THEMATIC SECTION:
CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION OF
ETHNIC-RACIAL RELATIONS

Voices of Black Children in Research and Literature: hoping is the verb

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ABSTRACT – Voices of Black Children in Research and Literature: hoping is the verb[1]**.** This essay is intended to highlight the experiences of black children in academic research and children's literature. Assuming their voices as references for the effective education of ethnic-racial relations, we discuss discourses produced in the school environment, many of them reifying stereotypes. In contrast, in selected children's literature, their voices trigger new meanings about their trajectories. Thus, aspects of teacher education are pointed out, with special emphasis on the need for a literary education that contemplates ethnic-racial diversity. It is a bet on the interlacing of voices, so that we can hope for more life-giving stories to all children as a project of anti-racist education.
Keywords: **Black Children. Children's Literature. Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations.**

RESUMO – Vozes de Crianças Pretas em Pesquisas e na Literatura: esperançar é o verbo. Neste ensaio propomos evidenciar experiências de crianças pretas em pesquisas acadêmicas e na literatura infantil. Tomando suas vozes como referenciais para a efetiva educação das relações étnico-raciais, discutimos sobre discursos produzidos no ambiente escolar, sendo muitos deles reificadores de estereótipos. Em contraponto, na literatura infantil selecionada, suas vozes acionam novos sentidos acerca de suas trajetórias. Assim, aspectos da formação docente são apontados, com destaque especial à necessidade de uma educação literária que contemple a diversidade étnico-racial. É uma aposta no entrelaçamento de vozes para que possamos esperançar histórias mais cheias de vida às todas as crianças, como projeto de uma educação antirracista.
Palavras-chave: **Crianças Pretas. Literatura Infantil. Educação das Relações Étnico-Raciais.**

Introduction

> It's very sad to see your daughter being rejected! Even before saying 'hello' she comes close and they all run, she approaches, and all the others group together, she calls, and no one answers. They isolate her, exclude her, hurt her. She does not understand it, but she feels it. She does not complain, but gets sad. My heart breaks! This time I was here spying, crying and thinking of ways to protect my daughter. This time I called her into my lap, hugged her, said she was beautiful and intelligent, I told her I loved her. But what will happen when I'm not around? (Xongani, 2018, online).

For the West, the predominant idea of childhood is that of smallness and minority. This moment of life represented so little that a continent vilified by the West, the African, was compared to it: to be African is to be a child. The stigma, double in this case, produces a nefarious effect when one thinks of the intersection of childhood and blackness. What does it mean to be a black child?[2] What does it mean to be a black child in the West?

If, for Frantz Fanon (2008, p. 191), "[...] man's unhappiness is to have been a child", and to Wadji Mouawad (2013, p. 416), "[...] childhood is a knife stuck in the throat and it is not easy to remove it", what about a childhood crossed by different colors, identities and bodies, plural and non-standardized? Being in childhood, in some cases, can cost life, existence as it is. Black children, for instance, at the age of three, question their mothers, also black, with questions like, "Mommy, can you be white?" (Dias, 2015, p. 36); white children say that if they could choose they would be white even "[...] because [if they were black] people would be making fun of them, they would say that it is ugly" (Fazzi, 2006, p. 118); old people, referring to black children, called them "[...] puppies of St. Benedict, because they were dogs in the shape of people" (Cavalleiro, 2006a, p. 57).

And with that, what is left of life, beauty, haughtiness, pride? If we think about the cultural products, the teaching materials, the toys and the resources used to whiten, normalize and colonize such small bodies, almost nothing remains. Very little is offered to black and white children to constitute broad and positive concepts of the diversity that makes up the world.

In this perspective, what is sought in this text is to listen to real and fictional children, especially the discourses about black children, present in academic and literary productions, with the intent that such voices help us think about other possibilities of pedagogical treatment of ethnic-racial differences, collaborating in the training processes of teachers. For that, we initially gathered studies developed at MSc and PhD levels, from different regions of Brazil and produced between 1990 and 2010, whose characteristic in common are children's discourses manifesting in face of aesthetic and cultural African and African-

Brazilians repertoires. In the second part, we aim to capture in the children's literary production "[...] with topics of African and African-Brazilian culture" (Debus, 2017), positive elements that reaffirm in the voices of black children – this time fictional – any enriching possibilities for literary education that, consequently, focus on the expansion of cultural and world references.

We consider literary education as an important ally to the pedagogical actions of valorization of ethnic-racial diversity, not relegating – it is important to emphasize – literature to a didactical function. One thing is the schooling of literature that, agreeing with Magda Soares (2006), when becoming school knowledge, becomes schooled. Another thing is to understand it at the service of teaching, in a process of "[...] misrepresentation, falsification, distortion, as a result of poorly understood pedagogy or didatization which, by transforming literary into scholarly, disfigures it, distorts it, fakes it" (Soares, 2006, p. 22). In contrast to this, literary education understands that the formation of readers, a process initiated in early childhood education, should take as a principle the need for "[...] children to share the pleasure of getting in touch with good texts and good books and feel that this pleasure contributes so that they may recognize themselves and be recognized as belonging to that community" (Dalvi, 2013, p. 127). And this includes "[...] a teaching of literature that prizes for diversity and the inclusion of all ethnic and social groups in its core" (Dalvi, 2013, p. 137).

It is hoped that this text, full of real and fictitious children's voices, will resonate, especially in the context of teaching and teacher training, in order to produce active listening that looks at how children, especially black ones, have been confronted with dramas and conflicts which often condition them to inferior and excluding racial categories. But also, especially through literature and literary education, the voices echo indicating ways to build, in the school space, an environment conducive to the production of positive subjectivities and identities, strengthened by ties of otherness, respect and recognition.

Voices of Children in Academic Research

The condition of the adult person investigating children is always subject to questioning, because *adult centrism* is a mark imbricated in the ways of thinking research, writing and academic production. Agreeing with Elizabeth Graue and Daniel Walsh (2003, p. 56 apud Corsi, 2010, p. 30), "As compelling as the phrase 'through the eyes of children' may be, we will never see the world through the eyes of another, particularly from the eyes of a child. On the contrary, we will always see the world through layers of theory". Recognizing this dimension and that there are specific characteristics to develop research with children, it represents to recognize the subjects of childhood as protagonists of their narratives.

In this sense, in the research selected for this section, one of the main characteristics in common is this care: to conceive the child as

a comprehensive being, who elaborates, refutes and reconstructs hypotheses about himself/herself and the world around him/her. Thus, the topic of identity is constantly triggered and is influenced by the environment and the forms of socialization in which it is inserted. This has instigated us to identify in some surveys what children think about the racial issue and their identities in dialogue with their visions about the world, their peers, as well as teachers and family members.

For Juliana Pereira da Silva, Silvia Neli Falcão Barbosa and Sonia Kramer (2005, p. 53) "[...] researching with children means being able to bring distinct situations where the children are interacting. [...] Therefore, not only the reference to the social class of the children is important in the research, but they are also indications of questions as values [...]". It is based on this understanding that in the research listed here we seek to show how, in educational processes, their voices inform us about their ways of understanding systems of oppression, such as racial discrimination. It will be possible to observe in the discourse how socializing contexts based on the hierarchy of people contribute to the construction of knowledge about human diversity in many situations in a limiting way. But transformations in discourses are also perceptible when educational processes are compromised and concerned with providing children with expanded cultural repertoires.

Angela Maria Parreiras Ramos' study (2007), whose objective was to understand the influences exerted by black protagonists of literary works in children from progression classes of two schools belonging to Rio de Janeiro municipal public network, evidenced a positive repercussion among readers. Through the action-research methodology, during almost one semester the author performed storytelling once a week in classes for 9- to 11-year-old children of two schools. Following the narrative, various activities were developed such as: conversations, drawings, paintings, clipping and collage, "[...] in which the students had the opportunity to represent themselves and/or the characters demonstrating the phenotypic characteristics" (Ramos, 2007, p. 23). In one context of her research, the word Africa was accessed by children. At first the answers were associated with negative questions, often related to misery: "There are many beggars there. Isn't that right?' – said a black student who was immediately joined in agreement by the other classmates" (Ramos, 2007, p. 57). But after the contact with children's literary productions with topics of African culture, the perspective was modified, and new images constructed:

> – Teacher, where do you get these stories you bring? Do you get them at the library?
> – No. They are mine.
> – You have all this? It's hard to find books like that.
> – What do you mean, 'like that'?
> A silence left her silent for a few seconds until her colleague broke the silence and said:
> – With stories from Africa!
> – That's right, with stories from Africa. They are so beautiful... I never saw anything like it! (Ramos, 2007, p. 107).

It can be observed the positive recognition by the children of the reading mediation strategies made by the researcher and how much this was responsible for instigating them to reflect on the lack of access to this type of literature, besides triggering their interest to the new acquis submitted to them. This demonstrates the potential of literary education for the critical reading of children, contributing not only to the construction or strengthening of identity traits, especially for black children, but also – for all children – to broaden the look on the world, allowing experience and experimentation of other perspectives, as well as fostering "[...] common but singular experiences" (Dalvi, 2003, p. 127).

This trend had already been pointed out in an earlier study, developed by Ana Lúcia Silva Souza and Camila Croso (2007) [*Equality of Ethnic-Racial Relations in Schools: possibilities and challenges for the implementation of Law N. 10639/03*]. This was a consultation held in 2005 with fifteen institutions of Early Childhood Education and 1st to 9th grades in the municipal networks of Salvador, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte (respectively the capital cities of Bahia, São Paulo and Minas Gerais states) on the implementation of Law N. 10639/2003 (Brasil, 2003), with the central objective of collecting subsidies to generate recommendations that favored its implementation. In order to do so, different segments were heard such as teachers, family members, students from 1st to 9th grades and pre-school children. With young children, on average five years old, conversation circles and storytelling sessions where held, and questions were asked: first, what they knew about the African Continent, and next what they would like to know. In the answers to the first question, there were references to a place where there were many animals and others said they did not know anything about it. Only the children from Salvador spoke about "[...] the colors of African Union, its location on the globe and they mentioned the slave trade" (Souza; Croso, 2007, p. 54). Regarding the second question, children from the three states presented a wide repertoire of questions, such as:

> – How they live, where they live, where they sleep, what their homes are like.
> – What the children and the school are like.
> – I'd like to learn how they protect themselves, how they get by, and how they take care of the dead.
> – Why were they enslaved? How did blacks live as slaves? Why did the Portuguese enslave them?
> – Why did not whites like blacks? Why were blacks not treated like whites? (Souza; Croso, 2007, p. 44).

This research captured elements about children's curiosities and inquiries about African and African-Brazilian culture, evidencing both the existence of a demand to learn and of an urgency of an education focused on ethnic-racial relations, like it is recommended in the *National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of African-Brazilian and African History and Culture*. This document recommends the addressing of topics related to African and African-Brazilian history and culture from the perspective of the

resistance of the black population, considering them protagonists in the processes of liberation and constitution of their re-existence in the diaspora. It is a perspective that also converges with the proposition of Nilma Lino Gomes (2012, p. 105), when she warns us that the pedagogical approach must produce a kind of knowledge "[...] that proposes to be emancipatory within the school, that is, which presupposes and considers the existence of an 'other', although an active and concrete subject, with whom one speaks and about whom one speaks. And in that sense, it incorporates conflicts, tensions and divergences".

According to the Consolidated Opinion CNE/CP 3/2004, responsible for ratifying the abovementioned Guidelines, "[...] we still need to create pedagogies to tackle racism and discrimination" (Brasil, 2004). This means that nothing is given when it comes to organizing work in the school from an antiracist perspective, i.e., it is part of the construction of an antiracist pedagogy to listen to the subjects about what they want to learn. As it was possible to verify in that consultation, the children set out very significant issues and open fruitful paths for effective work with African and African-Brazilian culture under different perspectives of what has been commonly offered to them: a historical and cultural perspective focusing on enslavement.

Souza and Croso (2007) showed that, in the case of students from 1st to 9th grades, there was a demonstration of interest in knowing the African continent through its constituents and not through static historical facts. Knowing *what they eat, where they sleep, how they protect themselves, how they care for their dead* were topics that instigated them, that is, children are interested in people and their lives. It is, therefore, an interested demand on a living history, made of people who attract them, focusing on the acquisition of knowledge about customs, singularities and differences that are expressed in the human being and their diversity.

Another important aspect to be considered when thinking about school and the education of ethnic-racial relations concerns the teachers training. One of the situations captured by the research indicates the discrepancy between the demands presented by the children and the pedagogical practices they perform. During the activity with five-year-old children, one of the teachers explained to them that the use of the word *negro* when referring to people was not correct and therefore she recommended a *right way*: "The right word is not *negrinha* [colored girl], but *morena* [brunette], and the boy is white, skin-colored" (Souza; Croso, 2007, p. 52). There is no doubt that the adult presence among children, ratified by the status of teaching authority, telling them how to address the others, crucially impacts their identities, focusing on the direct appreciation of white people who would have *skin color*, and making the others subaltern, especially the black ones.

This context, that should be an exception to the rule, considering the time that has passed since the approval of Law N. 10639/2003 (Brasil, 2003), is more common than expected. In a more recent study, Flávia Carolina da Silva (2016) identified similar pedagogical contexts

regarding the teachers' understanding of ethnic-racial belongings of the Brazilian population. With the objective of analyzing in the training actions carried out by the Curitiba Municipal Department of Education, to what extent the policy of continuous training complied with the legal determinations that established the teaching of ethnic-racial relations, the author presented as epigraph of her study an excerpt observed in the period of scientific initiation, when the teacher and 4- and 5-old children were talking: "He's black, I'm white, and you are blonde, right teacher?" And the answer was: "No... I'm brunette... you're brunette... and he's brunette too!" (Silva, 2016, p. 17).

Once again we notice that, although with apparently positive intentions, the production of discourses of authority on the part of adults (and, as we have already said, worsened by the teaching condition), produced with positions based on a racist perspective, impact on children's identities creating, especially for black children, an extreme difficulty of positive recognition of their ethno-racial belonging. According to Rita de Cássia Fazzi (2006, p. 86), one of the problems of encouragement, especially in childhood, to use the *brunette* classification produces uncertainty about the "[...] guarantee of non-discriminatory treatment in other social contexts, in groups or in another biographical stage in the individual's life", leading to the realization in adult life that "being classified as a *brunette* does not guarantee the elimination of racial prejudice".

But in discourses as those observed by Silva (2016), white children are also affected because, by not interfering in the constitution of their identities, they construct a feeling of racial, intellectual, aesthetic and cultural superiority (Cavalleiro, 2006b, p. 92), learning, for instance, that they are carriers of an exclusive humanity, because they would be the only human *skin color*. On the other hand, we recognize that the limits of the teacher come from the ways how racism is configured in the Brazilian society, characterized by a *racial etiquette* that "[...] emphasizes the control of the individuals' behavior in the discriminating group, in order to avoid the susceptibility or humiliation of individuals in the discriminated group" (Nogueira, 2006, p. 299). In this understanding, the triggering of information about discriminated racial and ethnic belonging – in this case of black children – is not considered to be *appropriate*: "Reference to color is avoided, just as avoidance of reference to any other subject capable of harming the susceptibility of the interlocutor" (Nogueira, 2006, p. 299), ratifying the pejorative notion assigned to the racial identity of this group.

And black children, through their narratives, demonstrate how such experiences impact them. Some of them complain, as it was captured in another passage in Souza and Croso's research (2007, p. 53), "My brother is white and does not like my color." Or: "She did not want to play with me, I became sad, angry, and I did not play with her anymore. Then I was sad" (Souza; Croso, 2007, p. 53). The sense of contempt coming from white children is another striking feature in the testimonials. The research conducted by Lucimar Rosa Dias (2017) in Mato Grosso do

Sul sought to understand how racial relations were expressed in the daily life of preschool children. To do so, she performed participant observation in three schools and talked with 5- to 6-year-old children about what it is to be black and white. Among the various dialogues collected that appear in the research, the following one happened between the researcher and a white child, after an activity that discussed the beauty of a black character:

> 'No, I said, those who do not like her as she is, black, have to stand up'.
> 'I don't like the 'brunette' so much, and ... how is it?'
> 'Blacks'.
> 'Yes... blacks. (I think she wanted to use the word negro, but she did not remember it)' (Souza; Croso, 2007, p. 65).

It is the listening of children that indicates many of the formative processes developed by adults, sometimes unintentional, but which nevertheless present references to children in ways of interpreting racial and social relations. The child's difficulty in naming racial/ethnic belonging to people and/or characters highlights how much the race/color topic is poorly explored with consistency, which creates insecurity and a need to *measure* the words so as not to sound prejudiced, ratifying, from a very early age, the *racial etiquette* present in people's discourses in the Brazilian context. For Fazzi (2006, p. 80), attitudes like these, which transform the racial issue into a taboo subject, make it difficult "[...] to overcome racial prejudices rooted, transmitted and assimilated since childhood".

But it is also the listening of the children the responsible for indicating the constant need to think about their subjectivities, their bodies and ways of existing. Beauty, for instance, is a recurring topic for them. Some say that beauty has to do with hair, others with skin color, and others with eyes. The research of Fazzi (2006, p. 113), whose goal was to "[...] construct an *ideal type* of prejudiced child, emphasizing the nature of the constituent stereotypes of interracial relations and characterizing the behavior, which, from the point of view of a sociologist, could be identified as prejudiced", identified beauty as a preponderant criterion in the racial classification of children. Investigating two municipal schools in Belo Horizonte, one located in a middle class neighborhood and the other in a favela, the author interviewed 6- to 10-year-old children from several grades, organized in groups. From the "[...] group of poor children" (Fazzi, 2006, p. 114), Helena, 8 years old, self-classified as *brunette*, would not choose to be black because [...] "[...] black... we feel embarrassed [...] it's because when we become black we feel something [...] feel our color, our ugly skin" (Fazzi, 2006, p. 115). And in Ramos's study (2007, p. 80), two answers to the question "How do we know if a person is beautiful?" indicated the eyes as a determining factor: "'By the eyes. If they are blue, she is beautiful'. 'That's right, when you have blue eyes, you are beautiful'" (Ramos, 2007, p. 80).

Thus, children tell us that ethnic-racial belonging permeates their school experiences and, especially for black children, a process of insta-

bility of their subjectivity develops. Using a metaphor of Fazzi's (2006, p. 218) for the school environment in relation to the racial issue, one can imagine a tense *game* of classification and self-classification that focuses mainly on black children, whose greatest drama is to expose them "[...] to a permanent ritual to belittle, in which they are especially affected by mocking and cursing" (Fazzi, 2006, p. 218).

Investigating in a public school of Porto Alegre (capital of Rio Grande do Sul state) municipal education network how the discourses of 7- to 8-year-old children "[...] are produced and plotted [...] in their relation with the dolls, referring to the differences of ethnicity and phenotypic characteristics", Michelle Brugnera Cruz Cechin and Thaise da Silva (2014, p. 610) observed the following scene:

> Three girls, named here E., J. and N., play with Barbie dolls and a bag full of clothes. J. holds three Barbies in her hand, a black one dressed as a ballerina, a black one dressed in trousers and a blouse and a blonde one in a bikini. J. asks N.:
> J: – Which one do you think is more beautiful?
> N: – This one here. (Pointing to the black Barbie dressed as a dancer).
> J: – But this one here has blond hair and is in a bikini.
> N: – I like this one better! She is in ballerina clothes.
> J: – She's black. I never saw a black ballerina!
> E: – Let's take her ballerina clothes off and put them on this one. (Showing the Beach Barbie).
> J: – That's better! (Cechin; Silva, 2014, p. 619).

Playing with dolls has been a fertile moment when children talk and, from listening to these voices, this instigates us to think what kinds of experiences are being offered by the adult world, so that they can build multiple contributions about life and ethnic-racial groups to which they belong.

But other narratives are also possible. The same authors have identified that the meanings assigned to black and white dolls can be disputed and depend a lot on the experiences that the children acquire in the various spaces, beyond the school scope, a privileged locus of our discussion. In another scene, the authors heard from a child: "Teacher, get your black Barbies! And get that *macumbeira* [*marabout*] Barbie too!" (Cechin; Silva, 2014, p. 623). The child was referring to a Barbie doll whose edition, which honored the singer Cindy Lauper, wore red clothes, greatly remembering the entity *Pomba Gira*, present in religious cults, such as in *Umbanda*[3]. What the authors learned from this context was the fact that the child seemed to know some of the religious rites of *Umbanda* because, while playing with the doll, she simulated the gestures proper to these cults, demonstrating a relationship of affection and playfulness in this process and evidencing a rare moment of the appreciation of African-Brazilian culture in children's practices captured by research.

However, it is evident from everything already pointed out, that the predominance of the sayings highlights a negative picture that trig-

gers the need for an active listening on what children tell us about the symbolic violence that permeates their experiences and causes them pain. And when we think mainly about small children, the images, the games and the ludic become more important because it is through these cultural contributions that they interact with the world and build their repertoires, their life histories and their possibilities of existence. We understand that literature, although despite a supposed devaluation by older children, is one of the most accessible and accessed cultural contributions in the school space. Thus, it can contribute effectively to the proposal of expanding cultural repertoires, of interpretations about the world and about themselves. In addition, literary education, with an emphasis on critical reading training, can foster the child's protagonism, creating the "[...] opportunity for them to know themselves as producers of the senses of/in their reading" (Simões; Junqueira, 2014, p. 13).

> If we are afraid of daring in alternative pedagogical practices, in the case of reading teaching, we need to remember the necessary humanizing literary education, one in which learning to read through literary texts is learning to read through art, which is manifested in texts. It delights, makes you laugh and cry, think and rethink; it brings the playful character of the game; it establishes in and through language, allowing recreations of the text read, of the activity carried out, of the itinerary covered, of the mental operations implemented in the act of reading and of becoming a reader in and of itself (Souza; Girotto; Silva, 2012, p. 176).

In this understanding, the teaching work aimed at recognizing the different racial identities of children gains an important ally since children's literature, when well selected, represents a cultural product that establishes a mediation between the real and the fictional, in order to contribute so that the black children can experience their humanity so denied on the real plane. This is what we propose to discuss in the next section.

Children's Literary Voices

Although here we allude to the voices of black children as characters in contexts of appreciation, it is important to emphasize that the sound of these voices in the fictional plane was, until a while back, almost inaudible. One of the main factors for this is literary racism, acting in a way that makes the black population invisible in the Brazilian artistic production. Allied to this factor, children's literature in Brazil was historically victimized by the condition of sub literature, because "[...] the minority of childhood was associated with the lower literary production within this cultural field" (Gouvea, 2005, p. 81).

Because it is a country structured in the racialization of certain social groups over others, especially indigenous and African descendants, Brazilian cultural products (such as children's literature) have not been able to distance themselves much from stereotyped models

throughout history. In mappings on Brazilian children's literary production, the conclusion was that since its creation in Brazil at the beginning of the last century, the condition of indigenous and black children in this production was and still is of under-representation, stereotypy or subjugation (Gouvea, 2005; Bonin; Kirchof, 2012).

Maria Anória de Jesus Oliveira (2003) exemplifies how black children were a constant target of physical or symbolic violence in consecrated literary productions in the last decades of the 20th century. In the investigation of twelve juvenile narratives published between the 1979 and 1989, along with the inferiority marks of black children and adolescents, the author identified violence as a recurring action in the plots[4]:

> Most black protagonists suffer physical and/or verbal aggression. Physical violence occurs in the social space in which the following are located: 1) Neco (in the shack where he lived, fights and is killed); 2) Carniça, in the street (faces the burglars, gets shot); 3) Oldemar (luckily, escapes the shots and the chasing dogs); 4) João (spanked by his father, is chased by the cops, arrested and mistaken for a thief); 5) Dito (in the street: he is mistaken for a thief, chased, arrested and beaten at work and in the new home); 6) Joca (at school, at his mother's place of work and in the street); 7) Tânia, at school; 8) Geni, at school; 9) Benê, in the wealthy neighborhood (Oliveira, 2003, p. 109).

More recently, the Brazilian literary industry has invested in productions aimed at responding to the aspirations of a society in transformation that demands an extension of rights to the recognition of the diverse identities. There is no doubt that 2003 is marked by the approval of Law N. 10639/2003 (Brasil, 2003), which amended articles 26A and 79B of the National Educational Bases and Guidelines Law [LDB], making it compulsory to teach African-Brazilian history and culture. Eliane Debus (2012, p. 146), analyzing the increase in the number of studies on African and African-Brazilian culture, argues that this is the reflex, albeit timid, of the "[...] dissemination of literary titles in the publishing market" and refutes, in another text written with Angela Balça, reductionist interpretations that suggest a possible co-optation of the discourses on the "[...] marginalized ethnicities" (Debus; Balça, 2008, p. 67) by the publishing market. According to the authors, the argument that the "[...] market bias [took advantage of] a niche" (Debus; Balça, 2008, p. 66-67) is reductionist, since this context is also a result of the transformations that society has been experiencing.

Oliveira (2008, p. 5) also recognizes that the last decades have indicated "[...] innovations in face of the characters, which break with racist and putting down ideas, as it prevailed until the 1980s". Some of the innovations refer to the fact that protagonists are no longer "[...] outlined in roles of subservience and passivity" and come into contact with experiences in the plots that involve existential crises, situating them "[...] in various social spaces [...], leaving the reader to interpret and resize such spaces" (Oliveira, 2008, p. 6).

Thus, social changes have made it possible, albeit very recently, to hear more often about diversities of children's voices in literature, "[...] space of the imagination, of the ludic, of freedom" (Aguiar, 2007, p. 18). Under these conditions, children in general can participate in a *fictional pact* proposed by authors in which the black child is rich in diverse experiences – and no longer under a single history (Adichie, 2009) – enabling those who read it, as a consequence, the invention of new worlds because:

> [...] I experience emotions that I have never felt, and I find myself able to take risks, widen limits, enrich my daily life and outline paths. At the end of the reading, I am no longer the same as before, because I have with me the results of the lived experience, balanced in the line that unites fantasy and reality. However, what I live in fantasy acquires, for me, an existential concreteness, that is, imagined experiences trigger real feelings that, in turn, will mobilize new behaviors. Thus, if I discover courage, love, freedom, the ability to face pain, for instance, I will be able to transfer such findings to my daily life and transform my life (Aguiar, 2007, p. 18-19).

It is with the intent of fomenting this debate in the educational training processes directed towards the literary education that in this section we will emphasize the literary voices of black children. In agreement with Hercules Corrêa and Aracy Martins (2007, p. 8), we believe that literature, and in this case specifically children's literature, is composed of three axes that are essential to establish "[...] dialogues about literature and its teaching or its educational mediations in school and society". Namely: cultures, knowledge and languages. These are axes that directly affect a child's ways of seeing the world by producing ever more beneficial effects as they are enlarged or explored, all the more so because the literary text itself does not reveal everything, "leaving empty spaces to be completed by the readers, according to the breadth of their experiential horizon, their previous knowledge, their values, their expectations, their readings" (Corrêa; Martins, 2007, p. 18).

In this attempt, we propose here an unusual exercise for academic texts: we will displace the literary voices of fictitious characters usually presented as the target of analysis for the position of protagonists in the process of literary education recognition. In other words, it will be the black children present in the narratives (even if written by adults) that will direct the discussion here on the need for an adequate treatment of the literary text and its potential for the appreciation of ethnic-racial diversity.

Initially, two African girls, named Ynari and Arabella, tell us many things about themselves. Princess Arabella (Freeman, 2008), for instance, says she's sick of it all. Spoiled as she is, Arabella, who already has everything, no longer knows what she wants.

> 'What do you think of a pair of roller skaters with ruby stones in the wheels?' The queen suggested.

> 'I already have them', replied Princess Arabella.
> 'And a golden bicycle?'
> 'I already have one', said the princess.
> 'And a plush little mouse to hug?'
> 'I already have one', said the princess.
> 'And a rocking zebra?'
> 'I have it'.
> 'What about a little tea set?' What about a doll cart? And a...
> 'I already have all this! Exclaimed the princess. Now I want something different' (Freeman, 2008, p. 11-13).

What does Arabella want? By the way, why does Arabella want something different? While she wants so much, Ynari only wants to play with words: "I've always liked words very much, even those I don't know yet, you know? There are words that are in our hearts that have not yet been in our mouths... Have you ever felt that?" (Ondjaki, 2010, p. 13).

The differences between them are evident: one is spoiled and understands things from her limited world references; the other is sensitive to what is different and to the world that she does not yet know.

> Ynari went to bed and had a dream with many new words. During the dream, an old man who explains the meaning of the words explained to her what the word 'barter' meant. She asked a lot of questions to this very old man and finally thought that a barter was a fair exchange, in which someone gives something and also receives something, and it may not be the same size, or the same color, or even the same flavor [...]. But Ynari understood that a barter is good for two people, or two peoples, to be content with the result of this exchange (Ondjaki, 2010, p. 27).

Barter is certainly a word Arabella does not know. Her favorite word is *wanting*:

> 'I want ... an elephant!'
> 'A what?', cried the queen.
> 'Ow!' Murmured the king. 'Where are we going to find such an animal? And who's going to let it stay with us?'
> Arabella did not even want to know about the difficulties. She wanted an elephant really bad (Freeman, 2008, p. 14).

But even though they live on the same continent, Ynari does not know Arabella. Despite this, we can think fictionally about the possibility of them one day meeting. What would they learn from each other? Of all the situations oblivious to creativity at this moment, surely Ynari would teach the meaning of barter to Arabella, the spoiled princess. But perhaps it will not be necessary, because another character will help our protagonist to understand many things about the world. For the princess, who wants everything and has everything, Elephant (attention to change in the initial capital letter) is the best gift she could be given. After looking for seven days and seven nights, the servants of the kingdom "[...] returned on the eighth day. With an elephant" (Freeman, 2008). But it turns out that Elephant became very sad and began to cry:

> 'Hey, you're my gift, you have to play with me!' Arabella cried impatiently.
> But Elephant did not move. A large tear trickled slowly down its trunk. And one more, and another. It did not take long, and Princess Arabella was in a lake of tears reaching her ankles.
> [...]
> 'I want to go home! Sobbed Elephant. Please, take me back'.
> 'I can't, you are my gift', protested the princess (Freeman, 2008, p. 21-22).

It's a big conflict. Nothing is denied to a princess-child, to a child-princess, everything is given to her. How could she now not have what she wanted the most? It is true that this sense of frustration also permeated Ynari's story. Not from within her, who only wanted to know more words and help people, but from the members of the villages where she walked by:

> 'Good morning, older one', Ynari said. But the elder did not listen because he was deaf. Then Ynari spoke to him with gestures and he understood.
> 'Good morning, girl', said the older man.
> 'Tell me, is this village at war?'
> 'Yes, we are at war with another village'.
> 'Why?'
> 'Because we can't hear the birds, and they can! And we also want to hear the birds, the waterfalls, people's voices', the older man gestured.
> 'I get it, but tell me something...'
> 'What is it?', asked the older man.
> 'If I teach you how to hear the birds, will the war end?'
> 'Yes. We just want to know how to use the word 'hear'' (Ondjaki, 2010, p. 29).

And likewise, in the five villages where she had been, *Ynari, the girl with five braids*, made a barter with the peoples: in the village of those who did not hear, she gave them a braid and they learned to use the word *hear*; in the village of those who did not speak, she gave them a braid, and they learned to use the word *speak*; in the village of those who did not see, she gave them a braid and they learned to use the word *see*; in the village of those who could not smell, she gave them a braid and they learned to use the word *smell*; and in the village of those who could not taste, she gave them a braid and they learned the meaning of *savor*. But if it is a barter, what did Ynari get? The word she got was *peace*. The war around her was over.

Arabella would still take a little longer to learn the meaning of barter. Dissuaded from the plan to stay with Elephant, who only cried and asked to return home, the princess decided to attend to such a request, but: "On the way, Princess Arabella saw a lot of different animals. 'I want this, and that, and that one too!' Elephant was walking fast..." (Freeman, 2008, p. 24). Elephant would show her something she did not know yet:

> When they finally reached the place where Elephant lived, a little elephant ran toward them.
> 'Mom! You're well on time! And I brought my gift with you!'
> 'Yes, little one,' said Elephant. 'And that's exactly what you've always wanted: a little princess!' (Freeman, 2008, p. 26-28).

Finally the meaning of barter is revealed to Arabella, who learns how much her desire can also be that of others. And both protagonists, Arabella and Ynari, have learned that multiple experiences constitute diverse histories and perspectives.

Like them, two boys – this time Brazilian children – also live existential conflicts: Nito and Joaquim. With close ages, Nito, of the story *Menino Nito*, by Sonia Rosa (2006) and Joaquim, of the book *Adamastor, o pangaré* (Picture 1), by Mariana Massarani (2007) face great dilemmas. For crying a lot, Nito was warned by his father: "Nito, my son, you are becoming a little young man... It's time to stop crying for nothing. And there's more: a real man doesn't cry!" (Rosa, 2006). Joaquim is outraged at his unborn sister: "I'm very angry because instead of a brother, I'm going to have a sister!" (Massarani, 2007). They are two black boys with legitimate conflicts and who live adventures in search of self-knowledge, their tastes and ways of seeing the world.

With his father's warning, Nito changed his attitude, keeping inside him all the pain that had made him cry before. "What to do with those tears kept for 'those hours'? Yes... that's right... Nito had only one way out: to suppress all the tears he had to cry. That was it! It was solved! 'A real man doesn't cry!'" (Rosa, 2006). Joaquim, with nothing to do but to conform, "with a wizard's wand that he was given as a gift at the birthday of a friend at school" (Massarani, 2007) created a magical horse named Adamastor.

In search of overcoming their conflicts, Nito and Joaquim live their days. While for Joaquim time follows full of many adventures with Adamastor, for Nito, his health happens to be compromised:

> Nito, who ran back and forth, stopped running, stopped jumping, stopped playing.
> At the end of a month, the boy could no longer stand or get up from the bed as long as the suppressed cries weighed.
> His father called his mother in a corner:
> 'Our son is sick! Let's call the doctor' (Rosa, 2006).

Certainly the suppressed crying had affected Nito's way of being. But although Joachim was apparently better off, Adamastor's arrival did not diminish his indignation: soon his sister would arrive. "A month went by and... Ana Luisa was born. The whole family thinks she's beautiful and looks like me. I don't think so" (Massarani, 2007). What doesn't Joaquim think: that his sister is beautiful or that she looks like him? Of course, if we asked him about the questions, the answer would be yes to both.

The fact is that both protagonists lived difficult times. Only with the arrival of "Doctor Aymoré, a nice old man who always cared for

plants and children" (Rosa, 2006), Nito could explain his drama of having to suppress all the crying after learning that a real man does not cry. In Joaquim's case it was also the crying, but of his sister, who bothered him even more: "My sister is still a baby. Usually babies cry a lot. Ana Luisa has a great lung!" (Massarani, 2007, s/p).

Towards the end of the plots, Nito knows other sides of the male identity:

> Doctor Aymoré listened very carefully and said:
> 'The case is very simple: now we have to weep all the hidden weeping. [...]'
> 'Can I? But am I not a man?'
> 'Exactly because you're a man, you mustn't suppress your crying. Every man has tears and tears will roll down his face. Any face: of men, women, children and elderly people' (Rosa, 2006, s/p).

Joaquim, on his own, resolves his conflict with his sister who cries a lot:

Picture 1 – Internal Illustration of the Book *Adamastor, o pangaré*

Source: Massarani (2007).

What do the voices of all these children tell us? In addition to living conflicts, adventures and experiences diversified by their different views of the world, they say that there are many ways to be a black child. As boys and girls, on the African continent or in Brazil, these children highlight the increasingly urgent need to expand the concept of childhood. The plural and multiple *childhoods* make it possible to overcome the stereotypy and inferiority historically imputed to black children in children's literary production, besides emphasizing that, as social sub-

jects, they are producers of culture and are responsible, in the singularity of their experiences, to construct children's culture (Gouvea, 2007).

This author reminds us of how "[...] narratives and poetry have been demonstrating the possibilities of other discourses, founded not on a logical rationality, but on the sophistication of the word as a sign between signs, of the text as a stage of the construction of meanings" (Gouvea, 2007, p. 117). If we add to this the understanding that in narrating their experiences (although, as we have already assumed, through the voice of adult authors), black children come to exist in the cultural imagination of a readership that previously ignored them, the potentiality of a literary education with works that recognize these children is much more enriched. But it is also in dealing with the literary text that the proposal we make is potentialized: if what we most desire is a children's literature that subverts educational logics and presents children as a cultural product, guaranteeing them access to works with appreciation of ethnic-racial diversity (and not just from a group) is also claiming literary quality. Moreover, the literary quality is also influenced by the assumption in the literary text of the child as a social subject, leading us, agreeing with Aguiar (2007, p. 56), to think of a balance between the child and the adult "[...] since certainly what we have come to call the literary quality of what one writes for children comes close to the ways of perceiving the world, proper to the child view that our adult lenses often do not allow us to see".

An Echo of Voices

In this text, children in academic research and in children's literature warn adults about themselves and about the incredibly revolutionary and emancipatory possibility when they stand as children who insist on living their lives fully, resolving conflicts pertinent to the processes of human constitution and with multiple issues of existence. Their voices echo and take us to think about the child in order to "[...] overcome a staged construction, which takes the adult as the apex of development processes, imposing it [...] an infantilization of their experience" (Gouvea, 2007, p. 113). And, regarding the teachers training processes, they denounce, warn and constrain, showing how much, on the issue of education of ethnic-racial relations, it is no longer possible to improvise. It is necessary and urgent to "[...] break up racist and secular discriminatory mentality, overcoming European ethnocentrism, restructuring ethno-racial and social relations, discouraging pedagogical processes" (Brasil, 2004). And this cannot be reduced "[...] to words and reasoning that are divorced from the experience of being belittled lived by blacks" (Brasil, 2004), be it in culture, history, economy or education.

These voices echo claiming that literary education presents itself as an ally to overcome improvised pedagogical practices, because it is a privileged field and equipped with the tools to work with literary texts in an enriching and expanding way of the cultural references of the world. Children's literature triggers a playful, imaginative and enjoyable look

(Gouvea, 2007), but it also represents a "[...] cultural, historical, ideological, political, symbolic and social phenomena capable of showing the contradictions and conflicts of reality" (Dalvi, 2013, p. 130); it provides consistent subsidies for the education of ethnic-racial relations. Hence the need for continued and adequate teacher training on literature work which "[...] does not detract from the dialectical character of works... as cultural products whose function is, paradoxically, to undermine or subvert the consensuses instituted within culture" (Dalvi, 2013, p. 130).

Lastly, we recognize that, although it was not our wish, black children in children's literature presented themselves happier than those in academic research, perhaps because on the fictional level it is much easier to fulfill dreams that all children live intensely and without interruption, without any obstruction to their existence. But as hoping is a verb, we take all the voices here present to provoke and sharpen the senses so that we listen to what they have to show, denounce and teach us, because by transgressing the *adult centric* and oppressive logic, they produce cultures in which all childhoods, always in the plural, can exist.

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Notes

1 This article is part of the Thematic Section, *Childhood and Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations*, organized by Renato Noguera (Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro), Míghian Danae Ferreira Nunes (Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira), Luciana Pires Alves (Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro) and Nancy Lamenza Sholl da Silva (Universidade Federal Fluminense).

2 Although we acknowledge the importance of the *black* (black and brown) category especially for quantitative research, in this text we will use the word *black* instead of *negro* because, from our work fields, it is the most used by children, especially small ones, both in their self-declarations and racial peer classification. A more in-depth discussion of the lexical choices made by children to nominate one's own and others' racial and ethnicity can be found in Fazzi (2006).

3 For this reason, probably the adjective *macumbeira* was attributed to this doll. In general, the representation of *Pomba Gira* is associated with a negative image, a mark of religious racism against religious practices of African matrices.

4 We will keep expressions such as *black characters* or *black protagonists* rather than *black* when the original author text is registered.

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