

## SEX EDUCATION IN THE NATIONAL CORNER: Folha da Serra magazine in the south of Mato Grosso in the 1930s

Educação sexual no rincão nacional:  
a revista *Folha da Serra* no sul de Mato Grosso na década de 1930

Educación sexual en el rincón nacional:  
la revista *Folha da Serra* en el sur de Mato Grosso em los años 1930

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**Abstract**: We questioned the topic of Sex Education in *Folha da Serra* magazine, in Campo Grande, south of Mato Grosso, in the 1930s, from two perspectives: the relationship between morals and science; and the inclusion of Sex Education as a school subject. Based on the references about History of Sex Education and History of Sensitivities, we concluded that: it was not a question of sexual freedom, but of a new regulation, using the same codes to establish another morality, preaching new meanings, values and sensitivities in relation to sex and sexuality. When approaching the topic of sexuality, replacing religious morality with scientific morality, presenting sexual education in a rational perspective, the magazine aimed to give that national corner a modern aspect.

**Keywords**: history of education; history of education of the senses and sensibilities; sexuality.

**Resumo**: Questionamos o tema educação sexual na revista *Folha da Serra*, em Campo Grande, sul de Mato Grosso, na década de 1930, a partir de duas perspectivas: relação entre moral e ciência; e inclusão da educação sexual como disciplina escolar. Pautados nos referenciais sobre história da educação sexual e história das sensibilidades, concluímos que não se tratava de uma liberdade sexual, mas de uma nova regulação, utilizando-se dos mesmos códigos para estabelecer outra moral, pregando novos sentidos, valores e sensibilidades no que se refere ao sexo e à sexualidade. Ao abordar o tema da sexualidade, substituindo a moral religiosa pela moral científica, apresentando a educação sexual pela perspectiva racional, a revista objetivou conferir àquele rincão nacional um aspecto de moderno.

**Palavras-chave**: história da educação; história da educação dos sentidos e sensibilidades; sexualidade.

**Resumen**: Cuestionamos el tema de la educación sexual en la revista *Folha da Serra*, en Campo Grande, al sur de Mato Grosso, en la década de 1930, desde dos perspectivas: la relación entre moral y ciencia; y la inclusión de la educación sexual como asignatura escolar. A partir de las referencias sobre Historia de la Educación Sexual y Historia de las Sensibilidades, concluimos que: no se trataba de una libertad sexual, sino de una nueva regulación, utilizando los mismos códigos para establecer otra moral, predicando nuevos significados, valores y sensibilidades sobre el sexo y la sexualidad. Al abordar el tema de la sexualidad, sustituyendo la moral religiosa por la moral científica, presentando la educación sexual desde una perspectiva racional, la revista buscó darle un aspecto moderno a ese espacio nacional.

**Palabras clave**: historia de la educación; historia de la educación de los sentidos y sensibilidades; sexualidad.

## INTRODUCTION

As we leafed through editions of *Folha da Serra*, a monthly magazine that was published from 1931 to 1940 in the city of Campo Grande, Mato Grosso<sup>1</sup>, our attention was caught by the significant number of news reports about sex education in various editions. Considering that *Folha da Serra* was a variety periodical (Luca, 1999) and that it had a great circulation across that distant part of the country, and its emphatic purpose was to contribute “[...] with a most modern share of good will to the progress and aggrandizement [...] of Mato Grosso” (Editorial, October 1931, p. 13), we question how relevant the sex education-related contents were to achieving the objective proposed by the publication.

Collecting and examining the articles on sex education that were published in *Folha da Serra* allowed us to inquire about how such contents circulated in the periodical from November 1933 to August 1935, totaling 21 titles about the topic<sup>2</sup>. What motivated the publication of pieces on such topic? What was the content conveyed by these articles? Who wrote them? How were these subject matters received by readers? Considering the titles that referred to sex education for children and adolescents, as well as the concern with ‘false pedagogues of sexuality’ and with sex education in schools, was there the purpose of creating a school subject with such approach? Was it an issue at the local/national level? In this first stage of ‘historiographic operation’, as defined by Certeau (2011), besides articles that explicitly dealt with the matter, we located others that indirectly approached sex education.

We analyzed the news reports we selected in *Folha da Serra* (with sex education contents) from the perspective of the history of education of meanings and sensitivities, bearing in mind the “[...] relationship between culture and nature [...]”, the “[...] material dimension of life [...]” and “[...] corporality in the course of history [...]”, as affirmed by Taborda de Oliveira (2018, p. 119), and considering that the articles aimed to affect the senses, thus establishing ‘right’ ways of thinking and acting in relation to sex and sex education.

By analyzing these articles we found that the discussion on sex education in the pages of *Folha da Serra* answered calls at the national level for discussion on sexology<sup>3</sup>, more specifically in Rio de Janeiro, with José de Oliveira Pereira de Albuquerque, MD, who signs many of the reports in the periodical. Our hypothesis is that this magazine, whose main objective was to contribute to the modernization of Mato Grosso, considered it important to address topics that were in vogue at the national

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<sup>1</sup> During this period, Mato Grosso had not yet been divided into two states, i.e., Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul. Such division was established by the Complementary Law No. 30, from October 11, 1977, which also made Campo Grande the capital of Mato Grosso do Sul.

<sup>2</sup> The magazine published 48 editions from 1931 to 1940. For more information about *Folha da Serra*’s printing and circulation, see Passone-Rodrigues and Moreira (2021).

<sup>3</sup> For an understanding of the issue at the national level, see Oliveira (2012).

level, such as the campaign for sex education, which was being strongly advocated in the Brazilian capital as an urgent and necessary topic for the strengthening of the Brazilian nation, thus adding new values and new sensitivities to the topic.

Albuquerque created, in July 1933, in Rio de Janeiro, a philanthropic entity called the ‘Brazilian Circle for Sex Education’ (CBES) in order to promote a reform in the sex culture of the Brazilian people, with campaigns on the radio, in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, bulletins and lectures<sup>4</sup>, advocating the modernization of the national culture, as Reis (2006) and Oliveira (2012) say. For Fontoura (2018), however, phrases such as ‘impressive penetration in the media’ and ‘modernizing rationality’ which are associated with Albuquerque and with the CBES, as initially presented by Carrara (1996) and Vidal (1998), should be relativized.

In order to “[...] better coordinate this propaganda [...]”, the CBES “[...] conceived the organization of a ‘Journalistic Circuit’ [...] to help disseminate sex education, thus “[...] bringing to the country’s most distant parts the cheery breath of a new mentality” (Albuquerque, 1933<sup>a</sup>, p. 8, emphasis in the original). We believe this is where the *Folha da Serra* magazine comes in; the magazine received and published articles from the CBES from 1933 to 1935. In a December 1933 edition of the newspaper *Correio Oficial*, in Goiás, we found a letter from the CBES inviting that newspaper to participate in their newly-created ‘Journalistic Circuit’; the letter also explained that such participation was free of charge and implied no obligation to continuously publish their articles.

[...] we fortunately remembered to include it in our ‘Journalistic Circuit’, which we are sure you will want to be part of. Needless to say that this initiative will entail no expense to your newspaper, nor any commitment to our Circle, so that, once joining our “Journalistic Circuit”, you may leave it at your convenience. To the newspapers that constitute our ‘Journalistic Circuit’ we will send an article every fifteen days [...]. (*Correio Oficial de Goiás*, 1933, p. 8 apud Diniz, 2012, p.7, emphasis in the original).

<sup>4</sup> José de Albuquerque wrote three books about the subject until 1930: *Impotência sexual no homem ou Introdução ao estudo da pathologia sexual* [Sexual Impotence in Men or Introduction to the Study of Sexual Pathology] (1928), *Higiene sexual* [Sexual Hygiene] (1929) and *Moral sexual* [Sexual Morals] (1930). The contents of these books are disseminated in the next decade in a campaign for sex education in Brazil, in the context of debates of scientism in the country, which emerged in the late 18th century. As the main figure of sex education in the country, Albuquerque was elected member of the Society of Sexology of Paris, in 1937. In addition, according to himself, he was a reserve officer of the Army’s Health Corps; a member of the *Société de Sexologie de Paris*; a delegate with the *Union Internationale Contre le Peril Vénérien*; an honorary member of the Mexican Society of Eugenics; a foreign member of honor at the 1st Congress of Eugenics in Lima, Peru; an honorary member of the 2nd Peruvian Antivenereal Meeting; an honorary member of the 1st Congress of Internal Medicine of Mexico; a corresponding member of the Instituto Argentino de la Población; the honorary chairman of the Sexology Committee at the 1st Interamerican Congress of Mental Hygiene; an honorary member of the Valparaíso Medical Society; an honorary member of the *Assemblée Générale Contre le Peril Vénérien*, assembled in Hage and Amsterdam in 1936 (Albuquerque, 1943).

We believe that the CBES sent the same letter to the various forms of press that existed in the country at the time, including *Folha da Serra*. The journalistic circuit publicized the *Boletim de Educação Sexual* [Sex Education Bulletin], which was written by the CBES and circulated at the national level from 1933 to 1939. The *Folha da Serra* magazine of Campo Grande published advertisements about the *Boletim*, such as the one below:

#### BOLETIM DE EDUCAÇÃO SEXUAL

The May edition of the 'Boletim de Educação Sexual' is circulating; the Boletim is the official publication of the Brazilian Circle for Sex Education, whose editor-in-chief is José de Albuquerque, MD.

This bulletin's purpose is to disseminate among the people indispensable knowledge of sexology, and for this reason it is being distributed for free and mailed to any part of the country, so those who wish to receive this edition should send their address to the editorial office at rua 7 de setembro n. 2017 – 1.º andar – Rio de Janeiro (Boletim de educação sexual, 1934, p. 11, emphasis in the original)<sup>5</sup>.

*Folha da Serra* also publicized notes about the 'Free Sexual Advice Station', which was headed by Cunha Ferreira, MD, and whose purpose was "[...] to provide individuals of both sexes with advice about sexual hygiene and physiology" (Posto Gratuito para Conselhos Sexuais, 1934, p. 29). The notes seem to indicate that *Folha da Serra* considered it necessary to inform the population of Mato Grosso about modern subjects that circulated in the Brazilian capital, which was viewed as a model of city to be followed.

Considering that all activities proposed by the CBES, such as the *Boletim* and the Sexual Advice Station, were free, and that the organization was a philanthropic entity, it is important to question who funded such activities. Fontoura (2018) says that the CBES did not have facilities, personnel or financial resources to fund the printing and distribution of their campaign material. He cites Leonardo Malcher (2007, p. 131-132), who in turn says that "[...] there was a list of collaborators, who somehow probably contributed to the Circle's initiatives"<sup>6</sup>.

Another relevant point concerns the logistically efficient correspondence between *Folha da Serra* and the CBES, considering that, despite the geographic distance between Campo Grande and Rio de Janeiro and the obstacles to the flow of

<sup>5</sup> This is, as Dr. Albuquerque later said about the *Boletim*, an eight-page tabloid with a run of 100,000 copies printed on newsprint. It was subject to the same legal requirements as imposed on large publications, including DIP's infamous censorship (Albuquerque, 1958).

<sup>6</sup> In his presentation of the 'sex education gallery', with 48 pictures, some of which large-sized, Albuquerque (1938) said it was funded by himself.

information, a few months after events took place in the Brazilian capital, they were reported by *Folha da Serra* in the South of Mato Grosso. The Northwest Railway of Brazil, which was built in 1914<sup>7</sup>, may have contributed to it.

Campo Grande, which in 1977 would officially become the capital of the then newly created state of Mato Grosso do Sul, expanded in the 1930s its campaign for the division of Mato Grosso, whose capital at the time was Cuiabá, north of the state. Some rivalry between the two cities was visible in the press<sup>8</sup>. Campo Grande, the ‘invincible rival’, had a ‘population of intellectuals’, and therefore ‘books’ were presented as a ‘valuable trade in the land’, and ‘education’ as a ‘disputed industry’ (Altiva Serrana, 1933).

To remove the stigma of ‘barbarians’, the *Folha da Serra* magazine seems to have openly contributed to promote the south of Mato Grosso, particularly the city of Campo Grande, as a modern place, a synonym for laborious progress. And when it came to boosting this new representation, the contents published in the CBES journalistic circle proved a valuable help as they presented sex education as a controversial topic, but also as a cutting-edge trend in education, free of prejudice and in line with science and the modernity from Rio de Janeiro.

Starting from the social culture in which the articles on sex education were published in *Folha da Serra*, the analysis we present below is based on two perspectives, both of which are dear to the discussions proposed by the CBES. The first regards the relationship that sex education established between morality and science; the second concerns the dilemmas of sex education as a subject at home and at school. Such perspectives allowed us to pose the questions we answer below: 1. Would sex education be science or ‘immorality’?; 2. Should sex education be a school subject?

## WOULD SEX EDUCATION BE SCIENCE OR ‘IMMORALITY’?

We began to proclaim all around that sexuality is not immorality. That constituted a real scandal, and the great mass of our people rose against us.

[...] we are most pleased to see that many of those who initially rose against our purposes have now joined our ranks!

[...]

<sup>7</sup> The Northwest Railway of Brazil is presented by *Folha da Serra* as the ‘backbone’ of the transportation system in Campo Grande; since 1914, it connected the city “[...] to the large national centers, to the markets that consume our production, which is swiftly carried on it without the heavy burdens that other means require” (Folha da Serra, 1933, p. 65). About the railway, see Queiroz (2004).

<sup>8</sup> About the southern divisionists’ campaign in the 1930s, see Queiroz (2006).

Despite the heterogeneity of the elements that compose it, the court of public opinion still is, after the court of our conscience, our best judge! (Albuquerque, 1934a, p. 30)

Albuquerque's discourses advocating sex education in the pages of *Folha da Serra*, presented the topic with a tone of scientificity, like a reformation that aimed to replace 'empirical norms' with "[...] scientific norms founded on the postulates of biology [...]", prescribing a new interpretation of matters related to sex. Still, various groups in society posed a strong resistance, pointing out the 'immorality' of the subject, as seen in the thoughts vented above (Albuquerque, 1934a, p. 30)

José de Albuquerque warned, when presenting the CBES to newspaper editors across the country and offering for free the contents of *Boletim de Educação Social*, that "[...] these matters require, when dealt with by the press, a lot of tact and delicacy not to offend, even remotely, the false prudishness of its readers [...]", and for this reason, "[...] one should not get down to technical details or terms regarding organs and functions, which would somehow hinder the campaign, arousing many to anger" (Albuquerque, 1933a, p. 8). These words reveal the strategies of the campaign that was run by Albuquerque, who heeded the 'delicacy' the matter required, thereby proposing for sex education to be gradually included in society in order to convince the 'court of public opinion' about new sensitivities and new behaviors around sexual matters. Albuquerque seemed truly concerned with the public opinion, which he considered his second 'best judge'. After saying, in 1933, that "[...] for many people, sexuality is a synonym for immorality" (Albuquerque, 1933c, p. 9), in 1934 he believed he had conquered prejudice and gained public opinion's support, having created an environment that allowed "[...] free course of sexual truths" (Albuquerque, 1934a, p. 30).

In an enthusiastic tone, José Firmo writes in *Folha da Serra* about the opening of space for sex education with the inclusion of new meanings and new sensitivities as proposed by the CBES. Firmo explains that "[...] just a few months ago, the environment was, if not totally hostile, at least indifferent to the idea". Before the CBES, "[...] no one had the courage to pronounce, in the same timbre as he delivered his lectures, anything related with sex". However, the early 1930s witnessed several 'advances' in this respect: "We won all the initial stages, destroying the pessimistic sentences of those who foresaw our failure and clung to superstitions (Firmo, 1933, p. 7).

However, despite the satisfied discourses about the space that was opened in society for the subject, after a few publications on sex education in *Folha da Serra*, José Nonato, a journalist and controversialist from Cuiabá, emphatically criticized the magazine, questioning why its editor, Aguinaldo Trouy, had allowed the topic of sexuality – "[...] a plague that was transplanted from Europe and North America, from those societies in full dissolution [...]" – to have space in his periodical, with excerpts "[...] that hurt the sensitivity of women in our country and aim to materialize them, animalize them, make them brute":

Let us leave Dr. José de Albuquerque and his companions by themselves in their efforts for this evil work of corruption of Brazilian social moral, charging with their spear against modesty, the natural armor with which the Providence preserves the woman from prostitution. No; let us not help these innovators, workers for the corruption of morality, which is the basis of family, the foundation of our homeland. (Nonato, 1934, p. 8)

For José Nonato, any art, science or philosophy that “[...] does not aim at the moral betterment of our species is no art, no science, no philosophy, it is nothing of value [...]” but, to the contrary, “[...] arbitrary conceptions generated in morbid brains that are acted upon by sin [...]”, says the journalist, i.e., conceptions that are ‘hurting sensitivities’ and corrupting the established moral (Nonato, 1934, p. 8).

The ‘frank reproach’ presented in Nonato’s letter is published in full, according to editor Aguinaldo Trouy, who comments that: ‘democratically’, topics have appeared in the magazine which ‘involve contrast and contrary arguments’. *Folha da Serra* has published, “[...] without any political or religious bias [...]”, several articles by the Brazilian Circle for Sex Education, about topics of a “[...] scientific nature, which have been carefully studied by part of modern medical science [...]”, but which “collide with the precepts of morals and religion, which are unbending on some points” (Albuquerque, 1934b, p. 8), says the editor, indicating the limitations to building a new sensitivity around sex and sexuality.

According to Trouy, the monthly illustrated magazine *Folha da Serra*

[...] greatly honors graphic art in this ‘distant part of Brazil’ that is still not widely known.

In addition, it reveals that, in this blessed State, occupations are not restricted to planting herb tea, breeding cattle, mining for gold and gems, and other activities aiming at material benefits, but there is also the cultivation of letters, to which its bright pages testify (Albuquerque, 1934b, p. 8, emphasis added).

Back to Nonato’s accusation, as regards materialism in sex education, it is worth noting that *Folha da Serra* published in September 1934 an article by Albuquerque titled ‘Sex education is not materialism’. The doctor points out that it is a mistake to believe that “[...] sex education is a task inspired by a refined materialism”. For him, “[...] Don Juanism is a symbol of male inferiority, and coquetry of female inferiority”. According to him, “[...] to the lack of sex education do we owe the abundance of Don Juans and coquettes, creatures who can only see life from the angle of material

satisfaction of their sexual instinct (Albuquerque, 1934c, p. 7, emphasis in original). With these words, Albuquerque condemns acts of seduction and flirt on the part of men and women, and prescribes conducts deemed more appropriate. Although he proposed ‘new morals’ for sex education, sensuality was an attitude the doctor denounced.

In the article titled *A dança* [The Dance], by Cecílio Rocha, ‘balls’ are presented by the author as a ‘school of sexualism, whether malicious or not’. For Rocha “[...] the ball is the main spot where modern young people gather, desirous of greater sexual sensations” (Rocha, 1934, p. 18). By saying that “[...] we fight for the physical and moral sanitation of races, and we place scientific precepts above dogmas [...]”, the author aims, from a hygienist perspective, to give greater emphasis to “[...] education on sex matters, thus preventing some individuals from consummating acts improper for their physical-moral constitution”. For Rocha, young people should get an explanation on how to control the body while dancing, considering the dangers of ‘sexualism’ and of ‘sexual instinct’.

The article titled *A voz do sexo* [The Voice of Sex] underscored the importance of listening to the ‘sexual instinct’ not as an ‘untamed, unruly beast’ as the popular discourse put it, but as a law of nature which therefore belonged to the field of biology. This was a new prescription of meaning about one’s body, and it was guided by ‘scientific morals’, by the ‘natural’ aspects of the physical body. “Let the biological laws that rule sexuality be respected, and then, instead of the roar of the raging beast, one will hear in its full serenity, peaceful and mild, the voice of sex!” (Albuquerque, 1934e, p. 37).

If certain empirical sexual norms, dictated by society but contrary to nature, are imposed on man, then his sexual instinct, from serene and placid, which it is when biological regulations are respected, as a beast, serene in its cage when one irritates it, will rise impetuously, and will impetuously attack whoever tries to oppose it.

Consequently, the fault is in the man who ‘provokes’, and not in the sex that ‘reacts’ (Albuquerque, 1934e, p. 37, emphasis in original).

This therefore means an attempt to put a new meaning into corporality, by proposing that the ‘sexual instinct’ should not be denied, as it is a matter of biology, of man’s nature, so it must be rationally controlled and respected, contrary to what Christian morals preached. These explanations are in line with CBES’ greater goal of reeducating the population with new sexual values, thus reaching sensitivities for the benefit of sanitization and against diseases, and cutting loose from prejudice and ignorance about the biology of sex, or sexology.



These attempts at an education of sensitivities, starting from new meanings and proposing new behaviors around sex and sexuality, assume a new relationship with the physical body, particularly with sexual organs. The ‘new morals’ proposed by Albuquerque declare it is an error to abstain from sexual relations as a means to secure ‘supernatural graces’ by denying pleasure. To the contrary, such morals declare that sexual organs, just like the other organs in the human body, are necessary “[...] to the preservation of health and to the overall balance of the system” (Stephanou, 2000, p. 37). The emphasis is placed on the body’s physiology. However, nowhere do the ‘new morals’ condemn religion, only the ‘old morals’ based on religious prejudice. After all, as Fontoura (2018, p. 687) says, for Albuquerque, sex education should be discussed so that reproduction, “[...] the true role of sex [...]” might be fulfilled. For Albuquerque, a scientific sex education should favor the biology of creation.

About sexology, it is worth remembering that from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the discourse about sex expanded in Brazil (Russo & Carrara, 2002; Oliveira, 2012), with emphasis on the 1930s, with the advent of the first professionals and groups dedicated to institutionalizing the study of sexology, like the CBES. In this context, sexology and psychoanalysis are considered the areas par excellence to deal with the topic. However, as Russo and Carrara (2002) point out, there were conflicts between both fields, which reflected on the publishing market, which was more resistant to publications on sex education and sexology, and more open to scientific output on psychoanalysis.

Regarding publications about sexuality, Dr. José de Albuquerque criticizes certain publications that claim to refer to sexology:

Although many of the books that fill bookstores’ shelves may pretend to deal with the highest and purest problems of sexuality, they are nothing but abominable repositories of the lowest, grossest immorality, that is, books that exploit only those sexual aspects of an individual that relate with libidinousness and sensuality. (Albuquerque, 1934d, p. 37).

Libidinousness and sensuality are once more judged as a moral problem. José de Albuquerque complains about the “[...] false pedagogues of sexuality [...]” who, according to him, “[...] want nothing from sexuality but material reward, financial profit [...]”, and are therefore “[...] offensive to public morality” (Albuquerque, 1934f, p. 10). These are, according to him, ‘abhorred authors’ of books that claim to deal with sexology. According to Albuquerque, many books that presented themselves as sexology books were only so in their titles. Such books “[...] do a disservice to the public cause [...]” as they contributed to giving their readers “[...] of little instruction, of course, the impression that sexuality is a synonym for immorality” (Albuquerque, 1934e, p. 37).

A reaction is necessary in this respect so that this form, among the many in which sexuality is basely exploited, ceases to fatten authors and publishers to the detriment of true science and the public good. (Albuquerque, 1934e, p. 37).

In response to the question whether sex education is science or ‘immorality’, the answer is: it depends. The doctor himself confirms that, depending on how the topic is presented, it increases the barrier “[...] already not small which has been making sex education inaccessible to young people”. According to CBES’ precepts for dealing with sex education, the sexual function is not immoral but, like any other function of the human body, it may be made immoral if deviated from its “[...] true purposes” (Albuquerque, 1934e, p. 37).

Albuquerque’s condemning of ‘certain publications’ allows observing an increase in access to reading by means of the printing and circulation of books and periodicals, with a growing publishing market in Brazil in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which contributed to disseminating new ideas, values and habits, like those of ‘sexual science’. We do not know the circulation capacity of *Folha da Serra*, which called itself a magazine of international circulation (Passone-Rodrigues, Moreira 2021)<sup>9</sup>, but it certainly contributed to disseminating such contents that sought to break with religious morals – which saw immorality in the practice of sex education – by presenting sex from a scientific perspective. Judging from the information above, it was apparently the only periodical in Mato Grosso in the 1930s that accepted publishing the contents of *Boletim de Educação Sexual*<sup>10</sup>.

Inasmuch as they prescribe new ways of thinking, acting and feeling about sexual relations, with biology-based discourses about the human body’s functioning, while also trying to escape being labeled as “immorality” by the ‘old religious morals’, Albuquerque and the CBES he created are part of the context of conflicting representations in the 1930s about the body/sex/sexuality, in the interchange of the physical/material and symbolic/cultural dimensions of education of meanings and sensitivities.

<sup>9</sup> *Folha da Serra*’s circulation was funded by subscriptions. Although they did not reveal its print run, the editors mention the editions the periodical had and its circulation, which reached beyond the state’s capital, particularly the state’s southern region, as well as two countries, namely Mexico and Argentina, with which the magazine had an exchange.

<sup>10</sup> But although the *Boletim* circulated until 1939, its content appeared in the pages of *Folha da Serra* only until 1935, which leaves an unanswered question about the reasons why the magazine ceased publishing CBES’ texts, considering that the *Boletim* circulated until 1939, and the magazine until 1940.

## SHOULD SEX EDUCATION BE A SCHOOL SUBJECT?

To answer this question, we begin with two statements by Albuquerque:

[...] sex education as a school subject? Let us not talk about it, for some clearheaded school principal, after hearing us, may want to add to the syllabus this discipline, and woe to him, the next day he may be forced to close the establishment for good, as the students' parents will not allow their children to cross the threshold of that house that receives them 'pure' and returns them 'impure and corrupted' (Albuquerque, 1933c, p. 9, emphasis added).

There is no need for a chair of sex education in schools, it is necessary that teachers do not create in children's minds the concept that the sexual function is immoral, shrouding it in a halo of mystery in the disciplines where the topic naturally appears. (Albuquerque, 1934h, p. 28)

In the first quote, Dr. José de Albuquerque ironizes when he speaks of sex education as a discipline, and he concludes that “[...] this is, unfortunately, the mentality of our people, in our time” (Albuquerque, 1933c, p. 9). In the second quote, Albuquerque stresses that a ‘chair of sex education’ is not necessary in school. In the article titled *Educação sexual nas escolas* [Sex Education in Schools], edition No. 39, year 1935, published in *Folha da Serra*, Albuquerque raises again the question about sex education as a school subject, and he confirms that “[...] there is no need to create a chair of sex education, as has been intended in a few countries, and as was attempted in Mexico [...]”, which caused the Mexican minister of education to be fired<sup>11</sup>. The doctor is even more enthusiastic in mentioning that “[...] only minds unenlightened about sexology can advocate the institution of a special chair of sex education in schools”. Though he favored the inclusion of topics that allow sex education in the classroom, Albuquerque does not favor the creation of a specific subject to that end<sup>12</sup>.

Felicio (2011, p. 3) explains that, fearing popular criticism against the CBES, Albuquerque made a justification for sex education based on ten points, among which he affirms categorically that “5 – Sex education for children should obey exclusively

<sup>11</sup> About the Mexican plan Albuquerque refers to, Castillo Troncoso (2000) explains that in 1932 the Mexican secretary of Public Education, Narciso Bassols, appointed a technical advisory committee to analyze the feasibility of a plan of sex education to be implemented in primary schools, in view of the rates of pregnancy and venereal disease among young people in that context.

<sup>12</sup> The first instances of sex education in Brazil in the school context are considered to have occurred in the 1960s with the sexual guidance programs for students implemented in Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, according to Werebe (1977), Figueiró (1995) and Guimarães (1995), among others.

the opportunity factor, whether at home or at school; [...] 7 – In schools, there is no need for a chair of sex education [...].

Albuquerque said it sufficed “[...] that the natural history teacher, when teaching students the morphologic constitution of the human body, does not skip and omit the male and female sex organs”. Thus, just like the teacher dealt with the other ‘organs and systems’ in the human body, he should also deal with sex organs, using the ‘correct’ terminology, as sex organs are normally known to children and “[...] even to adults by slangs, which are learned from the most suspicious sources” (Albuquerque, 1935a, p. 58). For the doctor, the ‘suitable’ denomination of the private parts of the human body would help give sex education a more rigorous sense.

However, when dealing with the body’s functioning, the natural history teacher should present the topic “[...] in general terms, because the student’s mentality is not prepared to learn details [...]”, so it is necessary “[...] to give them summarized notions of how sex organs worked”. After all, “[...] neither one extreme nor the other. Neither silence about the facts of sexuality, nor exaggeration by highlighting them within other school disciplines” (Albuquerque, 1935a, p. 58). Albuquerque explains that, in the chair of general hygiene, “[...] which should exist in every school [...]”, the teacher should teach “[...] in addition to breathing hygiene, food hygiene, clothing hygiene, mental hygiene, etc., also sex hygiene” (Albuquerque, 1935a, p. 58), thus sufficiently covering the topics about sex education and establishing the education of new meanings and sensitivities about sexuality in the school context.

The school content about sex hygiene should therefore fulfill its functional, utilitarian purpose. Albuquerque explains that sex hygiene transcends anti-venereal prophylaxis and is not restricted to the period from puberty to the disappearance of genital activity: “There is sex hygiene for children, sex hygiene for adults and sex hygiene for the elderly [...]”, and the markers delimiting these stages “[...] are the beginning of puberty and the beginning of climacteric [...]”, rather than fixed dates, “[...] since they manifest in different ages according to sex, and for the same sex, according to individuals” (Albuquerque, 1933b, p. 29). And in a response about who should teach sex education, Albuquerque explains that it “[...] should be initiated by parents; continued by teachers and completed by doctors” (Albuquerque, 1933b, p. 29), thus emphasizing the scientificity around the topic. Such prescriptions propose new sensitivities around sexuality which are concerned with the human body’s different biological stages, thus establishing educative actions to be taken by parents, teachers and doctors.

Resistance against sex education was presented with religious arguments, and it argued that dealing with sex would be an indecent, immoral act. For that argument, Albuquerque said, as shown in *Folha da Serra*, that “Sex education does not offend the morals of any religion, because it is founded on the truth of scientific facts, which the religions themselves teach us to cultivate, with their warning: ‘Do not lie’”

(Albuquerque, 1933b, p. 29, emphasis in original). Sex education therefore consists in telling children and adolescents the scientific truth, whether at home or at school, while keeping conformity, as seen above, with religious morals. Albuquerque does not stray from the established moral codes; he uses them and turns them into legitimate instruments of persuasion. In the construction of this new sensitivity around sexuality through scientific discourse, it is medical knowledge that sets what is right or wrong, moral or immoral; it proposes the internalization of new meanings regarding sexuality, thus creating ‘new morals’ of order and control which do not stray from the purposes of society’s regulating institutions at the time, i.e., the State and the church. It is, from the perspective of biopolitics (Foucault, 2008), the construction of new truths about sex, which creates a new form of authorization over the individual and the population by means of truths that are legitimized by medical knowledge and directed to authorized ears and situations.

The discourses established by the CBES in favor of science and of the ‘new morals’ were incorporated by doctors in Mato Grosso. An example of this is the text by Peri Alves Campos, MD, an editor at *Folha da Serra* from 1933 to 1940, about ‘How to start the infant’s education’. The text results from a lecture he delivered in Campo Grande as part of a series of ‘lectures about children’ that were held by the Campo Grande Library Society<sup>15</sup>. In the text, the doctor praises psychoanalysis, eugenics and pedagogy, “[...] united for man’s spiritual and moral liberation” (Campos, 1935, p. 11). Regarding the new precepts for the education of infants, Campos, who was from Campo Grande, highlighted the danger of caressing children, since “[...] the child’s system does not require our kissing or hugging [...] such procedure is exceedingly criminal, since by awakening children to sexual life, it makes them nervous, irritated and prepared for enormous suffering in the future”. Parents should control, through attentive and intelligent observation, the habits and emotions of children, “[...] so that we can educate them scientifically”. And whenever parents do not know how to handle some problem of this nature in the child, “[...] they should see a doctor who is able to teach them how to proceed” (Campos, 1935, p. 11). Affection could not be physical, since physical contact would awaken children to sexual life. In line with CBES’ campaign, Campos prescribed, with an argument of medical authority, new attitudes for parents on child education, based on the control of bodies, thus aligning both material and symbolic dimensions in their arguments.

The second observation about Campos’ lecture regards his encouraging the presence of a doctor as our social subject in the education of new meanings and sensitivities, thus proposing new ways of thinking and feeling about and acting on the education of children. About the imposition of the figure of the doctor upon the family, Costa (1999, p. 77) says it was “[...] one of the most important achievements of the social hygiene movement”. By causing this institution to adopt them, “[...]”

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<sup>15</sup> About the Campo Grande Library Society, see Passone-Rodrigues and Moreira (2019).

doctors tackled the lack of social prestige they suffered from, and created a new source of financial benefits”. And so gradually, as the author says, “[...] the confessor and the priest of a son were replaced by this kind and firm, sweet and tyrannical figure, the family doctor” (Costa, 1999, p. 77).

Regarding children’s sexual education, Fernando do Valle, MD, stressed the importance of the ‘truth and opportunity’ factors by saying that “Answering truthfully, at a child mentality level, the questions that one’s children formulate about things related with sex, is what the child’s sex education by his parents consists in” (Valle, 1934, p. 8). According to Albuquerque, “[...] the child who is used to seeing explanations always in the same way by everyone about how the airplane flies; how the automobile moves without being pulled by horses; how the telephone transmits voice through distance; etc. [...]” will not conform to the “[...] discrepancy of answers given to his questions about his brother’s birth; he thus concludes that people want to conceal the truth about it and are misleading him” (Albuquerque, 1934a, p. 27). Therefore, the new sensitivities applying to the sex education of children prescribed the ‘truth about the biology of sex’ and took advantage of children’s curiosity.

“After the individual reaches puberty [...]”, what is best for them “[...] is clear and full initiation administered by ‘male and female doctors’ about everything regarding the individual’s sexuality, so that they will not become the unconscious victim of sexual perversions and venereal diseases” (Albuquerque, 1934h, p. 46, emphasis added). The distinction between male and female doctors leads us to think that male doctors would take care of boys, and female doctors, of girls. To this argument we should add the fact that, in this period, coeducation was disputed by Catholic and liberal educators. The Manifesto of New Education Pioneers, published in 1932, advocated, among other things, lay, free and mandatory education, as well as ‘coeducation’ (Manifesto..., 1932). However, as Almeida (2006, p. 83) reminds us, “[...] because the coeducational system meant equal education for both sexes, it would clash with Catholic dictates and the nature of the Brazilian people, who considered moral questions as superior to the appeals of modernity”<sup>14</sup>.

In his publications, Albuquerque refers to equality of sexes and says that sex education should be provided for men and women alike, and that the term ‘fragile sex’ is antieducational, with deplorable and dreadful consequences:

It is erroneous to assume that one sex is superior to the other, that one sex is meant to dominate and the other to be dominated, that one is strong and the other weak. The concept of a ‘weak sex’ has gained such an appearance of truth that this term is viewed today as equivalent to ‘female sex’. The antieducational power of this

<sup>14</sup> The Organic Law of secondary education (1942) recommended girls only establishments for female students, with less hours of physical education and the inclusion of household finance as a school subject. Due to financial reasons, single-sex education was diminished in later legislation.

term is huge, and its consequences in the mentality of those who grew used to hearing it and repeating it are really deplorable and dreadful. The term 'weak sex', which lacks critical sense and even meaning because it is detached from reality, has done, to this day, nothing but arouse competition between sexes and launch a fierce fight between woman and man. (Albuquerque, 1935b, p. 36, emphasis in original).

Albuquerque's scientific discourse seems to argue that the differences between men and women were not biologically justified, with no connotation of superiority or inferiority for one sex or the other. However, one cannot find in his discourse or in CBES' discourse an opening to discuss the emancipation of women or the right to pleasure. In accordance with the norms and good behaviors that were valid at the time, virginity was considered suitable for women, while men would have greater sexual needs; this discourse remains until at least the 1960s (Rago, 1985) and was not challenged by Albuquerque<sup>15</sup>.

About female sex education in the *Folha da Serra* magazine, Albuquerque sees a progress in the fact that young women can become aware of subjects like pregnancy, childbirth and abortion.

Young women no longer leave the company of their mothers' friends when one of them breaks the news that some friend of theirs is pregnant, gave birth, suffered an abortion, etc., nor do mothers tell them to 'go and see if someone is knocking at the door' when they want to deal with these matters in their circle of friends (Albuquerque, 1934g, p. 7, emphasis in original).

Back to the question whether sex education should constitute a specific subject in the school context, the answer is no, there is no need for that. The topic of sexuality did not have to be a school subject in the curriculum; it was sufficient to include it in general hygiene and natural history classes, in a moderate manner, i.e., it should be neither neglected nor exaggerated. Introduction to the topic should obey solely the 'opportunity' factor, and it should be initiated by parents, continued by teachers at school and completed by doctors. Regarding the ideal period to deal with topics of sexuality, Albuquerque believed that the 'sexual truths' should be gradually 'revealed' since childhood, because revealing them "[...] only from puberty onwards, after they were distorted in childhood, is a task as vain as trying to straighten out a tree trunk that was intentionally bent". (Albuquerque, 1934h, p. 46)

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<sup>15</sup> His training in urology and his writings lead us to believe that Albuquerque and the CBES emphasized male physical and mental health. As a doctor, Albuquerque was also known for his efforts to institutionalize andrology, a science that should study male sexual problems. He created, developed and publicized the *Jornal de Andrologia*, which circulated from 1932 to 1938.

Inasmuch as it proposed sex education as content but not as a specific school subject, the CBES shows its limitations regarding proposals of new models of practice around the sexuality of men and women, in an effort not to break with the social representations in effect about the expressiveness and potentials of the human body, in a discursive effort to conform proposals of new behaviors to 1930s sociocultural standards.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The publication of texts about sex education in the *Folha da Serra* magazine in Campo Grande, Mato Grosso, in the 1930s – proposing the substitution of religious morals by scientific morals, as such texts viewed sex education from a rational perspective, in line with discourses circulating in the Brazilian capital – gave the periodical a modern aspect, in line with its objectives, which helps explain the relevance of publishing such contents, despite the awareness that addressing sexuality or sex education does not by itself ensure social emancipation or transformation. The magazine incorporated the scientific discourse about sex education by Dr. Albuquerque, from Rio de Janeiro, in order to show the ‘progress and aggrandizement’ of that distant part of Brazil, as it followed closely the latest trends in this discussion.

*Folha da Serra* was the stage for relations of discursive forces about sex education as it sought to establish new meanings and sensitivities for society in Mato Grosso by means of the authority of medical-scientific discourse. Its readers witnessed an attempt to impose the ‘true Sexual Morals’ founded on the scientific postulates of sexual physiology and hygiene, to the detriment of the ‘old morals’ guided by the ‘terrible shackles’ that had long been ‘mistakenly imposed on humankind’. Thus, by means of different discursive instruments, the CBES challenged the enunciation that treated sexuality as immorality, and it criticized the silence about sexual questions, which should be approached from a biological perspective based on the codes of sexual science, in line with the precepts of physiology and hygiene, without breaking with established social models.

This analysis allowed observing the mobilization of discourses in the press by the CBES, a mobilization that aimed to transform sensitivities, in line with the education of corporal meanings, as well as to create new pedagogical practices for sex education in the 1930s by relating nature and culture elements. CBES’ campaign made evident conflicting representations about the concepts of body, sex and sexuality, with medical-scientific discourses of a prescriptive nature that were based on the material and cultural dimensions of human life and guided by the old regulating institutions of society, though with a new way of authority consent over individuals



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