OTHER THEMES

Carnaval and Femininities: curriculum-pedagogical aspects on the Brazil-Bolivia border

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ABSTRACT – *Carnaval* and Femininities: curriculum-pedagogical aspects on the Brazil-Bolivia border. This article analyzes the educational dimension related to curriculum-pedagogical elements of femininity in the Corumbá (MS) *Carnaval*. The data analyzed were collected from previous research conducted by the authors. The methodology includes semi-structured interviews and online surveys. Ethnography was used, including in digital environments. The theoretical framework is post-critical in education. The study concludes that the teachings on femininity during the festivities are shaped by hierarchical national differentiations, with internal hierarchies persisting. However, the circulation of power and its arrangements throughout the event do not diminish the prevailing sense of joy associated with the celebration.
Keywords: **Gender. Border. *Carnaval*.**

RESUMO – Carnaval e Feminilidades: aspectos currículo-pedagógicos na fronteira Brasil-Bolívia. O objetivo do artigo é analisar a dimensão educativa que se refere a aspectos currículo-pedagógicos de feminilidades no Carnaval em Corumbá (MS). Os dados foram levantados em pesquisas anteriores realizadas pelos autores. O caráter metodológico envolve entrevistas semiestruturadas e pesquisas on-line. Foi utilizada a etnografia, inclusive em ambiente digital. O referencial teórico é pós-crítico em educação. Conclui-se que o que se ensina em termos de feminilidades por meio dessa festa se dá a partir da diferenciação nacional hierarquizada, mas sem se livrar das próprias hierarquias internas. O modo como circula o poder e se dão os agenciamentos nesse processo não coloca em risco a alegria.
Palavras-chave: **Gênero. Fronteira. Carnaval.**

Introduction

Carnival is a festivity celebrated in various parts of the world and stands out as a defining experience of Brazilian culture (Damatta, 1981), the *Carnaval*[1]. Several musical rhythms shape the Brazilian *Carnaval* and the experiences of those participating in the revelry, such as samba, axé, and frevo. Cities like Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Salvador, and Olinda have become prominent references for *Carnaval* throughout the country. However, there are regional specificities that deserve attention. Among them, it´s possible to experience the *Carnaval* festivities in the Brazil-Bolivia border region, specifically in Corumbá city, in the Pantanal of Mato Grosso do Sul (MS).

As in other locations, in Corumbá, the *Carnaval* gathers residents and tourists from diverse social classes, ethnicities/races, religious denominations, genders, generations, sexualities, and more. These experiences in capitalist contexts could be analyzed considering the economic and business dimensions that accompany them (Carvalho; Madeiro, 2005), as well as the historical dimension of behavioral changes that increasingly incorporate modern values and urban transformations (Souza, 2004; Green, 2000), or even aspects related to public health during and after the festive period (Porto, 2005). However, the objective here is to analyze the educational dimension concerning curriculum-pedagogical aspects of femininities that the festival presents in this border city.

This text draws from data collected in part from a master's thesis authored by the lead author of this article, defended within the Graduate Program in Education at the Pantanal Campus (PPGE-CPAN) of the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS), entitled *"Currículo e pedagogia cultural no carnaval de Corumbá/MS: as baterias das escolas de samba e a produção de masculinidades"* (Curriculum and cultural pedagogy in the Corumbá/MS *Carnaval*: the samba schools´ *baterias*[2] and the production of masculinities) (Helena, 2022). Additionally, we incorporate reflections from a completed research project conducted by the co-author, titled "*Gênero, sexualidade e diferenças: normas e convenções sociais na fronteira Brasil-Bolívia"* (Gender, sexuality, and differences: norms and social conventions on the Brazil-Bolivia border) (Duque, 2019a). Drawing on these two studies, we now aim to refine the previously gathered data to address the focus in the preceding paragraph.

According to a bibliographic survey, we found no similar research in border contexts using the same theoretical frameworks and methods as ours. These two studies, which enable the following analyses, were conducted using semi-structured interviews (Lüdke; André, 1986) with various residents, both in person and remotely/synchronously. Additionally, online research was conducted on journalistic websites, YouTube channels, and social media profiles. Ethnography (Magnani, 2009), including digital ethnography (Leitão; Gomes, 2017), was also

employed across different online spaces of sociability. Methodologically, we integrated these diverse sources of information to propose new analyses.

We understand that the researcher-participant relationship was established based on ethical agreements, and during ethnographic encounters or interviews, even when conducted remotely/synchronously. None of the researchers had access to participants before the research began or before they were invited to participate. Part of our ethical agreements included sharing our contact information, ensuring participants' anonymity, explaining the research objectives, making them feel comfortable, and offering the option to withdraw from the study at any time should they wish.

The interactions in the field or during the interviews were also considered in data production. At various times, factors such as having little knowledge of *Carnaval* (not being 'in the loop'), limiting the communication to the research context, not identifying as heterosexual, not being born in a border city, holding a higher level of formal education compared to the interlocutors, or possessing a different ethno-racial identity from those participating in the research, influenced data production. In other words, while the objectivity of the research focus was maintained, the interactions involved affections, subjectivities, and materialities that impacted our data and analyses (Magnani, 2009).

This methodological approach is shaped by the theoretical perspective we adopted, specifically post-critical studies in Education. When referencing "post-critical," we engage with a diverse range of theoretical and methodological approaches, avoiding eclecticism by not combining contradictory or unrelated theories, nor adopting radical perspectivism. We understand this perspective as part of the academic productivity fostered by Cultural Studies within the Brazilian context, allowing us to approach *Carnaval* as a field of study on curriculum-pedagogical aspects, contributing to a significant and distinctive trend in Education focused on cultural pedagogy (Wortmann; Santos; Ripoll, 2019).

Our theoretical and methodological stance reaffirms that the subject is not understood, in a universal sense; instead, we focus on the relationships and dynamics shaped by micropowers. We avoid explaining reality through adherence to metanarratives (Paraíso, 2018; Meyer; Paraíso, 2014). This also involves understanding differences through their social markers without reducing them to hierarchical relationships, meaning we do not equate differences with inequality (Brah, 2006). These social markers help us contextualize the debate from a post-structuralist perspective, considering the contingent and contextual aspects of the experiences we encountered during fieldwork (Hirano, 2019; Henning, 2015), including our own as researchers.

First, we will briefly present the Corumbá *Carnaval*, taking into account our thematic focus, and contextualizing the distinctive elements of the celebration in the border region of the Pantanal. Next, we

will discuss our understanding of femininities and the curriculum pedagogy within this study, grounding the discussion in various post-critical authors while relating theory to our field data. In the last section, before the conclusion, we will address the recognition processes present in the teaching and learning experiences of the local Carnaval, highlighting the circularity of cultural intelligibility in terms of gender, involving a diverse range of interlocutors. We will conclude by answering the guiding question and providing insights into the curriculum-pedagogical aspects of femininities in the *Carnaval* on the Brazil-Bolivia border.

Carnaval on and from the Border

The territorial border of this region comprises the Brazilian cities of Corumbá and Ladário, along with the Bolivian cities of Puerto Quijarro and Puerto Suárez. Corumbá has an estimated population of 112,669, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2021). As commonly understood, a border signifies more than just a territorial-geographic division (Ianni, 1988); it also bears significant social meaning, particularly in Mato Grosso do Sul (MS), where it is historically and politically linked to marginalization. “It is a space where various forms of negativity, such as illicit activities, clandestine operations, and racial mixing, are often associated” (Oliveira; Campos, 2012, p. 17). Consequently, as Costa (2013) observes, local cultural experiences often frame the border in terms of 'us' versus 'them,' though there remain opportunities for social connection. The author emphasizes that border regions possess a distinct dynamic, where contact with the "other" reaffirms a sense of belonging to a particular nationality. It is through this sense of belonging that distinctions between national and foreign populations have been established.

Corumbá is widely recognized in MS for its vibrant and festive atmosphere. Duque (2017) highlights this aspect, along with other significant meanings, such as the national identity marker that is emphasized through festivals, which celebrate supposedly distinctive ways of "being Brazilian" in contrast to "being Bolivian," particularly concerning gender and sexuality. In the field, a certain *Brazilianness*—allegedly "free of prejudice" regarding sexual diversity—is observed, especially when compared to the neighboring country. For this author, otherness—always framed in terms of identity and closely tied to the border—encompasses a variety of local experiences, including the participation and inclusion of effeminate gay men and transgender women in festivals such as *Carnaval*.

The collected data reveals that Bolivians are frequently depicted as inferior through various representations in the Brazilian city of Corumbá, thus delineating not only the physical borders but also symbolic boundaries between the two nations. While this topic will be expanded upon later, it is already clear that “very few large-scale cultural events in Corumbá incorporate elements of Bolivian culture (or Bolivian cultures)” (Costa, 2013, p. 147). In contrast, Rio de Janeiro emerges

as the "other" in opposition to Bolivia, representing an opposite sense of value. Costa (2013) notes that Corumbá's *Carnaval* follows the model of Rio's samba school parades, with consultants from Rio contributing to Corumbá's *Carnaval*. The city's positive association with Rio de Janeiro is highlighted in other studies (Duque, 2017; Passamani, 2018). *Carnaval*, symbolizing joy, stands as a central marker of this identity, reinforcing the border distinction. Joy counters the stigma attached to border regions, underlining the importance of this characteristic being both attributed to and claimed by the Brazilian city. This descriptor frequently appears in online advertisements and event decorations, branding the celebration as *Carnaval da Alegria* (Carnival of Joy), with this supposed 'joy' being promoted as a sentiment shared by all Brazilians in the region.

The pinnacle of the local *Carnaval* takes place during the samba school parades, although the celebrations also encompass a wide range of events. These include luxury costume parades hosted in local clubs, street party groups—known nationally as *blocos*[3]—parading through the streets led by sound trucks, referred to as *trios elétricos*[4], and exclusive parties that require the purchase of *abadás*[5] (custom event shirts that serve as entry tickets). Furthermore, informal celebrations like the street party groups called *blocos dos sujos*[6]—where participants wear mismatched or old clothing—add a unique flavor to the celebrations. Corumbá's *Carnaval* has reproduced excessive consumption, driven by industry and social agents who stimulate the entire sector" (Nachif; Alves, 2016, p. 322). Nevertheless, "some groups formed by the samba schools still maintain their ideological character, and during their parades, historical and social values are celebrated" (Nachif; Alves, 2016, p. 322).

The historical and social values referenced here are intertwined with the unique dynamics of the border and the framework of gender intelligibility in the region. These values are reflected in how life in border regions follows a distinct rhythm. Though the unequal differentiation between various social subjects may be contested or rejected, it remains embedded within the mechanisms of control and surveillance (Costa, 2013). The foundation of these cultural experiences lies in a "shared meaning" that arises within specific power relations. As Hall (2016) describes, these meanings "organize and regulate social practices, influence our behavior, and generate tangible and practical effects." Consequently, they are integral to the curriculum-pedagogical aspects of femininities that are both taught and learned in the cultural context of this border region.

Curriculum-Pedagogical Femininities

When referring to femininities, we understand gender as performativity, a stylized repetition of acts/actions that simultaneously reenact and experience anew a set of meanings already socially established (Butler, 2003, p. 200). These acts/actions carry both temporal

and collective dimensions, with their public nature having consequences (Butler, 2003, p. 200). These consequences fall within the field of gender intelligibility, that is, the recognition of a certain linearity of meanings between "biological sex," gender, and desire within a matrix of recognition—a construct that cannot be attributed to an individual subject, but instead must be understood as foundational and consolidating for the subject (Butler, 2003, p. 200).

This linearity of meaning, however, takes on specific historical and regional contours, as various studies have pointed out (Pelúcio, 2012; Pereira, 2012; Duque, 2022). Therefore, the matrix of gender intelligibility (Butler, 2003) must be understood in neither a generalized nor ahistorical way. With that said, we acknowledge that this text does not aim to exhaustively address the expressive possibilities of the curriculum-pedagogical femininities of the Corumbá *Carnaval*. To attempt to cover the entirety of femininity experiences in this celebration would not only conflict with the post-critical perspective adopted here but also disregard the methodological reality of the human sciences, where the complexity of lived experiences cannot be fully captured.

With this in mind, we aim to expand our analysis of these femininities as much as possible, based on our gathered data. This entails understanding the diverse identity expressions of femininities, whether cisgender or transgender. After all, “the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without these acts, there would be no gender at all, for there is no ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes” (Butler, 2003, p. 199). In other words, we are not associating femininities with so-called ‘biological sex,’ nor exclusively with womanhood. While women may perform femininities, not all feminine performances are embodied by women (Nascimento, 2021; Santana; Duque, 2020; Passos, 2022).

When analyzing experiences categorized as either cis or trans, our focus does not lie in examining "cis privileges" (Nascimento, 2021) or the intricacies of terms such as "*cistema*"[7] (Jesus, 2016) and "cis-politics" (Demétrico, 2019). Rather than csetting cis and trans categories in opposition, we recognize the internal multiplicity of these classifications and their interplay with power dynamics, as well as other social markers of difference (Favero, 2020). Thus, we adopt a post-identity framework, deeply rooted in post-critical theories, as an analytical strategy to examine these experiences.Through this lens, we observe that the pedagogical dimensions of femininities are not necessarily distinguished by cis or trans classifications.

Here, we do not propose erasing identities or ignoring these categories and their distinctions. Instead, we are interested in understanding the norms and conventions—in other words, the gender teachings and learnings—that equally involve, capture, or escape them. This is based on the understanding that "conducting and connecting bodies and lives is the result of curriculum strategies, the effect of its specific pedagogy, and the effect of its subject-making intentions"

(Maknamara, 2020, p. 61-62). The references to curriculum and pedagogy in this context encompass educational experiences that extend beyond the confines of formal institutions. After all, the curriculum-pedagogical dimension is not limited to schools or universities (Silva, 2001; Andrade; Costa, 2017).

Thus, whether in the samba school *barracões*[8] ((which function as both warehouses and creative workshops), on the grand stage of the luxury costume parades, in the streets where schools or *blocos parade, on digital media platforms where the festival is actively discussed, or even within churches and temples where the revelry is debated, a myriad of gendered teachings and learnings take place. Participants learn and teach not only how to play instruments, craft elaborate costumes, and sing samba songs, but also how to produce accessories, coordinate the timing of performances, recognize figures of authority, engage with political leaders, ensure safety, determine competition winners, and, in some cases, choose to refrain from the festivities or certain pleasurable experiences*. Throughout these interactions, femininities are undeniably shaped, performed, and learned. These curricular-pedagogical aspects of femininities, within and beyond the context of *Carnaval*, "produce values and knowledge; regulate social behaviors and ways of being; construct identities and representations; and shape specific power relations" (Sabat, 2001, p. 9).

As analyzed in this study, the border and its significance stand out as distinctive elements within this curriculum and pedagogy. We understand that "meaning is a dialogue—always partially comprehended, always an unequal exchange" (Hall, 2016, p. 23).This becomes particularly evident when discussing femininities at the Brazil-Bolivia border, where the dynamics unfold within a broader quest for recognition—both in terms of value attributed by outsiders and by the local community. These femininities are shaped by various elements constituting social identities, which are always mediated by social markers of difference extending beyond gender alone.

Thus, the curriculum-pedagogical femininities analyzed here exist within a "pedagogical space"—a space where power is both organized and exercised (Steinberg, 1997), yet it lies outside traditional educational institutions. This does not imply, however, that these "pedagogical spaces" are culturally isolated from one another. The curriculum and pedagogy of gender being examined here transcend the conventional boundaries of education, manifesting in spaces like cinema, television, sports courts, toys, and even in schools and universities. Due to their ability to produce and circulate meaning, these cultural artifacts are also embedded within *Carnaval* festivities (Oliveira; Ferrari; Char, 2021). What distinguishes the pedagogy and curriculum of formal educational institutions is the economic and technological resources they mobilize, in addition to their emotional appeal, which becomes more potent when it operates at an unconscious level (Silva, 1999).

Carnivalesque Femininities and Gender Prosthetic Artifacts

During an interview, a samba school percussionist, with decades of experience in *Carnaval*, reflected on women's participation in the *baterias*, noting that the era of prejudice against their involvement had largely passed. He pointed to the shifting perception of women as fragile or lacking intellectual capacity, offering an example: 'Women have demonstrated that they can perform the same tasks as men and excel in playing various instruments that make up the *baterias*.' However, another male percussionist added a more nuanced perspective: 'Women tend to opt for instruments that are more suited to their physicality.' He elaborated further: 'Men usually handle the rhythmic marking, compound by the larger instruments. Women typically play lighter and easier instruments like the shaker (*chocalho*[9]) or the small hand drum (*tamborim*[10]).

These two responses, from male participants, underscore the evolving perceptions of gender roles within the *Carnaval* context; A clear gender curriculum emerges, reflecting historical shifts and elements of continuity. The statements illustrate the extent to which 'sex' remains a qualifier for human identity, with the male body still framed as the active, dominant agent in contrast to the female body (Butler, 2003), even though there are fewer stark contrasts in this field data. The mastery of playing “various instruments” does not necessarily break with this gender curriculum, as the association between physical strength and “sex” continues to act as a hierarchical differentiator, to the point where “ease” is linked to women’s instrument choices. Therefore, sexual differences are inseparable from discursive demarcations. “Sex” functions as a norm, thus qualifying the body for life (Butler, 2003).

Keeping the context of the samba schools´ *baterias*, some women perform alongside their husbands, their involvement then becomes a "shared family experience." One percussionist noted that in the past, the women's desire to play instruments in Carnaval was uncommon and could be even considered "audacious." However, today, he believes that the *"bateria** is the most democratic space. Rich or poor, Black or white, gay, lesbian, doctor—everyone plays." Despite this diversity among percussionists, it is widely recognized that power dynamics continue to influence and legitimize particular gender performances, sanctioned by the curriculum as well as pedagogically taught and learned. In other words, these teaching and learning processes are marked by contemporary forms of power articulation and operation, which are subtle and difficult to visualize, as they result in increasingly refined, capillary, and subjective tactics (Prado Filho; Lemos, 2012).

Thus, musical instruments can be understood as prosthetic gender artifacts, inherently tied to performativity. As prostheses, they represent an "event of embodiment" and, like other elements in the production of gender and "sex," they are far from neutral (Preciado, 2018).

These instruments, when incorporated into the body, enable the production of gender performances and, with their associated curriculum and pedagogy, they can be viewed as cultural artifacts (Ferrari; Castro, 2018). Analytically, we understand these prosthetic artifacts—such as the instruments used in the *baterias*—as key enablers of the intelligibility of gender performativity.

The actions discussed here—specifically, playing instruments—are embedded within the curriculum-pedagogical aspects of femininities. These aspects are understood and taught through a binary framework of sexual difference, as discussed earlier. The materiality of the prosthesis, viewed analytically as a curriculum-pedagogical gender artifact, becomes even more apparent in the words of another interviewee who argues that women cannot march in the parade while playing heavier instruments. However, he acknowledges the existence of exceptions, as he has personally witnessed it. As a result, he concludes that "there's no difficulty in learning; it's the same for everyone."

The issue, therefore, lies not with the prosthesis itself but in the perceived capacity to use it. Simultaneously, the exceptions observed in these experiences seem to have little influence in dismantling the rationale behind women's preference for lighter instruments such as shakers and tambourines. In terms of gender intelligibility, these experiences contribute to the curriculum-pedagogical naturalization of male bodies—here, the men interviewed—as inherently stronger, and thus more capable of making the "more difficult" choice of handling heavier instruments.

A deeper examination of the social markers of difference reveals that, beyond gender, class distinctions significantly impact our analysis. One woman, who played in **baterias** at samba schools in Corumbá, highlighted the substantial cost of larger, heavier instruments as a key factor in her decision to lighter ones. This choice wasn't solely influenced by ease of use, but rather by the financial burden of purchasing and transporting these instruments, as samba schools often do not supply them; the percussionists are responsible for owning their instruments. In this case, her decision was not based on the instrument's weight or playability but rather its affordability.

Bilate (2013), who studied the context of *Carnaval* in Rio de Janeiro, also points out the instruments and their gendered meanings but linked to another social marker: sexuality. He observed the relationship between femininity and musical instruments not only in the experiences of female drummers playing shakers and tambourines. This author noted that most homosexual men in the *bateria* also play these same instruments, which are typically associated with women. Here, the curriculum-pedagogical aspect of femininities illustrates how gender performativity is produced and circulates in a post-identitarian framework—meaning it does not strictly adhere to predefined sexual and gender identities, instead, it rather creates and negotiates them

through particularities and shared cultural meanings. This process becomes evident in actions such as the "limp-wrist" gesture while playing certain instruments, which are perceived as more "feminine".

Costumes provide significant moments where gender teachings and learnings surface during *Carnaval*. In terms of performativity, these serve as gender prosthetic artifacts. It is possible to observe the costumes chosen for men and women performing in *baterias* on YouTube recordings of the Império do Morro (G.R.E.S..., 2015) and Mocidade Independente da Nova Corumbá (Mocidade..., 2017) samba schools. Women in the *baterias* often have to wear traditionally masculine costumes, representing soldiers or street sweepers, to participate in the performances. The opposite was not found in our ethnographic research. Undoubtedly, these curriculum-pedagogical relations involve hierarchies and values attached to certain professions, which allow more flexibility for men in terms of prosthetic transition, as long as they do not feminize themselves. Women tend to wear costumes of male characters in the *baterias*, while men do not do otherwise.

However, during the *blocos* parade, the feminization of men is notably prevalent, especially in the *bloco* Cibalena (TV Morena, 2018). As extensively examined by several scholars (Trevisan, 2018; Passamani, 2018; Green, 2000), the feminization of men through cross-dressing as women is a widespread phenomenon across Brazil, particularly among heterosexual men. These men typically wear clothing borrowed from girlfriends, friends, or female relatives, showing little concern for concealing masculine traits such as leg hair, beards, or discomfort with wearing women's shoes or sandals.

In Corumbá, as in other cities, we observed the presence of gay men among those who cross-dress, investing significantly in their costumes to "pass as" women. This form of Carnaval "passability" offers a completely different gender curriculum compared to heterosexual men, even though the costumes often share similar elements, such as high heels, makeup, wigs, and women's clothing. For some gay men, this temporary "passability" is a form of experimentation during the festival, free from social criticism due to the normative acceptance of such practices during Carnaval. Others, in contrast, seek to attract heterosexual men during the festivities. Others, in addition, aim to attract heterosexual men during the festivities. These experiences are even more profound for transgender and transsexual women, as our interlocutors shared: "Some never go back to dressing as men."

"Pedagogical places," despite existing within systems of control and regulation, function as political, ethical, and aesthetic territories that resist complete containment, enabling more than just normative reiterations. While these spaces are regulated and ordered, they also facilitate various experiences of escape and unexpected pathways that merit recognition and analysis (Paraíso; Caldeira, 2018). These experiences gain intelligibility through multiple channels, revealing the subjects involved and the norms and social conventions embedded within

an intelligibility framework that characterizes the entire border city. Further discussion will expand on this.

Carnivalesque Femininities and Recognition

Political and identity activism processes are closely linked to Carnaval, In various national contexts, including efforts led by women seeking representation and emancipation. The celebration provides a platform to combat sexism, especially for Black women (Machado; Araújo, 2016; Silva, 2018; Almeida, 2022). These experiences also encompass transgender women and transvestites. For instance, the *bateria* queens of the Caprichosos de Corumbá samba school include a Black trans woman. In a local newspaper interview, this woman shared that she has been "breaking a taboo" (Lima, 2019), acknowledging the persistent prejudice but emphasizing the importance of respect for differences and human dignity. Notably, the performances of the *bateria* queens do not contribute to the samba schools' overall scores, which, according to field data, may account for the innovation in trans representation in this role. Nevertheless, the same article asserts that transvestites and transgender women "are the ones who truly make *Carnaval* in Corumbá possible" (Lima, 2019).

In Corumbá's *Carnaval,* travesties and transgender women indeed hold positions of power and leadership within samba schools, as well as in other *Carnaval*-related activities, such as *blocos* or private parties. These roles are not as commonly filled by cisgender women. Consequently, when considering gender representation, it is necessary to account for the internal hierarchies that exist for the recognition of different expressions of femininity. Nevertheless, these hierarchies within femininities do not hinder us from identifying common elements among the interlocutors. Specifically, the pedagogical-curricular elements present in the local *Carnaval* contribute to the recognition of femininity, in both cisgender and transgender individuals.

In this section, we revisit the analytical notion of prosthetic gender artifacts to explore how the recognition of femininities occurs through a concept of "intersectional agency" (Henning, 2015) exercised by our interlocutors. The idea of agency here relates to the culturally and socially mediated capacities for action (Piscitelli, 2008). In simpler terms, these actions arise as responses to inequalities marked by social identifiers (Henning, 2015)—in this case, gender inequalities, though they are not limited solely to gender.

The experience of a 21-year-old woman is an example of agency. As the queen of the *bateria* of Mocidade Independente da Nova Corumbá, she sought financial resources to attend a workshop with a renowned queen from Estação Primeira de Mangueira samba school, in Rio de Janeiro. In her words: "I don't want to remain stagnant. I want to continually showcase my best on the avenue, to strengthen my samba school and for the audience, who deserves my dedication" (Rainha…, 2016). Her pursuit of recognition, both from her school and

the public, resonates across various interlocutors. This recognition is made possible because it follows a shared path through distinct individual experiences, thereby facilitating the circulation of what becomes intelligible and recognized (Knudsen, 2010).

We understand that "recognition is an intersubjective relationship, and for one individual to recognize another, they must resort to existing fields of intelligibility" (Knudsen, 2010, p. 168). These fields of the intelligible, in terms of gender, become visible through the unexpected experiences of women during the festivities, as in two situations reported in the local media. In the first, "during the presentation, the school's flag bearer felt ill and needed medical attention." According to the report, after attempting to continue, she "was unable to finish the parade, which ended a few minutes late" (G1 MS..., 2013). In the second instance, "not even the queen of the *bateria*'s broken high heel could stop her from finishing the route" (Cruz, 2017).

Thus, women gain recognition even in the face of the unexpected: whether through the strength to keep dancing samba in broken high heels or the determination to keep marching in the parade until they simply can't continue anymore. Despite these unforeseen challenges, choices are made, and decisions are taken through planning and organization, all within the realm of agency, shaped by this regional and borderland field of intelligibility. The local fauna and flora, so highly valued in the media, become central to these processes of recognition during Carnaval. Referring to costumes as prosthetic gender artifacts, we recall the decision of one of the trans women interviewees, who dressed up as a jaguar, the most spectacularly showcased animal of the region (Duque, 2019b).

She paraded down the avenue wearing a tight-fitting jumpsuit, a kind of second skin, printed to resemble jaguar fur, with discreet ears on her head, a tail, and her hair pulled back into a bun under the same fabric that covered her body. She also carried a large banner adorned with feathers; on one side, where she stood, a radiant sun was visible, while on the other, a large jaguar face dominated the scene. The trans woman received applause from the crowd on both sides of the street. Considering the violence and stigma that often mark the daily lives of trans women in Brazil, this moment of glamour and public recognition during Carnaval can be understood as a result of intersectional agency, which not only celebrates the success of some participants but also reflects the broader cultural intelligibility of the region.

In addition to these processes of recognition during Carnaval, the marker of ethnicity, with all its symbolic and representational weight at the Brazil-Bolivia border, gained prominence when a drag queen decided to dress as a Bolivian woman of the Colla ethnicity— often subjected to prejudice in the region due to stereotypes, particularly related to how they care for children, eat, and maintain hygiene (Banducci; Passamani; Duque, 2019). She participates, every year, in Momo's court (*Carnaval's* symbolic royal court), as a beloved drag queen among

the locals. The Corte holds a valuable status in the festival, consisting of the *Carnaval* queen, her princesses, and King Momo himself.

The costume created by the actor portraying the previously mentioned drag queen included the typical campesino hat, a flared skirt, and two long black braids, mimicking the Colla women's traditional hairstyle. Like the trans woman dressed as a jaguar, the audience widely applauded the drag queen during one of the *Carnaval* opening nights as they watched the Corte de Momo parade. These experiences highlight the complexity of agency and recognition processes during festive events. Whether the trans woman or the drag queen dressed as a Bolivian Colla—who often carry laughable stereotypes in the city's daily life—both participate in a re-signifying femininities proccess.

All these agency and recognition processes also involve interlocutors who do not parade and are not necessarily participants in *Carnaval* street groups or private parties. On the contrary, they are part of the audience that watches the performances or attends the rehearsals. An example is a 55-year-old resident, who says she loves Carnaval and has been passionate about it "since childhood," never missing a parade. In her words: "I enjoy watching, even the rehearsals because that's when we can see which school has the spirit of joy and enthusiasm. I also take the chance to have fun and end up dancing a lot to the beat of the drumlines" (Cavalcante, 2013).

This joy is accompanied by many emotions, including from heterosexual men. Several of them reported feeling emotional, even crying, for their passion for the samba school, especially for the *baterias*, identified by these, as the school's "heart". One of them shared, "When we're getting close to the end of the parade route, people get emotional. You see people crying; it comes from their hearts, right [...] The heart brings feelings to everything." Masculinity associated with emotion is strongly present in sports, in the "passion" men feel for their football teams (Bandeira, 2019; Rios; Coelho, 2020). Here, something similar happens: the emotion, typically regarded in our societies as "naturally" feminine, becomes "authorized" among men, regarding samba schools.

It is also important to consider the choices made by samba schools to honor women as a form of recognition, adding symbolic value to the school and the celebration as a whole. The images and representations of different women honored in samba-theme lyrics and *carnaval* costumes contribute to the processes of gender identification and differentiation, which are crucial to the recognition of femininity. We identified tributes to anonymous workers (Libero, 2017), Dona Maria Louca (G1 MS..., 2018), Santa Sara Khali (G1 MS..., 2018), Julieta Marinho (Winkler, 2010), Maria Bonita, and Helena of Troy (Andrade, 2022), among others. Through their biographies and accomplishments, these honorees further expand the curriculum-pedagogical aspects of femininities in the *Carnaval* at the Brazil-Bolivia border each year.

Final Considerations

In light of our interest in the curriculum-pedagogical aspects of femininities within the *Carnaval* in Corumbá, we understand that by examining this event at the Brazil-Bolivia border, the social markers of difference highlight what is considered national and foreign regarding femininities. From a post-identity perspective, this analysis allowed us to explore norms and conventions that transcend exclusively cis or trans experiences. This lens, informed by post-critical theory, enabled the analysis of data that not only points to the presence of teaching and learning processes but also shows how these processes circulate recognition in the production of differences.

Curriculum-pedagogical aspects possess a historicity marked by both continuities and discontinuities in the values and ways gender performances become intelligible in *Carnaval*. The increase in female percussionists expands gender notions, but there remains a pedagogy in which these notions are at play: women, often accompanied by their husbands, play "lighter" and "easier" instruments. These instruments, as gender prosthetic artifacts, sustain changes while still being anchored in a hierarchical gender content. High heels and costumes, also viewed as prosthetic gender artifacts, point to the agency that extends beyond instrument choice. Men, whether gay or heterosexual, wear heels with differing motivations, yet both seem to reinforce the power they hold over the intelligibility of femininity. It is no coincidence that travesties and transgender women retain these elements beyond the festive days. Female percussionists wear masculine costumes, while men do not wear female ones—indicating that, even in *Carnaval,* there are clear limits in how gender prosthetic artifacts can be navigated.

The matrix expectation of linearity between sex, gender, and desire in the pursuit of recognition is complex and cannot be generalized. The framework of gender intelligibility, which contextualizes the curriculum-pedagogical aspects discussed here, must be understood within the specific context of borderlands in the Pantanal region. Here, recognition occurs amidst the spectacle surrounding the jaguar, which, although threatened as a species, has been glamorized. This animal's glamour is pedagogically incorporated by the travesty, who is often subjected to prejudice in many situations in the city. Similarly, the "drag performance" ensures success for a drag queen who is part of a *carnaval* court, even when dressed as a Bolivian colla woman, a local symbol of social disrepute. The applause of the audience during Carnaval in Corumbá allows the gender curriculum to circulate pedagogically, even among those who are merely spectators and not active participants.

The curriculum content, as expected, is taught each year (either through repetition or with shifts in meaning) within processes of national differentiation specific to border regions, where one side tends to assert superiority over the “other.” At the same time, it reveals internal hierarchies—for example, with more *travesties* and trans women

holding leadership roles in Carnaval than cis women. On the other hand, some *Carnaval* experiences show a reduction of gender hierarchies. An example is the authorized expression of emotion, often regarded as a feminine quality through passion and joy, seen in the hearts and performances of heterosexual men, similar to the way it manifests in sports. These men also cross-dress without concern for "passability," whereas gay men seek to closely resemble women. This wide variety of meanings shares common curriculum-pedagogical aspects of femininities, which, during the days of the celebration, are imbued with power and agency without threatening a greater value: the joy of the city. This joy, taught and learned as discussed, earns Corumbá recognition and praise, despite its borderland status.

The search for recognition along the Brazil-Bolivia border is marked by hierarchical and unequal distinctions based on various social indicators. The curriculum-pedagogical aspects of femininities observed in *Carnaval* reflect this search, aligning with norms of identification and differentiation, but also highlighting moments where recognition occurs through a pedagogical contestation of these very norms. As an educational space, *Carnaval* allows for the identification of this pursuit of recognition within a borderland system of cultural signification. This pursuit is shaped and made possible by the intersectional agencies that are both limited and enhanced by the meanings and significance of the border.

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Notes

[1] In this article, *Carnaval* is retained in its original Portuguese form due to its deep cultural and historical significance in the Brazilian context. As a term, *Carnaval* transcends mere translation, encapsulating a specific set of practices, performances, and cultural meanings unique to Brazil, especially in regions like Corumbá. Translating it as "Carnival" could diminish these unique cultural connotations, aligning it too closely with other, dissimilar international celebrations.

[2] In *Carnaval*, *baterias* are percussion ensembles that drive the rhythm of samba school parades, integral to the festival's performance.

[3] *In Carnaval, blocos* are informal street party groups that parade through the streets, typically accompanied by live music, and are central to the event's communal and celebratory atmosphere.

[4] A *trio elétrico* is a large truck or float equipped with powerful sound systems and live bands that play during *Carnaval* parades. These mobile stages are central to street parties and serve as a platform for musicians to perform while moving through the crowd.

[5] An *abadá* is a custom event shirt often worn during *Carnaval* festivities. These shirts serve not only as costumes but also as entry tickets for exclusive parties and blocos.

[6] A *Bloco dos Sujos* is a type of informal street party during *Carnaval*, characterized by participants wearing mismatched or old clothing, often intended to look dirty or disheveled. The name itself reflects the playful, irreverent spirit of these celebrations.

[7] "Cistema" refers to the system of norms and privileges that favor cisgender individuals, reinforcing societal and institutional structures that marginalize transgender people. The term critiques the ways in which cisgender identities are normalized and privileged over transgender experiences (Jesus, 2016).

[8] *Barracoe*s refers to the large warehouses or workshops where samba schools prepare for *Carnava*l. These spaces are used to build floats, create costumes, and rehearse performances for the parades, representing crucial hubs for the artistic and logistical planning of the event.

[9] *Chocalho* is a percussion instrument commonly used in samba music. It consists of a set of metal jingles mounted on a frame, shaken to create a rhythmic sound.

[10] *Tamborim* is a small, hand-held drum typically played with a stick or fingers. It is an essential instrument in samba, contributing to the intricate rhythms of the baterias.

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