

**Global Feminisms  
Comparative Case Studies of  
Women's Activism and Scholarship**

**BRAZIL**

**Laura Castro**

**Interviewed by Sueann Caulfield**

**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
July 11, 2014**

**University of Michigan  
Institute for Research on Women and Gender  
1136 Lane Hall Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290  
Tel: (734) 764-9537**

**E-mail: [um.gfp@umich.edu](mailto:um.gfp@umich.edu)  
Website: <http://www.umich.edu/~glbfem>**

© Regents of the University of Michigan, 2015

**Laura Castro**, born in December 1981 in Rio de Janeiro, is an actress, playwright, singer, cultural producer, and political activist for LGBT families. She began studying music at age 9, and theater at age 16. In 2000, she graduated from the Vocational Course for the training of actors at the House of Arts in Laranjeiras, Rio de Janeiro (Curso Técnico Profissionalizante na formação de atores na Casa das Artes). In 2008, she graduated from the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO) with a degree in theater arts and a specialization in theater theory. In 2003, Laura founded the cultural production company, JLM Artistic Productions, and from 2005-2009 she was the manager and director of the Reference Center for Childhood Cultural Productions. As a partner in JLM, which today is called CRIA Productions, Laura is the creator and producer of various cultural projects, and a key organizer of musical and theatrical performances in Rio de Janeiro. She is the author of a number of stories and plays, including the 2013 play “To our Children” [“Aos Nossos Filhos”], about a woman who is lesbian telling her mother that she is going to have a baby. The play won two prizes (for best play to Laura and for best actress to Maria de Medeiros), and it is currently being adapted for film. In 2015, after fifteen years together, Laura married Marta Nobrega. They live in Rio with their three children, Clarissa (age 5 at the time of this interview), Rosa (age 4), and José (age 2). Laura has played an active role in legal rights for LGBT families and is president of the recently founded non-profit, ABRAFH (Associação Brasileira de Famílias Homoafetivas, the Brazilian Association of Gay Families). She documents her experiences on two blogs: [rosajoseeclarissa.blogspot.com](http://rosajoseeclarissa.blogspot.com) and [pautaprivada.blogspot.com](http://pautaprivada.blogspot.com).

**Sueann Caulfield** is Associate Professor of History at the University of Michigan, where she was the former director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies and currently heads the Brazil Initiative Social Sciences Cluster. She specializes in the history of modern Brazil, with emphasis on gender and sexuality. She has won awards and fellowships from the Fulbright Commission, National Endowment for the Humanities, and American Council of Learned Societies. Her publications include *In Defense of Honor: Morality, Modernity, And Nation In Early Twentieth-Century Brazil*, the co-edited volume *Honor, Status, and Law in Modern Latin American History*, and various articles on gender and historiography, family law, race, and sexuality in Brazil. Her current research focuses on family history with a focus on paternity and legitimacy in twentieth-century Brazil. She is particularly interested in questions of human rights in Latin America, and has participated in a number of workshops, cross-country teaching projects, and exchanges around topics of social justice and social action.

**The Global Feminisms Project** is a collaborative international oral history project that examines feminist activism, women's movements, and academic women's studies in sites around the world. Housed at the University of Michigan, the project was started in 2002 with a grant from the Rackham Graduate School. The virtual archive includes interviews from women activists and scholars from Brazil, China, India, Nicaragua, Poland, and the United States.

Our collaborators in Brazil are at the Laboratório de História Oral e Imagem - UFF (the Laboratory of Oral History and Images at the Federal Fluminense University in Rio de Janeiro, [LABHOI](#)) and Núcleo de História, Memória e Documento (the Center for History, Memory, and Documentation at the Federal State University in Rio de Janeiro, [NUMEM](#)). The Brazil interviews were conducted with support from the Third Century Learning Initiative and the Brazil Initiative (Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies), both at the University of Michigan, FAPERJ (The Research Support Fund in Rio de Janeiro), and CNPq (The National Council for Scientific and Technological Development in Brazil).

*Key words: LGBTQ, adoption, family, arts, theater, film, acting, lesbian, marriage*

**Sueann Caulfield: So we're talking with Laura Castro, playwright, theater actress, and also now a filmmaker with a first film in production that will come out in a year.**

Laura Castro: Yes.

**SC: And we're talking – I'd like to talk a bit about the vision, your vision of how your work would fit or not fit in the field of feminism, to think a little about the subject of global feminisms, how your work fits in this category or not, how you see this issue. But before getting into these themes of work, I wanted to hear a little about your life and how you came to do the work that you do. If you could talk a little about the idea of writing plays, or the themes of women, women's rights, in this case gay women, LGBT families, how this developed, and what the relationship is for you between your personal life and your work.**

LC: Well, it's a pretty direct relationship, right: I'm gay, I'm married to Martha, I mean, not legally married, which is one question,<sup>1</sup> but we will have been together 15 years next January.<sup>2</sup> So this is something that happened to me very early. I started dating Martha when I was 18. And, well, I'm the daughter of a great woman, I think, a great researcher, a person whom I always admired, who always worked in the university,<sup>3</sup> full professor. Perhaps not so much in the time when I was little, but now I realize she is always the example I had of a woman, a very productive person, very nonstandard even from who my grandmother was. If I think about the previous generation, she was a totally different woman from my grandmother. And there I was at 18 years old, just becoming a woman, and gay. And in my family, this was a small revolution, right? Because it was something different, because it wasn't expected. And yet at the same time, I was raised with a very free spirit, with open possibilities, just having that mother

---

<sup>1</sup> Same sex unions have been legal in Brazil since 2004 and so-called "stable unions" that allow certain rights, including adoption, have been legal since 2011. However, in Brazil, notaries perform civil unions and marriages and across the country many were simply refusing to acknowledge those of same-sex couples. On May 14, 2013, Brazil's National Council of Justice ruled that same-sex couples should not be denied marriage licenses. The Social Christian Party has appealed the decision to the Supreme Court. "Gay Marriage around the World. Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center:

<http://www.pewforum.org/2013/12/19/gay-marriage-around-the-world-2013/#brazil> (accessed 3/25/15). See also:

Brochetta, Marilio. "Brazilian Judicial Council orders notaries to recognize same sex marriage." CNN.com.

<http://www.cnn.com/2013/05/15/world/americas/brazil-same-sex-marriage/> (accessed 3/24/15)

Polask, Adam. "Brazil's High Court Rules that Notaries Must Register Marriages for Same-Sex Couples." Freedomtomarry.org. <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/blog/entry/brazils-high-court-rules-that-notaries-must-register-marriages-for-same-sex> (accessed 3/24/15).

<sup>2</sup> Soon after the interview, on January 3, 2015, Laura and Martha were married in their hometown of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>3</sup> Laura's mother, Hebe Mattos, is Professor of History at Universidade Federal Fluminense, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and her research focuses on slavery and race in Brazil. She also directs a number of projects on slavery and public history, including a project in conjunction with Columbia University about the memories and representations of slavery.

whom I found so spectacular, and my father also was part of it too. So I thought everything was really all right, that there wouldn't be any problems. It didn't even take a month for me to realize that I had a lot of trouble (laughs).  
So this is one ...

**SC: You mean after you told your family?**

LC: Yes, I realized that – in my family and in the world – things were not how my adolescent imagination thought they would be. And this is how I started, perhaps for the first time, to live with the preconceptions and the restrictions on homosexual women and on women in general. Even in women couples, what draws a lot of attention is the absence of a man, right? How do you open a can of olives if there is no man at home? Who will take care of a problem with the pipes? It's as if there are things that are not part of women's jurisdiction and so without a man, there's an absence there. And I clearly realized that this vision didn't work for us as a couple, something was missing. And with that – well, okay, first, I needed a personal revolution and many years of analysis, to relocate myself in the world, and I ended up spending a few years on this, on this challenge in my personal life. Then I married Martha in the sense that we lived together, open to the world as a couple. And then we made the biggest decision of our lives, which was to have children. Our first daughter was born in 2010, and we had made that decision in 2008. It was also in 2008 that we exchanged rings, not with a big event, but because it signified the idea of creating a family. And then, once again there weren't many examples, when I looked for a female couple with children to see how it could work. I was completely misinformed, both in terms of the whole concept as well as whether or not the child could be registered, what might happen to her in the future at school. There was a huge vacuum of information, and so I had to do a real search – for other people and families to share information. And after facing my own experience, which is, briefly, that we were able to adopt, that was a more positive scenario in the sense that two women or two men could be approved if they were together. I mean a few years before you would only be approved if you presented yourself as unmarried, and the other parent would have no official role in the relationship with the child. But the adoption process is slow, and we were approved, but that wouldn't be ready for over six months – and that wasn't yet about the child, but about the license<sup>4</sup> itself. So at that point we decided to look into assisted reproduction.<sup>5</sup> And Martha got pregnant with Rosa, our first daughter who was born in 2010. I once more looked for a lawyer and learned that there had been three cases in Rio de Janeiro to register two mothers together, and so we called this lawyer to represent us. After an eight-month process, I was able to register Rosa in my name as well. Her birth certificate was issued on her first birthday. The ruling took eight months, and on the day of her birthday the first certificate was canceled and a new certificate was issued, with both of our names. And then I got pregnant – I had a deep desire to get pregnant. I got pregnant with José, our second child. The process was much quicker that time. It took only two months. And

---

<sup>4</sup> Before adopting a child, a couple or individual must be approved and receive an adoption license.

<sup>5</sup> Assisted reproduction is the use of medical techniques to bring about the conception of a child, including artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, egg and embryo donation, and drug therapy.

when I was eight months pregnant with José, the adoption agency called us, because we had put our names on a list, and we had a child, Clarissa. She was almost three and she arrived more or less the same time as José. And so we had this big family, which we had been dreaming about since we were 18 years old. Now they were all there, our three children. And I really began putting everything together and, as I'm an artist, working with art, and my art always has a lot to do with what I'm living, with the things I believe in, principally creation, about writing, about everything. And, with the children, my desire to talk about the subject became a serious thing, I'd say. So I started doing some work on this, a little book for children that I hope comes out this year, that has been in process since my pregnancy with Rosa.

**SC: So it's on the theme of families with two mothers?**

LC: On the theme of families with two mothers.

**SC: What's the title of the book?**

LC: Of the book? *Mama Owls*.<sup>6</sup> (Laughs.) And also a first children's play that is about the mother-daughter relationship, and also about the question of gender, about motherhood, and about the many possibilities for family. I did this as a very open interpretation, but it addressed these themes, with songs from Vinicius [de Moraes],<sup>7</sup> and we did it in 80 cities throughout Brazil, and then in Lisbon. And then, talking more directly about the themes of LGBT, is the play "To Our Children,"<sup>8</sup> which is being adapted for cinema. So I worked with these issues at a more professional level. But it basically is about a woman lawyer who has a son with her partner. Well, the partner is actually pregnant. And she's going to talk to her mother, to tell her that she's going to have a child this way. And the mother really is a great feminist from the '60s, but she's going to have to deal with this situation. And the story develops several thoughts about the feminist issue. So, yes, through my experience and the choices I made, questions of gender were present. And I think I can say that I am a feminist, and that I think about this. (Laughs.)

**SC: (Laughs.) And to what extent is this most recent play, "To Our Children," that will now be coming to the screen, autobiographical? The characters represent you and your mother, or other people?**

LC: No, no, they represent, there some autobiographical aspect, in the sense that it very much grew out of my desire to talk about these themes, and from the fact that – as I said before – I had to face that even the most open-minded people could have difficulty dealing with this question, you know? Also, I think things appear today in a way that a

---

<sup>6</sup> In Portuguese, *Mamães Coruja*. The expression "Mama Owls" refers to the big eyes of mothers, who are looking at their children. It captures a sense both of protecting the children and of being proud of them.

<sup>7</sup> Vinicius de Moraes (1913-1980) was a Brazilian poet and song-writer, whose lyrics pioneered the Brazilian music known as Bossa Nova (which means, literally, "new trend.")

<sup>8</sup> *Aos Nossos Filhos*.

short while ago they didn't. People couldn't be so open, they couldn't live the way they can today. This is really very recent, and ignorance makes things very difficult, even for the most open-minded. But, the play is mainly fictional, based on many interviews and people I've met. I wanted to create a gay character who is somewhat *careta*,<sup>9</sup> in the sense of a conventional person, married to the same person for many years, a lawyer with very conservative values, very correct. I wanted to break the stereotype of the gay person who is fucking crazy, who goes to parties, who does no matter what. So an extremely conventional person, who is biased about various things and social issues, who talks ignorantly about HIV. So there is this character, then, with her prejudices and limitations, very conventional, and this is the gay character. And in counterpart to her – and I don't identify with this character (laughs) – there is a mother who is not of my mother's generation, but rather from the generation before, a woman of the '60s, who fought against the dictatorship in Brazil,<sup>10</sup> who experienced the moment of sexual revolution in Brazil.<sup>11</sup> At some point it clicked for me. Today we have a president of that generation. It clicked for me – the achievements of this generation, the search for freedom, the sexual revolution. I think it paved the way. My theory is that it paved the way for what we live today, even if not directly, they were not thinking about that, but it paved the way for a democracy that we live today, more fully, with the possibility to obtain rights. And it shaped the way young people think – if not for the sexual revolution, we wouldn't think as we think today. So I put these two women in conflict, because one comes from the other, but not in the direct sense that one is the daughter of the other; one comes from the other in the sense that the achievements we see today come from the achievements of that time, so in this sense, it is symbolic.

So it's possible that there's something inspired from my mom. This is a woman with an extraordinary mind, and I think my mom is that kind of person. But it's a woman from the previous generation, who fought against the dictatorship and has a whole history that is not the one of my life at home, growing up. So yes, there is personal inspiration, but there's a fictional story on top of this, which addresses values of freedom and the achievements of two different moments of Brazilian history.

**SC: So you are already responding to another question that I wanted to ask, which is how you see your work as an artist and a professional and also as an activist in relation to the history of your country? So you more or less explain the connection you see between the achievements from the 60s with the sexual revolution and what we got today with gay marriage legalized in Brazil and the growing possibilities of having kids and an alternative family, which is not so**

---

<sup>9</sup> The literal translation of *careta* is a grimace or pout, but colloquially it means a conventional person.

<sup>10</sup> The dictatorship refers to the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil for 20 years, from 1964 to 1985. It began with a coup d'état led by the Armed Forces against President João Goulart of the National Labour Party. Especially in the context of the Cold War, conservatives viewed Goulart as too far to the left; the United States supported the coup against him.

<sup>11</sup> The sexual revolution refers to the social movement in the late 1960s that challenged conventional norms about sexuality and interpersonal relationships, in the U.S. and throughout many countries in the world. The movement paralleled other social justice movements, such as the civil rights movement in the U.S., and anti-dictatorship work in Brazil.

**alternative any more – which was alternative, but is now normal, even legally. Do you see any connection, because besides your work in the theater, as an artist, as a professional, you also work as an activist in some ways, so can you explain a little more of this process?**

LC: So I think one thing is, we still have very little information, people, as I was saying before, because in 2008, 2009, I didn't know anything about anything, I needed to look for help, look for couples, and I ended up building a network of gay families, both men and women, a network of lawyers, somewhat specialized in these issues, who worked on one case or another, who started to talk with each other and create information. Because of this network and my artistic work, which goes more and more in this direction – so today, I am associated with WIFT – Women in Film and Television, an international organization, I went to *Festival de Films de Femmes*<sup>12</sup> which, in fact, is a festival focused on women's cinema, so I experienced how visible the discussions of these themes can be. And in the end I became a catalyzer for other people and other families in the same situation, or a similar situation, or wanting to have a family. And with this, today we are almost 500 families in Brazil, connected really virtually, through Facebook and other things. For three years we have been meeting with some families that are nearby and can meet. Last year a woman who works in the press room of the senate, she is gay, married with a woman, she has three kids. She called me to talk about participating in a public meeting on the new configuration of families with Senator Ana Rita from PT,<sup>13</sup> who created space for this discussion, and there was also a representative from the Ministry of Human Rights, and Maria Berenice Dias,<sup>14</sup> a lawyer who –

**SC: A judge, no? A federal judge?**

LC: She is, she is now a federal judge, exactly, but she was one of the first to defend the rights of LGBT in Brazil. There was me and one other representative (I can't remember her name, but I will tell you later), who wasn't from the Ministry of Human Rights, she was a representative directly from the Federal Government, and they held this round-table. It was very interesting because it was 8:00 in the morning, it was live on the Senate TV, and there was a huge repercussion against it on the internet, all of the religious people, I don't know, saying that there were no representatives of God at that table, that everyone was on the same side, that there was no one representing their

---

<sup>12</sup> The French international film festival started in 1938 and features films created by women from around the world. See <http://www.filmsdefemmes.com/fr>. Women in Film and Television International (WIFTI) supports the professional development of women in all areas of film making. See <http://www.wifti.net/>.

<sup>13</sup> The *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Worker's Party) is one of the largest left-wing parties in Latin America, launched in 1980 in Brazil in opposition to military dictatorships. It follows the democratic socialist trend, which differs from communism by embracing socialist economics but maintaining a democratic political system.

<sup>14</sup> Maria Berenice Dias (b. 1948) is a progressive Brazilian judge and the first woman to take the bench in her home state of Rio Grande do Sul and to become a justice in the highest Court of Appeals. She advocates for women's rights, human rights, and sexual rights, specifically focusing on family law.

voice. In truth, I think that this movement, because when I was putting on my play, Feliciano was there, and at that point, he was taking over the Commission of Human Rights of the House of Representatives – so Senator Ana Rita organized this round-table in response to that, for the Senate to be a counterweight to the House of Representatives, and there is a strong movement –

**SC: Sorry, can you, I think for those who might not know who Feliciano is.**

LC: Marco Feliciano is, he is (laughs), it's even funny, for those who know nothing, it's almost funny. He's from a conservative party, he's a priest in the Evangelical church, and he ended up being named the president of the Commission for Human Rights of the House of Representatives. And not only is he against all human rights of the LGBT population, but also against all movements for racial rights, for the black community, he's in favor of anti-gay policies, he's an open racist. He says things that we can't even imagine hearing anymore, that the black population was enslaved because they deserved it. That's how he reads the bible, the way people read it in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 18<sup>th</sup> century (laughs), so it's a very scary thing that this kind of guy can be on the Commission for Human Rights. And he was very against all of the rights acquired by the LGBT population, he organized a movement against the civil union, before marriage was legal, he's very much against marriage. And children – don't even mention it. We would corrupt them, eat the kids, who knows what we'd do!

So, there was this conservative movement which even got some attention, it got a lot of media attention, a lot of people talking about it. That's the point I was making, when there is a visible movement for obtaining rights, the reaction is also much more visible.

**SC: So, as we were gaining space, gaining space, reaching –**

LC: We are, I think we still are, but then we have to face this reaction from those who do not want anything to change, the classic conservative reaction – let's keep everything as it is. So there's the beginning of a movement of hetero-pride, a movement of men, those poor men, poor heteros, white, blonde men – those are the worst, they suffer a lot. (Laughs.) There are movements, in truth, because they feel that their space is changing, and that's when you feel it even more, the need to make things – I think we don't need to fight against them, because theirs is a scream with no real echoes, because the movement will go on anyway. But I do feel the need to make things more clear, more spoken, more public, on television, in the cinema, the theater, in interviews... Since having kids, I'm always interviewed on mother's day, every mother's day there's some news somewhere about my family. This year I received three phone calls and I said, you're not tired of talking about us? (Laughs.)

But this is because not everyone can accept showing their family, and to the contrary, I think it's very important to show. I think that, I understand – I have psychiatrist friends who can't show their families because of their patients, and, I don't know what. But I'm in a position where I can show my family, I think it's very important to show, because if had seen this more in newspapers, on television, in films, my life would have been

easier. So that's what I can do, that's the activism that belongs to me. And I was telling you earlier, that in terms of activism, there is this group, this network that was organized after the public forum at the Senate, it was a project that was initiated by Maria Berenice, to think about an association, to formalize this association of gay families, called ABRAFH (an acronym for Associação Brasileira de Famílias Homoafetivas),<sup>15</sup> exactly to create a space where you can look for information or ask about things, such as children's birth certificates. Also, to organize collective movements, as there is now something very funny happening, some *cartórios*,<sup>16</sup> after that marriage, after the change of the law of assisted reproduction, some cartórios are registering the children of two moms or two dads right when they are born, without going through a judge or a process, as I had to. Others no, because there is no formal law, so this is similar to the United States. If you go to Juiz de Fora,<sup>17</sup> you register. Here in Rio, no – because there is a judge of civil rights who is a known homophobic. So, in order to achieve equity in this, to organize projects, to create a national law, I am involved in the creation of ABRAFH. They want me to be the president, but I don't know if I can, I have three kids to raise, I don't know if I'll have time.<sup>18</sup> But there's no doubt that I am involved in this movement that I think is very important, this connection of families, for various reasons, for achieving basic rights, but also for knowing you are not alone in the world.

**SC: This would be to regulate the cartórios, meaning, to create a law to regulate --**

LC: This would be the first project, right?

**SC: Registering children, of two mothers or two fathers?**

LC: Yes.

**SC: And you think that it's important, the movement – is there a movement now to change the law, to create federal legislation to change the constitution, to alter the writing of the constitution, where it says that the civil union is between a man and a woman, or to make a law? Because today gay marriage is possible in Brazil because of a decision made by the Supreme Court.**

LC: Exactly, I think they have to change the law for, I think the ideal would be to change the law in terms of marriage and civil union, so that there is no doubt, because really, it says it has to be a man and a woman, but it doesn't say "exclusively" so we can take advantage of this hole. It doesn't say "exclusively," so we can too, that's how the Superior Federal Court is reading this and now there's no question about the marriage, any cartório, even in Rio, even with this homophobic judge, there's no doubt, you can

---

<sup>15</sup> The Brazilian Association of Gay Families. See <http://abrafh.blogspot.com/p/sobre-abrafh.html>.

<sup>16</sup> *Cartório* is a public notary office where documents such as birth certificates, death certificates, and marriages are legalized.

<sup>17</sup> Juiz de Fora is a city in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais.

<sup>18</sup> Laura did become president soon after this interview.

get married. But this really isn't the same when it comes to kids. It is the tendency, but it all depends on the legal interpretation. So since there's no law regulating this, there's no decision that regulates the cartórios, for the issue of children there isn't. Ideal would be a change in the law, yes, a revision to the constitution that could neutralize it, because in Brazil it's the contrary, and changing the constitution hasn't happened yet.

**SC: Uh-huh.**

LC: It's all been in the scope of the courts.

**SC: And in the scope of politics and activism, how do you see – because your work is around, as you explained very clearly, the relationship between your personal and family life and your professional life, at least in some works that you wrote and acted in, and your political activism that is related to your experiences, your life with your family. How do you see this part of the LGBT movement, I mean, of families and the rights of families and maternity and paternity. Do you see this related to what you would call a feminist movement or a specifically LGBT movement in global terms.**

LC: In the world, do you mean?

**SC: Well, in Brazil, and the world, maybe starting with Brazil.**

LC: Let me see if I understand the question. How I see this question of families in the context of other questions related to the LGBT movements and feminists in general, is this it?

**SC: In all of Brazilian history, how do you see this moment of activism for family rights, rights of families, as related to the history of the LGBT movement and or the history of feminists, or of feminism in Brazil?**

LC: Yes.

**SC: You mentioned in the beginning how you see where we are now as a result of the beginning of the sexual revolution.**

LC: Yes, no doubt, as I said in the beginning, related to the feminist question, there was a drastic change in the '60s, since the right to divorce, that made a huge difference. I find this funny even, that as the character of the play actually lived through the sexual revolution, when the daughter comes to say that she's going to have a baby with the partner, that her partner is pregnant, the mother says right away, "So you had a ménage? A ménage a trois," meaning were there three of you? Because she lived through the sexual revolution, so everything is possible, no?

**SC: While the character of your work is a conservative person, right, very monogamous?**

LC: She is! And she's horrified – no, in vitro fertilization, for God's sake! There's no way I was going to have a ménage, and the mom thinks so... because we had, right, there was a conservative backlash since, mainly because of AIDS I believe, so the moment of free sex, with no limitations, when everything was possible, drastically declined. This puts together the histories a little with the question of the gay movement, in general, because AIDS started in a population of gays, gay men for the most part, and from there, I believe, a new gay activism grew because the things we achieved, the right to freedom, was all lost in the same bag – lots of people died, the religious people on watch are going to say that this is a punishment, right? And then you have to start from another perspective, another place, and I think that also this was a battle that we won. Well this is maybe too much, but “won” with a certain speed, if you think about the 80s. Now in 2014, AIDS is a chronic disease that is no longer a disease that will kill you. It's easier to deal with than diabetes, no? And it has spread, no? It's not a disease that has a focus on the gay community, everyone can get it or not, if you are not careful with using condoms, the sexual education of the world had to adapt. But I think it's out of the gay niche and has become a chronic disease. And with this, once again there's a movement to face the prejudice against experiencing sexual freedom today. So I think that the movements in some ways, they encounter each other, there is an intersection. The feminist movement, the gay movement, even movements generally called rights of minorities, I always put minorities in quotes, as if women were a minority, as if black were a minority, I even think as if gays were a minority (laughs), but it's everything in the bag of minorities. Many of those things are majority, but there starts to be in the whole world a preoccupation with those rights. In Brazil, I think that even in my path there was an encounter with the movements of the black population. Since the system of quotas<sup>19</sup> in universities, schools, companies, TV, cinema, before starting to work with the issues of the LGBT rights or women, I made many plays about black culture. So this is something that always spoke to me, I have many artist friends, blacks, I produced a lot with them, and there was an outcry from them for rights, for visibility, from a new place, and I have the clear impression that one thing goes more or less together with the other, the issue of equal rights for everyone, for women, for blacks, for gays.... And then people say, oh, that's too much. You segregate the population into women, blacks, and gays, until one day we don't need this anymore. But the fact is, that it's very easy to say we don't need special rights, when the opportunities are not equal. So, in recent years in Brazil, and I think I'm saying, I don't know, I'm thinking here, I think that since Lula's<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> In 2012, a law was passed that reserved 50% of spots in Brazil's federal universities for students coming from public schools, low-income families and who are of African or indigenous descent. This measure of affirmative action also takes place in other contexts, such as the job place. See, for example: Carneiro, Julia. “Brazil's universities take affirmative action.” BBC.com. <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-23862676> (accessed 3/24/15).

<sup>20</sup> Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil from 2002 to 2011, is member of the left-wing Worker's Party. He made his way to power from poverty, becoming involved in unions that under his leadership became strong independent movements. His presidency advocated social democratic reforms and social programs that left him with the highest approval ratings in Brazilian history. It is common throughout Brazil to refer to leaders with their first names.

and Dilma's<sup>21</sup> government, we started to see concern related to those issues in a much more direct way, including in my work of cultural production. I see clearly that I get partnership and often resources for projects that value that kind of affirmative action in all fields, and when I started my professional activity, I didn't think that way. There is a political change that favors this.

**SC: And you get funding from NGOs, from the government?**

LC: For the cultural projects, I mainly get funding through the law of incentives,<sup>22</sup> that is normally approved by the Ministry of Culture.

**SC: From private companies?**

LC: Yes, but the majority of the funding that I get is from public companies.

**SC: Petrobras...**

LC: Yes, Petrobras,<sup>23</sup> the Bank of Brazil, Economic Federal, Eletrobras.

**SC: Who support you.**

LC: In some ways they have a less commercial way of thinking and they work within the framework of the political public, but –

**SC: And the public policy of the federal government which influences –**

LC: that influences this kind of choice –

**SC: Is directed to help in those social issues, social movements, equal rights.**

LC: Yes, exactly. And this is reflected in the culture, I see this happening.

**SC: And do you see this also being reflected in the public? Because another side of this is that you manage to attract a big public to your work. How do you see this**

---

<sup>21</sup> Dilma Rousseff is the current President of Brazil (2011-), now in her second term. She is also a member of the Worker's Party and was formerly Lula's Chief of Staff; she is the first female president of Brazil. She was reelected for a second term in 2014, but with significant controversy around economic issues and corruption.

<sup>22</sup> The Law of incentives allows corporations to pay a portion of their taxes directly to cultural projects. See "Laws of Incentive." <http://www.culturalexchange-br.nl/mapping-brazil/theatre/financial-support/laws-incentive> (accessed 3/12/15).

<sup>23</sup> Petrobras is a Brazilian semi-public multinational oil company, measured to be the largest company in Latin America. Members of the governing party in Brazil are facing corruption charges due to accepting bribes from the company, which has also led to impeachment calls for Rousseff as she headed Petrobras for seven years before becoming President. "Brazil: Thousands Back Dilma Rousseff over Petrobras." BBC.com. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-31880325> (accessed 3/13/15). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petrobras> (accessed 3/13/15).

**involvement? When you have this kind of theme in your work, the public is receptive?**

LC: Look, I think it's very cool because regarding all the issues related to black culture, we had an enormous audience, really enormous. This population, it's our identity, it's evident that this is something for everyone. Maybe it's not the most fashionable show, you're not charging 100 reais<sup>24</sup> for a box seat, quite the contrary those were very popular, very accessible performances. But there were people of all sorts, from all social classes, all colors, all ages, and always identifying a lot with the play. So it was very cool. With the issue of gender, LGBT, we had a good audience, wherever we went. But it created more conflict, so, we worked a lot. Not with "The Little Boy." It was a play that talked about the issue of maternity and everything, and people were able to identify with it. But when talking very directly about the issues of LGBT and everything, there were some places, even though the theater was full, where I left saying, "I think I wrote about two ETs,<sup>25</sup> as much as this mother is an ET, this daughter is also an ET." They are two people with thoughts that would not necessarily resonate in the audience, because the mother was too revolutionary. Who was this crazy talking about a ménage and the communist revolution? Who is this crazy wanting –

**SC: This reaction that you are feeling, you felt it because of published criticisms or because of talking to people.**

LC: There was a critique, a little like this, from *Veja São Paulo*.<sup>26</sup>

**SC: That thought the characters were exaggerated?**

LC: Yes, but then we had some excellent reviews, both in *Folha* and *Estadão*, in São Paulo.<sup>27</sup> And *Veja* is *Veja*, if they didn't talk about it that way, it would be weird. But it echoes this feeling that I had. And we went to many places, we traveled a lot, so when the show was running, the public knew what they were getting, and the reaction was very nice. Many people identified with the play, and waited to talk with us later. Maria [de Medeiros]<sup>28</sup> even said, "You have to set up a stand here so you can stay and open a consultation office." Because one after another would come, everyone wanting to talk, wanting to exchange experiences, and I thought this really was very nice. But we also went to the countryside, sponsored by SESC<sup>29</sup> and there sometimes I would leave feeling alarmed, "who are those women, because really neither of them seem to fit a profile –

---

<sup>24</sup> The real is Brazilian currency.

<sup>25</sup> Saying that someone is an ET is a popular expression that refers to the film character ET, meaning a person is so foreign-seeming that no one can relate to him or her.

<sup>26</sup> *Veja Sao Paulo*, a conservative weekly news magazine with a section on culture.

<sup>27</sup> *Folha de São Paulo* and *Estadão de São Paulo* are the two biggest newspapers in São Paulo.

<sup>28</sup> Maria is the actress who played the mother, while Laura played the daughter.

<sup>29</sup> *Serviço Social do Comércio* (Social Services of Commerce) is a private institution that promotes the well-being of people in commerce and their families through education, health, culture.

**SC: Familiar.**

LC: Right, in reality the two characters, from a very conservative point of view, they aren't any good. You get those two characters, and you burn them (laughs), you put them on the stake, those two witches, none of them are good. (Laughs.) So even though they are going to have different prejudices and different visions, I felt that there was some audiences that would think, "neither one, nor the other, for God's sake."

**SC: But in Rio and São Paulo, the big cities, you had this more positive reception?**

LC: I had a more positive reception. Of course I was in theaters like this [shows with her hands a small space], they were not enormous theaters, right? They were theaters that were right, I think, for this kind of work.

**SC: Right, and it's the work of two people on stage.**

LC: Yes, it is an intimate play, and everything. But now this issue is being talked about in the big media also, last year there was –

**SC: And even in telenovelas<sup>30</sup> on television.**

LC: Exactly, in telenovelas and everything. Last year there was, or it was this year, Matheus Solano<sup>31</sup> being Felix, who had a big gay romance.

**SC: That was a telenovela on Globo.<sup>32</sup>**

LC: Yes, on Globo, where there was a gay kiss, a gay kiss, a kiss between two men, at the end of the series, and with kids involved, they had two kids, and interestingly this actor, Matheus, who had huge success with this character, has worked with me since he was 19.

**SC: Oh, in the theater?**

LC: In the theater, we worked on our first professional play together.

**SC: Cool.**

LC: So this is someone whom I had lots of exchanges with, and he even told me, he came over not long ago, and he told me the reaction was extremely positive for him, the

---

<sup>30</sup> Telenovelas in Brazil are popular serial dramas on television, often referred to as soap operas but different from the soap opera genre in the U.S. Airing during prime time and running for less than a year, the shows are often popular throughout the entire country and spark national conversations. In March 2015 a new telenovela began to air, and for the first time a lesbian couple is the main relationship.

<sup>31</sup> Amor à Vida, which premiered in May 2013, was the first soap opera to include a gay relationship, including a gay kiss, which was highly discussed in the media.

<sup>32</sup> Globo is the main private television channel in Brazil. It is the largest producer of telenovelas.

Brazilian family cheered for his character, for him to get the cute guy, so I think this is very cool.

**SC: And he, personally, in real life, he's not gay?**

LC: No.

**SC: Neither of them, right?**

LC: Neither of them, I think. Matheus I really know he's not, the other one I never met personally, but not Matheus. I know his wife, they have a little girl the age of Rosa, my oldest child.

**SC: So, last question. As you've been talking all this time about the reception in Brazil and also about this movement in Brazil in the context of Brazilian history, how do you see this in the international context. You've already traveled to Europe with the play, you showed the play in the United States in an academic environment, how do you see those connections. In what ways are the things you're talking about – in regards to this process in Brazil and the reception of this new reality in Brazil – a global phenomenon and what do you see as particular to Brazil?**

LC: Yes, I really had the opportunity to think about that, because I act in the play with Maria de Medeiros, who is a very international actress, meaning she has an international career, she is Portuguese, but she has lived in Paris since she was 16.

**SC: She plays the role of the mom in the play.**

LC: Yes, she plays the role of the mom. And Maria worked in the United States with Tarantino,<sup>33</sup> worked a lot in Canada, in Italy, worked, really, in many countries in Europe, so she is a person who brings this international perspective. So when I sent the script to her – and she has a strong connection to Brazil – so when I sent the script to her, she immediately tells me that it reminded her of this gay [male] couple who are friends of hers, who were having kids, and of another couple, women, from the United States, and how this question today is a global issue, how this was a question for the whole world. And then not only did she come to Brazil, but also we started to take – first we went to Portugal, we went to Lisbon. And Maria was very scared of the reaction of the Portuguese to the play. Because we got there and found out, for instance, that even though marriage there today is legal, a single woman, or a woman married to another woman, has no right to reproductive assistance in Portugal, so they all go to Spain (laughs). They deal with this on the border. But this is a country still with a series of prejudices and limitations in this sense, even though in the week we arrived they were just approving in parliament the co-adoption by the homosexual partner, so the theme was boiling.

---

<sup>33</sup> Quentin Tarantino, famous American film director.

**SC: So in terms of the law, Portugal is more advanced than Brazil.**

LC: Yes, it really is, because in Brazil the law was not changed.

**SC: Yes, and this was before the decision of the Supreme Court in Brazil, on gay marriage—**

LC: Yes, in Portugal.

**SC: It was legalized in Portugal by law.**

LC: Yes, and they approved the co-adoption in that week. So the public that we found was very receptive and interested in the interviews that we gave, in how those issues were in Brazil, how they were in Portugal, and even in this group that we have, this network on the internet, there is a group in Portugal, there are about 100 families in Portugal, because it's the same language, and this brings people together. The issue of children in Portugal is still very complicated, because even though marriage is permitted, they have to go through insemination out of the country, and then later, in Portugal you can't have children without a dad, so they keep going to court and looking for a dad, and when you say that this was insemination, if it was an insemination through a sperm bank, then you have to show that, and then it goes to the European court that the child can be registered in the birth registry without a dad.

**SC: Do they put two moms?**

LC: No, no. Yes, this was happening at this time, the co-adoption. But they told me, I even talked with Maria's sister, with Ines de Medeiros, she is a Senator in Lisbon, and she told me that this was approved, but all of this group that I am connected with in Portugal, they say that there is no birth registry yet. So I think something was approved in the first instance, but it hasn't happened yet.

**SC: Because there is the right of the children to know their parentage, no? And this parentage is understood biologically, so that child would have the right to know who the father is.**

LC: To know who the father is, exactly, yes. So we went first to Portugal, and after that we took the play to the *Festival de Films des Femmes* in Paris, and it was very very interesting because in France, all of those terrible anti-gay rights demonstrations have been happening.

**SC: Mainly anti-marriage.**

LC: Mainly anti-marriage, children we don't even talk about. So we had many, two discussions there that were very meaningful, with an audience, it was a festival of women's cinema, about feminine and feminist issues, with producers, so we would talk

a little about this adaptation of this project for the cinema, and we presented it in the theater. So it was an audience very in favor of the issue, but they told me that this there was sci-fi. They used that word. It seemed very far away, the possibility to register a child in the name of two moms or two dads. That things were made super difficult. Then a guy gave a testimony that to have a son, they did it in a clinic in Israel, with an American egg, a uterus in India, so it was something like that, the clinic in Israel, the egg from the US, the uterus in India, for them to have a child, that in the end no way would be registered in the name of the two of them, but it was something –

**SC: This was a couple really well—**

LC: A lot of money, to make this *carnival*.<sup>34</sup> But it's something really very complicated, even in feminist matters, I was shocked, wanting to research more. But precisely because surrogates in the US are very expensive, the Europeans in general are paying people in India. And that person later went out to dinner with me, he showed me photos and everything. They live in a type of camp together, where they live with other women who are giving birth to children of Europeans.

**SC: Heterosexuals also? It's not just for –**

LC: No, not only, of course not. But it's a crazy thing, isn't it? And in Brazil, for these issues, surrogacy is forbidden. I know now two gay men couples who used what they called a temporary loan of the uterus, but it has to be someone from the family, within the 4<sup>th</sup> degree, and it needs to be in fact lending.

**SC: It's another border of legislation that is being debated now.**

LC: Yes, it's being debated. It's curious, isn't it? It's the body of the woman, it's her uterus, but those are questions that stay in my mind. That story made a big impression on me. And, I think, I am very curious to know how this film is going to resonate, because we are making it in co-production with France and this is a theme that is very Brazilian, in the sense that it talks about the military dictatorship in Brazil, talks about the situation in Brazil nowadays exactly as it is. I think this relationship of this mother and that daughter is very Brazilian, has a very Brazilian perspective. But at the same time, there is this issue that we have seen –

**SC: It's a global issue.**

LC: Yes, I have seen reactions in the whole world and even there in Michigan, at your class, I also found it very very interesting. I even thought that the actors at the University of Michigan played the little bit in English wonderfully well, they got it very fast and played wonderfully well. And at the same time in the United States, it's curious, no? These issues seem very outdated on the one hand because there are lots of families

---

<sup>34</sup> Refers to the chaos and the expense of *carnaval*, a multi-day holiday right before Lent when all sorts of parties, parades, and festivities take place.

and people don't think it's anything different with them. Whereas here, at the same time that all is settled, every time that we put on the play, it's a presentation, there is something unique, I feel. But there is something about being such a pluralistic country, each state different, with anti-gay laws and the challenges, so even though there are many more stories related to the LGBT movement, there is also in many places, more challenges, more difficulties.

**SC: This also seems to be the case, from what you are saying, in Brazil.**

LC: It seems, but a little less, in that in Brazil, there is something a little more general.

**SC: The law.**

LC: Yes, the law, and even with the Supreme Court deciding – because marriage was like that – it depended, after they approved civil unions, it depended on the mind of the judge at the cartório where the marriage took place. But since the Supreme Court approved marriage, then no. The opinion of the judge doesn't matter and everyone can marry. And now, the issue of children, with the marriage, and the changing of the law of reproductive assistance, which guarantees that, for example, two women could exchange their eggs, so in those cases they can't do anything because when the woman grows the egg of the partner, all the cartórios register them, because they can't tell who the mom is. But when I did this in 2010, this was forbidden. So there is a law, if I'm not wrong, from 2012, that changes the law of the reproductive assistance, creating actual laws about this issue for gay families that regulate the issues of gay men and women and with that, opens up a whole new space. Now when it's genetic material and the uterus of just one woman, then even being married and even having proof that there is an anonymous donor, the cartório still has autonomy to interpret this, and then you have to start a lawsuit if the cartório is not in favor to solve this. They resolve it reasonably fast. Two years ago, in my case, it took two months. But it's still a burden.

**SC: Good, so that's it, Laura. Thank you very much.**

LC: I spoke a lot.

**SC: It was great, wonderful, I think you covered all the subjects, so thank you very much for the interview, and we end here.**

LC: Thank you.