

Black Childhoods in the Literature of Conceição Evaristo: Memory, Ancestry and Homelessness / *Infâncias negras na literatura de Conceição Evaristo: memória, ancestralidade e desabrigo*

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ABSTRACT

The literature of Conceição Evaristo summons us to observe and listen to multiple perspectives, to a communion of voices of children, elders, blacks and women. Drawing on contributions from the social studies of childhood, from the field of studies entitled “Gorée’s Childhoods,” and from the thinking of post-colonial and decolonial philosophers and researchers, we seek to explore the author’s “writings,” paying attention to the experiences and imaginaries of black childhoods. In this journey, particular ways of relating to notions such as temporality, memory, agency and homelessness are highlighted.

KEYWORDS: Childhood; Race relations; Black Brazilian literature; Black epistemologies; Conceição Evaristo

RESUMO

A literatura de Conceição Evaristo nos convoca à observação e escuta de múltiplas perspectivas, de uma comunhão de vozes de crianças, anciões, negros e mulheres. Com amparo em contribuições dos estudos sociais da infância, do campo de estudos intitulado “Infâncias de Gorée”, e do pensamento de filósofos e pesquisadores pós-coloniais e decoloniais, busca-se percorrer as “escrivências” da autora atentando-se às experiências e imaginários sobre infâncias negras. Neste percurso, são evidenciadas formas particulares de se relacionar com noções como temporalidade, memória, agência e desabrigo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Infância; Relações raciais; Literatura negra brasileira; Epistemologias negras; Conceição Evaristo

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Introduction

*What is kept in my people sleeps lightly in me. And all it takes is a brief snap of the fingers for the unrestrained waters of memory to gush out the days of yesterday onto the days of today.*¹

Conceição Evaristo

This essay is based on some concerns about what has been thought about childhood. We don't intend to repeat and reaffirm through an effort to recognize what is sustained as consolidated thinking on this issue, but rather to review the holes, gaps and misunderstandings in what is established about childhood and, by problematizing it, to exercise other ways of thinking about it.

What is most widely instituted in our society about childhood involves discourses and practices of knowledge and power that have moved and still move many to speak and think about children and their insertion in culture and institutions, associating them with historically constructed ideas about their development, and the expectations that are created by adults about their possible *performances*. We will revisit some of these images that generate conceptual categories, ideas and adjectives of a childhood that highlights what a child should be, therefore essentialized and crystallized within a fixed and immutable model, which only changes progressively and evolutionarily and according to what is expected of it by adults.

In dialogue with what has recently become a radical break with this paradigm, based on social studies of childhood and other researchers and educators familiar with the same perspective, we will listen to what childhoods have to tell us, narrate, remember, evoke, suggest, and provoke. Among these childhoods, we have chosen black childhoods, in which we find processes of subjectivization made up of living memories and the invention of life, whose ontological, epistemic, political, aesthetic, and existential place draws us to think about memory, ancestry, and homelessness. We chose Conceição Evaristo as our intercessor because, through her *writing experiences*, she makes us listen to the tonalities of the voices of the black population and, in the relationship that her writing establishes with her *I-girl* and her other characters, she produces forces of thought

¹ In Portuguese: "O que está guardado na minha gente, em mim dorme um leve sono. E basta apenas um breve estalar de dedos para as incontidas águas da memória jorrarem os dias de ontem sobre os dias de hoje."

that open up *conceptual tool boxes* that move between the imaginary of the black diaspora, transculturality, transnationality and the poetics of homelessness. We observed that literature, like the other arts, opens up space for the counter-hegemonic and is less tied to productionist impulses, allowing us to expand our gaze and senses from time to time. It can thus serve as an inspiration for considerations about black children and childhoods.

1 Childhoods and What the Ones Can Make Us Think About

For a long time, the main theories in the social and human sciences were mainly interested in understanding and explaining social reproduction, resulting in little space and interest in this *new beginning in the world*, which is childhood. The structural-functionalist perspective of Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons, for example, drew attention to the bodies responsible for socialization, silencing the turbulence of children, “it is as if societies are conceived of as living organisms but are everywhere becoming machines” (Jenks, 2004, p. 14). The *machine* works because this conception of socialization strips children of their agency, and their status as social actors. Children’s social practices were ignored in favor of perspectives that privilege integration and order at the analytical level:

The theories did not offer an interpretative framework for understanding childhood, but would instead use a conception of childhood that allowed the theoretical framework to be maintained based on the metatheoretical assumption of a harmony, of balance (Rosemberg; Freitas, 2004, p. 4).

Another example can be seen in Jean Piaget’s psychogenetic theory, which postulates a universal sequence of acquisition of cognitive skills, hierarchically ordered, ranging from infantile, *figurative* and low-status thinking to adult, *formal* and high-status intelligence (Jenks, 2004), thus reserving the top of cognitive development for the way Western adults think and act (Rosemberg, 1976). These observations and criticisms are the impetus behind a general movement of metatheoretical revision in the social sciences and humanities. And, obviously, they do not occur independently of the social debate around the rights of groups characterized as political minorities, including children.

In the context of social studies of childhood, children are recognized as social agents and actors; they are not just future adults, they are both beings and becomings. Childhood, in turn, is no longer seen as a biological, natural, and universal phenomenon, but also as a social construction, varying from one culture to another; it is no longer seen as a precursor moment, but it is recognized as constitutive and constituent of history, culture, and society.

Social studies of childhood then break with a conception of passive childhood in a socialization operated by adults and institutions, in a vertical, unidirectional way. Socialization processes are no longer seen simply as a matter of adapting to or internalizing social norms and standards, but as appropriation and construction, in multiple directions: children, like adults, are agents of socialization processes for themselves, for other children, and also for adults, who become, for example, mothers, fathers, and teachers in their relationship with them, being transformed by their presence and actions.

In contemporary philosophy, Giorgio Agamben's (1993)² arguments present something surprising about childhood, in the sense that he affirms it as a condition for the possibility of human experience, not understood as a phase of life's time, but what makes it possible for human beings to make themselves heard in their relationship with time and, in this way, to be the authors of history. For Agamben (1993),³ childhood only happens between humans because there is no identification with them, so there is a difference between language and discourse, between the semiotic and the semantic. This is why there is history and also why humans are historical beings: "It is infancy, it is the transcendental experience of the difference between language and speech, which first opens the space of history" (Agamben, 1993, p. 52).⁴

From this distinction between speech and language, something on the order of an experience of emptiness that cannot be captured in a discursive system, we are summoned to an experience of language. Every time a child among us says something, or stops saying something, or can't yet say something, but somehow wants to express their voice, we have the opportunity to make a new start in the world. From this strictly human place

² AGAMBEN, Giorgio. *Infancy and History. The Destruction of Experience*. Translated by Liz Heron. Verso: London, New York, 1993.

³ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁴ For reference, see footnote 2.

marked by the limits of grammar, signs, and enunciations, we inhabit our childhoods. It inscribes ourselves in history every moment we make our own voice resonate and echo and our silences be heard. In the words of the poet, “part of me is just vertigo, the other part language. Is translating one part into the other part - which is a matter of life and death – is it art?” (Ferreira Gullar, 2004, p. 335).⁵

As regards children, however, if we take a brief look at the development of Western philosophical thought, there is a predominant view that places them as objects to be shaped, formed, standardized and instituted. This project is in line with the structural-functionalist approach mentioned above and affirmed by authors such as Durkheim and Parsons, who determined ways of being and acting about children that were adaptable to the structure of the social order. The same happened with Piaget’s theory, which is characterized by an idea of child development according to a certain sequential order, which would follow stages to reach adult intelligence.

For many centuries, in the history of Western philosophy, a certain ignorance about the uniqueness of children persisted, since children were not given a more careful, judicious and specific look. Plato, for example, promoted ideas of a childhood linked to a project for the future, whose protagonist was the adult, not the child. The Platonic idea was to manufacture a certain kind of childhood, an object of control, for the materialization of a broader political project, which would lead to a society of the Good, the True and the Beautiful, which would ultimately fulfill the realization of what is best in the human being. Thus, it was necessary to undertake an educational project according to a certain model of the human that was compatible with the direction of the Republic.

We also consider the inestimable relevance of this philosopher in our philosophical tradition. However, in order to achieve a project based on metaphysical, epistemological and political foundations, in some of his dialogues Plato would have constructed certain rather pejorative and degrading labels for children. In this respect, it is worth highlighting some passages taken from one of the chapters of the book *Infância. Entre Educação e Filosofia* [Childhood. Between Education and Philosophy] (2007), entitled *O Mito Pedagógico dos Gregos (Platão)* [The Pedagogical Myth of the Greeks (Plato)], this is the result of the author’s detailed study of some of the Platonic dialogues.

⁵ In Portuguese: “uma parte de mim é só vertigem, outra parte linguagem. Traduzir-se uma parte na outra parte – que é uma questão de vida ou morte – será arte?”

Referring to Plato's *As Leis* [The Laws], Walter Kohan (2007) identifies a view based on the child's inferior position in relation to the adult, because it is marked by disorder, lack of harmony and restlessness:

Children are impetuous beings, incapable of keeping still with their bodies and voices, always jumping and shouting in disorder, without the rhythm and harmony proper to adult man, and of a fiery temperament. Children without their teachers are like slaves without their masters, a flock that cannot survive without its shepherds. That's why they must always be led by a preceptor. They should not be left free until they have cultivated "what is best in them" (Kohan, 2007, p. 42).⁶

[...]

In *The Republic*, it is said that children, at birth, participate above all in desire; that some never participate in reason and many do so only much later; with children, as with women and slaves, the inferior dominates: passions, pleasures and pains; children and women admire the nuanced and the artificial (Kohan, 2007, p. 47).⁷

The child, like the slave and the woman, was thus associated with the merely sensitive dimension of the human condition, with its desires, emotions, passions, affections and feelings. This was based on a hierarchy in the use of reason, which is nothing more than a convention created and established to dictate what is worthy or not worthy of value. Anything that didn't fit this criterion was considered inferior and artificial. An educational model of a moralizing nature prevailed, based on punishments and duties and an intellectualist conception of knowledge.

On the other hand, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, at the beginning of his work *Émile; or, Concerning Education* (1889),⁸ already said: "We pity the state of infancy; we do not perceive that the human race would have perished if man had not begun by being a child"

⁶ In Portuguese: "As crianças são seres impetuosos, incapazes de ficarem quietos com o corpo e com a voz, sempre pulando e gritando na desordem, sem o ritmo e a harmonia próprias do homem adulto, e de temperamento arrebatado. As crianças sem seus preceptores são como os escravos sem seus donos, um rebanho que não pode subsistir sem seus pastores. Por isso, devem ser sempre conduzidas por um preceptor. Não devem ser deixadas livres até que seja cultivado "o que nelas há de melhor."

⁷ In Portuguese: "Em *A República*, diz-se que as crianças, ao nascer, participam sobretudo do desejo; que algumas nunca participam da razão e muitas o fazem somente bastante mais tarde; nas crianças, como nas mulheres e nos escravos, domina o inferior: paixões, prazeres e dores; crianças e mulheres admiram o matizado e o artificioso."

⁸ ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques. *Émile; or, Concerning Education*. Translated by Eleanor Worthington. D. C. Heath & Company: Boston, 1889.

(Rousseau, 1889, p. 12).⁹ Education, in his view, needed to value feelings, be attentive to children's real needs and their intrinsic relationship with nature, so that the latter could guide their development. Rousseau (1889) opposed an education of rules, precepts and punishments, developing a broad sense of education as learning about the human condition.

Do not give your pupil any sort of lesson verbally: he ought to receive none except from experience. Inflict upon him no kind of punishment, for he does not know what being in fault means; never oblige him to ask pardon, for he does not know what it is to offend you. His actions being without moral quality, he can do nothing which is morally bad, or which deserves either punishment or reproof (Rousseau, 1889, p. 56).¹⁰

According to Rousseau (1889), the child is someone who needs to be accompanied, observed and encouraged to exercise with nature. It would be during our childhood that we would practice our first actions using our organs, senses and faculties, in short, everything in us that gives us the feeling of our existence. This is how we learn to live. "He who has lived most is not he who has numbered the most years, but he who has been most truly conscious of what life is" (Rousseau, 1889, p. 15).¹¹

At the conclusion of *Book Second* of the aforementioned work, a book in which Rousseau dedicates himself to the education of the character Emilio from the age of 2 to 12, which he calls the *age of nature*, the philosopher highlights the inconvenience of this first education not being perceptible to educators who are much more concerned with their own interests than with those of the children. Finally, he makes a provocative remark: "Now a child, like a man, cannot be seen all at once. What observer can at the first glance seize upon the child's peculiar traits? Such observers there are, but they are uncommon; and among a hundred thousand fathers you will not find one such" (Rousseau, 1889, p. 119).¹²

In Modernity, Rousseau's (1889) theoretical contributions, although subject to criticism in terms of having considered the hypothesis of a childhood free from social influences, were relevant given their novelty in thinking about children in a different way. Roughly speaking, we can see that there has been a change in the view of childhood from

⁹ For reference, see footnote 8.

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 8.

¹¹ For reference, see footnote 8.

¹² For reference, see footnote 8.

the Greeks to the modern era, with it being better considered in its specificity and valued, but still linked to a chronological phase of life that needs to be overcome in order to give way to a being capable of being its own master, the emancipatory project of Modernity.

2 Gorée's Childhoods

Modernity, in agreement with decolonial researchers from the *Modernity/Coloniality* theoretical perspective (Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, Ramón Grosfoguel, Catherine Walsh, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Arturo Escobar, among others), was a strategy built on knowledge consisting of theories and paradigms adopted as *universal* truths, making the East and other peripheral peoples of the West invisible and silenced with their own knowledge, practices, know-how and histories.

This process is intrinsically linked to coloniality, whose pattern of power resulted from modern colonialism and within which work, knowledge, authority and relations between subjects are articulated in the market of the global capitalist system, underpinned by the idea of race. The *foundation myth of Modernity* is, in fact, an invention of the European ruling classes, which occurred at the expense of colonial violence against other peoples in America.

The modern project was associated with the production of a subjectivity linked to the idea of the emancipation of the subject, through the escape from the immature condition of their reason. This could lead to the development of a new humanity. To this end, a set of concepts, ideas and theories were created that underpinned an epistemic racism, the assumption of which stems from the idea that racialized black subjects lack the capacity to think and know. It is thus expressed by giving privilege only to authors from the hegemonic Western tradition, by not admitting other lives and existences with their own legitimate epistemologies in the production of scientific knowledge and critical thinking in general (Oliveira, 2018).

This relationship of oppression of the colonizer over the colonized, marked by epistemicide and epistemic racism, is not only expressed worldwide, but also within colonized countries which, through the reproduction of transplanted models of ideas and

theories from outside, structure thinking with hierarchical forms of power/knowledge that have the *Other* as the paradigm of the best, superior, valid, legitimate, ideal.

In this direction, the treatment given to childhood was no different, in that children were expected to meet a modern, colonizing ideal in order to achieve a supposed emancipation. If social theories disregarded childhood for so long, it was because of its hybrid character, which combines natural and social aspects, seemed to unsettle and challenge the dichotomy erected by the modern mentality between nature and culture (Prout, 2011).¹³

It is worth noting that this process was even more brutal among black children in colonized countries, as they were denied care, even after the enactment of the Free Womb Law in 1871, as shown in the text *La Educación de los Niños Negros en la Provincia de São Paulo (1871- 1888)* [The Education of Black Children in the Province of São Paulo (1871- 1888)], by Daniela Fagundes Portela, which is part of the publication *Nineces de Gorée o de la Negritud* [Gorée's Childhood or of Blackness] (2022). Slavery, Portela (2022) points out and was decisive in distinguishing and constituting the form of existence of Brazilian childhoods and, in particular, the childhood of black children.

The first of these findings points to a society that was certainly unjust in the distribution of its wealth, stingy with access to education for all and marked by the traces of slavery. How can a child be made to obey an adult, as the German teacher, who went to the Paraíba Valley in the second half of the century to teach the children of coffee planters, when the latter distributed shouts and orders among their slaves, would have it? (Priore, 2004 apud Portela, 2022, p. 36).¹⁴

The constitution of a history of childhood and children in Brazil was marked by the hierarchization of free and enslaved people in Brazilian society (Portela, 2022). Through detailed qualitative and quantitative research, Portela shows that the results relating to the period from 1871 to 1888 in São Paulo, the most successful province by

¹³ PROUT, Alan. Taking a Step Away from Modernity: Reconsidering the New Sociology of cChildhood. *Global Studies of Childhood*, v. 1, n. 1, pp. 4-14, 2011.

¹⁴ In Portuguese: “A primeira dessas constatações aponta para uma sociedade certamente injusta na distribuição de suas riquezas, avara com o acesso à educação para todos e vinculada pelas marcas do escravismo. Como fazer uma criança obedecer a um adulto, como queira a professora alemã, que vai na segunda metade do século ao Vale do Paraíba ensinar os filhos dos fazendeiros de café, quando esses distribuem gritos e ordens entre os seus escravos?”

the standards of the time of the Empire, demonstrated an absence of data on free black children and a lack of institutions dedicated to their free care in the same city.

The experiences of Black children have been discussed in the Field of studies entitled *Gorée's childhood* (Mena García, 2022; Meneses Copete, 2021). Gorée Island, located off the coast of Senegal in West Africa which was a landmark of the slave trade, as it was one of the largest slave trading centers on the African continent between the 15th and 19th centuries. Considering the traces of the island's slave-owning past, this field aims to reflect on a break with the homogenizing, hegemonic, racist, Eurocentric and adult-centric condition of childhood:

Gorée's and the plantation's childhoods, Afro-American childhoods, Afro-Caribbean childhoods and Afro-Colombian childhoods must be understood in the long duration of a definitive non-return, a nostalgic return or a politicized and historicized melancholy of the dis/umbigment founded on the current continental and planetary consolidation. Consequently, the experiences of Afro-Colombian childhood will be understood, first of all, in the context of a correlation of memories that can in no way be circumscribed only to Western inventions about childhood imposed in the formation of colonies and colonial states that survive to this day, for example, in the relationship that we will establish between these structures and the forms of violence (including armed violence) that affect racialized children (Mena García, 2021, p. 1011).¹⁵

Gorée's childhoods, Black childhoods, *Afro* childhoods, are modulated by the initial split triggered by the slave trade. Considering this context, Yeison Arcadio Meneses Copete (2021) proposes the notion of *disumbigment*, a critical, analytical and interpretative category created by the author to reflect on migrations, forced displacements, deterritorializations and diasporic processes. In this context, *disumbigment*¹⁶ is related to the disruption of an ancestral practice of some communities

¹⁵In Spanish: "Las Niñeces de Gorée y de la Plantación, las Niñeces afroamericanas, afrocaribeñas y las Niñeces afrocolombianas deben ser entendidas en la larga duración de un no retorno definitivo, un retorno nostálgico o una melancolía politizada e historizada del des/ombligamiento fundante en la consolidación continental y planetaria actual. Por consiguiente, las experiencias de la niñez [afro en general] afrochocoana será entendida, en primer lugar, en el marco de una correlación de memorias que de ninguna manera pueden circunscribirse solo a los inventos occidentales sobre la niñez impuestos en la formación de colonias y en los estados coloniales que perviven hoy, por ejemplo, en la relación que estableceremos entre estas estructuras y las formas de violencias (entre ellas la armada) que afectan a los niños y niñas racializados."

¹⁶The original word is *des-ombligamiento*.

in the Colombian Pacific, the *umbigada*, which consists of burying the umbilical cord of the newborn:

After the child is born, the process of care continues. In addition to the idea of protection and development, the “umbilical cord” appears. This latter is a traditional practice in the Afro-Pacific and in some African cultures of Ghana, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Cameroon, among others, through which the person is rooted in the territory, connected to the life and world of the ancestors. The care of the umbilical cord is rigorous, as it can be used for good or for evil. Once cut, the mother or baby may be forced to cut the umbilical cord. After cutting, the mother or grandmother keeps it for some time and then the umbilical cord is planted in the root of a tree, a banana tree or a banana plant, under the house [...] The individual is in some way connected to the tree or plant, which he or she will have to care for. In addition, the mother’s placenta is sown or buried for its nutritional components and is currently used to cure various diseases. The bond with life and the territory is multidimensional (Meneses Copete, 2021, pp. 1013-1014).¹⁷

We will return later to the category proposed by Meneses Copete (2021), when we approach the concept of *poetics of homelessness*. Regarding Gorée’s childhoods, it should be noted that, still in the words of Meneses Copete (2021, p. 1019), these racialized black childhoods should also be read from the perspective of intersectionality, so that the *childhood factory* in which children are subjected to from kindergarten to school, bear in mind that they have to face a consolidated racist, classist, sexist, adult-centric and homogenizing social structure.

As it can be seen, axes of inequality and domination that structure contemporary Western societies, such as race, ethnicity, class, age and gender, often overlap and intersect. Aware of this, black feminists, such as Kimberle Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, use the concept of *intersectionality* as a lens to explore the ways in which inequalities are mutually constructed. Conceição Evaristo’s writings shed a light on such

¹⁷ In Spanish: “Una vez nace la criatura el proceso del cuidado continua. Sumado a la idea de la protección y el desarrollo surge la ombligada. Esta última es una práctica tradicional en el afropacífico y en algunas culturas africanas de Gana, Gabón, Costa de Marfil, Kenya, Camerún, entre otras, mediante la cual la persona es arraigada al territorio, es conectada con la vida y con el mundo de las y los ancestros. El cuidado del cordón umbilical es estricto, pues este puede ser utilizado para el bien o para el mal. Una vez se corta, la madre o la abuela guardan este durante algún tiempo y luego se siembra el ombligo en la raíz de un árbol, una mata de plátano o de banano, debajo de la casa [...] El sujeto o sujeta queda de alguna manera atado al árbol o planta, el cual tendrá que cuidar. También, la placenta de la madre por sus componentes nutricionales es sembrada o enterrada, actualmente se utiliza para la sanación de diversas enfermedades. El vínculo con la vida y el territorio es multidimensional.”

intersections: her characters are children and elderly people, black girls and women, living in conditions of poverty, dealing with structures of oppression.

In the short story *O sagrado pão dos filhos* [The Sacred Bread of Children], in *Histórias de leves enganos e parecenças* (2016) [Stories of Small Deceptions and Resemblances], for example, social divisions, privileges, and injustices that cut across race, class, gender, and age are described accurately by the author, who tells us that “the descendants of the Correa Pedragal inherited not only material assets but also the arrogance of the former masters” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 37), while presenting the protagonist’s childhood:

Andina Magnólia dos Santos, daughter of Jacinta dos Santos and Bernadino Pereira, grew up under the rule of the manor house, although she was born in 1911. Serving the Pedragal family, from an early age she was the toy girl, the punching bag, the little nanny, blamed for all the mischief of Senhora Correa’s daughters (Evaristo, 2016, p. 38).¹⁸

We understand that the treatment of childhoods through the construction of discursive categories and practices of power/knowledge served to consolidate a perspective alien to the subjectivities and singularities of children, and certainly to Black childhoods through their systematic erasure, silencing, and submission to determinations historically produced by white colonial masters, in a complex structure of oppression that has spanned and still spans over generations, genders, classes, races, and ethnicities.

But, now and then, through a gap, to a keen eye, childhoods and children reveal themselves, with their own action, grammar, and structures of meaning. Conceição Evaristo generously opens this gap.

3 Black Childhood in Conceição Evaristo

Let us focus initially on one of Evaristo’s works – *Olhos D’Água* [Watered Eyes] (2016). There are significant passages that can be found right at the beginning of this book, which arise from her own listening to childhood memories of a black woman and

¹⁸ In Portuguese: “Andina Magnólia dos Santos, filha de Jacinta dos Santos e de Bernadino Pereira, cresceu sob os mandos da casa-grande, embora tenha nascido em 1911. Servindo à família Pedragal, desde pequena sendo a menina-brinquedo, o saco-de-pancadas, a pequena babá, a culpada de todas as artes das filhas de Senhora Correa.”

reveal the presence of intergenerational ties between women that strongly connect to her ancestry.

Always by my mother's side, I learned to know her. I could decipher her silence in times of hardship, just as I could recognize, in her gestures, the signs of possible joys [...]. One day, playing at combing a doll, a joy my mother gave us when, for a few moments, she left the washing, the ironing of other people's clothes, and became a great black doll for her daughters, we discovered a small bump hidden right on her scalp. (Evaristo, 2016, p. 16).¹⁹

The narrative transports us to the concreteness of the everyday life of a working, poor, black mother and, at the same time, to a displacement, albeit a temporary one, from this condition when she transforms into the *black doll* to bring joy to her daughters. There is something very special here, as there was very likely a lack of a toy – a doll – in the family, and, certainly, if there were one, it would not be a black doll. But beyond that, if such a toy existed, it would not hold the same relevance as the black mother herself becoming, performing, assuming the role of a doll – a living experience. “And it was precisely on those days of little or no food that she played the most with her daughters. At such times, the favorite game was the one in which the mother was the Lady, the Queen” (Evaristo, 2016, pp. 16-17).²⁰

Through Evaristo's (2016) memories, we witness the same childhood of hardship that crosses black generations, but also its capacity for invention and reinvention of the everyday through the poetry of play, which establishes mutual recognition and a shared destiny. Childhood as an inaugural condition of creation, of the human condition.

In this passage, we glimpse the presence of the contemplative gaze of the mother and daughters, which poetically recreates, through the perception of the beauty of forms, new images that she quickly offers to her daughters – the dreamed forms – for them to fulfill. This also reminds us of the symbolic nourishment provided by a poetic gaze that meets a certain hunger.

¹⁹ In Portuguese: “Sempre ao lado de minha mãe, aprendi a conhecê-la. Decifrava o seu silêncio nas horas de dificuldades, como também sabia reconhecer, em seus gestos, prenúncios de possíveis alegrias [...]. Um dia brincando de pentear boneca, alegria que a mãe nos dava quando, deixando por uns momentos o lava-lava, o passa-passa das roupagens alheias e se tornava uma grande boneca negra para as filhas, descobrimos uma bolinha escondida bem no couro cabeludo dela.”

²⁰ In Portuguese: “E era justamente nesses dias de parco ou nenhum alimento que ela mais brincava com as filhas. Nessas ocasiões, a brincadeira preferida era aquela em que a mãe era a Senhora, a Rainha.”

Sometimes, in the late afternoon, before night overtook the day, she would sit on the doorstep, and together we would contemplate the art of the clouds in the sky. Some would turn into little lambs; others, puppies; some, sleeping giants, and there were those that were simply clouds, cotton candy. Mother would then stretch out her arm, reaching up to the sky, gather that cloud, break it into pieces, and quickly place them in each of our mouths. Everything had to be done very quickly, before the cloud melted and, with it, our dreams faded too (Evaristo, 2016, p. 17).²¹

There is a profound encounter that unites past, present, and future in continuity through the eyes of the grandmother, mother, and granddaughter, translated into an ancestral foundation that shapes their existences and seals the meaning of their lives as belonging to one another, crossing generations. In this intergenerational encounter, there seems to be no doubt that the enigma surrounding the gaze is dissolved, finding answers in ancestral origins.

Today, having reached my mother's eye color, I try to discover the eye color of my daughter. I play the game where one's eyes become the mirror for the other's other. And one day, I was surprised by a gesture from my little girl. While we were in this sweet game, she gently touched my face, contemplating me intensely (Evaristo, 2016, p. 19).²²

At the end of *Olhos D'Água* (2016), the author narrates the story of Ayoluwa, a girl who is the daughter of hope – Bamidele – and who, at birth, brings joy to the African people, also symbolizing their choice not to die. She is a child who redefines life, moving toward a new way of existing. She is not an adult or an elder but is a child who reveals herself as a bringer of events: “And we all felt, the moment Ayoluwa was born, something

²¹ In Portuguese: “Às vezes, no final da tarde, antes que a noite tomasse conta do tempo, ela se sentava na soleira da porta e, juntas, ficávamos contemplando as artes das nuvens no céu. Uns viravam carneirinhos; outras, cachorrinhos; algumas, gigantes adormecidos, e havia aquelas que eram só nuvens, algodão doce. A mãe, então, espichava o braço, que ia até o céu, colhia a aquela nuvem, repartia em pedacinhos e enfiava rápido na boca de cada uma de nós. Tudo tinha de ser muito rápido, antes que a nuvem derretesse e com ela os nossos sonhos se esvaecessem também.”

²² In Portuguese: “Hoje, quando já alcancei a cor dos olhos de minha mãe, tento descobrir a cor dos olhos de minha filha. Faço a brincadeira em que os olhos de uma se tornam o espelho para os olhos da outra. E um dia desses me surpreendi com um gesto de minha menina. Quando nós duas estávamos nesse doce jogo, ela tocou suavemente no meu rosto, me contemplando intensamente.”

stirring in our wombs, the men too. No one was frightened. We knew that we were giving birth within ourselves to a new life” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 114).²³

Choosing not to die: an attitude born of the continuous decision to resist oppression, but also to exist, as an affirmation of life. Joy is also a feeling, a creative gesture very different from the feeling of resentment, as it shows its renewing, regenerative, new, unique strength. It does not return oppression with the same *modus operandi* but creates, because it is indeed distinct.

Conceição Evaristo’s memories, or rather her *fictions of memories*, as the author prefers to call them, not only restore a history that for a long time went unwritten, and thus unknown, intentionally covered and silenced due to the violent process of expelling African peoples from their native lands but also allows us to see ourselves in the mirror, which has always been a reflection of our meager colonizing consciousness.

As consciousness we understand the realm of the unknown, the covering, alienation, oblivion, and even of knowledge. This is where ideological discourse is found. But we understand memory as the unknowing that knows, this place of inscriptions that restores an unwritten story, the place where truth emerges, a truth that is structured as fiction (Gonzalez, 2021, p. 375).²⁴

Initially, we noted that there remains a strong idea in our society that a child must be properly initiated into the path of development so that, eventually, at a later age, they reach autonomy, showing the capacity to make decisions without adult intervention. This idea is based on the well-known chronological conception of childhood, linked to a linear life trajectory, following the sequence of past, present, and future, and, similarly, childhood, then adolescence, and finally maturity and old age.

In the book *Espírito da Intimidade: ensinamentos ancestrais africanos sobre maneiras de se relacionar* [The spirit of intimacy: Ancient African teachings in the ways of relationships] (2007), Sobonfu Somé states that children in the villages of the Dagara

²³ In Portuguese: “E todas nós sentimos, no instante em que Ayoluwa nascia, todas nós sentimos algo se contorcer em nossos ventres, os homens também. Ninguém se assustou. Sabíamos que estávamos parindo em nós mesmos uma nova vida.”

²⁴ In Portuguese: “Como consciência a gente entende o lugar do desconhecimento, do encobrimento, da alienação, do esquecimento e até do saber. É por aí que o discurso ideológico se faz presente. Já a memória, a gente considera como o não-saber que conhece, esse lugar de inscrições que restituem uma história que não foi escrita, o lugar da emergência da verdade, dessa verdade que se estrutura como ficção.”
GONZALEZ, Lélia. *Racism and Sexism in Brazilian Culture*. Translated by Bruna Barros, Feva, Jess Oliveira and Luciana Reis. *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, Volume 49, Fall/Winter 2021, pp. 371-394.

people of West Africa do not belong solely to the parents who brought them into the world; their parents' bodies were merely vessels for them to come into existence. Children belong to the community and the spirit. The spirit is understood as a life force present in everything. In us, humans, it takes on human form and helps us find our purpose, necessarily linked to ancestry.

Another noteworthy point is that, even before birth, a person, according to the Dagara, already chooses their purpose, which is revealed in a ritual. The child, still in the mother's womb, is asked by the elders: "Who are you? Why are you coming?" That baby uses the mother's voice to give a response expressing their essence and purpose. The elders then organize a space for a welcoming ritual for the baby who will come into the world. The spirit of ancestry among the Dagara can see past, present, and future.

In the article *Temporalidade, memória e ancestralidade: enredamentos africanos entre infância e formação* [Temporality, Memory, and Ancestry: African Enmeshments between Childhood and Formation] (2018), Wanderson Flor do Nascimento, in dialogue with the thoughts of Kenyan philosopher Johan Mbiti (1970), highlights that in many traditional African societies, the child is seen as the fullest expression of ancestry. Their educational process involves learning about the genealogies from which they descend and where they find the sense of their history and belonging, which connects them to the community. Death is not viewed as a total rupture with the physical plane, as it is in Western tradition, but the deceased remain present, and children coexist with death permanently, connecting with a past that is always remembered and updated in narratives, which serve as a way of revisiting history and also an opportunity to perceive a plurality of meanings.

More than presupposing that children are blank slates to be filled with whatever the community desires, there is a perception that they embody the very expression of a past era and thus bear the responsibility of updating these narratives. Memory takes shape within their bodies, not only as sensory images but through sounds, smells, and textures. Bodies feel what they remember, and individuals remember what they feel (Nascimento, 2018, p. 590).²⁵

²⁵ In Portuguese: "Mais do que a pressuposição de que as crianças são folhas em branco que podem ser preenchidas com o que a comunidade quiser, há a percepção de que elas são a própria expressão desse tempo passado e, portanto, carregam o dever de atualizar essas narrativas. E a memória se encarna nos corpos infantis, não apenas na forma de imagens sensoriais, mas em sons, cheiros, texturas. Os corpos sentem o que lembram. Os sujeitos lembram o que sentem."

In another work — *Becos da Memória* [Alleys of Memory] (2017), our interlocutor Conceição Evaristo introduces her own intermediaries — characters with voices and landscapes that depict childhoods marked by neglect, hunger, poverty, violence, and the imminent loss of their meager shelter. Yet, these are also poetic images that reveal the relentless creation of lives that, in the *favelas*, persistently exist and resist, living together in precarious conditions, in connection with ancestors, and within shared spaces at risk of destruction. The *favela* described by Conceição Evaristo (2017), as she notes, “has ended and ended. Today, *favelas* produce other narratives, provoke other testimonies, and inspire other fictions” (Evaristo, 2017, p. 12).²⁶

Conceição Evaristo (2017) notes at the outset that this book of hers emerged from a search to write fiction cloaked in a lived out reality, where her narrative writing draws from her own experiences and those of her people, something she terms *escrevivência* [lived-out writing].

I search for the voice, the speech of those who tell, to merge with mine. Thus was born the narrative of *Becos da Memória*. First, it was my mother’s word. She, Mrs. Joana, gave me the spark: “Grandma Rita slept wrapped up with her.” My mother’s voice brought back memories of our life in a favela, which no longer existed at the time of that narration. “Grandma Rita slept with her, Grandma Rita slept wrapped up with her, Grandma Rita slept wrapped up with her...” My mother’s tone cast me into the past, placing me face to face with my childhood self. So I went on to the exercise of writing (Evaristo, 2017, p. 11).²⁷

We are thus drawn to follow her journey, her *escrevivência*, meeting characters with lives of their own yet, simultaneously, who seem like multiple people within one—Conceição Evaristo—suggesting a Black childhood in search of dignity, freedom, joy,

²⁶ In Portuguese: “acabou e acabou. Hoje as favelas produzem outras narrativas, provocam outros testemunhos e inspiram outras ficções.”

²⁷ In Portuguese: “Busco a voz, a fala de quem conta, para se misturar à minha. Assim nasceu a narrativa de *Becos da Memória*. Primeiro foi o verbo de minha mãe. Ela, D. Joana, me deu o mote: “Vó Rita dormia embolada com ela”. A voz de minha mãe a me trazer lembranças de nossa vivência, em uma favela, que já não existia mais no momento em que se dava aquela narração. “Vó Rita dormia com ela, Vó Rita dormia embolada com ela, Vó Rita dormia embolada com ela...”. A entonação da voz de mãe me jogou no passado, me colocando face a face com o meu eu-menina. Fui então para o exercício da escrita.”

possibility, and life. These are “the men, women, children who crowded within me, as crowded as the shacks in my favela” (Evaristo, 2017, p. 17).²⁸

Maria-Nova, the child she was and still insists on being like Evaristo, is a girl already transformed, one among many of her characters. Her childhood in the favela is marked by poverty, fear, violence, and abandonment, yet also by moments of simplicity, curiosity, and joy. The images described in the book well translate the idea that “all great, simple images reveal a psychic state... it bespeaks intimacy” (Bachelard, 1964, p. 72)²⁹ and that “memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are” (Bachelard, 1964, p. 9).³⁰

Her memory emphasizes spaces such as the public faucets of the favela: the *upper faucet* had more water, used for washing the residents’ clothes. But it wasn’t just that. The water would also turn red, sparking the girl’s curiosity. Meanwhile, there was another space in the favela with the *lower faucet*, where mulberry trees grew nearby, children played together, and there was a small bar where they got sweets! Grandma Rita’s house stood in front of the *upper faucet*, and her mysterious figure, never fully seen by the girl, served as an object of curiosity. “I remember she lived between hiding and appearing behind the gate” (Evaristo, 2017, p. 15).³¹

Certain spaces seemed more cherished, praised, and admired, while others were not... “Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor” (Bachelard, 1964, xxxvi).³² Thus, the narrative shapes into a *poetics of space*, where the reveries of the imaginary are lived and relived, preserving meaning, significance, something worth remembering, valuing, presenting to the reader, and reintroducing to the writer herself.

4 Poetics of Displacement

According to Paola Jacques Berenstein (2001, p. 10), *favelas* possess a unique aesthetic, an urban otherness that deserves study. *Favelas* are labyrinthine spaces, piled

²⁸ In Portuguese: “homens, mulheres, crianças que se amontoaram dentro de mim, como amontoados eram os barracos de minha favela.”

²⁹ BACHELARD, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated from the French by Maria Jolas, with a new foreword by John R. Stilgoe. Originally published: New York: Orion Press, 1964.

³⁰ For reference, see footnote 29.

³¹ In Portuguese: “Eu me lembro de que ela vivia entre o esconder e o aparecer atrás do portão.”

³² For reference, see footnote 29.

with alleys and shacks. Walking through the alleys of memory of these places brings forth stories and evocations of men, women, and children who accumulate in the writer's imagination. The process of recollection takes shape as a *patchwork*,³³ which seeks to make sense of the pile of memories and spaces. But the *favelas* themselves, as Berenstein notes, are built following the logic of patchworks, where the *bricoleur-favelado* uses diverse materials to construct his shelter/house amid scarcity.

The *bricoleur-favelado* wants a shelter, whose final shape eludes him. He works with fragments and in a fragmented way. It's essential to remember that his primary goal is to house his family, and the construction of his shelter initially focuses on the bare essentials to meet this primary function of protection. [...] The logic of building a shelter in a favela is the same that governs the making of a patchwork quilt, sewn together from disparate pieces of fabric (patchwork) (Berenstein, 2001, p. 26).³⁴

Berenstein (2001) argues that this type of construction aligns more with the idea of sheltering than of inhabiting, as sheltering is temporary and provisional, while inhabiting is durable and permanent: "The shelter is temporary, even if it is meant to last forever; habitation, on the other hand, is durable, even if it is to collapse tomorrow. It is this relationship with temporality that makes the difference" (Berenstein, 2001, p. 26).³⁵ In line with Berenstein's (2001) thought, we understand that Evaristo's writing conveys not only a poetics of space but also a poetics of displacement. This concept speaks to the condition of Black subjects in diaspora and to the physical and onto logical circumstances of a large part of the Black population, who crowd into shacks across Brazil's numerous favelas. In the words of poet Edimilson de Almeida Pereira (2016, no page), "we, Black Brazilians, are still homeless subjects in our own land."³⁶

³³A technique that joins fabrics of various shapes.

³⁴ In Portuguese: "O bricoleur-favelado quer um abrigo, cuja forma definitiva lhe escapa. Trabalha com fragmentos, e de modo fragmentário. É preciso ter sempre em mente que seu objetivo maior é abrigar sua família e que a construção do seu abrigo se atém, num primeiro momento, ao mínimo essencial para responder a essa função primeira de proteção. [...] A lógica da construção de um abrigo numa favela é a mesma que preside a fabricação de uma colcha de retalhos, feita com pedaços de tecidos disparatados, costurados uns nos outros (patchwork)."

³⁵ In Portuguese: "O abrigo é provisório mesmo que ele deva durar para a eternidade; a habitação, ao contrário, é durável, mesmo que vá desmoronar amanhã. É esta relação com a temporalidade que faz a diferença."

³⁶ In Portuguese: "nós, negros brasileiros, ainda somos sujeitos sem casa, Homeless, em nossa própria terra."

In this sense, displacement is understood not only as the lack of a home or means of subsistence but as an ontological condition, *a priori*, of the diasporic subject. Since the initial rupture of those torn from their land and placed in the hull of a ship at the onset of the slave trade, through those who crowded into the slave quarters of the sugar mills or into the *favelas* across Brazil, displacement has permeated these experiences. Yet, the poetics of displacement, named here considering the initial diasporic uprooting and subsequent territorial displacements experienced by subjects in diaspora, also encompasses forms of resistance, the power of imagination shaped by such context. Thus, the very notion of *escrevivência*, which we brought up earlier as elaborated by the author, reminds us of the power of imagination that can overwrite the colonial imagination through the rewriting of Brazil's history, now told by Black voices — “not to lull the masters but to wake them from their unjust slumber” (Evaristo, 2012, no page).³⁷

When I think of *escrevivência*, I also think of a history rooted in the speech of enslaved Black women who had to tell their stories to the “big house.” Lived out writings a reversal; it blurs that image of the past because it is a path already traversed by Black authors, mainly women. This does not prevent other people from different realities, other social groups, and fields beyond literature from experiencing a *escrevivência*. But it is fundamentally based on Black women's authorship, already masters of writing, blurring that past image of African women telling stories to lull the big house (Evaristo, 2020, no page).³⁸

In this sense, *escrevivência* serves as a kind of patchwork, capturing the experiences of Black women—fractured, painful, yet powerful experiences—that bring forth what Édouard Glissant (2020)³⁹ termed a thought of the *trace/remnant*, emerging from the experience of the *bare migrant*, who arrived in the Americas stripped of everything:

³⁷ In Portuguese: não mais para “adormecer os da casa grande e, sim, para acordá-los de seus sonos injustos.”

³⁸ In Portuguese: “Quando eu penso em *escrevivência*, penso também em um histórico que está fundamentado na fala de mulheres negras escravizadas que tinham de contar suas histórias para a casa-grande. E a *escrevivência*, não, a *escrevivência* é um caminho inverso, é um caminho que borra essa imagem do passado, porque é um caminho já trilhado por uma autoria negra, de mulheres principalmente. Isso não impede que outras pessoas também, de outras realidades, de outros grupos sociais e de outros campos para além da literatura experimentem a *escrevivência*. Mas ele é muito fundamentado nessa autoria de mulheres negras, que já são donas da escrita, borrando essa imagem do passado, das africanas que tinham de contar a história para ninar os da casa-grande.”

³⁹ GLISSANT, Édouard. *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*. Translated by Celia Britton. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020.

[...] the deported African has not had the opportunity of preserving these kinds of specific inheritances. But he has made something new on the basis of the only memories, that is to say the only trace thoughts, that he had left: he has created on the one hand the Creole languages and, on the other, art forms that are valid for everyone, such as the music of jazz, which has been reconstituted with the help of newly adopted instruments but on the basis of fundamental African rhythms. Although this neo-American does not sing African songs from two or three centuries ago, he re-establishes in the Caribbean, Brazil and North America, through ‘trace thought’, art forms that he offers as valid for all peoples. Trace thought seems to me to be a new dimension that in the current state of the world we must set in opposition to what I call ‘systematic thought’ or systems of thought (Glissant, 2020, p. 7).⁴⁰

Through the thought of traces/remnants, ancestral memories come alive, dispersing like the thousands of deported individuals of the slave trade in the transnational and transcultural formation of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1995).⁴¹ The poetics of displacement, in this sense, consider this initial rupture, this a priori condition of *(dis)umbilication* (Menezes Copete, 2021), of deterritorialization, forced displacement, and migration. To write the experiences of women—and especially the memories of Black childhoods—means beginning from this initial *(dis)umbilication*, which severs the ties between the subject and the world, like the emptiness that permeates the entire novel Ponciá Vicêncio:

The girl heard it said at times that Grandpa Vicêncio had left her an inheritance. She didn’t know what an inheritance was - she wanted to ask, but didn’t know how. [...] They said she looked a lot like him in every way, even the way she would look at things. They said that she liked to look out into emptiness, just the way he used to. Ponciá Vicêncio didn’t reply to their talk, but she knew where she was looking. She saw it all, even the emptiness (Evaristo, 2007, p. 20).⁴²

The girl Ponciá, who saw her own emptiness, an ancestral inheritance, is also the woman Ponciá, who would continue to encounter this emptiness, which would later drive her to seek new directions, to chart new paths in her life:

⁴⁰For reference, see footnote 39.

⁴¹GILROY, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

⁴² EVARISTO, Conceição. *Ponciá Vicêncio*. Trad. Paloma Martinez-Cruz, Austin: Host Publications, 2007.

When Ponciá Vicencio resolved to leave the town where she was born, the decision was forceful and sudden. She was tired of everything there. Of laboring over the clay with her mother, of coming back empty-handed. Of seeing the lands of blacks dotted with farms, taken care of by women and children because the men spent their lives working the master's lands, and afterward, seeing the majority of the harvest handed right back to the colonels. Tired of the insane struggle, devoid of glory, in which everyone slaved just so they could wake up each day even poorer than the last while others grew wealthy the whole day long, she believed that she might design a different path, invent a new life. she could carve new paths, invent a new life (Evaristo, 2007, pp. 24-25).⁴³

The experience of homelessness, uprooting, and deterritorialization implies lack, emptiness, and the constant need to relocate. However, this incessant need to leave, to *invent a new life*, also speaks to the thought of the trace/remnant, to the onset of processes of creolization, of new cultures and ways of life shaped within the context of the Black Atlantic. As Glissant pointed out,

Those Africans transported to the Americas carried with them, over the Great Seas, the trace of their gods, of their customs, of their languages. Faced with the implacable disorder of the settler, they had the genius, arising from the suffering they endured, to make these traces fertile, creating – better than syntheses – outcomes that no-one expected (Glissant, 2020, p. 10).⁴⁴

At the end of the novel, Ponciá rekindles a collective ancestral memory, reconnecting the lost ties with the world through the awareness of an inheritance forged in the slave trade routes:

Outside, In the iris-hued sky, the enormous, multicolored Angorô [In Bantu mythology, *angorô* is the rainbow, but also a multicolored snake, *Nkisi* or *Orixá* that helps humans communicate with deities] cascaded slowly down while Ponciá Vicencio, link and heir to a memory newly uncovered by her relations, would never be lost; would be kept in the waters of the river (Evaristo, 2007, p. 132).⁴⁵

In Evaristo's narrative (2017), for example, we perceive how the vulnerability surrounding the lives of different generations of Black populations, in the face of real estate speculation that deprives them of their only place to live, is the continued daily

⁴³ For reference, see footnote 42.

⁴⁴ GLISSANT, Édouard. *Treatise on the Whole-World*. Cambridge: Liverpool University Press, 2020.

⁴⁵ For reference, see footnote 42.

repetition of the violence of their forced displacement, similar to the rupture imposed by the slave trade.

The tractors of the construction company were digging, plowing the northern tip of *The Favela*. There, the dust grew larger and so did the anxieties. Some families already had eviction orders, and this heightened everyone's pain. (...). Everyone knew *The Favela* wasn't paradise, but no one wanted to leave (Evaristo, 2017, p. 71).⁴⁶

Consequently, we can affirm that notions such as homelessness, deterritorialization, uprooting, and dis-umbilication are at the core of the aesthetic, literary, and cultural production emerging from the Black diaspora experience. Likewise, these categories also shape much of the imaginings and creations in the Gorée's childhoods. Childhoods, often marked by vulnerability, violence, and emptiness, as seen in the tragic story of the girl Zaíta, killed at the end of the story *Zaíta esqueceu de guardar os brinquedos* [Zaíta Forgot to Put Her Toys Away] by a stray bullet:

Zaíta got up and left, leaving her toys scattered, ignoring her mother's warnings. Some were carelessly left along the way. The beautiful Black doll, with her single open arm, seemed to smile helplessly happy. The girl didn't care about any slaps she might receive. She just wanted to find the flower-figurine that had disappeared. She looked for her sister at the back of the house and, disappointed, only found emptiness (Evaristo, 2016, p. 79).⁴⁷

Despite the tragic end of the story and the violent backdrop of the narrative, Evaristo, writing from the perspectives of Zaíta and her sister Naíta, who are preoccupied with the flower-figurine and the Black doll, highlights the powerful imagination of Black children, which proposes alternative narratives about the violence and lives in *Brazilian Favelas* and peripheries. What changes is precisely the point of view, which ceases to be an external gaze focusing only on the violence and hardships of *The Favelas* and shifts instead to the perspectives of children. This shift, shaped by the gaze of Black children,

⁴⁶ In Portuguese: "Os tratores da firma construtora estavam cavando, arando a ponta norte da favela. Ali, a poeira se tornava maior e as angústias também. Algumas famílias já estavam com ordem de saída e isto precipitava a dor de todos nós. (...). Todos sabiam que a favela não era o paraíso, mas ninguém queria sair."

⁴⁷ In Portuguese: "Zaíta levantou e saiu, deixando os brinquedos espalhados, ignorando as recomendações da mãe. Alguns ficaram descuidadosamente expostos pelo caminho. A linda boneca negra, com seu único braço aberto, parecia sorrir desamparadamente feliz. A menina estava pouco se importando com os tapas que pudesse receber. Queria apenas encontrar a figurinha-flor que tinha sumido. Procurou pela irmã nos fundos da casa e, desapontada, só encontrou o vazio."

proposes new ways to see, narrate, and imagine the struggles of Brazil's peripheral everyday life.

Conclusion

*Yes, she would go ahead. One day, now she already knew what her tool would be: writing. One day, she would narrate, make the voices sound, unleash the murmurs, the silences, the stifled scream that existed, which belonged to each one and to all. Maria-Nova would one day write the speech of her people.*⁴⁸

Conceição Evaristo

In this essay, we argued about the predominance in the Western world of views and discursive practices regarding what children should be and achieve, with the prerogative that, being so, it would be responding to some ideological notion of development, from the perspective of adults, within a biological, universal, and natural framework. On the other hand, we emphasized another way of thinking about childhoods, considering their social and cultural dimensions, therefore constitutive of history. We chose black childhoods because they, especially, not only expose undeniable processes of subjectivation of epistemic, historical, political, ethical, existential, and aesthetic value but also confront all of us with the possibility of being more human.

Conceição Evaristo's literature is a way to give voice to these childhoods that need to be heard. Her writing calls for an urgent listening to life. She fulfilled the path chosen by Maria-Nova, who, as we can glean from reading her book *Becos da Memória* (2017), reveals herself as a child curious to know what each existence, each shack, holds within it. Maria-Nova, as described by Evaristo (2016), enjoys reading, studying, listening to the elders, playing, and empathizing with the suffering and pain of others from the *senzala-favela*. Maria-Nova feels in her body the pain, the same as that of the people living in that heap of shacks. Conceição Evaristo speaks to us of a child who does not want to *die from not living* - words of the character Cidinha-Cidoca - but rather *live from living* (p. 160). "Life could not be spent in misery and in misery. She thought, sought deep inside herself what she could do. Her heart pounded more and more, compressing inside her chest. The

⁴⁸ In Portuguese: "Sim, ela iria adiante. Um dia, agora ela já sabia qual seria a sua ferramenta, a escrita. Um dia, ela haveria de narrar, de fazer soar, de soltar as vozes, os murmúrios, os silêncios, o grito abafado que existia, que era de cada um e de todos. Maria-Nova um dia escreveria a fala de seu povo."

thought came quick and clear as lightning. One day, she would write everything” (Evaristo, 2016, p. 160).⁴⁹ And so she did.

For the Portuguese artist Grada Kilomba, in a recent interview on a TV program (Kilomba, 2024), art touches on uncomfortable, impossible themes or those for which society lacks a language, and the great exercise of an artist is to succeed in making this translation or language without repeating discomfort and violence. The magic, according to her, is to bring difficult themes through the creation of a language that invites and caresses the audience.

Conceição Evaristo’s literature does just that: it calls us, invites us, and challenges us to look at power and oppression relations without the veil of ideology and alienation. The child, the woman, the poor, the black suffer violence and injustices, but they are not hidden, dehumanized, or silenced in her text. On the contrary, they are there whole, integral, and we, as readers, become witnesses to the violences that structure our society and, at the same time, to the power of these people, this communion of voices of children, women, the elderly, the black, and the poor that traverse Evaristo’s work.

Finally, it should be noted that, if the poetics of shelterlessness, as observed in the author’s literature, are traversed by vulnerability, emptiness, uprooting, and deterritorialization, at the same time, working with language and *escrevivência* re-establishes those lost ties with the world, as we see at the end of the novel *Ponciá Vicêncio*: “link and heir to a memory newly uncovered by her relations” (Evaristo, 2007, p. 132). Thus, traversing the alleys of the memories of black imaginaries, of the *Gorée’s childhoods*, similarly means inscribing black experiences in the alleys of language, making Blackness resonate, as observed in Aimé Césaire’s fundamental *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*: “My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth, “ my voice the freedom of those who break down in the prison holes of despair” (Césaire, 2001, p. 13).⁵⁰ In other words, collective black memories, memories of black childhoods, brought to the present and revived by the act of *escrevivência*.

⁴⁹ In Portuguese: “A vida não podia se gastar em miséria e na miséria. Pensou, buscou lá dentro de si o que poderia fazer. Seu coração arfava mais e mais, comprimindo lá dentro do peito. O pensamento veio rápido e claro como um raio. Um dia ela iria tudo escrever.”

⁵⁰ Césaire, Aimé. *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. Trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001.

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English version

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Statement of Author's Contribution

We, Michel Mingote Ferreira de Azara, Renata Lopes Costa Prado, and Silmara Lúcia Marton, authors of the article entitled “Black Childhoods in the Literature of Conceição Evaristo: Memory, Ancestry and Homelessness,” submitted to this journal, declare that, regarding the aspects listed below, the following contributions were made:

Conception and project: all authors contributed.

Drafting of the article: all authors contributed.

Final approval of the version to be published: all authors contributed.

Responsibility for all aspects of the work in ensuring the accuracy and integrity of any part of the work: all authors take responsibility.

Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Reviews

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Review II

The text is well founded from a theoretical-critical point of view and in relation to the intended objectives. The bibliography used is up to date, demonstrating knowledge of the authorship about the topic covered. It is also evident the originality of the reflection and the contribution of this essay to studies on the category of childhood in the works of Conceição Evaristo. However, despite these positive aspects, corrections are needed regarding the cohesion and coherence of some paragraphs, the use of punctuation and verbal agreement, as well as general formatting of the text (spaces, references, long paragraphs and very short ones). I suggest a careful review of the text. APPROVED WITH RESTRICTIONS [Revised]

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Reviewed on September 18, 2024.

Review III

The authors of the article “Black childhoods in the literature of Conceição Evaristo: memory, ancestry and homelessness” met what was highlighted in the previous review. Therefore, I consider that the text is approved for publication without any restrictions.
APPROVED

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