

CHILDHOODS AND CHILDREN IN VISUAL CULTURE: CONCEPTIONS AND PHOTOETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVES

Fernanda Mendes Cabral Coelho & Adelaide Alves Dias

ABSTRACT

This article highlights the importance of visual culture for the historical and social understanding of the conceptions of children and childhoods constituted in light of the theoretical assumptions of sociology of childhood, as well as, emphasizes the use of the photoethnographic narrative to understand reality in scientific researches, specifically related to childhood. For that, it presents three imaginary narratives produced from the images of children prepared in scientific research in Brazil, based on the epistemological and empirical presuppositions of History and sociology of childhood. It is a qualitative and descriptive study, of photoethnographic strategy, that includes an analysis produced in the light of a multireferential, critical and transdisciplinary, perspective. Through the photoethnographic narratives, the study revealed that childhood is constituted by the multiplicity of human societies, in which each age and context offer children possibilities for cultural creation and appropriation, thus triggering new and unusual forms of life, where children create for themselves strategies of survival and resistance. In this sense, thinking about the universe of children's cultures in the perspective of visual culture requires a constant movement of reflection on how these spaces reflect conceptions and images of children and contribute to the formation of these cultures.

KEYWORDS

Childhood; children; photoethnography; sociology of childhood; visual culture

RESUMO

Este artigo tem o objetivo de ressaltar a importância da cultura visual para a compreensão histórica e social das concepções de crianças e infâncias constituídas à luz dos pressupostos teóricos da sociologia da infância, bem como destacar o uso da narrativa fotoetnográfica para a compreensão da realidade em pesquisas científicas, mais especificamente relacionadas à Infância. Para tanto, apresenta três narrativas imagéticas produzidas a partir das imagens de crianças dispostas em pesquisas científicas no Brasil, pautadas nos pressupostos epistemológicos e empíricos da História e da sociologia da infância. Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo e descritivo, de estratégia fotoetnográfica, com uma análise produzida à luz de uma perspectiva crítica e transdisciplinar multireferencial. Através das narrativas fotoetnográficas, o estudo revelou que as infâncias se constituem na multiplicidade das sociedades humanas, em que cada época e contexto oferecem às crianças possibilidades de criação e apropriação cultural, desencadeando assim, novas e inusitadas formas de vida, onde as crianças criam para si estratégias de sobrevivência e resistência. Neste sentido, pensar o universo das culturas infantis na perspectiva da cultura visual requer um movimento constante de reflexão sobre como estes espaços refletem concepções e imagens de crianças e contribuem para a formação dessas culturas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Crianças; cultura visual; fotoetnografia; infâncias; sociologia da infância

INTRODUCTION

Visual culture allows representing the objects of mediational character of different times and cultures, stimulating interpretations about reality and how these affect the individuals' life. In this perspective, the study of visual culture has as object the representations that individuals build about the reality, according to their social, cultural and historical characteristics. In other words, it is a science that pursues to "understand what is represented to understand the representations themselves" (Hernández, 2000, p. 136). It is also emphasized that visual culture does not depend on the images themselves, but on the search and capture of reflections of reality, precisely by considering the image as a place of creation and discussion of meanings.

Based on these premises, this work aimed to highlight the importance of visual culture for the historical and social understanding of the conceptions of children and childhoods constituted upon the point of view of the theoretical presuppositions of the sociology of childhood. It also highlights the use of the photoethnographic narrative for the understanding of the reality in scientific research, more specifically related to childhood. We constituted a snippet of a doctoral thesis, already in a conclusive phase, linked to the Program of Post-graduation in Education of the Universidade Federal da Paraíba - Brazil. To do so, we chose to construct photoethnographic narratives from the images of children arranged in visual artifacts such as classic European paintings and photographs produced at different times and contexts.

Methodologically, this is a descriptive qualitative research and a photoethnographic¹ procedure (Achutti, 1997), bibliographic and documentary. The data generation (Graue & Walsh, 2003) was organized in three differentiated and interconnected contexts: the first refers to the images of children in European society, whose discursive elements influenced the first conceptual constructions in the human and social sciences; the second reveals the influence of European patterns on the ways of being and living of childhood in Brazil, from the image of a child in scientific productions in the area of sociology of childhood; the third context highlights the conceptual reconfiguration of children and childhood in the contemporary society from the infantile cultures projected in modern visual culture.

For the selection and iconographic systematization the following criteria were used: images arranged in studies and scientific research that approached as object of investigation the child and the childhood; records in classic paintings of the Middle Ages that dialogue with the first conceptual constructs of childhood selected in the researches; images of children arranged in digital media such as blogs and social networks. However, the highlighted images to outline the present text are arbitrary selections of our own critical looks, as teachers and researchers of childhood, resulting from several previous decisions that dialogued with the theoretical and practical foundations of the sociology of childhood.

The analyzes were organized from the interdisciplinary dialogue between the selected sources, a multireferential, transdisciplinary interpretative rigor (Sardelich, 2006)

¹ The photoethnographic narratives are arranged below in this article, portraying the discussions presented and offering themselves to other new glances.

between the contributions of history, the sociology of childhood and the critical perspective of visual culture. However, we do not intend to establish temporal snippets in view of the fact that the image selection movement started from the investigated theorizations and not from the iconographies themselves. Therefore, the images arise as the concepts emerge. Consequently, a relation of meanings is established in the images of the past *versus* the present (now produced through new cultural artifacts), but that is not unrelated to the reality of the child of each generation.

Given the above said, the text initially highlights the importance of visual culture for the production of studies and research with/on children, in dialogue with the assumptions of photoethnography as a theoretical-methodological perspective for constitutions of imaginary narratives. Afterward, it highlights the conceptions of children and childhood in the light of the sociology of childhood in interlocution with historical and cultural elements of different times and contexts. Finally, it presents the photoethnographic narratives reflecting on the differences between how children were and how they are represented through visual culture and how these representations have repercussions on the interpretations and (in) formations about the infantile cultures of each time.

VISUAL CULTURE AND PHOTOETHNOGRAPHY: NEW THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR RESEARCH ON CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

The current studies of visual culture depart from the confluence of different disciplines, from sociology, anthropology, semiotics, cultural and feminist studies and cultural history of art, under different theoretical-methodological perspectives that problematize and contextualize the phenomena that permeate the everyday life and its visualities (Hernández, 2000). Thus, visual culture understands the interface between all disciplines that deal with visuality in the contemporary (Mirzoeff, 2003).

For the approach of the visual phenomenon by the bias of the visual culture and its implications for the understanding of the daily life, it becomes necessary to reflect the concepts of culture and visual in a critical perspective, inserted in a field of multidisciplinary transdisciplinary studies (Sardelich, 2006, p. 465) that “is not organized from the names of artifacts, facts and or subjects, but, actually, from their cultural meanings, linked to the notion of mediation, representations, values and identities.

Sardelich (2006) suggests that the critical understanding of these cultural meanings implies considering four non-sequential and interconnected aspects: historical-anthropological; aesthetic-artistic; biographical and social-critical. In relation to the historical-anthropological aspect, the author emphasizes the importance of establishing connections between representations and visual artifacts and their meanings, since they are produced and legitimized in the context of traditional social relations involving customs, beliefs, political and religious ideas. On the aesthetic-artistic aspect, the author refers to the systems of representation understood at the heart of the origin production culture and not in its universality. In terms of biographical aspect, she argues that representations and artifacts foster, through the processes of identity, the construction of

values, beliefs and visions about reality. And the critical-social aspect corresponds to the contribution of representations and visual artifacts to the current configuration of the politics of difference and power relations in society.

The importance of the image is not only in its aesthetic value but, above all, in the social role that it exerts in the formation of human cultures (Martins, 2007; Mirzoeff, 2003). Therefore, the studies of visual culture question the way images move across daily life constituting and being constituted by the experiences and complexities of the human relations. Therefore, it is not a question of reconfiguring the object of study of visual culture, but of expanding its analytical dimension in contemporaneity, considering that “now the need arises to interpret the postmodern globalization of the visual as part of daily life” (Mirzoeff, 2003, p. 19). In other words, it is necessary to proceed to investigate how daily experiences produce, create and dispute cultural meanings that directly or indirectly exert strong power of truth, “an interventionist power that ends up transforming the imaginary world into life itself” (Martins & Tourinho, 2010, p. 138).

In this perspective, the tendency is to consider the image as a reflection of reality, a historical source and narrative of human events and experiences, capable of revealing meanings and provoking feelings in those who register, were or are registered, and who visualize, were or are visualized. That way, the images become “fragments of communication, memory and identification mark” (Carvalho, 2011, p. 124). Therefore, through the image, emotions, stories, narratives and experiences are solidified, that beyond a sign reveal intense characteristics and peculiarities of the reality portrayed.

Although the sociology of childhood has contributed, and still contributes, continuously and significantly to the elucidation and problematization of child-related causes, we consider visual culture as an indispensable theoretical field to reflect the tensions, evolutions and conceptual reconfigurations on childhood(s) and cultures, having in mind the strong influence of the images for the understanding and construction of the narratives that make up the history of civilizations and mainly, considering the level of importance that the image conquered in the social sciences and Humanities in the present time (Achutti, 1997; Hernández, 2000; Mirzoeff, 2003; Sardelich, 2006).

In this standard, photophonography² as a part of visual anthropology, characterized as a method of description and cultural interpretation that uses photography as the main narrative resource, it emerges as an important strategy to problematize the object of study in question. In terms of the presentation of photoethnography, Achutti (2004) suggests that the narratives are composed of a sequence of related images without any interlaced text. However,

this precaution does not prevent certain written information from being previously given to those who are going to delve into the visual narrative, that is, the juxtaposition of these two narrative forms is possible and even desirable, but it is important to note that the ideal would be for each type

² The term Photoethnography was created by Luiz Eduardo Robinson Achutti (1997). His Master's thesis entitled “Photoethnography: a study of visual anthropology on daily life, garbage and work” aimed at composing an autonomous photographic narrative presenting the daily life of working women from the city of Porto Alegre, who recycled garbage (Achutti, 1997).

of writing to be Offered to the reader separately, so that each one retains its full potential. (Achutti, 2004, p. 109)

Thus, for the presentation of the photoethnographie, we organized four cutouts positioned in the sequence of the text corresponding to the narrative. Due to the physical limitation of the text, it was not possible to undertake in-depth analyzes, but, in fact, dialogical approaches to the subject.

THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD IN THE FIRST CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

The iconography of the child has been much researched recently in the field of social sciences. The contributions of theorists such as Ariès (1981), Del Priore (1998), Kuhlmann jr. (1998), Sirota (2001), Sarmiento (2007) and Qvortrup (2010), were fundamental for understanding the child as a social subject and childhood as a generational structure. They stimulated new approaches that culminated in the new social paradigm of childhood that breaks with the cultural and historical traditions of social (in) visibility, negation (Sarmiento, 2007) and the idea of children as the projection of the miniature adult (Ariès 1981) or as an adult in becoming, as it is considered by Freinet (1994), he states that the nature and principles guiding adult and child life are the same³.

Of these contributions, in this work, two authors are indispensable for the construction of concepts and conceptions of children, infants and children's cultures: Philippe Ariès (1981), an important French historian, pioneer in studies on children and childhood, describes the historical evolution of these concepts in his "Social history of the child and the family", being a fundamental reference for the understanding of the cultural transformations experienced by children in medieval times; and Manuel Jacinto Sarmiento (2007), Portuguese sociologist, precursor of the new sociology of childhood, has been the great interlocutor between Brazilian and European researchers.

Ariès (1981) emphasizes the realistic painting of European art to refer to the representation of the child and designate the absence of the feeling of childhood through the historical and cultural conception established on the child. He points out the works of famous painters such as Rubens, Van Dyck, Franz Hals, Le Nain, Philippe de Champaigne, and points out that "in the world of Romance formulas and until the end of the eighteenth century there are no children characterized by a particular expression, but men of reduced size" (Ariès, 1981, p. 51).

According to the Ariès records (1981), between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, the child was represented by a strong religious iconography, characterized by the triad: image of the "adolescent angel" (the appearance of a young man to designate the child); The image of the "boy Jesus" (childhood appears related to the mysteries of motherhood), with an accent of tenderness and ingenuity, where the baby Jesus never

³ Célestin Freinet uses the horticultural metaphor to explain the educator's relationship with the child. For him, the child is like the tree that grows, feeds and defends itself as the adult tree and the educator is a "good gardener" who must take care of the plant so that it can flourish and bear fruit in the likeness of the adult. However, their conceptions were strongly criticized for the idea of children as a mere passive receiver (Araújo, 2002).

appeared naked; And after the fourteenth century, it arises the image of the “naked child” or the “putto”, the first reference in medieval art of the awareness of infantile particularity. Until the sixteenth century children were rarely represented. When they appeared in paintings and sculptures, the children had adult musculature. This shows that artists vehemently rejected child morphology.

Between the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries when child mortality began to preoccupy society, bourgeois families started to consider the child in its limitations and frailties as dependent and weak beings. However, these families maintained the assignments directed to the child that disregarded the limitations of the infantile body, leading them to work in the same conditions of adults, without differentiated them in health treatments, nor in social coexistence at parties or even orgies (Ariès, 1981). This lack of specific attention explains the high mortality rate of the time, called infanticide. The families were numerous and did not have much attachment to children. For Ariès, there was no feeling of childhood, an “awareness of infantile particularity, that particularity that distinguishes essentially the child from the adult, even young” (Ariès 1981, p. 156). Nonetheless, the lack of childhood feeling did not mean that the family had no affection for the children.

With the interference of public authorities and the concern of the church for infanticide, protection and care became the priority of women, in this case, midwives and nurses, creating a new conception on the maintenance of child life, “as if the common conscience only then discovered that the soul of the child was also immortal” (Ariès 1981, p. 61). This importance was directly associated with a deeper Christianization of customs.

The classical paintings were present mainly in the life of the bourgeois families that could subsidize the artists who during days produced scenes of the real life (see Figure 1)

The painting from Van Dyck represents the five eldest sons of King Charles I (7 years old) of England: in the center of the screen, the future heir shows a solemn red robe standing out from the others; on the left, Mary (6 years old) and James (4 years old), wear skirts, something that at that time was common. The garments reflect the lack of sensitivity to the child’s specificities and reaffirm the idea of an adult in miniature, “the child was therefore different from man, but only in size and strength, while the other characteristics remained the same” (Ariès, 1981, p.14).

The painting “Infanta Margarida” (1659), produced by Diego Velázquez, the official portrait painter of the Spanish court in 1623, expresses the posture and dress worn by the child of royalty (figure 03). It is highlighted the melancholy-type gaze, trying to minimize the similarities with adults, the lack of freedom and the lack of characteristics characteristic of childhood. The painted face also reveals the influence of adult culture on the child’s life as reproduction and likeness.

In relation to the image of the child in its historically established aspects, Sarmiento (2007) distinguishes two stages: the pre-sociological and the sociological. The image of the pre-sociological child is characterized by five conceptions, which the author defines as images: naturally developed child, unconscious child, bad child, innocent child and immanent child.

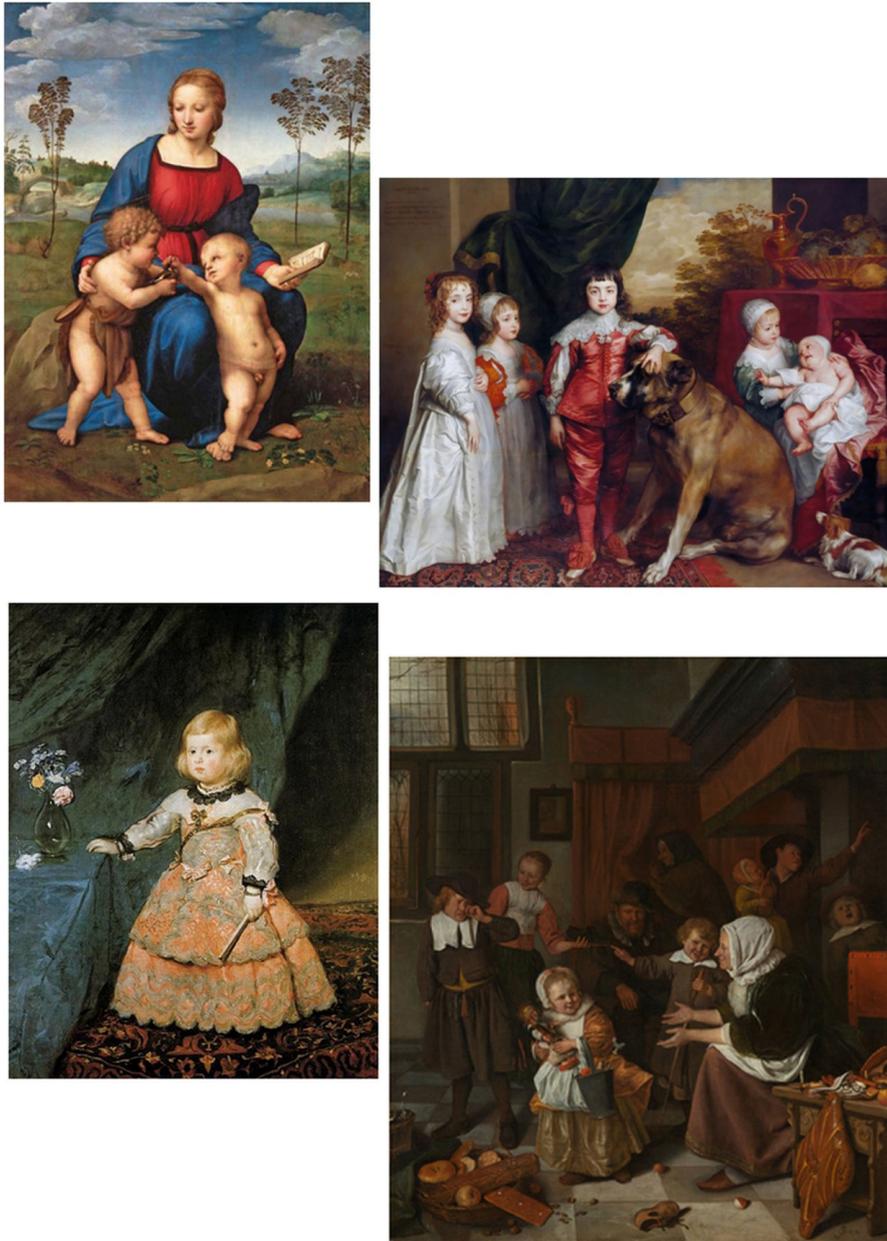


Figure 1: Photoetnography – Children and their “childhoods” in the European visual culture⁴

The first image of a pre-sociological child refers to the “evil child”, a child conceived as an expression of untamed, Dionysian forces with permanent potential for evil reinforcing paternalistic interventions and adopting measures of child repression. This representation is present in the image of the “Madonna of Goldfinch” (1506) by Raffaello Sanzio which represents a female figure in devotional moment with two children who are interacting with each other. When comparing the children’s facial expression, we can see

⁴ With Raffaello Sanzio (1506), “Madonna of the Goldfinch”, 107x77cm., oil on panel (Galeria Uffizi, Florença); Anthony Van Dyck (1637), “Los hijos mayores de Carlos I”, 163 x 198 cm, oil on canvas (Ariès, 1981); Diego Velázquez (1653-1654), “Infanta Margarida”, 127 cm x 107 cm, oil on canvas, (Ariès, 1981); Jan Steen (1668), “The feast of St. Nikolas”, 82 cm x 70.5 cm, oil on canvas (Ariès, 1981).

in one of them a dense, almost perverse look, different from the look of the other child that has more angelic features.

From the seventeenth century emerges another conception of children marked by social transformations, religious reforms and by affection in regard to the attachment of families to children. These changes contributed to the consolidation of the feeling of childhood and, consequently, initiated the concern with the hygiene, the physical health of the child, mainly related to the treatment of diseases and the moral formation of the child, with a strong tendency towards religiosity.

Therefore, the first feeling of childhood arises, but with a tendency towards which Ariès (1981, p. 158) calls “pampering”, that is, “the child, by his ingenuity, gentleness and grace, became a source of distraction and relaxation for the adult “. Ariès (1981) characterized it as a “superficial feeling” because as soon as children grew up, they were soon mixed up with adults and lost the perks of the early years of life. There was no specific place for children in society, there was no feeling of childhood, nor did they consider children as a social group with their own characteristics and needs. There was, in fact, a confusion of feelings about children and their childhoods that ranged from comic to irrationality, from distraction to servitude, from care to rigid discipline.

The romantic myth of “pampering” points to the second image of the pre-sociological child – the innocent child – based on the idea of innocence, purity, goodness and beauty. Emilio de Rousseau (1995) is at the basis of this conception, emphasizing that the nature of man (when born) is genuinely good and society perverts it. Sarmiento (2007) points out that in the book *Emílio or Da Educação* Rousseau emphasizes that the child has specific and particular characteristics that requires a differentiated treatment, both by the family and by the education process.

The strong tendency to dominate and shape child behavior led children to submit to adult models in both dress and behavior. This tendency was materialized in the daily life of the families where they established patterns of reward on good or bad behavior as a way to dominate and control their behavior (Ariès, 1981).

Jan Steen’s painting depicts family social coexistence during a Dutch celebration – the Feast of St. Nicholas – Sinterklaas⁵ (Ariès, 1981). The image composes a large family reunited in an abundant overeating. We can state that the centerpiece of the picture is the youngest daughter in the family who has just won a reward from Saint Nicholas for having behaved all year long - a doll and treats in the bucket. Otherwise, her brother weeping for having her empty shoe in his sister’s hands, probably for being punished for his bad behavior.

The painting of Philippe de Champaigne (see Figure 2) that represents the seven children of the Herbert family presents the children at each age wearing robes according to their size: the elder dresses as a small man, still pretending to be the world of the adult; the twins on the right, hand in hand and shoulders glued, wear identical dress,

⁵ Arrival celebration of St. Nicholas. The legend says that the children on November 5, the eve of St. Nicholas, hung socks on the sides of the houses or slippers at the window and at dawn he filled with candy and gifts the objects of children who had behaved well.

long dress open at the front and closed with buttons and nozzles – one should remember that the dress was used culturally in boys and girls, which reveals absence of gender in the clothes. From the twentieth century onwards, society is worried about finding suits appropriate to the condition of the child at each age (Ariès, 1981).



Figure 2: Photoethnography – Children and their “childhoods” in the European Middle Age⁶

In Hogarth’s “The Cholmondely Family” painting (1732), it is possible to perceive the reality of a noble family. The small child was more prominent in the lighting of the tones and is next to his parents, occupying a privileged place in the image. It also presents the essence of the infantile nature in children, since it is shown playing, but without

⁶ With: Philippe de Champaigne (1649), “The Habert de Montmort Children”, (Ariès, 1981); William Hogarth (1732), “The Cholmondely Family”, 736 cm x 548 cm, oil on canvas (Ariès, 1981); Renoir (1881), “Alice and Elisabeth Cahen d’Anvers”, 119 x 74, oil on canvas (Martins, 2013).

any object that refers to the child itself. Such an option reinforces the equal treatment between adults and children that disregards the characteristics of each phase. Once again, the images represent children dressed as adults, keeping the child as “adult in miniature”.

The eighteenth century expresses with vehemence the influence of ecclesiastics in the moral preparation of the child for life in society. According to the foundations of the church it was necessary to know the child better in order to correct deviations and guide them towards the path of good (Ariès, 1981). This tendency can be understood from the third symbolization pointed out by Sarmento (2007) on the pre-sociological child – the immanent child, based on John Lock’s theory of the *tabula rasa*. The tendency was the belief that in the child could be inscribed either vice or virtue, reason or unreason, considering that the society’s mission is to promote growth with a view to a cohesive social order.

From the end of the eighteenth century onwards we perceive that the specificities of the child are more emphasized in art, reflecting the cultural change about the infantile condition. This way, the child begins to present marks of the cultural transformations that differentiate children and adults, from the postures to the clothes.

The painting in this period gives colors and more delicate forms to the child’s traits, differentiating them from adults in aspects such as clothing, facial expression and hair props, in the case of girls, as we find in the work “Alice and Elisabeth Cahen d’Anvers” better known as Rosa and Azul, by Pierre Auguste Renoir, a French impressionist painter who sought to portray the sisters Alice and Elisabeth, daughter of the Jewish banker Louis Raphael Cahen d’Anvers’.

This painting was the subject of a study by Martins (2013) “Rosa and Azul in yellow-green land: the trajectory of Renoir’s painting and his presence in the Museum of Art of São Paulo (1881-1967)”. Martins states that the painting does not represent a traditional composition, but a modern form of portray, ignored by the erudite scope, escaping from the proposal of legitimization of the family Cahen d’Anvers as members of the upper bourgeoisie. The costumes gain colors and delicacy in pastel shades, conveying the freshness and innocence of the feeling of childhood. The girl in blue has a vain look on her face and the pink one seems to convey some discomfort. This image reveals the cultural rupture between the representation of children as miniature adults, differentiating the children in appropriate robes and utensils that refer to the feeling of childhood.

Aline Silveira Becker, a researcher in visual arts, discusses the works of Renoir in his article “History and images: the visuality producing childhoods” and emphasizes that the screen reveals a “beautiful, delicate but also, introspective, passive childhood, Behaved and duly supported by maternity” (Becker, 2010, p. 96). The image corroborates with Heywood (2004) in the book “A history of childhood: From the Middle Ages to the contemporary era in the West”, stating that childhood has gone through several “discoveries”. However, even in the face of reports such as “inexistence of the feeling of childhood” and “adultification of the child,” many children were saved from trauma and lived childhoods according to their child’s conditions.

Therefore, the iconography concerning childhood in the Middle Ages limits information and demonstrates, mainly, the influence of adult life in the life of the child.

This influence is materialized in the images that express behaviors and feelings of a “non childhood”. It should be considered that the childhood portrayed by Ariès had a time and a mode proper to that context and that culture, and, therefore, is not applied to all children in all contexts. Brazilian research always starts from the assumptions of Ariès to characterize its historical and cultural theoretical bases. The influence of the European conceptions of children, narrated by Ariès, in the conceptions of children and childhoods in Brazil is thus visible. This influence can also be seen in fashion, in family relationships, and in children’s behaviors that follow the same patterns of the adult culture.

CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN BRAZIL: A HISTORY OF SUBMISSION OR RESISTANCE?

In order to represent the pluralities of representations of contemporary children and childhood, we chose to select images that were investigated in academic and scientific research in Brazil. This was an attempt to approximate concepts, images and representations. We pursue to recognize the nuances of modernization in comparison with tradition in the iconographic registers of children who lived and lived the economic, social and cultural transformations of modernity. In terms of image, the digital technological advance marked the modern society, provoking, consequently, significant changes in the field of visuality. One of them is that artistic painting loses popularity for photography. This process began in the eighteenth century with the creation of the dark camera, but only became popular with the creation of the camera in the nineteenth century and then in the twentieth century with the arrival of the digital camera and the smartphone with camera coupled and Internet. This simplified explanation is not enough to demonstrate the impact of this important advance, which would escape the text’s aim, but it should be noted that economic and technological transformations have increased the access and use of visual artifacts: the artists began to use the photographic image as an expression of reality, photography became part of the social daily life of individuals of all ages and social classes (Martins & Tourinho, 2010) and the images became more sophisticated and accessible. Besides that, and especially, the image has become popular; it became a part of the population’s routines and this also had repercussions in scientific research in all areas of knowledge.

Resuming the discussion on childhood, the images present in the iconography of the child in the 19th century demonstrate that despite having secured the so-called “feeling of childhood” (Ariès, 1981), there is still rigor and discipline with a strong educational impact. Childhood became the opportune moment to establish rules, norms and forms of social behavior. In this context, according to Martins (2007), the school has a major role in the normalization of life and social relations, that is, the role of the school would be to prepare the boy and the girl for life.

One of the first findings was that the images of this period are constructed, oriented and based on a certain worldview and culture – of adults, remaining, this way, the tendency of the conception of children as “adults in miniatures” (Ariès, 1981). Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, studies of the sciences of developmental

psychology and learning, even though contributing largely to scientific advances in cognition and development, have relegated to childhood the same (in) visibility that children maintain their status of incapacity and of total physical, mental and social dependence, therefore, “vulnerable and requiring to be molded, controlled, and oriented towards a desirable adult stage” (Lee, 2010, p. 46). This (in) visibility, present in the study of childhood in the field of Social Sciences, severely marked by the silence of the children, composes the scenario of two last pre-sociological images: of the naturally developed child and that of the unconscious child (Sarmiento, 2007).

When it comes to the image of the naturally developed child, there are two central ideas around this image: the first in which children are natural beings, before being social beings; and the second, that the infantile nature undergoes a process of maturation that develops in stages, both based mainly on the contributions of the Psychology of the Development of Jean Piaget (1978).

In relation to the image of the unconscious child, the child is seen as a –“homunculus” – adult’s predictor (Sarmiento, 2007), based on Psychoanalysis, where Freud is the greatest reference. This social image imputes to the unconscious the development of human behavior with incidence in the relational conflict in the infantile age, especially in the relation with the maternal and paternal figures.

The photograph of the collection of the anthropologist Gilda de Castro Rodrigues (see Figure 3) gives the first impressions on the reality of nineteenth-century childhood in Brazil. It presents the image of a boy and a girl with erect postures and serious facial expressions, but the clothes continue to reproduce the adult pattern that has persisted over the centuries. It is possible to perceive that the look and the aspects show a certain degree of melancholy, in her, of sadness, in him, of superiority, but also sad. We begin to wondering: what kind of childhood is behind these faces? How could these children resist the social standards imposed by adult culture?

The research conducted by Kern et al. (2010) analyzes the history of children’s clothing in the 20th century through children’s photographs published in *Globo Magazine*, which was edited in the city of Porto Alegre / RS. The chronological fragment used by the researchers was from 1929 to 1967. The results show that children’s clothing was different from the adult’s one: typical children’s models such as short dresses, short pants, large bows on the head, doll shoes, cold sweaters, cardigans, were well used and, to compose the look, they wore shorts and social shoes with socks halfway up their ankles.

The research entitled “Images of children and childhood: the child in Brazilian iconography of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” by Abramowicz et al. (2011) shows the way children and childhood were portrayed during this period, with a special focus on black child representation. This research indicated an ambiguity in this period: on the one hand, the existence of a feeling of childhood; on the other hand, the (in) visibility of the child and childhood, especially the black child (p. 286).



Figura 3: Photoethnography – Children and their “childhoods” in Brazil⁷

The photograph of Militão Augusto de Azevedo, exhibited at the Museu Paulistano and discussed by Abramowicz et al. (2011), shows three black children, with a firm look, adulterated garments, with marked gender marks, which is also observed in the postures and position in which each occupies in the image (see Figure 3). Although this is not our discussion, we consider it important to consider this (in) visibility today, reflecting on the image of black children represented in contemporary visual culture.

Another finding of this research reveals that the representations about the children that were portrayed in the 19th and 20th centuries are generally marked by the conformity

⁷ With “Children XIX century, Santo Antônio do Monte”, (s.d.), collection Gilda de Castro Rodrigues©; “Children’s clothing XX century”, *Revista do Globo*, 19 agosto de 1955 (in Kern et al. 2010); “Children on their way to work” (s.d.), Militão Augusto de Azevedo, Museu Paulista, USP (in Abramowicz, et al., 2011).

of the child's behavior with the intention of "configuring the character of the boys to form and shape the a good working citizen and for girls a good mother and housewife" (Abramowicz, et al., 2011, 281).

The photographs relating to childhood in the early of the nineteenth century must also be situated in their time. It is a period of intense events, from wars and revolutions, economic crises, scientific and technological advances, where people have had to adapt to the different realities, mainly related to the world of work. With the technological advancement of the factory production, the use of male muscle strength was replaced by the cheap labor of women and children:

industrialization was a constant and terrible enemy of childhood. With the growth of industry and the need for workers in factories and mines, the special nature of children was subordinated to their usefulness as a source of cheap labor (...) one of the effects of industrial capitalism was to support Disciplinary aspects of the school, which were seen as a system to manipulate the child's will and condition it to routine work in factories. (Postman 1999, 67)

The children portrayed by Vincenzo Pastore (1910)⁸, a painting on display at Instituto Moreira Salles, S. Paulo, Brazil, present small workers, poor and black, some are barefoot, others with work uniforms. The image indicates movement and the environment is the street. In the face of the image, we can say that in a universe marked by adult cultures, the child is trying to resist through his fantasies and creativity, transforming the hostility of work into a marble game on the street.

CHILDREN IN THE CONTEMPORANEITY: NEW IMAGES IN OLD IDEAS

From the "non-speaking" child to "cyber-infancy"⁹, the conceptual construction of childhood has undergone numerous transformations where the main matrix of intelligibility has been culture in all its complexity and multiplicity. The period of the sociological child is constituted by the contemporary productions and results from an interpretive judgment of the children from the theoretical proposals of the social sciences. They are, definitely, processes of reinterpretation of the representations previously formulated, with revision of its foundation by the simultaneous understanding of childhood as "a social category of the generational type and a social group of active subjects that interpret and act in the world. In this action they structure and establish cultural patterns" (Sarmiento, 2007, p. 36).

According to Del Priore (1999), considering the reality of childhood described by Brazilian and international organizations "the world in which the 'child should be' or

⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.ims.com.br/ims/explore/artista/vincenzo-pastore>

⁹ Term created by Dornelles (2005) that corresponds to online childhood, connected to the digital sphere, which use computers, internet, games, remote controls, joysticks, in other words, postmodern childhood - of multimedia and new technologies of Information and communication.

‘have’ is close to the one where it lives, or most of times survives” (Del Priori, 1999, p. 8). Children continue to reproduce adult social cultures and, what is worse, the adults themselves are living with this regression without realizing the serious consequences that this can generate in the life of the child; on the contrary, there is a total permissiveness in relation to the practices of reproduction.

This characterizes a regression to the seventeenth century, considering what Ariès (1981) pointed out about the condition of the child and the feeling of childhood in medieval societies. The marks of child adultery that consider the child as a miniature adult (Ariès, 1981) are still well present in human social relations in the 21st century, which characterizes a lack of respect for the child, its specificities and limits.

A fashion story published by *Caras Online Magazine* recently gathered images of children from around the world, with the intention of showing the “60 most stylish fluffy children in the world”¹⁰. The clothes and accessories for children draw attention because they show an idea of childhood based upon the adult model, which can be seen in what the site calls the current trend of fashion, according to another famous website called *fashionkids*. This is about, therefore, a potential reproduction of adult cultures in the image of the contemporary child. But what do these images actually reveal? What kind of conception of children and infants did this subject want to pass through what they call “fashion kids”?

The images on this site (see Figure 4) show a black look with little varied colors. Children wear distinctive hairstyles and hair bands, stylish coats, sophisticated clothes, scarves, scarves and casual jeans, some even refer to Rock bands and wear sunglasses. The children exhibit postures with hands in their pockets, holding accessories such as bags and backpacks. These elements make up the idea of “mini-adults”: they lose color, sweetness and play to give way to monochromatic, daring and postural seriousness. Children model, make gestures, and reproduce everyday scenes.

Mariângela Momo (2007) in her doctoral thesis *Mídia e consumo de uma infância pós-moderna que vai à escola* [Media and Consumption of a postmodern childhood that goes to school] dealing with contemporary childhoods and media cultures that involve the ephemerality of images and meanings of children, emphasizes that “childhood who goes to school “takes with him elements of visual culture, especially media, and elaborates his own conceptions of reality transgressing patterns and subverting what adults tend to control and/or know. In this conception, according to the author, the way of being of a child in a contemporary culture is indefatigable pursuit of fruition and pleasure, it seeks tirelessly to enroll in the globalized culture, becoming a consumer of media artifacts, a process that transcends the boundaries of class, gender and generation:

production, circulation and consumption of material and cultural goods are characterized by acceleration and provisionality, children’s icons have the possibility of fruition, but this should happen in the present moment,

¹⁰ In the context of the website, the term “stylish” means being dressed according to the main fashion trends trends. Retrieved from <http://www.fashionkids.nu/pb/>

since such icons are fleeting. Such fruition involves not only the delight of material possession, but also of cultural possession. (Momo, 2007, p. 69)



Figure 4: Photoethnography – Children and their childhoods in contemporary Brazil¹¹

In Momo’s words (2007, p. 297), “children of media artifacts are concerned with the style of clothing they wear, use the internet with agility, choose what they are going to consume, and convince the other children that the product was made especially for them”. Such behaviors ceased to be just elements of adult cultures, being part of the daily lives of millions of children independent of class, gender, ethnicity.

¹¹ With “Technological (cell phones)” (MOMO, 2007); “Fashion Kids” (2017), retrieved from <http://www.fashionkids.nu/pb/>; <https://www.instagram.com/kardashiankids/>; Mc Melody (2016), retrieved from extra.globo.com; diariodonordeste.com.br; retrieved from verdesmares.com.br.

In this reflexive snippet, we return to some notes that bring strong visions on the condition of contemporary childhood. The example of a Brazilian child named Gabriella Abreu Severino, better known in the art world as Mc Melody, is a singer of pop music and funk ostentation and has been news on television and the internet since 2015. From images taken at journalistic sites (see Figure 4), it is possible to see that the child exhibits his body in a sensual and pejorative way, displays money as a trophy, and presents facial expressions that try to snub anyone who sees it. It is a child, a singer of only 9 years, who currently exerts a strong influence on social networks.

Clearly the images show an adult behavior, with a strong abusive tendency. In some photographs, the child exposes sexy clothes, makes daring poses, wears a bra with filling to enhance the breasts, displays a suitcase full of money and a necklace of gold. Always with strong makeup, the singer makes a “pout” with her mouth to insinuate a certain air of debauchery. This mix of narcissism, consumerism and self-centeredness can also be related to a pattern of media-exalted beauty desired by most people who show up on social networks with the intention of denoting “expressions of happiness and completeness”. These people seek through their iconographies “to inform the virtual world” a permanent state of beauty, of volatile consumerist desires and of egocentric superiority, thus generating what I call a culture of exhibitionism and overvaluation of “self-image”.

Inserted in a technological and visual universe, images have become the most essential product of our information and knowledge (Dias, 2005). In this perspective, the aspect of visibility refers to “our way of looking, seeing, contemplating, staring, watching, serving, witnessing, examining, glimpsing, glancing at, peeking, to peering and glimpsing the world “and this” reveals the need for an additional exploration of the concepts of communication and cultural representation” (Dias, 2005, p. 282).

Therefore, contemporary society presents to children a series of information present in visual culture that need to be questioned in its complexity, from the political dimension to its social impacts in childhood.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We recognize that the visual image is not stable, but changes its relation to external reality at certain points in history and culture. More precisely, the image becomes a place where one can create and discuss meanings. In this perspective, visual culture does not depend on the image itself, but on the tendency of interpretations that the image produces (Mirzoeff, 2003). This way, the visual culture represented through the selected images expresses signs and meanings that contribute to the mediation between the process of knowledge production and the formation of cultural awareness of historical belonging.

The relevance of the present image in realistic painting subsidizes theoretical information for contemporary research. In this regard, the influence of European culture on the early iconographic registers that express meanings about how children lived and were represented by medieval society, both in the writings of Ariès (1981) and in the registers of sociology of childhood, allow to sketch nuances of infantile cultures of different

ages. Such records allow us to affirm that adult cultures exercised and still exert a significant influence on the ways of living and being a child today. Hence it is necessary to promote debates and public policies that guarantee the effective protection of children's rights and the social commitment to guarantee the dignity of childhood in its entirety.

Based on the literature review, it is possible to affirm that the image of the child in visual culture was acquiring the status of reality and became an inexhaustible and indispensable source of information in the scientific context, especially for the unveiling of infantile cultures, considering their significant contributions to the sociology of childhood.

We also verified that the photoethnography as a theoretical-methodological dynamic allows not only to examine the imaginary narratives that make up the discourses and theories that founded and ground scientific studies and research, but also extends the possibilities of investigation, considering its narrative potential imagery for the understanding of reality.

In the case of conceptions of children and childhood in visual culture, the photoethnography reveals that the imagery representations are not based on biological ages and social roles, but on elements such as physical appearance, ways of dressing and relating themselves to culture and society. In this connection, when comparing the various childhoods portrayed, we perceive a conceptual regression to the views of Ariès (1981) on the condition of childhood in the seventeenth century, when the lack of differentiated treatments between adults and children gave rise to the conception of children as adults in miniature, relegating to childhood the condition of social marginality. This way, it is possible to affirm that the marks of the "homunculus" still are well present in the visual cultures of the 21st century.

In summary, the photoethnographic narratives of children, infants and children's cultures reveal that in the plurality of human societies, each age and context offers children possibilities for cultural creation and appropriation, and these possibilities trigger new and unusual forms of life in which children create survival and resistance strategies for themselves. Consequently, the new narratives about children and childhood must recognize that the social structure of childhood is constituted in the relations established between the various instances of society, being immersed in historical changes and social and cultural transformations. These structures have a direct impact on the social structure of childhood, considerably changing their experiences with reality, especially when it comes to culture. As human socialization multiplies, cultures mingle and blend. Even though giving due importance to this cultural multiplicity, it is indispensable to be alert to the necessary boundaries and differentiations between adult and child cultures.

However, we must recognize the limits of this analysis when we think of the pluralities of childhood, of poor childhoods, of working children, of the social relations established between them and with adults, in the multiplicity of family and educational contexts. It is especially necessary to recognize that even when influencing adult cultures, children elaborate their worldviews, they are social actors (Sarmiento, 2007; Sirota, 2001) and in alterities of childhood subvert and resist patterns and practices that attempt to condition child behavior.

We concluded that it is necessary to discuss the images of children and childhoods that circulate in the visual cultures of contemporary society, to know the impact of these conceptions for the formation of infantile cultures, and, departing from these realities, to analyze the relations that the children have established with these visualities in everyday life. These and other questions inspire us to continue researching this exciting subject.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Fernanda Mendes Cabral Coelho. Federal University of Paraíba, Brazil. She has a Master's degree in Education from the Federal University of Paraíba (2008) and a Specialization in Psychopedagogy from FIP / PB (2003), Graduation in Pedagogy from the Federal University of Paraíba (2001). She is currently a PhD student in Education at the UFPB / PPGE, Professor at the Federal University of Paraíba, Education Center – Campus I. She is a member of the Center for Research and Studies on Children (NUPEC). She has experience in Education, with emphasis on Scientific Methodology, mainly, focus on the following subjects: Teaching-learning, children's cultures, cyber-languages, ICT and Human Rights.

E-mail: fmcabralcoelho@gmail.com

Address: Rua Manoel Lopes da Silva, 136. José Américo. João Pessoa - Paraíba - Brazil. Zip code. 58073-586

Adelaide Alves Dias. Federal University of Paraíba, Brazil. She holds a degree in Psychology from the Federal University of Paraíba (1986), a Master's degree in Psychology (Social Psychology) from the Federal University of Paraíba (1992), a PhD in Education from the Fluminense Federal University (2001) and a postdoctoral degree in Education from Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (2013-2015). She is currently a professor and researcher of the Graduate Programs in Education and Coordinator of the Post-Graduation Program in Human Rights, Citizenship and Public Policies (Biênios 2014-2016 and 2016-2018), Federal University of Paraíba. She coordinated the PROCAD

/ CAPES Program NF 797/2010, is an Associate Researcher at CIERS-Ed (International Center for Studies in Social Representations and Subjectivity – Education) and the UNESCO Chair of Teaching Professionalization. He is a member of the Center for Citizenship and Human Rights (NCDH), the Paraíba State Education Forum (FEE-PB) and the Paraíba Children's Education Forum (FEIPB). She is the coordinator of the Center for Research and Studies on Children (NUPEC). She has experience in the areas of Education and Psychology, with emphasis on Early Childhood Education and Human Rights Education, working mainly on the following topics: childhood, early childhood education, autonomy, educational public policies and human rights education.

E-mail: Adelaide.ufpb@gmail.com

Address: Rua Manoel Lopes da Silva, 136. José Américo. João Pessoa - Paraíba - Brazil. Zip code. 58073-586

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