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ARTICLE

PAULO FREIRE: OTHER CHILDHOODS FOR CHILDHOOD¹

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ABSTRACT: This text considers Paulo Freire's contributions to the subject of childhood. Aware that childhood was not one of Freire's central preoccupations, this study features Freire, the master from Pernambuco, on a "minor" topic of his oeuvre. To this end, this article studies Freire's consideration of his own childhood in *Letters to Cristina*—an autobiographical text where Freire is in public dialogue with himself—to highlight the image of childhood presented there. This is accompanied by references to other works (e.g., *The Importance of the Act of Reading*, *This School Called Life*, *On Education: Some Dialogues*, *Towards a Pedagogy of the Question*, *Under the Shade of this Mango Tree*, *Pedagogy of Hope*, and *Pedagogy of Indignation*) where Freire, the educator from Pernambuco, presents his notion of childhood. As the text will show, Freire's notion goes beyond the traditional idea of childhood as a chronological stage to establish an idea of childhood as a vital force even and, above all, in the case of revolution.

Keywords: Paulo Freire. Childhood. Revolution. Time.

PAULO FREIRE: OUTRAS INFÂNCIAS PARA A INFÂNCIA

RESUMO: O texto pensa as contribuições de Paulo Freire sobre a infância. Cientes de que a infância não foi um eixo central das suas preocupações, mostramos uma contribuição singular do mestre pernambucano justamente num tópico "menor" de sua obra. Para isso estudamos a leitura que o próprio Paulo Freire oferece da sua infância em *Cartas a Cristina*, texto autobiográfico em que dialoga publicamente consigo mesmo. Destacaremos a imagem da infância ali presente e complementaremos esse estudo com algumas referências a outras obras (*A importância do ato de ler* em três artigos que se complementam; *Esta escola chamada vida*; *Sobre educação: diálogos*; *Por uma pedagogia da Pergunta*; *À sombra desta mangueira*; *Pedagogia da Esperança*, *Pedagogia da Indignação*) onde o educador pernambucano apresenta uma concepção de infância/meninece que desborda a mais tradicional ideia da infância como etapa cronológica da vida para instaurar uma ideia da infância/meninece como força da vida inclusive, ou sobretudo, no caso de uma revolução.

Palavras chave: Paulo Freire. Infância. Meninece. Revolução. Tempo.

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PAULO FREIRE: OTHER CHILDHOODS FOR CHILDHOOD²

I never felt inclined, even when it was yet impossible for me to comprehend the origin of our difficulties, to think that life was just like this, that the best to do before the obstacles would be to just accept them as they were. On the contrary, from a young age I already thought that the world would have to be changed. That there was something wrong in the world that could not and should not continue.³

Freire, 2015, p. 41

Until March of that year we lived in Recife, in an average house, the same in which I was born, surrounded by trees, some of which were for me as if they were people, for I was intimate with them.⁴

Freire, 2015, p. 57

The present text inscribes itself within a larger project to think of the contributions of Paulo Freire not only in the usual questions, related to the relationship between education and politics, but, in this case, its relationship to childhood. I am aware that childhood was not one of Freire's central concerns (MAFRA, 2007; NETO, ALVES, SILVA, 2011; PELOSO, PAULA, 2011). Indeed, I am also aware that while it is possible to register his preoccupation with the education of children — in particular children from the lower classes (PELOSO, PAULA, 2011) — Freire's emphasis is clearly upon popular and cultural education and the education of youth and adults, not children.

These qualifications should not be overdetermined. Freire's preoccupations are not with this or that educative practice. He is interested in any practice, of any age, in any context. For example, in *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, when speaking of his vision of ethics in educational practice, he affirms, "Because of this inseparable ethics of educational practice, it does not matter if we work with children, youngsters, or with adults, that we should fight. And the best way to fight is to live it out in our practice."⁵ (FREIRE, 2017, p. 18). This reference is one among many others. Collectively, they help us see that Freire is interested in educational practice as a whole and how educators live this practice much more than in this or that level of education. Aware of this wider sensibility in Freire, the master from Pernambuco, I intend to highlight his contribution to one of his "minor" topics, albeit one present in the background of his preoccupations. Perhaps childhood takes up a special —surprising and unsuspected — role in his corpus after all?

For this purpose, I begin with Freire's reading of his own chronological childhood in *Letters to Cristina*. In this autobiographical text, Freire is provoked by an invitation from his niece, Cristina,

which throws him into a public dialogue with himself. The first two sections — “*An invitation to revisit childhood*” and “*A (childlike-adult) reading of childhood*” — present this reading with additional references to other works (e.g., *the Importance of the Act of Reading*, *This School Called Life*, *On Education: Some Dialogues*, *Towards a Pedagogy of the Question*, *Under the Shade of this Mango Tree*; *Pedagogy of Hope*, and *Pedagogy of Indignation*). The third section — “*A conjunctive and connective way of living chronological childhood*” — explores the image of the connecting young boy that Freire assigns to himself. The fourth section — “*Other references, not always chronological, to chronological childhood, to his own and to his children’s*” — explores passages in which Freire refers to his children’s childhood along with his own, as well as his younger son’s testimony on their relationship. The next section — “*Another non-chronological childhood*” — pays attention to the only negative view of childhood that appears in the Freirian texts I have studied. In the section to follow — “*The most affirmed childhood of Paulo Freire: the revolution*” — we look to other testimonies in which the educator from Pernambuco presents a conception of childhood that goes beyond traditional ideas of childhood as a chronological stage to establish childhood as a force of life, not only to life of an individual human being at any age, but even, and above all, to the life of the collective for political revolution. The final section concludes referring to a recently text by his cousin, Nathercinha, comprised of a collection of letters from Freire to her, mentioned by Freire in *Letters to Cristina*, (FREIRE, 2015, P. 35). These letters crystallize the place of childhood in his life and thought.

AN INVITATION TO REVISIT CHILDHOOD

*Looking back on my remote childhood is a necessary act of curiosity.*⁶

P. Freire, 2015, p. 41

Freire speaks of and writes repeatedly about his chronological childhood in books, interviews, and letters. One of the texts in which he speaks most of this childhood is *Letters to Cristina*, written between 1993 and 1994,⁷ when Freire was more than seventy years of age. As the title indicates, the book is in the form of letters written to his niece Cristina. His childhood is chronologically distant to him in this book. The epistolary exchange with Cristina begins while Freire lives in Switzerland in the 1970s. In a moment of determination, his niece makes a special petition to her uncle, “I would like,” she says,

“that you write me letters talking about your life, of your childhood and, little by little, talking about the comings and goings in which you became the educator that you are”⁸ (Freire, 2015, p. 36).

Freire does not miss out on his niece’s invitation. On the contrary, he takes it as a challenge for autobiographical research, for a search and encounter with himself. As we see in the epigraph of the present section, he considers it this research a necessity in the sense that it can allow for a better comprehension of his present. This encounter is of special interest to me not purely out of biographical curiosity about Freire, but because I think it holds great promise for elucidating reasons from the depths of Freire’s personal history, and, above all, showing the historical path of someone who loves and lives for education. In other words, this search can offer meaning and sense not only for the private life of Freire, but for that of any educator who feels inspired to think and to live in the singularly childlike relation to one’s chronological childhood.

Freire’s search, his need to look back on his distant childhood, could also prove significant in opening a new idea of childhood in the relationship of educators with their own childhood. This does not mean that an educator’s recovery of his or her own childhood guarantees a questioning education. Much less does this mean that Freire’s recovery of his childhood is an ideal model to follow. Nonetheless, this recovery of childhood could inspire and give birth to other possible ways of understanding our educational lives. Who knows, perhaps we can also find beginnings — and not only chronological beginnings — of another relationship with childhood? Indeed, we may find that there is a non-chronological childhood for a life of education available to any educator.

The epistolary form of writing that pleases Freire the *Pernambucano* (i.e., the person from Pernambuco) contributes to this mode of expression becoming a kind of public dialogue with himself as he reflects on his early years in Recife and, thereafter, in Jaboatão. For Freire, revolving through his memories, through his chronological childhood, develops into an imperative to understand himself better, to establish an archeology, a historical continuity between his present as an internationally known educator and his past as a child, with all the contrasting yet specific marks of his childhood: The harshness of hunger, but also the intimacy of his relationship with nature; the inability pay for secondary school, but also the intensity and voracity in which he studied and read, with the encouragement of his mother and father, when the doors of the

school opened. In the end, we encounter the diverse fears and joys of living of as a child of his class, in his context, in the historical time in which he lives — in Pernambuco during the crisis of the 1930s. At the end of his life, during his last years on earth, Freire returns to his world of chronological childhood trying to revive, return, and again make present that not so excessively distant past of his first years of life, sitting beneath the shade of mango trees.

A CHILDLIKE READING OF CHILDHOOD

Today, fixed in my seventy-two years and looking back, far away, I clearly perceive how the questions related to language, and its comprehension, were always present within me.⁹

P. Freire, 2015, p. 90

Freire's reading of his own childhood in *Letters to Cristina* is the reading of an adult, not a child. It could not be otherwise. This is the "Freire the man," with mature ideas and having lived through major adventures, even those never finished, writing and looking for embryonic those marks in the "Freire the boy," marks that already arrange him into who he will become. For this reason, the principal aspect of Freire's dialogue with himself is the continuity he perceives between his chronological childhood and his chronological adulthood.

Freire recognizes himself in his chronological childhood in the following way. The first strong impression he recognizes is a disposition toward a political rebellion of sorts, confronting the world in which he lives. This first mark is a species of dissatisfaction with the order of things. Freire registers in himself from the time when he was a young boy. In this way, Freire can anticipate in his thinking and his life during his childhood what will manifest itself more clearly later in adulthood. This extends from a political formation of a certain kind, beginning with his military father, Joaquim Temistocles Freire, especially his critique of the division between manual and intellectual work, to the testimony born in the words and flesh of his uncle, João Monteiro. They are both central and formative figures for Freire providing important political lessons in his early years. We might say that they were Freire's his first conscientizers. Both of them, along with his general perception of social life in Jaboatão, are the main sources of his critical reading of Northeastern Brazilian reality. In relation to his early political formation, Freire tells what he has learned, for example, from his uncle: "in our conversations with him [...] opposition journalist, which, with his bravery and purity,

spent two days at home and three in jail, I had my first ‘course’ on Brazilian reality”¹⁰ (FREIRE, 2015, p. 82-83). In the same spirit, “in 1928, I heard my father and my uncle saying that it was not only necessary to change the state of things in which we were, but it was urgent to do so now. The country was being destroyed, stolen, and humiliated. And then the famous phrase: ‘Brazil is on the edge of the abyss’”¹¹ (FREIRE, 2015, p. 84).

In addition to these powerful words that ignited and formed his early political consciousness, at a young age Freire experiences the repression and torture that the police force of Pernambuco inflicted upon his uncle, João Monteiro. Freire not only listens to the words calling for urgency, he also feels the incarnate testimony of the body that suffers the atrocities of dictatorship. In it, he perceives the concrete effects of repression, but moreover he is able to witness the courage and value of resistance, of a non-paralyzing and irreconcilable fight for freedom, of word and life. His uncle’s body, in such a terrible state after being repeatedly tortured, soon exhausts itself and dies of tuberculosis in 1935, only a year after the death of his father when Freire is 13. Freire’s father also has an enormous impact upon him through the testimony of his words along with the economic conditions that force him to offer less to his family than he would like, despite being an active captain of the army who had to retire because of his own health problems.

In these ways, the basis for Freire’s political thinking begins in these first years. In these formative testimonies he discovers his conviction that it is the necessary and urgent to transform the world. Freire writes, “On the contrary, at a young age, I already thought that the world would have to be changed. That there was something wrong in the world that could not and should not continue”¹² (FREIRE, 2015, p.41). This was only possible because, as we can observe in other letters, ever since his childhood, Freire is attentive to everything: “my epistemological curiosity was constantly on guard”¹³ (FREIRE, 2015, p. 162).

In this sense, although moving from Recife to Jaboatão is seen negatively by “Freire the boy,” the “Freire the man” perceives the benefit of this amplification of the world for a life which exits the comfort of the backyard to directly encounter the most naked and raw marks of what Freire calls the “Brazilian authoritarian tradition” and the “memory of slavery” of the country (FREIRE, 2015, p. 102). This exercise of authoritarian power that Freire confronts is not only wielded by the governing elites but also by the butcher, teachers, neighbors, and

more. Authoritarianism, for Freire is seen as a mark that inhabits those that take part and create a dominant culture which exploits and carries peasants into misery, even in contrasting or opposing social classes.

“Freire the boy” already perceives that the dominated internalize and reproduce the values of the dominant in his culture. This entails a fight against this state of things that will necessarily demand a cultural and, more specifically, an educational transformation. In the quotidian life of the country side in Pernambuco, Freire sees himself perceiving his vocation as an educator since he was a boy, but not alone or by himself. This direct living-out of the raw economic and political reality allows a reading of Brazilian reality in which Freire encounters the most profound reasons for his political and pedagogical thinking.

It is therefore in this first political mark from his past where Freire recognizes an affirmative relationship to childhood through these letters. Freire searches and finds, in his time as a boy, the Freire who he is. His chronological childhood is not an absence but, instead, a profound presence of his present. His time as a boy makes itself intensely present in his mature life. “Freire the boy” and “Freire the man” are not as separable as they may first seem. In a first mark of childhood, we can see the beginnings of an educator sensitive to a state of things who condemns the injustice against those who inhabit a non-human life, as much as the daily lashes of the conditions in which they live as in the backlash they receive when they rebel against it.

A second mark that also supports this reading emerges from how Freire manifests a taste for the world of letters, for reading, for questions of Portuguese syntax and grammar, of linguistics and the world of study that captivates him from a very young age. His whole self vibrates with affirmation for his beginning steps in reading the word that also presupposes a reading of the world. In these beginnings he discovers the source of his present, his reason for being. In another text, he affirms: “the recovery of my distant childhood (...) is absolutely significant for me”¹⁴ (FREIRE, 1989, p.12).

As an educator who is a specialist in literacy, the question of reading, “Freire the man” judges it important and necessary to pass through his chronological childhood to comprehend the complexities of the act of reading. And his childhood does not disappoint him. The description of his own alphabetization is extremely beautiful, delicate and careful, especially when he narrates the moment in which he is taught to read by his mother and father in the backyard of their own house in Recife, under the shade of mango trees. Branches taken from the trees, used sometimes as chalk, draw the words and sentences

on dirt that becomes a chalkboard. Freire is not alphabetized through the textbook but with words made of his world and he goes to school already able to read (FREIRE, 2015, p. 61). His first reading of words is pleasurable and fun, reading a friendly and hospitable world with great intimacy towards trees and nature — a familiar and loveable world, affable and dialogical. In this alphabetization, the reading of the word begins in harmony with the reading of the world: The first words written and read are the words which make the world; there is no rupture or distance between them.

This story about Freire's alphabetization, along with the importance of the trees and backyard of his childhood home, is also referred to in other texts, some with more aspects and details than others. For example, in an autobiographical excerpt from *Under the Shade of This Mango Tree* (FREIRE, 1995), in a section entitled “My first world,” the backyard appears here as “my immediate objectivity” the “first non-geographical I.” It leaves a mark so profound upon Freire that it is reborn in an unexpectedly strong way in Switzerland, during his “third” exile. While reading a letter sent from Recife to Geneva, he sees himself again as the boy drawing words and sentences in the dirt under the shade of mango trees (FREIRE, 1995, p. 25). In this text, the backyard of the house located at 724 Encanamento Road, in the neighborhood of Casa Amarela in Recife (FREIRE, 1982, p. 14), represents what is most unique about his identity as an educator. His literary roots are to be found, literally, on the “(informal) floor of the school” in which he alphabetizes himself. He affirms this as a reference to what forms him into a worldly educator. The loving care of his mother and father initially carry him across this floor and are followed by his enrollment in the private school Eunice Vasconcellos. His first formal school is therefore perceived by Freire as kind of enlargement of his backyard beginnings, with words and letters in branches and earth. There is no rupture between the house and the school; on the contrary, there is continuity; or, in other words, his schooling had already begun, humbly, at home. This reading of words and the world will be amplified even more with his move to Jaboatão, which entails a change toward the past, towards poverty, towards misery, towards hunger, towards traditionalism, towards superstition, towards structures of exploitation, and towards the authoritarianism of the time, culture, and political realities of Pernambuco and the Brazilian Northeast that ignite the fiery dreams of freedom, democracy, and justice in the life and thought of Freire. Upon his move from Recife to Jaboatão, his words are amplified because the world is amplified from

the loving and care-filled backyard of his family home to the hard and unjust rural reality of the Brazilian Northeast.

This experience of his own alphabetization as a child is also taken up in another text, transcribed from Freire's intervention at the opening of the Brazilian Congress on Reading, in Campinas, November 1981 (Freire, 1989). In this short book, he reaffirms the importance of recovering his relationship with reading during his chronological childhood. By relating this story he shows how concrete this beginning was for him. In this version of the story, he reveals the names of his first words read and written in the backyard of his house. From his childhood universe we see names of birds — *sanhaçu*, *olha-pro-caminho-que-vem*, *bem-te-vi*, *sabiá* — and animals to pet cats, we meet Joli, his father's old dog, we explore geography and natural disasters, real and imaginary; we visit lakes, islands, rivers, wind, clouds, and the colorful transformation of the mangos which taught him the meaning of the verb *amolegar* ("to soften," in Portuguese). All these words from this natural world make up a harmonious, synchronized part of his chronological childhood.

To highlight one aspect of this particular retelling of this story to recover his beginnings in letters, we should not miss Freire's insistence on the fact that the "reading" of his world was made in a childlike way, that is, that he was not "a boy anticipated in a man, a rationalist in short jeans"¹⁵ (FREIRE, 1989, p. 16) and that his father and mothers' pedagogy took care that his "childlike curiosity" was not distorted by entering the world of letters. The deciphering of the word *naturally* accompanied the reading of one's own world. Even the materials and the scenery helped for that; there was no rupture between the world of life and the world of letters in the classroom in the shade of the mango trees, where the floor was the board and the chalk was made of branches from the trees.

This observation is significant because it helps us understand some of the reasons why Freire maintained a childlike disposition during his entire life. Indeed, his later pedagogic texts, such as *Towards a Pedagogy of the Question*, seem more childlike than *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for example. In the former, the form (dialogue), the tone (curiosity) and the content (focused on the educational value of the question) have a more childlike tone than the latter, more assertive, restrictive, and with stronger theoretical and ideological presuppositions.

Another aspect of this testimony to highlight is the childlike language that Freire uses to refer to his chronological childhood. He is at a Congress on reading, an event of educators, adults.

Freire fills his story on his chronological childhood with childlike Portuguese expressions (“*gargalhando zombeteiramente*,” “*peraltices das almas*,” “*passarinhos manhecedores*”). With others, as we have seen, his “childlike curiosity” fills his memories of childhood and reveals the “missing humility” preserved in his childhood. At the same time, this childlikeness reveals a kind of recognition that, even among educators (who are probably interested in the education of youth and adults), there are certain things that can only be expressed through childlike words. Freire’s childlike language appears as an expressive force that exceeds and goes beyond adult academic language. It seems to me, then, that, beyond the chronological age of the speaking subject, childhood has a singular expressive strength for Freire. As we will see in another section, the things we can name with childlike words are precisely not the unimportant things.

Returning to *Letters to Cristina*: One of them, the tenth letter, expresses this same taste for literacy some years later when he tells the story of his travels when he is now a young man, back in Recife, in a better economic condition. His job as teacher allows him to contribute to the house’s budget and also to buy specialized books and magazines; bookstores are his preferred outings and also his preferred place to meet friends. He describes his exercise of walking through the bookstores in the capital of the State with other young people as “childlike curiosity” (FREIRE, 2015, p. 129). This visualizes his friends standing ritualistically around the wooden box of books which is about to be opened. “Childlike curiosity” is the anxiety, the surprise, the curiosity for the new books that arrive, awakening the desire to know: The smell of books that is stored in bodily memory, the singularity of the first encounter with text and letter, which will be later recreated in the tranquility of home. Despite having many bookstores to visit, all close to each other, the ritual of waiting to open the box with books is always renewing in Freire’s testimony. Inside the box are books on language: Grammar, linguistics, and philosophy of language. The Portuguese language, and a strong aesthetic relationship with it, concentrates his attention. In Recife, his life in Jaboatão meets a propitious context for more critical and careful reflection (FREIRE, 2015, p. 130-132).

Thus, as we have seen, some of Freire’s inspirations are born from a long gestation, where they stay close with him for a long time; but we can trust, as he does, that they will never be gone. Among them, we can include Freire’s intimacy with nature, his critical analysis of Brazilian political reality, his dissatisfaction before this reality and his unstoppable

desire for change, his love of letters, his fascination for everything that had to do with the Portuguese language: All of that was born at home, in his childhood. Within this childhood — the form, mode, and figure in which he was born, — he was born to remain through time.

A CONJUNCTIVE AND CONNECTIVE WAY OF LIVING CHRONOLOGICAL CHILDHOOD

Our immediate geography was, without any doubt, not only an excessively concrete geography, if I may speak this way, but it had a special sense. In this geography two worlds interpenetrate, which we lived intensely. The world of toys in which, as boys, we played soccer, swam in rivers, flew kites, and the world in which, as boys, we were, however, anticipated men, around with our hunger and the hunger of others. [...] Deep down, we lived, as I already highlighted, a radical ambiguity: we were boys anticipated into grown people. Our childhood was squeezed between the toy and the “work,” between freedom and necessity.¹⁶

Freire, 2015, p. 49-50

We were born, like that: in a middle-class family who suffered the impacts of the economic crisis of 1929, we were “connective children.” Participating in the world of those who eat, even if we ate little, we also participated in the world of those who did not eat, even if we ate more than they did — the world of the children of the creeks, runaway slave villages, and hills.¹⁷

Freire, 2015, p. 51

I mean, I am used to saying that my brother and I were conjunctive children, I mean, connective, with the function of connecting one clause to the other, etc.¹⁸

Freire, In: Blois, 2005, p. 27

With the deterioration of Freire’s family’s economic situation, which demands their move from Recife to Jaboatão, where economic difficulties deepen, a partial change in this relationship with nature, when compared to how Freire lived in relation to nature in Recife, is marked. The epigraphs of this section clearly show how this passage from a more properly childlike relationship, marked by playing, intimacy, and the almost gradual fusion with nature is effected by the necessity of looking, in this same place, for sustenance for his life. The move from Recife to Jaboatão was in some sense a move away from a form of childhood.

Freire also begins to have a greater and more intense contact with children from the lower classes after this move. As we see in the last two epigraphs, he defines himself and his brothers as “conjunctive” and “connective” children: The connection or conjunction is in this case between classes in the sense that they serve

as a bridge between the children from the class that eats little (a little, but at least something) and the children from the class of those who do not eat. Jason Mafra has studied this image profoundly, showing that the idea of connectivity is a foundational category in the life and work of Freire (MAFRA, 2007, p. 22). More specifically, Mafra sees in this figure of the “connective child” an “archetype” that configures “the existential and constructing locus of anthropology as a practice of understanding and freedom”¹⁹ (p. 62). Thus, the idea expressed here is that the “connective child” and childhood cannot be restricted to a chronological stage; instead, they are a condition for the human being to continue living by transforming what seems to be a given into something else.

“Conjunctive and connective child” mean a childhood in love with and interested in unions, meetings, connections, in this specific case between two social realities marked by differences, even those not necessarily confronted directly or even consciously, as it would be in the case of oppressors and oppressed. The ideas of the conjunctive and connective mark two different aspects or nuances within the common form of encounter. On one hand, the *conjunctive* has the role of adding, increasing, expanding, making grow, augmenting; it is the generative strength that puts together and helps to pass, in this case, from one to two, from one class to the conjunction of the two. On the other hand, the idea of *connection* marks a form of relationship that can only justly be given from the two, which appears not only as the expansion of the one, but already a relation between them. The connection marks the relational character of the child. If the conjunction adds, the connection interlaces, ties. Thus, childhood appears with the affirmative complimentary marks of generation and relation, of encounter and connection.

At the same time, we could say that Freire not only provokes conjunction and connection between classes. We could say that he also lives between the chronological stages of his own life. Thus, the autobiography offers a chronological account of the child, Freire, who lives the life of an adult, woven into to an adult condition, by living a childhood in which his worries about his own hunger and of those close to him — conjugated and connected friends, yes, but also his mother, father, brothers — making him jump, without intermediary ladders, from play to work, from having fun in rivers, in backyards and their trees and in the hills, to the search for the most basic and necessary provisions for his own body and for those bodies even more dear to him. Here the categories of “Freire the

man” and “Freire the boy” are even less stable. It is good to play in nature, but it is also necessary to find, in nature, food that mitigates hunger. In the house, there is not enough money to provide for the family. The merchants deny his mother credit. She suffers not only the pain of being unable to feed her children, but the cruelty and humiliation of the treatment she receives in the butcher’s shop when she asks for their solidarity. The child quickly becomes an adult: He needs to find a way to help his family and himself not be given over to the brutality of hunger. The entrance into the adult world includes the entrance in the world of guilt, of morality and of “good habits” in which his family lives, with an Evangelical father and a Catholic mother, when, for example, the necessity of taking fruit or chicken from the neighbor to mitigate hunger forces him to contradict the values which dominate not only his home, but also the society at large. However, Freire makes an effort to show that neither of these two dimensions end or impede the other: He insists that he lives his childhood with joy when facing this double existence; that his chronological childhood is, at the same time and with equal intensity, an extremely joyful childhood, charged with a joy simultaneously childlike and adult.

It is interesting to also note one more note on childhood in the narratives from *Letters to Cristina* that winds through the story of Freire’s life. Focusing on the present perspective of the educator, he offers a narrative of childlike images and sensations, as he says to Cristina in a short response:

I am happy today to feel and perceive, after so many sent and received letters, of so much that was missing about which I was curious, sometimes even in a childlike way; so much thirst to know your universe, your “comings and goings,” how important your participation, your work, and your questions were for your formation as a professional, woman, and citizen, always so well raised and spoken and your beautiful insistence in fighting for your dreams (FREIRE, 2015, p. 298, my italics).

As has been noted in the earlier discussion of Freire’s recollection of his alphabetization in *The Importance of the Act of Reading*, in this story we see a crossing of his desires and childlike curiosities, affections, emotions and feelings of childhood: sensations of joy and pain, many fears. For example, the move from Recife, takes him away from his birth home in the safe world, from a new and stimulating school with his teacher, Aurea Bahia. He calls this an exile. His new fears abound, including fear of the convicted souls who appeared at night in his new old house in Jaboatão. His affection for

the big clock in the wall of the room diminishes his fear of nighttime silence with its sound, but then there is the sadness and growing fear of the day his family has to sell the clock. There is also the panic, pain, anticipated desire and the almost infinite emptiness provoked by the death of his father. His relationship with everything is made personal and intimate in relation to nature — trees, plants, animals, rivers, hills, all those things to which he never loses this intimate relationship, even when they begin to be seen each time more as a source of survival. A certain sensation of childlike vulnerability and precarity runs across the narrative he provides in this small rich text.

This story is filled with images and symbols, or least they are perceived as such by “Freire the adult.” Images like the piano of aunt Lourdes and the tie of his father, symbols of belonging to a middle class that, even when the resources of the family are scarce and hunger tightens, they cannot be sold because selling them would be to leave their class behind. However, Freire’s chronologically adulthood is predominantly a childlike language referring to his chronological childhood as if, through this recollection, he could in a certain way not only revisit it, but relive it — as if he was still a conjunctive and connective child, this time between two times and, as we will shall see, between two forms of inhabiting the world.

OTHER REFERENCES, NOT ALWAYS CHRONOLOGICAL, TO CHRONOLOGICAL CHILDHOOD, TO HIS OWN AND TO HIS CHILDREN’S

The necessity of beginning from childhood in order to think about the present appears also in his dialogue with Sergio Guimarães. “From Childhood” is the title of the section in that text where Freire answers the invitation to begin with childhood in the affirmative, not through a history of childhood but, instead, by referring to “childhood as schooling” (FREIRE; GUIMARÃES, 1982). In this contrast between history and schooling, we can read a contrast between two forms of temporality: *chronos* and *kairos*. History develops within *chronos*; it follows mimetically enumerated movements — consecutive, successive and irreversible — that constitute chronological time. Chronological time is time that, somehow, does not depend on our perception and is qualitatively undifferentiated. It is the movement of the clock, of planning, of chronograms. In a vastly different way, schooling follows the time of *kairos*. It must happen in the opportune moment, in this and not in that moment, only when the conditions are appropriate. The sciences of life establish a *kairos* for schooling and,

within it, alphabetization; but the harsh conditions of daily life — at least in Brazil and many other countries of Latin America — only allows a small minority to have this *kairos* sense of time respected. For a popular educator of youth and adults like Freire — that is, for people who are placed in the position of having to chase after the time that was stolen from them — the opportune time, *kairos* is always now because it is justly an opportunity, a type of possibility for passage between two worlds. In this sense, when Freire refers to childhood as schooling, we can read this as a reference to a state of childhood beyond the chronological. It is for those in school who are not chronological children that Freire is especially interested in alphabetization: Children entering school life, even if they are not in the socially acceptable chronological time to enter school anymore.

In this dialogue, then, Freire refers again to his own schooling that in his particular case coincides with his chronological childhood, with the socially established *kairos* for it. He emphasizes how the way in which he was alphabetized as a child, with words from his childlike world, remains present in his ideas about literacy in some form or another. The way in which he was alphabetized left such a deep impression upon him, that it remains present in his way of thinking and practicing it as educator in the same way. In this text, his memory is more crisp, precise, and has even more detail. We see his mother, Edeltrudes (Trudinha), sitting on the side of a wicker chair; his father, Joaquim, is swinging on a hammock in the shade between mango trees — free space, unpretentious, informal — in his backyard. As we have seen, Freire enters the world of letters, almost without realizing it, through the activities of a child populating his childlike universe: Giving words to the beings which inhabit his immediate, everyday world.

Another important aspect of this text is the way in which Freire highlights the importance of relationships during this period of chronological childhood, so instrumental in becoming who he becomes. He mentions his relationships with other members of his family, with animals, trees, and words. The way he was introduced to literacy by his parents is especially highlighted and revealed through his emotional context: It was an affective process, dialogical and loving (FREIRE; GUIMARÃES, 1982, p. 15-18). Freire makes clear that his father or mother were not school teachers, but he considers them both as educators and he considers one of the most important things his parents gave him was *time*! His mother on her chair and his father in his hammock were both patiently teaching him to read the words of his world.

It is important to stop oneself and pause in this observation. After all, this is Freire who defends the professionalization of the teacher against attempts to disqualify teachers (FREIRE, 1997). Yet he is made literate by non-professional educators who take care of what is most important for bringing someone into a world of letters with joy and emotion: They ensure that the reading and writing of words follows the reading and writing of the world, living a dialogical climate and environment and offering all the time their son needs to alphabetize himself. They offer a specific time of affections that one cannot measure with a clock. Freire learns to read within this formula in which his father and mother introduce him to the letters through time.

Freire's alphabetization was so deeply impressed upon him that he affirms that his way of acquiring literacy became the same thing he proposed for the education of adults years later. The dialogical way of his first apprenticeship into letters was so marked upon him that he sees this formula as a central axis that traverses across all of his pedagogical ideas in his distinct "Pedagogies" where always he begins by his shifting the axis from the teacher or the student and replacing it in the dialectical relationship *between* them. Thus, Freire, educator of the pedagogical relationship, recreates in his educational conception the relational formula in which he was educated as a child.

Freire speaks very positively of his relationship to his mother and father who, although a military man, has a loving and affective dialogical manner with his family and with Freire in particular (FREIRE, 1982, p.18-19). We do not find as many testimonies of Freire about his five children — Maria Madalena, Maria Cristina, Maria de Fatima, Joaquim Temistocles, and Lutgardes — in his written works, and the majority of them refer to the years in Santiago, where the two youngest, Joaquim Temistocles and Lutgardes, spent most of their chronological childhood. However, the testimonies from his sons and daughters suggest that this affective dimension that Freire lived in his own childhood was relived with his children, while chronological infants, and not only then either.

One of these references is in the context of a more general reflection on his political exile and his relationship to his first wife, Elza (FREIRE; BETTO, 1985, p. 90-91). After showing how Elza shared the experience of imprisonment and exile with him, accompanying him without being herself in the legal condition of being exiled, as a political act and in a completely solitary way (indeed, it was Elza who decided to go when Freire was reluctant to leave Brazil). Freire recognizes that Elza supported the biggest part

of their family life and “was educator to us all” (FREIRE; BETTO, 1985, p. 90). Indeed, Elza was a primary school teacher and was much more occupied than Freire with the daily education of their children. He comments, “In exile, the children arrived, jumping, to say: ‘Old, actually the infrastructure of the family is old’”²⁰ (FREIRE; BETTO, 1985, p. 90). He follows this passage, translating this sentence as: “does it mean, open your eye, because if the infrastructure falls, we end ourselves...”²¹, in order to pay a compliment to Elza and her role in providing for the family during the years of his exile and to express his guilt that was not easy to avoid “in the difficulty of a son — his schooling, the beginning of a son in school, a bigger need of a son —”²² (FREIRE; BETTO, 1985, p. 90-91).

Freire also provides examples of how occasionally he was flooded by guilty feelings because of his wife and childrens’ conditions. For example, these feeling emerged strongly once in the raw winter of Santiago, when one of the boys said that he was feeling cold and Freire did not have money to buy winter clothes for him. Freire observes how he suffered with this episode and how the problem was solved through the solidarity of a loving friend who worked in the United Nations and enjoyed credit in a store in Santiago. His friend bought winter clothes for his entire family. Being from the Northeast as he was, he would say: “the cold will arrive soon and you are from the Northeast, as I am too”²³ (FREIRE; BETTO, 1985, p. 91).

Another reference to his children occurs in this dialogue with Ricardo Kotscho, in which Freire shares (FREIRE; BETTO, 1985, p. 62) that when he was arrested by the military junta in 1964, his three girls visited him in prison without the two youngest boys, following the suggestion of his wife Elza, who was afraid that they would be traumatized by the situation. “I think she was right,” Paulo Freire concludes.

We find a happier anecdote in relation to his children in *Letters to Cristina*. There Freire remembers an occasion in which, for the first time in his life, during the first year of his exile in Santiago, he experienced a snowfall. He was more than forty years old when he first felt the snow on his tropical skin. He got to make snowballs and play with his children. He describes the event with a fabulously childlike word in Portuguese (FREIRE, 2015, p. 35-36): “I went to the streets and my children *meninizar-me* [‘childlikened me,’ or ‘made me more childlike’],” a pronominal form of a verb of the most informal childlike word with which to say childhood in Portuguese. Once again, Freire relives a playful childhood playing in the snow, this time with his precious children, chronological children, himself at an age

not chronologically childlike. And, at an even more mature age — already a septuagenarian, the age at which writes *Letters to Cristina* — even further chronologically from his childhood, he plays with language and invents a Portuguese neologism, a special childlike verb to describe the action of someone that, despite not being a child, becomes a child in order to play in the snow with his children, who make him become more childlike. Thus, Freire is doubly childlike and, with him, we, his readers of all ages, become childlike, too.

Towards the end, another enigmatic reference appears in a paragraph in which, after realizing the importance of the feeling of having been taken care of and loved by his parents in his life, he affirms that “not always, sadly, we are capable of expressing, naturally and maturely, our good wishes to our sons and daughters, through the various forms and proceedings, among them the precise care, not for more nor for less”²⁴ (FREIRE, 2015, p. 60). Perhaps the testimony to follow will help us better understand this passage. Indeed, this testimony may be the most educative one of all. It is from his youngest son, Lutgardes, who confirms that Freire followed the same path he walked with his parents with his own children, which seems to be more than expected. Lutgardes, a sociologist and professor, comments in a video made by the *Instituto Paulo Freire de São Paulo* that Freire was always occupied when he was in Santiago, in Chile. He worked the entire week and, on the weekends, he wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. His children, tired of not having time with their father, decided to converse with him in his office, saying, “look Dad, this way is not possible, you are working the entire week and on the weekend you work the entire time, too, how is something like that possible?”²⁵ Their father replied, “It is right. From now on, every Saturday we will go out together.”²⁶ Lutgardes, already a father at the time of the interview, sitting with his daughter on his lap, smiles and his eyes shine while he completes his story. “And then it was a wonder, we would go out, go around town, or we would go to the movies, eat lunch together, holding hands... Paulo Freire was loving, he was a very sweet person, very affectionate, right?”²⁷ (Instituto Paulo Freire, 2005). This testimony may help to understand the previous ones because it shows two relational phases between Freire and his children: A lifestyle that made him absent because of his dedication to his academic work and, later, for traveling around the world, but at the same time a life intensively present in the loving form of listening to the word and offering a response, attentively affirming the request of his sons and daughters.

The tenderness with which Freire dealt with his sons and daughters, despite being very absent in their lives in some moments, due to his intense work and trips, is very similar to the way in which he describes the importance of his mother and fathers' listening to his childhood inspirations. To exemplify the posture that he and his wife Elza maintained in relation to his sons and daughters, we read:

My father had a very important role in my search. Affective, intelligent, open, he never denied listening to us in our curiosity. He made, with my mother, a harmonious couple, in which unity did not mean the leveling neither of her to him nor of him to her. The testimony which they gave us was always of comprehension, never of intolerance.²⁸ (FREIRE, 2015, p. 62)

In consequence of this posture of his parents in relation to him, he highlights that "I never felt fearful when asking questions and I do not remember having been punished or even simply adverted for disagreeing" (*ibidem*). As we have seen, he retains the love and tolerance that he receives from his mother and father's education as a father. In another text, *Towards a Pedagogy of the Question*, when thinking about the importance of questions and answers in human formation with Antonio Faundez, Freire shows himself to be a father who looks to his own father, who illustrates the connectivity that made questions maintain a link with his sons and daughters:

One of the exigencies that we have always made, Elza and I, to ourselves in face of our relations with our daughters and sons was of never denying them answers to their questions. It does not matter with whom we were; we would stop the conversation to attend their curiosity. Only after testifying our respect to their right to ask questions would we call the necessary attention to the presence of the person or of the people who we were talking to. I believe that, at a young age, we begin the authoritarian denial of curiosity with the "but why so many questions, child;" "shut up, your father is busy;" "go to sleep, leave the questions for tomorrow"²⁹ (FREIRE; FAUNDEZ, 1982, p. 46-47).

In this way, Freire shows how he and Elza care for the curiosity of their sons and daughters: Their "right to ask questions" is respected. In this passage, he contrasts an authoritarian posture before the questions, a posture that discourages them, and a respectful posture, the one which responds. It seems clear here that Freire is not considering other options to face the questions of children or, in other words, we could ask: Is responding to their questions the most respectful way to face them? What other alternatives do we have when facing the questions of our daughters and sons?

ANOTHER NON-CHRONOLOGICAL CHILDHOOD

*My rebellion against every species of discrimination, from the most explicit and loud to the most surreptitious and hypocritical, not less offensive and immoral, has accompanied me since my childhood.*³⁰

P. Freire, 2014, p. 1999

As we have already seen, in the ten epistles that constitute *Letters to Cristina* there is an affirmative vision of chronological childhood. One can only register one appealing and almost unique negative reference to childhood, from a sermon that Padre Antonio Vieira gave in 1638 in which, based on the etymology of the word ‘childhood’ (from the Latin *infans*, meaning “no speech”), associates Brazil with a child and says that they took from Brazil its speech, and this silence, is the greatest tragedy of Brazil. This is Padre Antonio Vieira speaking to the emperor of Brazil in the 17th century. Freire feels inspired by these words to make a critique, in the 20th century, of the timeless Brazil. That is, he takes this metaphor of Brazil as a child and expands it, affirming that the country “does not speak and when it speaks it is not heard, it is repressed”³¹ (FREIRE, 2015, p. 84). On this reading, Brazil is a child who is always repressed.

In this image that Freire takes from Padre Vieira, childhood is an image of frailty, of the oppressed and repressed. It is a figure of denial, of an absent existence. However, despite this double negativity, the image also shows that childhood is not only associated to a chronological period of existence. Thus, just as it is possible to argue that in the speech of Padre Vieira Brazil as a nation is in a chronological state of childhood, Freire extends this image, at a relatively young age, to a present that seems to be not only his present, but also a condition timelessly present in Brazil. Certainly, the presentation of childhood as silenced and repressed life in order to refer to Brazil is not a border or hinge between past and future, as that would be as a purely chronological present, but, instead, it is a present which does not pass, a type of permanent state or condition of life for a country, a society, a culture.

In another text, Freire describes this same Brazilian reality as “the dramatic coexistence of different times”³² that mix themselves pathetically in the same space: Misery, traditionalism, hunger, authoritarianism, democracy, modernity and post-modernity, all together at the same time (FREIRE, 1995, p. 26) — historical times confounded and mixed, crossing classes, ethnicities, genders, and

diverse ages in the present. Brazilian reality defies the linearity of chronological history. It is this reality, where the past, present, and future get confounded, that Freire describes as a child. Certainly it is not about a chronological child; it is about a state or mode of being. In a way then, even in the context of a negative view on childhood, there is a sign that Freire thought of childhood as something more than an age in the *chronos* of time.

THE MOST AFFIRMED CHILDHOOD OF PAULO FREIRE: THE REVOLUTION

*The child continued alive, engaged in the construction of a pedagogy of the question.*³³

Freire; A. Faundez, 1985, p. 158.

That childhood is an idea that goes much beyond chronology for Freire has already been highlighted by various scholars from Pernambuco. For example, in a comparison with the Italian Giorgio Agamben, E. Santos Neto and M. L. Alves emphasize that, for Freire, childhood is understood as a condition of human existence, associated with the human person's unfinished quality (SANTOS NETO; ALVES, 2018 [2007], p. 9). In turn, Celia Linhares highlights that in Freire the child is "what yet reserves itself as dream, potency, desire and, therefore, what is still wrapped in mysteries, in possibilities never seen and, as such, does not achieve finding words to express itself clearly"³⁴ (LINHARES, 2007, p. 11). Thus, if this assimilation of childhood to desire confers to it certain lack or negativity in an anthropological dimension, as a "metaphor of human existence" in its ethical and political dimensions, then childhood contains the most affirming form of freedom as the creation of a collective life carried by possibilities, dreams, and utopias (*ibidem*).

At the same time, one of the most affirming visions of childhood in the work of Freire appears in the last part of his dialogue with Antonio Faundez, titled *Towards a Pedagogy of the Question*. Maybes it is not a coincidence because, as we have just affirmed, this is the most childlike of his various "pedagogies." In it, childhood appears not as a developmental stage, nor as a condition of life or metaphor of existence, but, instead, as a quality of a revolutionary process. Effectively, this is how Freire, from Pernambuco, ends his dialogue with the Chilean Faundez:

In my first visit to Managua, in November of 79, talking to a large group of educators in the Ministry of Education, I said to them how the Nicaraguan revolution seemed to be a childlike revolution. Childlike not because it had

recently “arrived,” but because of the evidences that it was offering its curiosity, its unrest, its taste for asking, and fearless dreaming, for wanting to grow, create, transform. I also said in that hot afternoon that it was necessary and essential that the Nicaraguan people, fighting for the maturity of their revolution, to not allow it to grow old, killing the inner child that it was. I went there recently. The child continued alive, engaged in the construction of a pedagogy of the question³⁵ (FREIRE; FAUNDEZ, 1985, p. 158).

The image of childhood could not be more affirming and powerful. Freire uses it as a compliment, a way of beautiful speech, a species of praise to a revolution that does not erase its curiosity, its restless, its taste for asking questions, its desire to dream, its desire to grow, create, transform. This is what a childhood without age is for Freire: A desire, a taste, and a sensibility for the forces of life like curiosity, dreams, and transformation.

The inner child of the Nicaraguan revolution has nothing to do with its chronological time of being in the world. It is, yes, a child of young age, but it is not a child because of its young age, because it was born a short chronological time ago. The revolution is not a child because it is “recently-arrived.” No. It is not a child for what it lacks, for its smallness or shortly lived time. Nor is the revolution a child for what it will be, for its projection into a future time. The (Nicaraguan) revolution, for Freire, is a child for what it is, for its mode of inhabiting the time of the present, for the affirming force it reveals, for its potency, its curious, restless, dreaming, creating, transforming way of being revolution. It is a child for the way in which it affirms a revolutionary life, for its way of revealing revolution to the world, of making itself not only a revolution, but a revolutionary mode of existence.

We are in the end of the 1970s, which is also the end of what Freire considers to be his third exile (he believes himself to have had two exiles before: the first, his arrival to the world, exiled from his mother’s womb, and the second his move from Recife to Jaboatão). He returns to Brazil but continues his travels around the world. He finds himself in Nicaragua before a revolution that is also a chronological child; it only has a few years of age and, as such, anticipates diverse possibilities for its growth through time.

There are many possible revolutionary notions to grow from this and, among them, Freire highlights two ways of relating to childhood which could distinguish themselves if they mature: a) The first understands maturing as a growing old and, therefore, as an erasure of childhood to overcome or convert it into something

else. This is the possibility where people understand childhood as something that needs to be transformed into something else that overcomes it. From this possibility a conception of education unfolds where education is about presenting the most appropriate path towards this exit, a type of transformation of childhood that will convert it into what has been idealized for it and that will become also what it is not. b) The second, here implicitly defended by Freire, understands childhood as something that maturity would do well to preserve, feed, and care for to the extent that it supplies vitality to life and, for that, it never should be abandoned. This way of understanding childhood detaches itself, for education, into another relationship to childhood, another logic of formation that closely attends, cares, and listens to childhood, because if childhood is overcome or erased, life will lose something that would diminish its vitality: without childhood, life would be less alive, for all ages. Following this possibility, education can leave behind its worries about forming childhood — and children — into something which it is not, occupying itself instead in cultivating and attending to it so that childhood remains always alive, being what it is in all ages.

This inner child of the Nicaraguan revolution is the creative and curious potency of life at any age. It is an engaged child, committed, fruitful. It playfully throws itself into building a pedagogy of the question, that which learns and teaches to ask question. It even ventures to ask itself “what is asking questions?”, what is its sense, why and for what? It is a pedagogy that puts itself permanently in a questioning state, that intensively lives the question and the asking of questions (Freire; Faundez, 1985, p. 48).

As we have seen, Freire, who did not dedicate himself particularly to the education of chronological children but instead to the education of a childlike people without age, proposes an affirmation of childhood as childhood: A properly childlike view, so much so that it becomes the greatest compliment given to a revolution, and nothing less than a revolution, something that is the most serious thing in the world, the most important and adult of all among the things of adults and, even for that, childhood does not need to stop at the same time being the most joyful, playful, and demanding of all things. The most adult of all needs the most childlike thing in the world. Nothing seems more necessary than a revolution of the present state of affairs and the dominating modes of life in Latin America. What Freire is suggesting is this: A childlike revolution is the most educative of all revolutions.

Ever since he was a child, Freire has known the necessity of revolution for life in Latin America. It is one of the things he learned when he was a boy in Jaboatão, which followed him always. With this sense of necessity, he also affirms that a revolution without childhood is a revolution that loses its capacity to create, to ask itself questions, to be restless. In other words, for Freire, childhood is a condition of revolution that is proud of being who and what it is.

This is not the place to judge the judgements that Freire makes of Nicaraguan education, much less the Nicaraguan revolution itself, without evaluating its historical successes or failures. This is not what it is Freire that affirms. Nor does childhood guarantee the success of a revolution; perhaps it is exactly the contrary: The world in which we live may appear more hostile with childhood conceived of in this way. The inner child of revolution affirms a pedagogy of the question, which, in turn, exposes it to the hostilities of the system. Childhood has nothing to do with a tactic of success. What Freire is affirming is that a “more proper” revolution — a revolution that is and wants to be a true revolution, or in other words, the most revolutionary of the revolutions — cannot forget nor erase its childhood. The most revolutionary revolution is the most childlike revolution. And, in being childlike, it educates in childhood: In joy, in curiosity, in asking questions, in what does not have age.

As we have seen in the first sections of this work, Freire does not only consider it essential to maintain childhood beyond chronological childhood, he also uses his own life as an example of a permanent cultivation of his own childhood. In this way, we can extend this affirmation of the inner child of revolution to any educator. Childhood is a condition in which to live an educational life, sensible to self-questioning and to engagement in a restless and creative pedagogical act.

In the same way, perhaps we can extend the risks of this childlike posture. The more childlike educators are, the more they can be exposed to the hostilities of a system. However, at the same time, the more childlike they are, the more educative this or that person who does not erase their childhood will be and they will keep this childhood alive in a questioning mode, joyful and curious, inhabiting their educative practice.

In other words, according to Freire from Pernambuco, we could say that childhood acquires its ontological statute first in the environment of the human, of what realizes its historicity while being thrown into the problematization and transformation of a

present life. In Freire's words, "in the comprehension of History as possibility, the tomorrow is problematic. In order for it to come it is necessary that we build it through the transformation of today. There must be possibilities for different tomorrows"³⁶ (FREIRE, 2001, p. 40) because "the future is not a *given datum*, a *destiny*, a *doom*" (FREIRE, 2015, p. 179). Thus, childhood realizes the political sense of a properly human existence: Its unstoppable vocation for being more, for affirming the future as possible and not as predetermined, its permanent becoming instead of being once and for all. "[T]he fight does not reduce itself to slow what will come or to secure its arrival; it is necessary to reinvent the world"³⁷ (FREIRE, 2001. P. 40). Childhood, for Freire, is a reinventing force of world.

CHILDLIKE WORDS FOR THOSE WHO NEVER STOP BEING CHILDREN

*It was like that, in a rainy afternoon in Recife, dark sky, color of lead, that I went to Jaboatão, looking for my childhood.*³⁸

P. Freire, 2014, p. 43

As we have just affirmed, this inner child that Freire attributes to the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua can also be attributed to Freire's own life. When re-reading some of his affirmations of childhood, whether about his own chronological childhood or about the childhood of a revolution, when we perceive the style and manner of his writing, always questioning and loving at the same time, we see Freire's childhood as something that he is constantly feeding and does not want to ever abandon.

Even in the last of his public interventions — interviews, encounters, and ceremonies — we can see his childlike way of being. Until the very end of his life he walks through the world questioning himself and others in a childlike way. To sing these childlike notes in his words: The perennial childhood of Freire expresses itself in his curiosity, his unquietness, his taste for asking questions, for not fearing to dream, for wanting to grow, create, and transform, in his childlike speech, in the originating use of words that first formed his world during his own childhood. He talks as a child talks, with the language and way of a child — even in the most solemn and important occasions — justly because only the child can handle such an occasion. Freire is born and grows keeping his childhood alive: Curious, attentive, and always engaged in the construction of a childlike pedagogy, a childlike pedagogy of the question.

This relationship of Freire with his childhood also shows, again, that childhood is not a matter of age, of having few years, of a fixed quantity of time. In the first letter of the pedagogical letters included in his posthumous *Pedagogy of Indignation*, at an extreme distance from his chronological childhood (only a few months before his death in January 1997), he comments on the dynamism of urban life, the transformation it demands, especially for people who are over seventy years old, like himself, and concludes, “It is as if today we were younger than yesterday” (FREIRE, 2000, p. 31).

This statement is a declaration of childhood, a precise definition: Childhood is a way of experiencing time when it inverts itself. Today we are younger than yesterday; there is childhood without age, of every age, at any age. Childhood is living time in a childlike way, open to the worlds which a question opens; the chronological age one has does not matter. It is a way, continues Freire from Pernambuco, of being “at the level of our time” (*ibidem*), a level which is not measured in its distance from the ground, but in the disposition to take risks, openness to the unusual, intimacy with the secrets of the world, a disposition to be able to be otherwise and to “comprehend teenagers and youngsters” (*ibidem*).

We can all be more childlike. We can be children at seventy years of age if we dare. There are children of seventy years who are younger than adults of forty, youngsters of twenty or, even, children of nine. Some years earlier, at the age of more than sixty years old, Freire affirms something similar about himself:

Sexagenarian, I am seven years old; sexagenarian, I am fifteen years old; sexagenarian, I love the wave of the sea; I adore seeing the snow fall, it seems alien. Some companion of mine from the Left will be already saying: Paulo is irreparably lost. And I would say to my hypothetical companion from the Left, I am found: Precisely because I lose myself looking at the snow fall. Sexagenarian, I am 25 years old. Sexagenarian, I love again and I begin to create a life again³⁹ (FREIRE, 2001, p. 101).

Loving the wave of the sea, adoring to see the snow fall when one belongs to a region where snow does not exist, losing oneself in what seems small, insignificant, unimportant, in the beauty of a mere detail, aesthetically relating oneself to the world, appreciating its beauty without saving time within it: In the end, for Freire, loving childhood means to risk beginning to live anew every time. Rebirth after death. To love after the death of one's beloved. To be born again in love after this death of the beloved. To begin to love when it seems like love is over, when the love of one's entire life dies and it

seems that it has ended love in life, childhood calls us to begin to love anew, as if we had never loved before, as if we began to love only for the first time. Childlike love, love of childhood, a childhood of love.

Thus, childhood is a way to relate to time; to invert it and become younger with its passing and to relate to the future as something always open, as something that does not make us (FREIRE, 2000, p. 56). We must fight to remake the future and, in this fight, to remake ourselves anew. Childhood is a way of looking to the future with eyes wide open, as if it also disposes itself to us, in the incomplete condition that inhabits us as humans (SANTOS NETO; ALVES; SILVA, 2011, p. 53). Finally, before anything else, childhood is a way of inhabiting the present, of being entirely present in the present, as if time was just time, embodying the now, as if we were only children, as if the future was just one other form of present. In childhood, there is not much past and there is a wide open future, undefined. The time of childhood is the present. Freire, a child of conjunctions and connections, is the one who says, "I think that the best time is the time that you live, it is today" (FREIRE. In: BLOIS, 2005, p. 30).

Justly because childhood is this presence and this relation to the present, it is important that chronological children grow "in the exercise of this capacity to think, of asking themselves and of asking and doubting, of experiencing hypotheses of action, of programming and not only following the programs, more than proposing, imposing. Children need to be assured of the right to learn to decide, which is done by making decisions"⁴⁰ (FREIRE, 2000, p. 58-59).

This may be one of the principal marks of a pedagogy of childhood for Freire: Giving to chronological childhood the conditions under which it can love its childhood in a childlike way, which means that it can also live its entrance into the world of letters in an childlike way through a politically sensible education, attentive and hospitable towards childhood, that does not assault it, that does not let it die. In this respect, the educational preoccupations of Freire, as we know, vastly exceed a chronological childhood. In a lecture on "Human Rights and a Liberating Education," offered at the University of São Paulo in June of 1988, he affirms: "The education of which I speak is an education of the now and it is an education of tomorrow. It is an education which must place us into permanently asking ourselves, remaking ourselves, questioning ourselves"⁴¹ (FREIRE, 2001, p. 102). Childhood is the way of all education, at any and every age. This is the paradox of the one who dedicated his life for the education of adults: In the way that Freire conceives of education, including the

education of youth and adults, it cannot be, among other things, an education for children, because what constitutes childhood is already a condition of this education. Being unquiet, asking, doubting, asking questions, creating: This childlike education, attentive to childhood, invites students, whatever their age may be, to live in childhood; those that inhabit and dwell in it, keep it alive and take care of it; those who forgot it or lose it must recover it or reinvent it.

Perhaps for this reason Freire has taken care of always feeding his childlike condition, his inner child. In this same intervention, he defends an Education in the perspective of Human Rights that is “courageous, curious, awakening and keeper of curiosity; that is an education that, as much as possible, preserves the child that you were, without letting your maturity kill it”⁴² (2001, p. 101). In Portuguese, Freire uses the feminine of child, “girl,” to call the attention to the sexism of language. This is the same language he used to refer to the Nicaraguan revolution a decade earlier. From this perspective, all are any. All education needs to preserve the child we once were; helping to keep it alive throughout an entire life. Following this, Freire completes his declaration of love to childhood: “I think that one of the best things that I have done in my life, better than the books I have written, was never allowing the child that I was to die; I could be the child who I was, the child in me”⁴³ (FREIRE, 2001, p. 101). The condition of childhood, the inner child within, is so powerful that it is necessary to not only keep alive the childhood that we were but also the one we cannot be: Childhood lives from possibility, from which everything can be. It makes a lot for sense to Freire, the conjunctive and connective child, to keep the other childhoods alive that cannot not be connected, reunited, or lived. It should also make sense to any educator sensitive to their encounter with other and different childhoods, to help to care for or restore the childlike condition in others.

Childhood, for Freire, is something that goes beyond his own biography; it includes it, of course, but it does not exhaust itself in it. In this sense, the place that Freire from Pernambuco gives to childhood helps us to see that childhood crosses the *chronos* of our lives — our past, our present, our future — and also crosses other times that we experience according to different logics. In a less anthropomorphizing vision, we can also perceive that there is childhood in others, in otherness, in plants, in animals, in school, in the world. There is a childlike life waiting to be felt, heard, and fed. There is a childhood of school to recover and reinvent. There is much childhood in the world waiting to be awakened, relived, by conjunctive and connective children.

TO END BY BEGINNING: LETTERS TO NATHERCINHA

*It is a good thing, Natercinha, that we never stop being a child.*⁴⁴

Freire. In: Lacerda, 2016, p. 50

The letters that Freire wrote during his exile in Santiago, Chile, to Nathercia Lacerda (LACERDA, 2016) have recently been published. Freire mentions them in *Letters to Cristina*. The publication is the result of a very beautiful work by Cristina Laclette Porto and Denise Sampaio Gusmão with Nathercia Lacerda and Madalena Freire, one of the daughters of Freire. It is a carefully composed aesthetic work, with historical pictures, presentation of Nathercia, six letters by Freire, an actual letter of Nathercia to Freire, one letter from Madalena to Nathercia and other details that, together, express the care and affection in which the project came to be. The six letters of Freire are typed and photographed conforming to the original manuscript.

Nathercinha is Freire's second cousin. Freire is the son of one of the sisters of her grandfather, Lutgardes, and therefore, a nephew of the grandfather, that is, a cousin-brother of her mother. Freire was closer to being her uncle than a cousin, due to his age, although he refers to her as "cousin" in the letters. The correspondence was initiated by Nathercinha when she was 9 and he was 45, in 1967. The letters of Freire to Natercinha (he wrote the nickname of his cousin without the "h" after the "t", perhaps because the name of his grandmother was Natércia) are dated between the Fall of 1967 and October of 1969. The last letter was sent from Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States, where Freire was living after leaving Chile and before going to Switzerland.

I leave these letters to the end because I recently discovered them and also because they are an anthem to childhood, in form and content. This is the result of careful handwriting, written especially so a child could read it; it has an egalitarian tone, intimate and affective. The writing is filled with poetry, metaphors, childlike images. In what follows, I make reference to the first three letters.

In the first, he highlights the impact of the snow, in an excerpt which is worth reading:

One day, I went to see the snow fall close to the small house where I lived. I got out of the car, covered by heavy clothing, with a coat, a hat, and gloves, because it was very cold, and I was as amazed as you get when mommy and daddy bring you a doll. Then, I began to get dusted in snow. Snow fell on me, on my hat, on my clothes. Snow falling seemed like dust from the sky. And I felt like a boy again and

I almost played by making snow men. It is a good thing, Natercinha, that we never stop being children. Men get in the way of things, they complicate everything. I do not know if you are going to understand what I am going to tell you. Mommy and daddy can explain it better to you. Grow up, but never allow to die in you the Natercinha of today, who begins to discover the world, filled with curiosity. If men did not allow to die in them the boys they once were, they would understand each other better. But I do not want to write a complicated letter to you. Letters of grown-ups. But it is also possible to talk like a child in a conversation like this. This is how I talk to Joaquim and Lut every time they want to talk. In the same way, every time you want to talk to me, write me. You are today the youngest of my friends who writes to me.⁴⁵ (LACERDA, 2016, p. 50-1)

This writing shows the place childhood has for Freire. In his life, childhood is something that he experiences: The wonder of his encounter with snow, feeling like a child with a new toy, a girl with a new doll. When he was 45 years old he still feels like a little boy, he lives his childhood, keeping it always alive. The other children, those who inhabit a chronological childhood, are equals and friends to Freire, someone who one converses and corresponds with. As Madalena Freire says in a letter to Natercinha, he proposes “a conversation between friends, placing himself as an equal. Little by little, he differentiates himself as an adult, without losing the egalitarian sense between you.”⁴⁶ (LACERDA, 2016, p. 82).

To make a dialogue between adults and children possible, the adult needs to put himself at the same level as the child, being a friend and an equal. After all, in the life of a human being, childhood is what keeps us alive, supplying the curiosity to discover the world and to comprehend ourselves better with other human beings. Regarding himself as an equal with a child is like relating to a childlike part of himself. The letter also has excerpts of “grown-ups,” when Freire affirms that the world is the way it is because the human being has forgotten its childhood. The tone of the letter is diaphanous, clear, and emphatic: Human beings and the world need childhood.

In the second letter, he returns to the snow. It is the end of Fall, the mountain peaks are covered by snow and Freire, with Elza and another couple, plays in the snow, making a snow man. He then adds:

Sometimes I feel as if I was a boy, too. I have the will to run. To play. To sing. To say to the whole world that I enjoy living. Never allow the Natercinha of today to die within you. The girl that you are today should follow the young woman you will be tomorrow and the woman you will be thereafter.⁴⁷ (LACERDA, 2016, 54-5)

The motivations repeat themselves. In the first two letters, Freire plays in the snow; in this second one, he expresses his will

to live in a childlike way, running, singing, and playing. But his taste is also for life in all ages, which demands him to take care of the childlike childhood, not the chronological one. Freire insists in his plea that his cousin not allow the death of this childhood, at any age.

The third letter, by contrast, is perhaps the most “political” of them all, the most explicit in terms of the justly political strength of childhood:

The city is becoming full of flowers of all colors. The garden of our blue house is green with grass. The rose trees are beginning to open their buds. We look to the rose trees and they look like people laughing. Children laughing with the purity of a childlike laugh. If the old men, as grown-ups could or wanted to laugh as the rose trees, does it not seem to you that the world would be beautiful? But I believe that one day, with the effort of humanity and the world, life will allow grown-ups to laugh as children. Even more so — and this is very important — life will allow that all children can laugh. Because today not all children can laugh. Laughing is not only the opening of the lips to show teeth. It is the expression of the joy of living, the will to do things, to transform the world, of loving the world and humanity; in the only way we can love God.⁴⁸ (LACERDA, 2016, p. 57-58.)

The colors, the flowers, the laughing. It is necessary to laugh as the rose trees. The world would be more beautiful. And it is necessary that all human beings, of all ages, can laugh as children. For that the world would be truly beautiful, that is, more just, more joyful, more full of life. It is necessary that the world become more childlike because childhood is joy and life: This joy that today accompanies only certain privileged lives. Childhood, then, is also this will of transforming the world so that not only certain lives are real lives of joy, of curiosity, of love. The world needs what childhood brings to make the world more worldly and life more alive.

This is my childlike reading of childhood in Freire, of his childhood. Of his childlike passion. Of his life as a child at all ages. Of the revolutionary strength of childhood. There are many childhoods in Freire. Who knows, perhaps readers of the present text are now just a little more attentive to childhood, to his childhood and to the childhoods of the world. If that is the case, we will play, we will laugh, we will jump in the snow, in the heat, in any part of the world that demands a little childhood.

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NOTAS

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² NOTE FROM THE TRANSLATORS: Kohan uses two terms in Portuguese (*‘infância’* and *‘meninice’*) and neither term refers directly to the English word ‘childhood.’ We have chosen to use the term ‘childhood,’ however, for negative reasons: the cognate of *‘infância,’* ‘infancy,’ is too developmentally limited and the equivalent of *‘meninice,’* ‘boyhood,’ is limited by its gendered expression. A neologism like ‘kidness’ would only introduce confusion. We have also translated all the quoted passages directly from the Portuguese versions, with the original Portuguese included in a footnote, and translated the titles directly as well. While this may occasionally differ from the present English translations, we prefer them in order to preserve the literary consistency of the prose in relation to the original Portuguese.

³ “Jamais me senti inclinado, mesmo quando me era ainda impossível compreender a origem de nossas dificuldades, a pensar que a vida era assim mesma, que o melhor a fazer diante dos obstáculos seria simplesmente aceitá-los como eram. Pelo contrário, em tenra idade, já pensava que o mundo teria de ser mudado. Que havia algo errado no mundo que não podia nem devia continuar.”

⁴ “Até março daquele ano vivêramos no Recife, numa casa mediana, a mesma em que nasci, rodeada de árvores, algumas das quais eram para mim como se fossem gente, tal a minha intimidade com elas.”

⁵ “É por esta ética inseparável da prática educativa, não importa se trabalhamos com crianças, jovens ou com adultos, que devemos lutar. E a melhor maneira de por ela lutar é vivê-la em nossa prática”.

⁶ “Voltar-me sobre minha infância remota é um ato de curiosidade necessário.”

⁷ Other texts in which Paulo Freire makes references to his childhood which I refer to are: *The Importance of Reading: em três artigos que se completam* (1981), *On Education: A Dialogue* (1982) and *Towards a Pedagogy of the Question* (1985).

⁸ “de que você fosse me escrevendo cartas falando algo de sua vida mesma, de sua infância e, aos poucos, dizendo das idas e vindas em que você foi se tornando o educador que está sendo”.

⁹ “Hoje, fincado nos meus setenta e dois anos e olhando para trás, para tão longe, percebo claramente como as questões ligadas à linguagem, a sua compreensão, estiveram sempre presentes em mim.”

¹⁰ “em nossas conversas com ele [...] jornalista de oposição, que, com sua bravura e sua pureza, passava dois dias em casa e três na cadeia, tive o meu primeiro ‘curso’ de realidade brasileira”

¹¹ “em 1928, ouvia meu pai e meu tio dizendo que não apenas era preciso mudar o estado de coisas em que andávamos, mas era urgente fazê-lo. O país estava sendo destruído, roubado, humilhado. E então a frase célebre: ‘O Brasil está à beira do abismo’”

¹² “Pelo contrário, em tenra idade, já pensava que o mundo teria de ser mudado. Que havia algo errado no mundo que não podia nem devia continuar”

¹³ “minha curiosidade epistemológica esteve constantemente a postos”

¹⁴ “a retomada da infância distante (...) me é absolutamente significativa”

¹⁵ “um menino antecipado em homem, um racionalista de calças curtas”.

¹⁶ “A nossa geografia imediata era, sem dúvida, para nós, não só uma geografia demasiado concreta, se posso falar assim, mas tinha um sentido especial. Nela se interpenetravam dois mundos, que vivíamos intensamente. O mundo do brinquedo em que, meninos, jogávamos futebol, nadávamos em rio, empinávamos papagaio e o mundo em que, enquanto meninos, éramos, porém, homens antecipados, às voltas com nossa fome e a fome dos nossos. [...] No fundo, vivíamos, como já salientei, uma radical ambiguidade: éramos meninos antecipados em gente grande. A nossa meninice ficava espremida entre o brinquedo e o ‘trabalho’, entre a liberdade e a necessidade.”

¹⁷ “Nascidos, assim, numa família de classe média que sofrera os impactos da crise econômica de 1929, éramos ‘meninos conectivos’. Participando do mundo dos que comiam, mesmo que comêssemos pouco, participávamos também do mundo dos que não comiam, mesmo que comêssemos mais do que eles – o mundo dos meninos e das meninas dos córregos, dos mocambos, dos morros.”

¹⁸ “Quer dizer, eu costumo até dizer que eu e meu irmão éramos meninos conjunção, quer dizer, conectivos, funcionam de ligar uma oração à outra, etc.”

¹⁹ “o lócus existencial e construtor de uma antropologia como prática do conhecimento e da liberdade”.

²⁰ “No exílio, os filhos chegavam, brincando, a dizer: ‘Velho, na verdade a infra-estrutura desta família é a velha!’”

²¹ “quer dizer, abre o olho, porque se a infraestrutura cai, a gente se acaba...”

²² “numa dificuldade de um filho – a sua escolaridade, o começo de um filho na escola, uma necessidade maior de um filho -”

²³ “o frio vai chegar logo e vocês são do Nordeste, como eu também”

²⁴ “nem sempre, infelizmente, somos capazes de expressar, com naturalidade e maturidade, o nosso bem-querer necessário a nossos filhos e filhas, através de variadas formas e procedimentos, entre eles o cuidado preciso, nem para mais nem para menos”.

²⁵ “olha pai, assim não dá, você está trabalhando a semana inteira e no final de semana você trabalha o tempo todo, como é possível uma coisa dessas?”.

²⁶ “Está certo. De agora em diante todos os sábados a gente vai sair junto.”

²⁷ “e aí foi uma maravilha, a gente saía junto, passeávamos pela cidade, ou íamos ao cinema, almoçávamos juntos, nos dávamos as mãos... Paulo Freire era carinhoso, ele era uma pessoa muito doce, muito afetiva, né?”

²⁸ “meu pai teve um papel muito importante na minha busca. Afetivo, inteligente, aberto, jamais se negou a ouvir-nos em nossa curiosidade. Fazia, com minha mãe, um casal harmonioso, cuja unidade não significava, contudo, a nivelação dela a ele nem a dele a ela. O testemunho que nos deram foi sempre o da compreensão, jamais o da intolerância.”

²⁹ “Uma das exigências que sempre fizemos, Elza e eu, a nós mesmos em face de nossas relações com as filhas e filhos era a de jamais negar-lhes respostas às suas perguntas. Não importa com quem estivéssemos, parávamos a conversa para atender à curiosidade de um deles ou de uma delas. Só depois de testemunhar o nosso respeito a seu direito de perguntar é que chamávamos a atenção necessária para a presença da pessoa ou das pessoas com quem falávamos. Creio que, na tenra idade, começamos a negação autoritária da curiosidade com os ‘mas que tanta pergunta, menino’; ‘cale-se, seu pai está ocupado’; ‘vá dormir, deixe a pergunta pra amanhã’.”

³⁰ “A minha rebeldia contra toda espécie de discriminação, da mais explícita e gritante à mais sub-reptícia e hipócrita, não menos ofensiva e imoral, me acompanha desde minha infância.”

³¹ “não fala e quando fala não é ouvido, é reprimido”.

³² “a coexistência dramática de tempos diferentes”.

³³ “A menina continua viva, engajada na construção de uma pedagogia da pergunta.”

³⁴ “o que ainda se reserva como sonho, potência, desejo e, portanto, o que ainda está envolto em mistérios, em possibilidades inéditas e, como tal ainda não logrou encontrar palavras para expressar-se claramente”

³⁵ “Em minha primeira visita a Manágua, em novembro de 79, falando a um grupo grande de educadores no Ministério da Educação, dizia a eles como a revolução nicaragüense me parecia ser uma revolução menina. Menina, não porque recém-“chegada”, mas pelas provas que estava dando de sua curiosidade, de sua inquietação, de seu gosto de perguntar, por não temer sonhar, por querer crescer, criar, transformar. Disse também naquela tarde quente que era necessário, imprescindível que o povo nicaragüense, lutando pelo amadurecimento de sua revolução, não permitisse porém que ela envelhecesse, matando em si a menina que estava sendo. Voltei lá recentemente. A menina continua viva, engajada na construção de uma pedagogia da pergunta”

³⁶ “na compreensão da História como possibilidade, o amanhã é problemático. Para que ele venha é preciso que o construamos mediante a transformação do hoje. Há possibilidades para diferentes amanhãs”

³⁷ “a luta não se reduz a retardar o que virá ou assegurar a sua chegada; é preciso reinventar o mundo”

³⁸ “Foi assim que, numa tarde chuvosa no Recife, céu escuro, cor de chumbo, fui a Jaboatão, à procura de minha infância.”

³⁹ “sexagenário, tenho sete anos; sexagenário, eu tenho quinze anos; sexagenário, amo a onda do mar, adoro ver a neve caindo, parece até alienação. Algum companheiro meu de esquerda já estará dizendo: Paulo está irremediavelmente perdido. E eu diria a meu hipotético companheiro de esquerda: Eu estou achado: precisamente porque me perco olhando a neve cair. Sexagenário, eu tenho 25 anos. Sexagenário, eu amo novamente e começo a criar uma vida de novo.”

⁴⁰ “no exercício desta capacidade de pensar, de indagar-se e de indagar, de duvidar, de experimentar hipóteses de ação, de programar e de não apenas seguir os programas a elas, mais do que propostos, impostos. As crianças precisam de ter assegurado o direito de aprender a decidir, o que se faz decidindo”

⁴¹ “A educação de que eu falo é uma educação do agora e é uma educação do amanhã. É uma educação que tem de nos pôr, permanentemente, perguntando-nos, refazendo-nos, indagando-nos”.

⁴² “corajosa, curiosa, despertadora da curiosidade, mantedora da curiosidade, por isso mesmo uma educação que, tanto quanto possível, vai preservando a menina que você foi, sem deixar que a sua maturidade a mate”.

⁴³ “Eu acho que uma das coisas melhores que eu tenho feito na minha vida, melhor do que os livros que eu escrevi, foi não deixar morrer o menino que eu não pude ser e o menino que eu fui, em mim.”

⁴⁴ “É uma coisa boa, Natercinha, que a gente nunca deixe de ser menino.”

⁴⁵ “Um dia, eu fui ver a neve cair perto da casa azul onde eu moro. Saí de dentro do carro, todo agasalhado, com capote, chapéu, luvas, porque fazia muito frio, e fiquei maravilhado como você fica quando mamãe o papai trazem uma boneca para você. Ai, comecei a ficar todo salpicado de neve. A neve caía encima de mim, no meu chapéu, no meu abrigo. A neve caindo parecia poeira do céu. E eu me senti um menino de novo e quase brinquei de fazer bonecos de neve. É uma coisa boa, Natercinha, que a gente nunca deixe de ser menino. Os homens atrapalham as coisas, complicam tudo. Não sei se você vai entender isso que vou lhe dizer. Mamãe e papai lhe explicam melhor. Cresça, mas nunca deixe morrer em você a Natercinha de hoje, que começa a descobrir o mundo, cheia de curiosidade. Se os homens não deixassem morrer dentro deles o menino que eles foram, se compreenderiam melhor. Mas eu não quero fazer carta complicada para você. Carta de gente grande. Mas é possível também conversar com menino conversa como esta. Assim eu converso com Joaquim e Lut. Tôda a vez que eles querem conversar. Da mesma maneira, tôda a vez que você queira conversar comigo, me escreva. Você é hoje a mais nova de minhas amigas que me escrevem sempre.”

⁴⁶ “uma conversa entre amigos, colocando-se como um igual. Aos poucos, vai se diferenciando como adultos, sem perder o pé de igualdade entre vocês.”

⁴⁷ “Às vezes eu me sinto como se fosse um menino também. Tenho vontade de correr. De brincar. De cantar. De dizer a todo mundo que gosto de viver. Você nunca deixe morrer em você a Natercinha de hoje. A menina que você é hoje deve acompanhar a mocinha que você vai ser amanhã e a mulher que será depois.”

⁴⁸ “A cidade está ficando cheia de flores, de tôdas as côres. O jardim da nossa casa azul está com a grama toda verdinha. As roseiras começam a abrir suas rosas. A gente olha para as

roseiras e parecem gente rindo. Meninos rindo, com a pureza do riso das crianças. Se os homens grandes, as pessoas grandes pudessem ou quisessem rir como as roseiras, como as crianças, não lhe parece que o mundo seria uma coisa linda? Mas eu acredito que um dia, com o esforço do próprio homem, o mundo, a vida vão deixar que as pessoas grandes possam rir como as crianças. Mais ainda – e isto é muito importante – vão deixar que todas as crianças possam rir. Porque hoje não são todas as que podem rir. Rir não é só abrir ou entreabrir os lábios e mostrar os dentes. É expressar uma alegria de viver, uma vontade de fazer coisas, de transformar o mundo, de amar o mundo e os homens, sômente como se pode amar a Deus.”

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