Grammars of Damage and Suffering in Brazil Today

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Abstract

The purpose of this reflection is to draw attention to the effects that recent political transformations have produced on people's subjectivity by observing clues to how these events are inscribed in daily relations. We approach both those who feel affected by or vulnerable to escalating discourses and practices of sexist, racist, homophobic and class violence, and others who have in some way adhered to conservative and exclusionary discourse. We are directly interested in the subjects, many of whom are devastated, who in their efforts, amazement, and negotiations interest us, not specifically the events to which we refer. As will be noted, the category "suffering" is central to this debate.

Key words: Suffering; violence; subjectivity; social markers of difference; interseccionality; far-right.

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Gramáticas do dano e do sofrimento no Brasil atual

Resumo

O objetivo dessa reflexão é chamar atenção para o efeito que as transformações políticas recentes têm produzido na subjetividade das pessoas: trata-se de observar pistas sobre como esses acontecimentos se inscrevem nas relações cotidianas. Procuraremos uma aproximação tanto daqueles que vêm se sentido atingidas ou vulneráveis diante da escalada dos discursos e das práticas de violência sexista, racista, homofóbica e de classe como dos que de algum modo aderiram ao discurso conservador e excludente. São os sujeitos, muitos dos quais devastados, que em seus esforços, espantos e negociações nos interessam e não os eventos aos quais nos referimos diretamente. Como será possível notar, a categoria "sofrimento" se mostra central nesse debate.
Palavras-chave: sofrimento; violência; subjetividade; marcadores sociais da diferença; interseccionalidade; extrema direita.

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Introduction

> "*Migues*! Are you there? I'm not well! I dreamt that the military broke down the door, invaded my house, dragged me outside and arrested me in the middle of the night because I'm gay".

This anguished message, a call for help in distress, was received in the middle of the night by one of the authors on a WhatsApp group of university students and professors at the time of the coup and impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, in 2016.

Little did we know at that time that we were in the middle of a process that would lead gender, sexuality and race to become central aspects of a discourse that arose not about difference or respect, but about inequality and exclusion. This grouping of social markers of difference has become central in the current political debate.

In fact, a retroactive perspective reveals that signs had appeared earlier on the horizon. In other situations and moments, gender and sexuality on one hand, and affirmative action policies based on race on the other, were led by a conservative reaction. Flávia Biroli (2018) recalls the "ambivalence" of the 1990s, when the Catholic Church reacted strongly to sexual and reproductive rights, which were gaining recognition in nation states. In Brioli's words:

> The redemocratization [of Brazil], combined with the international environment of the 1990s, raised new opportunities to politicize citizenship based on categories of gender and sex (as well as race and ethnicity). The decade of 2000, in turn, saw an increase in forums for participation as determined by the Constitution of 1988. The arrival to the presidency of the republic of a party whose historic social bases were in social movements, the Workers Party (PT), allowed an "unprecedented permeability of the State" (...) to movements such as feminists and LGBT. Simultaneously, the ambivalences of a government that depended on conservative alliances in Congress were particularly poignant in the agenda of reproductive and sexual rights. (Biroli, 2018:88)

To this "permeability", it is necessary to add the affirmative action policies based on race and ethnicity, which divided the country and Brazilian academy with fervent positions for and against the measures known as PPI (to refer to blacks, browns and indigenous - *pretos*, *pardos* and *indígenas* in Portuguese). While the state first recognized racism during the Presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, it was only in the administration of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva that quota policies began to be effectively implemented with a dual focus (which was also controversial, because many only wanted elitist identity measures) to include these groups in socio-economic terms, while simultaneously recognizing them as subjects of rights, opening space and legitimating their voices and life experiences. It is not possible to ignore the fact that the governments commanded by the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores - PT) had alliances with conservative Evangelicals, which influenced policies concerning these issues (Biroli, 2018). Even with the growing presence of religious fundamentalist groups, which culminated in 2013 when a pastor from a far-right party was selected to preside over a congressional human rights commission, most analysts were focused on another situation.

That is, in various realms of the social sciences – in particular religion, social movements, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality – we saw efforts to give intelligibility to these new agendas that produce subjects of rights, previously ignored or persecuted by the state. These agendas also took shape in articulation with international forums and marked by recent experiences of (re)democratization: South Africa and Brazil are actors of great importance in this field, celebrated for the construction of new Constitutions, which consider social groups that had previously been ignored and discriminated against. Both countries are paradigmatic in the field of human rights.

Since the turn of the millennium, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality became fields of growing and innovative intellectual production and a significant focus of political concern for social sciences in Brazil. Nevertheless, we now face the effects that stem both from this greater visibility and from the social transformations associated to emerging political subjects, especially in the realm of jurisprudence and public policies, but also in the organized reactions against these transformations. Different groups with various interests and relations with the current government have violently attacked black, quilombola, indigenous, women and LGBTI+ people. Their rights as minorities are threatened, and the scientific competence of the social sciences is equally questioned – with a special focus on Brazilian anthropology. The discipline has gained visibility in Brazil in recent decades along with the development of "identity politics" (Machado, Motta, Facchini, 2018)

The relationship between political insertion and knowledge is an ethical imperative that contributes to refining understanding of the role of the social sciences, problematizing contexts and conditions in which their discourses emerge and incorporate the conflagrated fields. However, this relationship is now denounced as "ideology", precisely by those who strive to substitute paradigms and scientific theories with certain beliefs or religious concepts. The attacks against anthropology in particular explore various flanks, including attempts to criminalize the production of reports on ethnic groups and their territories as well as educational and cultural actions related to gender and sexuality, spreading a movement that seeks to criminalize emerging political subjects to make them even more fragile (Carrara, França, Simões, 2018).

We return to the epigraph that opened this article to stress that the objective of this reflection is to call attention to the effect that recent transformations have produced on the subjectivity: it is an effort to observe clues about how these events are inscribed in daily relations (Veena Das, 2007). We have made an effort to approach both people who feel affected or vulnerable in the face of the escalation of discourses and practices of sexist, racist, homophobic and class violence and others who in some way adhere to the conservative and exclusionary discourse. It is these subjects, many of whom are distressed, who in their efforts, alarm and negotiations are of interest to us and not specifically the events to which we directly refer. We intend to show that the category of "suffering" is central to this debate.

In this reflection we also react to those who understand attacks on "gender ideology" and or LGBTI+ and ethnic and racial rights as "smoke screens" to deviate from supposedly more "serious" and or structural problems such as reform of the social security system. We understand gender, sexuality and race as categories that intersect in multiple modes and structure not only daily relations but also the fundaments of the nation (as representation) and the state itself (in its technical-administrative political apparatus), as shown in different approaches (Souza Lima, 2002; Vianna, 2014; Vianna and Lowenkron, 2017; Moutinho, 2004, 2012 and 2017).

In *Life and Words*, Veena Das argues in favor of the idea that the state is not purely a rational-bureaucratic organization, nor is it a fetish. Taking another direction, Das postulates that the state – which should never be considered in monolithic terms, as Antônio Carlos Souza Lima affirms in *Gestar e Gerir,* or as a complete and finished project, as Veena Das and Deborah Pole maintain (2004) in another text – oscillates between rational and magical modes. There is an entire legislative web composed of laws and institutions, but the state still shows its face, especially when observed from the perspective of subjects and how their daily lives relate

to the law – as rules performed and represented in modes of rumor, gossip, ridicule and even a type of mimetic representation. Das also adds that, in the context of the revolts that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi, a clamor for justice was also aimed at the state. This clamor is certainly not restricted to India. The apartheid regime in South Africa was no different in this regard, for example. Veena Das names as magical practices the presence of the state in the daily lives of the communities studied. In this article we attempt to follow the tracks found in general fragments of a clamor that in Brazil today has been questioning, confronting and even appealing to a state in complete reconfiguration. This state, in its legal-bureaucratic format marked by forms of exclusion, produces what Herzfeld (2016) has called social production of indifference.

With Zethu Matebeni (2017) we also rely on a body of knowledge that incorporates the reality lived by subjects. We therefore distance ourselves from an intellectual project that is based on normalizing regimes of knowledge. This is important to stress at a time when the government is supported by fake news, and fetishizes the "other" as difference and inequality, and operates with fragments that drain the humanity from those represented in their messages. We invest in coetaneity, thus understanding the "other" as different and contemporary and not as unequal, to be living in another time, or another era (Fabian, 2013). The analysis that follows is inscribed within studies about intersectionality and social markers of difference that not only reflect on "how some become 'us' and others 'them'" (Moutinho, 2014:203) but also why, as Flavia Rios and Edilza Sotero (2019) affirm "intersectionality, based on gender studies, has established itself as an unavoidable paradigm in the social sciences" (:01).

Images, phrases, effects: fundamentalist (re)founding of the State

Before Brazil's current president was freely spouting his hates on social media, we found this photo in the news upon waking up after the impeachment of President Rousseff, elected by the Worker's Party two years earlier.

The image is emblematic. Its acts on the subjectivity of many and convokes us to an ethnographic work about the recent transformations. Perhaps this can effectively be a rich moment for reflecting on what we have done, as anthropologists, and on what has been done to us as citizens and researchers in the human sciences. In fact, it is necessary to confront the anti-intellectualism that is now dominant and a first step may be to inquire about the effects of recognition of racism, homophobia/transphobia and sexism during 13 years of Workers Party rule, and of the recent denial by the state that these prejudices exist.

It can be said, without exaggerating, that we have reached a point of dispute over the very format of the state, which is closely articulated with epistemic power. It is not by chance that conservatives are taking aim at the human sciences and anthropology. In other words, there is a dispute over who has the power to define the subjects who deserve rights, and also a dispute over who has the authority and strength to define what is violence and against whom: the nation-state has been reinaugurated through the perpetration of a violence that intersects particularly with certain social markers of difference. At the center of this undertaking are subjects who embody both difference and inequality.

The photo that inaugurated the rule of President Michel Temer [who had been Rousseff's vice president], after what many called a parliamentary coup, substituted not only a white man for a white woman to lead the nation. The image juxtaposes the diversity of gender, race, color, ethnicity, clothing and origin with a monochromatic representation of white men in suits and ties – not all are effectively white, but this is what they performed.

This photo was followed by another equally emblematic one, entitled: the "beautiful, reserved and domestic".

(in https://veja.abril.com.br/brasil/marcela-temer-bela-recatada-e-do-lar/)

The woman in the photo and accompanying interview had just become the First-Lady. She was presented as being 43 years younger than the president, as liking "knee-high dresses" and said she was dreaming of having another child. In another headline, with a profile photo, carefully coiffed and made-up, the "the government's best bet" is presented in bold letters as having a function, beyond a decorative one: "with an agenda of national appearances, the young and beautiful first lady will become the show card of the Palácio do Planalto [the Presidential Palace], to lift its popularity from the dumps".[1] This was a challenge to the strength of recent feminism, which in articulation with the state, through a series of policies for inclusion, had expanded the spaces for women in Brazilian society. A reflection on this theme and this process becomes necessary.

1 http://ametadesul.blogspot.com/2016/12/marcela-temer-garota-propaganda-do.html - last accessed on 16 October 2019.

Violence, suffering and rights: a synthesis of intersectioned processes

The modern feminist, black and gay movements (the latter are now called LGBTI+) emerged in Brazil in the 1970s at the heart of the struggle against the military dictatorship and through an interlocution, often combative, with democratic forces and with the left (MacRae, 2018; Machado, 2010; Hanchard, 2001). Their respective trajectories of constitution as political movements shared an emphasis on experiences of discrimination and violence in the composition of collective identities that sustained the demand for rights and the interpellation of the state and its institutions. Since then, efforts of varying levels of success have have been made to forge and popularize notions capable of synthesizing the specific forms of violence and discrimination that women, blacks, gays, lesbians and trans people suffer daily, in their private lives and in the public sphere – misogyny, sexism, racism, homophobia – which each movement sought to denounce and combat (Ramos, 2005). Therefore, violence, discrimination and suffering, in articulation with demands for rights, are organizational themes of production of subjectivities and collective action of these movements, since the time when they were called "minorities".

Two other shared aspects mark the recent route of these movements in Brazil, through the end of the decade of 2000: the articulation before state agencies, as the main strategy to obtain citizenship, and efforts to denounce, punish and criminalize gender violence, racism, homophobia and transphobia, as central fronts of struggle, even if different markers, paths and rhythms are followed.

The insertion of feminist activists into the structure of the state dates back to the initial periods of redemocratization, which were marked by the creation of the National Women's Rights Council (CNDM) in 1985, which was linked to the Ministry of Justice and actively participated in drafting articles for the Constitution of 1988, and in the re-elaboration of legislation about work and early childhood care. Feminists also took part in the implementation of the Program for Integral Women's Health Care and in the support for Specialized Police Stations for Women. Activists from the black movement developed the constitutional determination that racism is a crime, with no statute of limitations and for which bail would not be available. These concepts were included in a law enacted in 1989. Militants were also active in 1995, when a call for action was sent to the government by the Zumbi de Palmares March Against Racism, and in the creation of the Inter-ministerial Working Group to Valorize the Black Population (GTI). Meanwhile, LGBTI+ people did not gain any specific protection from the constitution and would have to wait until the new millennium to obtain some recognition of their rights. In the 1990s, the struggle against the HIV-AIDs epidemic, which received some financial support from state healthcare agencies, did help sustain the movement and improved cooperation between activists and the state. This allowed the appearance of new associative and public expressions of sexual and gender diversity, marked by a policy to seek mass visibility and the strong exposure of LGBT Pride Parades, as they are called (Facchini, 2005; Simões and Facchini, 2009). The mid 1990s also saw a multiplication of initiatives in the legislative realm at municipal and state levels, criminalizing forms of discrimination by sexuality, as well as jurisprudence favoring the extension to same-sex partners of social security rights and access to healthcare for companions.

During the governments of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, the articulation of activists from the feminist, black and LGBTI+ movements with state agencies intensified and reached another level, although with different scopes and effects. In 2003, the Special Secretariat for Women's Policies (SPM) and the Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPIR) were created, with ministerial status, linked to the office of the president, as well as the National Council for the Promotion of Racial Equality. The synergy between these state agencies allowed various and important initiatives, especially in the realm of education, through the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI/MEC). The Secretariat for Human Rights (SDH) created the Brazil Without Homophobia Program in 2004, and in 2008 implemented a cycle of national conferences to discuss public policies for the LGBTI+ population (Aguião, 2018). At the end of the second

Lula government, the bases were launched for what LGBTI+ activists called the "tripod of citizenship". The first component was the National Plan to Promote LGBT[2] Citizenship and Human Rights, launched in 2009, based on a systematization of proposals approved at the I National LGBT Conference, although it was not supported by the approval of a decree, edict or resolution. In 2009, a General Coordination for Promotion of LGBT Rights was established within the SDH as the second element. Finally, the National Council Against Discrimination (CNCD), which had been created in 2001 in the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, was reorganized as the CNCD/LGBT. Other initiatives were formalized in the fields of healthcare (The National Policy for Integral Health of the LGBT Population was launched in 2011), and of culture (with the formation of the Technical Committee for LGBT Culture). But the main focus remained fighting violence and discrimination, a National System to Confront LGBT Violence was launched in 2013 by the Secretariat for Human Rights, to construct a national network of LGBTI+ policies.

In terms of legislative actions, the fight against gender violence was reinforced in 2006 with the special law on domestic violence known as Lei Maria da Penha. A law that defined the crime of feminicide was enacted in 2015, while another law consolidated the policy for racial quotas in 2012. No legal measures were enacted, however, for the LGBTI+ population. The advances came only in judgements of suits presented to the Federal Supreme Court, which, in 2011, extended conjugal rights and responsibilities to same-sex couples; and in 2018 recognized the possibility to change one's name and sex in civil records, independent from any judicial process or surgical intervention. In 2019 the court equated discrimination by sexual orientation and gender identity to the crime of racism.

These important Supreme Court decisions took place precisely when the situation favorable to government policies related to demands for gender and sexuality rights was undergoing a drastic change. The mark of this reaction was President Dilma Rousseff's decision in 2011 to suspend distribution of the didactic material "Schools without Homophobia", ceding to pressure from morally conservative legislators, linked to so-called religious caucuses in Congress, which called the initiative the "gay-kit" and accused it of being part of a scheme to sexualize children, destroy the family and implant communism. In 2012, the Ministry of Health canceled the government's promotional campaign for HIV-Aids prevention, which included a video of two men hugging in a nightclub, frustrating the attempt to present messages favorable to care and respect for sexual diversity at the heart of prevention actions. The rise in moral panic continued in 2014, mobilizing the rhetoric of "gender ideology", with attacks that led to the removal of references to gender, diversity and sexual orientation from state education plans. The "School without Party" campaign, supported particularly by the Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL) [Free Brazil Movement], produced a series of public mobilizations and proposed state and municipal laws against a supposed "ideological indoctrination" at schools. Amplified by social networks, the moral reaction spread to the prohibition of artistic expressions (such as the Queer Museum exhibit in Porto Alegre), and sparked demonstrations against intellectuals, as at the arrival of philosopher Judith Butler to Brazil, in 2017. This anti-gender campaign was a key element in the discourse of the winning candidate in the presidential elections of 2018.

Since the beginning of this regressive situation, the institutional mechanisms for LGBTI+ participation and insertion in state structures that had been implemented in the previous decade became a reason for concern and criticism among LGBTI+ activist groups. Throughout the cycle of the Conferences (from 2008 to 2016), discouragement grew about participation in state activities and decision making. The movements did not seem to gain enough visibility to have LGBTI+ demands be considered important in broader forums and instances. The disillusion felt by many activists about the effectiveness of these mechanisms was expressed in the evaluation that the policies for the LGBTI+ community were "fragmentary, isolated and peripheral"

2 At the time when these Plans, Conferences and Councils were implemented, the term used was "LGBT".

(Aguião, Vianna and Gutterres, 2014). Militants who participated on federal councils and technical committees regularly expressed frustration with the fact that they "participated in meetings without certainty that any of that would be enacted" (Facchini and Rodrigues 2017). The perception was that a lot of energy was aimed at spaces that ultimately and effectively produced very little (Bulgarelli, 2017).

In the background was the financial crisis of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), an associative model that had been predominant in the LGBT movement since the mid 1990s, made possible by financial support derived above all from agreements with the World Bank, which were active from 1994 until 2006. The reduction and bureacratization of the financing limited the resources available for local HIV-AIDS prevention projects, which were also essential to support LGBT citizenship initiatives.

Concomitantly, during the decade of 2010, there was an important inflection in the realm of HIV-AIDS prevention policies (Calazans, 2018; Pinheiro, 2015). Since the first phase of the epidemic, prevention measures focused on population segments most affected, through efforts to articulate them to the construction of support groups, guided by the principle of "peer education". Currently, the emphasis has shifted to preventive technologies and encourage individualized efforts that promote adhesion to a certain therapeutic scheme, accompanied by global guidelines for universalization of testing and immediate and systematic adhesion to treatment. A perspective of preventive responsibility tends to predominate in the guidelines for care, indicating the importance given to individual responsibility for behavior (which is either "safe" or risky") in relation to prevention, frequently leading to attributing guilt to people who are infected or simply exposed to the virus, particularly when involving sexual transmission.

The main criticisms to the growing emphasis on prevention and personal responsibility came from social movements working with HIV-AIDS, especially from entities and support groups with an expressive presence of gay and transvestite leaders. These criticisms warned about the fetishization of the use of statistical data that supposedly indicated the success of preventive actions, calling attention to the resurgence of the epidemic among "gays and other MSM", emphasizing the disproportionate risk related to AIDS among gay men. (Beloqui, 2008).

Amid a situation of moral panic in the decade of 2010, 2015 witnessed revolting attempts to criminalize allegedly intentional transmission of the HIV virus, in the wake of a moral panic invoked by a sequence of reports in the major media (notably the "O Estado de S. Paulo" newspaper and the popular program "Fantástico", on Brazil's leading television network, Globo), about a supposed network of men dedicated to deliberating transmitting HIV through inducement or coercion to the practice of anal sex without a condom.[3] The reaction of organizations, activists and professionals in defense of the rights of people with HIV and AIDS was effective, at least until now, to impede the creation of a specific law in Brazil to incriminate HIV positive people for transmitting the virus to their partners through sexual relations. In any case, insistent initiatives at criminalization are characteristic of how polemical social issues that involve suffering and discrimination have been handled in Brazil. They illustrate the ambivalent moral status of people living with HIV-AIDS, who are portrayed as either victims or agents of violence, considering the danger that they represent to themselves and to others. The "promiscuity" associated to gays and transvestites continues to be emphasized as an expression of irresponsible sexuality, due to a personal lack of control and moral weakness that generates suffering and tragedy. This materializes a danger that is said to be represented by those who, because they cannot control their own desire, place their own health and that of others at risk (Zamboni 2014 Carrara 2015; Simões 2018).

3 "Os homens que passam o HIV de propósito." (22.02.2015). Available at: https://brasil.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,os-homens-que-passam-o-hiv-de-proposito,1637673 [Accessed on 23.07.2018]; "Polícia investigará homens que transmitem HIV de propósito." (24.02.2015). Availalble at: https://brasil.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,policia-investigara-homens-que-transmitem-hiv-de-proposito,1638495 [Accessed on 23.07.2018]; "Veja como age o 'clube do carimbo." (15.03.2015). Available at: https://globoplay.globo.com/v/4037058/ [Accessed on 23/07/2018]

As a part of and consequence of this political reaction, of a moral and religious nature, which was consecrated in the victory of Bolsonaro in 2018, the government structures working with issues of race, gender and sexuality in the executive branch were submitted to a rapid recomposition and dissolution. The attempt to combine them into a Ministry of Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights, in 2015, was terminated in the following year, then under the government of Michel Temer, who transferred their responsibilities to the Ministry of Justice. At the time we were writing this article, the current government had a Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (whose minister proclaimed herself to be "terribly Christian"), in which the entities responsible for policies for women and promotion of racial equality were reduced to secretariats, along with those for the family, youth, and people with disabilities, the elderly, children and adolescents. The emphasis on the family is to be emphasized. The LGBTI+ question, which always faced more difficulties to formalize its existence in the government structure, and was never consolidated into a secretariat, was reallocated into a directory within the Secretariat for Global Protection, which formally also cares for issues such as amnesty,[4] torture and slave labor. With the concomitant suppression of the transversal agencies aimed at promotion and inclusion of diversity, notably the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy and Inclusion in the Ministry of Education (which also affected educational initiatives concerning ethnic-racial relations, the indigenous and quilombola residents), and the extinction of the Secretariat of Human Rights, the LGBTI+ question was reduced to a minimal and formal structure for protection against violence.

Thus, the conquests attained in previous decades have been quickly destroyed: a discourse of hate was instilled, which disfigures citizenship into privilege while promoting moral pain and normalizing violence.

Gender, intersectional feminism and the construction of new categories of violence: public exposition of suffering in the search for recognition

As we saw, the progressive "wave" of recent decades placed policies for racial equality, and the rights of women and LGBT populations at the heart of the debate. Nevertheless, in the universe of gender studies, during the still progressive years of Worker's Party rule, many criticisms were raised about the difficulty of effectively implementing some of those policies, considering for example, the sexist and heteronormative structures (and professionals) of the police, judiciary and other state structures such as social assistance and healthcare. The institutional structures, as well as the normativity of gender found in certain spheres of the state, restrained the implementation of certain progressive policies and laws. The attitude of state agents (at all levels from police to judges, healthcare agents to teachers) revealed that they were also part of a sexist society or a "rape culture", as feminists say. Even if a certain feminist political approach and one committed to the rights of the LGBT population has penetrated the state and administration, the issue of "changing the culture" had to be faced in education. It would be possible to "teach" another way of seeing minorities that is more respectful of diversity. But feminists always knew that "changing the culture" would be a slower process than producing and approving a law.

With the rise of the rightwing, the (international) anti-gender movement and discourse has also gained strength, which produces the accusation that there is an "evil" infiltration of "gender ideology"(sic) in schools. The anti-gender policy, perhaps originated with initiatives of the Catholic Church (for which Cardinal Ratzinger was an important agent, before he became Pope, demonstrating its conservative origin). But in Brazil it was incorporated in association to Neopentecostals and gained status as new public policy with the election of Bolsonaro. This discourse has supported a notion of the "natural family", composed of a heterosexual couple – and the recourse to "nature" reinforces binary, essentialist, and complementary notions of the couple.

4 The Commission on Amnesty created in 2002 to address reparations for victims of political repression from 1946 until 1988 is now within this Secretariat.

The attack on women's rights and gender and sexuality dissidences is made in the name of a supposedly irrefutable nature (Corrêa, 2018; Junqueira, 2018; Fassin, 2016; Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018).

The destruction of equal rights policies and state facilities for care has proceeded rapidly in 2019. And the attack on, and even the prohibition of the use of the term gender in education has appeared on an equally devastating scale since 2016. Nevertheless, in this context, some conflicts make visible the intensification of the struggle for rights. The young feminisms (as were visible in works such as the dossier organized by Facchini and França, 2011, Ferreira, 2015, Gomes and Sorj, 2014) that have been constituted in the last decade, made broad use of new communication technologies to produce texts, images and new feminist pedagogies.

While various feminisms dispute the scene – liberal-, intersectional-, radical-, Marxist-, black-, lesbian-, trans-, and even whore-feminism – increased emphasis has been placed on policies of the body and sexuality (as affirmed by Almeida, 2016), and on the recognition that these various trends speak of various types of *women*, with differences of class, race, sexual orientation, and even genitalia. Although this diversity is recognized within the feminist field, externally the political struggle takes place both in terms of opposition to what is seen as "traditional" and ingrained (such as the emic categories in the social movement of "patriarchy" or "rape culture"), as well as the conservative wave that was reborn after the coup and more sharply after the election of 2018. Also in the European context, the attack on gender ideology is associated to an attack on women's rights and to a semantic field that can easily be incorporated to the vocabulary of the new right-wing leaders (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018; Fassin, Éric 2018).

Moreover, a certain feminist solidarity and pedagogy was enacted in an intensely affective process produced in online and offline sociability, through the use of hashtags and first-person narratives: "Chega de fiu-fiu" [Cut the whistling], "Meu primeiro assédio" [My first harassment], "Meu amigo secreto" [My secret friend], "Meu professor abusador" [My professor the abuser], among others, problematized situations of sexual violence (harassment, abuse) and produced in the public scene a notion of "sexual abuse" that is still new. In 2018 this notion culminated in a proposed law about "sexual molestation" and in a revision and more severe categorization of certain types of rape, such as "collective" and or "corrective" [which the law defines as rape conducted to "control the victim's social or sexual behavior"].[5]

Those feminist campaigns presented scenes of suffering on the social media hashtags and posts that denounced the existence of a sexist "culture" that is naturalized through practices such as harassment. With first-person narratives that depict how young girls, children and youth were harassed or abused, the stories revealed scenes and experiences from childhood, marked by a difficulty to understand what had happened, in which the aggressor was usually a relative, or neighborhood or school acquaintance. The unknown aggressors were men who had harassed women while walking in the street.

One person told how at 9 years of age, when she was going to visit the city of her grandmother with whom she usually spent her vacation, she was touched by her grandmother's husband at the time, who was about 60 years old and was considered her grandfather. He even threatened her, saying that if she told anyone, her grandmother would not believe her and would punish her. The text revealed that the youth had never told anyone until the revelation in that tweet (published on Twitter). Following texts (tweets) reported the story in more than the 140 characters possible on the platform at that time, which also revealed that the "grandfather" had also molested another 12-year-old girl, but that no one believed the girl's story. Another story told how a 4-year-old girl was taken by "them" to the backyard, where they touched and kissed her, although she never said who "they" were.

5 As in law n. 13.718, from 24.09.2018

Similar to the cases of sexual violence that were reported, the aggressors are usually people who are acquaintances, relatives, from the victim's network of social relations (which is similar to the findings of a study about rape by IPEA).[6] They are usually adult or older men while the victims are children or adolescents. The reports were published on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, but were also highlighted by the commercial and hegemonic media, especially since 2015, the year that the commercial media called the "women's spring".

By denominating these episodes as "harassment", the feminist field sought to construct a new category of violence. This appeal took place through narratives of suffering – both those that reported facts and scenes of sexual aggression, as well as reports about the scars left by these experiences. The notions of victim and of trauma were central to the recognition of suffering, but were also used to demand rights (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009), by denominating that the suffering was caused by acts of violence perpetrated by specific people. Unlike the #MeToo campaign in the United States, the campaigns in Brazil did not seek to judicially accuse the perpetrators (although they may have been exposed in some cases), to the contrary, the intent was to show how acts of harassment are commonplace. More than accusing certain men, the campaigns denounced the machismo in society, showing how society itself is violent: solidarity networks were formed based on first person reports about suffering from the past, some of them never before mentioned. The act of revealing an event that had been silenced and omitted was also common practice in the denunciation of various forms of violence, in a feminist perspective of revealing the daily violences experienced by women in a "rape culture", which sexually objectifies and abuses girls and women.

The semi-public exposition[7] of reports of *shame*, *fear* and *guilt* in situations of victimization and violence, promoted affective identifications with new reports of abuse. These reports also entered the environment of universities, and accusations were made of sexual and moral violence among colleagues or between teachers and students. One report on a social network led to another, and the sensation arose that the victims appeared to be experiencing similar situations, which appeared to promote greater intra-gender solidarity and greater identification among women (and not only cisgender women) or people with feminized bodies. These reports and denunciations promoted new feminist groups within universities, both feminist collectives of students, and of professors who sought to confront the institutional situations and omissions at their universities (like the Rede Não Cala - Rede de Professoras e Pesquisadoras pelo fim da Violência Sexual e de Gênero na USP) [The Don't be Quiet Network – Network of Women Teachers and Researchers for the end of Sexual and Gender Violence at USP].

We are also inspired here by the work of Sergio Carrara (2015) which addresses a new apparatus of sexuality, in which the issue of consent became central. The particularity of these cases is that while in 2015 there was a public and more visible struggle to qualify acts as violent, precisely because there could not have been consent (especially regarding harassment and abuse of children), on the other hand, the new conservatisms function as an important force of backlash that revictimizes even the activists (see Facchini and Sivori, 2017).

As acts common to daily life (such as street harassment) were increasingly denounced as aggression or violence, a conservative reaction also gained space. Such reaction reinforced a style of hyper-masculinity and treated these demands for rights as a joke, or even reacted brutally, threatening the activists in the same digital sphere in which they were articulated. Feminists were also ridiculed during the presidential campaign.

6 Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas e Aplicadas (IPEA): "Estupro no Brasil: uma radiografia segundo os dados da Saúde", Nota Técnica N. 11, Brasília, Março, 2014, in: http://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/images/stories/PDFs/nota_tecnica/140327_notatecnicadiest11.pdf

7 Semi-public because it is aimed at an imagined public, on one hand, and on the other because it is restricted to "bubbles", that is to networks of relations made possible and limited by the digital network through algorithms beyond the users' control.

Moreover, the militants and women who posted reports were also directly attacked online – even with threats of rape, attack in their homes, and of violence against their families – as occurred to the feminist blogger Lola Aranovich, who was attacked by "male" and "incel" groups. Some of the activists had their psychic suffering revived and even became ill, some disappeared from the online environment. Such attacks are often associated to the ease of online communication (Baym and Boyd, 2012) and the broad impact of the new media that let girls and young women stand out, simultaneously made them more vulnerable to attacks.

On different scales, a certain hypermasculinity that is not ashamed of being sexist and homophobic has gained legitimacy in the public arena through the speech of the current president (who is well known for telling a congresswoman "you don't deserve to be raped") or even of the Minister of Women, the Family and Human Rights. They both emphasize a "traditional" femininity of the elites – the "beautiful, reserved and domestic" wife of former President Michel Temer, or even the evangelical pastors placed in government posts.

A look at the girls

At this point it is necessary to review some of the arguments and actions of groups of women who call themselves feminists and contrast them with "conservative" women. The latter have organized in the wake of what was called the "digital feminism boom". In the shift to daily life it seems interesting to inquire about that which the Free Brazil Movement (MBL, mentioned above) calls "feminism of the right" and the relationship between religion, race and racism.

Erica Santana de Souza, in her doctoral thesis *Formas de Militância Feminista em Cenário de Auto-organização e Ciberativismo no Brasil Contemporâneo: tendências atuais a partir do caso de Aracaju/SE* [Forms of Feminist Militancy in a Situation of Self-organization and Cyberactivism in Contemporary Brazil: Current trends based on the case of Aracaju/SE], examined this situation in Brazil, mapping and researching the new feminisms and conservative groups of the city.

As in other locations, it was since 2012 and more specifically since the first SlutWalk, that a strong feminist movement began to take hold in Aracaju. According to Souza, the event was

> Constructed in a decentralized manner and used social networks to organize and promote the event. Some youths, friends and acquaintances initiated the event on a Facebook page they created. Since then, the march continued to be organized annually, and, each year a main theme is chosen, but all have revolved around the theme of how the female body is treated in contemporary societies, strongly influenced by patriarchal culture, and have addressed other broader and current themes. The construction of the SlutWalk in Aracaju directly influenced the organization of some youths into study groups and the creation of the Women's Collective of Aracaju (2017:131).

These collectives, Souza observes, have incorporated a growing number of black women and took on an intersectional agenda, operating with a perspective that includes trans and transvestite women. The apparent boom of 2015, the "feminist spring" as the commercial media labeled it without recognition of previous movements, broadened and renovated the spaces and repertoires of feminist actions in Brazil as a whole. As we indicated above, forms of self-organization (the collectives) and the sharing of experiences on social networks, provided an important repertoire that gave intelligibility to experiences that, although difficult, were widespread: "a nameless bad feeling" (Souza, 2017:57). These women often referred to situations of frustration, exclusion, and oppression that only became stronger than a diffuse sentiment through contact with the feminist repertoire: it is possible to perceive how the collectives in Aracaju reveal the strength of an emotional language and a movement of recognition (of oneself and of others, in particular), but also the policies of inclusion through *suffering*. In other words, they recognize and produce a change in the self through the support found by sharing difficult experiences.

This also dialogs with the digital feminism around the visibility of the category "harassment" and of the redefinitions of rape (Almeida, 2019).

As one of the girls quoted by Souza said:

> When you recognize yourself as someone who suffered oppression, when you know what you are going through, that what you are suffering is oppression, and you are aware of this, you begin to fight it, when you also have strength for this and when you have the conditions. So when I discovered [feminism], I began to realize that most of the things that I suffered, many of my traumas, you know, I already told you this, I think I already said this, were due to machismo, right? So I thought: it's obvious, since our society, the foundation, right, of capitalism, is socio-economic inequality, right, and in turn the inequality of race and of gender strengthens this economic inequality right? (...) I had, my first child, he, is...I lost him with eight months and fifteen days, and I suffered obstetric violence. I lost my son, in reality, through medical carelessness when I was pregnant. I won't talk about this, or I will cry. But, I suffered obstetric violence at the time [...] I, I had the child normally (...), I didn't have the strength to push him out, and my son, and my son died inside at eight months and fifteen days, he wouldn't leave, because, its mostly the baby that makes the effort to leave, he wants to leave, right? The doctor and nurse got on top of me to force the boy out (...) They used forceps and cut. Now I know that the use of forceps and cutting, I forgot the name, the perineum, this is obstetric violence. (...) So afterwards, with feminism, I discovered that, obviously I felt pain there, I knew, but for me it was normal, it was a normal procedure. Today, I know that it is not normal (...) and they put me together with the women, with the babies of the women crying, the women getting up to care for their children. And I spent the whole night listening to babies crying. And I was catatonic the whole night. I didn't react, no reaction, I wanted to give up, so it was the second depression (silence). This was violence and a violence of gender and class as well, because they did this because I was poor. So when the doctor from the other shift arrived and saw my situation, he got my family's [phone] number, because they weren't allowed to be with me. I had no one with me, and he spoke with my father, and said: I will release her because she does not need to be here with the others (...) (girl from the Auto-organização de Mulheres Negras de Sergipe Rejane Maria, [Self-Organization of Black Women of Sergipe Rejane Maria]). (:58)

In the collectives they get together to read texts and share life experiences. The reflexivity, a shared self-reflection, proves to be essential in this situation of transformation of the self and the world. The themes most present at the encounters are: "black women and affectivity"; needs and desires, marginalization and public disregard for peripheral women, who are in general, but not only, black: transsexuals and transvestites; abusive relationships; the "loneliness of the fat woman" and "compulsory heterosexuality".

It is important to hear what another young woman said about this:

> My mother cannot read, she is a farm worker, but in reality, the first person who told me things that Simone de Beauvoir had spoken of, without her knowing, was my mother. When I asked her, if in another life she would like to be born as a woman or a man, she told me she would like to be born as a man. And I asked why? She said: because a woman is not valued in society, because my word has no value, because I earn less than your father. Understand? She cannot read and she said things that Simone de Beauvoir spoke of in her book. So, if you think about it, some things came from her [in terms of influence], even if she did not know, even though she never heard of feminism. (Woman from the Coletivo Feminista Ana Montenegro) [Feminist Collective Ana Montenegro]" (Souza, 2017: 67/68).

Another girl also took an interesting direction in the resignification of her actions:

> Today I understand, even based on black feminism. Today I understand that, even before we knew what feminism is, we practiced it. I have practiced feminism for a long time now (Souza, 2017:68)

In the polarized situation that has gripped Brazil since the massive street demonstrations of 2013, rightwing movements, some that are more liberal and others with a fascist tinge, came to dispute meanings and agendas at the interior of a series of actions and social programs that, since the Workers Party government, became involved with the state. The conservative groups grew in the realm of the mobilizations for and against impeachment. Once again, Aracaju serves to illuminate this movement.

Erica Santana de Souza mapped and interviewed people linked to various groups in the city. *Damas de Ferro* [Women of Steel], is composed of liberal and conservative women. A second group was created through the incentive of the boyfriend of one of the women mentors, *Juventude Conservadora de Sergipe* [Conservative Youth of Sergipe] which defines itself as "a group of people who struggle for real conservatism and tradition, for the traditional family, human values, for traditional morality, for integration of the people, valorization of national identity, valorization of our origins and a diffusion of spiritualism". A third group is *Movimento Aliança Estudantil (MAE)* [Student Alliance Movement], which does not believe that the legal order can "resolve the problems of humanity"; and joins those who oppose abortion, defend a minimum state and a neoliberal economic agenda.

There is no homogeneity in these groups: they have differing ideas about justice, conservatism, exclusion, the role of the state and gender relations. They share an anti-feminism, defending the biological function of women and their traditional role. These groups are active on social networks, organize events and interventions at the Federal University at Sergipe (UFS), and conduct study groups and self-reflection groups.

In the words of one of the young women interviewed by Erica Santana de Souza:

> There are people who say: "ah, if there had been no feminism, if not for the feminist movement, we never would have conquered rights". To the contrary, I think that they may have taken longer to be conquered, but it is the natural path of life that human questions are taken into consideration. So, the rights of women, like other rights, worker's rights, for example, were also a question of time, but sooner or later they would arrive, do you understand? But I do not attribute this to a movement. I do not attribute my conquests, for example, to a movement. "Ah, I study today in a public university because of feminism or because of some ideology, because someone offered me this". No. I study today because I was able to pass. It was not a movement that placed me here, no (Damas de Ferro). (: 196)

In addition to the anti-feminist sentiment, and the focus on individual effort, Santana noted a perception about racism that also challenges those who speak about intersectionality and the loneliness of the black woman. See what another girl said:

> In the group Levante Popular da Juventude [Popular Youth Uprising] (on Facebook), they conducted a consciousness raising campaign, in quotes, about racism (...). People wrote about situations of racism that they had suffered at some time in life. And there was a girl there, who is well known here at the university, she is a feminist, she leads this movement, she put up a poster that said something like "men say they are "lady-killers", but they are truly afraid of a powerful black woman", something like that (...). So I wrote, as a black woman, I raised some questions about this, affirming that what is wrong with a man not wanting a black woman. Is this racism or a question of taste, understand? And why does all of this have to be raised in a public forum if it is only a personal and intimate issue (young woman from the collective Damas de Ferro). (:196)

Some fundamental differences are noted when comparing feminism to its conservative reaction: the women of the right highlight they are encouraged by their boyfriends to take these positions publicly and they do not feel excluded or discriminated against. The most important point is that they do not feel vulnerable. What called the most attention in the nascent feminism in Aracaju was the place of suffering in the constitution of self and the sense of vulnerability, which we also noted in the online feminism about harassment discussed earlier.

Suffering in this context is a key category of differentiation, of identification and permeability to certain narratives. Those that are not conservative mobilize experiences of exclusion and humiliation. The centrality of this category does not seem to be limited to the current situation and may say something about contemporary policies and the construction of rights.

In South Africa the mobilization of suffering – of situations that reveal human suffering – was central in the struggle against racism, apartheid and above all in the construction of a common humanity (Moutinho, 2012). The country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented human dramas through testimony about human rights violations and investigations of cases, seeking out information and evaluating the possibility to promote amnesty and reparations. For the reflection proposed here it is interesting to consider an important aspect: the architecture of gender that informed its elaboration. It was the women at the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission who exposed the violence suffered by their husbands, brothers and sons in the community and with the women (Ross, 2001; Moutinho 2012). We thus argue, that an important gender bias is found (experienced in an intersectional perspective) in contemporary moral economy. This process mobilizes feelings of piety in conjunction to a call for order and policies for control (Fassin, 2014), policies that through sensorial and discursive mechanisms elide the temporality of the "other" and drain it of meaning.

Daily transformations and new conflicts

What do these youths from the new right think? Who influences them?

On a Facebook post, a young white woman with straight black hair and makeup, explained on a non-professional but clearly well-planned video, that for the Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL) [Free Brazil Movement] the difference between what they call "feminism of the right" and "the left" is that the left wants women to be "better and have more power than men" and that "the right wants equality".

The MBL, created in late 2014, had an important role in the movement to impeach the president elected from the Worker's Party. With actions aimed particularly at youth, the conservative right-wing movement had support at its base from the Estudantes pela Liberdade (EPL) [Students for Liberty] which has ties with the Atlas Network think tank (Casimiro, 2018), and promoted videos and discourses against minorities, organizing demonstrations, and presenting poor and historically inaccurate information, as well as personal ridicule, attacks and disqualifications, but which had a strong appeal among a young public.

Another video, featuring Pedro D'eytrot, one of the founders of MBL, who works in advertising after working with funk music, was entitled "*Bolsonarismo: feminismo de direita??*" [Bolsonarismo: right-wing feminism?], explains to the public this relationship that even the presenter highlights as surprising: "what is this madness that I am talking about?". Let's see. For D'eyrot,

> feminism began with a base in liberal values, values of the enlightenment, guided by reason, and morality. It began struggling for institutional equality for women: women had to have the right to vote, the right to participate in politics (...) had to be considered by law and by institutions as citizens who are equal to men. But as history proceeded, this feminism became misrepresented. And today we find a third generation feminism (...) which defends things that make no sense like the right of a woman to have hairy armpits or to paint her armpits orange [he shows a photo of Madonna with her arm raised and an unshaved and painted underarm] or to say that if you don't have a uterus you can't give an opinion about anything related to women (...) things that are far from the enlightenment ideal of using logic and involve a subjectivity that leads nowhere.[8]

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zekswHuh3w4 – last accessed 29/09/2019.

He then focuses on

> "third generation feminism", which he affirms, "incorporated an aspect of Marxism" which is the class struggle [...] of the confrontation of the boss against the employee. Except when third generation feminism uses the logic of confrontation, it begins to antagonize men. So, it is no longer a feminism that seeks equality, but that seeks conflict between men and women. And the base of our society is men and women living in harmony.

The presenter than explains that this relationship of feminism with Marxism creates something very dangerous which is the "concept of toxic masculinity". The "geniuses" of feminism created a concept to say that "everything that is masculine is toxic (...), causes a problem in society". And then he plays feminism against specific relatives. Pointing to the camera he says: "everything that your parents taught you, your grandparents taught you about what is a man is wrong". He specifies: his grandfather who has been married for 65 years "(...) he is the big villain of society [because] they are in the logic of Marxist conflict. (...) There are thinkers who say that all sexual relations are rape, various crazy things (and shows a photo of Andrea Dworkin at this point) because you are in this logic of conflict you must fight this male and create this toxic masculinity".

The video continues playing the students against women professors and then moves, just after four minutes to explain why young men adhere to Bolsonarism.

> He offers a virile symbol (...) of masculinity, whoever says that to be a man is bad (...) is wrong...he is charged up about this. [...] he is authentic. [...] So, he says that what young men want is only to be a man, to be a boy (...) what they are calling for through the symbol of Bolsonaro is to be a man and express this hormonal thing.

Bolsonaro is presented as the "cathartic thing" against the "little feminist friends" and against the "oppression" of teachers in the classroom. "He is a sexual identity phenomenon". And he makes the discourse of hate banal: "Bolsonaro doesn't say anything that any taxi driver or uncle in a bar doesn't say. All common Brazilian citizens know this".

The video posted on 29 September 2018, before Bolsonaro's election, had 173,660 views, 26,000 likes, indicating approval of the ideas and 744 dislikes, which indicates rejection or criticism of the content. At the end, the presenter convokes the audience to comment on the ideas presented, which has a certain adhesion: there are 2,168 comments, most of which reinforce the ideas presented.

The broader objective is to explain Bolsonaro's rejection by the feminine public. The post was published in the wake of the broad popular movement #elenão [Not him].[9] The general content is, in itself, absolutely crude: it lacks historic foundation. It cites classic authors – like Hegel and Marx – in a cryptic and foolish manner, it dismisses serious issues like rape and incites male students against women professors and female colleagues. Even though, it does provide an explanation of why young men adhere to Bolsonaro.

Conclusion

As revealed in the epigraph at the beginning of this reflection, the absence of recognition by the state, articulated to bellicose narratives and discourses of hate, produce devastating effects on many of us. However, not on everyone.

The material presented indicate that experiences expressed in narratives about "suffering" had been mobilized even before the coup against President Dilma. A field of identification among women was being produced through a sharing of situations that revealed similarities upon being vocalized. The process produces a didactic/pedagogy of feminism (always intersectional) to the degree that it shows how that which is lived as

9 A national movement that took to the streets in 2018

personal, is in reality broader, or that is, political. The slogan, "the personal is political" functions in practice, that is, the statements of suffering allow perceiving that which had been experienced only as individual suffering is a collective experience and is revealed to be a question of social inequality of gender, race, class and or sexuality intersectioned according to various dynamics.

In the opposite direction, it was possible to note that those who present themselves as conservative women from the right do not use narratives marked by suffering and a sense of vulnerability. There is a desire for order, at times control. And a voice marked by resentment emerges in various situations. Most of the narratives presented do not share values and representations with those who vocalize, based on various experiences, a subalternized position in the broader social situation. A series of mechanisms has been producing a cultural anesthesia (Feldman, 1994), feeding what Achille Mbembe has called necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003)

This is a process of inflection in the sense that it affirms ideas and experiences of gender, sexuality and race now lived from a bellicose and militarized, arrogant and virile perspective, mobilized by an economy of resentment that imposes a fixed[10] temporality. The hypothesis that we present in this text is that there has been a diffusion of a sense of distress and annihilation at a time when the state itself has assumed a discourse of hate against women, blacks, the indigenous, LGBTs, and more recently towards the environment.

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10 for a similar perspective in international comparative view (South Africa), see Moutinho (2012 and 2017)

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