

## **Secularization and Religious Intolerance: challenges for the History taught**

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**ABSTRACT – Secularization and Religious Intolerance: challenges for the History taught.** This article proposes reflections regarding challenges involved in teaching Afro-Brazilian and indigenous people history and culture in a context where mediatic strategies to promote social and political intolerance have been radicalized. It focuses on the analysis of the complex topic of education for the religious coexistence in a secular State. The authors consider the challenges arising from the promotion of an education that is pluralist, non-proselytic and conscious of the constitutional right to religious and agnostic rite, creed and expression, involving teachers in situations of symbolic, political and pedagogical disputes with a religious background.

**Keywords: History Teaching. Education for Citizenship. Laity of State. Daily School Life.**

**RESUMO – Laicização e intolerância religiosa: desafios para a História ensinada.** Propõem-se, neste artigo, reflexões acerca dos desafios do ensino de história e cultura afro-brasileira e indígena num contexto de radicalização de estratégias midiáticas de promoção da intolerância social e política, com foco na análise do complexo tema da educação para a convivência religiosa num Estado Laico. As autoras consideram os desafios de promoção de uma educação pluralista, não proselitista e cônica dos direitos constitucionais de rito, crença e manifestação religiosa e agnóstica, o que envolve os docentes em situações de disputas simbólicas, políticas e pedagógicas de fundo religioso.

**Palavras-chave: Ensino de História. Educação para a Cidadania. Laicidade do Estado. Cotidiano Escolar.**

## **Religiosity, Contemporaneity and Othering**

Our purpose, in this article, was to build an agenda concerning the relation between the education for citizenship, the question of religious beliefs and their impact on the curricular development in schools. In a context marked by the exacerbation of intolerance of all kinds in a republican context, within which the public school is necessarily secular, reflecting on the possible approaches through which Afro-Brazilian and indigenous questions are raised at school may help us to confront issues related to the promotion of religious coexistence by means of the educational practice. Our aim is to foster debates regarding aspects involved in the complexity of the religious phenomenon in its presence and absence in the school scope and, specifically, its effects and meanings for the curricular decision-making involving Human Sciences in particular. In this sense, an approach to the theme of education for religious coexistence in schools, taking into consideration both its visible and invisible features, was chosen, contextualizing such reflection in a series of debates about the challenges of the construction of citizenship in a secular State. Next, we developed a discussion related to the impact on the curriculum of the reflections regarding the religious theme in the school, focusing mainly on its effects on history teaching. The challenges of promoting an education that is pluralistic, non-proselytic and conscious of the constitutional right to religious and agnostic rite, creed and expression, involving teachers in situations of symbolic, political and pedagogical disputes with a religious background. Thus, the under-pinning question is: why look at the religious phenomenon through the lens of the school?

In contemporary times, religion has been shown – both nationally and internationally – as one of the dimensions of culture that is most affected by the corrosive practices of intolerance and discrimination in the daily life. In all cases, we observe that such effects are always mediated by the amplification taken through by mediatic strategies. These are discourses and actions present in the media that produce and repeat news that inform, select and, sometimes mark events that monument themselves amidst intentional options by forgetting and/or by silencing, according to what is set by the dynamics of Memory (Nora, 1993; Pollak, 1989; Huyssen, 2000).

Obviously, this is not a side that is exclusive in the field of intolerance, among the multiple marks of human. We have also witnessed daily to numerous forms and manifestations of gender intolerance – affecting specially LGBT people and families – as well as prejudice towards social class and/or geographical origin, which also result in discriminatory circumstances. Notwithstanding, regardless the fact that there are links between this large spectrum of topics connected by the thread of intolerance, our efforts in this text will be to address aspects involved in the complexity of the religious phenomenon in its presence and absence in the school scope, particularly in its effects for curricular decision making involving Social Sciences and the taught History.

The excessive information regarding the backgrounds where religiosity is converted into conflict and practices of othering does not always conform to effective possibilities of experience, even though they may be converted in discursive milestones that can be easily transformed into social representations. If, on one hand, such representations favor the construction of stereotypes and ways of looking at the other, on the other hand excessive information may be contrary to educational situations in which the effective contact with the logic of the other transforms itself in a factor that favors thought.

We are taken, almost every day, by dozens of news about religion-based wars; terrorist actions from ISIS; atrocities resulting from actions by the State of Israel against the Palestinians in Gaza Strip; conflicts and violence perpetrated because of religious diversity in numerous Brazilian cities; discourses inciting religious hatred and that become identity elements in religious groups that differentiate themselves through the strategy of *us x them*; by situations derived from decisions concerning the political use of Memory, which expand to religious environments, practices and monuments. Only in the last few months we have witnessed, for instance, the presence of religious lobbies in various legislative instances intending to interdict measures which allow the treatment of questions relevant to religious and gender freedom; Brazilian congressmen transforming the National Congress into a space of religious practice of confessional character; an *umbandista* child who was physically attacked by followers of a Neo-Pentecostal religion; the deprecation of the grave of a spiritualist leader, as well as numerous other news which reveal the recrudescence of circumstances in which the inter-religious dialogue is unfeasible or the disrespect towards different religious or agnostic options comes into force, in spite of us being in a democratic environment. Suzanne Citron, when discussing the relation between the History teaching from the mediation act of a Memory pedagogy regarding the relations with the National Memory, alerts to something that may serve also as an important background for the scenario involving this religious dialogue. According to her, a Memory pedagogy will not erase the identities formed within the sociability practices, but will make them different regarding the condition of dialogue and respect towards the other, making the subjects more open to the condition of facilitating a pluralist perspective by means of an ethic that can proscribe racism, dogmatism and Manichaeism (Citron, 1990).

The religious topic evokes reflections around new outlines of the of the public sphere and its dilemmas for the construction of a democratic society considering that, since the 19th century, the symbolic and discursive importance of knowledge in a non-solipsist perspective was expanded in this very public sphere, that is, a perspective that admits the statute of validity the contradictory as a condition for the exercise of dialogue between the different ones, aiming to overcome prejudice and intolerance. Henry Giroux inspires us when he clarifies that, when stressing difference and pluralism, the democratic experience is not reduced to the equivalence of various interests, but instead, it becomes a social experience in which “[...] voices and different traditions exist and

bloom so as to hear the voices of others, being committed with a continuous attempt to eliminate direct and subjective forms of suffering and keeping conditions through which the act of communicating and living amplifies, rather than restricts the creation of democratic public spheres” (Giroux, 2004, p. 360).

Roberto Cipriani (2013), based on Jürgen Habermas’ analyses of structural changes in the public sphere in the capitalist State, notes that religion nowadays is a cognitive challenge in the extent that it provides content and gives strength to social norms and solidarity among the citizens. Therefore, it provides a mediation role between opposing elements: the fundamentalism and the secularism. According to that author, one of the major challenges placed in contemporaneity, therefore, involves the need of religions to renounce the centrality of truth and the acceptance of the authority of science, subordinating themselves, hence, to secular laws. In this background, certainly, there are numerous common grounds to several schools and recognizable by different professors, in which the conflict between truths produces polarization between various forms of knowledge which do not go exactly through learning mechanisms, but through selections around its instances of legitimization. In numerous circumstances involving specific approaches in which religion appears as a theme, its apprehension and validation both by students and teachers is mediated by what Jean Claude Forquin understands as structures of plausibility, cultural and ethical filters that guide didactic and ethic decisions concerning the taught and learned contents. This author considers culture as a substantive content of education, not because conveying culture that is socially accumulated by humanity or some distinguishing scenarios of this global culture belongs to education, but because it will always convey *something of the culture*, “[...] elements in which there isn’t necessarily homogeneity, may be provided from several sources, they are from different eras, they obey to heterogeneous principles of production and logics of development and do not use the same legitimization procedures” (p. 15). In this way, the cultural variability occurs exactly for being subject to chances of *symbolic force relations* that differentiate themselves in the environments, societies and groups and, in this case, education will always be subject to the effects of this variability. In this manner, what is taught will always have relations with idealized fragments of cultural aspects subject to social approval and legitimizing procedures. Due to this understanding, it has been even more urgent to approach the topic of presence and place of the religiosity as *something from the culture* to think not only of the daily school routine and its hidden practices, but also the educational configuration of the topic in a secularly-oriented context, considering the subjects, their rights to usufruct and cultural production.

### **When Religious Alterities Meet at School**

If, on one hand, religious topics have been highlighted as a question set in contemporaneity - opposing subjects and social actors in dis-

tinct trenches in society -, on the other hand, in the name of religious options sometimes disguised as social discourses directed to large collectives, attempts of standardizing and regularizing their curriculum have been imputed to schools based on strong conservative and intolerant sources. This is what can be observed in the contemporary debate concerning the *Escola sem Partido* Program, for instance, when we verify its enunciating subjects from their religious and/or political party affiliations, without such dimensions being linked to its enunciates, proposed as neutral units of meaning and aiming to the production of alleged social consensus. The great problem in this case involves the fact that such omission, associated with a discourse based more on arguments of moral authority than on a debate about ethics, creates backgrounds on which the capture and diffusion of this discourse by the general public occurs under the strong appeal of a Manichaeic logic, one that opposes children and teenagers, at the same time that it opposes families and schools, as well as distinct cultural practices inside the school, within a hierarchy, in many cases, in a subliminal, although sometimes explicit manners. The latter is what we observe, for instance, in practices in which the approach of Law 11645/2008 is interposed by Neo-Pentecostal-oriented teachers. In this way, under an aegis of a discourse that proposes a neutral attitude in face of any *religious doctrine*, a remarkable articulation of religious groups can be observed. They seek the containment of any action that guarantees the reflection, in the school environment, of constitutive aspects of the social-cultural and religious diversity of the Brazilian society.

Also in contemporary Brazil, religious lobby, mostly Neo-Pentecostal and in some cases Catholic as well, support the suppression of the word *gender* in the municipal education plans, under the excuse of family and moral harm, what usually happens by using arguments of religious and/or moral content.

If we assume Walter Benjamin's (1994) remarks regarding the transformations processed in the experience statute in its connections with a society lined by the progressive rule of information as valid, we can consider the fact that, on one hand, the excess of information available today in various medias and social networks does not necessarily convert into experience, but into discourse and representation. On the other hand, something similar may happen with the school. If the school curricula are being presented from criteria that are equivalent to the news produced in accelerated times, thanks to the informative compartmentalization and to the accelerated movement of presenting the disciplinary topics to the students, almost as if in a zapping effect applied to the school, what is learned from this manner of operating with the school knowledge will also not be converted into experiences. In many cases, such learning is not able of intercepting nor promoting fissures in daily social practices that lead the subject to behave in certain ways towards the alterities of religion. In this manner, it is up to us to reflect about the prolonged effects and the dimensions of the religious phenomenon in the school and about their daily curricular impact.

Inspired by Ivor Goodson's thinking, we intend to qualify not the prescription background, but the practice environments in which narrative identities able of modifying modes of management of life itself can be engendered (Goodson, 2007).

On one hand, the religious topic is present in a great deal of our schools or in most of them through visible aspects, associated with thematic and/or disciplinary base. Here we call it visible what links aspects derived from an explicit pedagogical intentionality to a specific didactic content, which may occur through Religion teaching in cases in which it is institutionalized in public and secular schools. However, this intentionality transcends, in many cases, the course aimed to Religion teaching and finds, through specific themes related to subjects such as History, Arts, Sciences and Geography, among others.

On the other hand, even though the religious dimension in schools emerges daily under the aegis of the non-confessional discourse, it is common to observe the presence of Catholic rituals and symbols in the school environment, as well as the deepening of the confessional nature in some school establishments, opening themselves as units which signal other belongings beyond Catholicism, above all in schools bonded to Neo-Pentecostal groupings. The manifestation of this religious dimension approaches the school actors through implicit and explicit actions which go from praying before the meals or at the beginning of classes to disciplinary approach around courses focused on Religion teaching, which may be present in a diffuse manner through contents such as History, Geography and Sciences.

We agree with Carlos Jamil Cury (2004, p. 183) concerning the fact that, in the school practice scope, "religion teaching is more than it appears to be, that is, a curricular component in schools. Behind it hides a dialectics between secularization and laity within precise historical and cultural contexts".

### **Civil and Social Challenges in a Secular State**

Since the end of the 19th century, the Brazilian State affirmed itself constitutionally as a Secular State. From this follows a religious freedom guarantee with constitutional protection, with legal variations between the 19th and the 20th century and with repercussions in the social, political and educational life of the country.

The Brazilian State ensures, by means of the ruling Constitution in its Title II, Fundamental Rights and Warranties, Article 5, the freedom of belief, the freedom of cults and the freedom of religious organization, as well as its unfoldings: the right to atheism and agnosticism and to their self-declaration in any circumstances without embarrassments and hindrances; the rendering of religious assistance within public and private establishments of collective confinement; the State prohibition of interfering in religious matters of collective or individual interest; the conscience exemption due to religious reasons; the optional religious teaching in public schools; and the tributary immunity and the guaran-

tee, under the citizens' interests, of religious wedding with civil effects.

As for the freedom of belief, the Brazilian State guarantees the citizen's adhesion to any religious manifestation, preserving the right to changing of belief and to disbelief.

In the same way, it is saved to the citizen the right to non-adhesion to no religion, and the consequent agnostic and atheist freedom of expression.

In its Article 5, item VI, the Constitution observes that "freedom of conscience and of belief is inviolable, the free exercise of religious cults being ensured and, under the terms of the law, the protection of places of worship and their rites being guaranteed".

However, the Federal Constitution, in its Article 19, item I, clarifies that it is forbidden to the Public Power to establish religious workshops or churches, subsidize them, hinder their functioning or keep with them or with their legal representatives any relation or dependence status, except for the mutual collaboration, provided it is of public interest, without forbidding the wide participation.

Historically, Brazil has witnessed – and still does – several controversies related to the prohibition of the State to interfering or meddling in religious affairs, for instance, the long-lived and still permanent conveyance of religious symbols in public environments such as schools, public legislative and executive buildings, forums etc.

This principle of exemption does not concede to any citizen nor the State, therefore, the right to hinder the free practice of any religion, being that in a Secular State the religious norms of diverse confessions are "counsels directed to their believers and not rules for all the society" (Lafer, 2009). We assume from this, therefore, that it is prohibited to the Secular State the taking of a religious face, under the risk of becoming particularist, breaking with the pluralist presumption which includes not only respect to all religions but also the right to the choice of religious and non-religious orientation. Moreover, there is no mentioning in the Brazilian Constitution to monotheism, being the State, therefore, neutral regarding theology and individual beliefs.

Thus, "It can be claimed that, before our Constitution, Soriano's teaching that the State has the duty of protecting the religious pluralism within its territory, creating concrete conditions for the good practice without problems of religious acts of distinct religions, watching over the purity of the religious equality principle, but keeping from the religious fact, without incorporating it to its ideology, is valid." (Scherkerke-witz, 1996, p. 106).

Therefore, it is forbidden to the Brazilian State to subsidize any religion, as well as adopting an exclusive or proselytic religious perspective in ceremonies, public acts and public places in prejudice to all others. It cannot be inferred, however, that the secular State is anti-religious or non-religious. Rather it is pluralist, exempt and non-proselytic, not owing and not fomenting any dispute of religious nature or any act in favor of one religious perspective only, although it can legitimately promote

ecumenical events, receive claims of religious nature and legislate the guarantee of religious expression freedom. It is included the education framework in the perspective of the difference and the diversity, what takes into consideration the fundamental right of an education for the pacific coexistence and the tolerance towards religious, political, and sexual orientation.

### **The Religious Topic and its Curricular Reverberations: Impacts on the Taught History**

The teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture, human rights and sexual and gender diversity is a constitutive part of the contemporary educational agenda, inscribed in the democratic arena as legitimate claims of the democratic and republican society. Their placement in school environments consigns as much in general dimensions as it affects and calls, in a distinct way, teachers from different courses/areas. When we think of religiosity, the call of History teachers is, in most cases, visible.

To advance in the understanding regarding the presence, power and challenges of religious topics in the school, we believe that it is necessary to address the social practices dimension and their spaces and legitimation instances. The school is not similar to the religious institution. The circulation of the religious discourse, when occurring in the school environment, happens not through the Sacred, which permeates the religious organization, but through the bias of approaching culture, history and memory.

We consider that the school necessarily *desacralizes* the religious phenomenon – even though it can bring with itself, in some cases, the confessional dimension – because its social place and function are distinct from the one occupied by the religious institution. Indeed, this fact leads us to think that the school has capillarity in face of the culture and, therefore, will find demonstrations of religious practices from its agents. It seems consequent to us, at this point, to return to the reflections proposed by Jean-Claude Forquin. He claims that it is through Education that culture conveys and perpetuates itself, being the school an institution that selects and, consequently, takes decisions involving what is worth remembering and forgetting from the culture (Forquin, 1993, p. 14). Therefore, it is up to us to bring up the topic of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous religiosity topic, bringing some of its repercussions and challenges for the thinking of school culture and its possibilities of promoting an education based on respect and tolerance towards the difference, by means of the study of the culture and the inter-religious dialogue. This perspective demands, on the one hand, the rupture with ethnocentrism, an assumption of the educational process committed with the right to difference. From it results the consideration of a sensitive and politically-oriented education that provides the understanding that the cultural differences cannot generate hierarchies or segregation, but rather encounters, enunciation of the difference, cultural amplifi-

cation and respect. On the other hand, it demands the overcoming of the religious solipsism, which requires that a person who avows a faith considers the spectrum of so many other faith realities as plausible and respectable, beyond the realities of conscience that are non-religious as fundamentally ethical as well, since faith is not the only way to consciousness and social realizations of the citizens in secular contexts. Therefore, considering the educational process guided by the encounter of the interlocutors through which a “surplus of vision” in “horizons of outsideness” are made concrete, according to Bakhtin. Thus, in fundamentally alternate dialogic situations:

Both are placed in exotopia, that is, externally with regards to the other’s speech (Bakhtin, 2010a). The responsibility and responsibility of the interlocutors are based and manifested in this distinction which is, at the same time, the index of alterity and approximation presented by the discursive possibilities. The dialogue, which is constituted in the interaction with the materiality of the verbal and non-verbal language, is assigned with some finishing. However, given the dialogic tension, in the coexistence of coincidence and non-coincidence between the sayings, what prevails is its unfinished character and what is highlighted is the constitutive movement of dialogism as an ante-position of word and counterword from the interlocutors (Fernandes; Carvalho; Campos, 2012).

The surplus of vision is a necessary condition for the educative process that makes it possible that situations of inter-religious encounters between the Self and the Other are essentially formed as an experience exchange, not as a position of attempts to convince disqualification or nullifying of the others’ discourse. The exotopic place reveals the difference between the Self and the Other, singling out the unilateral effect of a pedagogy assumed as transmission. Differently, the exotopic place establishes the multilateralism of dialogical interactions through which pedagogy is concretized as a plural and eminently open process. Such opening to the dialogue marked by multiple words, silence, gestures and counterwords is a constitutive condition of an education that needs freedom as a principle and conflict as an ethics of the encounter, thus considering the dialogic tension as a foundation of the humanization for the coexistence and the tolerance. Thus, it is understood that the educational process provides several opportunities for encounters between subjects who are essentially different and free in their orientation, but educated to be initially to the respect, as well as to the exchange and mutual knowledge. In this sense, it is a matter of understanding education based on politics of difference, in which educators break the silencing, the omission and the historical rejection to which social groups made invisible have been subjected – and, therefore, their enunciative, symbolic, ethic and experiential universe. Exotopia is, this way, the foundation of a non-racist, non-discriminatory and non-doctrinal education, mainly because conflict, tolerance, listening, revision of positions as the foundation of relationships and the defense

of the right to the plurality of ideas, beliefs and perspectives without constraints, hierarchies or distortions are present.

### **For the Right to the Inter-Religious Dialogue in a Truly Secular School: The Power of Law 11645/2008**

In 2003, because of the social struggles of the Black Movement and other civil associations, the Brazilian government sanctioned the Law 10639/2003, which amends the Law 9394 of December 20, 1996, which establishes the national educational guidelines, to include in the teaching network official curriculum the mandatory nature of the “Afro-Brazilian History and Culture” topic, and other aspects (Brasil, 2003).

In October 2004, the Federal government instituted the National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture. The Informed Opinion of the National Education Council, in its Introductory Questions, clarifies that

The informed opinion seeks to provide an answer, among others, in the education field, to the demand of the Afro-descendant population, in the sense of affirmative action policies, that is, policies of reparation, and recognition and appreciation of their history, culture and identity. It comprises curricular policies, based on historical, social and anthropological dimensions derived from the Brazilian reality, and seeks to tackle racism and discrimination that affect particularly blacks. In this perspective, it proposes the dissemination and production of knowledge, the formation of attitudes, postures and values that educate citizens who are proud of their racial-ethnic belonging - descendants from Africans, indigenous peoples, from Europeans, Asians - to interact in the construction of a democratic nation in which all, equally, have their rights guaranteed and their identity valued (Brasil, 2004, p. 10).

It is the enunciation of the right to the specific identity amid the historical process of construction of the nation in a democratic and republican perspective. In addition, the Guidelines are a constitutive part of affirmative action policies that comprise both the policies of reparation and those of valuing history and culture in a plural, inclusive and diverse perspective.

Recognizing requires appreciation and respect for black people, their African descent, their culture and history. It means to seek, to understand their values and struggles, to be sensitive to the suffering caused by so many forms of disqualification: derogatory nicknames, pranks, bad jokes suggesting incapacity, ridiculing their physical traits, the texture of their hair, making little of the religions of African root (Brasil, 2004, p.12).

This is how the Guidelines express, concerning the forms of suffering caused by cultural disqualification. These forms include the

disrespect of African matrix religions, which have been historically undervalued, distorted and persecuted in Brazil. In this case, it is a struggle for the right to religious freedom as a support to the guarantee of making the African presence positive and its subsequent cultural and historical value.

Still entailed to a perspective that crosses the curricula and, consequently, the school practices, the effects of this prescription resulting from a historical conquest of the Brazilian social movements affect asymmetrically the disciplinary contents and fields, which in turn makes courses such as History and Geography to become, let us say, more drafted than others as for the approach to such themes.

The Afro-Brazilian and indigenous history and culture approach in schools cannot be realized in a proselytic manner, that is, aiming to transform the students into religious adepts. As for that, there is no controversy. However, to all students in a Lay State it is saved the right to study, research and know cultural and religious manifestations that are constitutive of the national formation to which they belong, as is the case for Afro-Brazilian religions for Brazil. With this, studying Afro-Brazilian religious manifestations as specific cultural expressions cannot suppose any proselytic trait, except if the study of such expressions is linked to the need of adhesion and belief or to exclusion, in the same educational context, of the study of other cultural and religious manifestations of interest for understanding Brazilian culture and history.

Religion teaching in public schools, which is optional according to the current legislation, cannot be considered, on the other hand, as a substitute to – or coincident with - the need of promotion of a lay ethnic education based on civil values, the promotion of citizenship and the observation of public freedom and human rights. The admission of optional religious teaching in public schools, necessarily based on the assumption of pluralism, respect for religious diversity and tolerance, does not exempt schools from promoting educational practices based on valuing and respecting civil and political freedom, commitment with the overcoming of social inequality, racism and prejudice and the commitment with the human rights agenda. The fact that in many public Brazilian schools there is still a ritual obligating the enunciation of catholic religious prayers as parts of the daily school routine, is a small sample of how big the challenge to promote a school guided by lay principles is, considering that no students should suffer embarrassments, deprivation or obligation as to their religious orientation in a lay school environment.

Therefore, the lay public school, therefore, is not a place for religious cult neither for religious indoctrination. But all religious manifestation is shown as an indoctrinating body, a ritualistic with ceremonies, cults, vows, cultural externalization of faith and staging that incorporate, in their way, the material culture through objects, clothes and gestures, besides adoration and faithfulness to tradition. It fits in this case the discussion about limits and powers of educational actions turned to studying and to valuing of Afro-Brazilian religious manifestations in a

cultural belonging affirmative context, in which African matrix religiosity come out of their historically granted hiding and enter the public scenario as one of the vehicles of identitarian, educational and political configuration, taking part in the affirmative struggle for the right to difference, for the end of racism and for racial equality. Once again, it is not about indoctrination, but the right to learning the culture in a plural and identitarian way.

Going back to the above-mentioned dimension of desacralizing that is processed in the school environment, we admit that in bringing it inside the school there is a symbolic displacement that leads the religious phenomenon to stop being a social practice bound to the institution in which it was originated to become, then, a cultural dimension, liable to be an object of thematization, knowledge, problematization and, overall, a curious and respectful dialogue by the teachers and students. We depart from the assumption that the school is not considered a place for cults or liturgical promotion, but a place for researching, studying, investigating and promoting educational practices guided by the principles that are dear to civil freedom, emancipation and promotion of diversity. The centrality of the educational action for the promotion of affirmative strategies and actions in a wider way in the school will fall upon the cultural interest of religious manifestations, whichever they are, and not upon the promotion of faith as a collective indoctrinate foundation, since freedom of belief is a subjective right and not an obligation of the citizen towards any public organization. Thus, no student can be demanded to participate in explicitly religious activities in a public lay school, but he/she may take part in activities of pedagogical and formation interest regarding the learning of foundations which rule a democratic, ethic and pluralist coexistence, since laity is one of the basis of an education oriented by peace and coexistence with difference. This way, no group can be discriminated in a public environment due to their religious belief or by manifesting religious difference towards a hegemonic group. Without practicing no forms of insult, threats or defamation against people who profess religious faith or even against those who do not profess any faith at all and manifest their agnosticism, the school can – and should – take part in the promotion of the awareness for the right to freedom, guiding students to ethical and respectful social living.

To the school, it is prohibited the collaboration with religious institutions or their entailment to a certain faith group, but the prohibition of developing educational activities promoting culture and history of the people who constitute Brazil, under the argument that a Lay State should not approach religious matters, does not proceed. There is another fundamental aspect to this, which is the fact that children and teenagers have preserved, through the Childhood and Adolescence Statute, in its Article 15, the right to belief and to religious cults, even when contrary to the will of the parents/legal guardians. The issue is polemical, since it involves the notion of juridical capability, and puts schools facing scenarios in which parents or legal guardians start ac-

tions such as petitions through which they manifest against the participation of their children in cultural activities where there is, for instance, content linked to religiosity (hegemonic or not), as is the case of June Festival and Black Awareness Week, in which there is evidence of religious and cultural forms from the black Brazilian population, hidden, distorted or historically persecuted, but not practiced by protestant matrix religion believers, for instance.

### **Public Policies for Promotion of Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous and African History and Culture**

If we go back to the context of the Law 10639/2003 implementation, we can see that the same Guidelines warns: “The struggle to overcome racism e racial discrimination is, thus, every educator’s duty, regardless of ethnic-racial belonging, religious belief or political view.” (Brasil, 2004, p. 16). Thus, it is professed an education marked by the respect to religious freedom as a condition for the educational process, detached from the struggle to overcome racism and racial discrimination linked to the beliefs and individual belongings. The definition of a Lay State such as the one proposed by Celso Lafer is recovered:

A first dimension of laity is from a philosophic-methodological order, with its implications for the collective co-existence. In this dimension, the lay spirit, which characterizes modernity, is a way of thinking that assigns the secular sphere of man’s destiny to critic reasoning and debate, not to the impulses of faith and to their assertion to revealed truths. This does not mean to disregard the value and relevance of an authentic faith, but to assign the adhesion, or not, to a religion to people’s free conscience. The lay way of thinking is rooted in the principle of tolerance, base of the freedom of belief and freedom of speech and thought (Lafer, 2009, p. 226).

This way, laity fosters one of the contemporary educational foundation for the overcoming of racism and racial discrimination, such as freedom, which is one of the basis of contemporary democratic republicanism that, ontologically and epistemologically, is only plausible in democracies, because it sets citizens in open social arenas where the respectful coexistence with difference and contradictions is a fundamental requirement to the exercise of plurality in the public scenario.

Among the Guidelines determinations, it is reported that

Afro-Brazilian History teaching will embrace, among other contents, black initiatives and organizations, including the history of the *quilombos*, beginning with Palmares, and of descendants of the *quilombos*, which have contributed to the development of communities, neighborhoods, villages, municipalities, regions (example: recreational, cultural, educational, artistic, and religious brotherhood black associations, and of black associations of assis-

tance, of research, and Black Movement groups). Happenings and realizations from each own region and locality will be highlighted (2004, p. 21).

As it is confirmed by the excerpts above, included in the DC-NREN/2004 (National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for History, Afro-Brazilian and African Culture Teaching), the Afro-Brazilian religious manifestations, due to symbolic and political struggles and disputes historically engaged, were inserted in the public scenario under a different bias from the ones that bestowed to them silence, violence, negation or distortion. They ended up being seen as a way of setting the black identity positivity regarding acknowledgment, through school and social acting, of an ethnic-racial affirmation in a background of reparation and positivity of memories and stories. This movement of positivity and social-identity affirmation sets also a vast movement of self and hetero acknowledgment of the cultural face denied to African descendant religious groups as much as it considers the bonding expression to the most different forms of religiosity as a republican right which is proper to the lay face of the State.

The topic, in its whole, acquires new outlines when we think about the possibility of the school coming to meet, in the full scope of search for an education for religious tolerance and promotion of inter-religious dialogues, different cosmogonies beyond the one present in the Afro-Brazilian kinds of religiosity. We refer, here, to the complexification of the debate to thinking about the curricular policies and the teaching formation processes towards the approach to indigenous culture and History, within which the relation with the Sacred is placed as a central element for the access to a cultural dimension that is available to us from the systemic study of indigenous societies: the dimension of ancestry.

Regarding this, the contributions by Maria Aparecida Bergamaschi's (2007, p. 202) reflections referring to the relation between Memory and Ancestry in educational practices among the Guarani people are important in the sense of aiding us to elucidate the fact that the access to other worldviews allow, to the non-indigenous, an attitude of rethinking their own parameters involving Education. According to her,

Knowledge, for the Guarani people, is expressed through the word *Arandu*: *ara* means time, day; *ñendu* means feeling, experiencing. In this perspective, *Arandu* means feeling time, allowing time act upon a person. Both ways of learning mentioned above are connected to time and, therefore, the older one is, there is a tendency of being wiser and, consequently, more respected by everyone. "The elders are our libraries", said teacher Marcos, from Cantagalo village, referring to researches which have been accomplished on traditional knowledge, in which elderly people are the consultation source. For the Guarani people, knowledge is happening in one's search along the elder and in a wise hearing of the revelation.

Backgrounds like this make us understand the circumstances which led the Guarani to resist the imposition of traditional schools and allow us to realize the reasons why differentiated indigenous school education became a reality in the last decade in the country, because of educators and indigenous' struggle. Because of this, it is not placed as a pertinent topic which is exclusive to indigenous people. Before that, it emerges as a problem with ethical, political – and consequently educational – central content, relevant as much to the indigenous as to the non-indigenous community. Everywhere in Brazil, indigenous communities have been developing school curricula with their own cultural marks: the study of the indigenous mother language, entailing school work and indigenous social life and the relevance of elder knowledge for pedagogic action. Differentiated indigenous schools are generally multilingual and develop educational practices from the wide educational territory notion, considering the relation between culture and nature and the importance of the cosmologies and indigenous cultural practices in the selection and approach of contents and methodologies.

Many people think, wrongly, that indigenous people lose their condition by getting in contact with other people, what is culturally a type of prejudice, since cultural contact may be and are modes of relationships that indigenous people keep for centuries, in various parts of the world, with other people and cultures. There are, also, indigenous people in Brazil without any contact or in recent contact, which shows the complexity of the topic and reveals each people's educational challenges.

There are at least five aspects to consider for the comprehension of indigenous school education: the principle of reciprocity, the relation between nature and culture, ancestry and elder knowledge, kinship, and the indigenous ritualistic and mythology, which includes their beliefs, their sacred places and their cosmogony. These elements are present in the indigenous educators' practices, influencing their ways of acting and founding differentiated curricular practices. Thus, the elders live the indigenous school life to share their wisdom or their ancestors', and the indigenous mythology is experienced and updated by the youngsters. Quite often, indigenous social life informs the school times, as it happens during the season of harvesting, handicraft or fishing, with the participation of children and teenagers in an inter-generation learning. It is normal that the elders take part in the School Council, influencing in the preparation of the curriculum and the activities planning. Educators are challenged to explain about subjects involving western knowledge in contrast to those of indigenous tradition, reaffirming the educational commitment that confirms difference as a value and the right to differentiated education, considering also the access to information as a presumed right to education, this way developing culture learning through the access to the most different forms of knowledge by means of a rupture of prejudices and cultural barriers.

Indigenous people are struggling for the formulation and maintenance of educators' formation programs, aimed to acting in school

education in indigenous communities and for the development of specific curricula and programs, including cultural contents relevant to each community, the study of mother languages and the pedagogical and political principle of interculturality.

Concerning more specifically to the curriculum, it is about facing the challenges for consolidating propositions which consider, in Human Sciences, for instance, the right to memory and the struggles through history as narrated from the indigenous point of view, including under the mythic point of view, which approximates indigenous educators and African descendants, as they have common grounds in overcoming historically cultivated challenges of silencing, stereotyping and distortion.

The Article 231 of the Federal Constitution of 1988 states that “Indians shall have their social organization, customs, languages, creeds and traditions recognized, as well as their original rights to the lands they traditionally occupy, it being incumbent upon the Union to demarcate them, protect and ensure respect for all of their property.” Besides that, article 58 of the Law 6001/1973 law establishes: “It is a crime against indigenous people and indigenous culture: mocking cultural indigenous ceremonies, rites, uses, customs or traditions, vilify or disturb, in any manner, their practice.”

Therefore, the constitution of differentiated educational projects in indigenous communities requires the anchorage of the constitutional laity principle, which presumes freedom of religious belief, rite and association, although keeping to indigenous people the right to their own tradition and to beliefs and habits, which supports their cultural practice as differentiated.

School Education of the *Quilombola* is also a recent reality in Brazil, being that states and municipalities in the country have been warranting the right to *quilombola* school education for no longer than a decade. It is a process under implementation, which counts on the Black Movement and social entities, demanding the rupture with the stigma which historically marked not only schools but also black and *quilombola* communities, also considering the under-registration in public data referring to communities currently classified as *quilombo* descendants.

This educational practice is organized through a curriculum constructed by the *quilombolas* as a collective project, considering them as protagonists in the approach of knowledge, practices and expertise. The founding principle is the respect to cultural marks of the *quilombola* population and their identitarian, political and social resistance. It concerns to a differentiated education that considers the *quilombola* struggle and resistance, living and collective organization, ancestry and ancestors' knowledge, territory as a space for reproduction of life and promotion of propositions for sustainable involvement, relation between education and social policies, respect towards *quilombola* and *quilombismo*, valuing of different forms of *quilombola* authorship and

being protagonist, besides the study of different ways of *quilombola* relationships with the sacred, arts, technology and sciences.

In both cases – indigenous and *quilombola* -, the acting of social movements to fight for the guarantee of access of indigenous people and African descendants to equal rights was and still is fundamental, considering the right to self-representation and the educational commitment with the rupture with social and cultural inequalities, besides the rupture with prejudice directed to the indigenous people and the *quilombolas* religious forms and their relations with the sacred. Therefore, the fight against violence, memory distortion and discrimination experienced by indigenous people and *quilombolas* in the country is in the basis of the struggles for citizenship rights and recognition to the difference, of which the indigenous school (and, probably, the non-indigenous) takes part as one of the elements of the republican project in the last decade, not without clashes and ill understanding.

In these realities, the school - and, therefore, the right to education – is an acquired right or is part of the agenda of indigenous people collective actions. The provision of specific education results from struggles, being its warranty a republican benefit to which everyone is entitled to, since one of the republicanism assumptions is the freedom of orientation. The curricular construction of differentiated schools is a result of choices and clashes. The differentiated curricula put into practice by indigenous and *quilombola* people result from negotiations and affirmations made by educators who, in knowing the inadequacy of the approaches historically consolidated by the Brazilian education, were challenged to investigate their own culture and their marks and to provide the school as an environment of pedagogic and cultural identitarian committed to resistances, cultural marks and the keeping of their people, of which the right to specific religious forms, also considering their diversity and dispersion, is one of them. In assuming the commitment to the differentiated teaching formation, indigenous and *quilombola* people put in debate the relevance of the education professional as a protagonist for the consolidation of policies of the difference through their own social and educative projects. This way, they offer valuable lessons to all other educators who, even when not acting in differentiated schools, may see their practices and concepts transformed, confirming the right to difference based of the realization of a lay republican school because of its opening to dialogue, crossed by its care for human rights and pluralist in the approach to culture.

However, in indigenous schools it is also verified a religion-based clash, since in several indigenous communities, be it rural villages or located in urban territory, the presence of specific religious groups divert from traditional bonds introduces certain aspects into the educational process, with little known nuances. There are conflicts in some schools generated by approaching topics such as secret ancestral knowledge and indigenous rituals, like body painting and shamanism as a source of knowledge and orientation. On one hand, there are the tradition contents, while on the other there are the most diversified non-indig-

enous western religious principles. It is not an easily negotiated reality, demanding from indigenous teachers enough acuity to guarantee freedom without, however, denying the right to the knowledge of the tradition and to the maintenance of educational projects guided by indigenous differentiation.

### **Final Remarks**

Among this process of symbolic, ethic and political remaking of the semantics of African descendant religious manifestations in Brazil, there are teaching formation processes. Amidst the recent entrance in education of mandatory indigenous history and culture teaching educators, students and, in a wide way, the whole society is also formed. It is about a context of formative learning, in which both teachers and students appropriate from discussions, understand new ways of dealing with religious and cultural matters and start a debate concerning religious freedom, associated to other civil freedoms secured by the State, but not necessarily guaranteed or historically observed in Brazilian schools of from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But it is also about a context of radicalization, of public manifestation of intolerance which, as we know, existed silently in social coexistence, as well as they were practiced and quite often little questioned, but that became visible and manifest more recently in the contemporary scenario, going through social medias, institutional arenas and public places and schools as well.

Even nowadays there is an evident detriment for the constitutional freedoms for the promotion of religious diversity and for the defense of human rights not only in schools, but also in social coexistence. In the pedagogic practice, we believe that there is some care that may be observed in this context of special undefinition or little effective knowledge regarding the school's limits and possibilities of action as to the questions set. However, certainly, the scenario, while conflicting, demands teachers to not back down to promote an education based shared – and learned – experience of freedom, by the exercise of tolerance and by the reaching of the right to history, culture and memory in its expansion.

Thus, considering pertinent that teachers face the question collectively, knowing how to make sense of conceptions and beliefs in their private scope and their acting as professionals in face of a public and republican ethics, in which take part different ethnic, social, religious and gender positions, but with daily hindrances headed by groups and people that fight against the commitment of education with the human rights contemporary agenda. In this extent, far from being a cultural relativist or professional who is unaware or *neutral*, the teacher is a subject whose action is articulated to professional practices promoted by other subjects and is inevitably called to the emancipatory agenda which is constituent of public education. According to this view, the educational practice is exercised conscientiously of its own partiality and as a form

of authority, taking over positions which are sensible to power games and to otherness, breaking with frontiers that hinder the promotion of interactions with multiple experiences and of the most varied positions facing collective, social and subjective questions, of which students and teachers take part. It is a notion of professional teaching authority rooted in democratic interests and in the promotion of emancipatory social relations, which in this case, are set as an educational project which gives opportunity to politics as a condition of freedom and understands the meaning of the relation between pedagogic action and power (Giroux, 2004). It is a discourse and a practice of indispensable criticism for the realization of education as the support of freedom against all forms of domination and suppression of alterity.

It is up to us to confirm that the foundation of the teaching action in a lay context is not, as assumed, neutrality, least of all omitting and silencing in face of religious intolerance or all types of intolerance and prejudice. It is, fundamentally, the open positioning to differences, to promotion of inter-religious and symbolic interactions aiming at the respect and the mutual hearing and finding, as well as the commitment with the overcoming of the discrimination of a subject for his/her religious or agnostic orientation. This way, the exotopic horizon is reached: when subjects in interaction recognize themselves mutually unfinished and establish respectfully and curiously the dialogue between positions which are diverse from each other's point of view, without this being necessarily followed by an expectation of unaware conversation, abandonment of the faith or cultural or identitarian hindrance. Pedagogical action is not, therefore, an indoctrination. It is, though, the promotion of the right to the expansion of horizons in scenarios that are respectful, creative and open to stimuli and shared discovery. It is rather an ethics, since supported by the appreciation to experience exchange – obviously not always harmonic - and by the opening to social interaction that is free from violence, distortion or humiliation but, of course, not free from dissension, since this is part of the difference. It is developed in public places, such as public schools. However, there are radical limits to the effective experience of laity as a society project, guided by the aegis of republicanism, as we are under an increasing privatization of life in the country, in a background marked by professional instability in public teaching networks, teachers' professional undervaluing, criminalization of the genuine exercise of the teacher's professional freedom (wrongly assumed as *indoctrination*) and prejudices directed to educational territories marked by social inclusion. In this case, the exotopic horizons are unfortunately retracted, and teachers will be struggling for dignity in the professional practice, as they are oriented by the understanding that school education is developed in intersubjective, markedly dialogic communities.

The mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian and indigenous history and culture, as well as the whole agenda bonded to politics of difference and the right to diversity in its maximum expansion, highlights the little known faces of democratic and public educational laity, requiring conjugated actions between educators, managers and social

movements not only to guarantee epistemologically strong teacher formation projects and a consequent and shared teaching act, without omissions or fear, but allowing the continuity of struggles for human dignity. Successful experiences have been pointing to the relevance of conjugated efforts aiming at the strengthening of schools' democratic management and the creation of networks for staging of educational projects bonded to the politics of difference and to human rights, as projects facilitate both the right to history and to conditions and reasons of silenced and distorted memories in Brazil, put into practice by the actions of the protagonist teachers and collectives in different parts of the country. In the same way, the creation of conversation groups and mechanisms to guarantee the exchange of formative experiences is basic in the school, as it is a collective project, articulated to its surroundings and social groups that attends to it by means of stories, actions and lives of students, experts, managers and teachers. It is, fundamentally, about experiences that convert the school into a *hearing community*, in the terms evoked by Benjamin when discussing the possibility of experience from backgrounds where it is possible to share narratives in his classical text "The Storyteller" (1936; 1994). This way, when converting the experience environment, the school is resignified and expanded as space-time of teacher formation, widening exotopia horizons that are so dear to the expression of social and cultural horizontality claimed by the youth who has been the protagonist in collective actions in contemporary times.

Nevertheless, we reinforce that this is not a peaceful scenario. Occasionally there are threats, constrains and new silencing in it. It is worth remember the recent investments carried out by Brazilian public authorities against teacher's professional freedom and the estimated pedagogic costs resulting from the intention of forbidding topics and approaches of political or religious nature under the penalty of criminalization of the teacher-professional. We would ask, then, to whom does it interest a pedagogy practiced to the default of the main challenges available to the living beings?

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