

THE BODY AS COUNTRY: GENDER AND POLITICS IN THE WORK OF LAERTE COUTINHO

DOI
10.11606/issn.2525-3123.
gjs.2025.210219

ORCID
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7399-3248>

MARCIO JOSÉ MELO MALTA

Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, RJ, Brasil, 24020-150 –
ppgest.pes.iet@id.uff.br

ABSTRACT


The aim of the work is to follow the production of the cartoonist Laerte Coutinho in the most diverse cycles, with a central focus on gender and political issues. Her multiple strands and facets will be presented, from union collaboration, militancy in the Brazilian Communist Party and her decisive contribution to the magazines “Chiclete com Banana “ and “Piratas do Tietê “.The research seeks to follow the artist’s turn from 2004 to 2016 in order to accompany the questioning of genre itself, which took place in conjunction with transformations in the way comics were produced, where a greater political and reflective engagement stands out. The methodology adopts critical discourse analysis, beyond the textual, with attention being paid to the imagery components, not just the cartoons themselves, but the traces of gender identity and performance inscribed in the works.

KEYWORDS:

Politics; Gender;
Cartoonist; Image;
Comics.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at analyzing the transformation observed in the work of cartoonist Laerte Coutinho. The process of gender transition not only influenced her personal life, but also corresponded to a change in her graphic production and a corresponding politicization. The relationship between the individual and society



is the theme of the investigation, which uses theoretical references, interviews with the artist and an analysis of the work itself.


Firstly, Laerte's biography will be presented, giving an account of her background and training as a cartoonist, with the artist's historical and relational context as an influence on her professional choices. Regarding the gender change itself, the time frame covers the period from 2004 to 2016, therefore covering the moment when the first discussions about gender in Laerte's life and work are perceived, until August 2016, during Dilma Rousseff's second government, when the president was removed from power by an impeachment process, a scenario in which the engaged political discourse grows in Laerte's production. The focus is therefore on capturing the transition between two more extreme phases, from the profile that is more focused on personal behavior to the radical profile observed during the impeachment process. Although it is not the focus of this work, it should be noted that radicalization will be the keynote of the works produced under the aegis of the governments of Michel Temer, then Dilma's vice-president, and then the far right-wing politician Jair Messias Bolsonaro.

Politics is the essential concern in the criterion for adopting this theme. And when looking at Laerte's production in the period analyzed, it is striking how this issue has gained ground in her drawings. If, in the past, the artist made a point of saying that she preferred not to address political issues - in the strict sense - since the publicization of a new sexual perspective, she has radicalized her attitudes and went on to draw a large number of cartoons or even comic strips exploring the realms of politics and even portraying powerful people on duty, a practice she said she couldn't reproduce due to "traumas" from the beginning of her career at the "Gazeta Mercantil" newspaper, where she used to draw portraits of personalities.

The following sections will delve into these reflections and follow the changes in the artist's career.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used consists of exploratory research that covers the artist's career. In addition to a section where the cartoonist is presented by a brief biographical profile, interviews given to the most diverse media outlets are collected, with newspapers and magazines being the most obvious. In this way, the most diverse stages of her career are mapped out and discussed, and in the case of Laerte, changes are a constant not only in her personality, but also in the course of her work, the main object of this investigation.



At the same time, the body of theory from the humanities and applied social sciences, including the field of communication, is used to support and feed the discussions through the literature review, therefore providing a better reflection on the object of the research. Theoretical works on political components will also be worked on, as well as those on the conservative wave experienced in Brazil and around the world, and the specific bibliography on gender.

There is a double perspective here, as the cartoonist herself declares that she is a reader of theoretical sources. That being in addition to reading in the field of psychoanalysis or communication, as she has revealed in the past that she is a fan of authors such as Freud and Bergson. In public statements, Laerte made use of ideas expressed by Judith Butler, a popular author in the field of gender studies, and illustrated the cover of the Brazilian edition of Paul Preciado's "Manifesto Contra Sexual" (Image 1) other book called "Testo Junkie", when he discusses the imbrication between sex and politics, defines well the process experienced by Laerte: "the concept of gender is, first and foremost, a sexopolitical notion" (PRECIADO, 2018, 423). From this perspective, it is possible to see the individual dynamics of the subject as a bearer of rights who is not held hostage by total and comprehensive notions.

typically terms that belong to a micro-level of analysis. (...) In everyday interaction and experience, the macro-level and micro-level (as well as intermediate “meso-levels”) form a unified whole (VAN DIJK, 2018, 116).

The transformations experienced by Laerte were not restricted to personal experience, but spilled over to the public, who followed the process through the press. There was, therefore, personal need to disseminate her own experience and transform it into a collective participation. In short, there was a desire to socialize personal experience and transform what had been experienced in an intimate forum into an all-embracing collective practice. This movement was twofold, not only on the part of the individual, but also on the part of the artist, who channeled her doubts, longings and fullness into art, as Barthes said about the role of language:

Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other (...) My language trembles with desire. The emotion of a double contact: on the one hand, a whole activity of discourse comes, discreetly, indirectly, highlights a single meaning which is ‘I desire you’, and releases it, feeds it, branches it out, makes it explode (language enjoys touching itself); on the other hand, I involve the other (BARTHES, 1994, 64).

Like the cartoonist Henfil, who claimed to be healthy precisely because he sold his neuroses to the newspapers, we can see that Laerte is gradually purifying the construction of her personality through the interviews she gives. This conclusion, as we will see below, is endorsed by the artist herself. The interviews are, therefore, a source for discovering the positions that the cartoonist is developing.

In an interview with the newspaper “Zero Hora” 2012, the hypothesis that Laerte’s behavior is guided by the interviews she gives can be confirmed. This attitude be because Laerte is working in an interstitial zone between the collective and the personal.

Although he didn’t finish his degree, the university environment was decisive. In 1972, he began publishing comics in partnership with cartoonist Luis Gê. Years later, the pair would team up again to start he magazine “Circo” and in the pages of “Chiclete com Banana”.

In 1973 he worked on the magazine “Banas”, which dealt with economics, and also collaborated with “Placar”, a sports publication where he drew the characters Baianinho and the Crioulo. These names would certainly not be adopted by her today, further highlighting how an artist can often take political positions across a long ideological spectrum throughout their career.

One of her main influences was the cartoonist Henfil, and she even lived in the artist's house in São Paulo, where fellow cartoonists Angeli, Glauco and Nilson also shared space. Everyone there collaborated with Oboré, a cooperative in the field of alternative media, for trade union publications. Their contributions were voluntary, without any kind of remuneration. On several occasions the trio of Henfil, Laerte and Angeli - Nilson had returned to Minas Gerais - drew comics together for the workers' struggle.

Laerte contributed to the trade union movement, creating characters that were emblematic of the working class in the ABC region of São Paulo, such as the puppet João Ferrador, whose catchphrase was the classic "I'm not good today".¹

The second half of the 1980s, the period in which Laerte broke with the party, was the same time he had separated from his second wife and also left the newspaper "Gazeta Mercantil" for which he drew cartoons. In this context of so many transformations in his personal life, the country was also going through times of change, although, slow, gradual and sure", as the president general said. The period that marked the transition from dictatorship to democracy was precisely the political atmosphere in which the magazine "Chiclete com Banana" appeared. Those were the days of the New Republic.

There began the partnership with Toninho Mendes that would result, in addition to "Chiclete com Banana", years later, in his own "Piratas do Tietê". The suggestive title "Chiclete com Banana" was based on the song of the same name composed by Gordurinha and Almira Castilho, recorded by Jackson do Pandeiro in 1950 and re-recorded in 1972 by Gilberto Gil. Perhaps this closer reference had a major influence on the naming decision. Regardless of where the inspiration came from, the unequivocal aim of the editors was the fusion of Brazilian and American elements, like an anthropophagy à la the Modern Art Week of 1922.

The fusion with elements from the United States can be seen in the magazine's first issue, dated October 1985, with the editorial entitled "A quebrada da esquina". The editorial in the first issue features a picture of an unsuspecting Donald Duck, a Walt Disney character from the United States, about to turn around the corner of a poorly-lit street. Lurking around the corner, ready to pounce, among other weird figures, is the anarcho-punk Bob-Cuspe.

The feeling of uncertainty was the keynote of the publication's production. Brazil was taking a flight to another political moment, but the scenario

¹ The figure of João Ferrador gained a lot of fame printing shirts that were worn by the then trade unionist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who became president of the republic in 2003.


was one of insecurity. Whether due to the economic situation or the change in customs, the magazine reflects the moment of catharsis and the end of utopias brought about by the 80s.

The thinker Juergen Habermas, in a 1987 text entitled “The new intransparency”, addresses a perplexity among intellectuals and politicians, showing that the expectation of a better life had been shaken, or what he calls an “influx of utopian energies” (HABERMAS, 1987, 104) as a symbol of the spirit of the time. In other words, the utopian energies were exhausted, and society’s spirits were cooled. Pessimism was the keynote from the end of the 70s.

Laerte’s humor in the magazine “Chiclete com Banana” was the most lyrical, in a poetic and imaginative sense, sometimes bordering on the nonsensical and absurd. An example of this is the story called “Fernando Pessoa meets the Pirates of the Tietê”. The cartoonist approached issues in a more subtle way, with a more technical and refined line as one of his greatest assets. Laerte’s subtlety was even ironized by the other characters in the “Los 3 amigos” series, or even, at times, self-irony (Figure 2).



FIGURE 2
Art from the series Los 3 amigos, by Angeli, Adão, Laerte and Glauco. Source: LAERTE, 2014, 34.



In terms of graphics, his works can be considered cleaner and with richly detailed backdrops. He dialogues with the world of fantasy, constructing extraordinary stories, for example in a comic where a young man interacts with various fairies over the course of a night. Unlike Angeli, Laerte didn't have a "foot in the door" type of humor.

In a phase of behavioral and non-committal humor, he was a scriptwriter for the television shows "Tv Pirata", "Tv Colosso" and "Sai de Baixo" the latter of which he wrote jokes for, during the course of five years. The 1990s therefore represent a time in Laerte's career when he worked as a scriptwriter on programs that reproduced common sense and prejudice. In his strips during the depoliticized phase, the reproduction of childish and unpretentious jokes through his characters stands out, characterized by a humor of manners.

He had been publishing for several decades in the newspaper "Folha de São Paulo", where he developed his most successful series, "Os Pirats do Tietê", among other characters. The newspaper acts as a showcase for Laerte, boosting and giving great visibility to his work published there.

A change in customs and paradigms took place at the beginning of the 21st century. These signs can be seen more precisely in 2004. With the cover headline "Laerte lets loose", the magazine "Caros Amigos" featured an interview - often neglected not only by the artist, but especially by scholars who look at her career - which can be seen as a watershed in her career.

At the climax of the article, one of the interviewers, Flávia Castanheira, asked if Laerte's character, Laertón, was gay in the series "Los 3 amigos". The answer was positive. Flávia, the magazine's art director at the time, insisted that this was a facet of his. The answering statement was: "Yes, I'm not completely heterosexual!" (COUTINHO, 2004, 36).

From 2004 onwards, there was a process of reflection on his gender identity, which profoundly transformed his production, making it more engaged with issues of human rights, gender and sexuality.

The loss of his son Diogo, at the age of 22, in a traffic accident in 2005, will be responsible for a major turning point in the strips published by Laerte in the newspaper "Folha de São Paulo" and replicated in various newspapers in Brazil. An enigmatic work gained ground, with a more technical line, where characters ceased to appear and abstract themes took over.

This movement of discovery had repercussions on her life and initiated a new way of dressing. With the death of her son, the artist says she "Threw everything up in the air" and reports that she started wearing panties,

bought in supermarkets. At first she only dressed up at home, but then she experimented with cross-dressing, the practice of dressing up as a woman, in some kinds of clubs (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3

Characters Hugo and Muriel in a cross-dressing situation. A comic strip from 2004, considered to be the artist's first public statement on the subject. Published in the newspaper "Folha de São Paulo".

In mid-2008, the newspapers "Zero Hora" from Rio Grande do Sul, and "A Tribuna", from Espírito Santo, stopped publishing Laerte's strips. The suspension of her space was attributed to a change of direction by Laerte, who had abandoned the idea of comicality in her production, not ending her comics with a joke, a gag, as was traditional in the

genre (Figure 4). The abandonment of fixed characters was another aspect observed.



FIGURE 4

Philosophical and reflective strips without fixed characters. Strip published on November 20, 2014 in the newspaper "Folha de São Paulo"

Laerte's new production was given a classification by comics researcher Paulo Ramos, who called it a "free strip":

The difference between these strips is that they are based on thematic freedom, the absence of humor and clear attempts at graphic experimentation. For this reason, they stand out from the rest and have consolidated themselves as a new, autonomous genre, peculiar to the national production of comic strips (RAMOS, 2011, 96).

One of the artist's arguments for the change was that humorous production had become a straitjacket that was imprisoning her authorship. In an interview in which she reflects on this moment, once again the expression "letting go" comes up. As if in an "eternal return", it becomes clearer that these are not watertight phases, but cycles in a process of longer duration, as can be seen in the following statement:

(...) poetic. I think that might be a word to explain why I let my hair down. I'm not necessarily making jokes anymore. I'm looking for a language, a move that is similar to what poetry seeks in a sense that it transcends traditional representation, the traditional function that words and grammar have (COUTINHO, 2010).

The notion of cycles rather than phases is endorsed by the artist herself, who said in an interview with USP radio: "I'm not calling it a phase anymore, because I don't see the end of it. I think it's a new cycle that I've started" (RAMOS, 2012, 503).

And in a free appropriation of the work, we can use the author Edward Said to establish some reflections. Said describes as “late style” the movement of an artist in a late or final period of life where he radicalizes the work: “I would like to explore the experience of a late style that has to do with a tension devoid of harmony or serenity, with a consciously unproductive productivity, against everything (SAID, 2009, 27).

In describing the late behavior of the musician Ibsen, Said points out that he wasn’t looking for a resolution, but rather perplexity and restlessness. This type of movement can be loosely compared to the type of conduct that happened to Laerte, not only in the field of art, but also because of her attitudes, positions and way of dressing, which shocked people.


In December 2008, Laerte published the series “Eu travesty” (I, a transvestite) in her space in the “Ilustrada” section of the “Folha de São Paulo” newspaper, with a total of 13 comic strips. Despite being autobiographical, the character doesn’t actually resemble the cartoonist’s biotype, who in the drawing has baldness, unlike in real life.

In 2009, Laerte came out as transgender and joined movements dedicated to debating the issue. In 2012, together with lawyer Márcia Rocha, actress Maitê Schneider and psychoanalyst Letícia Lanz, he founded the Brazilian Transgender Association (Abrat). Lanz described how the media spotlight turned on Laerte after her transition:

Laerte emerged on the country’s transgender scene at the apex of an established professional career. An artist respected for her creativity, ethics and the socio-political engagement of her daily comic strips, she quickly and inevitably became the target of the media spotlight, eager to discover and inform the general public of the reasons and details of the gender change of a person of artistic, cultural and socio-political importance. This is how, usually excluded and made invisible by formal communication channels, the transgender person - like the transgender condition itself - suddenly gained notoriety in Brazil (LANZ, 2014, n.p).

Commenting on her self-perception, Laerte quoted Simone de Beauvoir and her work “The Second Sex”: “What is it to be a woman? I’ve been led to question this. One of my conclusions is that Simone de Beauvoir was absolutely right: you learn to be a woman” (RAMOS, 2012, 503).

In an article that analyzed the characters Hugo and Muriel, Vera Maria Bulla highlights Laerte’s power to give voice and empowerment to trans people:



After analyzing comic book literature, theories revolving around gender identities and studying Hugo and Muriel's comic strips, it was possible to understand the complex process of identification, acceptance and assimilation of the most suitable identity for each individual who feels they were born in the wrong body. Violence and a lack of understanding make the transition process even more difficult. Works such as Laerte's comic strips allow marginalized voices, such as those of trans people, to find positive role models with whom they can identify and by whom they can be encouraged (BULLA, 2018, 49).

It is interesting to note that the change in behavior in relation to gender did not happen in a watertight manner. It was accompanied by representations in her work. In this respect, it was essential to reference the character Hugo, who came to function as an alter ego, experiencing similar doubts and transformations. The character became Muriel (Figure 5), addressing issues relating to the dilemmas experienced by trans people.

A timely debate is the role of the body in the construction of Laerte's characters. As the cartoonist transforms, Hugo gives way to Muriel, allowing the reader to follow the changes experienced by the creator through her art:

In other words, before Muriel there was Hugo, but Hugo disappears as Muriel's doubts, and experimentations lead her to deconstruct some binarisms about herself and the danger of labels. For those with an effective approach, in other words, for the body that potentiates the effects of the lines of subjectivation that one encounters when reading the comic strips, with the cartoonist's work, it is possible to draw a parallel, including a temporal one, between Laerte's personal process (the author's body) as a trans person and her character. In this sense, we have the idea that the comic strips about Muriel comment on something that is mirrored by Laerte's public figure (MOURA, 2014, 1348).

Author Gutemberg Cruz described Laerte's importance as a reference for trans people: "Works like Laerte's comic strips allow marginalized voices, such as those of trans people, to find positive role models with whom they can identify and by whom they can be encouraged" (CRUZ, 2023, 107).

The movement made by Laerte is similar to the description made by Guattari and Deleuze in "A Thousand Plateaus", where the authors use geometry to describe a perpendicular direction:

It is that the medium is not an average; on the contrary, it is the place where things acquire speed. Between things, it does not designate a localized correlation that goes from one to the other and reciprocally, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that carries them from one to the other, a stream without beginning or end, that gnaws at its two banks and acquires speed in the middle (DELEUZE and GUATTARI, 2009, 37).



FIGURE 5

Excerpt from a comic strip featuring Hugo dressed as Muriel. Published in the newspaper "Folha de São Paulo" ("Thank you for accepting to come to our show, Hugo...or Muriel?" "Muriel").

Not only in the strips, but especially in the production of strips and cartoons, a militant perspective is evident, where humor is giving way to political and critical engagement. Engagement means involvement in social movements and active participation in the public sphere, such as debates and participation in political activities. These issues will be discussed in the next section of the paper.

4. THE INTERTWINING OF GENDER AND POLITICS

As soon as Laerte began to deconstruct gender issues, her work began to address political themes that until then had either been non-existent or had manifested themselves in a timid and secondary way.

In an interview with the magazine “Caros Amigos” in 2004, the year that the cartoonist points to as the beginning of her questioning, she said that she didn’t feel comfortable making cartoons: “it’s not comfortable, I’m not at ease (...) the idea of expressing a political opinion, I always stop in the middle and think: is that right, am I talking nonsense?” (COUTINHO, 2004, 35). And she added: “(...) party political commentary, evaluation of the situation and so on, I don’t feel comfortable doing that” (COUTINHO, 2004, 35).

After the series of changes she went through, the cartoonist began to frequent the public arena more. Not only on gender issues, but also on the legalization of drugs and the unstable political scenario surrounding the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, for example. She even drew caricatures of the heads of political power, such as the then president of the Chamber of Deputies Eduardo Cunha.


It should also be pointed out that the times in which these practices take place are intensely polarized in Brazilian society (Figure 6). Both in conservative terms, where right-wing groups had been gaining strength with increasing attacks on social, political and civil rights, and in the field of resistance to such movements.

LAERTEVISÃO



FIGURE 6

Drawing denoting reactionary paranoia. Published in the newspaper “Folha de São Paulo” on December 24, 2015. “RED! Out PT! Out commie!” “Are you crazy? - I am the biggest symbol of capitalist consumerism... Of emptying all religious meaning of Christmas...” “Oh, right, so come in.” “Not in your house, reactionaries”.



In the book “Cultura e Política” (Culture and Politics), more precisely in his classic essay “As ideias fora do lugar” (Ideas out of place), Roberto Schwarz recalls that an artist is not immune to his time, but rather is formed by the contradictions of the era in which he lives: “Without going any further, let’s just say that, contrary to popular belief, the artist’s material is therefore not formless: it is historically formed, and somehow records the social process to which it owes its existence” (SCHWARZ, 2001, 82).

Still on the subject of gender, Laerte’s habit is to keep her positions open, not being categorical, conclusive or even arrogant. However, on several occasions, she locates this field as a political element:

I include myself in socio-political issues that also concern women, but I know that I don’t have a uterus or an ovary, I know that there are a series of issues... that I don’t need to have resolved, you know? Gender for me is an experience that should be free. People should be able to live the identity that seems most appropriate to them (COUTINHO, 2015).

He also asserts that he has a pedagogical work that could make people think about the subject: “If there is any political work in this area, it is to break gender codes, make people reflect and debate this kind of thing” (COUTINHO, 2010).

The comic book genre itself allows the reader to question the world and has a unique opportunity to reflect on the events around them, stimulating the formation of a critical conscience:

There are many ways of understanding comics. Firstly, we can think of it as a creative elaboration of the human intellect, since it is the result of a lot of research to draw up a script and design a setting and its characters. This creation can be used as a way of recreating reality in order to question it (DIB, 2016, 117).

The specific example of Laerte as an educational element is also pointed out by academic productions that highlight how what the experienced cartoonist teaches the general public how to have other perceptions about gender:

Laerte’s example is fundamental to understanding some aspects of contemporary society, allowing a thought-provoking and intriguing view of gender. Laerte’s story allows us to do just that: expand concepts and definitions, observing, learning, apprehending and analyzing various aspects of gender freedom. Aspects that, raised by the cartoonist over the last few years, produce profound questions about the

fabric in which social relations are organized and structured (SANCHES, BASTOS and GARCIA, 2017,79).

The importance of the political element in comics was described by Moacyr Cirne, one of the first theorists on comics in Brazil: “(...) the political manifests itself at the most varied levels of formal articulation, the political manifests itself at all levels, either directly or indirectly” (CIRNE, 1982, 20).

The political dimension in Laerte emerges as the artist’s self-awareness of her gender increases: “The ethics of trans existence in Laerte therefore arises from the political recognition of self’ (INOCÊNCIO and CARVALHO, 2021, 62).

The growth of Laerte’s political role based on the trans theme is recognized by various works that have looked into the subject: “(...) she transforms her comics into an object of defense or transgender people, in which the characters in the strip are a kind of autobiographical role, with a strong political appeal” (JUNIOR BRAGA & MARGONARI, 2016, 154).

In general terms, historian Marcos Silva highlights the existence of a different type of political debate in Laerte’s work: “In addition, Laerte’s production is clear evidence of a humor that makes you see politics where you don’t expect it, certainly broadening the perception of those who follow her images and texts” (SILVA, 2018, 141).

The changes experienced by Laerte are not limited to the issue of gender, but also allow us to draw a parallel with the aging experienced by the artist. The intersection generated by the two themes is enriching and allows for a debate on the importance of discussing ageing in the trans population:

Ageing is secondary at the moment. She introduces the subject when she says she is over 60, the age that marks the passage into old age. Transgender ageing is an unknown and unexplored path in gerontology, and even for trans activists. The cartoonist’s experience has contributed to improving the approach to the elderly and LGBTTQIA+ population - Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders, Transsexuals, Transvestites, Queers, Intersex, Asexual - in Brazil it could help to break down prejudices about trans identity and, finally, it will help to reduce two taboos imposed by society: that of growing old and, above all, that of growing old transgender (DOS SANTOS, 2018, 62).

Still on the subject of politics, Laerte said that even though she left the “Partidão” decades ago, she still sees society from the basic variables of Marxism, such as the existence of social classes. She believes that the relationship of prejudice experienced by transvestites is part of a class

stigma: “It’s part of the prejudiced way of looking at transvestites. And it’s the classist way too” (COUTINHO, 2010).

The political component, so present in the years of militancy in the “Partidão” returns in parallel with Laerte’s metamorphosis in the field of gender issues. Laerte took a turn in favor of defending civil and social rights. Even though she maintained a personal “edge”, mainly through her graphic style and way of constructing narratives, the artist was able to reconcile an active citizen militancy with wide repercussions. This approach can be seen in her words:


What happened was that I found myself motivated to return to militancy because of something very intimate - the transgender feeling - which led me once again to understand political action as necessary. I don’t just see it as a defense of the transvestite or transgender population, but of human freedom. A defense of the possibilities of the human being as a whole (COUTINHO, 2013(b)).

Commenting on why women rarely make comics, she ponders that this is due to millennia of male domination. And that something similar would also happen to black people. In her opinion, humor doesn’t go well with drama and struggle. And she says: “(...) they are not in the comfortable situation of white males, which is the best situation to make humor” (COUTINHO, 2004, 37).

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why she abandoned humor in her comic strips from 2009 onwards. As her representation began to encompass a wide range of oppressions, her discourse becomes more reflective about social processes in a broad sense, whether on issues such as gender, or even social inequalities in general.

With a chameleon-like personality, she recognizes her multiple changes, being a completely mutating being: “In my own way, I’ve always been sincere. It’s my ideas that change, according to the season - sometimes according to the time of day!” (COUTINHO, 2013(a)). And as you can see, these changes also resonated in her political stance. Laerte was able to reinvent herself and began to adopt other political stances.

The notion of politics adopted in this work is in a broad sense, referring both to engagement in the most diverse agendas, such as individual rights, as well as in the strict sense of the term, focusing on the production of cartoons and comic strips with themes that are specifically focused on the order of politics as partisan action and within the framework of state action, disputing conceptions of the world. In short, politics is understood



as a double intervention: both in the context of taking and defending positions on individual freedoms and in the context of disputing the direction of the state, in the sense of a strategy. This is the imbrication identified in the relationship between gender and politics highlighted here.

When we talk about the politicization of Laerte's stance as a public figure and as a cartoonist, we are pointing to the artist's greater involvement in collective causes, even when these are apparently related to personal issues, such as the right of a trans person to use the public toilet that fits their identity.

Regarding the title of this work, "the body as a country", this question allows for a digression that dialogues with the transformations that have already been explained. The expression was taken from the following explanation: "To have begun to accept and live my transgenerity is to enter a country that I recognize as my own" (COUTINHO, 2013(a)).

Although she is comparing her city of birth, a São Paulo of yesteryear, in the sentence quoted, Laerte is not referring to a country in itself, to a nation state, but rather to her life, her environment, as she herself says. But the question brings us to something implicit and interesting in the new social movements for rights. Laerte's body as a country reveals the importance of the microphysics of power. Something hidden between a corridor and the living room of an apartment, or a public square, but which proves to be fundamental to understand in the agenda of the times.

There is a liberation for Laerte when she stops committing herself to cisnormativity. With transgenderism comes a greater sense of belonging.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

They are not phases, they are cycles - this is an essential point to understand in Laerte's trajectory. A long process of construction and deconstruction through which the artist shapes herself, where gender transition was just a spearhead.

In the years since the section adopted here, Laerte's political participation has only grown, always engaging in collective issues and positioning herself publicly, being decisive with her drawings and statements in opposition to the governments of Michel Temer and Jair Messias Bolsonaro.

In the field of gender, Laerte has also gained even more prominence, becoming a reference in the discussion on trans activism and the subject of numerous interviews, documentaries, among others.

This process has given the artist greater visibility, both for her works and for her public figure. An audience who was not used to reading her comic strips, began to follow her work. Laerte gained projection and freedom in a new graphic and discursive form.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- BARTHES, Roland. *Fragmentos de um discurso amoroso*. Rio de Janeiro, Francisco Alves, 1994.
- BULLA, Vera Maria. *Tirinhas, alívio cômico e a identidade de gênero em transição: Hugo e Muriel no mundo imaginário de Laerte*. *Transverso*, Ano 6, N.6, Dezembro 2018.
- BUTLER, Judith. *Problemas de Gênero: feminismo e subversão da identidade*. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 2003.
- CIRNE, Moacy. *Uma introdução política aos quadrinhos*. Rio de Janeiro, Achiamé, 1982.
- COUTINHO(a), Laerte. *A vez dela*. Disponível em: <https://revistagalileu.globo.com/Revista/noticia/2013/12/laerte-coutinho.html>. 2013. Acesso em: 15 marc. 2016.
- COUTINHO, Laerte. *As pessoas devem poder viver a identidade que lhes parece mais cabível*. Disponível em: <http://zh.clicrbs.com.br/rs/noticias/proa/noticia/2015/07/laerte-coutinho-as-pessoas-devem-poder-viver-a-identidade-que-lhes-parece-mais-cabivel-4794790.html>. 2015. Acesso em: 18 de jan. 2016.
- COUTINHO, Laerte. *Laerte solta a franga*. *Revista Caros Amigos*. Número 84, março de 2004.
- COUTINHO, Laerte (b). *Laerte tira a roupa para a Rolling Stone*. Disponível em: <https://rollingstone.uol.com.br/noticia/laerte-tira-roupa-para-rolling-stone-brasil/>. 2013. Acesso em: 15 jan. 2016.
- COUTINHO, Laerte. *Ocupação Laerte*. 2014. Itáu Cultural.
- COUTINHO, Laerte. *Paradoxo de salto alto*. Disponível em: <http://revistatrip.uol.com.br/trip/paradoxo-de-salto-alto-9-12-2010>. 2010. Acesso em: 21 de fev. 2016.
- COUTINHO, Laerte. *Trip transformadores: Laerte Coutinho*. Disponível em: <http://revistatrip.uol.com.br/trip-transformadores/laerte-coutinho>. 2012. Acesso em: 16 de jan. 2016.
- CRUZ, Gutemberg. *Traços da diversidade*. São Paulo: Noir, 2023.
- DELEUZE, G.; GUATTARI, F. *Mil Platôs: capitalismo e esquizofrenia*, vol. 1. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2009.
- DIB, Ranieri Lima. *Avenida Paulista: educação em forma de quadrinhos*. In: *Quadrinhos e educação: fanzines, espaços e usos pedagógicos*. Vol.3. Jabotão dos Guararapes, SOCEC, 2016.
- DOS SANTOS, Tainã Lacroix Rosenkjar. *Transgênero e velhice: o caso Laerte*. *Revista Portal de Divulgação*, n.56, Ano VIII. Abr/ Mai/ Jun. 2018.
- INOCÊNCIO, Adalberto e CARVALHO, Fabiana. *Precisamos verdadeiramente de um verdadeiro sexo? O domínio ético (ser-consigo) no documentário "Laerte-se"*. *Revista Diversidade e Educação*, v. 9, n. 1, p. 45-65, jan./jun., 2021.
- JÚNIOR BRAGA, Amaro e MARGONARI, Denise. *O humor das tiras em quadrinhos na educação para a diversidade sexual*. In: MODENESI, Thiago e JÚNIOR BRAGA, Amaro. *Quadrinhos e educação: fanzines, espaços e usos pedagógicos*. Vol.3. Jabotão dos Guararapes, SOCEC, 2016.
- LANZ, Letícia. *O gênero entre pernas, orelhas e braços*. *Ocupação Laerte*. São Paulo: Instituto Itáu Cultural, 2014.
- MOURA, Andréia Guimarães. *Sobre corpos, sexo, desejo e performatividade: a desconstrução do discurso de gênero nos trabalhos de Laerte*. *Fronteras*, v. 1, p. 5-22, 2014.

- VAN DIJK, Teun A. *Discurso e poder*. São Paulo: Editora Contexto, 2018.
- HABERMAS, Jürgen. A Nova Intransparência: a crise do Estado de Bem-Estar Social e o esgotamento das energias utópicas. In: *Novos Estudos* (18). São Paulo, CEBRAP, set./1987.
- PRECIADO, Beatriz. *Manifesto Contrassexual: práticas subversivas de identidade sexual*. São Paulo, n-1, 2014.
- PRECIADO, Paul B. *Testo Junkie*. São Paulo, Edições N-1, 2018.
- RAMOS, Paulo. *Faces do humor*. Campinas, Zarabatana, 2011.
- RAMOS, Paulo. *Revolução do Gibi*. São Paulo, Devir, 2012.
- SAID, Edward. *Estilo tardio*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2009.
- SANCHES, Rodrigo, BASTOS, Gustavo e GARCIA, Dantielli. Liberdade de gênero: linguagem, memória e códigos culturais a partir do trabalho da cartunista Laerte. In: DANTIELLI, Assumpção, BIZIAK, Jacob e SOUSA, Lucília (orgs.) *Do cárcere à invenção: gêneros sexuais na contemporaneidade*. São Carlos: Pedro & João Editores, 2017.
- SCHWARZ, Roberto. *Cultura política*. 2001. São Paulo, Paz e terra, 2001.
- SILVA, Marcos. *Rir das ditaduras: os dentes de Henfil (Fradim – 1971/1980)*. São Paulo, Intermeios, 2018.

Marcio José Melo Malta, Professor of Political Science at the Fluminense Federal University (INEST/UFF, International Relations). Professor of the Postgraduate Program in Strategic Defense and Security Studies (PPGEST/UFF). Professor on the Lato Sensu MBA Postgraduate Course in Strategic Studies and International Relations. Researcher at the Foreign Policy Laboratory (Lepeb/UFF). Researcher at the International Policy Studies Laboratory (Lepin/UFF). PhD in Political Science from the Graduate Program in Political Science at the Fluminense Federal University (PPGCP/UFF). Master's degree in Political Science from the Graduate Program in Political Science at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences from the Fluminense Federal University. He is a cartoonist who uses the pseudonym Nico. Researcher at INCT-InEAC as part of the Atena Project. marciomalta@id.uff.br

Use license. This article is licensed under the Creative Commons CC-BY License. With this license you can share, adapt, and create, for any purpose, as long as you attribute the authorship of the work.

Submitted: 04/03/2023
Resubmitted: 11/20/2023
Accepted: 04/27/2024