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## WOMEN'S CIRCLES: AGROECOLOGY, MOVEMENT, RESISTANCE AND HEALING IN UNIVERSITIES

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**Abstract:** The text analyzes the experience of women's circles in the formal curriculum of universities courses in the Coastal Sector of the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR Litoral), located in Matinhos/PR. There were three experiences that took place in 2019: "Agroecology and the Sacred Feminine", "Priestess de Si" and "Sacred Feminine". The circles were configured in spaces consistent with ecological principles of care for the body and feminine cycles, of empowerment and organization of women, with impacts on their self-knowledge, on the strengthening of spaces for speech and women's solidarity networks.

**Keywords:** Sacred feminine; priestesses; feminism.

## INTRODUCTION

To write new chapters of their stories, many women have gathered in circles that group together women with different histories and desires. Women's or women's circles have been held around the world with different emphases and are considered a tool for humanity's social, cultural and psycho-spiritual changes for a post-patriarchal era (Bolen, 2003). For Machado (2020) the union and formation of women's circles are necessary to strengthen the sacred, self-esteem, trust, give and receive and break the ties and limiting beliefs, in a sacred movement supported by self-love and the love between sisters and such needs are supported by Agroecology, which brings in its essence the recognition of the role of women in the construction of a more just and egalitarian society.

Circles are a form of help for women who want to follow or change their actions, with a less hierarchical and more emotional approach. In the circles, women carry out knowledge and learning practices, to acquire courage, wisdom, commitment and experience, because in the circle they can talk about dreams, experiences and anxieties,

understanding themselves and strengthening a cooperative mind with supportive behaviors. In the way they have been implemented, they can be an important tool for a holistic education, disseminating new possibilities for becoming human and (re)building yourself as a woman (Geiger, 2014).

When education is mentioned, it is essential to review and renew the pedagogical practices of current times, in formal and non-formal contexts, postulating the human condition as an essential object and starting point of the entire educational process, emphasizing the importance of education through education. a holistic approach, of an integral education directed to the totality of the human being and not to just one or another of its dimensions (NICOLESCCU, 2000).

In the current conjuncture, universities has been stimulated by new and renewed challenges. The century-old university institutions feel obliged to rethink their role in a world that reconfigures and dynamizes their relationship with knowledge and that suffers a dismantling of its symbolic discourses. Curricula are needed that provide comprehensive training and enable cultural integration in different contexts, committed to society through the exercise of their own identity (Mengarelli, 2017). The Setor Litoral da Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR Litoral) points out in its political pedagogical project (PPP) that the intention of the educational process is the integral development, not only in the cognitive aspect but also in the affective and social aspects, in an emancipatory and social perspective. of protagonism of its subjects and their collectivities. Thus, only an innovative curriculum makes it possible to include women's circles as part of the training path within the formal curriculum, configuring itself as an institutionalized initiative of the feminist movement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Three different experiences took place during 2019 and are now the subject of this report. Here we intend to systematize and reflect on the impressions and expressions of the groups of students enrolled in the curricular modules of Cultural and Humanistic Interactions (ICH) entitled “Agroecology and Sacred Feminine”, “Priestess of the Self” and “Sacred Feminine”. The ICH are pedagogical activities that make up one of the curricular axes of all universities courses at UFPR Litoral and that are fundamental for the realization of its PPP, among which are: the promotion of vertical interaction (between classes in different phases of the courses) and horizontal (between different courses) of the academic community and the manifestation as an efficient strategy of cultural integration of the University in its context, through the interaction with the extra-academic communities that openly participate in the work. In addition, they emphasize processes of collective construction, perceptions and exchanges of experiences in reflective spaces (Mengarelli, 2017).

The conversation circles were self-managed processes of planning themes and activities, with collective and rotating mediation. They involved around 50 (fifty) students from the Technology courses in Agroecology, Social Work, Tourism and Hospitality, Degree in Arts, Degree in Geography and Public Health and three professors from the Technology in Agroecology course. In all modules the approach was qualitative with a focus on participant observation and focus groups with themes mainly related to feminism, self-esteem and self-care, female cycles and natural gynecology. The methodology of the activities consisted of carrying out weekly conversation circles, totaling 180 hours of activities. During the realization of the three circles, the participants answered written

questions during different activities and a written evaluation at the final meeting of each circle. Next, we will discuss the dynamics of each module and we will make some considerations about the reflections written in the evaluations based on discursive textual analysis (Moraes and Galiazzi, 2011).

## **ICH AGROECOLOGY AND THE SACRED FEMININE**

The Agroecology and Sacred Feminine module took place in the first half of 2019. At the time, the aim was to relate the topic to Agroecology studies and practices, passing through conscious eating and self-care. But the dynamics of the group of participants moved towards critical reading and studies on the book “Mulheres que correm com wolves” by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, permeated by active storytelling, reflections, self-care dynamics, use of medicinal herbs, promotion of self-esteem and manual arts practices.

## **ICH PRIESTESSES OF SI**

The module took place in the second half of 2019 and was attended by 26 female students from different courses. A group was created initially entitled “Women’s Care” and which later received the significant title of “Sacertodisas de Si”. At first, it was composed of women interested in agroecological and environmental issues, associated with natural and ecological therapies aimed at women’s health, invited by the proponents. The space was guided by the principle of self-management, as an educational and proactive process, guided by horizontalization and participatory planning and the rotation of functions.

## **SACRED FEMININE ICH**

The ICH Sagrado Feminino, which also took place during the second half of 2019, had the participation of students from

different courses and took the path of a circle of promoting self-esteem and strengthening identities. In addition, the participants carried out collective actions to involve the academic community in the theme of dialogues, such as the elaboration of notes with supporting and strengthening phrases, placed on the walls of the Institution; there was also a stencil t-shirt production action, in which each participant expressed himself freely. The dialogues took place from films, documentaries, dynamics and reports by the participants, mainly about inspiring women, female representation in spaces of power, feminism, self-care, relationships and women's health.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The reports were marked by a search for balance, identity, space for the exercise of creativity, reflection on the conditioning that silence women, the place of anger, desire, speech in social spaces. The dynamics of looking at, touching, letting yourself be photographed and taking care of yourself aroused feelings of acceptance and love in the groups, demonstrating the importance of women's collectives with a perspective of encouraging and strengthening each other. Crafts and handicrafts were also an important form of expression and mediated differences in age, gender, education and life histories.

The reflections brought by the participants of the circles, expressed in their written reports show that:

1) In the circle, it is possible to listen and share physical, emotional, social and productive states, which are mechanisms of relief and identification with other women's stories, which provide recognition and advice, relief from pressures and also see themselves as part of the trajectories of other women.

*"...It was an opportunity to get to know myself and to meet other sisters...I heard stories that touched me deeply and that have*

*been transforming me. I didn't know about the strength of being among women... It's a circle of understanding and acceptance, a place to get rid of our insecurities and celebrate the magic of being a woman"* (Camilla)

2) *"...Gathered women has always been revolutionary, participating in the ICH I had the opportunity to get to know myself better, and to get to know my sisters better... the ICH offers a space for delivery and mutual healing, it works with healing through speech, respect and understanding through each one's speech. It stimulates empowerment, self-confidence, self-care, self-esteem... Not to mention the strong and special bonds of friendship I created..."* (Juliana)

It is important to have participatory planning, self-management and proactivity in training – the collective definition of themes and the schedule of activities and the distribution of responsibilities for harmonizing and mediating themes.

*"...We had freedom of decision, development of creativity, critical sense, artistic skills, which made me believe more in myself and work on my patience"* (Sabrine)

3) Intergenerational situational leadership is fundamental – wise young women who, based on their experiences, assume themes to be shared in the role of welcoming and proposing alternatives to female sisters immersed in a dominant mass culture that distanced us from the feminine and from nature itself.

*"...This ICH was very interesting because of the contact with the girls because I learned a lot from them...because of their age [they] have a lot of knowledge and things that I had never heard of, nor imagined that existed..."* (Roseli)

7) Gender relations in decision-making spaces need to be dialogued - the sharing demonstrates how the institutional space, even in counterculture strands such as Agroecology, behavior, speech and male

political position are valued, oppressive and silencing of women.

*"... it is necessary to constantly dialogue about gender relations in educational institutions; deconstruct crystallized behaviors and expand the dialogue beyond women's circles and include feminism in daily agendas..." (Gabriela)*

*"...The themes were relevant for applicability in our daily lives as women in a patriarchal system; I really liked it because there was a care and refinement in observing racial, gender, sexual orientation, etc..."(Zuza)*

8) Physical, emotional and mental balance is like a daily practice of self-knowledge, female empowerment and health.

*"...It opens up a space for being a woman of empowerment, recognition of the body, its biological and emotional cycles, as well as the appropriation of methods of observation and balance of one's own body..." (Cristiane)*

*"Our meetings connected us and we were able to start a dive into the mysteries of the feminine together and through plurality to heal together. We touched each other's hearts, and we were also able to practice studies related to natural and autonomous gynecology and another immensity of knowledge that arises through of the feminine... This ICH was an invitation for more women to recognize themselves in this unit, and it was also the continuity of this real search for women who honor each other..." (Beatriz)*

*"... We could see that self-care goes beyond the physical sphere. Taking care of our emotional, we open up to take care of the physical and vice versa" (Renata)*

These reflections show that participation in conversation circles values female cycles, prepares women to recognize their creative moments, the limits of physical wear and tear and possible preventive care with their own health based on integrative practices. It promotes the understanding of the social conditioning of the female role, strengthens

the self-esteem and the psychic structure of the woman, influencing the behavior in the face of situations of violence. Thus, the recognition of the potential of the female being empowers women to occupy and act in the private space by choice. Participation in women's circles provided the appreciation of women's cycles, enhancing their decision-making and creative actions; performing with greater confidence the improvement of their emotional and professional skills; understanding the manifestation of imbalances in the physical body associated with emotional and mental factors; the experimentation of natural practices of physical-emotional balance from Natural Gynecology; in addition to greater knowledge and use of ecological practices for female cycles. In addition, the conversation circles were configured, in addition to a therapeutic space, also a space for political training, by strengthening self-esteem and the recognition of the importance of acting and manifestation in decision-making spaces.

## CONCLUSIONS

We highlight the importance of women's movements in the spaces of integral and humanistic training of the academic community and we emphasize that making a feminist movement part of the curriculum of courses in a federal institution of universities only happens in spaces with innovative pedagogical projects, such as the case of UFPR Litoral. Women's circles bring important reflections on the social conditions that regulate women's freedom of expression and gender differences, as well as the consequences of patriarchy, which emphasize and value only the voice and position of men. In addition to the benefits in terms of female empowerment, health promotion and self-esteem, the circles show the importance of developing such themes in formal academic spaces, as they provide student participation

in participatory and self-management spaces, of intergenerational experiences and in line with the culture of peace.

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