clave: Foucault, homosexualidad, genealogía, sexualidad, normalización.

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INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault, p. philosopher and psychologist. Foucault was born in 1926 and died in June 1984 of human immunodeficiency virus infection / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) (Gros, 2007, p. 25). Sexual orientation, p. homosexual. Foucault lived his life in Europe. He spent his adolescence during the Second World War in occupied France. The occupation harmonised with France's paradoxical nature, which promulgates freedom and equality but excludes and represses diversity because it is not within the norm. According to Eribon (2004, p. 50), the repression and ostracism were so brutal that secrecy imposed itself as a suffered, accepted necessity; there was a need to lead a double life. This was an era of repression, when homosexuals had to live in 'shame' and 'secrecy', 'destined' to suffer as victims of repressive violence. Foucault fought to overcome depression but attempted suicide in 1948. He was obsessively interested in determining the causes of his depression, which led to his interest in psychology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry (Eribon, 2004, p. 52). Foucault lived in exile in Sweden in 1955 to escape the restrictions that entrapped him (Eribon, 2004, p. 54). This period of exile contributed to his reflection on himself, i.e., on how a homosexual should fight daily repression and disciplinary techniques.

May 1968 caused an outbreak of struggle and resistance against submission, p. gay movements, anti-psychiatry movements, the student riots. These movements did not seek power. Rather, they reclaimed the possibility for the subject to fully control his or her life without being subjected to the power and knowledge of others. These struggles sought the freedom to display sexual diversity. It was a fight against the prejudices and penal regulations that sanction individuals for who they are, not for their behaviour.

After May 1968, Foucault began studying the mechanisms of power and gradually freed himself from the normative networks of repression. He began to feel freer about speaking out publically. In *A Dialogue on Power,* which Foucault wrote with Gilles Deleuze (1995, p. 18), he argued that the protests were the expression of dissident voices that

cannot be pigeonholed. These voices represented a counter-discourse that sought to normalise homosexuality in society and that tried to transform a culture of repression into one of affectivity and to educate people sentimentally regarding the interpersonal relations of friendship and solidarity.

Foucault (1999) committed himself to the struggle of minorities, i.e., those who had been classified as "others", the excluded, those who lived lives that were removed from what was thought to be "normal". This effort expressed an incitement to break with dogmas, norms, myths and representations. In 1971, together with lawyers, journalists, doctors and psychologists, Foucault formed the Prison Information Group (PIG). This group started to compile information collected from individuals who had prison experience or information about prison –primarily regarding prisoners– to create an opportunity to discuss what occurs in prisons. The goal was to formulate what is intolerable, p. the violence of power relations (Gros, 2007, p. 20). The focus of Foucault's attention, as it was for his study on madness, was finding the line that separates the "normal" man from an imprisoned man (Eribon, 2004, p. 276).

Foucault's personal malaise was what forced him to isolate, distance and question himself regarding institutions and their foundations. He sought to trace that malaise back to its conception, its birth[1], and write its history. His aim was to demonstrate that what seems evident in the world around us, in our knowledge, in the norms that regulate our behaviour, in our ways of thinking and in our reality can be questioned. He believed that because institutions are the product of history and not innate they can be transformed using historic action.

It is also important to note Foucault's militant participation in the homosexual movement, which complemented his final research projects dedicated to the history of sexuality, particularly the projects published in the magazine *Gai-Pied* (Burguière, 2009, p. 257).

[1] See *The Birth of the Clinic,* in *Discipline and Punish,* subtitled *The Birth of the Prison.*

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FOUCAULT'S METHOD

Foucault's method is genealogical. This form of cultural history provides an account of the constitution of knowledge, discourses, and dominions over objects (Foucault, 2010a, p. 384). With this method, Foucault wished to discover the system of thinking, the form of rationality, that underlies certain ideas and practices in certain historical and geographical moments (Foucault, 1996, p. 145). Foucault (1996, p. 21) states that each culture defines in its own specific way the area of its suffering, of anomalies, deviations, disturbances. For Foucault, each culture contains a coherent set of dividing lines (e.g., the prohibition of incest, the delimitation of madness, the exclusion of a religion or religions) and that from the moment the limits are defined, the possibility of violating them appears. This space for transgression, both confined and open, has its own laws in such a way that for each era it makes up what could be called the "transgression system" (Foucault, 1996, p. 13).

Foucault used this method to construct a history of sexuality because through this history it was possible to analyse the relations of an order in which knowledge and power are thoroughly complicit. With this method, Foucault wanted to determine the mechanisms that resulted in the treatment of homosexuality as an abnormality or pathology and in homosexuals being considered dangerous individuals because with this idea of sexuality, power is exercised (Foucault, 1995, p. 152). Additionally, as Foucault noted in his 1976 lectures, through the history of sexuality (2009b, p. 217), one could observe the point that links the human body to population, whereby he separated in his methodological analysis the disciplinary element, which acts on the body, from the regulatory element, which acts on procreation. This linking point between the organism and population explains the extreme medical valuation of sexuality during the 19th century.

"What I do is the history of problematizations. That is, the story of how things become problems" (Foucault, 2003). Foucault is describing a manner of interrogating culture to determine when and under which circumstances homosexuality was problematized. He wished to determine the conditions under which the human being problematizes what

he or she is, how he or she behaves and the world in which he or she lives; i.e., why does the problematization of sexual behaviour occur?

> Why is sexual behaviour, why are the activities and pleasures which depend on it, the object of moral concern? Why this ethical restlessness which, at least occasionally, in certain societies or certain groups seems more important than the moral attention paid to other dominions necessary for individual or collective life, such as food habits or fulfilling civic duties?. (Foucault, 2007a, p. 13)

FOUCAULT'S GOAL

Foucault's research aimed at producing an analysis that could demonstrate the objectification process by which others could recognise themselves and live out, for example, their homosexuality because what needed to be overcome was not homosexuality but the repression that impeded living homosexuality. To overcome repression, it was necessary to conceptualise the way in which human beings had been historically governed and limited.

Foucault (2001, pp. 241-245; 2009a, pp. 19-22) achieved this goal by demonstrating, using a history of the West, the different ways in which human beings are constituted as subjects, whereby the subject was understood as a set of limits on actions that are produced historically and that decrease the possibilities of the human being. The first aspect that Foucault studied was the form of research. For Foucault, science had transformed the human being into a speaking subject using linguistics or philology, into a productive subject using economic analysis or into a living being using natural history or biology (specifically, see Foucault, 2004). He subsequently studied the types of objectification (termed "dividing practices") of the subject both in its interior and as divided into others. This process objectifies the individual, for example, as mad and sane, sick and healthy or criminal and good.

> What I have tried to prove is how, in the interior of a given form of knowledge, the subject itself was constituted as a mad or sane, criminal or non-criminal subject, through a given number of practices that were real-life games, power practices, etc. It was necessary to reject a given

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> a priori theory of the subject to be able to conduct this analysis of relations that can exist between subject constitution and the real-life games, power practices, etc. (Foucault, 2010, p. 1036)

Once this goal is achieved,

> An attempt can be made to free ourselves both from the power of imposition and from the contingency of its historical formation, of the thinking systems that are familiar to us, that seem evident to us and that constitute part of our perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Subsequently, there is a need to work together with individuals involved in such a practice not only to modify institutions and their practices but also to re-develop the ways of thinking. (Foucault, 1996, p. 147)

FOUCAULT'S RESULTS

For Foucault (2007, p. 11), the birth of homosexuality as a problem can be found in the modern conscience of the West from the 18th to the 20th century, which was a period of repression. However, importantly, Foucault (2007b, p. 71) later recognised (in his 1978 lectures), while analysing liberal ideology and physiocracy, the need not only to understand this period as an era during which an unprecedented technique of social discipline was introduced but also to attend to the transformations of power technologies, which he understood as "security dispositifs". By means of this theoretical framework, he could individualise the two economies of power with their respective normalisations, p. the economy of disciplinary mechanisms (the law, regulations) and the mechanisms of security dispositifs, whose correlate is freedom. In the 18th century, hermaphroditism and homosexuality were illegal because they were against nature. That is, they were an attack against the regular functioning of the natural sphere, attacks that could by sanctioned by law. Homosexuals were classified as dangerous social types and sent to prison.

Subsequently, by the late 1860s, psychiatrists started analysing homosexuality from the medical perspective, p. this was the starting point for a series of new interventions and controls. Sexual behaviour or practice was not analysed. However, the individual in his or her unique na-

ture was studied. It was thought that the pathological sphere could be discovered and known, and therefore, homosexuals were imprisoned in asylums or attempts were made to "heal" them. Previously, homosexuals were considered to be libertines or a social threat. (Thus, the sentences, which could be extremely severe, p. even the stake in the 18th century, although this punishment was seldom applied.) From this period, a relation was established between homosexuals and the insane. Both groups were viewed as being ill in terms of their sexual instinct (Foucault, 1995, p. 152).

For Foucault,

> The psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted the day it was characterised – the famous article by Westphal on the 'contrary sexual sensations' (1870) can be taken as a date of birth – not because of the type of sexual relations but because of a certain sexual sensitivity, a given way of inverting in oneself the masculine and feminine roles. Homosexuality became one of the figures of sexuality when it was downgraded from the practice of sodomy to a type of interior androgyny, of hermaphroditism of the soul. Whereas the sodomite was a deviant, the homosexual was now a species. (2007, pp. 56-57)

Power was exercised when homosexuality became the object of medical study, that is, when it became an injury, a dysfunction or a symptom located in the depths of the organism or apparent on the skin surface or in behavioural signs.

Foucault (2007a, pp. 7-8) stated that the term "sexuality" appeared at the beginning of the 19th century, when it was related to other phenomena, p. the development of fields of study related to mechanisms of biological reproduction and the individual and social variants of behaviour; the establishment of rules and norms supported by religious, educational, and medical institutions; and changes in the ways individuals are thought to make sense of and valuate their conduct. In sum, in Western societies, an "experience"[2] was forming by which individuals started to recogni-

[2] By "experience" we mean "the correlation between areas of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity" (Foucault, 2007a, p. 8).

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se themselves as subjects of "sexuality", open to highly diverse dominions of knowledge and articulated by a set of rules and restrictions. Discussing sexuality included analysing the three axes that formed its constituent parts, p. the formation of knowledge regarding "sexuality" (medicine and psychiatry), the power systems that regulate its practices (punitive power and disciplinary practices) and the ways in which individuals start to recognise themselves as sexual subjects.

Foucault's research enabled him to conclude that by using a strategy that involved speaking about progress in human knowledge, the dilemma of science and ideology was avoided. That is, in the way that he analysed power relations and their technologies, the alternative of power conceived as domination or denounced as a farce was avoided. When doctors invented a society of normality, codes cease to govern society and were replaced by "the permanent distinction between what is normal and abnormal, and the perpetual task of restoring the system of normality" (Foucault, 1999, p. 353). According to Foucault (1996, p. 61), the undefined and confusing large family of "abnormals", who terrify others, constitute a phenomenon that is closely linked to a set of control institutions, i.e., surveillance and control distribution mechanisms, within the recognised sciences and the phenomenon of opinion, e.g., the ancestral fear of madmen. "When this great family is completely covered by the category of 'degenerates', it will cause derisory theoretical developments whose effects will undoubtedly profoundly enter into social reality" (Foucault, 1996, p. 61). This new medical morality results from the physician's control and knowledge in attributing and regulating such situations. Individuals who are half-beasts, Siamese twins and hermaphrodites represent human monsters not only because they are exceptions from the form of the species but also because of the commotion they cause in legal standards (marriage laws, baptism, rules of succession). The human monster combines the impossible with the prohibited (Foucault, 1996, pp. 61-66).

The "abnormality" of certain individuals addressed by institutions, discourses and knowledge also originates in their legal-natural exceptionality. A general theory of "degeneration" is constructed that serves as a social and moral justification of the identification, classification

and intervention techniques used on "abnormals" (Foucault, 1996, p. 65). A complex institutional web is reorganised within the boundaries of medicine and law to serve as a mechanism for "helping" the "abnormals" and as an instrument of "defence" for society (Foucault, 1996, p. 65). Power is normalised through an interconnected network of law, medicine, the police and psychiatric institutions. Medicine and the law interact in the sense that the law is granted the right to intervene in the lives of individuals because of what these individuals are by nature, on the basis of their constitution and on the basis of their personality traits being considered pathological, not because of behaviours that affect society (Foucault, 1996, p. 177).

HOW DID FOUCAULT REACH THESE RESULTS?

In his historical search for facts that can be considered milestones, Foucault (2007, p. 20) returned to Western antiquity. He found that sexual activities and pleasure were problematized through practices based on an "aesthetics of existence". Thus, he distinguished two historical moments, p. the Socratic-Platonic moment in the fifth century B.C. and the Hellenic moment in the second and third centuries A.D. In the former moment, *knowing yourself* meant that there is a correspondence between what one says and what one does. In the second moment, *caring for yourself* meant having the best possible relation with yourself. In both moments, the Greek schools of thought sought and taught, in addition to science, a practical way of governing one's conduct. Their objective was to teach students a set of practices through which a subject could establish a relation of vigilance, protection and cultivation of one's actions. These practices represented useful ways of governing one's conduct. However, in the Hellenic moment, not only were individuals taught to care for themselves but also the creation of an emotional community was promoted in friendship networks, which lasted a lifetime. Care of oneself was more than just an individualistic exercise. It also involved caring for others through a healthy diet.

Foucault (2007a, pp. 92-131) argued that in classical Greek culture, whereas homosexuality was not an object of moral concern, sexual activity was an object of concern among philosophers when this activity

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was excessive and resulted in harm. Thus, they concluded that these excesses should be avoided. Therefore, from a moral perspective, what was valued was for an individual to know and control him- or herself. Humans should have the freedom and power to master their pleasures and subject them to *logos*. The individual should know him- or herself to practice virtue and master desires. In sum, in classical Greek thought, moral reflection on sexual behaviour did not seek to justify prohibitions but to stylise liberty. This type of liberty was that liberty exercised by a "free" man, who was capable and prudent in knowing, as one should, the measure and the moment.

Foucault found (2007a, pp. 176-177) that a problematization of the relationship between two individuals could occur in the case of a relation between an older man with a completed education, who is supposed to play the social, moral and sexually active role, and a young man who has not achieved his ultimate position and who requires help, advice and support. The age difference and a certain distinction between positions was subject to particularly intensive moral concern, to such a degree that it was surrounded by values, imperatives, requirements, rules, advice and appeals, which were numerous, elaborate and unique. The regulation of this type of relation was based on the belief that a free adult man must not only consider his freedom and power but must also perceive how freedom can be exercised under the other's dominion, to which one submits oneself, and in the true love that is offered.

"In the case of relations consider, because of age differences, the freedom of the other person, his capacity of rejection and the need for consent" (Foucault, 2007a, p. 183).

Regarding Greek and Roman medicine, Foucault found (2005, pp. 133-134) that it was common for medical texts to focus on eating and health and only refer in passing, with a few paragraphs, to the sexual regime. The sexual regime was not a major concern of the physicians as long as the sexual act was not affected by problems suffered by the body and there was no risk of causing illness, in which case some physicians recommended fidelity, austerity and abstinence.

Foucault concludes as follows,

> The sexual act seems to have been considered for a long time now as dangerous, difficult to master and costly; the exact measure of its possible practice and insertion into a careful regime has been required for a long time. Plato, Isocrates, Aristotle, each in his own way and for various reasons, recommended at least certain measures of marital fidelity. And love of boys could be attributed the highest possible value, but also, abstinence was recommended so that the spiritual value expected from one could be maintained. (2005, pp. 217-218)

That is, in the two historical moments, sexual relations are a pleasure that is not condemned and the practices of freedom include a range of specific relations, p. with the body and health (followed by the entire "game" of life and death); with the opposite sex (with the wife as a privileged companion within the game of the family institution and the relationship that it creates); with friends of the same sex (with adjustment problems between sexual and social functions); and, in sum, with the relation to the truth in which the issue of spiritual conditions is understood, which enables access to wisdom (Foucault, 2007a, pp. 25-26*).*

In his account of the third historical moment, which Foucault termed the "ascetic-monastic" moment of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., Foucault finds that because of the rise of Christianity, observing and caring for the self ceased to be a practical way of governing conduct. Instead, it became a way of controlling desires because the primary enemy is the person him- or herself. Thus, life came to be understood as a constant struggle between good and evil, between God and the devil. In an interview with Bernard Henry-Levy, Foucault (1995, pp. 146-147) states that the reason why, in a society such as ours, sexuality is not simply a factor that facilitates reproduction, family relations, friendship and pleasure can be found in Christianity, in which sex is not only the nucleus of the evolution of our species but also the "truth" of our humanity. In Christian societies, sex has been the object of testing, vigilance, confession and imposed silence.

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FOUCAULT'S PROPOSAL: THE PRACTICES OF FREEDOM

For Foucault (2001), the political, ethical, social and philosophical problem of our times is not the task of freeing the individual from the state but freeing ourselves from the imposing state and the type of individualisation that is linked to the state. This effort involves the resistance to any form of government and opposition to "true" forms of knowledge or subjectivity and other theoretical discourses or ways of relating to oneself. Through the rejection of this type of individualisation, which has been imposed on us for centuries, we can develop new types of subjectivity (Foucault, 2001, p. 249). In addition, we should adopt a critical attitude that is directed towards not only social structures of domination but also the way in which these structures have been implanted in human behaviour, e.g., in the ways in which they relate to themselves and others. We should adopt power strategies, which are only exercised on free subjects to the extent to which they are free because slaves are not free subjects but dominated and excluded. Free subjects are the individual or collective subjects that command a range of possible modes of conduct, reactions and types of behaviour (Foucault, 2001, p. 254).

Foucault (2010) proposes practices of freedom, such as the striving of a free individual to develop, transform and access a certain type of being. Such practices represent the liberty of self-intervention that is required to produce qualitative changes and establish different power relations based on "desubjugation". The practice of freedom in subjects is based on a gradual rejection of dominant techniques to forge more adequate techniques. In an interview by Fornet-Betancourt, Becker, and Gómez-Müller on January 20, 1984, Foucault (2010, p. 1028) defines the practice of freedom as the relation one has with oneself and with others, i.e., the element that constructs the materiality of ethics, which is produced when we can reflect and define all of the forms of practising freedom in society and among individuals. Here, ethics is understood as an ethics in which the game of truth is played out in social relations with *minimum domination*. This ethics is not viewed from a legal perspective of individual rights or from the perspective of the individual as a subject of rights but from the perspective of the interplay of relations of freedom.

In this interview, in answer to the question of whether a liberation process was necessary, Foucault (2010) stated that liberation is occasionally the political or historical condition for practices of freedom to exist.

> If we consider, for example, sexuality, it is true that a number of liberations have been necessary in relation to the power of the male, that it has been necessary to free ourselves from an oppressive morality that concerns both heterosexuality and homosexuality; however, this liberation does not allow for the emergence of a complete and contented sexuality in which the subject has finally achieved a complete and satisfactory relation. Liberation opens the way for new power relations, which must be controlled through practices of freedom. (Foucault, 2010, p. 1029)

For Foucault, the problem with sexuality is defining the sexual practices that can be established by individuals in their freedom and in relation to others, p. sexual pleasure and erotic, loving and passionate relationships with others. "This ethical problem of defining the practices of freedom seems to be much more important than the somewhat overused statement that it is necessary to free oneself from sexuality or desire" (Foucault, 2010, p. 1029).

To construct practices of freedom, it is necessary to open power relations to the games of freedom through a process in which valid and acceptable forms of existence can be defined in a society. That is, it is necessary to oppose discursive practices in which the *truth* of subjects can be stated as a theory of sexuality that is no longer valid and proceed to practices of truthfully stating that the subject is in conditions and is capable of speaking about him- or herself to another person who listens to him or her and urges him or her to speak (Foucault, 2010a). Homosexuality should be expressed by a homosexual. Homosexuals should speak, which constitutes a counter-discourse of true knowledge with the subject and not anonymous knowledge without the subject. Only in this way, can the freedom of another person be understood and accepted because it is of his or her own being, constitutes itself and is constituted by others as a subject who emits a truthful discourse. Thus, we can articulate individual freedom with the possibilities of social

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behaviour defined in conjunction with others, which provides effectiveness and authenticity to the democratic game.

FOUCAULT'S FINAL REFLECTION

Currently, there are forms of resistance, or cross-sectional struggles, that are not limited to a country, which seek to suppress the effect of the power to control bodies, health and the life and death of the population and which question the most immediate institutions of power, e.g., medical concepts, family, priests, and pastors. These forms of resistance oppose secrets, deformation and the mystical representations imposed on individuals. In addition, they reject scientific and administrative inquiry that determines who one is (Foucault, 2001, p. 244).

While claiming their right to be different, the individuals who adopt these forms of resistance attack what separates them, what breaks their bonds with others and what undermines community life. Simultaneously, they emphasise everything that makes individuals truly individuals. The homosexual must be able to disengage from this sociocultural system that imposes exclusion and rejection on homosexuals. He or she should stop feeling guilty or abnormal and accept, care for and master him- or herself while making decisions independently and telling the truth about him- or herself to others.

> To care for oneself is to care for telling the truth, which requires courage and, above all, care from the world and others and which calls for the adoption of a 'true life' as a permanent criticism of the world. (Gros, 2010, p. *357)*.

Foucault (2007) reiterates the need for the other to urge this care for oneself, to speak rather than listen and to instruct rather than confess with the aim to achieve the positive construction of a community of friends who freely confide in one another with the purpose of mutual correction.

> Maybe one day people will be amazed. It will not be understood that a civilisation so dedicated to the development of vast apparatuses of production and destruction has found the time and infinite patience to ask itself with such anxiety about sex; maybe people will laugh, remembe-

> ring those men – ourselves – who believed that in the sexual dominion, there was a truth at least as valuable as the truth they have asked the earth, stars and pure ways of thinking for; people will be amazed by the ferocity we used to fake starting a night with a sexuality that was produced by everything –our discourses, our habits, our institutions, our regulations, our knowledge– in broad daylight and was reactivated with a bang. And the future will ask why we wanted so much to repeal the law of silence in the noisiest of our concerns. In hindsight, the noise may seem excessive, but still, people will be amazed by our obstinacy in not deciphering even more than in our refusal to talk and our resolution of silence. Questions will be asked about what made us so presumptuous, the reasons why we did not attribute the merit of being the first to agree on sex as a struggle against a millennial morality, the importance which we said corresponds to it and how we could glorify the fact that we had freed ourselves by the end of the 20th century from times of long and hard repression –times of prolonged, modified, greedy Christian ascetics who were thoroughly used by the imperatives of the bourgeois economy. And where today we see the history of censorship overcome with difficulty, in the future, the century-long ascent of a complex device will be recognised, a device to talk about sex, to assert in it our care and attention, to make us believe in the sovereignty of the law when, in reality, we are being worked by the mechanisms of the power of sexuality (Foucault, 2007, p. 192).

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, 30 years after Foucault's death, we continue to consider homosexuality an abnormality. In some countries, it is a crime. In others, it is a condition that limits rights and freedoms. If he were still alive, Foucault would have had his rights reduced because of his alternative sexual orientation, which is what occurred with his death, whose cause (Foucault contracted HIV/AIDS) caused serious inconvenience for academic authorities who preferred silence and oblivion. However, in the last decade, we have observed a revival and strong interest in the work of this fascinating writer, which vindicates the critical and emancipating potential of Foucault's method and results. In this article, we have tried to vindicate these aspects of his work, which we summarise below.

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Foucault's method is genealogical. It is a form of cultural context history, which addresses the constitution of knowledge and discourses as well as the dominions of the object. With this method, Foucault wished to discover the system of thinking, or the form of rationality, that underlies certain ideas and practices in given historical and geographical moments. The method was used to construct a history of sexuality because Foucault could apply it to analyse the functioning of relations within an order in which knowledge and power are highly complicit. In this analysis, Foucault sought to understand the mechanisms that were produced and the consequences of considering homosexuality to be an abnormality, or pathology, and homosexuals to be dangerous individuals because power is exercised based on sexuality.

Foucault produced an analysis that can be used to demonstrate the objectification process. In this process, others can recognise themselves and can live, for example, their homosexuality, because what must be overcome is not homosexuality but the repression that impedes homosexuals from living their homosexuality.

The power over homosexuality was exercised at a time when homosexuality became a focus of medicine. From this perspective, homosexuality was viewed as an injury, dysfunction, or symptom in the depths of the body, in the skin surface or in behavioural signs.

Thus, Foucault argued that in Western societies, an experience was formed in which individuals began to recognise themselves as subjects of a sexuality, whereby these subjects were exposed to highly diverse dominions of knowledge that were articulated by systems of rules and restrictions. To discuss sexuality was to analyse the three axes that constituted it, p. the formation of knowledge that referred to sexuality (medicine and psychiatry), the power systems that regulate the practices of such knowledge (punitive power and disciplinary practices) and the ways in which individuals start to recognise themselves as sexual subjects.

In his study of sexuality, Foucault returned to Western antiquity and found that sexual activity and pleasure were understood through an aesthetics of existence. In Western antiquity, Foucault distinguished

two historical moments, p. a Socratic-Platonic moment in the fifth century B.C. and a Hellenic moment in the second and third centuries A.D. In classical Greek thinking, moral reflection on sexual behaviour did not seek to justify prohibitions but to stylise liberty. This liberty was the type that was exercised by a "free" man, who was capable and prudent in the proper knowledge of the measure and the moment. In the two historical moments, sexual relations were a pleasure that was not condemned, and the practices of freedom encompassed a range of specific relations, p. with the body and with health issues (followed by the entire "game" of life and death), with the opposite sex (with the wife as a privileged companion within the game of the family institution and the particular relationship it creates), with friends of the same sex (with adjustment problems between sexual and social functions) and, finally, with the truth in which the spiritual conditions that enable access to wisdom were sought.

However, in a similar manner, Foucault also established a third historical moment, which he termed the ascetic-monastic moment of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Foucault found that as a result of the rise of Christianity, observing and caring for oneself ceased to be a practical way of governing conduct. Instead, this practice became a means to control desires because the primary enemy was the person him- of herself. Thus, life became a constant struggle between good and evil, between God and the devil. In Christian societies, sex became the subject of examination, vigilance, confession and imposed silence.

As a response to such thinking, Foucault proposed practices of freedom with which a free individual could attempt to develop, transform and access a certain type of being. Such practices represent the liberty of self-intervention, with which qualitative changes could be produced and different power relations established that are based on desubjugation. For Foucault, the problem of sexuality was defining the sexual practices that can be established by individuals in their freedom and in relation to others, p. sexual pleasure and relationships of eroticism, love and passion.

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Thus, it is necessary to oppose those discursive practices in which the *truth* about the subject can be stated in terms of a theory of sexuality as no longer valid. One must adopt the practice of stating the truth, in which the subject is conditional and capable of speaking about him- or herself to another person who listens to him or her and urges him or her to speak (Foucault, 2010a). Homosexuality should be described by homosexuals. Homosexuals should speak. Such speaking would represent a counter-discourse of true knowledge about subjects and not an anonymous knowledge without a subject. Only in this way can the freedom of another be understood and accepted because such freedom is of that person's own being, self-constitutive and constituted by others as a subject who emits a truthful discourse. Thus, we can articulate individual freedom using the defined possibilities of social behaviour with others, which provides the democratic game with effectiveness and authenticity.

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