

EDUCATION POLICY ON GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY: HISTORY AND PRESENT OF THE BRAZILIAN EXPERIENCE

POLÍTICA DE EDUCAÇÃO EM GÊNERO E DIVERSIDADE SEXUAL: HISTÓRICO E PRESENTE DA EXPERIÊNCIA BRASILEIRA

POLÍTICA EDUCATIVA SOBRE GÊNERO Y DIVERSIDAD SEXUAL: HISTORIA Y PRESENTE DE LA EXPERIENCIA BRASILEÑA

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents part of the results of a doctoral research dedicated to analyze the cycle of the educational policy on gender and sexual diversity in Brazil. Based on Stephen Ball's propositions, which applies Foucault's notions of power and discourse on educational policies, the analysis aims, beyond the metrics, to understand the political-discursive dynamics that marked both the production of this policy as the systematic reaction that has been organized against it. This text analyzes the background of this policy, its main initiatives, the agents involved in its construction and the pedagogical discourse they produced. It also identifies its main opponents, their tactics and discursive strategies, seeking to understand how they are articulated with the reactionary movements that have dominated Brazil in recent years. Finally, the paper highlights evidences that the debate on gender and sexual diversity in schools survives even in times of conservatism, censorship and ideological terrorism.

KEYWORDS: Education. Gender. Sexuality.

RESUMO: Este artigo apresenta parte dos resultados de uma pesquisa de doutorado dedicada a analisar o ciclo de desenvolvimento da política educacional em gênero e diversidade sexual no Brasil. A partir das proposições de Stephen Ball, que acionam noções foucaultianas de poder e discurso para a análise de políticas educacionais, buscou-se, para além da métrica, compreender as dinâmicas político-discursivas que marcaram tanto a produção dessa política quanto a sistemática reação que se lançou sobre ela. Neste artigo, são apresentados seus antecedentes, suas principais ações, os agentes envolvidos na sua construção e o discurso pedagógico que produziram. São identificados também seus principais opositores, suas táticas de ação e estratégias discursivas, apontando como se articularam com os movimentos reacionários que marcaram o país nos últimos anos. Por fim, apontam-se indícios de que o debate sobre gênero e diversidade sexual nas escolas sobrevive mesmo em tempos de conservadorismo, censura e terrorismo ideológico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação. Gênero. Sexualidade.

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RESUMEN: *Este artículo presenta parte de los resultados de una investigación doctoral dedicada a analizar el ciclo de desarrollo de la política educativa sobre género y diversidad sexual en Brasil. A partir de las proposiciones de Stephen Ball, que activan nociones foucaultianas de poder y discurso para el análisis de políticas educativas, se buscó, más allá de la métrica, comprender las dinámicas político-discursivas que marcaron tanto la producción de esta política como la reacción sistemática que se lanzó contra ella. Este texto analiza los antecedentes de esta política, sus principales acciones, los agentes involucrados en su construcción y el discurso pedagógico que produjeron. También se identifican sus principales opositores, sus tácticas de acción y estrategias discursivas, buscando comprender cómo se articulan con los movimientos reaccionarios que han marcado al país en los últimos años. Finalmente, señalase indicios de que el debate sobre género y diversidad sexual en las escuelas sobrevive aún en tiempos de conservadurismo, censura y terrorismo ideológico.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Educación. Género. Sexualidad.*

Introduction

This article presents part of the results of a doctoral research in Education dedicated to analyzing the set of Brazilian governmental initiatives that, in the last two decades, have proposed criticism and reformulation of school practices and knowledge with a view to confronting sexual and gender discrimination and promoting the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite and transgender (LGBT+) people *in* and *from* education. These initiatives, although disperse and discontinuous, if taken together, have constituted what can be defined as an educational policy on gender and sexual diversity.

The construction of this public policy brought together academics, activists, managers, education professionals, and students in a network of communication, articulation, and action that crossed schools, universities, social movements, and governmental instances. In this space of interlocution, a pedagogical discourse was produced, in an articulated and negotiated way, different from the ones that, until then, had inhabited Brazilian educational policies. Even with a small budget and limited reach, this policy incited debate in countless schools, with an impact on teaching systems, academic production, and educational legislation.

Early on, these initiatives provoked reactions from various conservative groups, whose offensives have taken on a systematic character over the last decade. The clash around the teaching of gender and sexual diversity in schools overflowed school communities and management areas, reached the National Congress and electoral disputes and made this educational policy, a relevant character in the main episodes that marked the recent Brazilian political history.

To understand its development cycle within a socio-critical paradigm, the contribution of the work of British researcher Stephen Ball was fundamental. By mobilizing the theoretical production of Michel Foucault to think about public policy, Ball (2012) criticizes managerialist approaches and points out the importance of interpreting educational policy within the broader social and political context. By applying a decentered notion of power to the analysis of education policy, his approach helped build a broader understanding of the spaces, times, and processes through which that public policy was constructed. It also implied a more plural perception of the agents involved in its production and the quality of their participation in defining its forms and development. The Foucauldian notion of discourse operated by Ball also helped to perceive this educational policy as a political field where the function and meanings of education were forged, negotiated, and disputed.

From this perspective, we built a qualitative research design focused not on a programmatic evaluation of the actions and results of this educational policy (something already worked on by previous research), but on the set of discourses that it put in dispute and its broader political effects. To understand it in its political-discursive dimension, a long bibliographical study was carried out, together with a direct analysis of textual materials produced both by its creators and its antagonists, which sought to map the multiple discursive strategies that these agents put into action and their effects on the production, development and inflection of this policy - and beyond.

Within the limits of this article, we point out, in the first part, some antecedents that allowed the emergence of an educational policy on gender and sexual diversity in Brazil. Next, we identify its main actions, the agents involved in its construction and the pedagogical discourse they produced. In the third part, we go through recent episodes to identify their main opponents, their action tactics and discursive strategies, analyzing how they articulated with the reactionary movements that marked the last years. Finally, we bring evidence that the debate on gender and sexual diversity in Brazilian schools resists, even if under a context of conservatism, censorship and ideological terrorism.

Historical Background

It is not possible to analyze any policies to promote women's and LGBT+ rights in Brazil without considering the history of exclusion, repression, criminalization and violence that defined the Brazilian State's actions over subalternized groups for centuries. The imposition of a masculinist and racialized cis-heteronormative gender system was a fundamental part of the

colonization processes that constituted societies like ours (LUGONES, 2020). Present since its genesis, the patriarchal, classist, and racist character of the Brazilian state persists even with the advance of liberal political models and our peripheral insertion in global capitalism - and its marks can still be found today (BIROLI, 2018).

Taking into account this historical investment is that we can think of a variety of sexual and gender policies, developed, in particular, since the democratic opening, as part of a process of de-patriarchalization of the State, in the sense that they confront, from the inside, the masculinist, racist, and cis-heteronormative character of our institutions and forms of government (MATOS; PARADIS, 2014). Once the containment of the military regime was over, different political fields managed to (re)organize themselves, among them activisms mobilized around issues of gender and sexuality (FACCHINI; CARMO; LIMA, 2020). Supported by the 1988 Constitution and strengthened by the institutional framework produced from the cycle of conferences organized by the United Nations in the 1990s, these movements began processes of dialogue with the Brazilian state for the construction of public policies focused no longer on repression, but on the promotion of rights (CORRÊA, 2018).

This process intensified with the social participation policies implemented by the Workers' Party (PT) (IRINEU, 2016). In 2004, a year after Luís Inácio Lula da Silva took office, the Federal Government held the national conference that would give rise to the first National Plan for Women's Policies (PNPM). In the same year, the Brazil Without Homophobia Program (BSH) was launched with the stated goal of promoting the citizenship of LGBT+ people. If not the first, the PNPM and the BSH expanded the volume, scope and quality of public policies aimed at these groups.

Production

By analyzing the plans and programs arising from these social participation policies, it is possible to perceive a strategic role for education. On the one hand, the need to overcome sexism, machismo, and LGBTophobia in schools as barriers to guaranteeing the right to education for women and LGBT+ is affirmed. On the other hand, educational institutions are thought of as a platform for a broader cultural transformation, whose effects would go far beyond the schoolyards and classrooms. These propositions took shape with the creation, in 2004, of the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity (Secad) in the Ministry of Education (MEC). Diversity worked, then, as an institutional and discursive "umbrella", strategically aggregating a wide and varied set of educational policies, demanded

by multiple social movements, ranging from indigenous education to socioeducation (CARREIRA, 2015). Among the education policies for diversity, those focused on issues of gender and sexuality constituted one of the points of greatest tension. The challenge was not small: to transform Brazilian schools, historically committed to the reproduction of dominant dispositions of gender and sexuality, into institutions promoting sexual diversity and gender equality.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education launched the first public call for training education professionals derived from Brazil Without Homophobia. The courses in gender and sexual diversity (GDS) focused on discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, while promoting positive visibility of LGBT+ people, something quite innovative at that time. Initially implemented by non-governmental organizations, these trainings were soon taken over by public universities and held in all regions of the country. In parallel, the course Gender and Diversity at School (GDE) was launched in 2006, from an initiative of the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women (SPM). Built on the relationship with a multifaceted feminist movement, the GDE brought an innovative approach by seeking to work, in an articulated manner, with issues of gender, sexual orientation and ethnic-racial relations. Created by the Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights of the Rio de Janeiro State University (CLAM), the course would take multiple forms as it was taken up by higher education institutions all over the country. The training projects developed both in GDE and GDS also included the production of didactic materials and the carrying out of multiplication activities in schools, expanding the subjects mobilized beyond those immediately reached by the courses.

It is also worth mentioning two other lines of action: the Gender Equality Award, which rewarded schools and texts produced by students - and the School Without Homophobia Project - which included the production of materials, research, and the formation of a network of managers. These and other actions, irradiated by the Federal Government, necessarily involved, to a greater or lesser extent, state and municipal education systems, and provided important spaces for dialogue between social movements, research institutions and education networks.

By examining the products of these initiatives in dialogue with existing literature (especially FERNANDES, 2011; MELLO *et al.*, 2012; CARREIRA, 2015; IRINEU, 2016), it is possible to identify a multiplicity of agents who acted in the construction of these actions:

Associations, organizations, and activist collectives, especially LGBT+ and feminist ones, were responsible for much of the political advocacy that allowed the elaboration of a gender and sexual diversity agenda in education. They collaborated in the execution of the initiatives, when they did not assume their realization themselves. From these activisms also

come political notions that have constituted a fundamental part of the repertoire of this educational policy.

Public managers in education, from highly visible politicians, who took on a central role in legislative disputes or decisive functions in the executive branch, to individuals working in less visible spaces of public management, were responsible for creating the political, technical, and operational conditions that allowed the flow of gender and sexual diversity agendas in the political system and governmental apparatuses, sometimes becoming true militants confronting patriarchy within the State.

Researchers, professors, students, and technicians linked to public institutions of higher education, mostly active in the field of gender and sexuality studies, constituted another important collective agent. Their ability to circulate through educational management, their privileged position of enunciation, and the infrastructure they had available in their institutions were their main instruments of action. They took over the coordination and execution of training projects and production of materials, acted as consultants in the elaboration of guidelines, and had seats in most of the social participation mechanisms. Their researches were used to scientifically ground and legitimate the need for an educational policy on gender and sexual diversity. They also brought with them fundamental concepts and theories for the construction of a critical pedagogy to gender and sexuality regulations.

Education professionals, especially teachers reached by continuing education, recurrently reduced by the literature to mere "implementers", little heard during the formulation of plans and programs, were responsible for materializing this policy on the school ground. Untimely affected by discontinuous training actions, with little or no resources and relying on shaky institutional support, their main tool was pedagogical creativity. In their polyvalent and recurrently solitary performance, they confronted conservatism, reorganized naturalized practices, rearranged spaces, and invented ways to work with contents that were previously absent in the basic education curricula.

Last but not least, basic education students, especially women and LGBT+ students, most of the analyses perceived as target audiences, were the main mobilizers in schools for the debate on gender and sexuality, from a posture of confrontation that challenged sexist and lgbtophobic school practices that had been naturalized until then. They also played a directly creative role, by engaging in the production of pedagogical resources and multiplication actions.

An innovative pedagogical discourse

The collaborative interaction between these multiple agents, simultaneously convergent and polysemic, was able to generate a pedagogical discourse, in many aspects, innovative. A discourse that advanced in the proposition of the effective incorporation of a gender perspective in education and innovated by proposing a debate on sexual orientation and gender identity at school from the perspective of diversity and human rights. From the analysis of part of the textual production of this educational policy, it was possible to identify some of its core meanings.

The notion, subsumed in the concept of gender, that the meanings of feminine and masculine, as well as the relations between men and women, are not the product of an innate, fixed and universal sexual difference, but of a social, historical and mutable construction, is a fundamental core of this pedagogical discourse. This notion is supported by a multiplicity of knowledge coming from the social and human sciences, on the one hand, and from the accumulated learning of social movements, on the other. Based on this knowledge, it denounces how the naturalization of a sexual difference sustains the existence of a system of male domination, which privileges men to the detriment of women, often guaranteed by the violent exercise of male power. It also denounces a cis-heteronormative system, which imposes through different techniques - even violent ones - a binding chain between sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. An articulated understanding of the regulations of gender and sexuality is proposed, in which misogyny, sexism, lgbtphobia, and sexism are thought of as integrated forms of regulation. We also add an intersectional perspective, incipient at first, but intensifying over time, which allows us to identify a single system, simultaneously patriarchal, capitalist, racist, and cis-heteronormative, to be fought against.

In opposition to the idea of a naturalized sexual difference, this constructionist perspective perceives bodies, expressions, gender identities, sexual and affective practices not from a naturalized normative standard, but in its multiplicity, investing in the recognition and valorization of differences. The deconstruction of sexual difference is done, on the one hand, by unveiling the historical and political processes involved in the production of scientific knowledge, especially the knowledge produced by the biological sciences. And, on the other hand, it denounces the historical role of Christianity in the symbolic and political constitution of the regulations of gender and sexuality, which is opposed to secularism as an organizing principle of the State and of the school. Based on these criticisms, practices are denounced as

violations of fundamental rights that, intentionally or not, operate by normalizing subjects to normative standards of gender and sexuality.

This discursive construction, while recognizing the school as a historical space of reproduction of sexual and gender regulations, believes and invests in its transformative potential. The school is then summoned to review itself, in order to overcome discriminatory practices and become a space for promoting gender equality and valuing sexual and gender diversity, in its community and beyond. The notion of diversity from which the discussion of gender and sexuality in school is proposed points to a non-confrontational tactic, which prioritizes an investment in pedagogical dialogue rather than in confrontation.

Under this common framework, however, very different pedagogical practices have been built, in meaning and intensity. Analyzing activities developed in schools by educators who participated in continued education courses, it is possible to find practices that bet on tolerance, respect, overcoming violence and promoting a peaceful environment, without this necessarily meaning a substantive change in the sexist and cis-heteronormative assumptions that organize school life. There are others, however, that acted beyond fighting discrimination, investing in the deconstruction of the school as a technology of sexual and gender normalization, proposing a deep review of pedagogical practices, of the curriculum, and of school management. The coexistence of moderate and radical investments is characteristic of this educational policy.

Although these notions were not in themselves new and had already circulated in scientific circles and social movements, the way they were worked out and incorporated into a pedagogical language constituted, in fact, an innovation in Brazilian educational policy.

Advancement and precariousness

Since its first years of implementation, the educational policy on gender and sexual diversity has survived largely with resources from parliamentary amendments, not figuring among the budgetary priorities of the Federal Government. Although inaccurate, official records show investments of about 70 million reais between 2005 and 2014 - from 2015 on there was no significant funding - and more than 50 thousand education professionals reached by training actions during the period. These seem like large numbers, but they become derisory when compared to the overall budget of the MEC - even when considering only the investments aimed at diversity policies (CARREIRA, 2015) - or in relation to the total number of working teachers in the country - more than 2 million professionals.

A study produced by the Federal University of Goiás in 2012 on educational actions derived from the Brazil Without Homophobia program criticizes precisely the scale of the implemented actions, for their inability to reach most of the country's educational system (MELLO *et al.*, 2012). The authors also highlight the punctual character of the actions, which would have produced very limited effects on school practices. This analysis contrasts with that expressed in the evaluation produced by the Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights regarding the DGE course, which describes the training initiatives as a successful and unprecedented practice in the history of Brazilian education (CARRARA *et al.*, 2011). Little concerned with scale, the report focuses on innovation and intensity of the experience lived by the subjects and organizations that participated in these initiatives. Another study, also produced by CLAM a few years later (CARRARA *et al.*, 2017), brings evidence that the theoretical and conceptual background, the set of information, the perspective and the exercise of dialogue throughout the courses allowed, at least for part of the education professionals involved, to build tools to act in the day to day of their schools. More than irreconcilable, these analyses seem to point precisely to the coexistence of advances and precariousness as a mark of the educational policy on gender and sexual diversity in Brazil. If it is impossible to deny the qualitative intensity of many pedagogical experiences lived by schools and educators, the quantitative results of these actions are still far from what would be necessary to produce substantial changes in the Brazilian school system as a whole.

Beyond the numbers

Besides mobilizing teaching networks and schools, the educational policy on gender and sexual diversity produced an important impact on the scientific field itself. The execution of courses in universities was mostly in charge of research centers and extension projects, mobilizing a significant number of professors, technicians, undergraduate and graduate students. This contributed to the consolidation of research and extension groups around these themes in universities, also generating impacts on scientific production (CARRARA *et al.*, 2017).

There were also important advances in the normative framework of educational policies. Analyzing the educational guidelines approved by the National Council of Education throughout the 2000s, it is possible to find evidence of women's and LGBT+ agendas, materialized in references to gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexual diversity. As a whole, these educational guidelines affirm the need to work on issues related to gender

and sexuality from kindergarten to high school, pointing to an approach focused not on standardizing behaviors, but on critical reflection, on the subjects' autonomy, on freedom of access to knowledge, on the recognition of differences, and on confronting all forms of discrimination and violence.

Although in terms of scope and resources its program has been quite reduced, this policy has constituted an explicit positioning - albeit precarious - from different spheres of government on the pertinence of addressing issues of gender and sexuality at school within a perspective of valuing diversity, fighting inequality, and promoting human rights. Besides the programmatic aspect, this expressive and communicative dimension of public policies (PECHENY; DE LA DEHESA, 2011) cannot be disregarded. In a progressive political context, this positioning, albeit shaky, served as legitimization for those who wanted to talk about gender and sexuality in school, allowing the proliferation of didactic experiences that went beyond the direct radius of action of the training courses.

The reaction

Since its implementation, the policy of gender and sexual diversity education has provoked reactions, sporadic and punctual at first, but which, over time, gained scale, capillarity and became systematic. Led by right-wing politicians, religious leaders, conservative groups, and agents of militarism, antagonism to this policy gained support from large sectors of society. After the political crisis of 2013, the fight against the discussion of gender and sexuality in schools became a central part of the repertoire of reactionary movements that took over Brazil in the following years. To understand the nature, dynamics, and broader political effects of this reaction, we investigated some significant episodes, whose analysis we summarize below.

The "gay kit" controversy

The first of these episodes, already widely analyzed, occurred in 2011, the first year of Dilma Rousseff's government, involving the set of materials produced by the School Without Homophobia Project. Presented at a seminar in the National Congress in late 2010, the material was harshly attacked by Congressman Jair Bolsonaro, until then, a congressman with little expression beyond his own military circle. Author of the term "gay kit", Bolsonaro had already been systematically opposing sexual and gender policies, especially in education. At the beginning of the new legislative year, other congressmen joined the attack on the material, especially congressmen linked to religious groups.

By examining the more than one hundred statements against the distribution of the material made by parliamentarians on the floor of the House of Representatives between late 2010 and early 2012, it was possible to identify a common argumentative line. The central axis of their discourse accused the material of, by presenting in a positive way the experience of LGBT+ characters, going beyond fighting discrimination to be characterized as an instrument of incitement and promotion of supposedly deviant behaviors (both from a religious and biological point of view) - which could be tolerated, but never valued, especially among children and young people. This approach, which parliamentarians accused of being incited by an activism that would have disproportionate influence on the government, would constitute, in their view, a threat to childhood and youth. In the speeches of these parliamentarians, the valorization of multiple sexual-affective practices and gender identities was perceived as an attack on the assumptions that would constitute the foundations of the family - always understood in the singular, within a cis-heteronormative perspective. By shaking the family, they would put at risk that which is identified as the institution responsible for the moral formation of society. In these discourses, morality and Christianity are confused, and religion is perceived as the only possible language of ethical formation. For supposedly attacking points that would be fundamental in the Christian moral formation, the material would constitute a threat capable of affecting the integrity of the whole Brazilian society.

Under pressure from the religious fronts in Congress, including conservative congressmen who at the time were its own base of support, the Federal Government ended up suspending the distribution of the material, which was publicly vetoed by the president. In the middle of the announcement of the interruption of the material, Dilma Rousseff, when questioned by journalists, declared that the government was still committed to the fight against homophobic practices, but that no government organ would be allowed to "advertise sexual

options". By justifying the veto not on the basis of political pressure suffered by the government, but on the supposed inadequacy of the material, Dilma Rousseff ended up legitimizing and reinforcing the reactionary discourse of those who identified the debate on gender and sexual diversity in education as ideological inculcation and moral threat.

This episode marked a moment of great visibility of the educational policy on gender and sexual diversity, which, until then out of the public spotlight, gained unusual space in the national news. Unfortunately, this visibility was not positive; on the contrary, it excited stigmas and prejudices rooted in Brazilian society, fueled anxieties about educational policies, and had as its outcome a public defeat of the LGBT+ field, whose effects resonate to this day. Beyond the mere suspension of a didactic material, the veto to the kit marked a turning point, from which the entire LGBT+ agenda was contingent and put under monitoring in different areas of government (CARREIRA, 2015).

The dispute over education plans

Two years after the veto of the kit, in 2013, Brazil saw the emergence of massive street demonstrations that began a political crisis that considerably changed the power relations in the national public arena. The protests on the left expressed in part frustrated expectations of more radical changes, made impossible by the agreements that the government made to assemble an always unstable majority in Congress and by its estrangement from the grassroots of social movements (BRINGEL, 2013). On the right, what we saw was the release of explicitly conservative and reactionary discourses, until then contained by the hegemony of social progressivism and now channeled by new and old political actors (NOBRE, 2013). If it did not lose its voters immediately, the left was no longer able to define the directions of the national political debate (PINTO, 2017).

The debate around the National Education Plan (PNE) is symbolic of this process of change in power relations and the advance of a conservative endeavor. In the analysis of the speeches of congressmen given during the second round of voting on the PNE, in 2014, the mentions of the "gay kit" are giving way to an expression hitherto little known to the Brazilian public: the "gender ideology". Formulated and disseminated by Catholic networks as a reaction to the advances of the sexual and reproductive rights agenda on the international stage (CASE, 2019), the discursive strategy of "gender ideology" operated as an agglutinator of a series of reactions to feminist and LGBT+ policies, until then dispersed and extemporaneous, shaping a powerful and systematic reactionary investment. Functioning as an empty signifier (LACLAU,

2013), this expression was triggered in different ways in multiple contexts around the world, especially in Europe and Latin America (FASSIN, 2021), generating diverse political effects.

In the speeches of Brazilian parliamentarians, this term was used to refer to a plurality of ideas, concepts, propositions that, in different ways, confronted normative and naturalized notions of sexual difference and proposed a constructionist perspective of the body, sexuality, identities and relationships, represented by the concept of gender. By treating gender as an ideology, congressmen disqualified these knowledges as scientific, while characterizing them as part of a cultural imposition strategy coming from a minority political activism. Since the word "gender" would carry embedded this "ideology," it should be eliminated from official documents, along with other related terms, as a way to prevent these ideas from reaching schools, jeopardizing the moral formation of children and youth. At the end of 2014, the Brazilian Congress approved the National Education Plan (2014-2024), erasing any reference to gender and sexuality.

Although the PNE maintained, albeit in a generic way, the commitment of education to combat all forms of discrimination, conservative agents spread a narrative that the removal of specific terms from the plan meant the interdiction of the debate on these issues in schools. Even though false, this narrative contaminated networks and educational institutions, producing doubt and insecurity among education professionals who wanted to address these issues.

In a context of advancing conservatism, the banner of fighting "gender ideology" became an interesting instrument of political capital production for multiple agents, composing a systematic offensive against feminist and LGBT+ policies that had education as the main target. In the sequential votes on state and municipal education plans, the educational policy on gender and sexual diversity would be harshly pursued (VIANNA; BORTOLINI, 2020), becoming the object of numerous prohibitionist bills in legislative chambers across the country.

Attacking gender to attack the left - wing

If this was not the case in other countries, in Brazil, the lexicon of gender ideology has been instrumentalized in recent years fundamentally as a tactic to attack not only sexual and gender policies, but against the left. If opponents of the kit strove to spare the government of which they were a part, from 2014 onwards the anti-gender rhetoric took on clear contours of opposition and became a central part of the rapidly growing reactionary repertoire. As religious and right-wing groups that previously supported the Workers' Party moved into opposition, this anti-gender offensive established a strategic articulation with the growing anti-left political

movements, such as the School Without Party (ESP) movement. Articulated, these offensives updated an old discursive tactic, triggered by the military regime, that associates sexual and gender politics with the left, feminism with communism, all together to compose an overall strategy supposedly aimed at destroying the family, Christianity, capitalism, and Western society. By incorporating the fight against "gender ideology," ESP would grow in membership and capillarity (MIGUEL, 2016) and, in return, provide anti-gender offensives with tactics of exposure, persecution, and intimidation that would usher in a veritable ideological terrorism in schools. Capillarized in local spheres, these offensives affected the school daily life and consolidated, in practice, an environment of censorship and interdiction of these debates.

The moral panic created around educational policies on gender and sexuality helped excite a narrative about the PT government as a source of corruption - not only political, but also moral (KALIL, 2018). By treating sexual issues as religious beliefs, educational proposals founded on a gender perspective have been described as attacks on personal faith, Christianity, and the freedom of families. By denouncing them as ideological indoctrination imposed by a corrupt government, opposition politicians pointed to the advance of a supposed leftist authoritarianism, an enemy of the family, Christian values, and democracy.

The antagonism to sexual and gender policies in education allowed parliamentarians involved in corruption scandals to present themselves as Christian defenders of the family in an attempt to deflect from the growing anti-politics sentiment at that time. During the impeachment session of Dilma Rousseff in 2016, the educational policy on gender and sexual diversity was repeatedly cited as a symbol of the advance of a supposed social degradation promoted by petismo, against which a conservative restoration would be the only solution.

During Michel Temer's government (2016-2018), although there was no direct investment by the Executive against the gender agenda, the advancement of capillary tactics of intimidation and censorship contributed to consolidate a feeling that there was no space for these debates in school. In 2017, a Common National Curricular Base (BNCC) was approved that, like the PNE, did not bring any explicit mention of gender issues and that located sexuality (although considering its social dimension) only among the contents of the natural sciences.

Electoral instrumentalization and dismantling

In 2018, the fight against the politics of gender and sexual diversity in education would be instrumentalized again. Through digital technologies hitherto rarely used in electoral processes, Jair Bolsonaro's campaign disseminated false information about materials with

sexual content that had supposedly been distributed to schools when Fernando Haddad, candidate for the PT, was Minister of Education. More than a smokescreen, the excitation of misogynistic and lgbtphobic stigmas, centrally supported in education policies, helped Bolsonaro build the image of a strong male authority, central to today in our representation of power, reinforced his association with Christianity and militarism, and revived a sense of moral restoration, which responded to the political emotions of many Brazilians at that moment.

The beginning of the new government marked the end, at least from an institutional point of view, of the cycle of educational policy on gender and sexual diversity as it has been constituted over the past two decades. The ministers of education appointed in 2019, Ricardo Vélez Rodríguez and Abraham Weintraub, explicitly took up the goal of eliminating "gender ideology" from schools. The secretariat from which the diversity policies emanated was dismantled and the federal human rights structures have since been instrumentalized for the implementation of conservative familist policies (MARANHÃO FILHO; DE FRANCO, 2019). As a symbol of the new government, the program of militarization of schools emerged, an evident disciplining investment, with symbolic effects diametrically opposed to diversity policies (BORTOLINI, 2021).

Between setbacks and resistance

Amidst the tragic advance of the precarization of social policies, education, health, and democracy itself that marked Brazil between 2016 and 2022, it is possible to find resistance. In the 2020 (BARBABELA, 2021) and 2022 elections, although timid, there was an advance in the political representation of women, while the number of LGBT+ people elected grew significantly, which points to the persistence of these groups in the Brazilian political arena. In the specific field of education, all laws that proposed to ban the teaching of gender and sexual diversity in schools were overturned. Although absent of explicit mention in the PNE and the BNCC, the approach of these themes continues to have support in the legal and normative framework of Brazilian education. In January 2018, the National Education Council reinforced this framework, approving a resolution that regulates the recognition of transvestite and transgender identity in basic education and guides schools to combat any form of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Amidst an anti-LGBT+ and anti-feminist agenda that continues to be triggered in political disputes (DOS PASSOS; BORTOLINI, 2022) and the continued effects of ideological terrorism, it is still possible to identify universities and education systems that persist in carrying

out initiatives aimed at the dissemination of gender and sexual diversity perspectives in education. The training courses offered by the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro or the activities on the rights of LGBT+ people carried out by the Pernambuco Secretary of Education in 2021 are just two examples, among other initiatives. In 2022, after a heated electoral dispute contaminated by fake news about closing churches and installing unisex bathrooms in schools, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva was once again consecrated as President of the Republic. Although the transition team of the new government pointed to the recreation of a secretariat for diversity in the MEC, the return of gender and sexuality policies in schools is still uncertain. Given the broad configuration of the new government's coalition, the contamination of the public arena and school communities by the "gender ideology" narrative, and the growth in political power of religious and conservative groups, what the future points to is the resumption of an intense dispute to overcome fear, misinformation, and stigma and build, through education, a society founded on freedom, democracy, and social justice for all and everyone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: To the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel, the Fulbright Commission Brazil, and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development - CNPq/PQ (2019-2023).

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How to reference this article

BORTOLINI, A.; VIANNA, C. P. Education policy on gender and sexual diversity: History and present of the Brazilian experience. **Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação**, v. 17, n. esp. 3, p. 2214-2232, nov. 2022. e-ISSN: 1982-5587. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21723/riaee.v17iesp.3.16691>

Submitted: 27/03/2022

Revisions required: 08/06/2022

Approved: 11/09/2022

Published: 30/11/2022

Processing and publication by the Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação.

Correction, formatting, standardization and translation.

