

# The queer children and the unplace of gender in school: notes to an air coloured feminism<sup>1</sup>

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## *Crianças viadas e o deslugar do gênero na escola: notas para um feminismo cor de ar*

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### ABSTRACT

In the present paper, I will discuss the power of what I will name unplace of gender in school: gender as a matter of radical difference that may allow us to build more plural resistances in the contemporary liberal onto-epistemology of identity politics in the field of Education. Based on the school memories of queer children, I particularly want to show the power of abject bodies - far from the binary logic of identities - in an intersectional and post-identity politics of an air colored feminism.

*Keywords:* Gender. Feminisms. Homosexuality. Femininity. School.

### RESUMO

No presente texto, problematizarei a potência do que chamarei de deslugar do gênero na escola: o gênero como matéria de uma diferença radical que pode, talvez, nos permitir vislumbrar, no campo da educação, um caminho para a construção de resistências mais plurais diante da onto-epistemologia liberal das políticas identitárias contemporâneas. Mais centralmente, e recorrendo às memórias escolares de crianças viadas, desejo mostrar a potência dos corpos abjetos para pensarmos a criação de pontos de conexão que, distante da lógica binária das identidades, nos permitem sugerir uma política interseccional pós-identitária de um feminismo cor de ar.

*Palavras-chave:* Gênero. Feminismos. Homossexualidade. Feminilidade. Escola.

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## Introduction

“And this happens: when I think a painting is strange that’s when it’s a painting. And when I think a word is strange that is where it achieves the meaning. And when I think life is strange that is where life begins”, wrote Clarice Lispector (1998, p. 83) in *Água Viva/Living Water*; one of her most beautiful and disconcerting novels. Clarice invites us to face the unknown, the odd, the difference that is undeniably the constitution of life. Specifically, the task of wondering who we are, and understanding that our lives, gestures, and thoughts are not something created by the solitude of the self or a voluntary act of a cognizant subject. First, and quoting Clarice again, the art of wondering what we have lived only takes place if “we make it together” (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 9). In other words, it is in the relationship with the other – not any other, but the other that is the matter of pure difference – that we may learn how to multiply our ways of living; thus, Clarice says: “I live on the edge”, as a profound and simple act of “destroying [ourselves] to reach the core and seed of life” (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 12).

In Education, it is common to see research that aims to show how the difference should become one of the main (if not the main) subjects of pedagogical work (PARAÍSO, 2018). However, in times of fallacious ideas as “gender ideology”, we find ourselves adrift and lost when it comes to teaching our students their plural becoming. I state this based on the most recurrent question I receive in different teaching training courses I minister in the gender and sexuality areas: how to do it? It is certainly not just a coincidence, once, especially nowadays, it is a consequence of at least two propositions.

On the one hand, we question how to empower themes like gender and sexuality in Education in a period when there are forces that seek to revive an idea about the school that has long been tried to be ignored: school as a place of normalization and homogenization of bodies, conducts, thoughts, subjectivities (BALTHAZAR, 2019; PARAÍSO, 2018). On the other hand, how to teach about a subject’s position we have not experienced in a period when words have become so dangerous in face of the identity politics: “the social media promote a real strife among activists who seek to assert themselves as the sole holders of the right to speak and act in the name of a certain social collectivity” (DUARTE; CÉSAR, 2019, p. 34).

It is a paradox of how our point of view – and, by extension, the meanings of education that derive from it – is not directed to multiplicity (as a relevant matter to the Philosophy of Difference in Education), but rather is marked by a

paradoxical dogmatic posture that structures and is structured by discourses of reactionary social movements and the most progressive discourses in Education. According to Deleuze (2013, p. 61), this paradoxical dogmatism is inscribed in a logic that: “all our thought is more modeled by the verb ‘to be’, by the IS”. In fact, we are increasingly moving away from the gray zones, from the multiplicity, from difference, and going towards the affirmation that what we are, as subjects, is always summarized into the verb to be. Therefore, the dialectical inheritance of oppressor versus oppressed conforms our subjective possibilities to a static matter that seems insurmountable to us: a binary gender discursive order founded from both domination and resistance discourses.

To suggest a different path, I try to problematize, far from the binary order of things, the power of what I will call unplace of gender in school: gender as a matter of a radical difference in Education (but certainly also in other social areas) that may allow us to build more plural forms of resistance against the reactionary political moment that we are experiencing in Brazil. In other words, I want to point out the limits of the liberal onto-epistemology of identity politics to create different forms of resistance. More accurately, based on the school memories of queer children, I want to show the power of abject bodies - far from the binary logic of identities - in an intersectional and post-identity politics: “a proposal that is based on the subjective and social experience of abjection as a privileged way for the construction of a collective ethics” (MISKOLCI, 2011, p. 39).

## **From identity resistance to difference as resistance**

Clarice in *Água Viva/Living Water* says: “As you see, it is impossible for me to deepen and take possession of life, which is aerial, my light breath. But I do know what I want here: I want the inconclusive” (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 27). According to Maria Lucia Homem, Clarice’s search for the meaning of things, words and life never finds an end, once the clarician narrator strange themselves when is faced with (and place us before) the relationship with the other: “Sustained by a nearly nonexistent plot, the book is created on an incessant flow, which the character ‘self’-feminine speaks to a ‘you-other’, alterity represented here as masculine” (HOMEM, 2011, p. 90). As read by the author, Clarice’s narrator weaves philosophical reflections on love, joy, and pain: “transiting between the monologue and dialogical sketches, which gives greater or lesser consistency to the other” (HOMEM, 2011, p. 90).

Maria Lucia Homem outlines how Clarice confronts us with an insurmountable question, like the philosophers of difference: what we are is, in fact, a constant exercise to be done in an inescapable relationship with the other. In other words, *Água viva* shows us a narrator that in the simple game of writing – “it is the way of using the word as bait: the word fishing for whatever is not a word” (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 21) – traces her own ephemerality and fragmentation as a subject in the dialogue with others: “spectrum that goes from the self to the most radical alterity” (HOMEM, 2011, p. 90).

Clarice, therefore, teaches us that the subject is not in opposition to the other who assures the self as “already made-up” subjectivities. In other words, and re-reading Clarice in the terms of Deleuze (2013), it is necessary to abandon the liberal inheritance that subjectivity weaves, emerges, awakens in the dialectical order of the self versus the other inscribed in the being: I *am* one, you *are* the other; where the identity has a fundamental place in the definition of the other, who shares or not this cohesive *is* we apparently are. According to the philosopher in his analysis of the filmmaker Godard, it is necessary to affirm the power of self: “when Godard says everything has two parts, that in a day there’s morning and evening [...]”, in the sense that is far from the dialectics of the *or*, the “*and* is the diversity, multiplicity, the destruction of identities” (DELEUZE, 2013, p. 62).

I base my considerations on Deleuze to problematize how in Clarice’s work the other is not the one from an apparently cohesive and coherent identity of the structural analyses. After all, and as the novel allows us to perceive, the other emerges in the microphysical space of our gestures and sayings, throwing us in its absolute strangeness, in its radical difference, in the unknown that absorbs what we are now. Far from affirming univocally what we are as subjects, it makes this apparent “made-up us”, our apparent identity coherence, our own past; and with it affronts us: the you, the self, the we are constant becoming. In Clarice’s words, “if I say ‘I’ it’s because I dare not to say ‘you’, or ‘we’ or ‘one’. I am forced to the humility of personalizing myself belittling myself but *I am the are-you*” (LISPECTOR, 1998, p. 13, italics my own).

Based on this, I mentioned the clarician idea of strangeness due to the invitation that Clarice makes us through her work: the task of wonder, the contemporary life, and the simplicity of existence through the relationship with other, bringing us and who we are to our own boundaries, in a movement of transformation and creation of who we are and what we can be as subjects (of gender, sexuality, race, etc.). It is a restless self-paced task of turning our too-easy gestures difficult, as Foucault (2013) once said. Inspired by Clarice, I want to tension the boundaries of our identities marks that constitute our subjectivities, suggesting, based on what is conceivable to us as subjects of multiple layers

of Humanism, the limits of this concept in which we constitute ourselves and apparently we are not able to abandon.

If I say apparently it is because I understand, according to Berenice Bento (2017, p. 255), that our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Travesti (LGBTs), and feminist movements promote “a way of resisting and systematizing indignation (in terms of tactics and strategy) inherited from the left-wing models that fought against dictatorships [...]”. The dialectic of we/oppressed versus they/oppressors still gives the tonic of our political struggles, a movement based on the dispute for a place in the norm of law and the democratic protection by the liberal Brazilian State. Grounded on the idea of strategic essentialism, social movements have revived during the first two decades of the Brazilian democratic period the dialectical heritage of class struggle, making the oppressed identities – perceived as structurally shared by a certain social group – the fictional political practice of believing that the conquest of rights depends on emancipation (MISKOLCI, 2011).

The recent need to be concerned about social identity (gender, race, sexuality), especially on social media, has found new vigor with the concept of place of speech (one’s own voice); which, according to Djamila Ribeiro (2017, p. 66), refers to the “social conditions that allow or not allow these [subalternized] groups to access citizenship places. [...]. It is not about affirming individual experiences but understanding how the social locus occupied by certain groups restricts certain opportunities”. Dialoguing with some structuralist approaches of the feminist critics, the debate concerning one’s own voice revisits some concepts, such as structure, oppression/oppressed and liberation, to sustain the epistemic importance of the identity in silencing of the voices of certain experiences; experiences which would locate the subjects in different and unequal social places (RIBEIRO, 2017).

Remaining in the scope of gender studies (even though the concept of place of speech presents a strong intersectional vertex with the racial questions, the focus here will be the intersectional gender/sexuality vertex), the researchers that use the concept of place of speech deny an essentialism inheritance linked to the concept of woman, defending the urgency of thinking from the unequal location of the identity groups in the *structural* power relations. In other words, according to Djamila Ribeiro (2017, p. 63), the place of speech is not about the individual itself, but how cultural markers (such as gender, sexuality or race) are “elements of the social structure that emerge as fundamental devices, which promote inequalities”.

The denial of an essentialism identity is one of the attributes of the Brazilian feminist studies characterized by the Philosophy of Difference, especially in areas such as Philosophy and Education. In Brazil, it is possible to find a hegemonic

proposition of how identity is a radical fiction or, as Foucault (2012) affirmed, identity is a truth; and the truth is a creation from this world. To explain this proposition, I quote Clarice: the identity as fiction would be a kind of “art, an artifice, through which arises a very delicate reality that comes to exist in [us]”. Therefore, according to Judith Butler (2008), we do not have a gender, or we are not a gender. Far from the verb to have or to be, we make (and paradoxically we are made by) gender; based on Clarice’s idea of artifice, it is an artisan work, an aesthetic work of construction, creating, producing the body as a becoming that supports and makes gender exists.

It is quite disseminated in Brazil the idea that gender is no longer taken as an essence of being a woman or a man, but as the art of making yourself woman or man. Moreover, this has shattered the idea of woman, in a sense that “the concept of woman does not deplete the plurality of women, in the same way that when we speak gay, lesbian, travesti, transexual we know that there is a diversity of experiences in each one of these identity umbrellas” (BENTO, 2011, p. 80). However, Berenice Bento (2011, p. 80) affirms that we find in this point a disjunction between the political identity and the ways that experiencing gender and sexuality are marked by an insurmountable plurality: “in the world, in the social relations, there is plurality. In the political sphere, everything occurs as if the only effective way of changing a certain scenario is through a binary machine. Men versus women, black *versus* white.”

According to Michel Foucault (2004) identity could be an instrument operationalized in the political game, but he affirms that it should only be an ephemeral device to favor human relations within the liberal logic government of the conducts. In this way, it is undeniable the political and juridical gains of social movements in the liberal-identity game, as the feminisms and the LGBTs movements. In Education, for example, we observe a great transformation where once the porosity of apparently fixed notions becomes a new order of discourse (SILVA; SEFFNER, 2013). Nowadays, we not only discuss gender and sexuality, but it is possible to observe how life exceeds the categories we usually work with. It is possible to see the increase of plural ways of being and living gender and sexuality in schools. The experiences in schools (but certainly not only) shows more and more that the differences of gender and sexuality are our living flesh, far from the idea of ideology.

In this case, where is the disjunction between political identity and ways of life? Fernando Seffner (2011) affirms that the field of experimentation and subjective creation of gender and sexuality “has been reduced between the LGBT population, and it happens at the same time that we have gained more and more rights [...], not denying we still have many rights to gain” (SEFFNER, 2011,

p. 59). Therefore, based on Foucault, we might say that this disjunction is a result of the way we made the political struggle an act of defense against power:

[...] if identity becomes the problem of sexual existence, and if people think that they have to ‘uncover’ their ‘own identity’, and that their own identity has to become the law, the principle, the code of their existence; if the perennial question they ask is ‘Does this thing conform to my identity?’ then, I think, they will turn back to a kind of ethics very close to the old heterosexual virility (FOUCAULT, 2004, p. 265-266).

In this 1980s interview, Michel Foucault has warned us about the dangers of making, based on a liberal democratic logic, the identity political practice not as a provisional procedure, dangerously making it a hegemonic, fixed, and impassable truth regime. Despite its many gains, there is no doubt that political identity has become the most important problem of social movements. Hence, identity has become something that guides our truth and, at the same time, under which we unveil our reality: we, women; we, gays; we, lesbians; we, trans. It is a paradoxical movement: identity tells us our truth and we, only us, tell the truth about our identity. In the end, we are not listening to one of Foucault’s strongest warnings: do not fall in love with power.

An example, Richard Miskolci (2011) has made an analysis regarding the conference of Miguel Vale de Almeida, an important LGBT activist in Portugal, at the International Seminar *Fazendo Gênero* (2010, in Florianópolis/BR). Almeida offered us a differentiation between critical reflection (post-identity and academic) and political action (identity and activism): “his speech ended up presenting that the liberal-identitary path as inevitable, reducing the critic to a future part of deeper cultural transformation” (MISKOLCI, 2011, p. 49). If there is such a polarization, how does one’s own voice work with, as a theoretical-political category, a body that does not fit into the binary logic of the dialectical thought? How to think education in and for the difference before an apparently ineluctable identity demand from social movements?

To suggest some possible paths, I will analyze some experiences shared by friends in conversations at the pub. In that relaxed atmosphere, exchanging the joys and sufferings of our lives, one element has always called my attention: the memory of school experiences narrated by friends who are effeminate gays. Methodologically speaking, the memories that will be mentioned here were taken up in a second moment through narrative interviews with some friends: “through the narrative interview, it is possible to reconstruct the meanings

that the subjects attribute to their schooling process because they speak about themselves, *reinventing the past, resignifying the present and what had already been lived* to narrate themselves” (ANDRADE, 2012, p. 175).

When I mentioned the reinvention and resignification by the mnemonic narrative, it is because I understand, as Gustavo Passos (2019) has suggested, that the narrative interview is not about *a* founding truth of the subject, but rather pieces of truth that constitute our subjectivities. Far from the idea of reaching the truth of what my friends have lived, I understand that the interview allows us to get open narratives of school memories that, in some layers, may suggest how language does not represent reality; but it gives reality life, meaning, and materiality. Specifically, how narratives are, on many levels, symptomatic of gender operating in a performative way: “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (BUTLER, 2010, 154). In other words, the narratives are not perceived as a recovery of a fact experienced, but as a survival, reminiscence, of school discourses that became body, gesture, and thought.

Therefore, eight friends of mine were interviewed to compose a network of memories that might suggest how the citationality of performativity is reiterated and connected to every act of speech, memory, and narrative production. However, and considering this article limitations, I brought to the analysis parts of two interviews that as Foucault has said (2012, p. 199) caused me certain commotion; in a way that the memories selection “was guided by nothing more substantial than my taste, my pleasure, an emotion, laughter, surprise, a certain dread, or some other feeling whose intensity I might have trouble justifying”. According to the narrated memories, from a “dramaturgy of the real” as Foucault has said (2012, p. 204), I aim to reveal and allow us to glimpse the intense experiences of a queer child at school; tiny lives that, like us, without great deeds, are “destined to pass beneath all discourse and to disappear without ever being spoken”.

## **The queer child or the gesture of experiencing the abjection**

First of all, it is important to point out how the disjunction between activism and everyday life supports a political necessity of identity; which materially results in how the Brazilian State has operated – or, at least, had operated until the coup against President Dilma Rousseff (and staggeringly it still trying to



operate) – a kind of social movements governmentalization, producing problematic effects to the welfare policies involved, in Education, with the philosophy of difference (PARAÍSO, 2018). To draw an analysis, I am methodology based on Giancarlo Cornejo (2011), and also on my own experience of belonging and being excluded as a queer cisgender man and researcher of the ethical-aesthetic possibilities of an *ethos* implicated in the critique of post-identitary feminism (BALTHAZAR, 2018).

Throughout a career researching women and feminisms, I was always asked: why don't you work with queers? Why women? Why feminisms? At that time, these were questions that I personally did not know how to answer; but today I realize they were insidious questions. After all, I could say that I am part of the *remnant* third-wave feminisms marked by the consolidation and expansion of feminist studies. The reason why I affirm this is because I was trained by feminists who shaped the third-wave in Brazil; as Ana Paula Martins, Dagmar Meyer, Guacira Lopes Louro, and many other professors who were part of my journey as a student. In Brazil, these professors joined feminist activism with academic production, as well as generated the epistemic turn of what we call women's studies for a post-structuralist idea of gender, since the 1990s.

In Education, Guacira Lopes Louro (1997, p. 118), for example, has asserted that stimulating and giving space for one's own voice of those who have been silenced by an androcentric structure of education as an observatory of the social was an important gain for the feminist and structuralist pedagogical matrix: "undoubtedly these formulations allow feminist pedagogies to be inscribed in the perspective of emancipatory pedagogies, which aim 'awareness', 'liberation' or 'emancipation' of subjects and society". Furthermore, and despite the political importance of such pedagogies, Guacira Lopes Louro (1997, p. 123) suggested, based on a post-structuralist feminist view, how some feminist structuralist pedagogical practices end up ratifying a binary logic of the gender: "the teachers and students actions within a markedly dualistic model - and this dichotomous logic - ends up marking both the description of professional and interpersonal relationships and the strategies for overcoming them".

In the same context, Dagmar Meyer (2003) has demonstrated how a post-structuralist feminist perspective in Education would mobilize a pedagogical and curricular practice that problematizes and undoes a binary understanding of gender as the synonym of the relations between women and men (our gender identities). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, these researchers in Education defended the importance of understanding gender not as "educational processes by which human beings are constituted, resulting in men and women", but highlighted "the need to observe the different ways in which gender operates, structuring the social relationships" (MEYER, 2003, p. 18). In other words,

and considering the implication of this article to the Philosophy of Difference, understanding gender as a social organizer, as an intelligibility matrix, has allowed the proposition of pedagogy and a curriculum:

[...] to “confound the borders”, all borders, especially the gender boundaries that, from an early age (still in the womb), are working to outline. [...] [This pedagogy and curriculum work] for subversion, for the confusion and hybridization of gender, sex, bodies, desires. But, fighting against the gender boundaries that divide, separate and hierarchize, it does not mean that he does not listen to “voices of the border”. [...] It is good to hear these voices when it says that the borders are a contact zone where converge the fluid differences, where power circulates in complex and multidirectional ways, where the capacity for action exists on both sides of this permanently changing and permeable gap (PARAÍSO, 2016, p. 234-235).

Within this perspective that has become the most important and widespread mark by researchers and professors in the Brazilian field of gender and sexuality studies in Education (RIBEIRO; XAVIER FILHA, 2014), a perspective from which I was trained as a teacher-researcher. However, through the revival of a feminist activism that returns to structuralist premises (since the time of my PhD. studies), I have started to see colleagues questioning me, not in a polite way, how and with what right a man could study and speak about feminisms? The questions were radicalized in offenses (sometimes veiled, others not so much) and I could notice that colleagues so committed to the propositions of the Philosophy of Difference were defending in their discourses, in their works, in their classes, the transitory, multiple, contingent character of gender and sexuality; but these same colleagues changed their tone by saying that men had no voice in the feminisms. It is a paradox that demonstrates the provisionality, the plurality, and, why not say, the tension that marks how each of us occupies at the same time subject positions that sometimes converge, and other times diverge. In this case, how the feminist posture of professor/researcher implied to the Philosophy of Difference can paradoxically cohabit with a militant posture involved in the criticism of structuralist feminisms.

A paradoxical posture that is also found in the concept of place of speech: “absolutely has nothing to do with the essentialist view that only black people can speak of racism” (RIBEIRO, 2017, p. 66), but, even denying essentialism, reaffirms it in other terms: “even though people who belong to privileged

groups are aware and fight against oppression, they will not fail to be privileged, structurally speaking, by the oppressions that inflict on other groups” (RIBEIRO, 2017, p. 70). Paradoxically, an important theme to the feminisms since Simone de Beauvoir and radicalized by Judith Butler, the denaturalization of gender was slipping away in the speeches of my colleagues, because it has clashed with the limitations of political identities and, more precisely, with the idea of place of speech (BENTO, 2011). Although the essentialism is denied and the idea of everyone talking about oppression emphasized, there is a suggestion that subjects are – within a structuralist tonic that universalizes the idea of white heterosexual man – situated in a place of power (or power as something that a privileged group holds), locating other subjects – the subordinated people, the social minorities – in the place of speech of those who are the object of power oppression.

In this sense, even though my colleagues deny (and the new features they give to social movements, especially under the aegis of the concept of place of speech) they slip in the idea of identity essentialism that they constantly deny, and as Judith Butler (2008) has shown, they operate within the binary logic of liberal thought that aim to deconstruct: men *or* women; homosexual *or* heterosexual, etc.; making the identity, the place of speech of the subordinate, a new undisputed law. They lose sight of what Foucault (2012) said about power not having origin or being something that one possesses, but power as a game of relations that all subjects from a greater to lesser extent play a part.

In this context, listening to the memories of many friends I began to conceive an answer to so many questions that for so long interpellate me: why do feminisms are so dear to me and why do I make them the main focus of my research? I was a subordinated subjectivity at school for being a gay child (even if I did not know at that time), but especially what marked my place (rather, placed me in a unplace) was to be an abject being; being a queer (effeminate) child. When I say subordinated, I certainly speak from a specific voice located in the games of power (homosexuality), but, as I will try to show, the abjection exceeds (and therefore maximizes the very idea of subordination): as a man who performs the feminine – or, as I will use in this article, a womanless femininity; a rereading of the concept of manless masculinity by Berenice Bento (2017) – it threw me (and unfortunately still throws so many other subjectivities) at the borders of the very idea of place of speech; as a man, I did not fit in the male culture of power or privileges, because I performed a womanless femininity. In other words, the idea of womanless femininity is a radical in-between space; that is why I bring the idea of a unplace *of* speech in the gender discourse order. Based on the stories narrated by my friends of their school memories (experiences from the 1990s), we can think how identity ends up not taking account of

abjection and, more than that, ends up ratifying the exclusion of bodies that are incomprehensible to the structural logic of place of speech.

Lucas's story: when telling his school experiences in a middle-class neighborhood catholic school in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Lucas begins as follows:

*Girl, you know that since when you asked me to talk about my school memories, I was like [he thought a little before continuing, a certain choking in his voice and hesitating continued] I had to dig them. Maybe because I've already reframed these memories. Today, they are indications of today's Lucas; I deal with them much better today than I did at the time.*

The difficulty of talking about school experiences is a constant among all the friends interviewed; but, paradoxically, everyone has become teachers – maybe the difficulties of school everyday life have motivated all of us to play a role in education perhaps attempting to transform it... but this is another story. After that, he immediately recalls a story that happened when he was twelve years old. He states:

*I was effeminate; I was a queer child, I have always been. Drawing dresses at home, anyway, I had a thin voice [and again he pauses, perhaps, as he mentioned above, trying to dig something long buried in his memory]. I cannot quantify how I suffered. At some point, I don't know how long it lasted, there was a kid who obviously hit me, he would hold me and no one would do anything; after all, he was hitting the little sissy. He would hit me the whole break and on several occasions, whatever. I remember I told him that if he kept hitting me, my brother would smash him, something like that, right? And by coincidence, my brother picked me up that day and the kid saw it, he has never spoken to me again.*

There are many elements to explore, but we will focus on two: the idea of queer child; Lucas clearly makes an allusion to the artist Bia Leite's work that caused Movimento Brasil Livre revolt in the *Queermuseum* exhibition in 2017, at Santander Cultural; I understand that it is a way of the memory positively evoke this place marked by abjection: a femininity without a woman, an effeminate queer. After the exhibition being censored and, especially, the mediatization of Bia Leite's work, the term queer child started to have a positive meaning

of an effeminate experience between my friends; or, as the dragqueen Lorelay Fox would say, being “effeminate, queer, homo, sissy, faggot, is revolutionary” (GAYS AFEMINADOS, 2015).

It is interesting to observe how the idea of queer child (*criança viada*) can be a reverberation, in the Brazilian way, of the political affirmation process of the term queer in the US – “an insult that has the strength of a constantly repeated invocation, an insult that echoes and reiterates the claims of many homophobic groups [...]”, but “which is accepted by a part of the homosexual movements to characterize their perspective of opposition and contestation. For this group, *queer* means to be against normalization – wherever it comes from” (LOURO, 2008, p. 38). Calling themselves as queer child could mean the frontier, to affirm dissent, which characterizes the unplace of a femininity without a woman as a way of life.

However, and following the idea of queer child, the memory of the school experience brings up the term little sissy: “a kid who obviously beat me, he would hold me and nobody would do anything; after all, he was hitting the little sissy”. From an affirmative queer child to little sissy, a diminutive that marks the strength of violence as curriculum, as pedagogy, which aims to normalize the dissenting bodies in school. In gender studies, the pedagogical facade of violence is not a new discussion: “the school is usually a very perverse social space for children who perform dissent gender and sexuality in their bodies” (SILVA, 2018, p. 267), in a way that gender norms operate coercively (and, by extension, pedagogically) on all bodies that escape and differ from norms (LOURO, 2008). No one does anything when someone hits the little sissy, as Lucas stated, because here violence is curriculum, it educates, disciplines, and corrects the abnormal. It is part of the school organization and foundation. Hence, can the gay movement explain this violence suffered by Lucas? After all, gay men share a voice within a structure of homophobia that sustains the act of violence to the little sissy at school.

Once again, we come across the disjunction between the terms used by social movements and life experiences; the experiences that cross, break, and shuffle the binary boundaries of the gender and sexual discourse order. In other words, the idea of homophobia is politically insufficient to analyze Lucas’ experience, once it is restricted to violence and injury against gay men; excluding a whole range of experiences of gender and sexuality: queer, lesbians, transvestites, transsexuals.

Instead of transforming the experience of discrimination into a political force of resistance and questioning of heteronormativity, it seems stronger,

in the Brazilian context, the maintenance of a perspective that seeks to reconcile the identity trap from which the movement does not seem to know how to leave. Hence the strategy that subdivides homophobia into the so-called transphobia, homophobia, lesbophobia, appealing for the protection and tolerance of identities instead of problematizing sexual norms and, above all, gender norms (MISKOLCI, 2011, p. 48)

The author suggests the term effeminophobia as a force to problematize, in our research, in our schools, how there is a common point between the several identities divisions: “the feminine and misogynistic antigender traits present in these forms of discrimination” (MISKOLCI, 2011, p. 48). It is important to notice that not every gay person shares the same place of speech, because they occupy different places in the gender discourse order. Therefore, the queer child, the effeminate gay and the womanless femininity is not welcome in this fallacious idea of the gay community: “gays are usually as much as or even more effeminophobic than straight people, which is noticeable by the preponderant way they say ‘not to be’ or that they ‘hate’ effeminates” (MISKOLCI, 2011, p. 49).

From this analytical perspective, and resuming the story narrated by Lucas, there was no violence of the order of sexuality, even though it is the background of the possibility of violence as curriculum: the heterosexuality that the school, as a quintessentially disciplinary institution, needs to guarantee. Gender is at the core of the violence experienced by Lucas. The little sissy is not synonymous of an already constituted homosexual sexuality. It is rather synonymous of a body with a penis that lives, which expresses itself, that exists in the feminine. It is not a bio-woman (in other words, a body engendered and named as a woman from birth), but he is also not a trans woman – subjectivities that seek, in a sense, the coherence identity of a woman.

Lucas’ body is something inconceivable in the binary order of things: it is a male body that performs the feminine and does not wish to be a woman; it is a womanless femininity. And this is noticeable in the way he recalls (similarly to the other interviewees) that “in elementary school, I would rather be with girls; so I stayed with them at the breaktime, playing the girls’ games. And I did not play football with the boys because I disliked everything that they liked. I was with the girls all the time.” Although he marks the gender as a fixed category (for example, stating that there was a girls’ game), Lucas inhabited the feminine territory: far from being something insurmountable, the body of the queer child/a boy who only plays with “girls’ things” and with girls, shows us how the gender boundaries are porous, how they are traversable and how it occupies an unplace

in the order of discourse. Thus, based on João Paulo Silva (2018, p. 269), the queer child messes the gender matrix that organizes the school “because it grows as a range in-between, in the middle, breaking with the male-and-female forms, causing the gender system to escape, leaking as a drill a pipe”.

On the classroom floor, Lucas’ body exceeds gender norms but also exceeds the identity norms of social movements. If Lucas is not, as states the idea of place of speech a man who holds a place of power/privileges in an androcentric culture, he is also not or wishes to be a woman – this subject of the subordinated voice, from which the feminisms seek coherence of their political subject –; I ask: what is the place of speech of a womanless femininity? Who can deal with this body: the feminisms that fight against structural misogyny or the gay movement that fights against structural homophobia? Neither of them and, at the same time, both: “at this moment, the dialectic (binary) of the slave owner and slaved person has to pay their debts with a third term: the abject” (BENTO, 2017, p. 248).

Therefore, the demand for an inclusive policy that privileges cultural diversity in the school finds in Lucas’ abject body, also in Lucas’ dissent subjectivity, its limit. As Berenice Bento (2011, p. 102) states, the demand for a unifying agenda by the social movements results in silencing voices and excluding subjectivities in the name of a supposed collective identity; a foolish dichotomy that does not consider that: “women are part of an inferior constructed class [...]. This place is partially occupied by XX chromosome women. The violence against the abject and fragile subjects identified as feminine is not limited to the women.” The queer child shuffles the idea of place of speech, once it does not fit into the oppressive/oppressed logic of the dialectical analyses: male (men who share privileges of a male structure) *versus* female (women oppressed by a male structure). The womanless femininity performed by and materialized on Lucas’ body is part of both sides; it is male and female; it is in the border; a place in-between; and, at last, it is a quintessential unplace of gender.

Eduardo’s story:

*So, talk about my trajectory, my school life, is always a traumatic episode. And it brings up some elements that remind me, in a certain way, some points of suffering that lead me to revive them. I was a child when I joined this institution. So, when I was six I went to preschool; and I have always been a shy child; I disliked playing with other kids, because I did not like the games known as masculine. So, these child games always caused me embarrassment, right? From being excluded from the games to being called names, like queer, from an early age.*

In Eduardo's first words, suffering is the first feeling that emerges when talking about their school memories, and the same happens to Lucas. According to Giancarlo Cornejo, injury is the first scar that marks a child, a queer child, within what we conceive as homosexual identity: "the queer injury interpellated me before I realized that I was queer" (CORNEJO, 2011, p. 82). As the inaugural event of a homosexual identity, it is interesting to evaluate how the recollection of the injury has as trigger the memory of the games that took place in preschool, when he was 5 and 6 years old: "the simple act of playing with certain toys or games is often a way of reveling a queer child" (DIAS *et al.*, 2019).

At this point, some questions are necessary: what do those 5 and 6-year-olds know about sexuality? What do they know about homosexuality? Homophobia is not a question here, once the misogyny finds in it a flow. Children, in their early childhood, do not know what is queer or homosexual, but they know that these words are bad, they can be offensive and can hurt. Therefore, being called queer and be forbidden of playing in preschool, is not a characteristic of a sexual identity already defined, understood, and formed, but it is a way of highlighting an incomprehensible difference for those children: a male child body that inhabits the gender frontier, a body marked by a womanless femininity.

As a curriculum secures the norms, gender coercions are not only exercised during events of violence between colleagues, but they also happen in insidious ways by teachers (PARAÍSO, 2018). This is marked in Eduardo's memories: "my [feminine] way of being used to cause discomfort to colleagues and teachers; I had a teacher who constantly told me off for putting my hair behind my ear, she said that I couldn't do it because it was a girl thing." The interdiction in the teacher's discourse, as well as in children's discourse, shows the impossibility of a body destined to be a man to perform the feminine. This female performativity prohibition, the incoherence of a male body experiencing the feminine, blurs the idea that these bodies can have a coherent gay identity and, therefore, a voice shared with other gay subjectivities.

We are before the radicality of how misogyny is the foundation of the school violence; more specifically, of an effeminophobic violence: "'Don't be a little woman! Behave like a man!' are the first truths that will form subjectivities, affecting the feminine by misogyny, before homophobia" (BENTO, 2011, p. 102). In other words, the danger of being corrected or disciplined is, first of all, a womanless femininity, in this body inhabits a gender that does not suit it. A dimension which is aggravated by the subjective relationship that Eduardo built with the violence that he has suffered:



*I had an aggravating factor; I was a chubby child; I was the fat queer. [...]. Since my early schools day, I was getting beat up [his voice cracks with crying], I always got beat up; and I always came home with a lot of bruises, on my arms, anyway, I have pictures that show this, but my family thought that it should be my fault; and that as a proper man I should defend myself. But these events started to happen more often and get more intense as I was reaching the teenage years, [...] I met a boy who, like me, had some mannerisms and was thin. I projected a lot to be like that boy, because for me being called queer was a problem and as well as being called fat; then I started thinking [the tears emerges strongly] I am queer and I will always be, but I can stop being fat right? So, when I was elevenish I started a process of gradually stop eating; at first, my family didn't notice, right? [...] until I started skipping some meals and, six months later, I lost around 20kg. Then, when I was 12 I was diagnosed with depression, bulimia, and anorexia; and I started having suicidal thoughts; this process lasted around a year, and it culminated in some wounds that are not only emotional, I have them on my arm, the marks of these suicide attempts. I ended up in a psychiatric hospital, a children's ward; my father stayed with me for 21 days. At that time, I was 12 years old and today I'm 26, so it's been 14 years. 14 years ago anorexia was a discussion among girls, among women, the ones affected by this disease. And the psychiatrist called my father to talk and said that I had several symptoms of homosexuality; and anorexia was one of the symptoms, that I would come up as queer at some point."*

This is a narrative that strikes us like a punch in the stomach. If suffering appears as the first light of remembrance, it is because the school is a space of suffering for all forms of gender and sexuality dissidence. However, despite all the possibilities of analyzing this story, I would like to raise the following proposition: the psychiatrist determines that homosexuality is an inevitable pathological result, but the diagnosis, the pathologization of suffering, the pathologization of violence, only takes place in the dissonant act of unplacement of a body of a 12-year-old boy who has symptoms of diseases that do not fit, and do not belong, to his sex: bulimia and anorexia.

From school violence to psychological pathologization, the womanless femininity does not occupy a place in the identity logical thinking of the Psychiatry from 14 years ago – nor even today, as Berenice Bento (2017) shows that the idea of transsexuality is characterized as gender dysphoria in DSM-V. In this logic of pathologization, the diagnosis emerges as part of the structural binary logical order, in which opposing spheres put the subjects in specific places of the culture; after all, “how to identify a child with ‘gender dysphoria’? By cultural

definitions of what is appropriate for each sex. There is no clinical examination to find ‘gender dysphoria’” (BENTO, 2017, p. 43). Thus, the determinant for a body to be violated in the school space and to be diagnosed as pathological by a psychiatrist is clearly its unplacement in the order of things: its abjection - a male body performing the feminine.

Therefore, here lies the most central idea of this article, not everybody nor every way of experiencing gender can be explained or be included in the binary logic that structure the resistances against the identity policies. If, as I have tried to show here, the dissidence is the limit of place of speech and identity policies, it is because the idea of gender and sexuality structure is sustained as “something objective, that precedes the subject”, not considering how the structure is the terminal state of micro-relations of force that are woven “in the everyday interactions, in the structured and structuring practices of the subjects who update and modify the rules and resources of the gender and sexuality structures in their daily lives” (BENTO, 2011, p. 86).

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, men have no voice, no place, in some feminisms, and this happens because we often take feminisms as synonymous of a movement from bio-men to bio-women; a uterine feminism (BALTHAZAR; MARCELLO, 2018; BENTO, 2011; BUTLER, 2008). If Biology is the only source of explanation, of the fighting coalition; then, despite their many gains (the labor market, the politics, and the women’s reproductive rights), feminisms failed in one of their most central goals: the radical fight against binarisms and the denaturalization of identities. After all, and if the movement is uterine, Simone de Beauvoir’s (2000) powerful quote that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” falls to the ground in a movement that paradoxically makes biology, identity fiction, the new and inescapable destiny.

## **Conclusion**

I would like to say that nowadays I have an answer to my colleagues: I work with feminisms because it was through feminist theory, and my feminist professors, that I comprehended that the pains I suffered - and as I showed here, many of my friends also suffered - has not a definitive locus in the binary order of the identity game but it is the result of our boldness (and why not to say that it is the result of our courage and insistence?) to inhabit gender unplacement at school. Queer children, effeminate queers, sissy or faggots do not have a clear place of speech, because we do not share only the pain of other gays (many

gays with heterosexual passability do not suffer misogyny) and we do not share only the pain of women (on one hand, there are spaces of the gender violence that we will never know; on the other, there is the space where gender violence finds homophobia, that heterosexual cis women will never know).

I am not saying that it is necessary to measure who suffers more or less violence. First, and far from the identity logic or one's own voice coherently shared, it is necessary to look where our pain brings us together in our radical differences. It is like that moment in the school break when we, queer children, choose to hang and play with girls. Far from the idea of a sorority, because we are not women but cisgender men, it is another act of resistance, a revolutionary act of refusing an identity that has been destined to us (we do not share the benefits of an androcentric society nor even a feminine space), but we staggering walk on the threshold of gender, on gender unplacement, and we make the feminine our way of existence. And alongside the girls at school break, we shape a post-identitary feminism; a feminism that I would like to qualify, based on Clarice Lispector's idea of the act of writing, as a post-identitary feminism, a feminism that does not seek one's own voice destined to a coherent political subject, it is a feminism that "does not belong to anybody. And nobody's freedom is very dangerous. It is like the infinite that has an air color". So, what do we learn from queer children playing with the girls? We learn the possibility of building together, in our differences, in our common pain, an infinite feminism, an air-colored feminism.

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