



'Don't say his name, or he'll appear here': intersectionality and performance among young children's narratives

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ABSTRACT – 'Don't say his name, or he'll appear here': intersectionality and performance among young children's narratives – This paper is based on a narrative event that took place among 5 and 6-year-old children at a Brasília/Brazil public kindergarten, in which characters such as *God* and *Zé Pelinda* (among others) were evoked, to promote a debate about how young children use social markers of difference. Religious, ethnic-racial and gender issues arise from their narrative performances in intersectional distinctions, which enable us to understand how these markers, and the politics of fear that often impose them, operate in children's social lives from a very early age.

Keywords: **Performance Studies. Oral Narratives. Early Childhood Education. Social Markers of Difference. Intersectionality.**

RÉSUMÉ – 'Ne dis pas son nom, sinon il va se montrer ici': intersectionnalité et performance dans les récits de jeunes enfants – Cet article part d'un récit collectif qui s'est déroulé entre des enfants de 5 et 6 ans dans une classe d'éducation préscolaire d'une école publique du District Fédéral - Brésil, dans lequel des personnages *Deus* et *Zé Pelinda* (entre autres) ont été évoqués, pour promouvoir un débat sur la façon dont les jeunes enfants utilisent des marqueurs sociaux de la différence. Les enjeux religieux, ethnico-raciaux et de genre émergent de leurs performances narratives dans un croisement intersectionnel de distinctions, ce qui permet de comprendre comment ces marqueurs, et les politiques de peur qui les imposent, opèrent dans la vie sociale des enfants dès le plus jeune âge.

Mots-clés: **Performance Studies. Récits Oraux. Éducation de la Petite Enfance. Marqueurs Sociaux de la Différence. Intersectionnalité.**

RESUMO – 'Não fala o nome dele, senão ele vai aparecer aqui': interseccionalidade e performance em narrativas de crianças pequenas – Este artigo parte de um evento narrativo ocorrido entre crianças de 5 e 6 anos numa turma de Educação Infantil de uma escola pública do Distrito Federal, no qual foram evocados personagens como *Deus* e *Zé Pelinda* (entre outros), para promover um debate sobre como crianças pequenas acionam marcadores sociais da diferença. Questões religiosas, étnico-raciais e de gênero emergem de suas performances narrativas num cruzamento interseccional de distinções, o que permite depreender como esses marcadores, e as políticas do medo que frequentemente os impõem, operam na vida social das crianças desde uma idade muito precoce.

Palavras-chave: **Estudos da Performance. Narrativas Oraís. Educação Infantil. Marcadores Sociais da Diferença. Interseccionalidade.**

Entering the Owl's Lair: about the theoretical and methodological context of the research

'You know that Harry Potter bogeyman? He did it like this, look' (Godzilla, 6 years old).

In this article, we are founded on our experiences with teachers, researchers, *storylisteners*, and storytellers to promote a debate about how young children trigger social markers of difference. Assuming that our field of action is located in the inter-weaving between Performance Studies and Education, we will use the concept of narrative performance to investigate the poetics and meanings of children's discursive exchange¹.

We understand that narrative performances comprise complex events that involve, among other elements, bodily and vocal performance of the narrators, organization and transformation of experiences, communicative interactions, entertainment, sociability, poetic/aesthetic creation, and shared construction of knowledge. Therefore, narrative performances are privileged moments of social experience that promote the emergence of meanings (Langdon, 2006).

In the confluence with Education, approaching the performance impels us not to operate in the mode to *teach*, but in that to observe, interrogate, discover, distrust, experience, enjoy, share critical pedagogies that are always *in process* and that are only possible in the relation, according to the specificity of each context. As Icle (2013, p. 20) points out, dynamically combining the dimensions of being and doing and emphasizing the creative character of human relations, the performance allows the educational practice itself to be considered as an invention. That is, in this article we not only address the communicative interaction of children from the perspective of performance, but our own research action — by sharing stories with children — is and will be considered as performance².

As we have done in other works (Hartmann, 2021; Hartmann; Silva, 2019), we will dialogue here with the notion of *a performing child*, as proposed and discussed by Marina Marcondes Machado (2010; 2015; 2017), because we are interested in how the author situates the performance within the scope of children's actions in everyday life, and how, through these, they present aspects of themselves, of the parents, of the surrounding culture. Investigating how intersectional relationships are performed by six

young children in a short but emblematic narrative event is our challenge in this article.

Therefore, the performance focused here has as protagonists-performers the children, who with their voices, words, gestures and identities offer us privileged access to their “worlds of life” (Brandão, 2015). In this process, in which we propose to avoid the perpetuation of children’s subalternization, we understand that the contextualization of the subjects and their conjuncture is fundamental. As argued by Faria et al. (2015, p. 17, our translation), in the introduction of the book *Infâncias e Pós-Colonialismo* (2015):

[...] it is not enough to problematize the current education and analyze the influences of the hegemonic colonial heritage brought from the European continent; it is essential to perceive the local and cultural specificities where these children reside, considering their social class, ancestral heritage, languages and preconceptions, understanding the specificities of the child peoples.

Seeking to understand the specificities of the *child peoples*, we also find inspiration in the Pedagogy of Crossroads, proposed by Luiz Rufino, which comprises “[...] a complex of experience, practices, inventions and movements that entangle multiple presences and knowledges and focuses on the human issues and their forms of interaction with the environment” (Rufino, 2019, p. 74, our translation). Thus, we will make use of theories and authors of different traditions and fields of knowledge, since these encounters (or, as Rufino says, these *crossings*) mobilize educational processes committed to the diversity of knowledge. To help us think about the identity avenues that intersect in the performance of children, we will bring to the conversation thinkers and artists who, we believe, can contribute to enrich the discussion proposed here.

Let us move on to the context: the narrative event analyzed in the article was recorded during the master’s field research of one of the authors (Vieira, 2015), carried out at the Centro de Educação Infantil do Riacho Fundo 2, one of the 33 Administrative Regions of the Federal District (also called *satellite cities*). Located about 20 km from the central area of the Pilot Plan, Riacho Fundo 2 was founded in the 1990s as part of the housing policy developed by the Companhia de Desenvolvimento Habitacional do Distrito Federal (Codhab), which prioritized housing cooperatives from various sec-

tors of civil society in the constitution of the city, and currently it has about 100,000 inhabitants. The economic activity of the region is based on the trade and service industries and a large part of the population commutes daily to other regions of the Federal District to work, which characterizes it as a *dormitory suburb*. The region has a solid waste recycling cooperative, Embrapa's environmental reserve and the Ecological Park of Riacho Fundo. The city has several public facilities, such as schools, health clinics and police stations; however, because of the demographic explosion that occurred in the last decade, there is a lack of schools for elementary and high school students, who need to move to Riacho Fundo 1 and Núcleo Bandeirante to study.

Eight children from a group of the 2nd period of Early Childhood Education participated as collaborators of the research. All were aged between 5 and 6 years and came from families with an average income of 1 to 5 minimum wages. Of the eight children, five were black and three were white.

During the research, weekly meetings were held with the children, lasting 5 hours, throughout the months of May to December. The meetings took place in the reading room *Toca da Coruja* [Owl's Den], called this way due to the large number of owls that inhabited the school. The meetings included workshops on storytelling and storylistening, reading of books, dramatization of the stories listened to, oral retellings, pictorial records of the stories and much conversation with the children. With these strategies, we seek to follow the perspective of Manuel Sarmiento (2005, p. 370, our translation), avoiding an "adult-centered colonization of children's modes of expression and thought."

Taking into consideration the children's immersion in this literary universe experienced in the workshops, and the continuous involvement with characters of children's culture, the children chose the names by which they wanted to be identified in the research, because, following the perspective of Campos (2008), we had explained to them that, for ethical reasons, their original names would not be revealed³. This process of choice occurred at the end of the empirical research and ended up adding another element to the analysis, as it allowed each child to reveal how much the name chosen translated their preferences. Thus, in the event focused here, we will have the presence of Godzilla (5 years old), Barbie (6 years old), Pinocchio (6 years old), Branca de Neve (5 years old), Aline Barros (5 years old) and

Rapunzel (6 years old) – two children did not attend that day. It is also important to mention that narrative performances, such as the one that will be analyzed here, occurred mainly in the moments of the children's movement around the school and when performing the pictorial records of the stories shared in the workshops. On these occasions, the children's dialogues focused, for example, on what had been the snack of that day, daily events in the classroom and in their homes, comments on TV shows, in which their perceptions of the world were expressed, evidencing in many cases, as we intend to argue here, their conceptions about social markers of difference such as religion, gender and race, among others.

Moreover, who are we, adults “in the search for exchanges between gesture and word” (Machado, 2017) with children? Our academic and professional histories intersected on the road that connects childhoods and oral narratives (we are also, therefore, at the crossroads). We both understand that doing research *with* children, in a dialogic approach and shared authorship, is more pertinent and relevant than doing research *on* children. In this joint experience, we have both sought to understand children in their entirety and in the singularities historically and socially given, to understand the gaps in the relationship between adults and children, so that our relationships are full of meanings, based on the exchange of worldviews and sensibilities (Galzerani, 2002). We have thus sought to de-colonize our research, shunting hegemonic models and places that centralize dominant meanings, norms and aesthetics, understanding; however, as Abramowicz and Rodrigues (2014) advises us, that this is a process that faces several obstacles, including the productivist/neoliberal logic that is increasingly in effect in our universities, the desire for prescriptive pedagogies (which question less and provide more models) and the difficulty in dealing with difference (often masked or softened by the discourse of diversity).

Therefore, the adoption of this perspective of knowledge sharing and de-hierarchization of relationships is configured as a theoretical-methodological challenge for conducting research with children, as it makes it necessary to overcome many barriers, symbolic and concrete, that separate and distance adults and children, especially in the school context. Our perspective, in this sense, is to approach with respect, and above all, sensi-

tivity, these child-peoples, recognizing their unique and geopolitically situated experiences.

And how do we make that possible? With a lot of listening. Listening that is carried out in processes of sharing stories, both from children's literature and everyday life, personal stories, invented or dreamed. Thus, our methodological perspective is always permeated by stories, because, as we believe, the narrative event itself, whenever it allows the alternation between narrators and listeners, can provide a de-hierarchization of the socially instituted roles. As pointed out by anthropologist Constantina Xavier Filha (2014, p. 16, our translation): "Children have a lot to say; to listen to them, however, it is necessary to provide spaces and conditions." It is the listening spaces and conditions of this research that we will address next.

'Yes, he does exist!': a narrative performance of shared fears

The narrative performance object of this article took place on a sunny and dry afternoon, and was recorded in audio format during an activity of the story workshop. All six children and the researcher were sitting around a large table. As the furniture was not adapted to the size of the children (it was intended for adults), some of them, such as Godzilla and Pinocchio, drew kneeling on the chair. An enthusiastic conversation unfolded as they drew on A4 sheets of paper, using crayons. Then, there is a question:

Rapunzel: Auntie, isn't it true that God doesn't like fighting?

Pinocchio: If you fight, he'll whip you.

Barbie: That's right.

Godzilla: It's not! God doesn't beat you. God doesn't beat you. Right, Auntie?

Pinocchio: He just grounds you.

Snow White: If you beat others...

Godzilla: God, he gets sad and sends you down there.

Barbie: And Jesus will choose.

Rapunzel: Auntie, isn't it true that there are some little critters down here, that they eat our body?

Godzilla: It's the... It's the...

Barbie: Godzilla, don't say it, don't say it!

Godzilla: The beast, the little devil.

Pinocchio: Auntie, isn't it true that we can't say the bad name? Of the one that lives down there?

Godzilla: Auntie, one day... Do you know my cousin's boyfriend? Her name is Carol. Her boyfriend said that... His father, when he went to sleep... 'You know that Harry Potter bogeyman? He did it like this, look (he makes a scary expression with his face and hands). His house was haunted. A macumbeiro lived there and he sold the house to the devil. And he went there and then he saw a word in there and he told his father. And when his father fell asleep, then and he went there and woke up and the Harry Potter bogeyman was there!

Snow White: Aunt, Pinocchio said: 'Don't say that it is a little devil.'

Godzilla: Auntie, one day...

Pinocchio: It's another bogey, but I won't talk, or he may appear.

Aline Barros: It does not appear, right aunt?

Barbie: Who is it, then?

Pinocchio: He's from down there and he appears. I'll say it, but he'll appear.

Snow White: Auntie, I'm scared.

Pinocchio: I'll say it, but he'll appear. Can you say it? You want me to say his name?

Godzilla, Barbie and Snow White: Yes!!!

Pinocchio: It's Zé Pelinda.

Rapunzel: I'll tell Aunt Camila!

Pinocchio: It's Zé Pelinda.

Godzilla: Hey, what's that?

Pinocchio: He is... Maxuel likes Zé Pelinda, they're boyfriends.

Godzilla: Jeez!

Pinocchio: It's a man plus a man.

Researcher: And who told you that?

Pinocchio: I know.

Researcher: I know you know, but who told you this story?

Pinocchio: Auntie, I've known for a long time.

Godzilla: It was last year. You said last year he was a fag, right? He doesn't go with women. What's his name again?

Pinocchio: Don't say his name, or he will appear here.

Barbie: Stop that, he appears!

Godzilla: Calm down! That's just a legend. He doesn't even exist!

Pinocchio: Yes, he does exist!

(Vieira, 2015, p. 118-119).

'Yes, he does exist.' The word in performance affects, produces meanings. We are interested in perceiving how quite diverse identity markers (religious, ethnic-racial and of gender) emerge from the children's performances and what meanings they produce for them. Before starting the per-

formance analysis, however, we will present some of the main concepts and references that will accompany us in this process.

Let us start with the concept of intersectionality, coined in 1989 in an article published by professor and civil rights researcher Kimberlé Crenshaw, in which a new theoretical and methodological paradigm of the black feminist tradition is introduced, in order to promote not only a criticism of the structural conditions of racism, sexism and their consequent violence, but also to foster concrete actions so as to promote the guarantee of the rights of those portions of the most discriminated population (Akotirene, 2019; Henning, 2015). Although the term was not exactly that, in Brazil, Lélia Gonzalez, in 1988, already presented the notion of amefricanidade to refer to the experience of black women and men in the diaspora and the experience of indigenous women and men against colonial domination. Contemporarily, Brazilian thinkers such as Carla Akotirene and Renato Nogueira have complexified the debate on intersectionality, from a perspective that encompasses the criticism of colonialism, imperialism and the Western epistemic monopoly (American and Central European). Akotirene (2019, p. 47, our translation) points out: “Intersectionality allows us to start from the avenue structured by racism, capitalism and cisheteropatriarchy, in their multiple lanes, to reveal which people are really run over by the matrix of oppressions.” As we will argue below, it is possible to perceive in the narrative event in question that even young children are already situated in this matrix of oppressions.

We believe that the intertwining of performance studies in education with an intersectional approach to childhood can provide new possibilities of *listening* to children, which enable us to understand their place not only as children (that is, situated in an age marker), but also as boys/girls/trans/etc. (that is, with diverse genders), as well as situated in terms of ethnic-racial, class or disability aspects, among others (Alanen, 2016).

In the article *Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis*, Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) refer to the three ways of using intersectionality: the first applies intersectional analysis frameworks to research; the second draws attention to intersectionality as theory and methodology; and the third explores intersectionality as praxis

that extends beyond academia. In our proposal, to a greater or lesser extent, we will work with intersectionality in these three areas.

Recently, Brazil has seen the publication of a series of studies on the potentialities of the encounter between intersectionality and early childhood studies, with emphasis on the dossiers launched in 2021: 'Interlocações Sul-Sul: Infâncias, Interseccionalidade e Pensamento Decolonial,' published in the *Cadernos de Gênero e Diversidade*, at UFBA; 'Gênero, Sexualidade, Infância e Educação,' in the *Revista Debate Insubmissos*, at UFPE, and 'Interseccionalizando em educação: lutas sociais e direito à diferença,' in the *Revista Brasileira de Estudos da Homocultura*, at UFMT. In dialogue with foreign studies, we highlight the article by Konstantoni & Emejulu (2017), in which they support the importance of the recognition of intellectual history and the struggle of black women in the sense that the integrity of intersectionality is preserved as the radical practice of emancipation of knowledge and collective action for social justice. In other words, more than a concept, an analytical tool, intersectionality presupposes a practice of fighting inequality, prejudice and oppressions, which, as we intend to argue in this text, operate since childhood. Therefore, intersectionality contributes to thinking (and acting with) childhood also in terms of power relations and structural inequalities (Benatti et al., 2021).

We also seek to dialogue with philosopher and educator Renato Noguera, who has a vast production in which he proposes a decolonial project based on a childhood from an afroperspective, offering analytical and methodological tools that aim to promote, based on recreational play and narration, other forms of comprehension and action on reality, based on pluriversal perspectives⁴ of the world (Noguera, 2019a; 2019b).

We perceive in what Noguera and Luciana Alves treat as *playing* and *narrating* a possibility of connection with performance studies in education. During the performance focused here, for example, we observed that some children, as they got involved in the debate, stopped drawing and complexified questions set forth there. This was largely due to the inclusion of new characters in the *plot*, as we will analyze below. Others, such as Barbie and Aline Barros, participated more actively and bodily – making mention of going under the table or approaching the researcher. In both cases, play and narrative combined. As stated by Noguera & Alves (2020, p. 542, our

translation): “Childhood cooks play and narrative recipes. Without them, living becomes unpalatable. For example, politics and religion can be considered narratives; sports are ways of playing. Playing and narrating make life abundant⁵.”

We believe that performance studies in education, by investing in processes of experience, contextualization and analysis of expressive events, seeking their meanings in poetics, in the creative potentialities that emerge from frictions and encounters with the *other*, whether he/she is an adult or a child, can further enrich researches on intersectionality and childhood. As argued by Jean Carlos Gonçalves and Michelle Gonçalves (2018, p. 141, our translation), in the article *Teatralidade e Performance na pesquisa em Educação: do corpo e da escrita em perspectiva discursiva* [Theatricality and Performance in Education Research: on Body and Writing from a Discursive Perspective]:

Studying Performance is to be interested in identity marks that remodulate and re-signify subjects, considering their bodies and their narratives based on different social roles they play and/or social places they occupy. This is where it becomes central to understand Performance as a frontier between art and life, in which there is room for cultural criticisms, resistances, and differences.

Therefore, based on the narrative performance described, we seek to reflect on the social roles and places occupied by both the narrator children and the narrated characters, that is, we will analyze the performance both in the sense of the narrated event (the content of the stories – WHAT is narrated) and the narrative event (the discursive situation of the narration – HOW it is narrated) (Bauman, 1977; Hartmann, 2016; 2021). Thus, we seek to investigate possibilities of listening and understanding the narrative performance of children through this crossroads, or this *crossing* between theories, subjects and characters.

Childhood, intersectionality and performance

As can be seen, the narrative performance in question here is triggered by a question asked by one of the children to the ‘*Auntie*,’ in this case, the researcher. The question brings to the scene a character, followed by a series of others who come to constitute the children’s narrative arguments. For

this reason, we chose to organize our performance analysis according to the sequence of characters that constitute the event.

Let's revisit the beginning of the performance:

Rapunzel: Auntie, isn't it true that God doesn't like fighting?

Pinocchio: If you fight, he'll whip you.

Barbie: That's right.

Godzilla: It's not! God doesn't beat you. God doesn't beat you. Right, Auntie?

Pinocchio: He just grounds you.

1st character: God

God doesn't like fighting, but if you fight he'll whip you. God doesn't beat you, he just grounds you... Who would this *god* be, present in such concrete (and, why not say, oppressive) ways in the children's lives? The children begin the narrative event in question by talking about their hypotheses of God's relationship with people, denoting the social and religious context in which they are situated, in which the influence of Christian precepts is evident. As Rogoff (2005) says, children learn to narrate in their communities, that is, *culture*, in its various forms of manifestations, plays an important role in the narrative constitution of their narratives. Among the children present at the performance, God is evoked in his disciplinary power (watches and punishes): 'Snow White: If you hit others...' Godzilla: God, he gets sad and sends you down there. The *almighty Father God* of the Catholic and Evangelical religions seems to be part of the daily life of the six children. God – who is also a father – grounds, whips, sends one down there. God is scary.

2nd character: the Devil

In opposition to the figure of God, he appears in the discourse of Godzilla 'the one who lives down there,' that is, the Devil. Barbie then made a fervent plea that this name not be pronounced. Barbie's plea proves what Austin (1990) sought to demonstrate long ago: "to say is to do." That is, the child understands that the word in performance not only represents, but also creates reality. The Devil, in the very invocation of his name, is scary.

3rd character: Harry Potter's Bogeyman

The Devil's entrance confers an atmosphere of mystery and amazement to the conversation, which is complexified by the inclusion of a new element: a house haunted by *the Harry Potter Bogeyman*. This one mentions the character Lord Voldemort, from the Harry Potter saga, written by the Englishwoman J. K. Rowling, considered the most powerful dark wizard of all time. He has as physical feature a deformed face, which Godzilla performs for his audience, enhancing the scary character of the story. With his performance, the narrator evokes the memory of his colleagues, engendering, in the interaction, a new experience of astonishment. Godzilla is a narrator who, as Benjamin (1986) would say, bases what he tells on his own experience or on the experience reported/shown by others (we could think here of the films in the Harry Potter series), also incorporating the living experience of the listeners into the narrated facts. And everybody knows it: Harry Potter's Bogeyman is scary.

4th character: Macumbeiro

But the list of frightening characters does not stop there: Godzilla's cousin's boyfriend's house, where Harry Potter's Bogeyman lived, 'was haunted. A macumbeiro lived there and he sold the house to the devil. By highlighting that the house was haunted and was sold to the Devil by a macumbeiro, Godzilla brings out the religious intolerance of his community with adherents of religions of African origin. By bringing the macumbeiro closer to the very Devil, he rejects the religious experience of other groups different from his own. Macumba is scary. Difference is scary.

Let's talk a little bit about macumba. Macumba has historically been the target of religious prejudice and intolerance on the part of the Brazilian hegemonic discourse. As argued by historian Luiz Antonio Simas (2020, our translation), in the entry *Macumba*, published in *Revista Serrote*: "I believe that prejudice against macumba and repudiation of the adjective 'macumbeiro' are part of this tricky web of Brazilian racism." From a counter-hegemonic perspective, Simas and Luiz Rufino, in *Fogo no Mato – a ciência encantada das macumbas* (2018), challenge these historically rooted conceptions and propose a new semantics for the term *macumbeiro*:

Macumbeiro: definition of a playful and political character that subverts prejudiced meanings attributed from all sides to the repudiated term and admits impurities, contradictions, and erasures as the foundations of an enchanted way of facing and reading the world in the broadening of grammars. The macumbeiro recognizes the fullness of beauty, sophistication, and alterity between peoples. The expression ‘macumba’ comes most likely from the kikongo *term* kumba, ‘sorcerer.’ *Kumba* also designates the enchanters of words, poets. Then, macumba would be the land of the sorcery poets; the enchanters of bodies and words that can flog and flatter uncompromising reason and propose plural ways of re-existence and urgent ‘unhinging’ by the radicality of enchantment, amid the diseases generated by the castrating righteousness of the world as a singular experience of death (Simas; Rufino, 2018, p. 4, our translation).

It is interesting to think that the *macumbeiro* described by Godzilla sells the house to the Devil, but who comes to haunt him there is *Harry Potter’s Bogeyman*. Pure macumba, full of mysteries, charms, impurities and otherness.

Throughout the children’s narrative performance, there is a combination of different universes (fictional and/or religious) that coexist in the same narrative space-time. There is, however, one word that has not yet been revealed. Godzilla says: ‘And he went there and then he saw a word and said to his father’. He *saw* a word. Pinocchio then assumes the protagonism, operating in the same key of understanding that words create reality: ‘It is another bogey, but I will not say it, or he may appear.’ With his speech, Pinocchio provokes an affective mobilization in all the children of the group. Even Aline Barros, who had remained silent in the first moments of the conversation, asks the adult/researcher for confirmation about the non-appearance of that character. Pinocchio: He’s from down there and he appears. I’ll say it, but he’ll appear. Pinocchio’s performance establishes a pact between him and his audience, which is fully involved in the story, amalgamating the expectation and fear of the appearance.

5th character: Zé Pelinda

Another character begins to be part of the narrative event: the name *Zé Pelinda* is pronounced, not once, but twice. There is a brief silence and the boys begin to explain who this feared character is.

But, after all, who is *Zé Pelinda*? Since he was evoked in the children's performance, let's talk about him. Anthropologist Vânia Cardoso (2007) explains that *Zé Pilintra* is part of the *street peoples*, spirits of rogues and prostitutes who in life would have occupied socially marginalized spaces. *Street peoples* are known for the power to appear where they wish and for their ability to interfere in everyday life in an unexpected and constantly feared way. *Zé Pilintra* is a rogue recognized for always wearing an impeccable white suit and with the flap of his hat covering his eyes, unexpectedly visits capoeira rounds, in which he participates with his agile blows, and then disappears through the streets of downtown Rio de Janeiro. *Zé Pelinda* is scary.

When narrating collectively about the possible appearance of *Zé Pelinda*, the children established a symbolic space that promoted expressions of curiosity, anxiety and fear. Pinocchio brought *Zé Pelinda*'s presence to that group of children, removing him from the fringes and bringing him to the center of the dialogue. Although he was presented as a kind of trump card by the boy (after all, he had the power to evoke it or not), *Zé Pelinda* was also a threatening being. Why exactly? The explanation is given by the boy himself, when introducing the last character of our performance: 'He is... Maxuel likes *Zé Pelinda*. They're boyfriends'. Godzilla exclaims in response: 'Jeez!'.

6th character: the Fag

Another identity avenue is then opened in the narrative performance addressed here. At the intersection with religious and ethnic-racial issues, children add another element: the discussion about gender and, more specifically, about homosexuality. It gains new contours the moment Pinocchio explains to Godzilla: 'It's a man plus a man,' Godzilla adds, adding a new definition: 'You said last year that he is a fag, right? He doesn't go with women. Fag's scary.'

Érica Renata de Souza helps us reflect on how language, in its various forms, plays a fundamental role in creating and maintaining socially accepted gender rules. Based on Joan Swann's work, entitled *Girls, boys and language*, she comments:

[...] children build an ‘internal system of gender rules’ according to their experience and the representations available in the culture in which they are situated. Through written and spoken language and the linguistic and non-linguistic images with which they interact, children learn expectations for their behavior. However, the author (*Swann*) does not suggest that children are passive recipients of social messages, determined by the structures of language, but argues that ‘children are also (re)negotiating relationships with others and (re)interpreting the images they find’ (Souza, 2006, p. 172, our translation).

In different ways and in the different social contexts that children attend, they are learning about the rules, norms, gender hierarchies (as well as other identity markers) – and we can think of the important place that the school occupies in the children’s experience and in the maintenance of hegemonic/traditional gender roles, especially at a time when the Brazilian government is led by ultra-conservative leaders. Pinocchio and Godzilla know well what they are negotiating with their colleagues and with the researcher: man plus man is a fag. Fags don’t go with women. And they, at the age of six, have known that for a long time...

At the end of the conversation/performance, the children resume the danger of exhortation. Pinocchio gets upset: ‘Don’t say his name, or he’ll appear here’ – Barbie despairs: ‘Stop that, he appears!’, to which Godzilla replies: ‘Calm down! That’s just a legend. He doesn’t even exist! Pinocchio, however, does not accept that the other determines whether Zé Pelinda is real or not, because when Godzilla claims that he is a legend, he does not back down and categorically states ‘Yes, he does exist!’.

But after all who exists: Maxuel? Zé Pelinda? And how do they exist: in the natural world or as a phenomenon of experience? As argued by Daniele Silva (2012, p. 93, our translation): “The children’s composition of the characters is related to their perceptions of the surrounding social reality.” The fact is that in (the) performance, they all exist.

God, Devil, Macumbeiro, Harry Potter’s Bogeyman, Zé Pelintra, Fag... all these beings are telling us about social markers of difference. Chaveiro and Minella point out that the children’s experiences may be limited due to racism and sexism. According to them,

[...] in Western society these hierarchies are structurally consolidated through the intentional maintenance of euro-centric values transmitted to

children. Thus, since this is a constant process influenced by multiple factors, it may not be possible to determine precisely the moment when racial and gender elements come to constitute identities in children, as it is important to consider ancestral heritage and transgenerational aspects, especially when analyzing Afro-diasporic experiences. However, it is pertinent to note that such elements, functioning as social markers of difference, occur since the children's first experiences, especially in historically marginalized territories (Chaveiro; Minella, 2021, p. 106, our translation).

So far we have seen how these markers operate in the events narrated in the performance. Now let's see how they are manifested in the very narrative event, that is, in the children's performances. Firstly, it will be necessary to remember the choice of names by which the children wanted to be identified in the research: Pinocchio — the wooden doll that turns into a living being and lies to its/his creator Geppetto — is a black boy. Godzilla — a giant monster created in the explosion of a nuclear bomb, similar to a dinosaur — is a black boy. Rapunzel — the princess with the long braids, locked up inside a tower — is a white girl. Snow White — the princess with skin *as white as snow*, persecuted by her stepmother — is a white girl. Barbie — the thin, slender, blonde, woman-shaped doll — is a black girl. Aline Barros — an evangelical singer and pastor — is a white girl.

How performances and politics of fear operate in strengthening hegemonic patterns

Throughout the article, we sought to demonstrate how different religious, ethnic-racial and gender conceptions appear in the children's verbal and bodily performances through the description of characters and facts that are not only the subject of a debate about their existence, but awaken a very specific affection. Snow White says it explicitly: Auntie, I'm scared.

To conclude this text, we will present two perspectives of approach on fear, which can also be found in a *crossing*: fear as narrative/performance and fear as political affection.

To address the first, we note here the significant work developed by Guilherme Fians in the book *Entre Crianças, personagens e monstros*, published in 2015. In his ethnography, carried out in an Early Childhood Education school in Rio de Janeiro, Fians also comes across episodes experienced-narrated by children who thematize the fear of the unknown, and is

inspired, among other authors, by Tim Ingold to analyze them. In the article *Caminhando com dragões: em direção ao lado selvagem*, Ingold (2012, p. 19) argues that, although certain creatures (such as dragons or, we could say, in the performance addressed here, the Harry Potter Bogeyman) may not exist as elements of the natural world, they exist as phenomena of experience. That is why they arouse fear. According to Fians (2015, p. 153, our translation): “It seems that it is the narration of stories involving the being in question that brings out the possibility of its existence and manifestation in the world, and it is this possibility that makes the discussion about this entity and its attributes relevant.”

If, on the one hand, as we have already observed in other contexts (Hartmann, 2013), fear can be combined with the enchantment manifested in the children’s performative strategy (the narrative event), on the other hand, it appears here as a reaction of prejudice against and denial of the Afro-Brazilian religious universe or homosexuality.

In dialogue with Sílvio de Almeida, we recognize a “politics of fear” that predominates in the constitution of the subjectivities adapted to the necropolitical environment (Almeida, 2019), present since childhood. This is where our second perspective comes in: fear as political affection. Fear as part of those mechanisms Foucault called biopolitics: a set of strategies for populational management through the control of bodies, ideas, subjectivities, in short, of life in all its spheres, from birth to death (Foucault, 1979; 2008). Biopolitics uses biopower as a technique to produce economically active and politically docile bodies. Biopolitics is, ultimately, a politics of fear, recalls Žižek (2014, p. 45). Social management is enabled through fear, criticizes Safatle (2015). “Colonialism is the politics of fear. It is to create deviant bodies and say that we have to defend ourselves from them,” says Grada Kilomba (2019, our translation), in an interview with *El País*, adding colonialism to the debate.

Fear is present from the beginning to the end of the narrative performance addressed here, manifested in different ways in all the characters that are presented. Fear is the invisible thread that spans across a daily event, which occurred on a given afternoon in an Early Childhood Education center in the periphery of a large Brazilian city. Fear creates patterns, reinforces structures, maintains the hegemonic order. However, lest we forget, fear, as

children show us, can also be narrative and play. And, at the crossroads of narrating as playing, resistances can reveal themselves, structures can transform, the potency of childhood can imagine/create other worlds.

Dealing with racism, sexism, homophobia, with religious and class prejudices, requires dealing with fear, fear of the other, fear of the different. Unfortunately, at the time of the research we still did not have Emeçida's book *E foi assim que eu a escuridão e ficamos amigas* [And that is how me and the darkness became friends], dedicated to his daughter Teresa, which ends like this: "[...] Everything is a matter of how we look at them. Sometimes what scares us has a lot of us in it (only it's a little different)" (Emeçida, 2020, n.p, our translation).

Notes

- ¹ Therefore, consistently with this analytical perspective, we will replace what we commonly call *conversation* with *narrative performance*.
- ² We have designated this methodological perspective, under development, as *performative ethnography* (Hartmann; Sousa; Castro, 2020).
- ³ The project was approved and authorized by the sector responsible for overseeing research in public educational institutions of the State Department of Education of the Federal District (SEEDF). The families and guardians of the children who collaborated in the research authorized their participation by signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and were aware of all the procedures and instruments that would be used during the empirical process.
- ⁴ Pluriversal, according to Nogueira (2019a), is a mention of the ontological perspective of thinker Mogobe Ramose that opposes the idea of universal, which assumes the existence of a single and monolithic perspective.
- ⁵ In this article, with a much greater complexity than we will be able to address here, Nogueira and Alves propose the notion of Childhood Emergence Zones (ZEI), based on narratives of the Exu and Iroco orixás, taken as heteronyms of childhood and time. The ZEI would arise through the lines of force of narration and play, "as a playful and temporary community to resume the state of childhood and child-becoming."

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This original paper, translated by Roberto Cândido (Tikinet Edição Ltda.), is also published in Portuguese in this issue of the journal.

Received May 10, 2022

Accepted August 30, 2022

Editors-in-charge: Taís Ferreira; Melissa Ferreira; Fabiana de Amorim Marcello

