

THE CONFINED ARTWORK AND THE BAN ON NEUTRAL LANGUAGE: AN ANTI-EGALITARIAN CAMPAIGN IN MATO GROSSO DO SUL

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of a specific facet of the anti-egalitarian campaign in Mato Grosso do Sul, with a particular focus on key markers such as gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class. To achieve this goal, two pivotal experiences were meticulously examined since they act as both the genesis of subjects and the crucible of distinctions. These experiences encompass the removal and seizure of an artwork by artist Ropre displayed at the Museum of Contemporary Art - MARCO, on allegations of promoting pedophilia, and the enactment of Law No. 5,820/2021, which prohibits the use of neutral language within the state. Employing digital ethnography as our primary research methodology, we delve into the digital interactions and discourse surrounding these two significant events. The theoretical framework presented here adopts a post-critical perspective within the realm of Education, uncovering the presence of post-curricula and post-cultural pedagogies that revolve around the actions of various anti-egalitarian moral entrepreneurs. These pedagogies and curricula represent intricate domains of meaning, warranting in-depth analysis through the lens of difference production, thus elucidating the political connotations and intentions that underlie the anti-egalitarian movement.

Keywords: Differences, Anti-egalitarian Campaign, Education.

RESUMO

O QUADRO “PRESO” E A PROIBIÇÃO DA LINGUAGEM NEUTRA: OFENSIVA ANTI-IGUALITÁRIA EM MATO GROSSO DO SUL

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar parte da ofensiva anti-igualitária em Mato Grosso do Sul no que diz respeito a marcadores como gênero, sexualidade, raça/cor/etnia e classe. Para atingir esse objetivo, foram selecionadas duas

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experiências entendidas como lugar de produção dos sujeitos e, portanto, também das diferenças. São elas: a “prisão” (apreensão) de um quadro em uma exposição da artista Ropre no Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Mato Grosso do Sul (MARCO), por acusação de promoção da pedofilia; e a aprovação da Lei n.º 5.820/2021, que proíbe o uso da linguagem neutra no referido Estado. Elas foram selecionadas por meio da etnografia digital. Essa metodologia possibilitou uma imersão no campo on-line de interações que envolvem essas duas experiências. A perspectiva teórica adotada é a pós-crítica em Educação, a qual permitiu concluir que existem pós-currículos e pós-pedagogias culturais em torno da atuação de diferentes empreendedores morais anti-igualitários. Eles são campos de significação torcidos que também merecem ser analisados sob a ótica da produção das diferenças, em sentidos e intenções políticas anti-igualitárias.

Palavras chaves: Diferenças, Ofensiva Anti-igualitária, Educação.

RESUMEN

EL MARCO “ARRESTADO” Y LA PROHIBICIÓN DEL LENGUAJE NEUTRAL: OFENSIVA ANTIIGUALITARIA EN MATO GROSSO DO SUL

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar parte de la ofensiva antiigualitaria en Mato Grosso do Sul en relación con marcadores como género, sexualidad, raza/color/etnia y clase. Para ello, se seleccionaron dos experiencias que se consideran lugares de producción de sujetos y, por lo tanto, de producción de diferencias. Ellas son: la “detención” (incautación) de un cuadro de una exposición del artista Ropre en el Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Mato Grosso do Sul (MARCO), acusado de promover la pedofilia; y la aprobación de la Ley n.º 5.820/2021, que prohíbe el uso del lenguaje neutro en ese estado. Fueron seleccionados mediante etnografía digital. Esta metodología permitió la inmersión en el campo online de las interacciones que involucran estas dos experiencias. La perspectiva teórica adoptada es la educación postcrítica, que nos ha permitido concluir que existen pedagogías postcurriculares y postculturales en torno a las acciones de diferentes emprendedores morales antiigualitarios. Son campos de sentido trenzados que también merecen ser analizados desde la perspectiva de la producción de diferencias, en significados e intenciones políticas antiigualitarias.

Palabras clave: Diferencias, Ofensiva antiigualitaria, Educación.

Introduction¹

The production of differences in various educational contexts has long been the focal point of disputes and tensions among diverse interest groups. These groups range from social movements advocating for safer, more inclusive, and diverse spaces, such as indigenous, Black, LGBTQIAP+, feminist, and

disability rights movements, to movements opposing advances in recognizing differences based on social markers like gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class. It is essential to note that when we refer to differences, they are not solely understood in terms of inequality but also as opportunities for democratic actions and political agency (BRAH, 2006).

These disputes and tensions manifest differently in specific regional realities, even though

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both egalitarian and anti-egalitarian movements share certain modes of action. In the context of Mato Grosso do Sul (MS), there exist initiatives aimed at combating inequalities and reactions to the struggle for the expanded recognition of differences in the face of an unequal reality. This local reality is marked by disparate development resulting from agribusiness and its environmental transgressions, ethnic-racial conflicts within numerous *quilombola* and indigenous communities, a significant occurrence of femicide, and LGBTQIA+phobia (BECKER; OLIVEIRA; CAMPOS, 2016).

Indigenous mobilization has been vigorous in the struggle for survival. In response to this reality and in the pursuit of equal rights, it has unveiled a form of “decolonization” within local communities, challenging the impact of protective policies enforced by the Brazilian State (MURA; SILVA; ALMEIDA, 2020). Moreover, several *quilombola* communities (founded by formerly enslaved Afro-Brazilian people) have adopted “strategies of empowerment”. These approaches encompass initiatives aimed at safeguarding their territory in response to the inadequacies of public policies in Mato Grosso do Sul (ARRUDA et al., 2021).

Regarding sexual and gender diversity, the initial organized group in the region was the Association of Transvestites and Transsexuals of Mato Grosso do Sul (ATMS), which preceded groups led by gay men. In 2001, “the political visibility of transvestites and transsexuals became the primary strategy in response to the group’s survival demands, particularly concerning physical safety in the public spaces they inhabit” (SARDINHA, 2012, p. 11). At the local level, the establishment of the first Brazilian Women’s House was a significant milestone. This achievement was the result of collaborative efforts by women holding various positions of influence, power, and leadership. It introduced an innovative approach to supporting victims of domestic violence in the country. “This approach is characterized by its polycentric, democratic, horizontally

structured, parity-driven, and locally rooted management” (SILVA, 2022, p. 181).

It is widely acknowledged that sexual and reproductive rights have faced relentless attacks from what are commonly labeled as “anti-gender movements”, both in Brazil and on a global scale. However, while it is understood that gender and sexuality play pivotal roles as distinguishing factors in the activities of these movements, I categorize them as anti-egalitarian in this context. This categorization aims to expand the scope of analysis to encompass additional elements of differentiation, including class, race, skin color, ethnicity, and highlights “the inherent tension within these movements concerning fundamental democratic principles of equality and universality in the realm of public policies and human rights” (MISKOLCI; PEREIRA, 2019, p. 3).

With this context in mind, the aim of this article is to scrutinize a part of the anti-egalitarian movement in Mato Grosso do Sul concerning markers such as gender, sexuality, race, skin color, ethnicity, and class. It’s essential to recognize that the anti-egalitarian reaction doesn’t occur in isolation but against a backdrop of pro-equality resistance. While this text primarily focuses on the anti-egalitarian aspects, we must acknowledge the progress and achievements in acknowledging differences, as discussed in previous sections. However, when alluding to pro-equality actions across various differences, we don’t intend to imply that anti-egalitarian movements merely react to the advances made by so-called “political minorities”. Rather, we interpret this reality through a more intricate lens, that of a “technical-mediatised public sphere” (MISKOLCI, 2021). This sphere “is distinguished by its technological nature and emphasis on media-driven popular culture. In this context, it often prioritizes swift, straightforward responses, which can challenge institutions and professionals specializing in fact-checking and evidence examination” (MISKOLCI, 2021, p. 40).

Thus, I commence by delving into two specific experiences, which will be elaborated upon later in this paper: the removal and seizure of a painting during an exhibition by the artist Ropre at the Museum of Contemporary Art – MARCO (MS), with allegations of promoting pedophilia, and the enactment of Law No. 5,820/2021, which enforces the prohibition of using neutral language in MS. It is imperative to encompass not only the discursive creations related to these events but also the digital interactions and offline actions of various involved individuals, including artists, politicians, journalists, educators, and authorities. In this context, when I refer to ‘experience,’ I adopt the interpretation of it as a “correlation within a culture among fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity” (FOUCAULT, 1984, p. 10). As delineated in this article, these two experiences in Mato Grosso do Sul exhibit diverse characteristics shaped by various elements, such as institutional, technological, legal, partisan, and religious dimensions, among others. Mato Grosso do Sul is here considered a milieu where subjects are constructed, consequently leading to the creation of distinctions.

When discussing the formation of subjects, it is essential to avoid regarding them as passive “subjects of experience” who are fully constituted by and passively undergo events. Instead, we must consider experience as the dynamic space where subjects are shaped (SCOTT, 1988; BRAH, 2006). This perspective highlights that these experiences, as they unfold, transcend the confines of a single marker of differentiation. Therefore, it is unproductive to rigidly anchor identities and privileges solely in response to anti-egalitarian experiences. Our focus should be “on combating the essentialization of all subjects, acknowledging that forms of oppression do not occur in isolation. We must analyze them within their intricate and multifaceted character” (FAVERO, 2019, p. 184-185). In essence, experience represents “what flows through us, what unfolds within us, and what

deeply impacts us. It is not just about events that transpire but also about what profoundly resonates with us. Many events unfold in our daily lives, but very few of them genuinely resonate and leave a lasting impression” (BONDÍA, 2002, p. 20).

This article, along with this introductory section, is structured into three main sections prior to concluding remarks. The initial section delves into the theoretical and methodological aspects of this study, encompassing ethical considerations, the fieldwork that guided the selection of the two experiences under analysis, and the significance of adopting the chosen theoretical perspective. In the subsequent section, I expound upon the experiences slated for analysis, providing a detailed account of the data pertaining to the production of differences and the involvement of the anti-egalitarian movement within the context of Mato Grosso do Sul. The final section scrutinizes how the primary artifacts within these experiences fail to encompass the curriculum and pedagogy condemned by anti-egalitarians. It’s important to note that this section doesn’t aim to dismiss the existence of flexible and comprehensive possibilities for curriculum and pedagogy. Instead, it seeks to explore how the understanding of post-curricula and post-cultural pedagogies can augment the ongoing and imperative need for analyses of difference production in the realm of education.

Equality and Differences: Theoretical-Methodological Aspects

The perspective embraced in this study aligns with the notion commonly referred to as post-criticism within the field of Education. This perspective encompasses a diverse array of theoretical approaches characterized by the “post” label, including post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-colonialism, post-gender, and post-feminism. It also integrates critical

theories like Cultural Studies, Queer Studies, and Ethnic-racial Studies. Fundamentally, “this perspective resists conformity to a grand narrative or a prescribed methodology; it offers no predetermined path to follow or predefined destination” (MEYER; PARAÍSO, 2014, p. 43).

This approach establishes a critical theoretical and methodological framework for my analyses, with a specific focus on the concepts of “diversity” and difference. The term “diversity” is frequently employed to mitigate conflict and is associated with concepts that promote “pride” or “respect”. It places a strong emphasis on fostering horizontal social relations while downplaying the inherent unequal production of differences. In contrast, “the perspective of differences brings to the forefront the power dynamics involved in classifying individuals as distinct, often in ways that position them as inferior to the majority” (MISKOLCI, 2005, p. 35). As a result, it staunchly opposes any attempts to assess the Other through the lens of a hegemonic gaze.

This approach illuminates the intricacies and nuances of these terms within the context of my analysis. By distinguishing between “diversity” and differences, it underscores the underlying power structures and hierarchies that can be obscured when using the term “diversity”. The emphasis here is on recognizing and challenging the unequal dynamics that often underlie the classification and treatment of individuals as “different”. This distinction serves as a critical lens through which to examine the topics explored in this study.

The objective here is to avoid the risk that “respect and recognition of difference become reified into a kind of mere ‘celebration of singularity’ or praise of difference, often aestheticized and almost invariably superficial” (JUNQUEIRA, 2009, p. 400). In other words, while acknowledging that “gaining rights can, in part, involve adjusting to society” (SEFFNER, 2011, p. 60), it is also crucial to problematize the concept of equality. The aim is not to assume a binary view of “equality”, where some

naturally conform to hegemonic values while others represent difference. “It is not about identifying ‘the strange’ as ‘the different’” (BENTO, 2011, p. 556). Instead, I propose contemplating “how strange it is to be equal and the intense and repeated violence expended to produce the hegemonic transfigured into natural equality” (BENTO, 2011, p. 556).

In the process of selecting the experiences for analysis, it was imperative to acknowledge that while recognizing and respecting differences is essential, it does not exempt the researcher from the obligation to “critically engage with the processes through which distinctions, boundaries, and hierarchies are proposed, enforced, or perpetuated during their construction, while similarities are negated and convergences are discouraged” (JUNQUEIRA, 2009, p. 399). The initial phase of this exploration involved a digital investigation (LEITÃO; GOMES, 2017), which allowed me to be guided by algorithms and information streams spanning various platforms. Ethnographically, this approach facilitated my “immersion in the field” and the preliminary gathering of data relevant to the focus of this study. The exploration took place across a variety of venues, including platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and online news outlets.

This navigation became possible due to the current state of the internet, where information is structured in a comprehensible manner, not only for humans but also for machines (PADILHA; FACIOLI, 2018). Thus, I am aware that search queries on journalistic news websites and even simple video views on platforms like Facebook and Instagram algorithmically contributed to data collection. In other words, from a methodological perspective, it’s crucial to acknowledge that the data gathered here are subject to the capabilities provided by algorithms. Furthermore, it’s vital to recognize that the internet is not an isolated entity, existing separately from the offline world. On the contrary, the “real” and the “virtual” are continuously intertwined (BRAGA, 2015).

The sociotechnical landscape is permeated with algorithms, which also wield substantial influence in offline relationships (SILVEIRA, 2017). Consequently, this study delves into experiences that defy clear categorization as purely online or offline.

In this context, digital ethnography enables us to contemplate reality in its technologically mediated complexity. The experiences methodologically chosen from media artifacts are regarded as communicative practices that span both human bodies and digital technologies (PADILHA; FACIOLI, 2018). These artifacts encompass not only traditional forms such as paintings or official documents (laws or notices) but also digital media like videos, journalistic texts, memes, and more. For this very reason, as we will delve into later, these artifacts embody particular curricula and cultural pedagogies. After this exploratory phase, I organized the collected links into digital files, converted texts into PDF format, downloaded videos, captured screenshots of screens, and systematically arranged them. I did this with the awareness that this information might be deleted, erased, or simply withdrawn from public view by the individuals responsible for the posts. At the same time, I acknowledge that not all the gathered data will become subjects of analysis for the composition of this text, as there is still material awaiting examination.

The systematization of this data within these files took into account that each ethnographic environment is defined not only by its software or hardware characteristics but also by the diverse manners in which it is engaged with (LEITÃO; GOMES, 2017). These digital environments constitute “social practices that are shaped [...] and take on specific forms contingent upon the particular context” (PADILHA; FACIOLI, 2022, p. 112). Activities such as sharing, liking, disliking, viewing, commenting, reacting with emojis and/or emoticons, sharing memes, and other forms of interaction render these digital spaces observable. As denizens

of these spaces, we interact with them in our own unique ways, even without conducting interviews or establishing direct contact with interlocutors. The mere presence of a researcher in these spaces exerts an influence, much like in offline life. Algorithms capture this influence, encompassing activities such as viewing, accessing, or the time spent reading on the screen.

In light of these experiences and the interactions involved, ethical considerations assumed paramount importance. For instance, the individuals who engaged in commentary or shared records of the experiences under analysis will remain anonymous, and online sources from which various artifacts were selected for examination will be kept confidential. Furthermore, the online fieldwork exclusively encompassed public digital environments that offer unrestricted access (NUNES, 2019). I abstain from divulging further particulars regarding these virtual spaces and the contexts in which the information was generated in order to protect the privacy of those who interacted within these publicly accessible forums. Following this approach, experiences of varied natures were collected before the selection of the two specific instances currently under examination. These experiences included collaborations with employees of the Campo Grande city council, unrelated to grammatical or pedagogical content, in a quest to identify content deemed “excessive” and “inappropriate” in textbooks (TORRES, 2017). Another instance involved the endorsement by state deputies of Mato Grosso do Sul of a proposal that prohibits erotic dances in schools, without specifying the particular dances or musical styles to be proscribed in educational settings (ROCHA, 2020).

The selection of the two aforementioned experiences, among those previously exemplified and many others, was guided by their representation of different temporalities. One of the experiences involved an incident in 2017, prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and before the Bolsonaro government came

to power. The other occurred in 2023, post-Covid-19 and after the Bolsonaro government's assumption of power. This temporal distinction is marked by "anti-agendas", which refer to government actions that obstruct discourse on human rights, gender, sexuality, race, skin color, ethnicity, and class. It is widely acknowledged that a significant political shift led to the censorship of specialized materials, and the dissolution of participatory national councils (AGOSTINI et al, 2019), among other issues linked to differences.

Furthermore, these two selected experiences ethnographically manifested in different media artifacts, enabling extensive data collection in various digital environments where these experiences were discussed. Additionally, these experiences were confined to non-educational spaces. This choice, focusing on experiences outside the formal education system, highlights how anti-egalitarian movements launch offensives that jeopardize education in its broadest sense, extending beyond traditional schooling. Nevertheless, it's essential to note that the analysis presented here does not aim to encompass all anti-egalitarian movements but rather specific ones that I believe, based on the information presented here and the qualitative research methodology I adopted, represent experiences that align with the objectives I have outlined.

Finally, these two experiences were chosen for analysis because they provide an opportunity for reflections on various social markers, including gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class. These markers are not considered fixed analytical categories; instead, their significance is revealed through the actions of individuals involved in a specific situation (HIRANO, 2019). Therefore, the identification of these social markers of difference was not an attempt to analyze an infinite number of them. Instead, I focused on the interplay, articulation, or intersection of those markers that were contextually most pertinent. In other words, "the analysis commences by giving due consideration to the

differences that genuinely hold significance within specific, historical, localized, and, undoubtedly, political contexts" (HENNING, 2015, p. 11).

The Pictures and Public Notices of Our Lives

In Campo Grande, the state capital, moral entrepreneurs spared no effort in anti-egalitarian movements. When referring to them, I am identifying them as religious Catholics or neo-Pentecostal evangelicals, as well as secularists of these religions. Others, whether religious or not, may work in public institutions (not excluding universities) and/or hold government positions. Democratically elected politicians also make up these groups. In fact, many artists, from the most varied areas, can be seen as moral entrepreneurs. Evidently, depending on the profile of each entrepreneur/morality, these characteristics are articulated. "The moral grammar that unites sectors of the Catholic church, neo-Pentecostal evangelicals, and diverse interest groups is the glue of a true anti-egalitarian political alliance" (MISKOLIC; PEREIRA, 2019, p. 10).

One of the selected experiences, as previously mentioned, pertains to a confined artwork. These moral entrepreneurs had previously engaged in digital activism aimed at pressuring politicians in Mato Grosso do Sul (MS) to support the so-called "Gag Law". This law pertains to the discourse surrounding what is conventionally known as "gender ideology" in educational institutions. I have analyzed this issue in previous works (DUQUE, 2018; OLIVEIRA; PASSAMANI; DUQUE, 2019; DUQUE; SOLON, 2020). Concerning the experience of the confined artwork, the chief of the Specialized Police Station for Emergency Care for Children and Adolescents (DEPCA) explained their actions as follows: "Our actions were taken to protect our children and adolescents, and we seized the artwork because we believe that it

indeed promotes criminal behavior” (MIDIA MAX, 2017).

The “Cadafalso” exhibition, held from July 19th to September 17th, 2017, at MARCO, featured a series of 32 canvases (paintings) that had previously been displayed in various cities across Brazil. These paintings were created by the artist Alessandra Cunha, also known as Ropre, from Minas Gerais. According to the artist, each of her works aimed to draw attention to different aspects of the “macho system” and carried thought-provoking titles that exposed situations of violence, oppression, and social submission (MARCO, 2017).

Among the exhibited works was one titled “Pedophilia”. This particular painting depicted two men alongside a small girl with straight, tied-up hair, who appeared to be in a state of fear. Both men were portrayed with exposed penises, and a phrase, “Machismo kills, violence humiliates,” was inscribed backward on the canvas. Positioned above the girl was a large open eye. The artist explained that her choice to represent the male body instead of the female body was a deliberate one, as the female body has been commonly explored in works of art. Furthermore, she emphasized her focus on the phallus (penis) “because our society is phallogocentric, and this symbol is often employed to assert dominance. Tackling this sensitive topic was particularly challenging, as she felt it was necessary to address the underlying issues” (SANCHEZ, 2017).

The experience unfolded when, in the Legislative Assembly, a deputy raised concerns about another exhibition, “Queermuseu: Cartographies of Difference in Brazilian Art”, held at Santander Cultural in Porto Alegre, a city in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. The exhibition was subsequently canceled amid allegations of promoting pedophilia, zoophilia, and blasphemy (FOSTER, 2017). Following this deputy’s remarks, other politicians also commented on the local exhibition. For instance, one politician, speaking from the podium, asserted that the images in the MARCO

exhibition “promote pedophilia”. They stated, “Especially during such a tumultuous period when we witness many 11-year-old children becoming mothers, we encounter these images, originating from corrupted minds. It’s nothing but a ‘mess.’” Another deputy expressed “their regret over the authorization of this exhibition, considering it an affront to the Brazilian family and an attack on our children”.

In light of the statements presented during the session, which encompassed segments reproduced in the aforementioned speeches, three deputies officially filed complaints against the exhibition at DEPCA (FERREIRA; HENRI, 2017). One of them expressed that “following the negative publicity of the Banco Santander exhibition, regrettably, the Museum of Contemporary Art now features an exhibition that undermines family values and encourages pedophilia” (PERES, 2017). Although the deputies referred to the exhibition in its entirety, the core of the controversy surrounds the “Pedophilia” painting, as previously mentioned.

The seizure of the painting immediately sparked reactions. The Public Prosecutor’s Office, specializing in Child and Youth Assistance, swiftly declared that the confiscation was not warranted and that the work could not be considered a criminal act. The Public Prosecutor and Coordinator of the Public Prosecutor’s Offices of Diffuse and Collective Interests also offered their support for the work (HADDAD, 2017a). The artist herself responded to the controversy. Ropre suggested that politicians seized the opportunity to “put on a show”, questioning behavior depicted in the arts (SIMÕES, sd).

Other groups, such as the Coletivo Juristas Pela Democracia (FOLHA DE DOURADOS, 2017) and the Brazilian Bar Association/MS (RODRIGUES, 2017), also voiced their opposition to the “incarceration of the artwork”. Additionally, artists gathered in the city center to protest against the removal of the painting from the Museum of Contemporary Art. Some had gags and their hands tied, while others car-

ried whips as symbols of dictators and colonels opposing art (TV MORENA, 2017).

Consequently, the painting was returned to the Museum of Contemporary Art on September 15, just two days before the exhibition's conclusion. It was transferred under the Chief's command to the Secretary of Culture and Citizenship. The secretary, after contacting the deputies, articulated the following stance: "We had a discussion and agreed that the exhibition [...] needed an age rating, and that's precisely what we did; we placed a notice at the entrance of the MARCO stating that only individuals aged 18 and above can access the artist's works" (HADDAD, 2017b).

Initially, the age rating was set at 12 years, taking into account the educational purpose of the exhibition, as well as the potential for adolescents who have experienced violence or sexual abuse to engage with the works, recognize the crime, and contemplate the forms of violence they may have encountered. However, despite the change in age classification, the exhibition's audience expanded, drawing visitors who had not initially contemplated attending to see the painting that had been reinstated at the museum (HADDAD; SANCHEZ, 2017).

The second experience pertains to the enforcement of a ban on neutral language through Bill 212/2021, which was approved by the State Legislative Assembly and subsequently sanctioned by the governor, resulting in Law No. 5,820/2021. This legislation "mandates the obligatory use of the standard form of the Portuguese language". Remarkably, this occurred despite the fact that the Supreme Federal Court (STF) had previously suspended a similar law in Rondônia. The judiciary, beyond its actions in the Rondônia case, also intervened by suspending a decree issued by the Bolsonaro government, which sought to prohibit the use of neutral language in projects funded under the Rouanet Law. The Federal Public Ministry (MPF) has argued that such prohibitions constitute a form of prior censorship and represent a "hindrance to the diverse exercise of the right

to culture and freedom of expression, contravening the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and human dignity" (BOMFIM, 2022). Nonetheless, it is worth acknowledging that the duration of the prohibition may have impacted the submission of project proposals under the Rouanet Law.

Interestingly, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, the law prohibiting the use of neutral language encountered a relatively smooth path to approval and subsequent sanction. Paradoxically, the defense of this prohibition appears to be rooted in an ostensibly anti-exclusion stance. According to the legislator responsible for proposing this law in the State Legislative Assembly, there were "significant challenges in disseminating this linguistic innovation", particularly among the adult and elderly population. The legislator argued that these demographic groups "have already acclimated to the established vernacular", suggesting that adopting neutral language would "foster greater exclusion than inclusion" (MAISONNAVE, 2022). This prohibition applies to educational tools utilized within schools, instructional materials, and official documents. The decision was based on contentions that the use of the specific language in question would lead to "widespread and generalized disruption of linguistic norms", characterizing it as an "imposition by activists".

Despite the arguments in favor of passing this prohibitive law, the proposing politician failed to specify which schools were employing the language he sought to ban. Surprisingly, there were no reports of the use of neutral language in schools on social media until the legislation was proposed. Neutral language, in this context, is defined as language that "replaces the gender-specific elements in words, such as articles and pronouns, with forms that can encompass both genders and those who do not identify with either" (COUTO, 2021). The initial draft of the proposed law carried an alarmist tone and extended its scope beyond just neutral language. Even indigenous languages, which

are distinct from the “educated language,” i.e., Portuguese, were prohibited. A revised version of the proposed law added a single paragraph stating, “The provisions of this article’s main clause do not apply in cases where it is necessary to use Indigenous Languages in the school environment” (MATO GROSSO DO SUL, 2021).

In an effort to mitigate the potential anti-egalitarian consequences of the proposal, the politician who sponsored the prohibitory project asserted that the sole intent is to “preserve the Portuguese Language.” They emphasize that “prejudiced individuals will not alter their behavior, and intolerance is unrelated to grammar,” although no specific evidence supports this argument. They conclude by stating, “I believe the project harms no one. It is merely a matter of grammar”. Thus, the speech does not attack or deny hierarchical differences, nor does it negate the existence of prejudice towards non-binary gender identities. Instead, the argument centers around the view that “in a country where many struggle with the Portuguese language, it is unreasonable to demand such deconstruction in the name of eliminating or replacing everything inherited from the past” (RODRIGUES, 2021).

On the other hand, the politician who led the minority opposing the project and chaired the Assembly’s Education Committee justified his stance upon the project’s presentation. He sought to prompt contemplation, asking, “Would it be like prohibiting people from saying ‘you are’ and forcing them to say ‘you ain’t’? Words evolve in meaning over time” (RODRIGUES, 2021). Notably, this perspective stands as the solitary opposing voice among the state’s politicians, as reflected in the local press. Up until that point, there were no documented instances of consultation with non-binary individuals from MS, nor with experts, whether in the field of linguistics or other domains of scientific knowledge. A feature on one of the state’s leading online newspapers presented a “random” assortment of responses from high school students. These individuals stated that

they were unaware of anyone advocating for the use of neutral language in their schools, as it is already commonplace “on the internet”. The article concludes by inviting readers to share their views, asking, “What are your thoughts on the use of neutral language and the proposal that seeks to ban it? Comment on social media or in the section below” (FERNANDES, 2021), though no comments were posted on the journalistic website.

In contrast, on the day the project passed its first round of approval, a heated argument unfolded in the Assembly. According to reports, the debate grew “contentious,” reflecting the broader national divide between *Bolsonaristas* and *Lulopetistas*. This journalistic account is elaborated upon with the reproduction of a speech by a politician from a party that supports the former president. He argued, “This is the injection of ideological nonsense into Brazilian education. There are already a few militant teachers pushing for this”. As seen from the news image, behind his image on the screen (given that sections were remote due to the Covid-19 pandemic), there was a projection of the national flag and a photo of Bolsonaro with the presidential sash. The second-round approval came with justifications that downplayed the significance of neutral language in light of “more pressing issues”, such as illiteracy, poverty, and the state of school infrastructure. The topic only resurfaced in 2023.

That year, when news broke that the STF had formed a majority to overturn the law in Rondônia, which had been suspended since 2021, one of MS’s online newspapers featured a “doctor in Education” opposing neutral language, offering no new arguments for debate. Meanwhile, another source who defended the necessity of neutral language, as a language specialist, contended that “it remains possible to promote the use of neutral gender while simultaneously addressing global illiteracy and poverty”. (O ESTADO DE MS, 2023). However, the controversy gained more momentum after

the State University of MS (UEMS) issued a notice employing such language.

The notice was published in Official Electronic Gazette No. 11,160 on May 17, 2023, and pertains to the announcement of an open position for “applicants” in the selection process for the Lato Sensu Postgraduate Course in Curriculum and Diversity at the Dourados Unit (MS) of UEMS. It provides extensive information about the selection process, including the intended profile of prospective students: “graduates” from pedagogy programs and other relevant degrees. The document also outlines specific details about the Affirmative Action Policy for underrepresented groups, including “Black” individuals, Indigenous people, “applicants with disabilities”, Quilombolas, transvestites, and transsexuals. Two deputies requested the President of the Assembly to instruct the higher education institution to republish the notice. One described the document as “ridiculous” and noted that the use of neutral language is a “slay” and that is a common practice in public universities, which should not be overlooked. The other emphasized, “If it is a law, it must be adhered to” (MALDONADO; OLIVEIRA, 2023).

Consequently, this second experience is ongoing in the local context where I am composing this text. Rather than analyzing it retrospectively, I recognize that the data collected up to this point presents significant facets for analysis. At this juncture, it remains unclear whether UEMS has indeed been notified, whether it will adhere to the politicians’ request, or whether the institution will make other decisions in light of the controversy. In light of these two experiences, I now turn to the discussion regarding the curriculum and pedagogy that I observed during my ethnographic work. Building on post-critical theories in Education, particularly within the realm of cultural curricula and pedagogies, my aim is not to question knowledge as socially constructed, but to delve into the exploration of that which has yet to be constructed (SILVA, 1999).

Post-Curriculum and Post-Cultural Pedagogy

In these two experiences, it becomes evident that a politics of cultural artifacts is in motion. This entails the assimilation of struggles that “different subjects and cultural groups establish as central to claiming other social spaces” (FERRARI; CASTRO, 2018, p. 103). While this policy indeed empowers the so-called “different” (i.e., political minorities) “to contest naturalized forms of subjugation that normalize subjects, their practices, and expressions” (FERRARI; CASTRO, 2018, p. 103), it is also apparent that anti-egalitarian moral entrepreneurs employ cultural artifacts in a contrary game of meaning and objectives.

These artifacts, whether they support egalitarian or anti-egalitarian causes, “function as components within networks of meaning” (FERRARI; CASTRO, 2018, p. 102). In the field, for instance, I encountered a video on Facebook featuring one of the deputies, flanked by two others, at the police station where the painting had been seized. The text accompanying this artifact states: “We must safeguard our children and young people, and scenes like these are outrageous to those who, like me, value family, morals, and good customs”. The video elicited only three comments commending the politician’s actions. In the video itself, the politician emphasizes his commitment to preserving “the rights enshrined in the ECA (The Statute of Children and Adolescents) and our Constitution.”

Another artifact is an image posted on Facebook by a theater group that called upon artists and the general public to protest against the painting’s confiscation. The graffiti image features a woman standing, with one hand on the wall and the other on her waist. She is sick, she is vomiting multiple politicians’ heads, the heads are in photographs superimposed onto the woman graffiti. Part of the text accompanying the artifact, written in all capital letters, asserts: “Art cannot be silenced [...] no

to censorship, no to repression!! Fascists will not pass! [...]”.

It’s also essential to consider that the same artifact can serve the interests of both egalitarian and anti-egalitarian movements. For instance, in the case of journalistic articles about the selected experiences, they are posted on various online addresses of newspapers and then copied or shared as artifacts by individuals affiliated with one or another of these movements. Apart from these journalistic articles, we also observe comments and discussions sparked by individuals when they share these articles on social networks. These comments play a pivotal role in framing the discourse and directing the conversation in specific directions.

I understand your constraint. Let’s work with the provided examples while improving the overall structure and clarity: For instance, one artifact, elucidating the “language they want to ban” (FERNANDES, 2021), was shared on Facebook, accompanied by contrasting comments. Some users emphasized the value of schools as platforms for discussing, problematizing, and critiquing contemporary conflicts, advocating for societal progress: “If school is not useful for discussing, problematizing, and criticizing contemporary conflicts, what is even there for? People, it’s time to evolve”. In contrast, another user’s comment expressed skepticism or opposition to neutral language with a hint of exasperation: “LOL LOL LOL enough of this queer language, right? For love of God 😄😄😄😄😄😄😄😄”. Consequently, these comments represent the diverse networks of meaning surrounding this issue.

It appears that journalistic media spaces exercise less control over the removal of critical comments, whether they lean toward anti-egalitarian or egalitarian perspectives. In contrast, when we explore the online platforms of news outlets, we encounter a greater degree of contention and a wider spectrum of comments from individuals holding diverse viewpoints. For instance, on Facebook, when news about

the deputies’ response to the notice featuring neutral language was posted on a local newspaper’s page, it ignited a range of reactions, including comments like: “Don’t mess with them, they mean business!” and “Do these deputies have no other responsibilities?” These comments reflect both those who support the prohibitive initiative and those who question the actions of the politicians.

In a similar vein, on another local newspaper’s Facebook page, when news emerged that politicians in Mato Grosso do Sul had “piggybacked” on the Santander Cultural case in Porto Alegre and called the police regarding the artwork at MARCO, a spectrum of opinions was voiced. One comment in favor of their actions stated, “They’ve finally taken a useful step”. Conversely, another comment criticized, asserting, “The only art politicians comprehend is the art of corruption”. This also occurred on the Instagram of a local newspaper, posting news about the public notice containing neutral language, presenting favorable comments and others criticizing the initiative. Interestingly, one woman expressed her thoughts in a somewhat ironic manner, saying, “🙏♀️ Jesus can now come back. Because the world, *they are ending* 😏”. On the other side of the spectrum, there was a viewpoint that held the university in high regard: “Inclusive documents do not offend me, especially when they come from such an esteemed university. This institution offers the best physical and human resources I’ve ever encountered in my life”.

Remarkably, within the selected experiences discussed here, it is noteworthy that posts applauding public universities are quite rare within the ethnographic context. In contrast, references to religious beliefs are markedly prevalent, especially within the domain of anti-egalitarian posts, irrespective of whether these comments are found on personal or social profiles. In the personal profiles of individuals engaged in both anti-egalitarian and egalitarian movements, there is a noticeable trend toward uniformity in criticism. Comments on

these personal profiles frequently mirror the stance of the individual who originally posted or shared the news. This phenomenon, while partly influenced by algorithmic algorithms, is undoubtedly shaped by the way those managing these profiles handle criticism on social networks. This management essentially functions as an agency that significantly influences the content, production, and pedagogical dissemination of these artifacts. Understanding intentional management practices within networks of meaning is crucial because they directly impact the content and dissemination of these artifacts. This characteristic is not limited solely to networks of meaning but also extends to groups with specific interests.

As Maknamara asserts, “guiding and connecting lives and bodies is an outcome of the strategies inherent in a curriculum, it’s a product of the specific pedagogy associated with it, and it’s an outcome of individuals’ desires” (2020, p. 61-62). This concept can be understood by recognizing that, through these artifacts that essentially constitute pedagogical curricula, there is a positioning within power dynamics, interests, constructions of gender, and race. Both egalitarian and anti-egalitarian movements engage with these issues in diverse ways (ELLSWORTH, 2001). It’s essential to stress that this engagement doesn’t adhere to a simplistic binary framework; rather, it encompasses a spectrum of diverse and multifaceted positions, leading to multifocal and nuanced learning outcomes.

The intricacy of this situation becomes apparent when we explore the social media profiles of individuals who have commented on issues such as the removal of artwork or the adoption of neutral language, whether they are in favor of or against these initiatives. Surprisingly, some profiles that align with democratic movements on platforms like Facebook and Instagram occasionally take positions contrary to the use of neutral language. Conversely, even conservative profiles and posts in line with anti-egalitarian moral

entrepreneurs may not consistently support the removal of artwork.

A more in-depth analysis reveals that media artifacts related to these two experiences can be effectively understood through the concept of “addressing modes”. These modes are not always straightforwardly aligned and can often lead to unexpected or elusive responses, as demonstrated when examining artifacts and their reception by different individuals. As Ellsworth keenly observes, “the space between the address and the response is a social space shaped and informed by historical power dynamics, as well as social and cultural differences” (2001, p. 43). This dynamic of addressing and response remains pertinent in both pre- and post-Covid-19 pandemic contexts. The pandemic has not altered this dynamic; the power of addressing does not guarantee predictable or desired responses, whether desired by egalitarian or anti-egalitarian movements.

Both anti-egalitarian and equality-seeking movements have well-defined pedagogies and curricula that “facilitate the construction and circulation of meanings related to gender, sexuality, race, and more” (FERRARI; CASTRO, 2018, p. 102). They offer guidance on how individuals should behave and think, presenting alternative ways of being that may or may not conform to established norms. The contestation of norms persists, even in contexts characterized by hierarchies and dominant ideologies. This raises a critical question: Whose perspective defines the norm, and from which positions of power?

Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that what constitutes a pedagogical curriculum in these two experiences is intrinsically tied to the process of shaping social identities in response to various power dynamics, including those related to gender, sexuality, race, color, ethnicity, class, and more (SILVA, 2001; SABAT, 2001). Nevertheless, it’s imperative to critically examine the curriculum in terms of what it enables us to comprehend and what it leaves out (LOURO, 2004).

In this context, the various experiences are intertwined with a diverse range of artifacts, extending beyond mere media, which warrant in-depth analysis. This analytical process enables us to reflect on elements that may not immediately appear to be part of the curriculum or pedagogy. For instance, the “Pedophilia” artwork did not, in a pedagogical sense, endorse pedophilia, nor did the exhibition pedagogically promote threats to childhood. On the contrary, as previously elaborated, the curriculum-pedagogical component therein was precisely the opposite. Likewise, the promotion of neutral language was not designed to exclude specific curriculum components but rather aimed at fostering inclusivity by addressing the needs of non-binary individuals.

Anti-egalitarian moral entrepreneurs manipulate the domains of meaning within the Ropre artwork and the UEMS notice, influencing curriculum and pedagogical aspects. This manipulation goes beyond reaffirming what is intrinsically curriculum-pedagogical within these artifacts; it involves considering what circulates as perceived truth in the discourses and practices of moral entrepreneurs, particularly in anti-egalitarian contexts.

It’s essential to note that the term “post” in this context signifies a marker of time rather than an indication of overcoming. It denotes that after the exposure of the “Pedophilia” artwork, from a curriculum-pedagogical perspective, it was denounced and removed. Similarly, after UEMS incorporated inclusive language into a notice, thereby using neutral language, there was an objective basis for seeking the application of punitive laws, ostensibly against exclusion.

If we can aptly assert that a range of artifacts functions as curricula within the realm of cultural pedagogy, constituting an uncontrollable triad of political, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions, in their role of shaping and organizing subjectivities and identities, and if it is equally valid to recognize their potential as multifac-

eted escape territories (PARAÍSO; CALDEIRA, 2018), then it is equally fitting to posit that these very curriculum-pedagogical domains serve as political, ethical, and aesthetic realms for the capture and distortion of meaning, meticulously orchestrated by anti-egalitarian moral entrepreneurs.

Post-curriculum and post-pedagogy are in no way lesser iterations of curriculum or pedagogy compared to their predecessors, nor can they be dismissed as mere fabrications or, as some label them, “fake news”. They represent intricate domains of meaning deserving scrutiny from the vantage point of difference production within the context of anti-egalitarian political meanings and intentions. After all, regardless of their curriculum-pedagogical truth or the initial intentions shaping the Ropre artwork or the UEMS notice (which the law, in theory, subsequently proscribed), it is imperative to acknowledge that both play a role in the differentiation and construction of social identities.

Final considerations

The term “our children” has been consistently used in a generic sense by those associated with the removal of the painting. This generic use lacks defined gender, sexuality, race, skin color, ethnicity, and class markers, invoking an idealized image of children devoid of specific vulnerabilities. Consequently, it becomes easily mobilized through social commotion. In contrast to this anti-egalitarian discourse observed in the first experience discussed here, markers of differences are evident in one of the artifacts linked to the prohibition of neutral language. Specifically, the social media promotional card for the UEMS Specialization Course in Curriculum and Diversity, which employed neutral language in its announcement, prominently features a black woman with dark skin and braided hair alongside a young indigenous man adorned with a headdress and carrying a backpack.

The omission of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class from the generic category “our children” and, simultaneously, the attack on initiatives aiming to validate these markers, form the curriculum-pedagogical approach employed by these entrepreneurs to produce and circulate the post-curriculum and post-cultural pedagogy described here. This omission perpetuates invisibility and non-recognition of important markers of difference, potentially rendering people unequal in their rights, which is contrary to the intentions behind inclusive initiatives.

Furthermore, the invisibility and visibility of differences in these two experiences are indicative of the strategies employed by the anti-egalitarian offensive in Mato Grosso do Sul concerning markers such as gender, sexuality, race, skin color, ethnicity, and class. This offensive operates both before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, aimed at fortifying “anti-agendas.”

The concept of “slaying” plays a crucial role in this anti-egalitarian game. The “slaying” of neutral language, along with equal exposure and the intentions behind the “Cadafalso” exhibition, are manipulated within distorted curriculum-pedagogical contexts to fuel anti-egalitarian sentiments. These sentiments can manifest in various forms, including fear, disdain, rejection, or hatred of otherness, i.e., differences. This sentiment is at the core of challenges faced by modern democracies, contributing to processes of illness, agony, and potential democratic decline. These processes can persist even when regular electoral processes in countries are maintained (DESLANDES, 2019).

Therefore, it is essential to conduct in-depth analyses that identify the moral entrepreneurs responsible for these post-curricula and post-cultural pedagogies. These individuals play a pivotal role in circulating and generating distorted meanings concerning differences and the ongoing struggle for equal rights. It’s important to understand that this extends beyond being a part of an anti-gender offensive.

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