

RACISM AND THE CLAIM FOR RECOGNITION IN CURRICULAR EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

From a post-structural theory perspective, we problematize the tactical distribution of precariousness addressed to Black people, which is diluted in state policies, institutional practices, and everyday intersubjective relations. Due to the performative nature of the theory, we refine the different modes in which precariousness emerges in some studies, understood as the persistence of a trace of racism. We argue that the unequal distribution of care goes beyond the material dimension, seeping into the processes of subjectivation of Black children within the curricular experience. Faced with the perpetually deferred promise of resolution, these individuals bring forth a claim that challenges the norms of recognition, shifting toward the political demand for humanization – not only as an ethical gesture of care but also as an act of reparation.

RACISM • CURRICULUM • SCHOOL SEGREGATION • RESPONSIBILITY

RACISMO E REIVINDICAÇÃO DE RECONHECIMENTO NA EXPERIÊNCIA CURRICULAR

Resumo

A partir da teoria pós-estrutural, problematizamos a distribuição tática da precariedade endereçada a pessoas pretas, diluída em políticas de Estado, em práticas institucionais e em relações intersubjetivas cotidianas. Em razão do caráter performativo da teoria, burilamos os diferentes modos de aparecimento da precariedade em algumas pesquisas, entendida como persistência de um traço do racismo. Argumentamos que a distribuição desigual do cuidado extrapola a dimensão material e vaza para os processos de subjetivação de crianças negras na experiência curricular. Diante da promessa de solução sempre adiada, trazem uma reivindicação que constrange as normas de reconhecimento, transitando para a exigência política de humanização, não apenas como gesto ético de cuidado, mas também de reparação.

RACISMO • CURRÍCULO • SEGREGAÇÃO ESCOLAR • RESPONSABILIDADE

RACISMO Y REIVINDICACIÓN DE RECONOCIMIENTO EN LA EXPERIENCIA CURRICULAR

Resumen

Desde la teoría postestructural, problematizamos la distribución táctica de la precariedad dirigida a las personas negras, diluida en las políticas de Estado, las prácticas institucionales y las relaciones intersubjetivas cotidianas. Debido al carácter performativo de la teoría, hemos depurado los diferentes modos de aparición de la precariedad en algunas investigaciones, entendida como la persistencia de un rastro de racismo. Sostenemos que la distribución desigual de los cuidados va más allá de la dimensión material y se filtra en los procesos de subjetivación de los niños negros en la experiencia curricular. Frente a la promesa de una solución siempre postergada, traen una reivindicación que constriñe las normas de reconocimiento, transitando a la exigencia política de humanización, no solo como gesto ético de cuidado, sino también de reparación.

RACISMO • PLAN DE ESTUDIOS • SEGREGACIÓN ESCOLAR • RESPONSABILIDAD

LE RACISME ET LA DEMANDE DE RECONNAISSANCE DANS L'EXPÉRIENCE CURRICULAIRE

Résumé

Ancrées sur la théorie post-structurelle, nous examinons la répartition tactique de la précarité dirigée vers les individus noirs, telle qu'elle se manifeste dans les politiques gouvernementales diluées, les pratiques institutionnelles et les relations intersubjectives quotidiennes. En raison du caractère performatif de la théorie, nous affinons dans notre analyse les différentes formes de précarité mises en évidence dans plusieurs études, interprétées comme la persistance d'un trait racial. Nous soutenons que la répartition inégale des soins s'étend au-delà de la dimension matérielle et s'infiltré dans les processus de subjectivation des enfants noirs au sein de l'expérience scolaire. Confrontés à la promesse perpétuellement différée d'une résolution, ces individus affirment une exigence qui remet en question les normes de reconnaissance, passant à une exigence politique d'humanisation, non seulement comme geste éthique de soin mais aussi comme forme de réparation.

RACISME • CURRICULUM • SÉGRÉGATION SCOLAIRE • RESPONSABILITÉ

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WHEN WE ARE INESCAPABLY CALLED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PUBLIC DEBATE ON URGENT issues within the field of education, racism emerges as a matter of great relevance in the country's educational scenario. Considering that every Brazilian is compulsorily subjected to the formative journey provided by schooling, we believe this topic warrants serious attention, given the countless reports of incidents in educational institutions accompanied by complaints of ineffectiveness, negligence, and omission by the authorities or those institutionally responsible for responding to them.

Considering the responses to Brazilian racism, we almost always find them insufficient, as they pale in comparison to the country's legacy of slavery and colonialism. There is an effort by the federal public sphere to assert its position in the debate, assembling a body of public policies with affirmative actions, curricular reforms, the approval of laws, guidelines, and programs, as well as the creation of formal institutional spaces that profess a commitment to the debate and to the construction of an anti-racist education.

In order to contribute to the debate, this text will address racism and the curricular experience. Despite the many responses aimed at tackling the problem, we perceive that there exists, within the pedagogical imaginary, an expectation that institutions, public policies, teacher training, curriculum, and theorizing can generate alternatives to overcome racism. In contrast, grounded in the post-structural framework, we view its solution as a *perpetually deferred promise*, which we now responsibly approach by problematizing the production of *induced precariousness* directed toward Black people – historically diffused and naturalized within state policies, institutional practices, and intersubjective relations.

In this sense, following Butler (2019), we inquire: which bodies are the object of protection, safeguarding, and care, and which are differentially exposed to harm, violence, and death? The argument that the unequal distribution of care and protection is permeated by issues of race emerged from the examination of certain studies in the field, which reveal, in addition to the historical struggle against racism, the production of *induced precariousness* affecting a specific group's access to the right to education.

In line with the urgency highlighted in those investigations and to support our argument, among the many cases that proliferate daily in the news and on social media, we have selected an episode of racism reported by the parents of a 5-year-old child from Osasco, São Paulo, Brazil, which occurred in November 2023. It came to public attention that the child had been subjected to systematic violence, ranging from racist bullying to the school's negligence in ensuring his safety¹. With this, we aim to show that the deliberate production of precariousness extends beyond the material dimension and leaks/blurs the processes of subjectivation, affecting those who are presumably under the safeguard of the doctrine of full protection.

Finally, in dialogue with interlocutors from the literature, we bring to the forefront the claims observed within the curricular experience of Black children at school. A claim that asserts itself by challenging the norms of recognition and by exercising a political action that is performative in itself. An invitation addressed to us to take a stand in the struggle for meaning surrounding such a crucial topic in the field of education, which can strengthen and expand the fight for recognition based on these possible and essential alliances. This is because

1 According to the complaint, the boy was left waiting for school transportation near the school exit, even though the institution had a safe location to protect children from risks to their physical integrity. Allegedly, he was the only one left in an unsuitable location and was also the only Black student in the class.

... if and when it does become possible to walk unprotected and still be safe, for daily life itself to become possible without fear of violence, then it is surely because there are many who support that right even when it is exercised by one person alone. (Butler, 2019, p. 58).

This is the ethical task to be undertaken.

Induced precariousness production, school, and racism

We could say, given the urgency to respond to the inquiry directed at us, that schools are under siege, whether from the media or academic production itself when addressing reports of racism. However, as this is a delicate topic with significant political implications, we are compelled to carefully produce responses that address the issue with the necessary ethical responsibility.

Butler (2019) helps us consider the production of conditions of systematic negligence that are discursively framed as *individual responsibility* and “moral failure” in the absence of social support structures. This creates a *contentious boundary*, defining which bodies are deemed recognizable and grievable and which are subjected to precariousness without eliciting any commotion. Their social existence becomes possible only when addressed in terms of language; that is, “the body is alternately sustained and threatened through modes of address” (Butler, 2021, p. 17, own translation). It is this discursive instance we aim to examine. Our goal is to refine the various ways in which the precariousness induced by racism emerges, considering its reverberations in institutional and intersubjective practices within the school environment.

In considering the agency of language and the performativity of its effects, we once again draw on Butler (2015, 2019, 2021) to discuss the performative production of pedagogical theorizing developed in response to this call, in which actions to confront racism are constituted as an imperative for schools. Meanwhile, we find it pertinent to examine part of the academic literature focusing on racism and basic education.² Based on the articulations constructed by theorizing in response to this issue, specific approaches emerge for understanding racism and/or racism within schools and for developing pathways informed by this understanding.

We can say that there is a consensus that racist violence occurs daily in schools, along with an understanding of the imperative need to act on this diagnosed problem. However, we perceive that the frameworks under which the problem has been addressed continue to promise a future solution. This trend is observed in many studies, which suggest the possibility of overcoming and eliminating racism. Regardless of the theoretical framework that supports them – whether intercultural pedagogy, everyday practices, decolonial, postcolonial, among others – they also assert that most schools have not committed to the anti-racist struggle.

Studies corroborate that schools generate vulnerability and violence by diagnosing various manifestations of racism within institutional practices, indicating structural racism as a marker of experiences in schools. They point to the presence of religious, epistemic, environmental, linguistic, and institutional racism in the school environment, as well as their pedagogical and psychosocial effects on children, adolescents, and even on the black teaching experience. These studies highlight

2 The first search was conducted on the journal portal of the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior [Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel] (Capes) for a brief overview, using the descriptors “racism and school”, peer-reviewed articles spanning from 2019 to 2023. A total of 28 articles focused on basic education and racism were retrieved.

the difficulty, and even the inability, of schools to address this issue due to the absence of the topic in their curricula, in initial and ongoing teacher training, and in actions that ensure, for example, the implementation of Lei n. 10.639 de 2003 [Law no. 10.639 of 2003] and Lei n. 11.645 de 2008 [Law no. 11.645 of 2008]. This legal framework is a frequent anchor in analyses justifying the relevance and mandatory inclusion of this topic in schools and education courses.

As a contribution to the fight against racism, these studies highlight some challenges that must be addressed to promote anti-racist education in schools, such as the denialism and historical revisionism of neoconservatives, Eurocentric curricula, and the persistence of the *coloniality of being and knowledge* that permeates this experience. The role of schools in this process also emerges centrally as a coping strategy, especially with regard to the presumed and urgent need to decolonize curricula to create new opportunities and foster a rethinking of their pedagogical practices and actions, based on the participation and critical education of their members.

The formulation *about* schools in this scenario is noteworthy. Schools almost always occupy the role of the institution that fails to comply with laws on implementing actions addressing the ethno-racial issue, and are consistently characterized as places where violence occurs; however, *if* and *when* they fulfill their role, they can assume a position of power in overcoming the identified difficulties. We highlight the persistence of binary logic in the lens that examines schools, as if contradictory practices inherent to social and educational relations could not coexist within them. Many meanings and political struggles inhabit these spaces, and our challenge is to make efforts to expand the norms of recognition in the experiences lived there.

We are not contesting the potential for critical political action within schools, nor that schools can be, and often are, spaces of violence, as numerous and frequent reports indicate. A recent study conducted by the Instituto de Referência Negra Peregum (Ipec) [Peregum Black Reference Institute], in partnership with the Seta Project,³ revealed that 64% of young people consider the school environment to be the place where they experience racism the most (Anthunes, 2023). Another alarming statistic highlighted in the same study is the 71.7% dropout rate among Black youth aged 14 to 29 in basic education. These alarming figures are corroborated by studies such as those by Matos and França (2023), which confirm that students who experience racism have higher dropout and failure rates in basic education, in addition to data regarding access to higher education for Black individuals, despite affirmative actions.

The representation of school as a place of violence dominates the pedagogical imaginary. In a certain sense, if the school is produced in this way, it bears responsibility for creating and exacerbating the induced precariousness that targets these individuals, as indicated by the research findings and data. Following this path, where the school institution appears as one that enables violence through omission or negligence, reproducing the racism experienced in society within the relationships established in the school environment, it seems to take on the attribute of a violator of rights.

This formulation draws our attention because the school is portrayed as an abstract, absolute entity that *enacts*. It appears as an institution that exercises agency seemingly detached from its “actors”. Although many analyses highlight racism as a structuring element of Brazilian society, it seems to us that this argument is haunted by a notion of sovereign power situated *within* the

3 Translator’s note: Seta refers to Sistema de Educação por uma Transformação Antirracista [System of Education for an Anti-racist Transformation].

institution itself rather than within the established *relationality*, which is mediated by a colonial, racist, and Eurocentric intelligibility.

We emphasize that the school does not simply “allow”, “omit”, or even deliberately “reproduce” racist practices. Care must be taken in the formulation, considering the performative effects of statements, which can produce a perception of the school as detached from the relationships and discourse that give it existence – particularly from the intelligibility frameworks that create demands, such as the “need” for intervention by framing it as an institution fundamentally lacking in everything, where the proposed solution lies in increased regulation of its practices and the implementation of specific actions to resolve the problems posed, following a markedly teleological rationality.

Despite the critical intentions of the proposals concerning more effective pedagogical actions, the call for greater control and monitoring of the implementation of laws and guidelines is also noteworthy. These are actions that would pave the way for an anti-racist education grounded in the control of its practices, in awareness-raising, in preparing through training for changes, in social transformation through the overcoming or elimination of racism, in promoting the expansion of theoretical production on the subject, as well as in producing supportive teaching and learning materials, disseminating successful experiences, and introducing methodological changes in the approach used in these actions.

As we have already stated, we are not here to contest the proposed strategies for confronting the issue. The point is that, as it is presented – even when structural racism is acknowledged – it seems to overlook the dynamics of how society itself functions, where everyday racism is reenacted continually across different domains and settings, including by the individuals who inhabit schools. It often appears as though racism originates solely from others, from the school, the institution, or the social structure.

We invoke Grada Quilomba (2019), who discusses the production of *othering*, in which the “other” (intrusive enemy) is always positioned as the antagonist of the “self” (compassionate victim), a characteristic operation of colonial societies constructed on the basis of racialization. This dynamic enables “whiteness to see itself as morally ideal, decent, civilized, majestic, generous,” (p. 37, own translation) an ideal that, in our view, dominates the Brazilian imaginary.

This split evokes the fact that the *White subject* is somehow divided within him/herself, as he/she develops two activities in relation to external reality: only one part of the ego – the “good”, welcoming and benevolent part – is seen and experienced as “I” and the rest – the bad, rejected and malevolent part – is projected onto the “*Other*” as something external. (Quilomba, 2019, pp. 36-37, own translation).

The author asserts that it is essential to create another grammar that escapes the colonialist legacy, one that approaches colonial history from the perspective of *accountability*, making this, “rather than morality, the basis for creating new configurations of power and knowledge” (Quilomba, 2019, p. 13, own translation). Although the theoretical framework supporting Grada Quilomba’s writing is more aligned with a different theoretical matrix, we welcome her contribution and propose here to examine the racial issue through the lens of post-structural thought focused on the school *setting*, grounding our discussion in the works of Judith Butler and Elizabeth Macedo to explore the curricular experience of Black children in schools, particularly through the perspective of the production of induced precariousness.

The functioning of this institution, its regimes, practices, and meanings, is bound to a thought structured onto-epistemologically around notions of subject, curriculum, and knowledge. When cases of racism occur, it is not merely a matter of prejudiced or intolerant behavior embodied in *someone* or by an institution, or a lack of political will, better curricular organization, or even financial resources to promote anti-racist actions. These are parts of the diagnosis, not the solution. There is no solution. What might be possible, perhaps, is to wage an unceasing struggle to broaden the debate and conditions for recognizing these bodies, making their/our lives more livable within the school environment. Thinking about alternatives to create curricular experiences within/for schools that are less violent, while keeping in mind that this is a permanent struggle, will not bring about a solution, the overcoming, or elimination of racism.

We are not “affected” by racist discourse as if we were passive in the face of racism, with everything to be resolved through awareness and pedagogical and/or punitive actions. This is a rather naive thought... To say that racism is structural means that it is constitutive of Western ontology and is strongly embedded in the Brazilian imaginary. We are ontologically constituted by racism; therefore, it could not be otherwise when we talk about the curricular experience, which is why it is so difficult to think of a solution within/for the school. This is why it is so challenging for the school to escape a difficulty that is not “its own”, as its constitution is indelibly marked by Eurocentric and racist onto-epistemology.

The question that arises is: how can the responses produced by the school institution, and even by theorizing, provide paths for reflection, deconstruction, and the creation of new meanings for the curricular experience? There are indications here that this is not an individual or behavioral issue but rather an intersubjective experience mediated by a colonial and racist framework that must be continuously deconstructed and dismantled.

Understanding that we are structured and subjectivized in this way is one of the possible paths to producing a shift in perspective in/through pedagogical theorizing or even within the practices experienced in school. Creating new paths requires rethinking what underpins the projects of recognition within/of school, and this also entails a radical openness to the other, considering that the experiences of children and adolescents who have experienced and continue to experience racism cross the school gates, form part of the lived experience, and therefore *should be* addressed by curricular theorizing (Macedo, 2017).

Re-enactment of everyday racism, ethical violence, and schooling

The case of the child from the city of Osasco makes us think about how we can fail to provide protection and care, making the experience of Black children and adolescents overwhelming in the school environment. A case that exposes a systematic and continuous process of subjective annihilation of Black children from a very early age and alerts us to the centrality of the topic of racism in discussions in the area of education, especially in the field of curriculum. The induced precariousness historically produced in the Brazilian educational context is ratified in some studies, which point to the unequal distribution of access to rights, care and protection intersected by race.

The persistence of racism in everyday school life results in increased educational inequalities and the exclusion of racialized people. Marcelino (2019) addresses the perception of Black men about the experience of racism in school, highlighting privilege markers associated with white bodies and black bodies marked by exclusion and inequality. This finding is supported by the research of Matos and França (2023), which indicates that students who are victims of racism

have higher rates of dropout and school failure in basic education, creating barriers to accessing higher education.

Perussatto (2022) contributes by examining, through the documentary analysis of *O Exemplo* [The Example], the struggle of the post-abolitionist movement for the implementation of night schools for the Black population in the early 20th century, showing with his study the historical struggle against inequalities that persist to this day in the Brazilian scenario. Along these lines, the work of Gil and Antunes (2021) analyzes provincial educational legislation, newspapers and official reports during the first decades of the Republic, showing that the educational exclusion of the Black population in public schools was already a state policy in Brazil, a fact massively denounced by the black press at the time.

The impacts of racism are also highlighted by Cintra and Weller (2021) in their study employing an intersectional approach to race, class and gender to analyze the experiences of young Black women in schools in Distrito Federal [Federal District], Brazil, where racial violence is a shared experience, regardless of social class. We further highlight the study by Cantuário and Alves (2021), which discusses the impacts of racism and its effects on the denial of humanity and the erasure of Black subjects because of their ethno-racial identity.

In this regard, Candido et al. (2022) present an investigation of the care process for Black children and adolescents in a Psychosocial Care Center for children and adolescents, where the ethno-racial issue is central to understanding racism as a social determinant of mental health. Their study analyzed the harmful impacts and psychosocial effects on mental health of racial violence directed particularly against this population in different spaces, including the school environment.

Another study that we are interested in giving visibility to is the work of Musatti-Braga and Rosa⁴ (2018), which discusses the place of Black women's bodies in the Brazilian social imaginary, highlighting the persistence of these bodies being associated with positions of subalternity and servitude. Based on listening to Black adolescents from a public school in São Paulo, they noted the "socially unspoken" about these students. In a psychoanalytic reading, the study considers that a past unresolved in the present hovers over them, resulting in a social and symbolic contiguity of the *mucama* [maid] to today's Black women, a place of lack and devaluation.

We can affirm that there are robust and numerous studies that address the racial issue in the field of education and related areas. We are interested in highlighting the issue of devaluation, of the place of subordination and inferiority, of dehumanization, or rather, the *non-place* given to racialized people, which sometimes appears explicitly denounced in these works, sometimes insinuated by the deliberate negligence in caring for the Black population, if we consider historically how their guarantee of rights has been treated by the Brazilian State. It is worth noting Butler's (2019, p. 131) warning regarding the political effort to manage populations, which

... involves a tactical distribution of precarity, more often than not articulated through an unequal distribution of precarity, one that depends on dominant norms regarding whose life is grievable and worth protecting and whose life is ungrievable, or marginally or episodically grievable, and so, in that sense, already lost in part or in whole, and thus less worthy of protection and sustenance.

4 The search in this database covered the period from 2019 to 2023, looking for articles with the descriptors "racism" and "school" appearing anywhere in the text.

This leads us to believe that the skin of lives considered worthy of preservation and safeguarding has color, ethnicity, and social class. We can say that the differential distribution of care is the persistent *traces* of racism in the Brazilian context. The implicit lack of care and the persistence of inequality and exclusion processes for specific groups are highlighted in the work of Jesus et al. (2023), who analyze and denounce the precariousness of school facilities for physical activities and sports practices in Brazilian public elementary schools, where racialized and peripheral people predominantly live. This reality is repeated in *quilombola*⁵ schools and in schools aimed at indigenous peoples.

Therefore, it is important to note that the topic is not erased within schools, as everyday episodes or *traces* of racism give no reprieve. *Non-expression* is also productive when it comes to suppressing anti-racist education in this space. There is a regime of truth that frames our perspective, a discourse at work that outsources the agency of racism and barely acknowledges its structural nature. This regime are visibility schemes that enter into operation to reveal things in a specific and determined way, almost never (self-)confronting themselves as part of the machinery, since schemes of intelligibility are iterable and require subjects to circulate and function (Butler, 2017).

All of this leads us to problematize the invention and positionality of the Black subject in the world inaugurated by modernity, remembering that the school institution emerged within it. Racialization functions as a marker of identity and as a regime of intelligibility through which hegemonic epistemology and ontology are ordered. Historically, the black body has been produced as a repudiated body. Their dehumanization and their constitution in a subjugated position – through both its very naming (“Black”) and racialization as a marker of difference and exteriority to the universal subject – is a legacy of colonialism, whose persistence extends into its ongoing devaluation in everyday practices, the so-called *coloniality of being*.

These are schemes that constitute racialized people with reference to whiteness, placing them not only in a position of material subordination, but in the realm of subjectivity, where they are ontologically produced as devalued, as non-human. This is expressed, as we have said, so profoundly that we barely pay attention to some aspects, such as the failure to recognize this population as worthy of care and protection, as lives that matter.

In line with Butler (2019), we are constitutively precarious; however, we must problematize the naturalization of the induced precarity among racialized individuals, which enacts in the deliberate negligence in accessing and guaranteeing rights. This violence becomes even more pronounced in processes of subjectivation, especially for children and adolescents, considering that “*there can be no embodied life without social and institutional support, without ongoing employment, without networks of interdependency and care, without collective rights to shelter and mobility*” (p. 94, emphasis added). To consider the *trace* of racism through the unequal distribution of care is a way of listening to this claim and attempting an ethical response to the disconcerting call of this otherness.

5 Translation note: *Quilombola* refers to descendants of Afro-Brazilian communities, known as quilombos, originally formed by enslaved people who escaped and resisted slavery. Today, *quilombola* communities are recognized in Brazil as traditional groups with cultural and historical significance, holding collective rights to their ancestral lands.

And speaking of precarity... "*Mom, will I ever become white?*"

When a 5-year-old child asks this question to their mother, it transcends what we might understand as the private sphere and poses a broader interpellation to society as a whole. It corroborates studies on the effects of racial violence on subjectivation within the school environment and dismantles any moralizing argument that portrays the racist as the embodiment of evil to be fought, while also reiterating the impossibility of considering the educational experience separate from the racial issue. It lays bare the indelible mark carried by racialized people in their process of subjectivation, pointing us toward the immeasurable pain of racial violence. It also provokes us to question why 5-year-olds systematically called a Black child "poop". Are they inherently evil or perverse children? Do they deserve severe punishment for their racist language?

Butler (2021) draws attention to the notion of discourse agency when stating: "The one who speaks is not the originator of discourse, for this subject is produced within language by the prior performative exercise of discourse: interpellation" (p. 71). Children, adolescents, young people, all of us are subjectified by a racist discourse that persists within the Brazilian imaginary, where the non-human status of racialized people is naturalized. This is also what the political struggle can address, making visible our entrapment within such discursivity, considering that we are mediated by it while maintaining constant vigilance as we formulate potential responses to the issue.

There is no possibility of choice. At birth, the linguistic machinery performs ways of being and existing in the world; we are inaugurated by it and introduced into it. In the Brazilian context, it is this violent and naturalized discourse that makes us intelligible, which does not mean it is beyond problematization, but rather that we are highlighting the constitutive dimension of injurious discourse, diluted and naturalized in society. This practice is evident in the school's inaction in the case of Osasco – not only because it failed to intervene with the class of the child who was a victim of racist bullying, but also in the subtlety of racism reflected in the negligence of leaving the child in an inappropriate place to wait for school transportation.

There are many layers of perpetrated violence that must be the focus of theorization on curricular experience. The child's words unsettle and profoundly reach us by challenging our very notion of humanity, founded on coloniality, and call us to invent new ways of experiencing school in which black bodies matter and demand to have their faces humanized, to be recognized within the sphere of the human.

The child's crying in response to a nickname that crushes her make us reflect on the performativity of *injurious discourse* and the effects of naming on subjectivation. When the child expresses a desire for "a school that is kind" to her, it reveals her perception of being an outsider to the place of recognition within her school experience. Her restrained crying provokes a selective commotion in a society that performs an *episodic mourning* yet remains unmoved by the genocide of Black youth in the urban peripheries of the country or the genocide of Indigenous peoples. The defiant tears of that child unsettle everyone, reminding us of her humanity and questioning the standards of recognition in/of a school that does not see her as worthy of care and protection.

Her tears recall Claudia's narrative, a character in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Both children – Morrison's and Osasco's – share a dual experience: both are subjected in different ways to aggression and destruction through the alienation imposed by the denial of their place within the human realm as they access the symbolic field that renders them intelligible. Yet they are two young bodies that also share the space of demand, presenting us with ethical-political challenges by questioning the framework that defines the conditions for recognizing their own humanity

(Butler, 2015). We could say that, through its failures and opacity, the iterability and performativity of recognition norms allow the emergence of this desiring subject.

Claudia wisely observes that adults and children, regardless of color or social class, viewed the white doll she was given as the ultimate desire of any living being. She goes on to question: “Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs – all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured” (Morrison, 2019, p. 24, own translation). The author speaks of the desire for dismemberment experienced by Claudia, who would furiously tear open the dolls she received while fantasizing about doing the same to White girls.

I destroyed white baby dolls . . . to discover what eluded me: the secret of the magic they weaved on others. What made people look at them and say “Awwwww”, but not for me? The eye slide of Black women as they approached them on the street, and the possessive gentleness of their touch as they handled them. (Morrison, 2019, p. 26, own translation).

All of this is beyond comprehension for a girl whose understanding of human recognition conflicts with the hegemonic view of the place she inhabits, even one held by her peers. In the narrative, Claudia mentions Pecola, the central character of the book – a dark-skinned Black girl who embodies bare life and the most extreme conditions of induced precarity. Her exposure to the cruelest forms and effects of racism is starkly and repeatedly depicted in her heartbreaking nightly prayers, where she pleads: “please, God . . . , please make me disappear” (Morrison, 2019, p. 48, own translation). And there, in her imagination, fueled by pain and an overwhelming desire to escape, her body begins to disappear. However, “only her tight, tight eyes were left. . . . They were always left. Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there, in them” (Morrison, 2019, p. 49).

Pecola then deciphers the enigma and experiences a kind of epiphany: all the ugliness, all the systematic contempt and violence she endured... There lay the cause of her misfortunes! The secret of her ugliness revealed – an “ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike. She was the only member of her class who sat alone at a double desk” (Morrison, 2019, p. 49, own translation). A situation of contempt experienced in the schoolyard, where she was surrounded and cornered by boys who composed “verses” to joyfully torment her, despite her tormentors also being black.

It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds – cooled – and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path. They danced a macabre ballet around the victim, whom, for their own sake, they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit. (Morrison, 2019, p. 69, own translation).

This is a radical rejection of her own body. Through these experiences, Pecola realizes that she needs to find another solution, as her efforts to disappear were in vain. Observing the treatment given to Marie Appolonaire, a mixed-race girl with fine features, curly hair, and lighter skin, Pecola had an epiphany: perhaps “if her eyes, those eyes that retained images and knew scenes, were different – that is, beautiful – she would be different” (Morrison, 2019, p. 50, own translation). She would imagine that if she had beautiful eyes, maybe everything would

change. Perhaps the humanity that had been taken from her would be restored. She fantasized about hearing, “Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn’t do bad things in front of those pretty eyes” (Morrison, 2019, p. 50, own translation). In the delusion crafted as a survival strategy, she returned to her fervent prayers. “Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes” (Morrison, 2019, p. 50, own translation).

Grada Quilomba (2019, p. 215) warns us of a historical pattern of violence that affects not only the individual but also permeates and constitutes the collective memory of colonial trauma, which she calls the “collective historical trauma of enslavement and colonialism, re-enacted and re-established in everyday racism”. Two lives, Pecola’s and the boy from Osasco, thus re-enact the *trauma*⁶ within the lived experience of the curricular environment. Two desires converge in communion when he says: “Mom, will I ever become white?”. Both teach us that they have prematurely deciphered the norms of recognition as well as the conditions for being recognized, seeing themselves as set apart from the sphere of humanity worthy of care and protection. This is because the way we are “seen” profoundly impacts processes of subjectivation.

They bring us the account of unspeakable pain, but in the same movement, they also extend a *call* addressed to us: their claim challenges the norms of recognition imposed upon them. They remind us that care cannot and should not be selective. Not only have they deciphered these norms, but they also express the desire to be recognized within bodies that persist. They show us, furthermore, that no human can be human alone. Inspired by Arendt, Butler (2019, p. 98) states that “is not a matter of finding the human dignity within each person, but rather of understanding the human as a relational and social being”.

Welcoming as an ethical gesture and as reparation

By addressing the relevance of the subjective dimension in considering racialization within the curricular experience, we are presenting an alternative approach to confronting racism based on pedagogical theorizing, in dialogue with other works that address the unequal distribution of care and the induced precariousness resulting from the intersection of race and class. A response that the deconstructive exercise engages in the very act of deconstruction, in a manner that seeks to do justice to otherness by attending to its claim. This is a form of welcoming akin to what Macedo (2017) considers a *responsible theory*.

Among the many things that become perceptible within the school context, there are some we do not even find strange because they have long been present there. Others are strange and gradually become de-familiarized as they are represented as possible. Thus, responsible curricular theory destabilizes barriers and reactivates the uncontrollable and unpredictable within a pedagogical discourse that is often normative and prescriptive. (p. 31, own translation).

The problematization of the tactical distribution of precariousness, linked to the restriction of care and protection for racialized people, alerts us to the persistence of a *trace* of structural racism that often goes unnoticed. Our task is to free thought and allow the emergence of new formulations that, in an ethical gesture, embrace the claim of otherness while also enabling

6 Although the notion of *colonial trauma* has been incorporated into the writing of this article, we diverge on what it would mean to “respond *adequately* to it”, as we consider that the children did produce a response, as discussed further in the text.

the expansion of norms of recognition, constrained by the presence of the other who refuses to be forgotten.

The experiences reported here are part of the “many things” that happen in school. They are young bodies that bring not only testimony but also inaugurate a type of political action that calls us to consider and problematize in curricular theorization the various forms of restriction imposed on black bodies in the school space, as well as the pedagogical practices presented as anti-racist actions. This is not about finding a solution. Our intention is to emphasize that we must engage with the present, with what is lived in school. This is curriculum. It does not fit within any plan. Thus, there is no solution; rather, there is a possible response.

We understand that every solution is always deferred. This is what it means to stand *before* the other, whether in theorization or in humanity. We can join the chorus of those who say: “You exist and are important to us”⁷, by dedicating ourselves to producing a theory that endeavors to decipher the enigma of the other’s desire. When confronted, we can situate questions about such desire, recognizing that in this realm, a radical openness to the Other is essential – in this case, the racialized child’s body, which has transitioned from a desire for recognition to the recognition of the very desire to have their face humanized and to demand the dignity inherently owed to them as a vulnerable body that needs and deserves protection and care, indiscriminately. An ethical gesture of care, but also one of reparation.

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7 Reference to Silvio de Almeida’s inaugural speech, then Minister of Human Rights and Citizenship, in 2022.

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Silvane Lopes Chaves – Data collection and analysis, writing and text revision.

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