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## Fighting, loving and suffering among the Mothers for Diversity

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**Abstract:** This article is based on the author's dialogue with the association Mães pela Diversidade (Mothers for Diversity), an NGO located in the Brazilian state of Goiás, to analyze the performance of "maternal activism" opposed to violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, *travesti*, transgender, intersex, queer and other non-straight gender expressions (LGBTIQ+). Through verbal and drawn ethnographic records, I propose to reflect on the ways emotions are dramatized in social and political struggles that claim for justice, denounce the violation of human rights, and building a network of mutual support.

**Key-words:** activist mothering; LGBTIQ+ movement; violence; emotions; visual anthropology.

### Lutar, amar e sofrer entre as Mães pela Diversidade

**Resumo:** Este artigo parte da interlocução com a associação Mães pela Diversidade do estado de Goiás, Brasil, para analisar a performance do "ativismo materno" que combate violências cometidas contra filhos e filhas lésbicas, gays, bissexuais, travestis, transexuais, intersexos, *queers* e outras expressões de gênero (LGBTIQ+). Por meio de registros etnográficos verbais e desenhados, proponho refletir sobre os modos como emoções são dramatizadas para a confecção de lutas que, dentre outras coisas, visam à busca por justiça, denúncia de violação de direitos humanos e construção de uma malha de apoio mútuo.

**Palavras-chave:** ativismo materno; movimento LGBTIQ+; violência; emoções; antropologia visual.

### Luchar, amar y sufrir entre las Madres por la Diversidad

**Resumen:** Este artículo parte del diálogo con la asociación Mães pela Diversidade (Madres por la Diversidad) de Goiás para analizar la actuación del activismo materno que combate la violencia contra hijos e hijas lesbianas, gays, bissexuales, travestis, intersexuales, *queer* y otras expresiones de género (LGBTIQ+). A través de registros verbales y dibujos etnográficos, yo pretendo reflexionar sobre las formas en que se dramatizan las emociones para la creación de luchas que apuntan, entre otras cosas: la búsqueda de la justicia, la denuncia de violaciones de derechos humanos y la construcción de una malla de apoyo mutuo.

**Palabras clave:** activismo materno; Movimiento LGBTIQ+; violencia; emociones; antropología visual.

## Fighting, loving and suffering among the Mothers for Diversity

### Introduction

The large hall of the International Convention Center of Brazil, in Brasília, was crowded during the opening ceremony of the Joint Human Rights Conferences in 2016. The event, promoted by the Human Rights Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, convened more than seven thousand people to debate public policies related to social groups historically marginalized in Brazil. While public figures spoke in the pulpit, a group dressed in white performed a silent act in the audience. They extended a quilt of patchworks in which each patchwork showed the name of a fatal victim of homophobic or transphobic violence in the country. The people who conducted the act were activists from the movement *Mães pela Diversidade* (in English, Mothers for Diversity), a Brazilian non-governmental organization composed of mothers, fathers, and other family members of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, *travestis*, transgenders, intersex, queers and people with other gender expressions (LGBTIQ+).

At the center of the group, Avelino Fortuna maintained a painful expression<sup>1</sup>. The quilt sutured his story of activism to the story of his son, Lucas Fortuna, a journalist, volleyball referee, and activist both in the LGBTIQ+ and student movements. Lucas was nationally recognized as the co-founder of the National University Meeting on Sexual Diversity and Gender (ENUDSG) and for starting a movement of cisgender men who wear skirts to confront cis-heteronormativity<sup>2</sup>. Also, he had helped to create the *Colcha de Retalhos* (in English, Patchwork Quilt), a LGBTIQ+ activist group founded in 2003 in the context of the Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG) whose actions had a wide impact on the history of the state's LGBTIQ+ movement.

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<sup>1</sup> With proper authorization, I kept the original names of activists with whom I spoke to conduct the research. I intend to collaborate with their fights, which generally associate names with the cases of reported LGBTIQphobic violence.

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the expectations and social obligations that propose that sexual desire reflects or expresses itself through gender and vice versa; and also by the assumption of heterosexuality as compulsory, “natural and, therefore, the foundation of society” (Miskolci, 2009: 156).

Drawing 1 – Mothers for Diversity's patchwork quilt



Source: Novais, 2018: 235.

The Patchwork Quilt that Lucas helped create was updated in the one being hold by the Mothers for Diversity in Brasília, represented in Drawing 1. There, the journalist's name reappeared among the more than 300 pieces of cloth. In November 2012, at the age of 28, he was murdered in Cabo de Santo Agostinho, Pernambuco, during a business trip. While the context and the *modus operandi* of his death signaled a homophobic crime, the murderers were convicted of robbery. After the loss, Avelino Fortuna became part of the Mothers for Diversity. Since then, the father has been wearing skirts and carrying Lucas's photo in lectures, protests, and LGBTIQ+ Pride Parades in several Brazilian cities.

This is one of the forms that mothers and fathers of LGBTIQ+ people have worked alongside the Brazilian LGBTIQ+ movement and alongside a wide range of activist mothers from Brazil and Latin America. When claiming justice, they account for crimes, mourn the fatal victims, and also protest against the negligence of the State. Besides, they are responsible for welcoming those who have lost children to violence or who carry psychological traumas and family conflicts due to the sexual orientation or the gender identity of their offspring.

This article recovers notes and ethnographic drawings made in dialogue with Mothers for the Diversity of the state of Goiás between 2016 and 2018, while working on my master's thesis for the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at the Universidade Federal de Goiás. My aim here is to analyze how the group has made political acts or *fight*s around the performance of motherhood. To this end, in the topic "Fighting", I will outline a brief historical review of the emergence of social movements of mothers of LGBTIQ+ in Brazil, highlighting the efforts of activists to battle against State's actions and speeches that they denounce as LGBTIQphobic governance. Then, in the topic "Loving", I will present the ethno-

graphic description of a meeting of activists from Goiás and reflect on the political strategies circumscribed in emotions, especially love and suffering. In “Suffering”, I will examine the collective dramatization of mourning during the NGO’s demonstration at the LGBTIQ+ Pride Parade of São Paulo in 2017. Finally, in the concluding section, I will discuss some aspects of the production of the identity “mother of LGBTIQ+” along with the making of the activist mothering.

The drawings I incorporate into these words are records from my fieldwork journal and they were made to create a visual ethnography. Although the meanings of the images may intersect the written content, they were not used to complement or ornament the verbal text. I used drawings because in ethnography works they “can be understood as a process, a way of thinking, observing, knowing, describing, and revealing” (Azevedo, 2016: 24). So, the images are a way of narrating and as a methodology that allowed me to expand the relationships with the research interlocutors: while the Mothers referred to me as the “boy who is drawing us”, the illustrations were requested and celebrated by them. Often, after the activists read my drawings, new conversations and ideas emerged. This led me to dismember complex situations of the field and to access insights that contributed to the analysis.

For this reason, this work also intends to collaborate with the idea that drawing is a way of knowing through making (Ingold, 2013). Many times, I was only able to weave lines of argument through the inspirations that arose when tracing the paper with my ink pen and watercolor. This is not merely an aesthetic or artistic endeavor. As Michael Taussig (2013) suggests, it is an attempt to duplicate the submersion in the participant-observation. Thus, I propose that these images be read as lines that translate visual, imaginary, and subjective experiences that I often came across in the field and that I was rarely able to verbalize.

### **Fighting: the rising of activist mothers of LGBTIQ+ in the State arena**

Brazilian mothers of LGBTIQ+ people have been forming networks of mutual support and political mobilizations since the 1990s, such as the Group of Parents of Homosexuals (GPH), created in São Paulo by the psychoanalyst Edith Modesto in 1997 (Oliveira, 2013). Although they are not pioneering or exclusive, Mothers for Diversity have acquired increasing visibility among these initiatives. The association acts in 24 Brazilian states through regional chapters, and it organizes spaces for sociability and protest that also permeate cyberspace through social media. For this reason, the phrase “we are almost everywhere” is repeatedly said by the participants to build an apparent omnipresence of the NGO in spaces that merge the spheres of the household and the street, or the dimensions of family, public, and political relations.

The group was officially founded in 2014 and was institutionalized as an NGO in 2018. However, its origin can be stretched a few years earlier to an event that marks the symbolic relationship between mothers of LGBTIQ+ people and the State. According to Regina Facchini (2018), these mothers emerge among the Brazilian LGBTIQ+ movement in a context marked by the multiplication of categories of identity, mobilization formats, and negotiation strategies with the State. This moment is visible since 2010 when the fights of LGBTIQ+ activists begin to deal with the upsurge of a conservative wave that have made attempts to destroy “government structures to combat racism, inequality of gender and LGBTphobia” (Facchini, 2018: 324) and “to pressure the Executive more strongly against social, sexual and reproductive rights” (Facchini, 2018: 323).

During this period, hate speeches against the rights of LGBTIQ+ people accumulated in the mouths of parliamentarians in Brasília. Mainly, the pronouncements of the president Jair Bolsonaro, at the time a federal deputy affiliated to the Progressive Party, were recognized for his articulation with religious and conservative segments in the congress. According to Vanessa Leite (2019), Jair Bolsonaro was a leader in spreading moral panics that put sexualities, gender expressions, and notions of family at the center of discussions on public policy propositions:

In 2010, the relationship with evangelicals narrowed powerfully after Bolsonaro promoted himself as a leader against what he called “gay kit”. That year, he was part of the Human Rights and Minorities Commission of the Chamber of Deputies and, when discussing the project that became known as the Law of Spanking, he declared: “If the son is kind of *gayzinho* [a little gay], he should be spanked and then he would change his manners”, while claiming to represent the defenders of children and adolescents (Leite, 2019: 134).

The expression “gay kit” is used by detractors to refer pejoratively to the Escola Sem Homofobia (School Against Homophobia), a project carried out by the Ministry of Education (MEC) in partnership with the LGBTIQ+ movement. This project aimed to distribute teaching materials on combating homotransphobic violence for Brazilian students. From its presentation until its shelving, members of the “bible board” of the Congress claimed that the proposal would pose a threat to the “traditional Brazilian family” – or the cis-heteronormative family model –, as it would supposedly “entice” and “pervert” children and teenagers (Leite, 2019).

In the veins of this controversy, Jair Bolsonaro even said in a news interview: “I don’t want a gay group to create a school curriculum for elementary school with MEC [...]. Will our children now have to be gay to have that right? Will anyone be proud to have a gay son?” (Leite, 2019: 126). These statements exemplify some

ways in which Brazilian government officials have produced normative frameworks surrounding gender and sexuality expressions and the moralities around the family of origin. In this logic, statements from the State that aim to “protect” the family also produces offenses to mothers and fathers, or to the care actions that involve mothering and fathering.

Thus, in reaction to Jair Bolsonaro’s speeches, the activist network All Out invited mothers of LGBTIQ+ people to participate in a campaign launched in 2011 within the Federal Senate, in Brasília and exposed in public squares of Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The campaign exhibited photographs and testimonies of 20 women from the northeast, midwest, southeast, and south of the country<sup>3</sup>. Most of them were portrayed embracing their daughters/sons, while expressing happy features and stories that extolled affectionate categories such as pride, complicity, respect, admiration, and, more often, love.

On the other hand, some mothers had serious expressions and told how they lost their children to homotransphobia. Other mothers repudiated the inability of parliamentarians to guarantee the secularism advocated by the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, as reported by Ângela Moysés from Brasília:

As a mother, and concerned with the alarming rate at which homophobia has reached our country, I feel outraged when religious and political leaders rise to the pulpits, to the tribunes and go to the media to pour out their “knowledge” about homosexuality, uttering absolute lies, based on personal beliefs and opinions, contaminating audiences with their misconceptions about the subject and instigating society against people whose only “sin” or “crime” is to love their peers. As a mother, I urge our governors to guarantee the secularity of the State and to punish the homophobia that victimizes our young homosexuals daily.<sup>4</sup>

After this campaign, the mothers founded the group Mothers for Equality, which split up two years later because of internal disagreements. From this group’s dissent emerged the Mothers for Diversity. The women who started the movement were joined by some fathers, grandmothers, aunts, and other family members of LGBTIQ+ people. In addition, the movement incorporated professionals from law, medicine, social work, and other areas; members of entities such as the Ordem dos

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<sup>3</sup> Some of these mothers already participated in mutual support networks of family members of LGBTIQ+ subjects, as the psychologist Edith Modesto, founder of the Group of Parents of Homosexuals.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt taken from the pamphlet distributed by the campaign.

Advogados do Brazil (the Brazilian Bar Association or OAB), and also representatives of LGBTIQ+ activism groups, such as A Revolta da Lâmpada, from São Paulo.

Since then, Mothers for Diversity have been summoned to speak, to celebrate, to mourn, and to show their flags, posters, and other visual and emotional fighting strategies. This is how the association moves between journalistic news, talk shows, or music videoclips by MPB (Brazilian Popular Music genre) and funk singers. They even appeared in fictional narratives, such as in a Brazilian soap opera in 2017, in which actual activists supported to diminish the conflicts of a character-mother who refused to relate to her transsexual son<sup>5</sup>.

The massive appearance of activists mothers of LGBTIQ+ in this social context is propitious since before mothers fought close to the LGBTIQ+ movement, the LGBTIQ+ movement was already fighting maternally (Facchini, 2018). In other words, since the 1970s the Brazilian LGBTIQ+ activism groups have already been performing practices expected from families of origin and more specifically, the acts of care made by mothers. For example, the record of aggressions, the recognition of bodies, the worthy burial of the dead, and other actions have made the LGBTIQ+ movement “the welcoming place for concerns, fears, and pains and for building hope for possible life projects from a very diverse set of subjects” (Facchini, 2018: 313). To delve into these ideas, in the following topics I will present ethnographic records of two distinct moments in which I was in dialogue with Mothers for Diversity.

### **Loving: narratives of support between micropolitics of emotions**

While Mothers for Diversity promoted lectures, had picnics or vigils in front of forums in São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, and Pernambuco, in the state of Goiás the association acted in the individual figure of Avelino Fortuna until 2017. Avelino justified the difficulty in gathering other mothers of LGBTIQ+ people by activating the commonplace image of Goiás as a state with conservative and provincial customs and governments.

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<sup>5</sup> I refer to “A Força do Querer”, by the author Glória Perez, exhibited on national network Rede Globo in 2017. In the plot, the character played by the actress Carol Duarte identifies as a transsexual man, Ivan, who struggles with his family’s incomprehension, especially from his mother Joyce, played by actress Maria Fernanda Cândido. Ivan suffers different aggressions at home and on the street, where he is beaten in a cruel episode of transphobic violence. Joyce then rebuilds the relationship with her son and searches for ways to understand and respect his transsexuality. One of the sources of information that the mother character seeks is the NGO Mothers for Diversity. In three different scenes of the show, Joyce watches real testimonies from activist mothers of the group.

However, as social scientists who work on the region have discussed, this stereotype is crossed by contradictions that refer to a “strategic essentialism” used by militants to justify their fights (Braz et al, 2011). For instance, local LGBTIQ+ activists describe that Goiânia – the capital and biggest city of the state – vacillates between a traditional city and a modern city. The metropolis is identified as a place permeated with discriminatory situations and lacking cultural leisure spaces for LGBTIQ+ people. Still, it was the first and so far one of the few Brazilian cities to offer free health care for transgender people since 1999, through the Hospital das Clínicas (Braz et al, 2011).

Despite this, the increasing alliances between fundamentalist religious groups and the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, and the consequent obstacles to negotiations between the LGBTIQ+ movement and the State, have at times placed Goiás closer to its conservative stereotype. This may explain why LGBTIQ+ political mobilizations arose in Goiás only after the 1990s (Braz, 2014). In southeastern and northeastern regions of Brazil, on the other hand, LGBTIQ+ activism arose as the fights against the repression of the military-civil dictatorship in the late 1970s and, in the following decade, as a reaction to the State’s negligence concerning the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Facchini, 2011).

Although the emergence of the association Mothers for Diversity in Goiás can also be considered late, there are records of mothers who had fought in the region before, such as the seamstress Tânia Cardoso Fortuna, mother of the journalist Lucas Fortuna, who attended the LGBTIQ+ Pride Parades of Goiânia, wearing her peculiar rainbow-colored beret, even before her husband Avelino joined the activism. She had also tried to bring together mothers of LGBTIQ+ activists from the Colcha de Retalhos (Quilt Patchwork) in her home in the mid-2000s. But the group, called Mothers of the Quilt, did not resist the losses that involved the family: a few months before the murder of her son, Tânia suffered an aneurysm and died (Novais, 2018).

During 2017, I followed Avelino Fortuna’s attempts to expand the social movement in Goiás. At the time, he shared regional coordination with human resources manager Rosana Cintra. Both tried to convene activists through social media and informal visits to families. One of these meetings took place in April of that year inside Helenice Soares’ house, on the periphery of Aparecida de Goiânia. The plot of emotions, memories, and projects shared on this visit guides some of my analysis of the maternal activism made by the NGO. The scenario of this record was set in the small living room of the Soares family, whose location and characteristics signaled a low-income economic situation. Although crowded with residents and visitors, two mothers and one father took the stage. These three people came from different experiences of parenting and activism, which crossed their different social positions of gender, sexuality, class, and race.

The hostess Helenice, a 45-year-old black woman, had studied until high school and worked as a cleaning and general services assistant at a company that served

public hospitals. She was divorced but was once again living with her ex-husband after a reconciliation. She had known the association through her son, an 18-year-old transsexual man who was a friend of Rosana Cintra's son. Rosana was 38 years old, had a degree in people management, and was currently unemployed; she lived in Goiânia, identifies herself as *parda* (brown or mixed-race), and was married. Finally, Avelino Fortuna, 63, was retired, widowed, identified as white, resident of Santo Antônio de Goiás, a town in the metropolitan region of Goiânia. The three activists identified themselves as cisgender and heterosexual and had lived isolated from experiences of LGBTIQ+ sociability.

Helenice said that, before her son told her he was a trans man, she did not know what the word *trans* meant and, until that moment, she still interpreted his gender expression by the female identity that had been granted to him at birth. Although it took her years to understand and get used to her son's new name and pronoun, Helenice did not stay away from him. On the contrary, from that moment on, a concern arose: she began to notice, in her words, "how much these people suffer only from getting to a place. Just arriving at a bus stop. I never realized that suffering."

To refer to this suffering, she narrated an episode in which her son was physically injured by a group of men inside the bathroom of a bus terminal in Goiânia. Then, the mother said that she was recognized in the neighborhood as an extraterrestrial mother, because unlike others who "did not accept", who wanted to "hit" and "throw their [LGBTIQ+] children away", she remained close to her son: "My love for him increased. I wish I could put him in a glass dome, leave him there, watch him, take care of him, so he wouldn't go out there and suffer so much..."

On the other hand, Avelino told us that he put his son's life at risk when Lucas' revealed his homosexuality. And he described that *accepting* Lucas's sexuality became a long pedagogical process permeated with micro-aggressions that gradually led to more affectionate relationships. Like Avelino, Rosana said that the relationship with her son at the beginning was full of discontinuities and conflicts. Then, she referred to the recovery of this relationship as an expensive process of personal transformation that resembled her son's hormonal gender reassignment treatment: "Just as a hormonal treatment takes a lot of time, we are also undergoing treatment. We are also in a transformation."

Like the famous phrase of Simone de Beauvoir, the conversation of the three activists indicates that one is not born a mother of LGBTIQ+, she becomes it. The becoming of this identity goes through a contradictory process of making kinship that in emic vocabulary appears as the term *acceptance*. As Leandro de Oliveira (2013) argues, the kinship links between LGBTIQ+ sons/daughters and their mothers, fathers, and families of origin involve the negotiation of responsibilities, emotions, and commitments that must be understood similar to Marcel Mauss' notion

of the gift. Thus, acceptance becomes something to be given, received, and reciprocated: when the family does not give enough acceptance, the LGBTIQ+ person may resent it; when the family offers excessive acceptance, whoever receives it becomes obliged to repay it, “to the point that ‘failing to repay’ is a course of action that can be portrayed as uncomfortable, almost like a kind of sacrifice (Oliveira, 2013: 150)

This traffic of gifts diagnoses the hierarchies of relationships made between LGBTIQ+ people and their families. For this reason, LGBTIQ+ subjects have problematized the idea of acceptance, as it presupposes that the family of origin is the only and most valued space for sharing and building emotional bonds. In contrast, the family of origin has often been denounced as a violent institution for those whose gender and sexual expressions overflow cis-heteronormativity. Consequently, acceptance may not have a relevant dimension for LGBTIQ+ subjects, who have established networks of friendship and care through so-called “chosen families” (Henning, 2014).

Despite this, and although acceptance is pronounced and experienced by different formats and intensities among activists, this category is still used to symbolize a sequence of practices and emotions that involve the attempt to relieve and reconfigure family tensions. Acceptance, therefore, represents the dramatization of the family bond between LGBTIQ+ people and their mothers/fathers, in the same way that “the gift dramatizes the existing bond between donor-recipient” (Rezende and Coelho, 2010: 91).

Drawing 2 – Studdy of the close, son/daught comes out, mother comes in.



Source: Novais, 2018: 235.

This reinforces the argument that the maternal-filial relationship results from a politicized gestation. Helenice, Rosana, and Avelino also explained that the absence of this political effort can make mothers feel coerced to hide the fact that they mother LGBTIQ+ subjects, so they can meet cis-heterosexist family expectations (Sedgwick, 2007). As represented in Drawing 2, mothers can come into the well-known structure that confined their daughters/sons: the closet, or in the words of Eve Sedgwick (2007), the epistemological and political regime capable of erasing, violating, and silencing LGBTIQ+ people. In my drawing, I replaced the structure of the closet with the metaphor of the aquarium as an attempt to describe some ideas that I heard from interlocutors to refer to this regime, such as the transparency of its edges, difficulty breathing, drowning, suffocation, tightening and choking.

The mothers' closet also generates sacrifices and dilemmas for them. On the one hand, imploding this "confinement" may be related, as Arthur Costa Novo (2017) noticed, to the high recurrence of divorces between the mothers of the group and their husbands. Staying in the closet, however, represents the refusal to relate to the children and, consequently, to protect them from homotransphobic violence. That is why Avelino repeated to Helenice and Rosana the phrase that has constantly been uttered in his public speeches: "Fathers and mothers who do not come out of the closet with their children are signing their children's death certificates".

At the end of the meeting, after telling us how to mourn the death of his son made him an activist, Avelino said: "Every LGBT who is murdered I feel like my son was murdered again. And it hurts me so much. So my fight's goal is that parents can never do what I did: get out of here to go and recognize my son's body in Pernambuco. We were not born to suffer, we were born to be happy."

Drawing 3 – Study of the symbol.



Source: Novais, 2018: 187.

In different moments of this dialogue, love and suffering were conjured up to represent the political compositions that Mothers for Diversity create within their family relationships. The increase in love, which Helenice said was responsible for activating her practices of care, is not an isolated feeling in the group. Instead, love is one of the most used codes by the NGO (Costa Novo, 2017). It appears as a written, sung, and shouted noun. It takes the form of the verb to love, often conjugated next to the verb to fight. It appears as the well-known motto of the association: “Get your prejudice out of the way, we are walking with our love”. It visually materializes in the banners they carry, in their social media posts, and in the icon that symbolizes the group (Drawing 3). By the way, it was tracing this heart painted in the rainbow colors that I understood why drawing is also knowing by making. Even after staring at the icon so many times, when I drew it, I recognized that, in addition to the heart, there is the representation of two bodies embracing each other: another visual representation of love.

At a certain point during the visit at the Soares family home, Rosana also referred to love as an alternative to the contradictory relationships maintained through acceptance: “I know that the role of Mothers for Diversity is to show that love for their children it is greater than what society imposes. [...] Love is beyond that. Love is not accepting. You don’t have to accept anything. Who am I to accept anything? I have to understand. I have to love. I have to support and I have to be present. And I was able to reach that conclusion through the stories I heard in the group.”

Therefore, in this context, love is portrayed as an insurrection strategy against cis-heterocentric norms, not as the representation of the myth of maternal love. The emotions that emerge in these statements should not be read as passive, involuntary reactions, or the result of psychological and hormonal interactions that lacks rationality. Anthropologists and feminist authors have denounced that the epistemological rupture between emotion and reason, historically perpetuated by the Western philosophical tradition, is capable of associating emotions with sexist norms of femininity, so that, “with their behaviors taken by common sense and medicine as closely regulated by hormones, women would be more emotionally unstable and therefore less rational” (Rezende and Coelho, 2010: 25).

But according to Alison Jaggar (1997), reason and emotion are not opposing dimensions that would indicate the binary “activity/passivity”. On the contrary, emotions are “trajectories through which we actively engage and even build the world” (Jaggar, 1997: 166). Also, emotions are indications of reasoning, insofar as they can reveal “our deepest perception that we are in a situation of coercion, cruelty, injustice or danger” (Jaggar, 1997: 175). In this perspective, love has been triggered as an agency that “rebels against any determination of social order that opposes the full experience of that feeling” (Rezende and Coelho, 2010: 55).

The interactions that took place in Helenice Soares' living room in April 2017 led to the creation of projects that arose the mobilization of mothers of LGBTIQ+ people in Goiás. Seven months after the visit, these three activists met again with thirty people: the majority of them were mothers, but there were also a few fathers and sons/daughters. This, which was considered the first official meeting of Mothers for Diversity in Goiás, was held in a room at the State Reference Center for Equality (CREI), in Goiânia<sup>6</sup>. During this meeting, I realized that the love manifested in the first dialogue between Helenice, Rosana, and Avelino jumped from the dimension of the relationships they maintained with their children at home. These emotions were then expanded in a wider dimension to the fabric formed by the group of mothers, by the LGBTIQ+ movement, and by the LGBTIQ+ people, whether they were their daughters/sons or not. In the speech that marked the beginning of the meeting, Rosana said:

We are mothers and are often the first to close the door and heart to our different sons and daughters. But we are also mothers who, regardless of anything, we need to love our offspring. Mothers for all work! Mothers of all differences, mothers to support, help, and reach out. Mothers to fight with claws and hearts. Mothers who are warriors, activists, and who face society with their heads held high, beating their chests and saying: my child is valuable! My child will be who he/she is, without masks, without pain, and full of love!

**Drawing 4 – Collective hug, supporting nodes.**



Source: Novais, 2018: 246.

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<sup>6</sup> CREI was created in 2009 by the Special Secretariat for Policies for Women and Racial Equality, linked to the state government. Yet another sign that, as Regina Facchini states, mothers of LGBTIQ+ are “fond of dialogue with state actors” (2018: 237), even though they contest violent speeches that come from the State.

This alchemical transformation of particular emotions in collective fights can be understood as *micropolitics of emotions*, a term that indicates the potential of emotions “to dramatize, reinforce or change the social macro-relationships that frame the interpersonal relationships in which the ex-experience emerges individual emotional” (Rezende and Coelho, 2010: 78). Not only love, but feelings involved in painful experiences also leaks from the household to the street and from isolated sensations to collective experiences. The Drawing “Collective hug, supporting Nodes” is a visual representation of this expansion of individual emotions to the web of activists. This is one of the drawing records that recovers a powerful case of the micropolitics of emotions that merge manifestations of love and mourning. This case occurs annually in mid-June, when Mothers for Diversity from all regions of Brazil wander massively to the LGBTIQ+ Pride Parade of São Paulo, considered the largest event of its kind in Latin America.

### Suffering: “This fight is what keeps me alive”

Described by anthropologist Regina Facchini (2011) as distinctive signs of the contemporary Brazilian LGBTIQ+ movement, the Pride Parades have united celebration, claiming for rights, respect and solidarity, and have helped to transgress the quantitative sense of the idea of “minority” by calling crowds to the streets. It is a mobilization format that “survives the criticisms of depoliticization and continues to cause neighborhoods, cities, states and the country to reflect, even temporarily, on the existence and demands of LGBTIQ+ subjects” (Facchini, 2018: 321).

Drawing 5 – Mothers of LGBTIQ+ walking in the Pride Parade of São Paulo



Source: Novais, 2018: 236.

A few months after the meeting at the Soares family's house, still in 2017, I accompanied Avelino Fortuna on his interstate journey to the Pride Parade in São Paulo. There, he introduced me to his friends from the association as “the son he brought from Goiás”, an indication that my ethnographic work has been marked by exchanges of subjectivities and affection<sup>7</sup>. Avelino and I were no longer connected only by the research threads.

As a way of inhabiting his traumas, the activist from Goiás has fathered other LGBTIQ+ people wherever he goes. It was in the land of mourning that he changed his form of fathering, starting to exercise the fights inherited from his son and his wife. In this context, grieving must be perceived as proposed by Rezende and Coelho (2010): a series of expressions of sorrow prescribed by sociocultural frameworks. According to Veena Das (2007), these expressions of suffering become obligations to the dead. These obligations are not an attempt to overcome the loss, but to redo the routine, unfolding and repeating the memory of the suffering, in order to express “gestures that mark the insistence on making violence a visible loss” (Das, 2007: 194).

I noticed some overlaps between these analytical thoughts on the language of mourning and field experiences. At the Pride Parade, Avelino gave materiality to homophobic violence and his suffering by wearing *things* that belonged to his losses: Tânia's colorful beret and skirts that referred to Lucas. It is by moving between these symbologies of motherhood that Avelino is commonly called a *pãe*. I believe that the creation of this category of kinship that mixes the Portuguese words for *father* (pai) and *mother* (mãe) informs about the invocation of Tânia's memory in Avelino's activism. Second, it informs about an absence around what is socially understood by fatherhood. In this sense, the term *father* lacks the politics of care and affection performed by mothers. Indeed, Avelino is one of the few fathers to “wear the shirt” and engage in the group's activities. Thus, in a way, the identity *pãe* seems to allow him to practice the activism made by the mothers.

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<sup>7</sup> Avelino has been my research interlocutor since 2015, when I wrote a non-fictional novel about the life story of Lucas Fortuna, my final work in the journalism course at UFG. After I finished the book, my name started to appear frequently in Avelino's public speeches as someone who, in his perspective, represented the verbal rescuer of Lucas' memories and as a consequence of his political engagement. In enigmatic situations, I was also mentioned as a metaphysical continuity of Lucas' life path.

Drawing 6 – In the front line.



Source: Novais, 2018: 240.

Furthermore, Avelino wears skirts on protest occasions. The skirt should not be interpreted only as a sign of femininity or as a finished, unaltered object. It is a *thing*, or as proposed by Ingold (2012), a *parliament of threads* in constant transformation. Avelino wore a skirt for the first time at Lucas's funeral: a purple garment, made of hard and heavy fabric. But the skirt he wore at the Pride Parade had a light, swirling texture and was covered with images of Saint George wielding a sword among red roses. The father explained to me that this new skirt no longer referred to the pain of the first skirt. This was a "cry for freedom from an oppressed people".

Again, the *pãe's* grief branched from his private history and was expanded to the hundreds of Mothers for Diversity. When the Mothers left the street where they organized themselves and walked towards Avenida Paulista, the micropolitics of pain could be seen throughout the group, who wore the same shirts and sang in uniform: "Get out, get out of the way! Get out, because the Mothers are different!". Drawing 5 recovers a visual memory about that moment. The Mothers walked down the corridor of people to the sound truck where the opening ceremony of the Parade took place. On this truck were event organizers, celebrities, representatives of the LGBTIQ+ movements, and politicians from São Paulo. Avelino was also there as one of the guests to speak on behalf of the NGO. He said:

Good afternoon, world! [...] Despite my pain of having lost my son to homophobia, my heart is bursting with joy at being able to be here with you, continuing the fight that was his. [...] It is this fight that keeps me alive, for

the affection, for the love that I have received from the community, from the LGBT population, and, mainly, from my Mothers for the Diversity that welcomed me. So, may we have the biggest LGBT Pride Parade in the world! I wish that all violence against LGBT people ends! I wish deaths cease! And I wish that we have love, freedom, and the right to be what we are! I send you a big hug and, as my son used to say, a kiss on everyone's mouth!

This speech reiterated the militancy narrative that the *pãe* had told before in the Soares family home. In it, apparently dichotomous emotions and situations – sadness and joy, losing and being welcomed – were intertwined as driving forces for political engagement. Like the skirt, the speech also symbolized the transformation in how the *pãe* grieves. As Regina Facchini recalls from a reading by Veena Das: becoming an activist often implies “a way of re-writing history itself, of building the possibility of re-inhabiting a world devastated by violence” (Facchini, 2018: 313).

Drawing 7 – Network of moms and violence data.



Source: Novais, 2018: 224.

After the opening ceremony, the group of mothers headed for the first of more than 15 sound trucks that lined in the Avenida Paulista (Drawing 6). The interlocutors explained to me that this prestigious place meant that they would be responsible for “fighting on the front line”, “guiding” and “blessing” the approximately

three million people who followed behind. These statements also indicate ways in which activists articulate some notions of motherhood. Particularly, the notion of *blessing* resonates with Christian symbols. On the other hand, there is also an idea that the *guide* position describes the activists' attempt at mothering the subjects involved in the Parade.

Between the partying moments that accompanied the march, the militants sometimes took the microphone to say about their fights. They referred to victims of LGBTIQphobia to demonstrate the collective need to care for the lives of LGBTIQ + people. Other times, cases were recalled to denounce LGBTIQphobic speeches that came from the State; to demand that the State recognize the LGBTIQphobic violence as a crime<sup>8</sup>; or to protect families of origin from the losses generated by violence. Thus, even those who had not experienced losses also performed emotional micropolitics, expressing the fear that their children would become what they often called "statistics", in reference to the high quantitative data of victims of LGBTIQphobic violence in Brazil. I translate this protection work in Drawing 7.

## Final considerations

The sound truck crowded with mothers of LGBTIQ+ people traveled the length of the Pride Parade claiming for justice and narrating stories of love, support, and violence. As pointed out by social scientists who research movements led by families of victims of violence, mothers are essential protagonists for reporting human rights violations. After all, as Márcia Pereira Leite provokes: "Who could speak better of pain, suffering, and loss, and at the same time, of forgiveness and tolerance, of reconciliation and peace, if not the 'mothers'?" (Leite, 2004: 154).

This process was called by the anthropologist Roberto Efrem Filho (2017) as the *mothering of political action*: strategies of invoking mothers or emotions and acts historically forged in the notion of motherhood for the confection of activism. When observing the rituals of claiming justice carried out by LGBTIQ+

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<sup>8</sup> Only in June 2019, the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court (STF) allowed that homophobia and transphobia would be considered as crimes in Brazil. The public discussion around the penalization of homotransphobias demonstrated an absence of consensus among the LGBTIQ+ Brazilian movement. On the other hand, this comprised one of the main demands of the Mothers for Diversity, who celebrated the decision of the STF. Thus, I have noticed that the NGO relates in different ways to the LGBTIQ+ movement: some proposals and positions are similar, but tensions and ruptures also arise, especially when the Mothers praise normative notions of family of origin or when they reject the diversity of affective and sexual experiences of LGBTIQ+ subjects, when stating, for example, that one of the goals of the association is "to destroy the label of promiscuity that society so lightly sticks to our children" (Giorgi, 2019: 16).

and peasant movements in Paraíba and Pernambuco, Efrem Filho argued that the literal presence of a mother is not even necessary. What must be performed in public are the social conventions that surround the idea of a mother, the one “that embodies the care work that can be taken to the extreme, especially if the signs of untranslatable and incomparable suffering are sufficiently visible” (Efrem Filho, 2017: 201).

In this article, becoming a mother must be seen as proposed by anthropologists and feminist scholars, who have shown that the notions of parenthood and motherhood are relationships made throughout the socio-cultural fabric, established according to constructions of gender, sexuality, and race, through power relations (Strathern, 1995; Hill Collins, 2000). According to Marilyn Strathern, Western societies have produced hierarchies between mothering and fathering by considering mothers indispensable for raising their children, while fathers “can actually abandon their children from birth without being seen as denatured monsters or threats to the social system” (Strathern, 1995: 312). In this way, care, protection, and provision of emotional and nutritious substances have historically been inscribed in female bodies or in ideas of mothering.

This assumption threatens to condition female agency to domestic and family responsibilities. But based on Strathern’s interpretation that the sphere of the household does not always refer to domination and passivity (Strathern, 2006), I have argued that the household, family, and motherhood also enhance the political agency of Mothers for Diversity. I warrant this argument on Roberto Efrem Filho’s assertions that “the experiences of mothering of political action do not reproduce forms of domination”, since “care work is a political fight” (2017: 202). Mainly, I warrant this on the reports of activists who have shown that loving their LGBTIQ+ sons and daughters also represents a political effort against the symbolic and physical aggressions that prevail in the relationships of families of origin (Novais, 2018).

In this sense, becoming a mother is far from the experiences of conceiving, gestating, and giving birth. Instead, according to Efrem Filho (2017), this is a performance of gender. I add to this premise that becoming a mother also pervades notions of kinship constituted in the braid between gender and race. After undertaking a literary review in the studies of black feminists, especially in the works of the American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) and the Brazilian anthropologist Lélia Gonzalez (2018), I learned that black mothers have created political actions to combat colonial exploitation, high rates of racial violence, disadvantages of access to basic rights and services and other historical inequalities founded on structural racism.

As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) also suggests, one of the main characteristics of black women’s motherhood is its potential to catalyze political actions. After nar-

rating the case of a black mother who fought to protect her son from a situation of violence in the United States, Hill Collins concludes: “The motherhood politicized her” (2000: 194). Thus, the sociologist calls *activist mothering* the ways how daily obligations undertaken by black mothers are transformed into strategies to fight against the multiple oppressions that cross their lives.

Besides, the sociologist mentions the Madres de La Plaza de Mayo, who since 1970 have searched for their daughters/sons that were “disappeared” by the Argentine military dictatorship, to argue that “not only black women but those who care for black women can also access the power associated with activist mothering” (Hill Collins, 2000: 194). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that political practices forged by black women have been reconstituted by other activists and other social movements.

The mothering of political action can also be enacted by militants who, whether being mothers or not, receive relative approval to “mobilize ‘maternal narratives’ and ‘act maternally’” (Efrem Filho, 2017: 200). This is an important line to interpret why the NGO refuses to name itself through other categories of kinship, although it also brings together some fathers, aunts, and grandmothers. By maintaining the identity of “mothers” and not “fathers”, the activists deny the normative temptation of the Portuguese language to turn any collective noun that includes the minimum presence of men into a masculine collective noun. Above all, they indicate that the group founds its political practices on the performance of this activist motherhood.

Thus, I have noticed that Mothers for Diversity use the political repertoires made at the confluence of gender and race constructions around motherhood to create a curious picture. The NGO’s proposals and agendas commonly neglect from these repertoires discussions about tackling racism or about how racism intrudes into LGBTIQphobic violence<sup>9</sup>. This absence has also become visible due to the low participation of black women, women from the periphery, and low-income women in the movement (Novais, 2019; Costa Novo, 2017).

However, Mothers for Diversity select from these repertoires the dramatization of protection, care, love, and suffering in order to: first, glue together the pieces of family arrangements broken by homotransphobia that circulates inside the household; second, to fight against the LGBTIQphobia that circulates on the street and in discourses and practices made by the State. This public expression of love and mourning resembles the collective mourning rituals analyzed by Efrem Filho

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<sup>9</sup> Data of transphobic violence indicate that 82% of trans people murdered in Brazil in 2018 were black and brown (Benevides and Nogueira, 2019).

(2017). These are moments when mothers perform the recognition of LGBTIQ+ subjects as precarious lives, or susceptible to being attacked and exterminated.

In Judith Butler's terms, this recognition is closely linked to actions of care, because "it is exactly because a living being can die that it is necessary to take care so that he/she/they can live" (Butler, 2015: 32). In this way, one can only mourn the death of someone if, first, that life is perceived as alive.

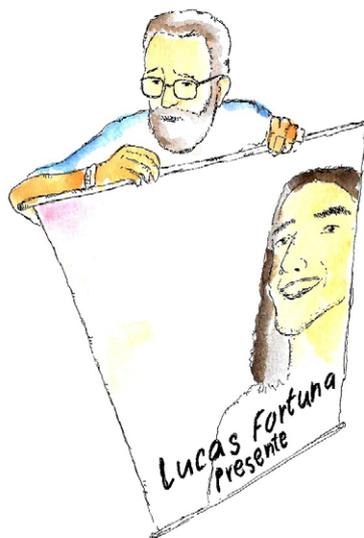
Butler also tells us that the processes and conflicts in the State arena act to control the collective commotion that regulates what lives must be grievable. Along the same lines of thought, Berenice Bento (2018) denounces the potential of the State to coin systematic techniques for promoting life and death. *Necrobiopower* is the concept used by the author to identify this set of techniques, referring to "attributes that qualify and distribute bodies in a hierarchy that removes from them the possibility of recognition as human and that, therefore, must be eliminated and others who must live" (Bento, 2018: 7).

Based on this concept, Bento argues that, besides promoting an unequal distribution of recognition of humanity, the State promotes the elimination of "bodies that pollute the purity of an imagined nation, a type of 'transmission belt' of an imagined Europe: white, rational, Christian, heterosexual" (2018: 4). In this context, the mothers of victims emerge as political, moral, and affectionate subjects who fight against the death zones administered by the State, as interpreted by Vianna and Lowenkron:

By protesting against this logic, claiming precisely the illegality of such deaths, as well as politically activating the language of reproduction and care to endow the dead with public life, the "mothers of victims" also seek to dispute and change combinations between war, reproduction, protection and domesticity that continue to be relevant in making the State (especially the Nation-State) (Vianna, Lowenkron, 2017: 29).

Although this excerpt refers to mothers who fight against the violence that mostly affects black people from peripheral communities in Rio de Janeiro, I believe it is possible to extend the analysis to the activism made by the Mothers for Diversity. The political actions built by these mothers of LGBTIQ+ in their family relationships or on their public protests also comprise a fight against the necrobiopower and the normative frameworks of mourning regulated by the State. Claiming that the deaths of LGBTIQ+ people are potentially grievable, the mothers asseverate that their lives are recognizable.

Drawing 8 – Lucas Fortuna Present.



Source: Novais, 2018: 237.

This is what Avelino Fortuna does when exposing Lucas's photography during the march of the Pride Parade. Márcia Pereira Leite calls this visual expression a *photo-symbol*: a portrait used by social movements to highlight attributes such as youth and vitality of the victim of violence, in order to help in making the "mothers' narrative about the impropriety and absurd of their children's death" (Leite, 2004: 170). In the graphical construction of Drawing 8, I returned to paying attention to this field experience, practicing the notion that the drawing allows us to double seeing or to see beyond (Taussig, 2013). While in the observant-participation I was attentive to the way the fights were said by the activists, it was by drawing that I noticed that a great part of the group's activism is manifested in imagery. In addition to the photo-symbol of Lucas and other daughters/sons victims of homotransphobia, balloons, costumes, quilts, posters, and choreographies produced a visual narrative of the fights, often colored in the rainbow associated with the LGBTIQ+ causes. If, on the one hand, the images made by Mothers for Diversity intervened in my way of inscribing the ethnography, on the other hand, my drawings were also taken by the group and became part of the activists' visual repertoire, which published them on their social medias.

Thus, I argue that drawing – as a means of observing, narrating, reflecting, dialoguing, revisiting the field, participating, and presenting the research – is a methodological process that contributes to densifying the subjective dimension of ethnographic entrepreneurs. When sketching Avelino's facial expression, I remembered the moment when he unrolled the banner he had brought from Goiânia: his

face had marks of sadness, in contrast to his son's big smile. Finally, I remembered the poster moving into the hands of other mothers, which leads me to understand that that photo-symbol, far from inert, passive, or immobile, was part of the collective expression of love and mourning.

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