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Gender Diversity and Education in Rural Areas of Brazil*

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Abstract

The article focuses on gender diversity and seeks to fill a significant gap in the treatment of this topic in the countryside, in Brazil, through workshops carried out with adolescents in schools from Agrarian Reform settlements in Paraná (2015-2017). In the rural areas, the research found a differentiated and non-linear appropriation of gender diversity's projection by the television media in the context of homosexual marriage being legalized in Brazil (2013), as well as notable generational tensions resulting from the acceptance, by young people, of homosexual relationships and homoparentality. The research concluded that the systematic knowledge made available by formal education mitigated occasional setbacks among young people, propitiated the revision of prejudice, reduced homophobia and promoted attitudes of respect for distinct forms of family organization and experience of sexuality.

Keywords: Gender, Diversity, Rural Youth, Formal Education.

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Introduction: the status quo of studies on gender diversity in the countryside in Brazil

There is a gap in the production of research on gender diversity in rural areas (Gontijo; Erick, 2015), as well as in the dissemination of systematized knowledge on the subject in rural schools. In Brazil, gender and rurality studies have focused on the sexual division of labor (Heredia, 1979), political and productive organization and the protagonism of peasant women (Esmeraldo, 2013), the feminist struggle for gender equality, access to land and food sovereignty (Medeiros, 2010; Schwendler, 2013) and, more recently, violence against women. (Scott et al., 2010) With the current transformations in the countryside and advances in theory, the issue of peasant sexuality, practically absent in rural, and gender and sexuality studies in the social sciences and humanities, has begun to be studied from the specificity of the subjects and their territories. (Woortmann, 2010; Gontijo; Erick, 2015)

Homosexuality in the countryside had been analyzed, above all, in light of the migration process. This pattern of interpretation, based on the urban/rural dichotomization, has structured cultural hierarchies, with the subsequent marginalization of the rural. (Scott et al., 2015; Bell, 2000) Modern urban culture has been presented by research, nationally and internationally, as a locus par excellence for the affirmation of sexual diversity, as a heterogeneous environment that offers opportunities for anonymity and sexual freedom. (Valentine; Skelton, 2003) Cities have been seen as spaces that attract the LGBT[1] segment, as a way to escape discrimination, prejudice, control and domination of family and relationships. (Green, 2000) Green's studies from the 1990s highlight the large Brazilian cities as magnets that attracted homosexuals from the interior who, along with natives from the big cities, formed "urban homosexual subcultures." (Green, 2000:278) Rural spaces, on the other hand, have been characterized as idyllic, formed by harmonious, cohesive, and homogeneous communities and therefore heteronormative (Scott et al., 2015) or as advocating a narrow and restricted view of sexuality, promoting conventional gender relations and roles. (Browne, 2011) This rigid social order, with little tolerance for the expression of sexual diversity (Scott et al., 2015), led rural minorities to adopt, in many situations, a "sexual camouflage" to performatize gender in order to fit the hegemonic rules of living and working in rural spaces. (Fellows, 2001)

However, more recent research has sought to understand how heterosexuality is affirmed/constructed, but also contested/deconstructed in everyday practice in rural areas. The simplistic characterization of the rural as a space that limits the experience of sexuality and the urban as a liberal space has been challenged by more positive views of sexual diversity in the countryside. (Scott et al., 2015) Paulo Ferreira (2006), in his anthropological research on masculinities and sexualities in northeastern Brazil in the interior of Ceará, addresses the "unspeakable of peasant sexualities." The author critiques the theories of peasantry and of gender and sexuality that annul and silence peasant sexuality, the "*afectos mal-ditos"* (unspoken affections), which are fitted into the ideal of heteronormative desires in an "idealized rurality." Silvana Nascimento's (2006) thesis, *Gênero e Sociabilidade no Interior de Goiás* (Gender and Sociability in the Interior of Goias), clarifies that in peasant populations the "sexualized" identity is based "on a heterosexual and hierarchical model that, nevertheless, does not exhaust all the senses of the relations between sexes since the forms of collective encounters are defined by the rule of homosociability," which is a logic of local sociability that "brings together people of the same sex and, at the same time, separates those of different sexes, men on one side, women on the other." (Nascimento, 2006:85, 89)

This research, among others, questions the hegemonic discursiveness brought about by rural and gender and sexuality studies that have ignored (or tangentially treated) the complex and diverse interior, rural, and ethnically differentiated realities, as well as Amazonian contexts regarding sexual and gender diversity (Gontijo, 2015; Gontijo; Erick, 2015). Fabiano Gontijo highlights the importance of a research agenda that recognizes this diversity and the creative ways in which rural, interior, indigenous, quilombo, caboclo, and riverine subjects constitute affective relationships and interrogates how "hegemonic standards of normality," as understood by Butler, "are (re)interpreted and experienced (perhaps backwards) in distinct cultural contexts, creating new or other subjects

[1] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, Transsexual or Transgender.

imbued with new or other moralities and (even) constituting new or other legalities" (2017:53). The situational particularities of rural and ethnically differentiated realities, for example, have strained the experiences of sexual and gender diversity, as pointed out in a study by Gontijo, Domingues, and Erick (2016:84), which reveals that the rural and quilombo world "does not passively absorb the influx of the urban world, but negotiates with the latter according to its own local interests".

Recent research has also chronicled urban-rural migration and the development of a gay subculture/identity in rural spaces (Gorman-Murray, 2007; Kazyak, 2011), revealing/confirming that the way people express and experience their sexuality is often distinct between the countryside and the city (Kazyak, 2011). Emily Kazyak's (2011) research, conducted with gay and lesbian people who lived in or migrated to rural areas and/or small towns in the United States, identified a growing acceptance of LGBT people's sexuality in rural areas, linked to the community's recognition of values that define someone as a good person. This urban-rural migration can also be identified in Brazil with the territorialization of the struggle for land and the growing acceptability of LGBT people in the countryside, as identified in the studies of Mariano and Paz (2018) and Cordeiro (2019).

In this study, the rural is understood in its complexity, in a "space-time that transits between rurality and urbanity" (Gontijo;Erick, 2015), where heteropatriarchal regimes have been challenged, particularly in agrarian[2] reform encampments and settlements. In this context, the LGBT issue has been driven by women's struggle to break the patriarchal culture. Such a development is driven through the gender parity clause (2000) and the mandatory inclusion of women as beneficiaries of land reform (2003) (Schwendler, 2013). Changes in gender roles have also been instigated by the schooling of young people in the countryside and the realization, developed in later studies (Schwendler, 2020), that the cultural changes which most strongly affect young people - more educated and open to new sociabilities and gender patterns - cause generational conflicts and tensions in the context of the countryside. Likewise, the interaction with urban LGBT groups, in a context in which agendas related to the theme of gender diversity gain space in the country's political scene, contributed to the self-organization of the Landless LGBT within the MST (Mariano; Paz, 2018). In this way, the struggle for LGBT rights is transposed to the countryside and recreated from the theoretical and political assumptions of the struggle for land, linked to the Popular Agrarian Reform project (Cordeiro, 2019). The rainbow flag is also hoisted in the countryside, especially at the collective meetings promoted by MST (Landless Rural Workers Movement), in the settlements and agrarian reform encampments, as well as in Via Campesina, an organization that brings together the social movements of the countryside, nationally and internationally.

Nonetheless, in the rural school environment, there is a marked gap in dealing with the issue of gender diversity. Sexuality, when dealt with, is approached in a biologized and medicalized way. (Zanatta et al., 2016) According to the research of Luciane da Silva (2019), conducted in a settlement school, the main source of information for young people on the subject has been the television and internet media, interaction with schoolmates, and the formative spaces led by MST youth.

Facing the (almost) invisibility of the topic in the Brazilian rural context, both in research production, as pointed out by Gontijo and Erick (2015), and in school pedagogical practice, this study examined the tensions and generational differences in relation to the way of understanding and accepting gender diversity in the countryside, especially in relation to the potentialized projection of homoaffectivity by the television media in the context of the legalization of homosexual marriage in Brazil. (2013) We also investigated the impact of the gender learning provided by the pedagogical workshops developed by the Project[3],with emphasis on the reproduction, subversion and deconstruction of hegemonic regulatory regimes.

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[2] The action of the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) (Landless Rural Workers Movement) (1984) is particularly noteworthy, as it has been promoting a greater awareness of gender and sexual diversity issues, based on the protagonism of peasant women and, more recently, of LGBT individuals, who have been organized as a LGBT Landless Collective since 2015

[3] The research is part of the international project Gender and education in rural areas in Brazil, developed by Universidade Federal do Paraná (Sônia Fátima Schwendler) and Queen Mary University of London (Else R. P. Vieira), sponsored by the British Academy/Newton Trust (2015-2017) (AF150000).

The methodological path of the research

Aiming at the co-production, along with the school youth, of didactic resources for the inclusion of the topic on the *Educação do Campo* (Education of the countryside) curriculum, this research developed four phases of educational workshops in two pilot-schools in areas of Agrarian Reform settlements in Paraná, achieved through the struggle of the MST: the *Colegio Estadual do Campo Contestado*, located in the Contestado Settlement (2000), in the municipality of Lapa (8th and 9th grade elementary and high school students) and the *Colegio Estadual do Campo Iraci Salete Strosak*, located in the Marcos Freire Settlement (1998), in Rio Bonito do Iguaçu (high school and teacher training). The workshops were held from November 2015 to June 2016, with an average of 150 students at each stage[4], in the age range of 14 to 18 years. They are part of the qualitative methodology of participatory action research[5]— a process of co-investigation, which starts from practical problems and the viewpoint of those who experience them with the goal of changing them — linked to the life story of young settlers.

Data collection relied on ethical protocols and life history methodology[6] —that makes possible the deep apprehension of the relations that young people establish with their environment, as well as the reappropriation of this society in a singular manner — through educational workshops. Starting with scenes from recent TV Globo soap operas that focus on gender diversity, the students were encouraged, initially, to debate the projection of homo-affectivity by the media and its acceptance in the countryside, in the referred context of the legalization of homo-affective marriage in Brazil in 2013. Later, interweaving their perceptions with systematic interventions made available by the researchers, the students were invited to produce didactic resources to be included on the school curriculum of Countryside Education.

These interventions were based, in part, on the theoretical contributions of the American philosopher Judith Butler, who criticizes gender binarism and heteronormativity— where heterosexuality is constituted as the social norm that governs language, social and institutional arrangements (Butler, 1990). For Butler "The regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe and contour the 'materiality' of sex, and that 'materiality' is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony" (Butler, 1993:15). The reproduction and concealment of normative heterosexuality occurs through "the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and 'natural' heterosexual dispositions" (Butler, 1988:524). Naturalization, in turn, requires a cultural intelligibility, that is, a coherence between sex, gender, sexual practice and desire, always oriented towards the opposite sex, as well as "a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (Butler, 1990:194). To this, we can add the contributions of Guacira Louro who, along the same lines, built a theoretical framework for the study of gender diversity in Brazilian education, questioning the field of production of gendered knowledge and power from the perspective of a universal subject and a heterosexual norm (Louro, 1997). The intervention in formal education was also based on Alípio Souza-Filho (2009) and Roger Rios (2009).

The testimonies of the students in the context of the educational workshops allowed us to reflect on the different forms of "acceptance", punishment and the resistance strategies adopted by LGBT people in the countryside. The study also made it possible to understand the pedagogical and human benefits generated by the students' access to systematic knowledge during the educational workshops. We concluded that the generational differences and the tensions resulting from them are accentuated, and that the new knowledge made available generated conceptual, cultural, and pedagogical impacts, notably the revision of prejudices and of omissive or excluding attitudes toward gender diversity on the part of the group of young people who participated in the research.

[4] The students participated in the four stages and were organized into four different groups per stage. In each school, the workshops were held in the classes in which the students studied, after the signing of an Informed Consent Form by students and their legal guardians.

[5] See Thiollent (1992).

[6] See Thompson (2000); Marre (1991).

The educational potential of teledramaturgy in the debate about homosexuality

After the legalization of homo-affective marriage in Brazil in 2013, the TV Globo network broadcasted, consecutively and within a short period, at prime time, three soap operas that gave great visibility to male and female homosexuality, as well as to homo-affective marriage: *Amor à Vida* (Walcyr Carrasco, 2013); *Em Família* (Manoel Carlos, 2014); and *Babilônia* (Gilberto Braga et al., 2015).

José Oliveira (2014), in cutting-edge work, calls attention to the potential of soap operas in expanding the debate of legal accomplishments beyond the legal and academic space, contributing to the struggle of the LGBT movement to overcome prejudice and embrace difference. According to him, the media, more specifically soap operas, can be perceived as "a socioeducational ally in expanding the rights of small minorities, extending achievements and modernizations that have already occurred in academic and legal circles" (Oliveira,2014:165). However, he warns that despite the educational potential of teledramas in broadening the discussion about homosexuality and contributing to the construction and affirmation of homo-affective identity, there is not necessarily a correspondence between the encoding and decoding of the content, as also revealed by Stuart Hall (2003). Media discourses are not simply absorbed in a linear way by the audience, who reworks and re-signifies these discourses from different sociocultural mediations (Orozco Gómez, 2005; Oliveira, 2014).

Oliveira (2014) also argues that the intentionality of television fiction clashes with the limits of the appropriation of the transmitted content, especially given how the traditional spaces of cultural mediation, such as the family and religion, affect the way in which the content is appropriated. There is a fear, on the part of more conservative segments, that soap operas will alter "the historical injunctions of gender and sexuality, since this cultural product enters homes on a daily basis and its discursiveness operates contrary to what is reproduced [generally] in the spaces of the home, school, and religion" (Oliveira, 2014:164). It is in the family space, followed by school and religion, that the first constraints in relation to sexual orientation occur, and it is also where the complexity of the visions of the different individuals that constitute the family are blended, mediated by their context and the content conveyed by the soap operas.

Leandro Colling (2007; 2013) complements the reflection, alerting to the fact that, although the genders and sexualities considered dissident have been occupying more space in Brazilian soap operas, the discourse and representation of homosexual characters are in line with a heterosexist standard of marital relationships, based on heteronormativity, in "practices that seem to be predefined and, therefore, do not need to be problematized" (Beleli, 2009:117).

Case study in schools from the Agrarian Reform settlements: tensions and generational differences when faced with the media's projection of homo-affectivity

Sharing Oliveira's vision of the potential of teledramaturgy in broadening the debate on LGBT legal victories, as well as Maria da Glória Gohn's (2014) categorization of the television media as a space for non-formal education, which intentionally transmits certain knowledge, produces values and constructs identities based on the content it presents (Gohn, 2014), the field research initially discussed scenes from the soap operas with students from the aforementioned Agrarian Reform settlements.

Amor à Vida portrayed male homosexuality, having also turned into a media spectacle the first gay kiss in a Globo soap opera, thus giving visual expression to the new moment of no prohibition and no refusal established by the resolution by the National Justice Council.[7] The second and third soap operas address the issue of female homosexuality and new family configurations. *Em Família* featured the relationship between photographer Marina (Tainá Müller) and Clara (Giovanna Antonelli), who separated from Cadu (Reynaldo Gianecchini), with whom she had a son, to live a homo-affective love. The soap opera again visually alludes to the Resolution by equally making a

[7] Resolution n. 175 (2013) prohibits the relevant authorities from refusing to grant or register a civil marriage, or to convert a stable union into marriage, between persons of the same sex.

spectacle of the first civil marriage between two people of the same sex, as well as the acceptance of the family. The soap opera *Babilônia*, on the other hand, emphasized the creation of a child by two mothers, based on the relationship and homo-affective marriage of Estela Marcondes (Nathalia Timberg) with Teresa Petruccelli (Fernanda Montenegro). They raise Rafael (Chay Suede), Estela's grandson, who loses his mother in childbirth and is abandoned by his father.

The students emphasized marked generational differences and revealed an awareness of heteronormativity (although they did not yet have the term to express it) underlying the prejudiced reaction of parents and grandparents to the projection of homo-affective couples by the media. "The parents are from a different era. They think differently" (Student, Rio Bonito do Iguaçu - RBI, stage I); "In the community, you could hear the older people saying: what's the world coming to, look what's on TV. It was a very prejudiced thing" (Student, RBI, stage I). In their understanding, the elders react with fear and try, in a way, to protect the younger generations from the "contamination" of these possible ways of relating affectively in society.

> My father, especially the times he watched it, said: "with small children watching, they show these gays". So he tried to exclude them, because he doesn't agree with this idea, and then he passes it on to the children, and to the families. (Student, RBI, stage I)

> I was at home with my grandparents and I could see when the soap opera was on. In the beginning everything was fine, but when they came out as boyfriends, my grandparents said: "What a disgrace, is this something you show to children on TV?" (Student, RBI, stage I)

For some students, the visibility given to homosexuality by the media opens the way to confront prejudice. "In the old days they didn't make soap operas with these homosexual couples" (Student, RBI, stage IV). Other students (RBI, stage IV) emphasize: "Nowadays it is more common"; "We try to find out about their [homosexual people's] lives" (Student, RBI, stage IV).

Our research also found a non-linearity in the awareness provided by the non-formal education of soap operas, which confirms Oliveira's position that traditional spaces of cultural mediation, such as family and religion, affect the way content is appropriated. The reiteration of heteronormativity and the consequent exclusion of homosexuality (echoing Butler) through family education has made discriminatory attitudes re-acquire consistency in their account of the reception of soap operas in the countryside. "They [the elders] end up saying the same thing to their children and the children follow the same path" (Student, Lapa, II phase); "If the parents are very prejudiced and the child lives with them a lot, generally they are going to be prejudiced too, right? (Student, RBI, II stage); "My mother is prejudiced. I am not prejudiced, I think that everyone does what they want with their lives. But my mother, she has a certain prejudice, because she doesn't like it" (Student, RBI, IV stage).

The family environment can be seen as a space in which "sexual hierarchies are reproduced and legitimized, naturalizing the heterosexual norm" (Oliveira, 2014:137). Homosexuality is constituted in this context as "a variant of sexuality inhibited by cultural subjection" (Souza-Filho, 2009:103). The foreclosure of this form of sexuality in the countryside was strongly highlighted in the students' speech, as well as in the didactic resources they produced (theater, songs, poems, slogans, fanzines, muralism) (Schwendler; Vieira, 2016). The fact is that the younger generation, as mentioned, participates in spaces of stigmatization in families and of bullying, including in school, and ends up reinternalizing and reproducing exclusionary attitudes:

> This can be seen at school. It's only when someone homosexual comes here that they point at him, saying he's gay, he's a fag (Student, Lapa, stage II)

> People don't even know if you are gay. If you are holding hands, they don't look at you with a normal face, they look at you like, ah, how can such a young girl be a lesbian? (Student, Lapa, stage II)

Several students pointed out that people try to hide their prejudice, but contradict themselves by clearly refuting the possibility of the homoaffectivity projected by the media becoming a reality in the family environment. "At home we watch soap operas, no matter what they show, but they say:

'you shouldn't follow what's on there'. But, in this case, if they are talking about these things, they are teaching that there shouldn't be prejudice" (Student, Lapa, stage II). This attitude of parents may be associated with the fear that their children will incorporate the values conveyed by the media and develop homosexual behavior (Oliveira, 2014). One student anticipates an omissive stance from her parents, i.e., asking her to stay away from homosexual people. "My mom is pretty prejudiced. I sometimes joke at home: 'You might to get a daughter-in-law instead of a son-in-law.' She says: 'God forbid that should happen to me'" (Female student, RBI, stage IV). The prejudiced speech of the mother also reveals the view analyzed by Souza-Filho (2009) that homosexuality, seen as a sexual expression contrary to nature and to divine precepts, can only happen as a punishment from God for the deviation.

Interventions through formal gender learnings and the deconstruction of hegemonic regulatory regimes in the countryside

The decisive contribution of the project lay in its second stage: the introduction of systematic knowledge about gender diversity in the schools of the Agrarian Reform settlements and the co-production of knowledge and pedagogical practices within the specificity of the countryside along with the students. The transforming role of education in the deconstruction of discriminatory social practices was then exercised, in opposition to the excluding matrix of compulsory heterosexuality, according to which the beings that escape from the norm are not "fully human". Paulo Freire is even more eloquent when he proposes that the authenticity of awareness "occurs when the practice of unveiling reality constitutes a dynamic and dialectical unity with the practice of transformation" (Freire, 1982:145). Butler (1988), in turn, brings to light the need for the action of individuals towards their re-actualization and reproduction as reality. Consequently, formal education plays a crucial role in the process, providing access to knowledge and the revision of attitudes.

Despite the merit of the educational intentionality of the soap operas, the research revealed that formal education is essential in the problematization of concrete situations of reality (the unveiling of homophobia) and of the content broadcast by the media (gender diversity). The verification of the differentiated absorption of the theme and the non-linearity of the process among young people, previously pointed out by Oliveira (2014), therefore demanded a step beyond non-formal education. The declarations of the students in fact reveal that the cultural scripts of gender, like the appropriate behaviors for each sex, learned spontaneously in the bosom of the family and in the community, survive those who created and reproduced them through generations. They are learnings that crystallize and are only changed through subversion and a changing context.

The formative process of the workshops introduced into the debates important concepts and their respective terminologies (distinction between sex and gender, cultural scripts, medicalization and punishment of homosexuality, prejudice, discrimination, abjection, disciplining, generational differences, sexual orientation, homoaffectivity, family configurations, etc.), as well as factual information (legal changes, world cultural change, etc.) For the students, the knowledge made available in the educational workshops pointed to new worldviews, which contributed to them challenging their parents about the experience of sexuality. This is what a student from Lapa points out, according to whom homo-affective couples, including those who adopt children, provide an experience within new cultural parameters: "It seems that it is a step ahead of the heterosexual couple. When the child is in this family, he/she has a different vision of society" (Student, Lapa, stage II).

In the third workshop, when we touched on female homosexuality, the legalization of homo-affective marriage and the new family configurations, the students from Rio Bonito do Iguaçu felt at ease talking about the tensions in the family and community and presented divergent positions as to the acceptance of gender diversity. On one side, the homo-affective issue was seen as abnormal, and some said they would not like to share spaces with homosexual people; on the other side, there was a group that accepted and lived with homosexual people (in the family or groups of friends).

> – Student: Nothing against marriage, but I wouldn't go [to a homo-affective wedding], because my family was raised in a traditional way. A couple is a father and a mother. Now, if I want to

> date, I get a boyfriend, if he wants to date, he gets a girlfriend. I would not go. I have nothing against it, but if they are grabbing each other in front of me...
>
> – Student: I think that if there are two mouths, they can kiss each other.
>
> [...] Shouts, applauses, buzzing.
>
> – Student: He said, 'there are two mouths so the they can kiss each other'. Of course they can, but go kiss somewhere else, not where I can see.[...].
>
> – Student: My brother is homosexual. It' s normal, my family accepts it, everybody accepts it. But in her case, she was raised in this culture, but she can change that culture. The human being is not limited, you can change.
>
> – Student: I don't see my father, like, wow, my father is a caveman. I don't want to change, I don't see myself kissing another woman on the mouth.
>
> – Student: But if you can't change your opinion, you can't change anything else. (Shouts, applause) I think that if two girls like each other, they have every right to be together. It doesn't have to be a man with a woman just because society says so. I think that when two people like each other, it really doesn't matter.

While one student felt that it is normal to reject what one does not know, another student argued that this is ignorance.

> – Student 1: So, everyone does what they want, in their own space. I don't judge, I don't come along and say "I don't like you, because you are different from me". But I do respect.
>
> – Researcher: But what if a friend of yours was homo-affective, would you still be friends with her?
>
> – Student 1: Yeah, it has happened and we are still friends, but we have grown apart.
>
> – Student 2: It happened to me and it was no problem.
>
> – Student 1: But in your head there is no problem, in mine there is.
>
> – Student: I just thought it was bad of her to say that, like, you are going to reject what you don't know. I, for example, always go after what I don't know.

The students themselves emphasize the importance of the role of knowledge about gender diversity provided by the workshops as instances of formal education: "Knowing contributes to building different attitudes" (Student, RBI, stage III). The student below highlights both the issue of tolerating the others' different way of thinking, and the recognition that the human being is built on the confluence of practices, discourses, and worldviews constructed in society and absorbed, reworked and/or modified by the individual.

> We are molded as the years go by. Everything is a process of formation. And what we don't do is discuss this at home. This may be our fault, because we don't raise this issue for discussion, but it may also be society's fault, of social coexistence. And this opportunity that we have in the workshop is already a big step. And her reaction there is the same reaction that many had here, in the first video that was shown [*Em Família*]. "My God, two women getting married". So I think it is a collective construction. There is no right or wrong, there are positions. We have to learn to accept positions. (Student, RBI, stage III)

Research by Ferreira (2006), Gontijo and Costa (2012), Gontijo and Erick (2015), Gontijo, Domingues and Erick (2016) corroborate the student's position by revealing the silenced sexualities, as well as the creative way in which rural populations, including indigenous and quilombolas, constitute affective relationships, thus subverting the hegemonic patterns of an "idealized rurality". The student's speech, moreover, brings to mind two important concepts worked by Butler: performativity and agency. Performativity, a reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names, occurs not through isolated acts, but through their repetition within a highly rigid regulatory framework, and a ritual that becomes naturalized over time (Butler, 1990; 1993). This reiterative process of heterosexuality "acquires consistency (and invisibility) precisely

because it is undertaken continuously and constantly (often subtly) by the most diverse social instances" (Louro, 2009:90). However, the necessity of reiteration poses the possibility of nonconformity. In this process, Butler (1993) highlights the agency of subjects; once bodies do not completely conform to heteronormativity, possibilities for subversion and deconstruction of hegemonic regulatory regimes open up.

During the third stage, the speech of one student already makes it clear that, in order for the imaginary of the heterosexual as a social norm to be deconstructed, it is essential to review concepts in relation to the different forms of expression of human sexuality:

> I was brought up without access to this. It's very tricky to start thinking about this difference which isn't new, and all of a sudden you stop to think 'Hang on, it doesn't have anything to do with that, it's the same thing as a 'couple', but until you reach this conclusion the process of redoing all the construction that your parents, the community and society created, is very difficult. Up until you deconstruct that and reach the point of knowing that a man kissing a man is the same thing as a woman kissing a man, it is very complex because of the difficulty of this construction. It is very hard because of the challenge involved in changing the culture (Student, Lapa, stage III, 2002).

In parallel, in the two schools involved in the research, the impact of the formal education provided by the Project was evident. Cultural change requires access to knowledge, as well as socialization based on cultural parameters that problematize heterosexism — "a system in which heterosexuality is institutionalized as a social, political, economic and legal norm" (Rios, 2009:62), through which the LGBT segment is seen as abnormal and, therefore, can be excluded, silenced, hidden. Homophobia — an intense and everyday discriminatory expression that "involves distinction, exclusion, or restriction prejudicial to the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Rios, 2009:71) of those who do not conform to heterosexist parameters — when institutionalized as heterosexism, produces "abject bodies," those in which life does not matter (Butler, 1993); life as LGBT, life as *Sem Terra* (Landless).

During a workshop, when the researchers problematized the term "normal" to designate heterosexuals (implying that homosexuality is abnormal), the possibility emerged in the speech of a student (Lapa, stage IV) for the existence of a discriminatory category of abject bodies in the rural community. She emphasized the recurrence, among the students, of the use of the term "normal couple" to refer to the heterosexual couple, in the sense that this affective configuration is the most common in society; on the other hand, a homosexual couple was seen as part of "another model of society, another cultural standard; a person that should not exist in the world" (Student, Lapa, stage IV). It is important to register that, in recent years, several homosexual couples have become beneficiaries of agrarian reform, thus modifying the very notion and the heterogeneous and heterosexual geography of the representation of rural life, which, in itself, does not produce the acceptability of different ways of experiencing sexuality in the countryside.[8]

Different forms of "acceptance", punishment and resistance strategies

Gender stereotypes and prejudice contribute to the fact that rural families have difficulty in accepting their children's homosexuality. Several forms of denying homosexuality by the family and/or society surface in the students' statements. One young student highlights a false acceptance in society, manifested many times through silence:

> In my family it is like this, everybody accepts it, but not in our family. We know that most families find it absurd. We all talk normally if a homosexual arrives. But we know that they don't want this to happen to their children (Student, RBI, stage IV).

[8] This non-acceptance has contributed to the production of a culture of hate and violence against LGBT people, also present in the rural context, as exemplified by the murder of the young LGBT man Lindolfo Kosmaski, a rural education teacher in the state of Paraná, on May 1, 2021 (*Brasil de Fato*, 2021).

The Lapa students also highlighted, in the second workshop, that the family is one of the formative spaces laden with taboos, in which homosexuality is still seen as a disease. It was on this occasion when the students learned that the categorization of homosexuality as a sexual deviation goes back to its medicalization in the 19th century, which, in the scientific search for what might cause the anomaly in order to fight it as a disease (Souza-Filho, 2009), legitimized prejudice. As one student put it: "Because the family, the father and mother, accepting a gay son or a lesbian daughter is difficult. Parents see it as a problem or a disease" (Student, Lapa, stage II).

Another issue that surfaced in the discussion with the students in the second workshop was hegemonic masculinity, which "requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it and ideologically legitimizes the overall subordination of women to men" (Connell; Messerschmidt, 2013:245) and excludes and subordinates homosexuals. The students' speech reveals that, due to hegemonic masculinities, male homoaffectivity is more difficult to accept than female homoaffectivity. Since the construction of sexuality includes the very demonstration of affection, homosexuality is more accepted among girls and women than boys and men.

> It' s harder for men to come out of the closet, because, according to society itself, men are seen as the alpha male, the pillar of the family. How is he going to regress to something like that, walking hand in hand with another man, or kissing, or hugging. People often get upset about it. They find it bizarre, strange, abnormal (Student, Lapa, stage II).

The "transgression of the heterosexual norm not only affects the sexual identity of the subject, but is often represented as a 'loss' of its original' gender" (Louro, 2009:91). In this way, heteronormativity, according to Louro, seems to be exercised most intensely and concretely in relation to the male gender. "Sometimes, the culture itself creates this, that 'men have to be men,' they can't hug, they can't kiss, they can't find other men beautiful. Women, on the other hand, hug other women. It is a more normal thing" (Female student, Lapa, 2nd phase), which can also be explained by the logic of homosociability, as revealed by Nascimento's research (2006). Besides this, the students became conscious that the idea that star signs, clothing and playing influence sexual orientation is mistaken, that is, the social markers of gender are not definers of sexual identity and orientation:

> I have a cousin whose mother wanted a girl and a boy was born. She had bought everything pink, and he wore pink. Nowadays he is still small, he is ten years old, but he plays with dolls, he likes to touch hair, so we are already preparing ourselves because I think he will be gay. But he also says that he likes the little girls at school (Student, Lapa, stage II).

The systematic knowledge introduced also led to the deconstruction of the understanding, previously recurrent in both schools, that homosexuality is a choice or a deliberation of the individual. Sexual orientation (heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality), according to Souza-Filho (2009:113), is "constructed in subjective and social clashes, produced in interactions, based on cultural patterns, power relations, social ideas, configuring itself as an individual phenomenon as much as a collective one". A student from Rio Bonito (stage IV) said: "It's because sometimes even the parents might not care so much about their child's choice. But what others will say..." Another student from Lapa (stage II) states: "I joked: `Dad, Mom, I'm going to be a lesbian'. And they said: 'if that is your choice'".

It is worth pointing out that the parents' reaction, shown above, in the event of their daughter's sexual orientation being homo-affective, was not the one most frequently found. The students reviewed their positions, but their parents, outside this formal education process, tend to present recalcitrant views of exclusive heteronormativity. Moreover, it seems that acceptance is more difficult on the part of fathers than mothers. "Often it is the father who is more difficult with his son. The mother, very often, she ends up accepting" (Student, Lapa, stage II). However, other statements, mainly from female students, show that mothers, although more open to dialog about the subject, would not accept homosexuality because they consider it an abnormality:

> But she said: "Not here at home. I'll throw you out". I have a gay uncle who is very close. But she says: "the others are the others, we are us". She wouldn't accept it in our house. [...]She speaks normally. She is fine with it. But not her daughter (Student, Lapa, stage II).

Underlying the commissive discourse is the disciplining of bodies to conform to heteronormative gender roles. For Michel Foucault, in the regime of disciplinary power, the art of punishment puts into action normalizing devices in which one compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, and excludes. Punishment can occur "through subtle processes, ranging from mild physical punishment to slight deprivations and minor humiliations" (Foucault, 1997:175).

The study of social ostracism led one student to identify it within her own family. She relates the case of an uncle who lives in the settlement and was excluded for having a homosexual relationship. "And his parents just stopped talking to him. They excluded him. He doesn't exist to the family anymore" (Student, RBI, stage I). Another student points out, "that's why there are couples who don't come out because of their parents. They hide, or leave home" (Female student, RBI, stage IV). People often don't declare themselves to be gay in order not to be excluded from family life or to face discrimination in society. This situation, quite common in the rural context, was also evidenced in the studies by Gontijo, Domingues, and Erick (2016) on quilombo communities in the north and northeast, as well as by Ferreira (2006), on the Brazilian northeastern peasantry. The denial of the homoaffective experience can be seen as a strategy to deal with the "unspoken affections," to circumvent any repression or identification with the stereotypical and negative identity of homosexuality, as Ferreira (2006) states. Thus, the "unspoken affections" can be interpreted as affections that trace "*lines of escape*, reinventing local rumors, using them as strategies to meet" (Ferreira, 2006:91).

Although it was possible to identify in the field research "the unspeakable peasant sexualities, where no word fits, no desire to make it official, no will to define it" (Ferreira, 2006:91), the students also noticed in the migration from the countryside a way to face prejudice in the family and in the community and express their sexual orientation in the anonymity of the big city. The students from Lapa, after the theater in the second workshop, showed how much the family's posture interferes in the affirmation of homosexuality, and exposed the suffering generated by the non-acceptance by their parents of their sexual orientation. Since the person has no way of changing it, one of the possibilities has been to leave home or to emigrate, when expulsion doesn't occur. The non-employability and non-social insertion of the homosexual in the rural community are other dimensions of symbolic violence towards the homosexual that were discussed. Hence the escape from heteropatriarchy and the disciplinary and commissive effects of gender-related discrimination (Vieira, 2013):

> Very often the family that doesn't accept it ends up expelling the son or daughter, or they leave because they can't gain acceptance from their own family. Now, when the family is able to accept it, it is easier to achieve unity and to understand how strong it is (Student, Lapa, stage II).

Through the theatrical performances and speeches, the students developed the issue that the primary circle (the neighborhood and the community) exerts an inhibiting or even intimidating role towards homosexuality. According to them, in the countryside, there is shame and fear of comments from relatives and neighbors, which leads to prejudice and rejection in the family space itself of what is not heteronormative; it is as if the family felt burdened by society for not having educated their children within the norm. "I think that, for the family, in a certain way it is a source of shame, isn't it? The parents think what the others will say, much more than in the family, even" (Student, RBI, stage I).

Impact: access to knowledge and revision of prejudices

Knowledge has a fundamental role in confronting the prejudice that materializes in discrimination, resulting in the "violation of the rights of individuals and groups" (Rios, 2009:54). The socialization of knowledge, through the dynamics of the educational workshops with the students, as demonstrated by this research, generated a conceptual and cultural impact. Laura

Meagher (2013) suggests three predominant categories of impact: conceptual (new knowledge), cultural (revision of misconceptions), and instrumental (for example, development of educational practices).

It is immediately noteworthy that the democratic space and freedom of expression in the workshops broke the culture of silence (a term borrowed from Paulo Freire) around a known fact (homosexuality), which is taboo in rural areas. The words of one student summarize the importance of the workshops having breached the barrier of prohibition: "Because we don't always hear about it. It's something that people think we shouldn't know about" (Lapa, stage III). For the great majority, the workshops, primarily, allowed access to totally new knowledge, "I didn't understand anything and I was able to clear up my doubts" (Student, Lapa, stage III). This conceptual impact (new knowledge) is emphasized by many students as inseparable from the establishment of a culture of debate in a context that repressed discussion on the topic.

The students also highlight the learned ability to identify the specific focuses of diffuse prejudice at first glance. The workshops changed "everything, I didn't understand why prejudice happened. And after the lectures I understood more" (RBI, stage III). For most students, there was a revision of distorted conceptions and/or prejudiced attitudes. They claim that they learned to have more respect and tolerance for the different ways of living sexuality. Intolerance, as Rios (2009:79) states, "violates the right to the simultaneous existence of diverse identities and expressions of sexuality", and, thus, harms pluralism and democratic life. On this issue, the great majority highlighted the lessons of respecting differences in social relations, as well as helping the victims of prejudice. According to the students (RBI, stage IV) "the workshops taught me that I should accept everyone the way they are", because "prejudice only delays people's awareness". Another student highlighted the learning that contributed to reconsidering prejudices. "Many things that were talked about are things that happen every day, but go unnoticed, and the classes helped us to review certain things" (Lapa, stage IV). "In a heterosexist culture, individual behaviors and institutional dynamics, formal and informal, constantly reproduce the parameter of hegemonic heterosexuality as a social and cultural norm, often unintentionally and unnoticed" (Rios, 2009:76).

Still within the striking cultural impact of the revision of prejudice, the statements reveal how important the educational work of raising awareness about gender relations is in reducing it. "I think that since last year prejudice has decreased a lot, right" (student, RBI, stage III). Another student reveals a change in the way of understanding homo-affectivity due to her access to knowledge. "When I saw the soap opera [*Em Família*] I thought: 'My God, I can't believe this is happening. Wow, they're going to be together. It was a shock for me when this soap opera came out. The student added, "How come I thought that way, getting that fright?" When asked what helped her to think differently, she responded, "The different discussions at school. We were listening to each other's opinions. We understood that it was just a conservative form of culture. That it is a historical process" (Lapa, stage III).

The cultural impact is also manifested in the recognition that prejudice creates obstacles and compromises the social insertion of homosexuals and new families: "I learned how much prejudice harms people's lives and also how society is already adapting to this new phase of life with homosexuals" (Student, RBI, stage IV). It is also interesting to note the opinion of one student, who, already in the first stage, recognized the importance of the work with gender diversity carried out in the school by the Project, pointing to the need for the institutionalization of this work by means of a government policy, to reach all schools, so that students can grow up with a more open mind as to cultural change: "This work that you are doing in the school is very important. The government should also think about a project for all schools, so that we can grow up with this idea that they are normal" (Student, Lapa, stage I).

The continuous debate developed in and with the school allowed one of the students from Lapa, who suffered indirect bullying when she left school because she had a gay uncle, to be able to present the impact of this prejudice in her life to the group, with the presence of classmates and teachers, in the third phase of the workshops. "When I was younger, I had to leave, because I was beaten up by the boys for the fact that my uncle was gay. Nobody would talk to me, and I would ask the teacher if she could stay with me waiting for the bus, because otherwise I would get beaten up

by the boys. Furthermore, the workshops helped her not to be ashamed of living with homo-affective people. "I had more courage to go out with my uncle, because I was ashamed to go out with him because he was gay" (Student, Lapa, stage III). It is evident that, because heterosexuals are socially dominant, heterosexuality is assumed as the sexual norm and homosexuality is transformed into difference (Rios, 2009). The workshops also contributed to the acceptance of homosexuality itself, "because today I can accept myself the way I am" (Student, RBI, stage IV), which implies "detaching gay and lesbian from the meanings that we have learned to associate them with", no longer perceiving them "as deviations, pathologies, unnatural and illegal forms of sexuality." (Louro, 1997:83, 84). The debate on the theme in school and family promoted greater acceptance of gender diversity and a consequent reduction in the suffering of homosexuals, many of whom, in these spaces, began to assert themselves without fear of others' judgment.

In conclusion

Gender diversity, in the vision of the students, was initially difficult to be debated. Prejudice was identified as the main cause of the difficulty in approaching the topic. Religion, differing opinions, and the lack of discussion outside and inside the school space appeared as obstacles to dealing with the theme. The systematic study (through educational workshops) of gender diversity and of new family configurations, as well as the discussions with young people about significant cultural changes and their projection by the media, proved crucial to the deconstruction of prejudices and homophobic practices.

Although the verifiability of the workshops' impact on the space of family and friends is beyond the scope and methodology of the Project, the students' statements reveal that formal access to knowledge about gender diversity generated cultural impacts beyond the school environment. Contradictory reactions from parents are insinuated in the students' comments, and it is worth remembering that the generational conflicts triggered by young people's questioning of their parents' attitudes are seen here as fundamental for sociocultural transformation, under the prism of historical materialism. An indignant mother, unaware that sexual orientation is not learned, commented that her daughter declared herself a lesbian because she was influenced by the debate. On the other hand, one of the parents defended the work done, which had enabled him to become less prejudiced, because the children had brought the discussion and the learning to the family environment.

The non-linear process of non-formal pedagogies, such as the media, verified by the study, led young people to reinternalize prejudices, in a process of reiterating what they had seen/heard in their daily family life. The statements about the formal educational process, however, demonstrate that this reinternalization of prejudice was dissipated during the workshops and, in the final evaluation, the students already manifested the desire to work on this prejudice in the family and in the community. The passage from the reabsorption of prejudice to the perception of the need for agency against it in the community was a great achievement during this formal educational process. At the end of the workshops, the students were looking for ways to negotiate the conditions to materialize agency, in view of the family loyalties and hierarchies, still very present in the rural culture. The students also bring to mind the role exerted by the evangelical churches in the fight against homosexuality, seen as a deviation, disease, and abnormality, which contributes to families, especially the older generations, closing themselves off to dialog: "And you can' t discuss it with parents. There is no way, today, that I can go to my grandfather and want to argue about it, you know? Even more so as he is an evangelical" (Student, RBI, stage IV).

They recognize the difficulty of individually addressing the theme in the rural community, where gender and generational hierarchies prevail. "In the community we don't have much freedom to talk about the subject" (Student, RBI, stage IV). Their statements show the extent to which the issue is veiled in interpersonal relationships in the countryside, which contributes to many hiding or denying their orientation and gender identity in the context in which they live. But they signal possible channels of agency through the socialization of the knowledge obtained in the workshops, within the community. The students were almost unanimous in suggesting an educational process on gender diversity, in the form of community lectures and workshops, as a means of socializing this

knowledge and deconstructing prejudiced views. The intervention performed by the Project confirms what Louro (1997) says about the pedagogy of sexuality and the educational potential of the school in the construction of new patterns of learning, coexistence and production of knowledge, through which heterosexist representations and practices can be deconstructed.

Finally, it is important to point out that, in the face of the intensification of conservative and gender-biased narratives in the spheres of power — which has led to the removal of the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity from the National Education Plan (2014) and instituted a climate of surveillance and denunciation of progressive teachers —,this article concludes with a few questions: with the advance of the extreme right, will the emancipatory discourses produced by the project constitute an instrument of counter-hegemonic action in Gramsci's terms? Will this younger generation — more schooled, and with greater access to information technology and education in gender and sexuality — be the protagonist for transformations in the countryside in terms of positive attitudes towards inclusion of gender diversity?

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