Children and Quilombos in the Northeastern Backlands: an Analysis of the Childhoods that (Re)Exist

ARTICLE

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Abstract

This article discusses concepts such as black and quilombola childhood, structural racism and decoloniality, based on childhood studies, with an emphasis on scientific productions in the areas of Sociology of Childhood, Geography of Childhood and Anthropology of Childhood, among others. The objective is to explore the ways of life and production of quilombola childhoods in the backlands, through a bibliographic review that includes authors such as Arroyo (2014, 2018), Dussel (2005), Quijano (2005), Akotirene (2019), Lopes (2006, 2008), Noguera and Alves (2019). The analysis reveals cultural particularities of quilombola childhoods, bordered by the knowledge and practices of children in interaction with adults and elderly people from quilombola communities. Furthermore, the research shows the need to expand studies aimed at this specific group, contributing to a deeper understanding of quilombola childhoods in the context of Alagoas.

Keywords: Quilombola childhood. Children. Structural racism. Alagoas.

Crianças e quilombos no sertão nordestino: uma análise sobre as infâncias que (re)existem

Resumo

O artigo apresenta e discute conceitos que enaltecem a pauta da infância negra e quilombola, do racismo estrutural e da decolonialidade. Ancorado nos estudos das infâncias e, com relevo para as produções científicas dos campos da Sociologia da Infância, Geografia da Infância e Antropologia da Criança, objetiva-se compreender como as crianças quilombolas do sertão alagoano produzem seus modos de vida e constroem suas infâncias em contextos atravessados pelo racismo e seus múltiplos desdobramentos. Com base no estado do conhecimento e dialogando com autores como Arroyo (2014, 2018), Dussel (2005), Quijano (2005), Akotirene (2019), Lopes (2006, 2008), Noguera e Alves (2019), propõe-se uma investigação que opere com discursos e denote a construção de um objeto capaz de evidenciar particularidades das culturas infantis quilombolas e sertanejas, expressas nos saberes e práticas compartilhadas entre seus pares e em outros encontros intergeracionais na(s) comunidade(s). Por fim, as aproximações que emergem da revisão apontam a necessidade de amplificar as pesquisas voltadas para esse grupo específico, fomentando um debate que considere e aprofunde as

experiências de ser/viver as infâncias nos territórios quilombolas de Alagoas.
Palavras-chave: Infância quilombola. Crianças. Racismo Estrutural. Alagoas.

1 First Words

> We cannot speak of the existence of a single culture belonging to children, but rather of *children's cultures*, thus characterizing the plurality inherent to them. This plurality is established through the interweaving of the production of childhood and the production of place. Every child belongs to a place. Likewise, every child exists *in* a place (Lopes and Vasconcellos, 2006, p. 110).

The multidisciplinary field of childhood studies has become essential for understanding and engaging with children and the different ways they experience their childhoods. These studies are guided by fields such as Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, Geography, and others, privileging children's voices and adopting innovative approaches to conducting research *with* children in the Human and Social Sciences (Ferreira; Macêdo, 2021).

However, despite advances in discussions on childhood, there still persist traps inherited from modern scientific-positivist thought, which guide a significant portion of research conducted in universities in Brazil and around the world. Such traps manifest themselves mainly in the tendency to homogenize children's experiences, reducing them to a single, universal conception. As analyzed by Damião *et al.* (2020), this dominant model constructs the idea of childhood based on Eurocentric references, anchored in representations of white, middle-class children from European and North American contexts. This perspective, by defining childhood as a linear and uniform period detached from historical, social, racial, and territorial conditions, ultimately silences and marginalizes other forms of childhood – such as those of *quilombola*, Indigenous, riverside, rural, and peripheral communities – that fall outside this normative pattern. Thus, the critique of this model is not only epistemological but also political, as it exposes how the knowledge produced can reinforce inequalities and render invisible the diverse ways of being a child.

In Brazilian society, it is common to observe that the media, music, cinema, and literature convey representations of Black girls and boys that sharply contrast with the

idealized images of childhood in contemporary society. From an early age, Black children are portrayed through stereotypes and expressions that associate their existence with mockery, demonization, repulsion, and devaluation. These representations not only reinforce structural prejudice but also contribute to denying the diversity and richness of Black childhoods, perpetuating historical and social inequalities (Santiago, 2022)[1].

There is still, however, a small number of studies that position *quilombola* children as main participants and coauthors, that is, research with children inside and outside school settings. Thus, there is a gap in investigations that take as their focus the ways of life of *quilombola* children, their lived experiences of childhood in these territories, the interfaces of racism in their trajectories, the processes of child socialization in the territory, toys and play, and the rich *quilombola* children's culture, interwoven with the culture of place, identities, generations, and ancestry. This void highlights the need to expand studies focused on this specific group, in order to contribute to a sharper understanding of children and their childhoods among *quilombolas* in the state of Alagoas.

These influences bring to the surface issues that make it possible to uncover hidden narratives or identify elements that naturalize the *sertão*[2] of Alagoas and *quilombola* children. At the same time, they reveal explicit and implicit discourses that cut across social relations in a hierarchical society. Such relations classify social actors, especially children and their childhoods, and they are shaped by the specific times and spaces of the Alagoas *sertão*.

This article aims to analyze how *quilombola* children from the Alagoas *sertão* produce their ways of life and construct their childhoods in contexts traversed by structural racism, based on a literature review grounded in authors who discuss childhood, Black children, coloniality, and ethnic racial relations, Arroyo (2014, 2018), Dussel (2005), Quijano (2005), Akotirene (2019), Lopes (2006, 2008), Noguera and Alves (2019), among

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[1] Discussion by Viviane Santiago, on the Geledés website. *Black Childhood: A (Re)Necessary Reconstruction.* Available at: https://www.geledes.org.br/infancia-negra-uma-reconstrucao-necessaria.

[2] The term *sertão* is rendered as "backlands" in the title for reader accessibility but kept in Portuguese throughout the text, as it conveys cultural and historical meanings specific to Brazil that are not fully captured by the English term.

others. In this way, the study is sustained by the following questions: In what ways do hegemonic conceptions of childhood, historically constructed from Eurocentric, colonial, and universalizing references, influence how *quilombola* childhoods from the Alagoas *sertão* are represented in academic production? What are the ways of life, knowledges, and cultural practices of *quilombola* children that demonstrate their resistance to these exclusionary logics? How does structural racism traverse their everyday experiences, reproducing the construction of their childhoods?

From this scenario, we consider the relevance of the study in problematizing conceptions of childhood and of the child that are still crossed by Eurocentric, colonial, and universalizing references, which deny the diversity of knowledges, practices, and ways of *quilombola* children.

In this sense, the article is structured as follows. In the first subsection, we present the methodological considerations that guided the investigation. Then, in the second and third subsections, we develop a critical analysis of how the image of the child and the conception of childhood were historically constructed from positivist and Enlightenment fields of knowledge. Finally, in the fourth subsection, we turn to the central focus of the research, the analysis of scientific productions that have Black and *quilombola* children from the state of Alagoas as main participants, highlighting advances, silences, and gaps that are still present in this field of studies.

2 Methodology

To improve the data collection related to the theme addressed, specific descriptors were used in repositories such as the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD), the *SciELO* virtual library, Google Scholar, and the repositories of the Federal Universities of Sergipe and Alagoas. These descriptors were: childhood, *quilombola* child, structural racism, education, and Alagoas, aligning with the purpose of mapping "what has already been produced on the subject" and identifying "gaps in knowledge" (Gil, 2002, p. 47), especially regarding research on *quilombola* childhoods in the *sertão* region of

northeastern Brazil, specifically in the state of Alagoas.

The choice of repositories from the Federal University of Alagoas (UFAL) and the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS) was motivated by the interest in deepening the survey and analysis of academic productions related to *quilombola* communities located in these geographic territories. However, it is important to emphasize that this choice does not imply the exclusivity of *quilombola* presence in Alagoas and Sergipe, but rather a methodological strategy to delimit the research field, without disregarding the diversity and breadth of the theme in other regions of Brazil, using the same descriptors. These were combined to verify where and how research focusing on Black and *quilombola* children and childhoods is being produced.

According to Gil (2002), bibliographic research is an essential strategy for identifying, selecting, and analyzing existing knowledge on a specific topic, allowing the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the contributions and limitations of previous studies. This research is classified as qualitative, with a focus on bibliographic review, seeking to explore journal articles (especially in academic journals), as well as book chapters and complete works. Gil emphasizes that bibliographic research provides an "up-to-date overview" of the field of study, organizing accumulated knowledge and facilitating new reflections and interpretations (Gil, 2002, p. 44).

The bibliographic review was structured around key references in the theoretical field that supports the study, including authors such as Akotirene (2019), Carneiro (2023), Arroyo (2014), Ribeiro (2019), Gomes (2012, 2021), Noguera and Alves (2019), Quijano (2005), Maldonado-Torres (2018), among others. Thus, the research is grounded in a bibliographic approach that, according to Gil (2002), helps consolidate and expand the understanding of the topic under study. The analysis covered research produced between 2019 and 2024.

During the analysis process, some categories were outlined from the critical reading of the works found and the dialogue with the theoretical framework mobilized. The categories that emerged were: *quilombola* childhood as a space for the production of meanings, knowledge, and ways of life; education and school, which highlight both the challenges and possibilities for constructing anti-racist pedagogical practices; structural

racism and practices of resistance, which reveal how *quilombola* childhoods are marked by inequalities but also by strategies of (re)existence; and academic production within the Alagoas territory, emphasizing the role of Northeastern universities in making this topic visible. These categories therefore functioned as analytical lenses that not only organized the findings but also helped to expose gaps and challenge the historical invisibility of *quilombola* childhoods in the Alagoas *sertão.*

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Beyond the official history: the decoloniality of *quilombola* childhood

The objective of this subsection is to discuss the constitution of the concept of childhood as a social category which, with modernity and the advances of the Social and Human Sciences, came to be analyzed from social, cultural, geographical, and political perspectives. In addition, the subsection offers a critical analysis of how the image of the child and the conception of childhood were influenced by positivist and Enlightenment approaches, underpinned by Eurocentric and colonial conceptions.

According to Sarmento (2004), childhood makes it possible to identify characteristics that distinguish children from adults and express a common generational condition. Childhood, as a category, is "relatively independent of the empirical subjects who comprise it" (Sarmento, 2004, p. 7). Although there are common elements in children's cultures that connect all children, the category must be understood through the intersections that cut across them. In a study on racism, for example, it is crucial to place Black children at the center of the analysis, since their experiences are marked by contexts of exclusion and racial discrimination (Noguera e Alves, 2019).

The understanding of children as subjects of rights only became possible at the end of the twentieth century, with the emergence of methodologies that opposed the historical invisibilization of childhoods (Guczak; Marchi, 2021). The view of the child as incomplete and passive erased their histories and contexts, limiting their capacity for action and dialogue and positioning them as passive subjects, recipients of others' actions in their

everyday lives (Lopes, 2008). This critique leads to the need to rethink the child as a social actor, recognizing their agency in contexts that are socially and culturally marked by the absence of rights, as a producer of the space in which they live, a coauthor of adult culture, and a producer of their own children's culture. For Lopes (2013):

> The meaning of childhood is thus traversed by the dimensions of space and time which, when combined with the social group, produce different cultural arrangements and different symbolic traits. As children appropriate these dimensions, they reconfigure and reconstruct them, and in creating themselves, they create their different histories and geographies (p. 67).

The shift toward seeing the child as a subject of rights was late, the result of studies in the Sociology, Anthropology, and Philosophy of childhood that challenged adultocentrism and treated the child as a subject rather than an object (Guczak; Marchi, 2021). This understanding was consolidated through legal advances, prompting a revision of conceptions of childhood in society. Nascimento (2021) highlights that, from the twentieth century onward, childhood ceased to be viewed as universal, with children recognized as concrete, contextualized subjects affected by political, economic, and technological issues. Additionally, Cohn (2005) emphasizes that in other cultures the idea of childhood may be different, varying according to sociocultural contexts.

This historical desire to understand and master knowledge about childhood and children gives rise to different perspectives, spurs research, and generates knowledge production. However, it also produces dissonances in the semantic understanding of the terms "childhoods" and "children." To avoid misguided approaches in studies involving these concepts, Sarmento (2005) proposes a semantic distinction, arguing that they should not be treated as synonyms, since each carries specificities intrinsic to its historical, social, and cultural trajectories (Ferreira and Macêdo, 2021).

In Brazil, the condition of Black children is marked by neglect and invisibility, with profound inequalities and systemic exclusion. This reality demands an intersectional approach that recognizes the multiple dimensions of oppression and promotes actions to guarantee dignity and justice (Santos, 2024). The first records on childhood in Brazil appear with the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, who shaped Indigenous children according to European values, reflecting the complexity of colonization. As Lins *et al.* (2014) point out,

Indigenous childhood was assimilated into the colonial project, which neglected original knowledges.

Colonialism and modernity/capitalism resulted in processes of dehumanization of Black children, as theorized by Quijano (2005), Freire (2013), Dussel (2005), and Maldonado-Torres (2018). These systems of oppression deny the humanity and identities of colonized peoples, creating a global hierarchy of power and knowledge, as highlighted by Mignolo (2011) and Walsh (2013). Lugones (2007) observes that the coloniality of power imposes a hierarchy of humanity, relegating the "Other" to a subordinate position, while Carneiro (2023) employs the concept of *dispositivo de racialidade* to explain how social and institutional practices marginalize and dehumanize Black populations, reinforcing their subordination.

In decolonial studies, the concept of the "Other" is central to understanding unequal relations among cultures and identities. Maldonado-Torres (2007) and Quijano (2005) argue that coloniality created the figure of the "Other" as inferior and subjugated, a social construction that sustains global inequalities. Ribeiro (2019) and Nêgo Bispo (2015) underscore how racism and exploitation are produced and perpetuated, constituting a form of colonization and counter-colonization:

> [...] all the ethnocentric processes of invasion, expropriation, ethnocide, subjugation, and even the replacement of one culture by another, regardless of the physical or geographical territory in which that culture is located. And we shall understand counter-colonization as all the processes of resistance and struggle in defense of the peoples' territories against colonizers – the symbols, meanings, and ways of life practiced in those territories" (Santos, 2015, pp. 47-48).

Thus, Santos (2015) argues that, at the same time the West imposes its structures of power and control over bodies and minds, forms of resistance emerge that seek to subvert these impositions, resulting in a continuous cycle of colonization and counter-colonization. This process affects both children's forms of socialization and cultural and subjective identities, shaping and redefining power relations from the earliest moments of life.

Arroyo (2014) advocates the construction of decolonizing pedagogies inspired by

advances in postcolonial studies, with the aim of identifying and overcoming relations of power, knowledge, and being that are deeply rooted in social, political, and pedagogical thought. This critical perspective promotes a break with colonial paradigms by challenging the hierarchies and forms of oppression that shape the educational imaginary. It also encourages rethinking other possibilities for childhood, making it possible to value diverse and plural experiences that can question and transform hegemonic models of education and subjectivation (Santos *et al.*, 2024). *Quilombola* childhood, especially Black, *quilombola*, Northeastern childhood, is socially, symbolically, culturally, politically, and geographically on the margins of colonizing pedagogies that stereotype, construct, and delimit its subjectivities and identities. In other words, *quilombola* childhood is the "Other" of the official history narrated and officially recorded by the West.

In this essay, the Northeastern *sertão* is approached as a territory historically regarded as "lesser" and uncivilized, situated outside the abyssal line of the Global North and the major Brazilian metropolises. In this context, the North and Northeast regions concentrate 68.19% of the *quilombola* population, with Maranhão presenting the highest percentage (3.97%) of *quilombolas* in its population, followed by Bahia (2.81%), Amapá (1.71%), Pará (1.66%), Sergipe (1.27%), and Alagoas (1.21%)[3].

Mentioning these data is important because, as we understand with Lopes and Vasconcellos (2006, p. 110), "[…] every child belongs to a place. Likewise, every child exists in a place." *Quilombola* children produce their childhoods in this territory historically shaped by inequalities and power relations. According to Albuquerque Júnior (2018), the *sertão* is a historical and social construction, the result of power relations, disputes over land use, the configuration of space, and the organization of social relations. It is not merely a geographic space, but an idea that reflects the tensions and contradictions of Brazilian society.

Reflecting on the decolonization of childhoods requires a deep critique of the universalizing model of childhood imposed by the West, which projects the child as a

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[3] Data available at: https://www.gov.br/pt-br/noticias/assistencia-social/2023/07/populacao-quilombola- e-de-1-3-milhao-indica-recorte-inedito-do-censo.

passive, controlled, and disciplined being, to be supervised by adults. This conception, by objectifying the child, disregards the multiple ways of being, knowing, and living that emerge outside Eurocentric and adult-centric parameters. As Gallo (2018, p. 61) states, "adults think about children, think for children, tell children what it is to be a child and to live childhood." These factors have contributed to the colonization of childhood and have produced an image that defines what it is, what it is not, and what it cannot be (Ferreira *et al.*, 2022).

Noguera (2018) argues that "childhood here must be understood in a dual register. Beyond the generational marker that defines it as a 'period' of life, childhood is a condition of human experience, or a meaning" (Noguera, 2018, p. 89). From this perspective, childhood transcends mere age delimitation, constituting an ontological dimension that reflects ways of being and interacting with the world (Santos, 2024). Thus, the decolonization of childhoods is not limited to a theoretical exercise, but involves actions and claims that seek to recognize and reimagine childhoods in their pluralities. Through this critique, the aim is to open space for childhoods that resist and (re)exist outside Western standards, as subjects of their own knowledges, practices, and lived experiences, traversed by the intersectionality of oppressions. According to Carla Akotirene (2019):

> It is timely to decolonize hegemonic perspectives on intersectionality theory and adopt the Atlantic as a *locus* of intersecting oppressions, for I believe that this territory of waters fundamentally conveys the history and forced migration of African women and men. The waters, moreover, suture colonial wounds inflicted by Europe, made manifest in the ethnicities trafficked as commodities, in the cultures drowned, in identity binaries, and in oppositions between human and nonhuman. In the Atlantic Ocean, we find the knowledge of a salty memory of enslavement; ancestral energies protest tears beneath the sea (Akotirene, 2019, p. 15).

These reflections by decolonial theorists show that the construction of the *Other* was fundamental to sustaining the logics of domination, exclusion, and colonial violence, establishing a system of power based on the racial, cultural, and epistemological inferiorization of non-European peoples.

For Arroyo (2018), decolonial studies reveal that, historically, not only childhood but also Black people, Indigenous peoples, *quilombolas*, women, the poor, and individuals with diverse sexual orientations were deprived of a voice. These groups were

systematically classified as inferior, subhuman, irrational, and without culture, marginalized and dehumanized, which positions them in society as "without thought," "without a voice," and "without culture," reinforcing social exclusion and oppression.

From this perspective, decolonial studies seek to invert this process of negation by promoting the valorization of local knowledges and historically oppressed cultures. They propose strengthening marginalized communities, defending the affirmation of their voices and identities. The decolonial movement is therefore essential for recovering and dignifying these groups' experiences, challenging the hegemonic narratives that still dominate the fields of knowledge and education, and opening space for the histories and knowledges that have been silenced (Arroyo, 2018).

Arroyo (2014), in *Other Subjects, Other Pedagogies*, presents a crucial analysis for rethinking the creation and visibility of other pedagogies of confrontation, in order to combat, with the weapons of critique and action, the colonial and capitalist models that interfere in the lives of different subjects. Arroyo (2014, p. 32) supports this view and states that pedagogies of resistance and liberation, as opposed to a single, neutral, apolitical pedagogical theory, should educate subjects belonging to marginalized groups to resist recognizing themselves as "subaltern, inferior, irrational, uncultured" and, in the movement of affirmation, to be "capable of producing knowledges, cultural values, ways of thinking" that are not circumscribed by the tentacles of modernity/coloniality/capitalism (Arroyo, 2014, p. 32).

The decolonization of childhoods therefore requires an epistemological and collective interruption of the ideal of childhood constructed from a colonial perspective. In a historical-social approach, this reflection implies recognizing childhoods in their own agencies and potentialities, breaking with the "coloniality of being," which, according to Maldonado-Torres (2018), situates non-European bodies and ways of life as "inferior and infantile, in need of tutelage and control" (p. 246). As Cohn (2005, p. 50) states, "there is no image produced about the child and childhood, or by the child, that is not, in some way, the product of a specific sociocultural and historical context."

Thus, it is necessary to construct other pedagogies for childhoods, capable of valuing and respecting differences and plurality, which demands an approach that

recognizes the relevance of the contextualization and the historical and cultural diversity of the territories in which children are inserted. This approach should guarantee the right to intellectual, cultural, ethical, and identity formation and promote an education that not only respects diversities but also seeks to strengthen local and community identities, offering children a space for recognition and affirmation of their own being in the world (Santos *et al.*, 2024).

3.2 *Quilombola* childhood: what research reveals about the modes of producing knowledges, practices, and children's (re)existences

> [...] children, from any group, society, or culture, know themselves, know where they are, and what is part of their lives; they know their world; and they confront the principles of belonging and identity that are attributed to them" (Gusmão, 2012, p. 164).

In this subsection, we present the studies selected in repositories such as the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (*BDTD*), *SciELO* and Google Scholar, as well as in the library repositories of the Federal University of Alagoas (*UFAL*) and the Federal University of Sergipe (*UFS*). The objective was to highlight scientific productions on *quilombola* childhoods in the Northeastern *Sertão*, with an emphasis on the constitution of racial and *quilombola* identities of Black children and on how the device of racialization, rooted in structural racism, acts intersectionally upon their ways of being, living, and creating.

To organize the literature review and make the selection of studies transparent, the following criteria were adopted: descriptors such as "*quilombola* childhood," "*quilombola* child," "structural racism," and "Alagoas" were used; the studies needed to directly include *quilombola* children as subjects of the research; and they needed to address, even if only partially, the ways of life, knowledges, and cultural practices of these children. Based on these criteria, five studies were selected for meeting the investigation's aims and aligning with the search descriptors, allowing for a consistent and representative sampling for analysis.

The selected studies reveal distinct aspects of *quilombola* childhoods, highlighting

children's participation in cultural practices and in the construction of their identities, as well as the challenges posed by structural racism and processes of coloniality. In some studies, children's participation is direct and active, with records of workshops, conversation circles, field diaries, and audiovisual productions, whereas others present childhood in a more descriptive way, revealing methodological gaps, especially in the direct listening to children.

In presenting the studies, we emphasize that some offer more detailed contributions, while others are less fully described or do not provide complete identification of participants, which points to the need for data systematization. In sum, this subsection organizes the literature review around the five selected studies, explaining the selection criteria, the participation of children in the research, and the elements that allow for analysis of how they construct their childhoods, thereby contributing to the understanding of *quilombola* childhoods in the *Sertão* of Alagoas.

In the Northeastern *Sertão*, in Alagoas, reflecting on children from the vantage point of their territory has motivated researchers to a philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and historical pursuit, through methods and methodologies that make evident children weaving their childhoods and everyday lives from the constitution of their children's cultures. This process has generated statements that expand to other geographies, that is, other modes of existence in subjugated territories, bringing to light subjectivities that have been historically (in)visibilized and, through the political and denunciatory bent inherent to the act of researching, these subjectivities begin to occupy a place in political struggles for the right to life. We recognize that, although studies that adopt listening to children as a methodology are still scarce, in recent years such practices have been building significant pathways of learning with and about children.

In the study *Identidade negra/quilombola: diálogos intergeracionais de autoafirmação em uma comunidade do sertão nordestino*, by Nascimento and Libardi (2023), research was carried out with children, preadolescents, and elders from the *quilombola* community of Serra das Viúvas, located in the municipality of Água Branca (AL). The main objective was to investigate how racial and cultural elements are present in the daily life of this community, especially in relation to the construction of the racial

and *quilombola* identity of the participants.

The methodology adopted involved workshops structured as scripts with a central theme, called the "focus of the meeting." Among the methodological strategies employed, the following stand out: conversation circles, reading and textual production, drawing activities, play, dialogues with older subjects (interviews), and focus groups composed of children. These approaches enabled rich data collection and provided a space for interaction and reflection, essential to the development of the research.

The results revealed the significant presence of racial and generational issues in the identity construction process, especially among children. The authors noted that, when representing their grandparents, children and preadolescents often avoid identifying them as *preto* or Black, reflecting the elders' difficulty in affirming aspects related to their own racial identity. This phenomenon also manifests itself in the racial whitening adopted by children as a way to distance themselves from characteristics that express their Blackness.

This dynamic reveals the vulnerability of Black children and preadolescents in the community, who face greater difficulties in accepting themselves as Black, due to the internal and external pressures of racism. Nevertheless, the authors point out that *quilombola* identity functions as a collective element shared across generations, contributing to the community's social cohesion. Even so, the way children experience racism differs substantially from the experiences of young people, adults, and elders, demonstrating the complexity and intersectionality of lived experiences within the community.

The undergraduate thesis by Santos (2024), *Infâncias e território: modos de viver em comunidade quilombola do agreste alagoano contos de uma pesquisa*, is a study conducted in the community of Poços do Lunga, in Taquarana (AL), between 2021 and 2023, with the objective of analyzing the processes of child socialization and their relations with territory, culture, and health. The results and discussions presented in this study stem from the author's participation in the *PIBIC* research project titled "Therapeutic Itineraries of Mental Health in a *Quilombola* Community in the Agreste of Alagoas." The research, directed toward children, establishes a theoretical discussion on the

construction of childhood and, forcefully, on Black childhood in Brazil and the processes of colonization experienced by these subjects. It also addresses the sociohistorical and cultural constitution of *quilombos* in Brazil and, in a more systematized way, of the *quilombola* children of the Poços do Lunga community in Taquarana (AL).

The researcher adopts, as a method, the analysis of scenes of children's everyday life recorded in a field diary, highlighting moments when children express their ways of being, living, playing, and constructing their childhoods. However, the study does not prioritize more attentive, child-centered listening; this absence constitutes a gap in children's voices and in their potential to narrate lived experience, producing conceptual and methodological shifts around doing research with and about children today. This does not diminish the rich contribution brought by children in the scenes described by the author.

Children's narratives are fundamental for reflecting on aspects such as territory, culture, identity, and interactions between peers and adults within the community. Furthermore, the active participation of children could significantly contribute to breaking the stigma that regards them as incapable of articulating thoughts and ideas about their own lives, reaffirming them as subjects of knowledge and action within the research context.

In this regard, the study reveals a fundamental gap – precisely the absence of children's voices and direct participation – since the researcher's objective was focused on listening to participants of an older age group. When describing the participants, the author states that "the population participating in this study included *quilombola* residents of both sexes, aged 18 and older" (Santos, 2024, p. 10).

In this study, children play an incipient role, appearing only in the author's field diary descriptions. However, this does not diminish the importance of the investigation, since the author provides a critical and powerful analysis of *quilombola* childhood in that community. The children become more visible in the sections titled *Quilombola Community and the Construction of Childhood*, *Territory and Affections: The Influence of Space on Child Formation*, *Peer Culture and Orality: Pillars of Child Identity in* Quilombola *Communities*, and *Afro-perspectivism: The Child as a Cultural and Social Agent*.

The study revealed that, in the *quilombola* community that served as the research site, childhood is approached in a unique way: while the right of children to play and attend school is valued, they are also encouraged to reflect on their own reality. As shown, children play central roles in several community activities and act as active agents in the preservation and construction of *quilombola* culture and identity, contributing to knowledge production. In the community, childhood unfolds through multiple processes of socialization and interaction that shape both children's identities and their understanding of the world.

These practices are sustained through exchanges, autonomy, and authorship, crystallizing a powerful way to begin a new journey in the constitution of the adult–child relationship – geo-graphies essential for ensuring that children and their childhoods are recognized from their historical processes, their lived experiences with place, and an ethics that does not reduce them to incapable beings or subjects of a distant future (Macedo, 2021).

In the article by Silva and Oliveira (2020), titled *A construção da autoestima e afirmação das identidades negras nas crianças quilombolas*, the authors present research conducted in a *quilombola* school located in the *Quilombola* Community of Muquém (AL). The objective was to analyze the literature on the construction of self-esteem and the affirmation of Black identities among *quilombola* children. The authors observed that Black children often expressed negative narratives regarding the symbolic and imaginary representations of Blackness.

The doctoral dissertation by Macedo (2021), titled *"VAMOS CAIR NO MUNDO": pelejas crianceiras no Sertão Quilombola do Alto do Tamanduá (AL)*, aimed to discuss the narratives of children from the *quilombo* of Alto do Tamanduá, in the *Sertão* of Alagoas, about their ways of being children, seeking to characterize the knowledges produced and shared through oral tradition. The study is situated within the field of social studies of childhood and establishes dialogues with the sociology of childhood, the anthropology of the child, and frameworks that engage with African cultures and worldviews.

Children's narratives were the author's main source of investigation and the central

focus of the study. As such, narratives emerged that were rich in meaning about the place where children live, especially because they are immersed in the community's daily life, where memory, identities, and ethno-racial and religious issues manifest (Macedo, 2021). According to the researcher, as a result of her wanderings with the children in the community, they guided her to the center of the circle, refining her perspective and presenting new ways of understanding childhoods within an ethno-racial territory, bringing freshness to her journeys through the *sertão*. The term used by the author, "hit the road," expresses the movements, ritualization of cultural practices, construction of social organization forms, and the embodiment of *quilombola* ways of being children in the *sertão* of Alagoas (Macêdo, 2021).

Another study conducted in the *quilombola* community of Alto do Tamanduá (AL) investigated children's narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research, titled *"Não pode sair de casa, não pode abraçar ninguém…": As crianças quilombolas do sertão alagoano e o que dizem sobre a pandemia*, presented an analysis of a study with children, aiming to examine – through their narratives – how the social context affected their subjectivities, territories, and ways of living childhood during that period. The research was conducted in two *quilombola* communities in the Alagoas *sertão*, Alto do Tamanduá and Jorge (AL).

As central research questions, the study sought to understand how *quilombola* children were affected by emerging discourses and practices during the pandemic and how the school – as a space of interaction, exchange, and cultural construction – became distant and uninhabited by them. The study is situated within decolonial research, challenging adult-centric, Eurocentric, and colonizing logics, both in relation to children in general and specifically to *quilombola* children (Ferreira *et al.*, 2021).

Another study, *Entre preservar e transformar: práticas culturais de crianças quilombolas no sertão nordestino*, by Souza and Libardi (2023), explores cultural practices developed in *quilombola* communities in northeastern Brazil, focusing particularly on the role and involvement of children in preserving and producing these cultural expressions. The goal was to analyze, through narratives and experiences lived by children from the *Quilombola* Community of Serra das Viúvas (AL), the cultural

practices of this younger generation, as well as to observe the relationship between this generational group and local popular culture. The authors frame their discussion around intergenerational factors that influence the construction of children's practices in the *quilombo*, understood as a space inevitably shaped by economic, political, environmental, sociocultural, and geographical factors of the present time.

Souza and Libardi (2023) begin with the following question: What are the daily cultural practices that encompass and characterize *quilombola* childhood? The authors defend a methodological approach in which children became participants and coauthors, since "the research conducted is not about children and their *quilombola* childhood, but about cultural practices *with* these children and their childhoods" (Souza; Libardi, 2023, p. 124). A total of 37 children between the ages of 4 and 12 participated – 25 girls and 12 boys. Attendance at each session varied between 15 and 17 children. In two of the 11 workshops, two elderly women also participated to create spaces for intergenerational dialogue between them and the children. As a data collection tool, 11 detailed field reports were produced by the researchers throughout the workshops, supplemented by photographs (taken by the researchers and sometimes by the children themselves) and audio recordings.

The results showed that the community is simultaneously a *locus* of traditional and contemporary culture. While certain traditions were preserved in Serra, urban cultural elements were also incorporated into the community's rural context – such as *funk* music. During the production of some handicraft items, it was common to hear this musical rhythm, showing that the community should not be confined to an image of sociocultural isolation. In the case of the *quilombo* of Serra das Viúvas, daily connections between rural and urban spaces were observed, including in the cultural sphere.

The studies mentioned share as a backdrop the participation of children, documented through field diaries, children's own accounts, audiovisual productions, and photographic records. These works address the participation of *quilombola* children as coauthors of the scientific productions in which they are involved. Furthermore, they explore fundamental aspects of the constitution of racial and *quilombola* identity among these subjects, intertwined with the sociocultural contexts of the present time and, more

specifically, with the impacts of structural racism on the construction of their childhoods in the *quilombo* setting.

Santos (2024, p. 10) asserts that "children establish a deep and meaningful connection with the territory in which they live." In this context, investigating childhood requires from the researcher an in-depth understanding of the child's historical and social conditions, as well as of the elements that shape the history of education, childhood, pedagogy, and school. Research on childhood and with children is not limited to isolated aspects but involves understanding the complex interactions they establish with the cultural, social, and educational contexts around them (Alves, Ferraço, and Soares, 2018).

The ways in which children create other forms of being, living, and creating in the *quilombo* are primarily represented through play and toys – moments in which they can express themselves and experience leisure beyond the dominant logic of capitalist society and its pathological pedagogy of productivity. After all, "children are always ready to create new meanings for objects whose significance has been fixed by the dominant culture, broadening the singular meanings that new things tend to acquire" (MEC/SEB, 2016, p. 35).

In light of this, Corsaro (1997) proposes a reflection on the process of constructing childhood cultures, characterizing it as reproductive, interpretive, and creative. In this context, children develop their own ways of living, coexisting, creating, and reorganizing that which originates from the adult culture in which they are immersed. Thus, children create "tactics that disorganize and reorganize places, transforming them into practiced places" (Alves, Ferraço, and Soares, 2018, p. 58). These are places that offer meaning, where children can envision possibilities for living and discovering other ways of intervening in reality.

4 Final considerations

Through this study, the aim was to discuss Black and *quilombola* childhood, structural racism, and decoloniality, drawing on scientific studies from the Social and Human Sciences to present and engage with the body of research on the ways of life and

the production of *quilombola* childhoods in the Northeastern *sertão*, explored through a bibliographic review.

The bibliographic survey conducted for this article found that, between 2019 and 2024, scientific research developed in the state of Alagoas has focused on themes related to *quilombola* culture and ethnicity across multiple territories. These studies examine issues such as ways of life and resistance, the formation of Black and *quilombola* identity, mental health, school curricula, anti-racist pedagogical practices, Black children's literature, ethno-racial relations in schools, anti-racist early childhood education, and teacher training. Such studies predominantly involve adults, adolescents, and elders as participants; although children appear in some of these works, analyses tend to center on the educational context.

The research also reveals what can be understood as children's resistances and (re)existences, in which, by inhabiting the *quilombo* space, children share and create tactics to produce other ways of life and childhood that are not brutally affected by systems of oppression seeking to erase cultural diversity, knowledges, and forms of creation present in *quilombola* communities. In these studies, children emerge as subjects capable of inventing new pedagogies from and within the *quilombo* ground, such as pedagogies of resistance that, according to Arroyo (2014, p. 32), are "capable of producing knowledges, cultural values, ways of thinking."

Moreover, the role of older generations in shaping children's understandings of themselves is evident, as are play and toys, which function as representations and expressions of children's culture. These elements configure forms of resistance against the voracious machinery of capitalism that impacts their lives. For all these reasons, Black and *quilombola* children construct, in their very existence, unique ways of producing knowledge, practices, and strategies of (re)existence in the face of the structures of racism that traverse their daily lives from an early age.

Research on *quilombola* childhoods in the Northeastern *sertão* aligns deeply with decolonial frameworks by revealing children as cultural, social, and historical agents capable of producing knowledge, reinventing practices, and weaving their own existences. In *quilombola* territories, space is not merely geographic, but also memory,

affection, and history – both shaping and being shaped by children through their play, narratives, and intergenerational interactions.

In every workshop, conversation circle, or everyday account, it becomes evident that children not only live their childhoods but also create them, resisting colonial narratives and establishing new geometries of being, playing, and knowing. Thus, the dialogue between theory and research reveals the power of *quilombola* childhoods: bodies, voices, and imaginations that affirm presence, memory, and agency – translating into actions and lived experiences the meaning of a childhood that refuses to be colonized.

Ultimately, these studies demonstrate that *quilombola* childhood is constructed at the intersection of race, generation, and territory, challenging the Eurocentric and adult-centric views that have historically rendered children – and especially Black children – invisible. By assuming active roles in preserving and transforming community knowledges, they affirm their identities and produce their own forms of belonging, reaffirming what the theoretical framework indicates: the decolonization of childhood depends on recognizing the child as a subject of plural knowledges, practices, and existences.

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