



Teaching sexual diversity in Brazilian schools: an education experience in Foz do Iguaçu

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Abstract

We intend in this paper to present a pedagogical experience that links anthropology and secondary schools in combating heterosexism and violence against the LGBTQ community. The project described here created a pedagogical space where prejudice and discrimination for reasons of gender and sexuality were debated in an educational environment. We believe that especially in these times of global attacks on women's and LGBTQs' rights and human rights, it is essential that at the local level we keep on resisting and creating spaces in which reflection and deconstruction of oppressive structures are promoted. This article deals with the experience of education projects on gender and sexuality carried out by a Brazilian federal university in a city in the interior of the state of Paraná, located on the triple border of Brazil with Argentina and Paraguay. It is important to note that Paraná is a state considered as extremely conservative. We hope to show how we develop an experience of what we call "extension of the university" in Brazil, aligned with research and education on the subject of sexualities. In Europe, those activities are usually called "civil engagement" or "socially-relevant education", though most universities do not have it as constituent of their mission as is the case in Brazil. We understand that this kind of project can be an efficient arena for applied anthropology and also as an investment in educating young people as a valuable human resource to combat violence and to promote peaceful communities. In times of uncertainty, where in Brazil religious groups take more control of secular arenas like the Congress, education for sexual diversity becomes a standing point for anthropologists. The project we present in this paper was carried out at the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA), as an extension of a larger and older program carried out by Nucleus of Identities of Gender and Subjectivities (NIGS) based in the Federal University of Santa Catarina.

Introduction

At the international level, we have witnessed the rise of conservative policies and movements with an emphasis on the exaltation of traditional gender roles and the fight against the so-called "gender ideology". At the same time we hear many people publicly calling for the defense of national identities and borders, for the return to traditional families, and supporting the lives of the unborn child against abortion. As Junqueira states (2017: 27)

not only do these missionaries of the natural family do intentionally oppose to legalizing abortion, criminalizing homotransphobia, legalizing same-sex marriage, recognizing homoparentality and extending the right of adoption to same-sex parents, but also they oppose to educational policies on gender and sexual equality that promote the recognition of sexual and gender difference/diversity (our translation).

Returning to the classical definition in which the historian Joan W. Scott (1988) defines gender as both a constitutive element of social relations based on the perceived differences between the sexes and as a

fundamental way of signifying the unequal relations of power between the sexes, the French sociologist Eric Fassin affirms that defining gender by emphasizing its ability to give meaning to power relations offers us an important key to understand the clashes about "gender ideology": "the attacks against the 'theory-of-gender' can be interpreted precisely in those terms, as they simultaneously signify religion, race, class, and nation, thus inviting readings in the language of intersectionality" (Fassin, 2016: 185). In this sense, we can affirm that a battle is being fought to guarantee the permanence of the symbolic and material power in masculine, white, rich, heterosexual and Christian hands.

There are many examples of these conservative tendencies at the international level, it is enough to look at the election of ultraconservative governments in Hungary (2014) and Poland (2015) that sought to criminalize abortion; the defeat of the peace agreement in Colombia (2016) in which the decisive vote against the agreement was supported by both evangelical and catholic Christians, as they were fearing that the agreement would represent a victory of gender ideology and attack on the values of traditional families. More recently, it grew stronger with the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America (2016), who, for example, in early 2017 signed an executive order banning the granting of government funds to groups and associations that promote or advise abortion abroad, and, in July 2017, affirmed that transgender people would not be accepted in the military in the US (New York Times 2017). We consider there are increasing uncertainties concerning policies that defend the right for sexual diversity.

The Brazilian context

Established after the parliamentary coup that abrogated President Dilma Rousseff's mandate (2016), the government of Michel Temer (2016-2018) has shown its proximity and support to the claims of religious and ultraconservative groups in Congress. It began with the establishment of a completely white male cabinet, without any woman or any black person occupying a ministerial position. Temer's government repeatedly showed support for legislation that further limits women's reproductive autonomy even in an emergency environment such as that caused by the Zika virus epidemic, and even with the growing numbers of children affected by the Zika congenital syndrome. On the other hand, in the area of education, bills are being processed both in the Chamber of Deputies (PL 867/2015) and in the Senate (PLS 193/2016) to institutionalize the so-called "No-Party School Program". This program aims to force schools and teachers to "respect" the moral convictions of students and families, proposing in practice the prohibition of the debate on sexual, moral and religious education to be promoted or to take place in schools. These bills aim to establish the primacy of churches and families on "education" issues, thereby undermining the principle of secularism in public schools, as well as teachers' freedom of expression in the exercise of their professional activity. The bills would help to silence and to naturalise the inequalities produced in society by sexist or homophobic practices. Defenders of heteronormativity express their desire for certainty and they would always keep pressure in public policies trying to make invisible all nuances and diversities that exist in the way people experience their sexualities, heteronormativists try to make diversity and uncertainty invisible, rather than celebrating the positive uncertainty of gender fluid identities.

Unfortunately, since the governments of President Dilma Rousseff (2011-2014, 2015-2016) we have witnessed in Brazil within the education field the prevalence of religious and conservative discourses that have achieved important political victories such as the withdrawal of the word "gender" from the National Plan of Education (PNE, 2014). The PNE sets education goals to be met over a ten-year period. In the vote that sanctioned the PNE 2014-2024, evangelical deputies succeeded in changing the highlight of the plan that states: "PNE guidelines are pro the overcoming of educational inequalities, with emphasis on promoting racial, regional, gender and sexual orientation's equality" into one which states that "PNE guidelines are pro overcoming educational inequalities and eradicating all forms of discrimination." This was already a clear setback compared to the PNE 2001, where at least one reference to the subject was presented when was stated the need: "to include in the curricular guidelines of teacher training courses topics related to the issues addressed in the cross-cutting themes, especially with regard to gender, sex education, ethics (justice, dialogue, mutual respect, solidarity and tolerance), cultural pluralism, the environment, health and local issues."

Although the explicit mention was approved in the 2001 PNE, it should be noted that little progress was made in relation to initial teacher education in the areas of gender and sexual diversity. In 2008, the organization "ECOS - Communication on sexuality" carried (Ecos, 2008) out research analysing the curricula of undergraduate courses such as Pedagogy and Education, among others, in the entire Brazilian territory. The researchers concluded that themes related to sexuality and gender are not present in a significant way in most of the undergraduate courses that are responsible for the training of new teachers. In addition, the disciplines on gender, sexual diversity, sex education, when offered, are mostly optional, and will probably be attended mostly by students previously interested in them (Unbehaum, Cavasin and Gava 2010). On the other hand, the research shows that resistance to the implementation of a national policy of sexual education is more focused at the local level than in the formulation of national proposals.

The difficulties of the State and Municipal Secretaries and Councils to approve training and action plans devoted to education in gender and sexuality diversity are denounced in the Brazil - Gender and Education Report 2013: "a growing process of self-censorship is identified in certain sectors of federal, state and municipal governments with regard to issues of gender and sexuality as a result of the political action of such religious groups" (Ação Educativa, Carreira , 2013, p. 110). In this scenario of ideological clash, the School Without Homophobia Kit¹ (2011) was not distributed; the distribution of educational materials of the federal program Health and Prevention in School aimed at AIDS prevention was canceled (2013); and the National Educational Directives on Gender and Sexuality were not issued, despite the promises of the National Education Council and the deliberations made in this regard at the II National Conference on Education (CONAE 2014).

¹ The "School without homophobia kit's" was a collection of para didactical materials intended to be used in secondary schools to fight homophobic bullying. The religious and ultra-conservative groups in the Congress strongly opposed to the distribution of 'The kit materials', which were produced with the funding of the Brazilian Ministry of Education. Finally, the government succumbed to their pressures and withhold the material's distribution. Even if strongly criticized for reproducing a very normative representation of sexual diversity, these materials could have been an instrument to think about sexual diversity in school.

In 2015, after a longstanding demand from the educational community, social movements, and the National Council to Combat Discrimination of LGBT (CNCD / LGBT), the "Gender Committee in the Ministry of Education" was established. This Committee, among others, had the objective of "proposing guidelines and presenting technical and political subsidies for the formulation, evaluation and improvement of policies aimed at guaranteeing the right to quality education, among other actions, projects and educational programs with the promotion of rights related to gender issues, and facing various forms of prejudice and discrimination" (Article 2, Sub-paragraph 1). The Gender Committee came into existence for only 12 days and, after political pressure, was replaced by the "Committee against Discrimination" by Ordinance No. 949 of September 21, 2015.

Education for Sexual Diversity

Amongst the political turmoil of having the first Brazilian woman ever to be elected as President and then having her impeached, "the maintenance of a sexist, homophobic/lesbophobic, racist and discriminatory education in the school environment" is considered one of the great challenges faced by Brazilian education (AÇÃO EDUCATIVA, CARREIRA, 2013:10). This directly affects school communities, such as the experiences we describe below. The kind of initiative we will present in this paper constitutes a pedagogical space of resistance that where prejudice and discrimination for reasons of gender and sexuality are debated. We also believe that especially in these times of global attacks on women's rights and human rights, it is essential that at the local level spaces continue to exist in which the deconstruction of oppressive structures is promoted.

This article deals with the experience of education projects on the interior of the Paraná province, on the triple border of Brazil with Argentina and Paraguay. It is important to note that Paraná is a state considered as extremely conservative in Brazil.. The experience was carried out at the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA), a Brazilian public university focused on students from Latin America and the Caribbean. The academic partnership between UNILA and the Nucleus of Identities of Gender and Subjectivities (NIGS), Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), goes back to 2012 when the postdoctoral researcher Arianna Sala (one of the authors of this article) spoke in the lobby of the Latin American Institute of Art, Culture and History (ILAACH). Since joining UNILA as a teacher in 2012, and a year later as elected dean of the Latin American Institute of Art, Culture and History (one of four academic units), Arisi sought to bring to Foz do Iguaçu what she had learned from the NIGS colleagues, the nucleus in which he had carried out postdoctoral studies. Several extension activities originally created and developed by NIGS researchers, such as the Poster Contest against Homophobia, Lesbophobia and Transphobia and the Papo Sériio Workshops (Sala; Grossi, 2013), were offered by UNILA researchers to the teachers of the Regional Nucleus of Education (NRE) of Foz do Iguaçu. These initiatives helped solidify a partnership that bridged the gap between Higher Education Institutions and public schools, especially at secondary level. This bridge was built slowly.

Papo Sériio (Serious Talk) Workshops and Poster Contest

In 2012, we organized the first of many academic activities of education and exchange of experiences with and for the multidisciplinary teams of schools of the state public network in the region. In the first year, we developed a poster contest, replicated the experience developed in Santa Catarina by the Papo Sériio project. We

counted on two scholarships for undergraduate students who helped to map educational initiatives concerning ethnic diversity in schools all over Brazil. We then designed two projects: one aimed at the internal public of the university with the objective of combating heterosexism in the relations between students, technicians and teachers, coordinated by a university psychologist who works in the Pro-Rectorate of Student Affairs (PRAE) and another for the external public with teachers and students of the state public network, coordinated by another university support staff worker. The Poster Contest was the final workshop activity that encouraged students to produce posters as a way to combat heterosexism, racism and ethnic discrimination. We asked tour operators in the region support with prizes for the winners of the competition.

We prepared classes with teachers and students from both schools as a form of social intervention. This is a common form of relationship in Brazil between university students and the community with which the university works. The "Extension projects" are a common practice in Brazil, but rare in European countries. Moreover, the "Extension" projects are the third pillar of Brazilian universities together with researching and teaching and are aimed to link the academic community with the local communities in which universities are situated. In Europe, it is sometimes referred to as "civic engagement", "socially relevant projects", or "knowledge exchange". The principle idea of Brazilian extension projects relies on the belief that the knowledge constructed within the universities must promote an improvement in social realities not only of the university' students but also of people living in the local communities around the university. With such an extension action, our main objective was to promote the fight against heterosexism and to reflect in the classroom on issues related to gender identity and sexual diversity. The coordinator of the Education Secretary in Foz do Iguaçu reported to us that it was important also to pay attention to the themes of racism and ethnic discrimination, as well as sexual diversity. He suggested two public schools in Foz do Iguaçu with which we should develop the activities: the State School Professor Carmelita de Souza Dias and the State College Carimã.

The partnership between researchers from the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina and Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana has a history also at the student level, since several students linked to the group of activists Maldita Geni - an LGBTQ activist group created at UNILA - were in the UFSC to participate in academic events such as Making Gender (Fazendo Gênero, in Portuguese) and they joined a network of exchanges and communication with researchers in Brazil. UNILA maintained, through the participation of students and employees involved in the NIGS projects in Foz do Iguaçu, good relations and working partnership with several activist groups for gender equality in the city, such as Ciranda Feminista, Espaço Paranaense da Diversidade Sexual, Iguaçuense Space of LGBTQ Diversity. In addition, we established professional relationships with groups of activists in Argentina and Paraguay, countries neighboring Brazil. The culmination of this work came when we held the Trans Day NIGS event at UNILA in 2015.

Trans Day NIGS History

"Trans Day NIGS - Seminar on Transphobia, Citizenship and Trans Identities" is an annual seminar first held in 2010. This seminar focused on the struggle for the depathologization of trans identities around the world. Through the Stop TransPathologization campaign 2012, it was the first event of this campaign carried out in

Brazil, in which the objective is to fight for the depathologization of trans identities and for their removal from the catalogs of diseases, such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) Of the American Psychiatric Association, and the World Health Organization (WHO) CID, which is currently undergoing a review process, with publication expected in 2017 (ÁVILA, 2014). This struggle had repercussions on the publication, in May 2013, of the fifth version of DSM, in which transsexuality, once considered a "gender identity disorder", ie a "mental disorder", became "gender dysphoria". The non-conformity with gender does not imply in itself a "dysphoria". Despite the changes, medical and "psi" discourses that need to be problematized in conjunction with health practices, as well as other legal and judicial demands and imbricated social class implications are still present in the field of transsexuality.

Trans Day NIGS aims to promote a space for meeting and dialogue between researchers on transsexuality and travestilities, activists and policy makers in various fields, articulating trans theories and political claims, through diverse forms of dialogue and artistic expression. The event has become a reference point in the country for reflections and debates about the depathologization of trans identities. The first Trans Day NIGS, organized in October 2010, was the starting point for a succession of activities carried out at the UFSC around the rights of a segment with little visibility in the LGBTQ field. Trans Day NIGS 2010 hosted a conversation with a representative of trans men, a representative of trans women and two researchers, Miriam Grossi and Simone Ávila. About thirty people, most of them academics in social sciences, anthropology and psychology at UFSC, were present, but there were also some activists and the presence of people from outside the UFSC academic community. There was great public participation in the debate. An exhibition of photos of people of non-normative gender was set up with the intention of contributing to the visibility of these subjects. We installed a visual manifesto, with bands of coloured cloth hanging in the central foyer of the Center for Philosophy and Human Sciences of UFSC that contained slogans.

In 2011, Trans Day NIGS focused on Transphobia, Citizenship and Trans Identities while in 2012 the focused of public debate shifted to public policies for trans health, the social name as an inclusion strategy and the (in) visibilities that the collective suffers, always with the presence of activists and researchers. The focus on the arts as a means of activism was intensified in 2013, with the IV Trans Day NIGS giving a centre stage to art exhibitions. The presence of an artistic sphere understood as space of enjoyment and reflection, was a distinguished feature of the event, with the presentation of the theatrical spectacle "Andróginos"², of Porto Alegre, that discussed the binary norms of gender. We also organized the I International Exhibition of Art and Gender, The diversity of viewpoints, with a strong presence of trans voices, has always been a trademark of the seminar. The event was considered well-developed enough to travel, so we brought the Trans Day to Foz do Iguaçu. The VI Trans Day NIGS / UNILA aimed to broaden the scientific reflection and debate on the pathologization of trans identities, addressing issues of great political importance at the national and international level in the field of gender studies, focusing on the dilemmas and paradoxes that involve the pathologization of trans subjects both in the subjective plane and in their social and political implications.

² The director of the piece was Isandria Fermiano, the performers were Carolina Diemer, Karine Paz and Vinicius Mello.

The idea was to discuss the theme of gender identities and categories as a general issue present in all activities. The medical and legal fields have a way of knowing transsexualities and transvestilities that leads to the closure of subjects in closed and established concepts. We understand that some social movements work from this perspective and in a way they do accept these closed categories, so we tried to broaden the perspectives and even sometimes we completely tried to deny such frameworks. We consider that the demands of the social movements are important to be discussed in academic events. We understand that it is imperative for the academy to understand these political and identity movements along with the theoretical propositions of contemporary feminism and move forward. With this specific seminar on transphobia, citizenship and trans identities in its fifth edition, we wished to expand the academic space for discussion and exchange of knowledge between the university, social movements and the State, in the Latin American context. Our aim was to contribute to raising awareness to the right of citizenship of these individuals and social groups, through the implementation of innovative public policies in the field of gender and sexualities. Therefore, we brought together researchers who study transgender identities or expressions, transsexual and transvestite movement activists, representatives of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and human rights policy makers. The themes of the 'round table conversations' on Trans Day NIGS / UNILA were about trans depathologization in the international context, health, education and social movements, and the trans in Latin America: who have rights? And the right to what?

One of the outcomes was the visibility given inside of the academy for those who were developing their work as researchers in the study on sexualities and diversity. At the same time, it also offered an academic stage for activists that worked in civil society in other arenas. For the activists, it meant that the university was becoming more accessible. During the governments of Lula and Dilma, the academy finally opened up its elite's doors to other sectors of society that have been always under-represented in the university. The Trans Day event was part of a bigger wave of popular events that had brought people who had not being welcome inside academic spaces before. The reflections provoked by Trans Day in UNILA opened up space for internal debate about trans people's inclusion and in how to keep them in the university without having them drop out. Some proposals for use of 'social name' were presented in the Superior Council of the institution. Such policies like 'social name' (translating literally from Brazilian Portuguese) or 'preferred name' (in English) have the goal to recognise and to respect identities of people who are out of the heterosexual norm so they help to resolve the daily embarrassments that these people face by not having their identities and social name recognized.

Trans Day event addressed uncertainty by embracing it, opening up academy spaces to the complexities that non-binary approach to gender and sexualities bring with it. We understand that the presence in the university of many queer activists that refuse to be boxed as female or male and of researchers that fully embrace their bodies as they are, without trying to box them in stable binarism or any other fixed terms, create from uncertainty a proud and visible flag. The event literally occupied all the entrance halls of UFSC and UNILA with the colours of LGBTs and Queer's flags making it visible different colours that opened up multiple opportunities to express differences in sexualities and bodies.

Networks

At UNILA, some students, teachers and administrative support staff had organized in Unila a Gender and Sexuality Study Group for discussion and debate on sexual diversity: the Maldita Geni³. The opportunity to compose an "extension" or a "civic engagement" project in order to establish dialogue directly with the residents of Foz do Iguaçu on matters related to sexuality interested the members of the Maldita Geni. The projects developed at UNILA sought to follow the NIGS 'orientation to check the gender category as "a category used to think about social relations involving men and women, relationships historically determined and expressed by different social discourses about the sexual difference" (GROSSI, 1998: 6). During the whole school year, UNILA undergraduate students and the coordinator teacher would visit the two public schools and, in their classrooms, offer lectures, workshops and promote debates with the school teachers addressing theoretical debates concerning diversity of gender and sexualities, and in some occasions addressing debates about differences of race and ethnic background as well. In some occasions, undergraduate students together with the secondary teachers had the opportunity to be with the secondary students for pedagogical activities, such as writing down in the blackboard all the offensive terms they knew and then try to classify them as aggressions concerning discrimination and prejudice against sexual diversity, racism or ethnic background. The workshops along the year were implemented in the classrooms, but its theoretical preparation, was done in the university. The activities addressed issues in the schools to combat homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia, transphobia, travestiphobia and heterosexism and to call attention to the importance of combating the various forms of violence that occurred as a consequence of them.

The workshops were created and developed aiming to make visible the multiple sources that impose the reiteration of the social norms of gender, denouncing their built character, which, far from being natural, need a repetitive normalizing apparatus (Bento 2011). The interventions attempted to debate the deconstruction of the discourses that produce hierarchies between people and social groups, the binary oppositions (male-female, hetero-homosexual, etc) that are the ideological substratum of heterosexist violence, as are the roots for the violence against women. Through and during the workshops, we tried to stimulate a process of deconstruction, with the teachers and in the students and with whom we came in contact, of the ideas they had about gender, sexualities, and different types of violence. In this sense, we try to insert ourselves into a "queer pedagogy" (Miskolci 2012, Lopes Louro 2001) in trying to deconstruct the process by which some subjects become normalized and others marginalized. We consider that rather than adding categories in the conceptualization of students is it is necessary to deconstruct the hetero-homosexual binarisms overlaying the vision and understanding that sexuality is something biological and to situate it in the socio-historical and cultural field. The posters were hang in the secondary schools and, later on, in the walls of the university as well, as a bridge of the students' artistic and intellectual production of the secondary schools and of the university.

³ "Maldita Geni" is a music title by Brazilian composer Chico Buarque de Holanda about a trans who suffers all kinds of violence in her small town.

Conclusion

We share our experience in anthropology and civic engagement to show an example of how an anthropological approach can contribute to the pedagogic challenges of engaging secondary schools, undergraduate and postgraduate students, researchers and social movement activists in debates on gender roles, sexual diversity and gender identities. We believe that anthropology can contribute to a future where more acceptance of difference will be a reality. However, we still live in a society that focuses on the discrimination of differences to impose and exalt heteronormative values. The policies presented previously and that were implemented during the Lula and Dilma governments were insufficient to create a society where everyone is seen and respected as equal. We are witnessing the strengthening of the evangelical influence in the Chamber of Deputies, which insists on systematically attacking the few rights already acquired by LGBTQ population and is engaged in preventing new rights to be obtained. In this context, Foz do Iguaçu is a conservative city regarding respect for sexual and gender diversity, as well as the rest of Brazil. Although situated in a border region, it still is a city that doesn't offer municipal public policies for protecting and defending the rights of its LGBTQ population. We understand that by (re-)creating educational experiences such as those developed by NIGS in small and medium size cities in Brazil is very important. It shows that we can celebrate that sexualities are fluid and uncertain and that it is fine to live with uncertainties in these domains, that we can celebrate diversity of gender and sexualities and we have to educate against any form of violence against differences. We also believe in the need of the Public Universities' commitment to society in the construction of new knowledge and exchanges of experiences in order to create a more egalitarian and less violent society. We hope that the record of our education experience will help other university groups worldwide to develop their own activities such as the poster contest against heterosexism and to hold events such as Trans Day NIGS to give visibility to non-heteronormative sexualities. Universities can help to reduce violence against transgender and homosexual people and contribute to a more diverse and non-violent world.

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