

The Education of Trans People*: reports of exclusion, abjection, and struggle

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ABSTRACT – The Education of Trans People*: reports of exclusion, abjection, and struggle. This article presents the results of an investigation about the processes of exclusion, abjection, and struggle from trans people* as an attempt to enforce their rights to education. The qualitative research was conducted drawing from five interviews and the analyses were organized in three axes: exclusion with the interruption of schooling; going back to school in adult life, and the new perspectives of life upon gaining access to and remaining at school. The results reveal students facing excluding processes who challenge gender rules regarding their right to education or, or even their right to live under situations of abjection. However, they also show ways to rethink gender relations in the struggle for accessing and remaining at a less excluding school.

Keywords: Right to Education. Gender. Trans People*.

RESUMO – A Educação de Pessoas Trans*: relatos de exclusão, abjeção e luta. Este artigo apresenta resultados de investigação sobre os processos de exclusão, abjeção e luta de pessoas trans* na tentativa de garantir seus direitos à educação. A pesquisa qualitativa foi realizada a partir de cinco entrevistas e as análises foram organizadas em três eixos: a exclusão com a interrupção dos estudos; a retomada na vida adulta e as novas perspectivas de vida com a conquista do acesso e da permanência na escola. Os resultados revelam processos excludentes de estudantes que desafiam as normas de gênero quanto ao direito à educação ou, até mesmo, à vida com situações de abjeção. No entanto, também mostram formas de repensar as relações de gênero na luta pelo acesso e pela permanência em uma escola menos excludente.

Palavras-chave: Direito à Educação. Gênero. Pessoas Trans*.

Introduction

The starting point of this article is a qualitative research (Xavier, 2020) intended to expose the processes of exclusion, abjection, and struggle experienced by those who identify themselves as trans people* as an attempt to enforce their right to education. The results of such reflection reveal this right has historically been denied to certain groups, excluding processes experienced by students who challenge the gender rules regarding their right to education or even the right to live. However, the existence of trans people* in the school ambience has also shown us ways of fighting so that schools are less excluding.

As we approach the theme in question it is important to acknowledge that advocacy for the right to education is consensual in Brazil. Our recent history records different dimensions of this right, including the democratization of the access to public schooling and the guarantee students will remain in school. The right to education is provided by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Brazil, of 1988 (CF/1988), through article 205, located in Section I of Chapter III, which acknowledges it is a duty of the State and of the family. Also, the same article assigns education with the functions of full development of the individual, preparation for the labor market, and the exercise of citizenship (Brazil, 1988).

There are countless studies on the subject and it is not our purpose here to thoroughly map them, but rather discuss the right to education of trans people*. We have been looking for contributions from different perspectives and theoretical frameworks to problematize the fact that, even if the 1988 Federal Constitution indicates the right to education is to be enforced, such right is not the reality of groups characterized by mismatching gender, sexuality, ethnicity/race, and social class.

Within the limits of this paper, we point out the importance of discussing gender in education as a concept capable of overcoming the innate and binary notion of the difference between men and women, to grasp the multiple socially constructed political meanings of feminine and masculine and condemn a system of social relations of power defined by the cis-heteronormative² masculine domination, intended to regulate gender and sexuality (Scott, 2012). From this point of view, education cannot be considered yet a right held by all people.

Nevertheless, the absence of certain individuals in the educational institutions is not unheard of in Brazil. The 19th and 20th centuries were characterized by processes that sought to rank and naturalize differences in ethnicity and race, class, sexual orientation, and gender. Such processes were associated with citizenship being denied to groups consisting of women, indigenous, black and trans people* completely excluded from the access to education (Oliveira, 2002; Andrade, 2012).

Along the 1980s, there were great efforts to expand the right to education. The Constitution expressed, as an educational principle, the conditions for access and permanence as well as the State's duty of

providing quality education to all and each citizen, with no prejudice regarding origin, race, sex, color, age, or any other forms of discrimination.

Within this context, there are examples such as the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA) – designed from the regulation of article 227 in the CF/1988, which represents a landmark since it acknowledges, for the very first time in the legislation, children and adolescents as right-holding subjects – and the Act of the National Education Bases and Guidelines – passed in 1996 (Oliveira, 2002).

Since the CF/1988, a great deal of changes can be observed in the political and economic fields under international pressures combined with the feminist movement and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, Transsexual, and Intersex (LGBTI) people in order to introduce gender issues in public education.

The administrations of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva made, even though not systematically, investments in fighting social inequalities and discriminations (Vianna, 2018). Along that period, we have seen the advocacy for educational plans and programs covering the matter of diversity in general and, more specifically, the issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual diversity.

However, this wave to introduce gender in the public educational policies has never been linear or free of conflicts. Many of the educational inequalities remain and need efforts by the public authorities in order to be tackled, inasmuch as the State “[...] has shown to be refractory when it comes to enforce such rights” (Oliveira, 2002, p. 41). More recently, conservative proposals have strengthened in the political arenas, even if incompatible with democratic ideals and the human rights, they were crucial in gradually reducing and disqualifying the social policies intended to lower the social inequalities.

Among the sectors affected by the inability to access the human rights, the LGBTI population must be highlighted as they have been claiming for year the legal recognition of their rights. We grant special highlight to trans people* – the focus of our attention in this paper – as they have been facing a series of difficulties regarding having their rights to education acknowledged and enforced in a society heavily based on heteronormativity. Philosopher Judith Butler (1999) is our reference regarding the concept of abjection³, which so well encompasses the disqualification of the bodies of trans people* as a result of the excluding gender rules. Carla Rodrigues and Paula Gruman (2021, p. 68) summarize the philosopher’s reasoning by saying: “Butler applies the concept of abjection to the existences that do not fit into the heterosexual normative patterns, resuming its bordering nature, of exclusion”.

Such bordering and excluding nature is clearly expressed in Brazil, the nation that most kill trans people* all over the world. For the purpose of documenting the violence perpetrated against trans people*, the *Dossiê dos assassinatos e da violência contra travestis e transexuais brasileiras em 2021* [dossier of murders and violence against Brazilian

transvestites and transsexuals (Benevides, 2022)] recorded at least 140 murders of trans people* in 2021. Data indicated by Bruna Benevides and Sayonara Nogueira (2021, p. 30) also highlight the articulation between transphobia and racism by pointing out that approximately 80% of the Brazilian trans people* murders were against black transvestites and trans women*.

The Brazilian government has been neglecting the debates on public policies for the LGBTI populations, as suggests Michelle Miranda (2018). There is not, to this day, any tool to quantify the information about the death and violence against trans people* in Brazil. The alarming data on the violence LGBTI people have endured draw the attention both from the agencies advocating for citizenship and from those who protect the human rights such as the United Nations Organization in Brazil (UN Brazil).

Several studies report persistence prejudice, threats and physical assaults against LGBTI students in Brazilian schools. A survey by the Brazilian Association of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transsexuals (ABLGT, 2016) shows that 73% of non-heterosexual students have already been verbally abused at school, and physical aggressions are mentioned one out of four students. Considering that trans youth* is directly exposed to violence, problematizing trans people* right to education becomes more and more imperative. Data revealed by Bruna Benevides and Sayonara Nogueira (2021) corroborate the everyday violence experienced by this population:

15 years old was the age of the youngest trans adolescent murdered in 2019. There were three 15-year-old victims and two of them were stoned to death. The third victim, in addition to being beaten up to death, was hanged and her body was found with signs of sexual violence (Benevides; Nogueira, 2021, p. 30).

Inability to utilize the social name still persist at the schools as well as the exclusion of trans people* from the school ambience, “[...] which disrupts the Right to Education of a significant portion of the population” (Benevides, 2022, p. 43).

However, changes have also gained strength from 2000s on. On one hand, the activism of trans people* in Brazil becomes more visible (Carvalho, 2015). The same country that murders also sees 30 trans people* being elected in 2020, as emphasize Maria Clara Araújo dos Passos and Carla Cristina Garcia (2021), achievements resulting from a four-decade-long process of struggles for their collective interests.

The State is confronted with new meanings; gender and sexuality are now included in the school curriculum. The rights of the individuals whose sexualities are belittled start to gain space both in resisting the normative order (Andrade, 2012; Bortolini; Pimentel, 2018) and in designing educational policies. In turn, such policies are based on respect for the human rights in order to ensure access and permanence from Elementary School to Graduate Studies (Vianna, Bortolini, 2020; York,

2020). Some studies point out that new perspectives associated with the path taken by the public educational policies aimed at gender, sexual diversity, and the LGBTI population in the national scenario, stressing the importance of researching the presence of trans people* in educational contexts (Andrade, 2012; Sierra, 2013; York, 2020; Matos, 2022). Studies questioning the pathologic aspects of sexual diversity and the multiple identity positions become more relevant in the field of education (Cavaleiro, 2009; Junqueira, 2009; Louro, 1997; 2009).

Thus, in the educational area, it is already possible to condemn the harsh places where trans teachers* seek to practice their profession, the highlight being the works by Dayanna Brunetto Carlyn dos Santos (2017), Luma Andrade (2012), Marco Antonio Torres (2012), Maria Clara Araújo dos Passos (2020), Marília Neri Matos (2022), Marina Reidel (2013), Neil Franco, and Graça Aparecida Cicillini (2016), among several others. But, even relying on studies about the struggles in include trans people* in the schools, it is still urgent to reflect, as we consider it of utmost important, about the processes that withdraw from trans people* their right to education or, even, their right to live. Judith Butler argues that people that are intersex transsexual or transvestite carry, in the very way of identifying themselves, some questioning of the alleged correlation between the assigned sex, gender, and desire. However, precisely because they question such logic, they become abject, that is, they people who are socially death with as non-human. This happens as such people are immersed in a world where the coherence among the types of gender, assigned sex, and desire are naturalized and only those able to combine the three categories are considered human beings:

The abject designates here precisely those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which – and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation (Butler, 1993, p. 3).

We see it, therefore, as extremely relevant the considerations by Butler (2011), in *Precarious life*, when she portrays the abject bodies that are subordinated and excluded from the right to education in order to construct the dialogue with the subjects of our research which originated this article and was conducted with five trans people*, member of the *Luana Barbosa dos Reis* LGBTI Citizenship Center, also known as CCLGBTI North.

Open since 29 August, 2016, the objective of the CCLGBTI North is to welcome LGBTI people under social vulnerability, psychological and/or physical violence due to discrimination against gender identity or sexual orientation. It has a link with the Social Reintegration Project *Transcidadania*⁴ conducted in the city of São Paulo. The services provided by CCLGBTI North are divided in two great areas:

a) to defend human rights – including assistance to victims of violence, discrimination, or prejudice; psychological and legal support and social work with a follow-up for filing police reports, and other types of guidance;

b) to promote LGBTI citizenship – with the help and support to public municipal services by means of raising awareness of civil servants, conflict mediation, lectures, seminars, and debates.

The research has not focused on the municipal center neither is this article; it is just the place where trans people* could be found as they were seeking rights that had been denied along their entire lives, including the opportunity to resume their schooling.

Intertwined stories, Threads that go astray

Judith Butler (2015), in dialogue with Friedrich Nietzsche reflects over ethics or moral issues in the sphere of social relations. For Butler, in his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche says in a controversial manner that the story of “oneself” takes place when we are challenged, that is, when we are forced to tell a story of ourselves by means of a system of justice and punishment. In other words, the accusation would lead us to report due to the fear of a retaliation that might come or be enforced. That is, the emergence of one’s own story or the need to become a self-narrating subject is fostered by constraint.

Butler (2015) considers it narrow Nietzsche’s (2009) concept of one’s self account. As she puts it, Nietzsche does not take into consideration the several situations in which we are invited to give an account, focusing on punishment, on fear, or on the original aggression that is part of every human being. For Butler, there might be other reasons, in addition to fear and punishment, for someone provide a report of him or herself:

Giving an account thus takes a narrative form, which not only depends upon the ability to relay a set of sequential events with plausible transitions but also draws upon narrative voice and authority, being directed toward an audience with the aim of persuasion. [...]. In this sense, narrative capacity constitutes a precondition for giving an account of oneself and assuming responsibility for one’s actions through that means (Butler, 2005, p. 12).

We find it significant to briefly present some of the limitations pointed out by Butler (2015) of Nietzsche’s view about the origin of one’s account also because they warn us that, if one gives an account of him

or herself in response to a questioning, they will engage and place themselves in relation to the receiver with whom and to whom one speaks. For Butler, there is a limit in self-recognition and it is necessary to acknowledge one's own opacity. We give our self-account to ourselves and to the other(s), each account takes place in a given context of questioning. The moment someone is connected to a reflexive activity and, at the same time, reconstructing him or herself by thinking about oneself, he or she is talking to the other and is developing a relationship with that other by means of the language.

Indeed, it should be noted that nobody can give a full account of oneself due to certain limitations of doing so. By telling one's own story, there is a commitment to what is being told, while simultaneously this account is provided with the purpose of summarizing the reasons that led that individual to become what she or he is. It is not a simple task, as the moment the subject attempts to connect one fact to another and identify given periods as central aspects of her or his own story, they end up staging themselves in their narrative.

And that was the perspective embraced here when we were seeking to cluster the accounts collected, based on this ambivalence of giving account of oneself as something that slips away and cannot be considered in a fixed or complete way. But, also, despite its limitations, a committed story is told. The accounts we have analyzed were drawn from semi-structured interviews with trans people* in different age brackets and experiences in relation to their schooling; all were participants in CCLGBTI North.

The interviews were selected because they were considered the most adequate to understand and analyze the issues related to the right to education of trans people* with the purpose of identifying how their relationship with Basic Education were established and experienced.

After the early contact with the trans people* interested in participating in the research, procedures necessary to obtain their agreement were presented, the Free Informed Consent Form was sent, which explained it was required by the Ethics Committee to ensure the interviews would remain confidential and the ethical treatment of the interviewees. The five trans people* – mentioned in this paper by fictitious names – are at least 18 years old, with different educational experiences. Valentina, 40 years old, identifies herself as a black, Catholic trans woman*, attending the 8th grade in middle school. Rebeca, 40 years old as well, defines herself as a white, lapsed Catholic trans woman*, attending 11th grade (high school). Antonio and Maria Eduarda are both 45 years old. Antonio is a spiritualist trans man*, belonging to the Brazilian race, attending the 10th grade (high school). In turn, Maria Eduarda defines herself as a brown, spiritist transvestite, attending the 5th and the 6th grade (elementary and middle school). Finally, the junior in the group, Arlequina is white, 28-year old trans woman* who has no religion and is a student in elementary school.

In spite of the distinctions above, the group shared a common aspect: they all had resumed Basic Education schooling thank to the en-

couragement provided by the very CCLGBTI North. The interview script was organized in order to address the current relationship they had with the school, their memories of school, when and how they found out their gender identity, and the relationship they used to have with the school before, during, and after going through the process. The accounts draw near in many aspects, such as the experience of exclusion, of abjection, and the difficulties in taking their gender identity, the relationship with their family, with the workplace, and the experiences of transphobia they went through along their educational paths.

The memories of what they had experienced at school also reveal that, in addition to the perception of being different, a heavy process of inequality begins reverberating in other aspects of their lives. The school thus shows difficult it is to deal with students who challenge the gender rules. And, depending on the circumstances, the school takes a stand of concealing the experiences of discrimination or reiterating the normalizing processes underpinning the heterosexual ground, in an attempt to fit together the dissenters of the gender rule. This leads to students being expelled or dropping out. These trans people* tell their stories, and their narratives come close to so many stories already recorded, even they if they are constantly neglected by the educational policies that are allegedly democratic.

Yet, in adult life, after their gender transition, going back to school through the access facilitated by CCLGBTI North ends up opening new perspectives of life so that these people can exercise basic citizenship rights which other citizens have always been able to exercise.

Thus, the experience of trans people* at school not only stir up the hegemonic notions of gender but they also instigate to re-think the school environment and invite cisgender people to reflect over the privileges some groups hold, which bring about inequalities to others.

That is why we sought to explore the moment and the reasons for being excluded from or interrupting school; the circumstances of re-summing the schooling process that had be interrupted and the way the access to education may bring along new perspectives of life.

Stories of Exclusion: I dropped out of school because I was not being accepted in that standard

The early school experiences come close, in many aspects, especially when the school turns out to be a hostile environment, making believe that there is only one legitimate of living non-hegemonic femininities and/or masculinities.

The early memories of school and the relationship with childhood and/or adolescence are characterized by discriminations experienced and often translated into school exclusion. If, as Miguel Arroyo (2010) argues, school exclusion may be the cause of all other exclusions, in the case of the stories told here, school drop-out, sometimes after being expelled from home by one's own family and from the right to access a number of institutions.

In the case of Arlequina, she didn't know she was a "transsexual": "[...] I found it out when I was 13 years old. [...] I'm a little girl who was born a slightly different". And even before being able to name herself, she was denied the possibility of at least going to school.

Furthermore, not all people drop out from school due to the same reasons. In the case of Rebeca, survival depended on having a family member with a job, that is why she interrupted her study at the age 14 years. In turn, Antonio, Maria Eduarda, and Valentina tell they quit school due to the suffering and discrimination they went through during the early experiences at school.

The early remembrances of school refer to a self-perception as someone who is different from the others. Difference, systematically transformed into inequality. Some people tell mention a perception of themselves as being different since childhood. Other, when they attempt to re-read their past, they name the violence suffered along childhood and adolescence:

Since I was little, at school, folks would tell repetitive jokes, call names such as 'faggot, queer', things like that, but I didn't know what they were talking about, that why I simply dismissed it [...] And those jokes, all the time, bullying, that they used to say of children. But I didn't know what that was all about. At that time, I didn't know who I was. I didn't know actually there was a GL world. That world, y'know? I wasn't aware, not even in my dreams. For me, people were calling me names and I didn't understand what all that was about. How old was I? Eight, nine, ten years (Rebeca).

Then, when I found out I was very young. I think I was on 2nd grade, or so, when I realized I wasn't what I wanted to be (Valentina).

And, at school, I had a difficulty because when I became a teenager, I had an interest in the girls, not the boys. That was a problem in my life, I bullied by the entire school [...] because at the time you didn't call it bullying, right? (Antonio).

These experiences reveal us what Michel Foucault (2014) calls a school that disciplines, regulates, and surveils the norm that establishes ways of living gender and sexuality. As suggests Willian Siqueira Peres (2009), when a child or an adolescent acknowledges their will and desires as different from classmates of the same sex and/or same gender identity, homophobia begins to be internalized and it may last for the rest of their lives.

Subjects who construct their sexuality or gender identity on a normative basis, that is, in agreement with the sex assigned to them, and who reproduce behaviors that are expected according to the binary logic of feminine/masculine usually enjoy a privileged position in relation to those who experience process of building their identity in a non-normative fashion. On the other hand, the privilege of a certain group changes into processes of exclusion and abjection towards the other groups which, by infringing those models taken for granted, not only are hallmarked in negative ways, they are also deprived of rights.

Gender rules operate since the earliest childhood and the bodies carry meaning even before they are born. Thus, if a hegemonic view on gender finds consistency and matches the assigned to a gender, consequently, this view is not only reductionist but it also grants privileges to those who match such binary logic.

In most of the accounts, discrimination, now understood as bullying, homophobia, or transphobia has caused students to drop out of school. Valentina quit school as she was in 8th grade. She says she felt afraid of her classmates at the time, as she was the target of countless threats:

[...] Then, when they threatened me for first time, I hid. The second time, I hid again. But there came a moment when I could no longer hide because I already felt I was being suffocated as a child, because I had to eat my meal in the bathroom, even if I didn't want to go into the boys' bathroom which I was ashamed of. But I had to go in there and hide if I wanted to eat [...] because there a gang who stole the meals of others (Valentina).

Valentia recalls that one day a "brat" says to her "Ah, today I'm gonna fall flat on that faggot's face". First, she thought she could not run away from the situation as, if she escaped at that moment, she would have to spend her entire life running away. She remembers her mother's lessons of not taking home the problems that happened in other places. Her mother said that if someday she got home to listen to an assault being told, she would "be beaten" again for not defending herself. Thus, threatened by the classmate, she hit who threatened her before being hit herself. And she describes it as a stunning moment in her life: "[...] it was when I stood up, hit and I didn't know how strong I was, that ability to command respect within the school, to empower myself." From that moment on, despite the jokes still being told about her, the boys quit harassing her. However, even so she dropped out of school and, when she was trying to come back 20 years later, she says that students "[...] threw stones" towards her. As Sara York (2020, p. 51) points out, the clandestine body, fugitive from cis-heteronormativity, confronts jokes, oppressions, and prejudices all along the school path: "[...] a life woven upon violence."

Violence is also part Antonio's memories, since he was a teenager, when he found out he was interested in girls, not boys. One time, he skipped school for four days. Then, his classmates were looking for him because, if he didn't return, the teacher would impose suspension on the whole class. Antônio, in his innocence, in his own words, came back to school but went on suffering with the same jokes and gossip about him. When he reached high-school, he decided to quit school:

I had no longer strength to go on because I didn't know who I was, I didn't know where I belonged. And that: I couldn't focus, I have always been a kind of hyperactive child. Then nothing seemed to catch my attention, I didn't pay any attention. Then, due to my rocky life, as a teenager, with no one to talk to, facing this situation of not knowing [...]. Because, today, I know it was not OK, that I should have gone on. But, as nobody was backing me up to shed some light [...]. I acted on instinct. I quit school and

began to work. That that led me to underemployment, right? Because if you don't have knowledge and skills, you end up being left behind. People get promotions [...] And, being a Trans person* it is hard to get a cool job, isn't it? (Antonio).

In Antonio's case, the hegemonic view on gender not only supposes *correct* ways of experiencing gender relations, but it also determines which are the *healthy* ways of experiencing sexuality. And what would be the only *healthy* way of living sexuality? The answer is heterosexuality, more and more consistent and reiterated by the social institutions and their actors and actresses, by assuming such connection among gender, sex, and sexuality. Consequently, people who don't fit into the norm and discontinue this sequence, on one hand, are sidelined in the concerns of institutions such as the school, and on the other hand, those people are necessary to "[...] circumscribe the outlines of those seen as normal" (Louro, 2009, p. 92).

In turn, Maria Eduarda's relationship with the school is pervaded by comings and goings. She quit school in her early teenage, when she still identified herself as a gay boy:

I quit school because they were no longer accepting me in that standard. Because when I was going to school, I was gay, not a transvestite yet. [...]. At school, as soon as I began going to school I was bullied and then I didn't want to go anymore, then I quit [...]. I quit going to school because there was too much prejudice (Maria Eduarda).

Later, she tried to resume her studies, older at the age of 25 years, when she already identified herself as a transvestite in terms of her gender identity. Her accounts show the intrinsic relationship between school experience and violence. She considers she suffered discrimination and went through homophobic situation in both experiences. She was even assaulted in her adolescence, which apparently didn't happen anymore when she became a transvestite.

Written years before, the ethnographic account by Luma Andrade (2012, p. 247) seems to describe the reality here sized up in this research:

Transvestites being denied the classroom results in confinement and exclusion, which make them deviant and unwelcome. When this happens in the school environment, the pressure is usually so intense that it drives transvestites to drop out of school, but then the disseminated idea is that it was their own choice.

Gender violence appears in different ways. However, transphobia, the generalized hostility consisting of "[...] prejudices and discriminations suffered by transgender people, in general" (Jesus, 2012, p. 7), is part of the field where the violence against LGBTI people is produced. Likewise, it also affects people who don't comply with the heterosexual mold. However, the most dramatic effect of transphobia lies in the outcome of the processes of subjectivity and identity construction in trans people* (Peres, 2009).

At school, such effect strongly affects the educational trajectories of and the attempt to socially belong by youths who are experiencing gender and/or sexual identity construction outside the norm. Some accounts highlight the strategies. Like Rebeca, when recollecting being called “little faggot” and “sissy” at school, she says she suffered but she had to deal with boys who mocked, laughed, and made fun of her. She developed a way of not being impacted by these events. She used to say to herself that was not important.

Yet, not paying attention to what other people said shows the necessary strengthening of LGBTI youths to deal with the ostensive discrimination coming from classmates, teachers, family members and even acquaintances.

Unlike other accounts, Rebeca tells that, when she was 14, her parents got a divorce and she had to financially help the family by getting a job; it was outside the school that she found out she was a trans person*.

If Rebeca quits school for a matter of survival, Arlequina in turn wasn't even able to go to school in her childhood or adolescence. She suffered a lot of aggression at home and need to work as a peasant, picking up wood to turn into coal. She remembers that was a very heavy work: “for men”. The aggressions adding up to the exhausting work made her run away from home. Arlequina's accounts reveal she was not at all accepted by her family and, at the same time, by the school, a project of abjection in which some lives “[...] are not considered *lives* and whose materiality is understood as not important”, as reminded by Baukje Prins and Irene Costera Meijer (2002, p. 161).

Thus, schooling for this group is incomplete, precarious or it doesn't even exist. The discriminations they report, still in their early academic path, reveal privileges cis-heteronormative individuals hold in relation to those who confront cis-heteronormativity (Rodvalho, 2017), and this experience no doubt becomes visible at school. That is, challenging the gender rules at school results in an experience hallmarked by discriminations and by a problematic presence in the school ambience.

In fact, the invisibility of sexuality, specifically the sexualities considered non-compliant, may often cause panic and refusal of school actors who increasingly attempt to reiterate the rule and, by doing so, inequalities are maintained and reinforced.

The school is a place where there are curriculum disputes that determine the type of citizenship to be established. Beyond curricular issues, in this institution discourses circulate that influence the processes of teaching and learning, in addition to being the place where criteria are defined in accordance with such discourses. Thus, the dissemination of some heteronormative thinking about the issues associated with gender and sexuality frequently cause the exclusion and abjection of those who alien to the rules pre-established in the school environment. As a result, the school, which should be a space to promote citizenship ends up becoming a space that must be problematized because it ex-

cludes and marginalizes certain individuals. In the excluding context, there are few alternative conducts for the youths. On one hand, dissimulation and silence; on the other hand, violence, public humiliation or segregation (Cavaleiro, 2009; Oliveira, 2017).

As sexuality remains invisible as an issue, and more so the non-compliant sexualities, inequalities are stressed out and reinforced. As says Rogério Junqueira (2009), the homophobic attitudes at school perform an effect of depriving rights, they generate lack of interest, they cause dropout and abandonment, they compromise the transition to work, they undermine self-esteem, and they interfere with the construction of identities.

There are many cases, as those of Maria Eduarda, Antonio and Valentina, where children and adolescents drop out of school due to the hostility they suffer by not complying with the rules. Trans people* may become emotionally weakened as a result of the discriminations they endure, starting with family and reverberating in other institutions and relationships. Depending on how strong is the discrimination institutionally experienced, they will quit school and, in fact, they will be expelled from the schools. In this regard, we can talk about the transphobia performed by the State and its institutions, whose structure is underpinned on cis-heteronormativity.

Exclusion from the school happens not only because these people are outside the institution but due to the circumstances and relationships that keep them away from the school by denying their right to education. And, when this right is denied, what is left? Few possibilities. The first one would be remaining in this system with no guarantees and, at the same time, with no opportunities to enforce their access to quality education. When the former becomes unfeasible, quitting is the only option; leaving; letting it go. And, in this case, school dropout is a limited term as it in fact doesn't show the reason for quitting school, since cis-heteronormativity yearns to eliminate the dissident (Bento, 2011).

Experiencing oppression and exclusion is reinforced inasmuch as the schools remain silent. Silence as the guarantee of the rule (Louro, 1997) hides these individuals and turns out to be interesting for the analyses of educational public policies in relation to meeting the basic citizenship needs such the right to access to and remain at school.

The Coming Back: returning to school after becoming an *old donkey*?

The similarities in the educational paths reported also include the return to school as an adult, after taking on the gender identity of a trans person*, encouraged by the Trans Citizenship Social Reintegration Project.

The opportunities for coming back to school in order to complete basic education and the psychological and legal support offered by CCLGBTI North provide these people, in fact, with conditions of steady-

er financial autonomy so that they can think about projects and look at the labor market with different eyes and, also, they can re-signify their relationship with the school.

However, the accounts are not the same regarding the meaning of coming back to school. The experiences involve from fear to returning to the new perspectives that finishing school may bring.

All the interviewees returned to school through the support received from the Trans Citizenship Social Reintegration Project. Yet, finding out about the project and the possible return to school happened in a different fashion for each of them.

For Arlequina and Maria Eduarda, with deeper stories of subordination, the several services provided by CCLGBTI and returning to school meant an opportunity of minimally leaving a situation of abjection to achieve basic civic right (Butler, 1999). Both were the ones with shorter school paths, those whose financial aid and other services/ rights achieved through the Citizenship Center provided the opportunity of enforcing rights that had not yet been achieved:

I'm in love with the school, because I had never been to a school [...]. I got in it with the wrong foot, y' know? I was a [drug] user. Everybody could tell I was a user, because of my skinny bony appearance [...]. The project is helping me a lot, as a result I quit [using drugs], I'm much better, I have been so longer. The girls said I wouldn't last a month, I'm going to the 7th month (Arlequina).

My mom died six months ago, and yesterday was the 13th, it was her birthday, and I'm seeing a psychologist here at the Trans Citizenship Center, I'm feeling well after I started seeing him. I think I'm a bit depressed, going into some depression, because I felt like giving up everything, and it took me two years to join the project and now that I joined it I'm feeling really good, but I'm still adapting, because it was just me, my mom and my husband. Since I got a divorce and my mother died, now I'm all alone, then I'm adapting to live on my own (Maria Eduarda).

Loneliness and lack of support gain new perspectives as a result of the alternatives presented by the Citizenship Center and the school. Antonio already led a more stabilized life. Being married for 17 years, living in a prime neighborhood in São Paulo and working more often than Arlequina and Maria Eduarda, despite of "filler Jobs" or "moonlighting", once again he counted on the support given by CCLGBTI, going back to school after getting a message:

Because they always pass a message, isn't it, of help, of jobs, and I don't know what else; and she put a message, say there would be a possibility for who... who had not finished high-school and were a Trans [person]. There was an allowance so that you could finish school; and I saw in that the possibility of coming back to school, graduate and go to college ... (Antonio).

Valentina and Rebeca also returned to school through the Citizenship Center. Valentina returned when she was 37 years old, after getting an internship in a Non-Governmental Organization:

And my bosses fell in love with me, from [my] sector and asked me in case a job opening came up if I would like [...]. And then, when [it really] came up my boss called me [...] She said: 'Well then, Valentina, you will have to somehow pay us for the job'. Then I said 'What do you mean?'. She turned to me and said 'Going back to school. This will be our payment' (Valentina).

Rebeca heard about the Trans Citizenship Social Reintegration Project from a friend when she still lived in the city center of São Paulo:

I'm one of the first beneficiaries of the Trans Citizenship [Projeto]. Then I rented a small room, I quit selling myself in the streets, I said my next step would be a job. The school I started going to, [the staff themselves] went to the school, explained about the project, what it was all about. The school is near where I live, which is Education for Youths and Adults. [...] Then I was able to attend the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades. [...] And I am just about to finish [middle school] (Rebeca).

Yet, returning to an environment of which one has memories of oppression not always is an easy task and that is why it makes room for uncertainties:

Then I felt a knot in my throat [...] my stomach stirred up and I said 'Oh my God, after turning into an old donkey, how will I handle school? What is it gonna be like?' I bullshit for a year, then the very next year... [...] I came back to school [...]. And, well, it was a torture (Valentina).

However, despite participating in a project intended for trans people* and having the possibility of studying with other who took a minimally similar path, the experience is not free of setbacks or even discrimination:

I have a teacher just because I'm on 5th, but I have other teachers there, especially the IT teacher who, just for talking to her, you see she is homophobic, she keeps a distance. I have already heard from other girls, not to me because I stay cool, I'm secretive, but my friends are more talkative, so then, they have already experienced some distance from her. [...] We have already discussed that and we all agreed that she is homophobic. All. [...] It is just that she dresses it up, because she is a teacher and she is not allowed to be biased (Maria Eduarda).

[...] There just a few people I'm really not in love with, who go there and are spiteful. Someone who says she's my friend but mocks me, she keeps say that ... because of the clothes I wear. [...] My behavior standard ... doesn't fit in a ...sometimes the girls here say to me 'Arlequina, you have the guts, using such leggings' [...] (Arlequina).

The cases that more clearly show the way homo-lesbo-transphobia affects the life of individuals hallmarked by non-compliant sexual or gender identities at school are experienced by trans people*, which upsets their possibilities of social integration due to the lack of emotional welcoming from friends and family members. And institutional violence to top it up. Such situations cause emotional vulnerability and, in these cases, the answer is to fight, to find strength to handle discrimination.

Discriminations in the school everyday life damage the socialization processes. And even if this experience has already been experienced in the early contact with the school, it tends to happen again in their coming back. This is because we are all immersed in a cis-heteronormative culture. And, although trans people* may at times present innovative, revolutionary or critical discourses, they may equally reproduce discourses and models such as those from Arlequina's classmates when questioning her clothing and her very body.

On the other hand, raising awareness as the LGBTI Citizenship Centers have been doing helps confront situations of discrimination or transphobia and allows trans people* to go on with their study:

The school I go to has been wonderful to all [trans women] who go to that school too. There you even find a banner say the school considered a standard for LGBT, that is why it is marvelous. But here in the project, there are girls going to other schools and they are victims of prejudice. The teacher calls them by their birth names, not by their social names, there is still a lot of prejudice. But the project staff visit the school and talk to the school management, so this is already changing a bit. In my school this is wonderful, but that are girls that are suffering more than me (Maria Eduarda).

The school I used to go, [the project personnel] visited the school, explained what the project was about, and everything else (Rebeca).

I wanna give my best to learn, more and more; I'm a dedicated person. At school, there was a lot of mess, but not anymore because I made... I made the decision of keep aside from the rowdy ones. I stay in the corner, folks call me ... some people say I'm weird, that I'm skinny, but that's even better because, then, I pay attention in class, I'm not there to play jokes, I'm in class to learn (Arlequina).

Their telling about going back to school gives a hint of the possibility of re-signifying an experience quite often marked with pain. Raising awareness of the trans* experience is an example of who the institution can invest and be an ally in confronting inequalities. This could take place in several ways: curricular choices inclusive of sexual diversity, raising awareness of other school actresses and actors, attempting to subvert cis-heteronormative rules, listening to trans* or LGBTI students, and respecting and valuing whoever is different.

Going to School is Opening a New Perspective of Life to Me

Even with all the obstacles and the lack of equal opportunities found along the way, going back to school allows a new way of looking at the world. Although difficulties have be dealt with at school, there is a hope of overcoming the context of discrimination and exclusion, when members of the school community encourage respect, sensitivity, and inclusion by appreciating the differences.

Thus, returning to less hostile environment and the expectancy of exercising rights, including the right to education, builds new perspectives of life:

That was magic to me [...]. Then you say ‘Gee, one more victory achieved, one more mission accomplished. [...] It was a victory of life. Then the 1st, the 2nd, the 3rd grades came. I thought ‘Oh my God, this is not gonna end’. But they ended. Isn’t it? Now I intend to study HR [human relations]. [...] Now I’m doing it, by the end of the year, it is three months long, I will take a course to be a Social Educator which is going to enhance my resumé. And then, next year, as it may be, HR (Valentina).

It’s two years, right? The beginning, I intend to go to college, stuff like that, because I think knowledge is everything. The only thing you take from this life is your knowledge (Antonio).

Look, back then everything was difficult, I was beaten in the street, there was a lot of prejudice, people looked. There is still prejudice today, it is much better. Girls now are not going through not even half of what I had to suffer. Today, the school is wonderful, yes, there is prejudice, but people are respecting more, they already call us by our social name, teachers are wonderful (Maria Eduarda).

The school brings a perspective of respect and continuation for these people as, integrated to the initiatives of the public authorities, it may become an ally in the struggles for rights of trans people*.

Listening to trans people’s* account just as abject narratives would limit the view of the capacities they have at school. The search for rights make them create forms of struggle and resistance amidst this process and, when combined, they produce what Miguel Arroyo (2012, p. 14) defines as “other pedagogies”, pedagogies of resistance:

Victims of historical processes of domination/subjugation carry pedagogies of resistance. They carry historical contexts, the political relations within which subjugated were created, but they also carry with more emphasis the resistances to these contexts and to those social, economic, political, cultural and pedagogical relations.

Following Arroyo’s reasoning, one may say that trans people* resist by fighting for their own survival, by claiming for the right to a life with quality. Thus, they contribute significantly in building new pedagogies, they learn to think in different ways, since thinking is constructed taking into consideration the discriminatory experiences, but also the struggle. Their own views reflect how they read the world, the political perceptions and relations, the questions they raise; that is, they are affirming themselves as subjects.

Thus, new viewpoints may serve as a reference in forming any subject and, as suggested by Marina Reidel (2013) in *Pedagogia do Salto Alto* (high-heel pedagogy), gender relations need to be rethought through new approaches in the school. And, here, a question emerges: what are the pedagogies that trans people* have been producing?

In fact, looking at the trans* experience at school leads to envisage a pedagogy of destabilization, of resistance. In attempting to achieve the right to education, they resist, disobey and throw new forms of opposition by bringing about a series of questions to the school environment (Andrade, 2012).

While, on one hand, trans people* experience exclusion from the school system, and their existence are made invisible, on the other hand, when they return to school and attempt to seek their rights as citizens, they are demanding their rightful place. That is, they demand access but also permanence and equal opportunities when coming across this privileged place occupied by subjects with normative identities and sexualities, since education is not, or at least it should not be, a privilege.

Trans people* at school de-stabilize – sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly – the gender rules and end up questioning the format of the institution itself:

Those who are still living in the mentality of a small world, some day in the future they will fall down, they'll fail and be disappointed, and they will wake up for life because the world is not the way they want, instead, it is the way it should be, as people say, what would the world be like if there was only one color and not so many? (Rebeca).

I just wanted to say that we are winning this battle, we haven't reached where we wanna go [...]. Then I think there is still a long way to go, but we are moving forward, I think in order to get to the point in which everyone is free, to be what they want to be. I think respect is vital (Maria Eduarda).

Because I was telling I left my parent's home due to the fact that I'm different, unable to follow the standard of a good little girl, which brings you some money for sure. No, I wanna run away from being so right and orderly, nothing is orderly in the world, there are people who try to do the right thing, but not ... they are never like this. [...] There are women with shaved heads, women who are sick of this, sick of that, that women with tattoos on their body, there are several types of women. Then, I'm one of the women who is different. I can be different, can't I? Yes, I can (Arlequina).

Those people resist by completing basic education, by getting a real job, by continuing to study, by claiming their rights; not only completing basic education but also the use of the social name, the access and specific treatment in the public health system. And part of what they say gives hints of what they mean by schools being more inclusive:

It is as school that..., you have everything there, special people, normal people, the elderly, then everybody is equal, there are not such things (Rebeca).

In Education for Youths and Adults [...], teachers are excellent. The teacher of Portuguese is well-learned, he has a very good knowledge. Most teachers have good knowledge. Most people have a master's degree. That's why I think everything is excellent. Excellent! What they can teach us, they surely do. They make books available so we can study and all that (Antonio).

Interacting [with] us, bringing us because today at the school I'm going to there are boys who are 14, 15, 18 years old, who had a different idea of what a transvestite was; that transvestites were drug users, transvestites beat you up, transvestites as outcasts. Today the boys are beginning to see us with different eyes, they start looking and realize that we too are members of society, that we too are human beings, that we are not all that

society portrays us [...]. They, they are beginning to see and realize, and get closer to us. I think one day we will win this battle (Maria Eduarda).

Even if many mishaps and challenges still persist for them to go on with their study, when they look back to the path they have trodden at the schools upon joining the Trans Citizenship Social Reintegration Project, the trans people* we have interviewed give us clues about what an inclusive school must be. The experience in Education for Youths and Adults (EJA) shows that the school doesn't necessarily have to be a hostile or frightening place. There are other people looking for new opportunities. The school may gather belongings associated with class, race, sexuality and gender living together, interacting and exchanging knowledge and experiences, as it may also be configured as an institution that is crucial in fighting against the oppressions trans people* suffer.

The key role that education can play is important in order to overcome an excluding scenario:

Once more the role of education will be essential. Despite all difficulties, the school is a place within which and from which new standard can be constructed in terms of learning, conviviality, production and transmission of knowledge, especially if values, beliefs, representations and practices associated with prejudices, discriminations are subverted or shaken regarding racism, sexism, misogyny, and homophobia (Junqueira, 2009, p. 36).

If education has been and it a right historically denied to certain groups, it will keep on being like this as long as there are no equal opportunities, especially for those historically marked with elimination. The same is true while knowledge and practices from people treated as subject are not taken into consideration in the educational processes. But the struggles we have observed and listed here are some kind of hope that it is possible to exist beyond cis-heteronormativity.

Final Remarks

The analysis of the research results presented in this article points to long way to cross in order to universalize the right to education. It is a widely disseminated idea that, if it is not rigorously examined, leaves room for some meritocratic thinking, which holds the subject guilty for not accomplish her or his own schooling. In spite of being a constitutionally granted right, it is not equally enforced to everyone.

Groups hallmarked with non-compliant gender, ethnicity/race, class, and sexual orientation end up unable to exercise their rights and those who identify themselves trans people* experience processes of exclusion, abjection, but they also shape struggles and resistances by attempting to ensure their right to education.

At the schools it is urgent to de-stabilize homophobia and transphobia. These and other forms of discrimination and violence have been problematized on the individual, on the collective, and on the in-

stitutional level, upon condemning the structural nature of violence, of prejudice, and of gender inequalities.

Certainly, the school must not be fully held accountable for the processes trans people* are subjected to in several institutions. Nevertheless, the State must undertake efforts in order to foster public policies intended to ensure equal opportunities and to enforce rights with not distinctions based on gender.

There are many minorities still fighting to be recognized as subjects in order to have access to basic rights, such as the right to come and go, basic citizen rights, to have their gender identity acknowledged and validated, to have access to the public health system, or to have a life expectancy above de 35 years, as is the case of trans people* (Benevides, 2021).

Along the process, in order to win more allies in the struggle for equality, it is indeed necessary to de-stabilize the gender rule. We all have been taught to comprehend unique ways of being, existing, thinking, producing, and reproducing knowledge based on hegemonic perspectives. Due to the mirror we have been given, we have also learned to use ranking criteria of oppression and to define inferiority.

The accounts analyzed here show that, despite the fact that trans people* have story that come together, the oppressions they have suffered are taken into consideration, all of them are unique. But they are also different faces of the experience of being trans* in such an unequal nation. Beyond the violence suffered in several spheres, from the moment they had been perceived as deviant children or adolescents, there are ways of confrontation so that they can make themselves visible as holders of rights and not just as a number in death statistics. All those interviewed in this study have found ways of resisting to the oppressions they have gone through and to make themselves. They came back to school, they returned to the labor market, they made some kind of transition, they pursued their rights, and they made plans for the future.

There is no whimsical conclusion or a recipe here. We do believe that those had been the feasible ways of fighting and resisting. Fight and resistance that are, or should be, of those who have had the opportunity to graduate from school, because complete one's schooling can turn into privileged in relation to people who couldn't exercise the same right. It is no tour differences that keep us apart, but rather the way we deal with them by systematically turning them into inequalities.

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Notes

- 1 Trans people* refers to non-normative gender identities, more specifically of transvestites and/or transsexual people who do not identify with the classification they were assigned at birth, as men or women. We chose to use the asterisk at the end as an attempt to include different forms of identification that may

be located within or outside a binary gender system (Jesus, 2012; Santos, 2017; Carvalho, 2015; Rodovalho, 2017).

- 2 According to Jaqueline Gomes de Jesus (2012, p. 26), cisgender is a concept that “[...] includes people who identify with the gender they were designated when they were born”. Cis-heteronormativity is a concept referring to a set of power relations that normalizes, regulates, idealizes, and institutionalizes cis-genderness as the rule.
- 3 The theoretical category of abjection was originally designed by Bulgarian post-structuralist philosopher Julia Kristeva (1982) who lives in France, in *Powers of Horror: an essay on abjection*, achieving great recognition in the work by feminists such as Judith Butler. It is used here as the main reference to name the bodies which build themselves drawing from exclusion, from what is rejected by cis-heteronormativity.
- 4 The *Transcidadania* (trans citizenship) Social Reintegration Project was designed by the Municipality of São Paulo in partnership with the Municipal Department of Human Rights and Citizenship (SMDHC) and the Municipal Department of Economic Development of Labor (SMDTE) with the purpose of social rehabilitation, reintegration into the labor market and recovery of civic participation of trans people* who struggle against vulnerability, by providing completion of basic schooling. For further information, see Concílio, Amaral, Moreno (2017).

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