

# BETWEEN THE CROSS AND THE GENITALS: CONFLICTS OF GENDER IN THE CURRENT BRAZILIAN POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO

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## ABSTRACT

Immersed in the Brazilian reality and giving rise to recent debates in the country, this text reflects on how the impacts of the crisis in which we live in reverberate in our education and our social relations. We analyze the information that is disseminated, the power relations involving issues related to gender and the importance of thinking in an education that positions itself actively in the current scenario. We expose what we live in, we send out an S.O.S.

## KEYWORDS

Gender; educational policies; education; power; silencing.

## The Non-place of Brazil

This paper talks about a Brazil that currently is in crisis, just like the rest of the world. The interesting thing is that the crisis here is not merely economic, affecting the political scene as a whole, people here are also suffering from pressures of the Evangelical and Catholic Parliamentary Front - ECPF - using their dogmas and beliefs to dictate standard ways and manners of how to be a citizen in our country. We could say that *“things are getting ugly”*, or that *“human beings are going crazy”* but actually *“this crisis is becoming a mess”* because there’s *“too much patrol, too much mess”* and *“there it goes the good life”*\* of an upper class that cannot support the approach of those who have always been silenced and socially placed as the sidelines and had their voices taken away.

The current Brazilian political scene has put into debate the concepts of gender and sexual orientation, which questions the validity and necessity of its articulation in the legal and educational fields. The inflamed situation came mainly from the approval of the National Educational Plan - NEP - and its spin-off in state and municipal plans. We thus witnessed the consequent suppression of identities and individuals, simply because they do not fit in the gender binary arising exclusively from medical-biological basis, which people are classified at birth only by their genitalia, fitting in two pre-set categories and named as man and woman.

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\* Lines taken from a Brazilian song called “Alô, marciano” (Hello, martian), from the singer Elis Regina

The clash established between the advancement of research and gender theories for Education and ECPF raised situations that are the objects of analysis in this study. It also provided us materials for understanding the reality to which we are submitted but not subjugated as Brazilian citizens. Such materials are presented as interviews, blogs, texts, publications on social networks and videos that show us the power relations between people, governments and researchers concerned with the advancement of gender theories in the Education. In this sense, as well approached Felix (2014), the truths reviewed here do not present themselves as unique and absolute, but as circumscribed and historical, which reveals to us its contaminant character.

Among the situations generated by this mentioned encounter, we obtained the establishment of the Gender Committee, by MEC, which would assume responsibility for gender issues related to public policies of inclusion and support to those who would not fit in the structural, institutionalized and standardize pattern established by man/woman gender binary. It is important to state that this pattern has been related to failure and to students dropping out of educational institutions, simply because they do not feel belonging to the universe in which they need to stay for years of their life in order to complete their basic training. However, under strong pressure from the fundamentalists, the 'gender' word, as feared, was suppressed, resulting in the Gender Committee becoming the Combat Discrimination Committee.

We recall that this modification occurred in a span of only twelve days, which shows how the manipulation and irresponsible use of power by fundamentalists reverberates negatively on the necessary progress for an Education that deals with current, urgent and necessary issues to individuals who are part of the school. And thinking beyond the school, this impact will further strengthen the violence suffered outside the walls of schools on women, the feeling of 'social non-belonging' as common in a day-to-day basis for trans people, prejudice suffered by groups of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people.

It is necessary to show on which Education we are supporting to establish our gaze. We think, therefore, that education needs to be liberating and emancipatory, offering minimum benefits for the students to be able to establish their vision of the world they live in and relate together with the possibilities for changes and acting in their reality, besides also feeling safe to be who they are and not forced to act under established standards. We agree here with Louro (2013), who presents us an education that sees its 'normal' practices threatened by "new" subjects and the "new" practices that offer challenges to what is established. And to support, we seek help in the thoughts of Miskolci (2013, p.55) that deal with the need of Education to "stop being one of the standardization branch of biopolitics to the state and started to become a deconstruction social vehicle of a historical inequities and injustices order".

Thinking about the impact that the crisis in which we live can bring and has brought to our education and our social relationships, we analyzed the information that is disseminated, the power relations involving issues related to gender and the importance of thinking in an education that positions itself actively in the current scenario.

## In the name of the Father, the Son and the Sex. Amen!

444 | The disputes between the fundamentalists, ECPF conservatives, progressive politicians, the theories of gender and the thematic breakthrough attempts in education bring to the Brazilian scenario multiple realities. In this article, we analyze two of them, directly opposite. At first, we found deeply rooted truths in an ideal of defending a traditional Brazilian family and the maintenance of good nation's customs. Filled with inconsistencies, violent vocabulary attacking several identities and individuals, we found a firm purpose of fighting a newly created "Gender Ideology".

As a counterpoint, and under constant current setbacks, we have the second reality in which we find the relentless pursuit of protection of basic rights to the individuality of the human being, the fight against discrimination and prejudice related to gender identity and sexual orientation, the school dropout reduction attempts motivated by such discrimination. In it, we found, as a way of maintaining constant movements, theoreticians that keep the heated discussions of issues that relate gender, sexual diversity and education.

The ECPF speeches are numerous and bring with them ideas that raise some kind of theoretical confusion, generating the mobilization of a large group of people that do not know the issues of gender. It is often used expressions without theoretical support to frighten and press families, fathers/mothers, teachers, members of the Church and society as a whole that are a part of the progress achieved by the gender studies.

On the suppression of the gender term and the modification to Combat Discrimination Committee, we transcribe some lines of Congressman Marco Feliciano (Social Christian Party - São Paulo), the ECPF

Thank God, the decree No. 916 of September 9 no longer exists. It was moved to decree 949 of September 21, formerly instituted gender committee, now instituted Combat Discrimination Committee. [...] There, now it includes all, whether the person is a man, a woman, whether it is a man who feels like a woman, or is a woman who feels like a man, this decree provides any kind of discrimination. It was a victory, we torn out all the gender words. [...] Victory to our family, victory to our children. And still here lurking, we continue here in Brasilia probing all things that are against the traditional family and against the morals of our nation (FELICIANO, 2015):

Here we find issues that do not even take into account respect for individuals, exemplified by the deputy's speech. To celebrate and finalize the modification of the Gender Committee, he generalizes the struggle of various social movements, silencing them when he says "There, now it includes everything." He even mocks the struggles for the rights of transgender people when he says that it does not matter "if the person is a man who feels like a woman or woman who feels like a man." It should be noted here the huge gap between the deputy and the theories that discuss gender, since we know that it is not just a feeling, but those are people who suffer from not finding themselves comfortable in the established and imposed standards from birth, or long before it, simply because of their genitalia.

The deputy also boasts about taking the word 'gender' out of the committee. When he uses the 'torn out' sentence, he perfectly represents what people are suffering in the various groups of people affected by the deletion of the term, which happened fourteen times over

the original text. It tore out not only the word but the individuality, the representativeness and the possibility of inclusion and maintenance in Public Education Institutions people who are placed on the margins of society because they do not follow the standards imposed. It is drawn not only fourteen times, but thousands of times a day through raping, murdering and not respecting the ideals of diversity as discussed over the years. He challenges his listeners, using as a defense the figure of Brazilian traditional family and morality.

Reaffirming this line of thought, but using a more violent speech, Federal deputy Jair Messias Bolsonaro (Progressive Party - Rio de Janeiro) also speaks of the Gender Committee creation

Turn little children [...] into homosexual and open the doors to pedophilia. [...] And now [...] the National Conference of Education began to guide the nearly 6,000 municipalities in Brazil to include in the Municipal Education Decennial Plan gender ideology. In other words, teaching the son of the poor [...] despite having an appendix, he is not a man or girl, he is something else. Plus, it guides the boy to try hugging a girl or a boy too. And it guides the girl to do the same thing. [...] The responsibility is Dilma Rousseff, a woman who does not govern anything, a woman who has no character, no moral! [...] A man does not want to come home and see his son playing with a doll just because he was guided to in schools. [...] They want, through the rascality, turn everything into a homosexual brothel. [...] Like the issue of a 12, a 14 year-old boy feeling like a girl or being a girl, and even going in as they are already going in the girls bathroom, through a resolution of a council linked to this garbage called the National Secretariat of Human Rights (SDH), which only supports vagabonds and scoundrels.

We were able to see the deputy's speech guidance to people who are far from issues of Gender, Diversity and Education. He uses a speech that carries with it the idea that theories, students, public policy and education want to turn children into homosexuals and the school in a "homosexual brothel" is, at least, one example of a person who does not even understand the prospect of keeping the work with the gender theme in schools. Besides ignoring the realities faced by people involved with the school, the deputy uses a sexist language, reinforcing prejudice, striking the image of Brazil's current President and relating her to "rascality", "crap", immorality and lack of character.

We note that the deputy's speech is something institutionalized in Brazil, which is threatened by gender studies. Given that such studies turn also to a perspective of gender equality, putting into question male, heterosexual, white, medium, urban and Christian supremacy, common in our country. By attacking the President, criticizing the transgendered children, putting homosexuality as a threat and classifying the SDH as junk, the deputy places himself as sexist, transphobic, homophobic and denies all rights to the exercise of individuality provided by SDH.

From these and many other speeches against the maintenance of the gender word in the NAP as well as its consequences, and also the creation of the Gender Committee, there is a moral panic about the gender word, coming from an interest group in this case, the ECPF. As stated Miskolci (2007, p. 115), this actually happens acting in a manner "to bring up any existing social fear and turn into the question of the moment", making everything that infers against their standards, a threat.

Gains in a battle involving moral panic may be material and / or moral. It is true that progress in a moral or ideological cause increases the status of a group as well as collectively reinforces the values that this group advocates. (p.116)

446 | And what values do such groups advocate? Who are the beneficiaries of the moral panic about the gender issue? These questions allow us to think about the political performances about life, about rights, both individual and collective, and on the body. As pointed out by Fonseca (2009), a biopolitics intervening on collective and individual life. They are political structures, devices, institutional, legal and scientific mechanisms of appropriating these beings and the duties of these beings. It is a repressive, limiter act with interdictions, which promotes domination, and with it, in symbiosis, violence.

## A Communion Necessary for Salvation

Although we are experiencing a reality in which we find a moral panic brought by ECPF, on the other hand, we find a path drawn by researchers of gender theories, teachers, politicians among others who, dissatisfied with continuous setbacks of our country, look for ways to subvert institutionalized and replicated patterns.

Accordingly, the CNE launched a technical note, raising concerns with the fact that the issues of gender and diversity have been addressed deliberately the Municipal, State and District Councils and directed that they should be revised. Using five considerations based on national laws, the technical note also explains the problems arising from the generalizations that are part of the modification of the Council of Gender, such as the omission and disregard for the singularities.

Also in a statement released on his blog, Daniel Cara deals with the risk that the deletion of the gender term and the consequent modification of the Committee for something so generic represents to the society, especially for those men and women who are abandoned by conservatism. He also talks about the restriction that is established with these changes, making public policy something vague and without direct effect on people who were kept in social invisibility.

In the bubble of all this mobilization, Brazil received the philosopher Judith Butler, who represents a big name in gender studies and Queer Theory. When asked in an interview conducted by the Folha de São Paulo Journal about the movements and the conflicts addressed in this article, she offered the following statement, which strengthens our walks,

While some believe that life may have several gender and sexual trajectories, those who fear gender want there to be a single life. And they want it to be determined by God or a natural law. Everything else is frightening chaos, and they often choose hate as a way to deal with their fears.

Despite the great support on the maintenance of gender perspectives in education, we face setbacks that hurt the rights of the citizens, as addresses Deputy Jean Wyllys (Socialism and Freedom Party - Rio de Janeiro)

Education with a gender perspective and the fight against homophobia (and transphobia) regressed in schools, and every attempt to advance was quickly muffled and censored after

slanderous and scoundrel campaigns of the fundamentalists, who quickly made the government retreat (Wyllys, 2015).

While we see a government retreat regarding gender issues, we think, corroborating Britzman (2007) that the school and its curriculum should not close the identities, keeping them repetitive and standardized, but instead they need to explore and encourage them. We conceive that the act of exploring open spaces for students to understand themselves as historical, political, social and cultural human constantly evolving and subject to changes.

We also refer to Furlani (2015) launching a document-analysis to clarify the doubts generated by a brochure produced, not signed, against the much-feared “Gender Ideology”. The author dissects, point by point, the theoretical confusion present in the spread of the “Gender Ideology” expression, deconstructing totalitarianism and revealing its sensationalist content. She addresses issues related to intersex persons and transgender realities, as erased in the school reality and in the current political scene. She brings the idea, theoretically supported that gender is a social and a cultural construction and not a self-defined and personal construction, as stated by the other brochure, based only in medical and biological concepts.

As approached by Salih (2013), when analyzing the works of Judith Butler, we understand gender as something that presents non-natural way, which is not presented in a permanent field, but unstable, more related to what we do, not something that we are. Gender was therefore related to the speeches that have survived politically and culturally but they are, in a post-structuralist perspective, contaminations that recreate, renew and reinvent it constantly.

Then we have the Brazilian political speeches arguing for or against the inclusion of the gender issue in education. As Revel (2005) contributes, from the discussion of the discourse concept in Foucault, the speeches and statements create truths and aim to sustain engendered practices. It is also the discourse that articulates knowledge and power. And how elucidates Silva (2000, p 43), “Speech not simply describes objects that are external: the speech ‘makes’ the objects on which it speech”. We reflect, therefore, the need to keep questioning certain discourses that were established as truths, especially when they are grounded in religious dogma together with the political sphere.

We also note that the fundamentalist discourse confuses the work of gender theories with the fear of “early sexualization (or homosexualization) of children”, which brings us to the ideas worked by Foucault (1988) that in the case of incitement of speeches related to sex and a “police of statements,” shows us that

It was defined much more narrowly where and when it was not possible to speak of it; in what situations, among which speakers, and in which social relations; it was settled thus regions, but of absolute silence, at least of tact and discretion: between parents and children, for example, or teachers and students, employers and servants (p.23-24).

Well, if by an oversight, intentional or not, we changed the word sex for the word gender, as it is being mistakenly done by our politicians, the Foucault statement would become even more true in the current Brazilian scenario. It is feared that a word so present in our educational, social, political and cultural reality can be understood and addressed by all the people, strengthening the demonstrations and demanding that their basic rights are assisted. Thus,

it creates a field of censure and pressures such that most people will feel cornered and rebel against something that it is a right, namely, recognition, appreciation and representation of subjectivities and diverse and plural human identities.

## Let's go in Peace and may someone be with us

Here is an arena in which the discursive struggles have been assisted, resisted and re-shaped every day. On one hand a political scenario not favorable, which insists on closing the eyes of the people, using faith in the name of God and the defense of the traditional family and morality. On the other, and more injured, there are those who try to keep open their eyes and ears in an attempt to denounce the abuses and the fallacies and prevent further setbacks, seeking to continue to rebuild an education that finds itself currently without support, perspective and with little confidence. We find possibilities of resistance, movement and some help in research groups that are part of the GT 23 of Anped in 212 research groups that have as focus Gender and Sexuality, in 186 groups studying Gender and Education, the initiative 'Watching Plans', in LGBTT Social Movements, in Collectives, in Graduation and Post-Graduation on the theme of Gender and Diversity, among others that continue to sustain themselves in constant imbalance, in attempts to silence and in the negative received, keeping the heart and the will to follow.

We reaffirm, that “*you don't imagine the wildness*” of living in a place where we have “*every man for himself and everybody in the mud*”. Here “*the resistance is waking up*” and, even though we want that some kings ask to get out, we fear that those could be the ones fighting for the “*upper class to keep going downhill*”. “*Hello, hello martian, as usual we are at war*”.

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