

Biopower, life and education ¹

Biopoder, vida e educação ²

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Abstract:

Life has been recurrently taken as speech object. But how do we conceive this life that is so important for us? In this foucauldian-inspired text, we analyze the way life is stated in textbooks used in two schools located in the capital of a Brazilian state and we describe some forces that make these statements possible. First, we do not notice differences in the way books describe life. In addition, realizing a juxtaposition between the notions of life and body, we suggest that the books surveyed contribute to the education of students in a way of exercising power that is simultaneously individualizing and generalizing: the biopower.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, basic education, textbook

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Resumo:

A vida tem sido recorrentemente tomada como objeto do discurso. Mas como concebemos esta vida que nos é demasiadamente importante? Neste texto, de inspiração foucaultiana, analisamos a maneira como a vida está enunciada em livros didáticos utilizados em duas escolas localizadas na capital de um estado brasileiro e descrevemos algumas forças que tornam possíveis esses enunciados. Primeiramente, não percebemos diferenças na maneira como os livros descrevem a vida. Ademais, ao constatar uma justaposição entre as noções de vida e corpo, cogitamos que os livros pesquisados contribuem com a educação dos alunos para uma forma de exercício do poder que é concomitantemente individualizadora e generalizadora: o biopoder.

Palavras-chave: *Michel Foucault, ensino fundamental, livro didático*

To start: the context and the way taken

Foucault (1999, p. 285) considers the assumption of life by the power as “one of the fundamental phenomena of the 20th century”. By developing researches in a similar perspective, Portocarrero (2009) writes that, throughout the 20th century, the increasing concern with life sciences can be seen in the proliferation of discourses around the theme.

To illustrate this dissemination of discourses – and practices- that consider life as an object, we highlight that in the Federal Government of Brazil, there is a Minister of Environment whose primary concern is to develop actions to promote life. Brazilian Federal Constitution, in its 5th article, highlights life as the first fundamental right of Brazilian citizens (Brasil, 1988). In the health area, a campaign created by the World Health Organization (WHO) and nationally released by the Health Ministry claims: *Save lives: clean your hands* (WHO, 2015). In synch with these ideas, the state bodies responsible for road transports claim that: *the use of seatbelts saves lives*. Costa (2007) mentions that, in the educational sphere, schools rest in people’s imaginary as an institution through which we can become *someone in life*. Various media campaigns and people advise *enjoy life, it is short*.

But how do we conceive this life, so dear to us? According to Ferraro (2011), not even the different biological sciences characterize life identically. In the dossier *Genesis of life*, organized by the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science, Eduardo Rodrigues da Cruz (2008, p. 71) writes: “without an interdisciplinary approach, in which religious and theological considerations are part of the process, we will hardly have satisfactory answers to the questions of the origin of life as a whole”.

The work of Foucault references societies of different times and places that conceived the continuity of life after death. When alluding to the Greco-Roman World, the author shows the distinction that Plato, Socrates, and other thinkers made between body and soul.

... the soul is not the same as the body, the soul and the body are two distinct things, that the body is mortal and the soul, on the other hand, is immortal; and that this immortal soul, after [the] death [of the body] will be judged by what it did during life and will be exposed, if committed injustices during its existence, to terrible punishments and long peregrinations underground. (Foucault, 2010, p. 248)³

The belief of life after death and the apparent animism are associated to the way African-Brazilian religions and most Indigenous people in our country narrate life. When debating about the Indigenous issue in the classroom, Macedo, Leitão, Mindlím, and Freire (2002, p. 91) explain:

Indigenous peoples are deeply concerned by what happens in the beyond, a domain that is not very highlighted in the everyday life. The *pajés* walk the road of souls, in mystic kingdoms in the heavens, the waters, or the forest, to cure the mortals. They transform into animals, fly, and take magic walks to search spirits and convince them to cure diseases. The cure does not end in death – on the contrary, it is in the fusion between life and death, the belief in the soul, that the resources to prolong life are found. The poetry and the magic of Indigenous spirituality are a counterpoint to the religious homogeneity imposed by monotheistic religions, presented as the only truth.

Despite this multiplicity of concepts, schoolbooks in Brazil seem to disseminate only ways of narrating life identified with biology. This statement refers us to the works of Castro (2012), when he highlights that in modernity life is the object of constant biologization, and also to Bezerra Jr. (2015, p. 44), to whom:

³ Translator’s note: As we did not have access to the original translations, all quotations have been translated by me.

There is virtually no field of human experience in which Biology has not thrown its tentacles, producing knowledge, discourses, and practices that invade our everyday life, explaining, modulating, and pointing ways in almost all we live: psychosomatic symptoms, sociocultural identities, economic decisions, mystical experiences, aesthetic and political preferences, health, well-being, etc.

The homogenization on the way to narrate life in schoolbooks calls the attention for basically two aspects. First, because it goes against the project of national education (Brasil, 2013), which supports a pluralism of ideas, the value of extracurricular experiences and differences. Second, because, following Foucault (2008), the statements establish relations with non-discursive practices or occurrences of a technical, economic, social, political nature. In this sense, the author demonstrated how, during the 19th century, the constitution of a biological discourse of life supported the emergence of a specific type of power, called biopower, and the development of capitalism.

This biopower was, without a doubt, a vital element to the development of capitalism, that could only be guaranteed by the insertion of the bodies in the production system and by the adjustment of the population phenomena to the economic processes. However, capitalism demanded more than that, it was necessary the increase in their effort as well as their utility and docility; it was necessary methods of power capable of increasing the strengths, the aptitudes, life in general, without making them more difficult to subject themselves; if the development of the great apparatus of State as *institutions* of power guaranteed the maintenance of production relationships, the rudiments of anatomo-politics and biopolitics invented in the 19th century with power *techniques* present in all levels of the social body and used by various institutions (family, Army, school, police, individual medicine, or governance of collectivities) acted in the level of economic processes, in its development, in its strengths that are in action in such processes and support them; they also operated, as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, acting on the respective forces of one another, guaranteeing relations of dominance and effects of hegemony; the adjustment of accumulation of men to the capital, the articulation of the growth of human groups to the expansion of productive forces and the different sharing of the profits were, in part, made possible by the exercise of biopower with its multiple forms and procedures. The investment on the living body, its valorization, and distributive management of forces were indispensable at that moment. (Foucault, 1988, pp. 153-154)

Other authors have helped to broaden the understanding around the relations established nowadays by biology, biopower, and capitalism. Peters (2015, p. 28) affirms:

The emergence of biopolitics assumes a more radical format with neoliberalism as the rationalization of government through economic means, in which the subjects with rights are forced to be free, that is, to make options within a limited state in which well-being is reduced or modified in each turn of the market of arrangements similar to the market. This involves the “responsabilization” of the individuals, making them responsible for themselves faced by the emphasis on individual choice. An excellent example is the development of human capital

by Schultz and later by Becker, the third generation of the Chicago School, giving an analysis on education, crime, marriage, social well-being in terms of human capital, attributing to citizens the responsibility to take care of themselves, letting the State free to privatize all the State activities, remaining as a legislator or regulator of a system in which the choice is made [by the citizen].

Aquino (2015), when analyzing the importance of education to the development of biopower, diagnoses that biopolitics, as an easily adaptable strategy of governance, constant and widely disseminated, has a strong ally in the educational practices. After these considerations, he asserts: “Actually, we can affirm that the biopolitical governance uses essentially pedagogical actions- or, to be more precise, a ‘pedagogization’ –, without which its intentions would not materialize” (p. 55).

Faced by these elements, in this text we have two objectives: (1) analyze the way life is presented in school books used in the first years of Elementary education in two schools, one public and another private, located in the capital of a Brazilian state; and (2) describe some forces that make the statements about life present in school books possible. In both schools, we initially assembled 14 schoolbooks written in Portuguese. We excluded works written in English used by one of the schools from the 3rd to the 5th grade. The schools used books from different publishing companies, but all volumes used by each school came from the same publishing company. To the final analysis, we composed a *corpus* for this study of 5 books; 2 used by one of the schools to teach Portuguese and 3 used by the other to teach Natural Sciences. These 5 books were selected for having statements on the research object, i.e., life.

Methodologically, guided by the objective of analyzing how life is presented in schoolbooks, we initially used some procedures presented by Foucault (2008), in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. In this book, the author writes that the analysis of discursive formations should aim the description of the statement in its specificity of singularity – in what makes it different from the others. Such description presupposes the discrimination of four elements that constituted an statement: (1) the referent, a concrete or abstract object to which the discourse refers to and is constituted as a unique thing; (2) a subject, or a position that can be occupied by different people, but which would indicate an authority that is recognized, consented, and

accepted by others to present a discourse about the referent as it is presented; (3) an associated field, or a set of other statements that give the stability to the statement to present itself as it is; and (4) a materiality, or a set of surfaces, with its respective transcriptions rules, where the statements are written. In this article, the referent is the way life is enounced in schoolbooks; the subjects are all those that, within the schools, use such books to disseminate biological discourses on life; the associated field refers to the connection done in the schoolbooks between the statements on life and the discourse elements peculiar to biopower; and the materiality, the schoolbooks analyzed.

To Foucault (2008), the archaeological analysis not only allows to identify and distinguish statements and discursive formations, but, especially, tries to connect them with specific non-discursive practices. That is, when aiming to describe the singularity of a discourse, we try to delimit chronological limits, the institutional field, and the set of political, economic, social, etc., events with which this discourse is associated.

However, we can deduce from these theoretical elements and notions presented by Portocarrero (2009) that the archaeological analysis, by enabling the description of the conditions that allow the emergence and transformation of knowledge, lets us engage in another type of analysis, called genealogy. The author understands genealogy as the history of the political conditions which allows the discourse, or yet, “as a state of power relations that act on the lives of individuals and populations, making them a target” (Portocarrero, 2009, p. 141), be by disciplinary mechanism on the individual body, or by technologies of power typical of biopower, which aim the control of populations. Foucault (1979) characterized it as a type of history that describes, for example, the constitution of different types of knowledge, discourses, and objects without referring to the subject. In this sense, it could also be considered as an “antiscience”, because it allows us to understand the power effects particular to the discourses considered as scientific.

Thus, after analyzing the way life is enounced in schoolbooks, we did a study of genealogic inspiration. That is, based on Foucauldian proposals on biopower and the contributions of other authors, we tried to present the political conditions that allowed those statements.

The choice of *corpus* is justified by two reasons. First, because this educational level has historically been the one with a larger access to Brazilian population. To confirm this claim, we transcribe part of the National General Guidelines for Basic Education, published by the Ministry of Education:

Elementary Education was, for most of the 20th century, the only educational level to which a great part of the population had access. In 1989, in the end of the decade, the proportion of students enrolled still represented more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total of students attending Brazilian educational systems in all levels of education. In 2009, the selective profile of our school has decreased a little, with the expansion of access in the different levels of schooling. However, among the 52,6 million students of K-12, around 66.4% were in Elementary Education, corresponding to 35 million students, including those in Special Education and Young and Adult Education (according to *Sinopse Estatística da Educação Básica*, MEC/INEP 2009).

If we could basically universalize the access to school to children and youngster from 7 (seven) to 14 (fourteen) years old, and are close to guarantee it to all children of 6 (six) years old, we cannot guarantee that all those students end the Elementary Education (Brasil, 2013, p. 106)

The option to study schoolbooks in the first years of Elementary education is not only due to the wider access to this educational level. Such option is also because, as suggest by Veiga-Neto (2002, p. 172), based on the works of Keith Hoskin published in 1990 and those of Michel Foucault, school continues to be “the institution which best establishes the connection between power and knowledge”. That is, the processes of objectivation of individuals by specific knowledge and powers, as well as those operated by school curricula, are strategies that aim to subject or connect students to specific forms of domination, disciplining, and control.

Therefore, if in Brazil, the largest access to schooling takes place in Elementary school, it seemed equally important – or even a priority- to analyze the articulations between power and knowledge that this educational level helps to disseminate.

Education to biopower

Gallo (2008), in the first lines of his text *I, the other and many others: Education, alterity, and the philosophy of difference*, highlights some basic questions that characterize education, understood as an eminently collective phenomenon which, because of that, is only successful

by a meeting of singularities. Later, based on the philosophy of Espinoza, the author adverts that such meeting can potentialize our abilities to think and act or, on the contrary, reduce them.

In a similar perspective, Silva (2007, p. 85) writes: “It became a common place to highlight the diversity of cultural forms in the contemporary world. It is a paradoxical fact, however, that this supposed diversity lives with equally surprising phenomena of cultural homogenization”

We start this section with such theoretical notes precisely to emphasize that the way life is stated in the 5 schoolbooks analyzed is restricted to a statement: life is a phenomenon that necessarily depends of the body. Nothing written in those books show another way; what they teach sums up this singular, homogeneous, repetitive, and monotonous way of conceiving the life of plants, animals and, consequently, humans. Nothing that refers to any form of life can be found outside or beyond the limits of a biological body.

We have noticed in the analyzed material a juxtaposition, a fusion, a perfect coupling between the notions of life and the body. Life demands a body, it is within it; the body is an essential condition to life; if there is no biological body, there is no life, as shown by Marsico, Carvalho e Antunes (2011b, p. 144): “we cannot live without air. Through breathing our body captures the oxygen from the air and releases carbon dioxide”. This quote reminds us of Foucault (1979), when the author affirms that:

capitalism, developing itself in the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, socialized the first object, that was the body as a mean of production, the labor force. The control of society over individuals does not simply operate by consciousness or by ideology, but starts in the body, with the body. It was in the biological, the flesh, the corporeal in which, above all, the capitalist society invested. The body is a biopolitical reality. (p. 106)

Backed by this theoretical perspective, we can consider that contemporary capitalism is still investing and dealing with the production of bodies to control society and to offer them to the workforce. However, when using the ideas of Aquino (2015), quoted in the introduction, we can move forward and identify how school, when presenting the “body” in a supposedly scientific way to the students, contributes since the first years of Elementary school to introduce them to an universe of discourses and knowledge that supports the practices related to biopower.

According to Foucault (1988, 1999), biopower established itself in the 19th century, when the old sovereign right to “make die and let live” was complemented by the modern and inverse right of “make live and let die”. Its development, however, dates to the 17th century, when one of the two poles started to think the body as a machine. This first pole of biopower invested on the bodies to tame them, to expand their aptitudes, and extract their strengths making them grow in usefulness and docility, integrating them to the control and economic systems. Such processes were assured “by procedures of power that characterize the *disciplines: the political anatomy of the human body*” [emphasis in the original text] (Foucault, 1988, p. 151). The second pole of biopower, the *population biopolitics*, formed in the mid-18th century, was concerned on regulating the body-species, which depended necessarily of biological processes (for instance, proliferation, births, mortality, health level, life span, longevity, etc.).

As can be inferred by these theoretical fundamentals, there is no way to conceive biopower dissociated of biology, a subject that started to be organized by the end of the 19th century. Thus, it is interesting to notice that, aiming to connect students to this specific way of power exercise, everything that the analyzed schoolbooks teach about life, including those not on natural sciences, correspond to the perspective of “didactization” of the biological knowledge on life. Therefore, in such books life is presented as a finite process, of limited duration, whose initial and final marks, the “limits”, are easily identifiable: birth and death. It can seem trivial, as if there were not other ways to narrate life, what is always said is: we live after we are born and until we die.

Foucault also worked with the theme of finitude in *The order of things* (2007). “To be finite would be, very simply, to be taken by the laws of a perspective that, at the same time, allows a certain apprehension- of the type of perception or understanding- that prevents it from ever being a universal and definitive intellection” (p. 516). Finitude, consequently, from an archaeological point of view, would be one of the fundamental characteristics of modern episteme. It was in fact within this modern episteme that biology started to be organized.

The period between birth and death, this time lapse that characterizes the existence of a being, is systematically described as composed by successive phases, which are called the vital cycle. Here are some excerpts from the book of Marsico, Carvalho Neto, and Antunes (2011a) which illustrate our statement:

The living beings grow, transform throughout their development, reproduce – i.e., are capable of originating other living beings as themselves- and, finally, die...The vital cycle is the repetition of a series of phenomena referring to life...Throughout their development the human being goes through different phases. The main ones are childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age...The human being is a living being and, since its birth until death, goes through important mental and physical transformations. (pp. 52-53, 118 e 121)

Thus, life is invariably described as a linear process which always obeys, while it lasts, the same order, the same sequence. Life would be a routine, a set of steps that follow one another during time.

Moraes and Veiga-Neto (2008) suggest that the notion of linear and progressive time (past- present- future) are connected to disciplinary procedures, one of the biopower poles. They help us understand that, by learning the elements of the vital cycle, the students are not just appropriating themselves of a “school content”, but are also been subjected by a knowledge that, until today, is compatible and required by biopower to control the bodies and include them in the economic order. This way of conceiving and living time is necessary, for instance: (1) to allow the self-regulation of the subjects (wake up, take a shower, dress, feed themselves, leave to work...); (2) for some subjects to regulate others (such as a kindergarten teacher who organizes the children’s routine under her care); and, (3) for subjects to regulate others (as the professionals of basically all hospitals and other companies, which work following a routine of shifts distributing people during the day, week, or month so as not to interrupt services).

Consequently, as described by the schoolbooks, the phenomenon of life proposes a very peculiar way of dealing with time. In fact, the phenomenon of time can only be conceived through existence and related to life, because before the birth of living beings and after their death nothing exists. If life appears at the moment of birth and finishes with death, how could there be, to the living beings, time beyond this interval? Before and after life there is nothing. So, time itself needs to disappear.

Hence, time is equally limited, something that necessarily ends. Even though it can only exist in the moment we assume this way of understanding life, the relation between them is one of opposition. Time and life are in different poles, relatively contrary; the more we live, hypothetically, the less time we have ahead of us; the more we live, the less time we have left...Then, when we celebrate life in the birthday parties, we are also making a ritual that situates people of their own finitude.

The story entitled “*The surprise of the party*” from one of the books analyzed, narrates the birthday of a character, Carolina, showing the opposition between life and time. After the children sing *Happy birthday*, in which one of the verses on the Brazilian version says “all the happiness, many years of life”, the character Menino Maluquinho completes “each year...she gets older” (Borgatto, Bertin, & Marchezi, 2011a, p. 68). Writing in a different way, we would have: “each year, we are closer to our death, the end of our time”.

We get older; we get closer to our finitude; we have less time: these are some conditions that we try to scape nowadays! Especially the last one, however, seems to characterize a condition that helps to sustain the capitalism in which we live. According to Bauman (2001), the *liquid modernity*- or the time of software capitalism- could be described as the time in which the future has faded away, is uncertain, doubtful, dissipated. The notion of finitude seems to have reached its maximum, its apogee. What matters and is valuable, what is recognized and known- or better, what only exists- is the present, the now.

In other words [in liquid modernity], bounds and partnerships tend to be seen and dealt with as things destined to be *consumed* and not produced; they are subjected to the same evaluation criteria of all other consumption objects [emphasis in the original] (Bauman, 2001, p. 187)

However, the fact is that, in the liquid modernity, “the other consumption objects” are everything: bounds and partnerships, goods and services, interests and affinities, identities and desires. All should be consumed instantly; all things should be used and disposed quickly; the destiny of objects and people is consumption. Nothing should remain. Everything should pass without leaving a mark of ever existing. And, as it seems easy to deduce, this logic applies to all of us. We will pass, disappear, and will not last, not even in the memory of those that last.

Once, referring to an article written by Pierre Bourdieu in 1997, entitled *Le précarité est aujourd'hui partout* (Nowadays precarity is everywhere) Bauman (2001, p. 184) infers that:

... precarity, instability, vulnerability, is the most widespread condition of contemporary lives (and also the one felt more profoundly). French theoreticians talk about *précarité*, the German *Unsicherheit* and *Risikogesellschaft*, the Italian, *incertezza*, and the English *insecurity* – but all have in mind the same aspect of human condition, experimented in different ways, and under different names around the world, but felt especially unnerving and depressing in the most developed and prosperous places in the planet – because it is a new unprecedented fact. The phenomenon that all these concepts try to capture and articulate is the combined experience of a *lack of guarantees* (position, titles, and survival), *uncertainty* (in relation to one's one continuation and future stability), and of *insecurity* (of the body, of one's self and its extensions: possessions, neighborhood, community).

Precarity, instability, vulnerability, lack of guarantees, uncertainty, and insecurity; inspired by Foucault (2007), we can affirm that those are not essentially human conditions but produced by a politics of life – a biopolitics. This teaches us, in schools and other spaces, that our existence depends on the body, it is fleeting, and our time, finite.

In this context, consumption assumes a central point in our existence. The schoolbooks describe it as a necessity. They mention that we need water, food, air, and other natural resources to survive:

Natural resources are fundamental for the existence of life. This means that living beings, such as animals and plants, depend on water, air, soil, light, and Sun heat, as well as other living beings to survive....To live and develop well, plants need soil, water, air, and sunlight. (Marsico et al., 2011b, pp. 96 e 100)

However, the schoolbooks say much more about consumption, asserting that we need to consume many other things. The precarity of our existence manifested, beside other things, by contagious diseases that affect our body, exposing it to death risks, becomes an argument to consume health actions.

A virus is a type of microorganism which causes diseases, such as the flu, chickenpox, mumps, measles, and dengue, among others, which are also contagious...Roundworms live in people's intestines, causing stomachache, inappetence, and weakening. If the disease is not treated, it can lead to death. (Marsico et al., 2011a, pp. 142 e 146)

We should consume health actions because life – always depend, needy, and fragile – needs to be cared and protected. As there are external elements and facts to the human livings which are good for life, preserving and promoting it, there are also harmful agents to the body and, therefore, harmful to life itself. In this sense, the elements presented in the schoolbooks allow us to define health as the condition of a body which works in harmony, making life possible.

The human body is composed by a set of organs. Each organ has a function, but they all work together...When all the organs of our body work well, we have health. Health is also to be free from diseases and to have a good social relationship, that is, to live well with relatives, friends, people in the school and the neighborhood. (Marsico et al., 2011c, pp. 90 e 122).

But, as shown by the examples, to have health each organ needs to perform its function correctly. The general balance is only reached when each part plays its role satisfactorily. The interdependence, consequently, among the parts of the same being, among different beings and the other elements of nature, is another fundamental characteristic of life.

When general harmony is affected, the diseases emerge. To combat them and preserve life, besides physical hygiene and healthy habits which are predominantly individual, there are collective initiatives that the governments can undertake to take care of the population. We can perceive how the characterization of fragility, dependence, natural deficiencies of life and human beings is a condition to naturalize the strategies of biopower aiming to control collectivity, the body-species.

There is a set of cares that should be taken by the government so that the citizens have a good health and can live well. This set of cares is what we call basic sanitation. Among the cares that are part of the basic sanitation of a city are:

- Water treatment and distribution;
- Creation of a sewage system;
- Sewage treatment before releasing to rivers or sea ;
- Garbage collection;
- Garbage recycling. (Marsico et al., 2011a, p. 138)

All actions of basic sanitation have a converging aim, shared by vaccination campaigns and first aid practices taught in schoolbooks: protect the body – the individuals’ and the collectivity, the living beings and the species – to maintain them healthy and righteous. Then, we consume individual and collective health actions because our life is precarious. This is what the schoolbooks teach. From this statement, we considered pertinent to bring some thoughts of Gaudenzi and Ortega (2012, p. 22):

Michel Foucault ... even though he does not use systematically the term medicalization, references the process when he points out the constitution of a society in which the individual and the population are understood and handled through medicine. He refers to the process of social medicalization when arguing that, contrary to what one might imagine, modern medicine – emerged in the end of the 19th century, the moment of the development of capitalist economy and the efforts to expand market relationships - did not become individual, but in fact, presented itself as a social practice that transformed the individual body into labor force aiming to control society. Firstly, the investment was done on the individual through the action on the biological and, later, the control of consciousness and ideologies...Medicine, then, establishes a series of control measures on the individual and collective bodies, allowing for a more and more refined exercise of power over life.

It is important to highlight here the fact that medicine, developed to protect human beings, gives itself the right to kill, eliminate, extinguish other living beings which can potentially cause diseases to people. Thus, to preserve a species, others can be killed. Once again, we analyze what is disseminated by schoolbooks: “Roundworms live in people’s intestines, causing stomachache, inappetence, and weakening. If the disease is not treated, it can lead to death” (Marsico et al., 2011a, p. 146).

It is even more interesting to remember that a logic similar to the one expressed by schoolbooks – killing so that the human species, or at least a part of it, can be protected – explains modern forms of racism.

Actually, what is racism? It is, first, a way of introducing, in these domains of life to which the power was entrusted, a cut: a cut between who should live and who should die. In the biological continuum of human species, the emergence of races, the distinction of races, the hierarchy of races, the qualification of certain races as good while others, on the contrary, are inferior, all this will be a way of distinguishing, within a population, some groups in relation to others. Summing up, establishing a caesura of a biological type within a domain considered as been precisely a biological domain. This will allow power to deal with a population as a mixture of races or, to be more exact, deal with the species, subdivide the species to which it is responsible in subgroups, that are, precisely, races. This is the first function of racism: fragment, establish caesuras within this biological continuum to which biopower is directed. (Foucault, 1999, pp. 304-305)

Surely, in no way, we claim that the works studied promote racism. We only wish to explicit that such materials help to perpetuate and naturalize the notion that some species of living beings are less important and can be killed because they transmit diseases to people. Besides this, analogously, when applied to the relationship among human races, it would explain biological racism. That is, according to Foucault (1999), some human races were not considered good to be mixed with others and, therefore, can be killed.

Coming back to the issue of vital cycle, we thought it was important to report how the processes and phases which compose the cycle receive an impressive space in the schoolbooks. Each phase is thoroughly described. The organs involved in natural reproduction are detailed; they show photos and drawings of seeds and eggs. They show images of children, young animals and plants. The same is done with adults, be them plants or animals, and the elderly. The external and internal characteristics of the living beings, each developmental step, are exposed as to highlight the elements that constitute and differentiate life phases. The descriptions and photos widely disseminated in the schoolbooks allow the characterization of beings, the identification of their different life phases, the understanding of the elements that differentiate them from others, which lead to the creation of classes.

To exemplify, the statements transcribed bellow are systematically followed by illustration photos:

Most vegetable grows from seeds. Some plants can develop from a piece of stalk or a leaf taken by an adult plant...

[In humans] Adolescence is the phase that goes from 12 until 20 years old, approximately. In this phase, people change a lot. The differences between boys and girls become more evident and the body starts to take an adult form. (Marsico et al., 2011a, pp. 64 e 120)

Ovoviviparous animals are those that develop inside the eggs and hatch them inside the body of the female...

The reproduction of human beings is done by the joining of reproductive cells from a woman and a man, forming a single cell or egg, called zygote. Before the birth, the baby develops inside the mother's belly. (Marsico et al., 2011b, pp. 120 e 132).

According to Foucault (2009), the “power of writing”, which results from the creation of a set of documents and reports that capture and objectify the details of bodies, constituted itself as one of the base elements in the gears of disciplines. To the author, the disciplinary power “... separates, analyzes, differentiates, takes its process of decomposition to the

singularities needed and adequate....The discipline ‘fabricates’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that considers individuals, simultaneously as objects and exercise instruments” (Foucault, 2009, p. 164).

Once more, writing, in the words of the philosopher, allows “ a first ‘formalization’ of the individual within power relations” (Foucault, 2009, p. 181). The writing devices are conditions to fabricate individuals as describable and analyzable objects, to keep them “under the control of a permanent knowledge” and to organize a “comparative system which allows the measurement of global phenomena, the description of groups, the characterization of collective facts, the estimation of deviations among individuals, its distribution in a ‘population’” (Foucault, 2009, p. 182).

However, there is a phase in the vital cycle that, contrary to others, is systematically referred but never commented. One could think it was not a part of the circle of life. It would be, perhaps, one of the frontiers which would mark the end of time for a living being, the end of life. Nothing is written about this moment; no comment is made about this instance in which absolutely all living beings will go through; death” The schoolbooks name it, but do not comment. Nothing is said about death, which is literally presented as the end of life: “As all living beings, human beings are born, grow, reproduce, and die” (Marsico et al., 2011b, p. 132).

Foucault (1999) wrote that one the concrete manifestations of biopower was the progressive disqualification of death since the end of the 19th century. Before the funeral ceremony was a brilliant moment, in which basically all society took part. Now, death should be hidden, the “most private and embarrassing thing (to the limit, today, is less the sex and more the death the object of taboo)” (Foucault, 1999, p. 295). The author continues claiming that, before, what justified the high level of ritualization of death was the passage from one power to another, from the sovereign on Earth to the one beyond, of one life to another.

The disqualification of death seems to be systematically reinforced in contemporary schoolbooks. Besides, the silence that such materials impose on death contributes, at the same time, to deny the existence of a power “beyond” and a way of narrating life that transcends corporal existence, as well as affirming the uniqueness of biopower and reinforce the relation of immanence between life and body.

The development of living beings, as can be perceived in the analyzed books, seem to focus on fundamentally two objectives: reproduce and work. That is, living beings would grow to their apogee, the maximum stage of life, adult life, especially because they would be able to perform these two actions, that could be taken as the existential ends to each individual. Yet, who has established that these are the existential priorities of all the Brazilian population? Would it be a consensus among Brazilian inhabitants that the exercise of sexuality and economic accumulation are indeed the main objectives of life? It is interesting to observe that these two actions, reproduction and work, frequently stated in the schoolbooks as purposes of life are presented associated, in the same sentences.

I like to help my parents, because then they earn money so that I can study. I want to do well in school and, when I'm older, make money so that my mother can buy rice.

When I grow up, I want to be a carpenter. I'll build a very big boat to take people to Guimarães, the island where we lived. There, there are mountains and caves, and I can pick fruits from the tree.

One day I want to get married and have children, but only boys. (Borgatto, Bertin & Marchezi, 2011b, p. 136).

Adult age starts around 20 years old. In this phase, the human being has completed its physical development and stops to grow. In general, it is from this period on that the person is considered mature to have children and raise them.

Old age is the phase in which people have already worked enough, raise their children, and have learned a lot with life (Marsico et al., 2011a, p. 120).

As shown by the first example, the books describe work as a way to obtain money to consume, to study, to eat. When we systematize these sentences, we have: we work to earn money to be able to consume.

From this way of conceiving work unfolds two reflections. The first refers to the relation of circularity established by schoolbooks: if consumption is a vital need, if work is a purpose in life and if we work to consume, therefore, we live fundamentally to supply, through consumption, our existential needs. The perception we have, however, is that the politics of current life transforms everything in a need: air, water, food, but also the latest version of a cellphone, a pair of sneakers, the latest fashionable clothes, the most powerful car, etc. Consequently, we live to satisfy endless existential needs. We become insatiable.

The second reflection, an unfolding of the first: in the understanding of Costa (2009), money was transformed in the maximum symbol of power. We present again an excerpt from the analyzed work: “they earn money so that I can study.... make money so that my mother can buy rice”. Money provides power, the more money we have, the more we can consume. Therefore, the works perpetuate what the author characterizes as the “illusion of power”, that is, the concept that success, fame, and fortune are the most important elements in life.

When we reach for ‘greatness’, and consider them as the highest good to be reached, we neglect a multitude of options and paths that could offer us, perhaps, a common life, with reasonable conditions of existence and many chances to find on it a personal realization, tranquility, and the much desired happiness. (Costa, 2009, p. 23-24)

About the other purpose of our existences, Foucault (1988) wrote that sex allows, simultaneously, the access to the life of the body and the species. Therefore, we use it “as the matrix of disciplines and as the principle of regulations” (p. 159). Nonetheless, in the statements in the schoolbooks, sex would enable more than the access to the life of the body and the species. As body and life are presented as one thing, reproduction would be the process through which the phenomenon of life is made possible.

For many decades now, geneticists do not conceive life as an organization endowed by the strange ability to reproduce itself; they see, in the mechanism of reproduction, what, in fact, introduces the dimension of the biological: a matrix not only of the living beings, but also of life. (Foucault, 1988, p. 88)

Consequently, life, as narrated by schoolbooks, is a consequence of biological reproduction. Here are some examples:

The flower is responsible for the reproduction, i.e., to originate new plants. It is from the flowers that the fruits are formed. The fruit shelters and preserves the seeds, which will originate new plants....

Human beings belong to a group of vertebrate mammal animals. They are born from the union of a man and a woman. (Marsico et al., 2011a, pp. 61 e 118)

But if reproduction is indispensable to life, to human beings, its fundamental mechanism, sex, would also be an object to be constantly consumed? With this reflection we end this section, sharing the understanding that current schoolbooks give a significant space

on their pages to describe biological reproduction, not only because its mechanisms are indispensable to the perpetuation of life, but also because, as the first and most elementary of all vital needs – as without it no other is possible- reproduction should be the object of constant consumption and the object whose consumption should be the most desired.

Final remarks

According to García and Vázquez (2015, p. 86), biopolitics, understood as biopower, cannot be considered as “ an evil desire, that comes from a mind, of one person, of a group, or a social class that, with malefic interests, dedicate themselves to submit and annihilate others”. It is a condition of life, especially human life, that mobilizes the State to exercise an illimited control over people’s behavior.

Thus, when we decided to analyze how life was stated in schoolbooks and describe other forces that made those statements possible, we did not intend to make a moral judgement on biopower. We only wished, even with the presence of biopower illimited controls, to find a space to think about ourselves, about the students we are forming and to what society, as well as the mechanisms involved in this formation.

Therefore, faced by the elements of this article, we wanted to end with some considerations. In accordance with the ideas of Ferraro (2011), we did not identify differences in the way the schoolbooks used in different schools and produced by different publishing companies narrate life. Considering the limits of our research, we think it is pertinent to consider the close commitments that the process of schooling in Brazil – in all educational systems- is establishing with the production of subjects who live, think, and desire in consonance with this type of biopower which understands consumption as an organizing element of life. Despite other school technologies, we think it is imperative to reaffirm the importance of schoolbooks, especially in the first years of Elementary education, to disseminate knowledge and connect students to specific powers. Finally, other studies can

investigate if public and private schools adopt different strategies to situate their students in different positions with the politics of biopower.

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