

But anyway, who is this subject? Ethical-political dilemmas, conceptions of democracy and the subjects of learning in the BNCC for High School

Mas, afinal, que sujeito é esse? Dilemas ético-políticos, concepções de democracia e os sujeitos da aprendizagem na BNCC do Ensino Médio¹

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the relationships between the subjects of learning, both the student and the teacher, and the mobilization of the concept of democracy, in the National Common Curricular Base, stage of High School, highlighting the area of Applied Human and Social Sciences, final version of 2018. The way in which the concept of democracy appears in the current curriculum base text is analyzed, based on the historical circumstances of the production of this final version of this curriculum and, also, based on the theoretical delimitation of the dilemmas that affect contemporary subjectivities. The main conclusion is that democracy is situated as a regulator of the ethical-political aspirations of students, under the bias, however, of a horizon of political stability, devoid of historicity, thus emptying the agency and the confrontation of the contemporary crisis by the subjects of learning.

Key words: National Common Curricular Base. Democracy. Learning Subjects. Ethics and politics.

RESUMO

O artigo examina as relações entre os sujeitos da aprendizagem, tanto o estudante quanto o/a

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¹ This article is the result of research funded by National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPQ) and Research Support Foundation of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ)

professor/a, e a mobilização do conceito de democracia na Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) correspondente à etapa do Ensino Médio, com destaque para a área de Ciências Humanas e Sociais Aplicadas na versão final de 2018. A partir das circunstâncias históricas de produção dessa versão final da BNCC e da delimitação teórica dos dilemas que afetam as subjetividades contemporâneas, é analisado o modo pelo qual o conceito de democracia figura no texto da base curricular mencionada. Constata-se que a democracia é situada como regulador das aspirações ético-políticas de estudantes, sob o viés, no entanto, de horizonte de estabilidade política, desprovida de historicidade, esvaziando assim a agência e o enfrentamento da crise contemporânea pelos sujeitos da aprendizagem.

Palavras-chaves: BNCC do Ensino Médio. Democracia. Sujeitos da Aprendizagem. Ética e política.

To situate places of enunciation about the BNCC for High School

If a historian of future times were to take the years between 2012 and 2022 in Brazilian society as an object of analysis, he/she would certainly have to make selections and cuts, as all those who think about pasts and their possible interpretations do. Perhaps this hypothetical historian would realize how much the political and social confrontations in these ten years have sharpened to the point of fraying the fragile tissue of the democratic order established after the end of the military governments, with emphasis on the period after the coup that deposed President Dilma Rousseff in 2016.

We who are writing this article are not in this fictitious position of temporal distance. As subjects, we integrate this time, an agonizing present of many uncertainties, in particular regarding the exercise of rights, on a democratic basis, in the daily performance of teaching and investigative intellectual work. We are teachers and researchers who meet when crossing the Theory of History with the Teaching/Learning of History, let us emphasize, of many histories.

At the intersection of these professional identities and study interests lies our place of enunciation in this text. We aim, therefore, to systematize some considerations and provocations about the conceptions of learning subjects – both students and teachers (PASCUAL, 2013) –, related to the ethical-political dilemmas of democracy, in the way this concept and those subjects were mobilized in the National Curricular Common Base (BNCC) corresponding to the High School stage. The BNCC for High School was approved by the Ministry of Education in December 2018, completing the final document related to the BNCC of Basic Education in all its stages (BRASIL, 2018). Our focus is directed to the relative part of what was then designated as the Area of Applied Human and Social Sciences, in which the curricular component History is inserted.

If we refer to the BNCC for High School and the cut between 2012-2022, it is worth justifying these beacons in the light of some demarcating events, namely: the approval by the Ministry of Education of the National Curriculum Guidelines for High School in

January 2012, document mobilized as the main legal foundation of the BNCC (BRASIL, 2013); and the year 2022, when many State Departments of Education, in several units of the Brazilian federation, experience the process of deciding and implementing curricular reforms that correspond to the requirements of the BNCC, stage High School.

The landmark events mentioned refer to milestones in the scope of governmental curricular policies and serve as a circumscription for debates and confrontations in this sphere, which undoubtedly fall within those ten years, but also refer to previous moments in contemporary Brazil, in the inferences from the democratization process established by the crisis of military governments at the dawn of the 1980s, highlighting the enactment of the 1988 Constitution and the Law on National Education Guidelines and Bases in 1996; and some other actions, among them the elaboration of the National Curricular Parameters, in the 1990s, and, at the dawn of the 21st century, of the laws 10.639/2003 and 11.645/2008, concerning the mandatory teaching of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous people History and culture, as well as the elaboration of the Curricular Guidelines, culminating in the consolidated version in 2013².

In the way in which the 2018 final document related to the BNCC is presented, among the legal frameworks mentioned, the National Curricular Guidelines, in the consolidated version, published in 2013, are referred to as the basis of the BNCC, under the terms of the latter being oriented “by the ethical, political and aesthetic principles that aim at integral human formation and the construction of a fair, democratic and inclusive society” that guide the first (BRASIL, 2018, p. 7).

Our reflections mobilize the mentioned frameworks to not only situate the historicity of the governmental curricular policies on the agenda, but to go a little beyond them, or rather, to approach them in view of the dissonances between the discursivity manifest in the text of the proposed curricular document in the form of a common national base, and already in application, and what is at stake – disputed and conflicting -, in the bodies and

² It is important to situate differences regarding the nature and specificities of the curricular guidelines and prescriptions implemented by the federal government since the promulgation of the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (LDB), in 1996. In spite of the name, the Curricular Parameters effected prescriptions in the sense of establishing contents and objectives for learning in the different stages and modalities of Basic Education. The Guidelines, on the other hand, postulated concepts and guidelines, built in detail, in order to problematize the notions of curriculum, associating them with the construction of curricular prescriptions, including the national base. In the case of the elaboration of the Guidelines, it should be emphasized the political context, under the presidential terms of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, between 2003 and 2014, guided, within the scope of the Ministry of Education, by the incorporation of civil society demands, via public consultations, and by the dialogue with several segments involved in the debate about Basic Education, between professional associations, municipal and state secretariats, teachers of Basic Education and Universities. On such curricular policies after the LDB, see, especially: SILVA, 2015.

lives of the subjects who are directly affected by such curricular policies, in this case, the subjects who star in the school routine, the identities of “teacher” and “student”. Our analytical path to address these dissonances dialogues with the question about which subject is this who is present (or absent) in the text of the prescribed curriculum of the BNCC for High School in the area of Applied Human and Social Sciences.

To think about these dissonances, we argue that it is also necessary to situate how the concept of democracy, as an ethical political regulator mobilized in curricula and school practices of teaching History, is conceived in the BNCC for High School, emphasizing the competences and abilities proposed for the area of Applied Human and Social Sciences. We argue that, if, on the one hand, the text stabilizes the concept of democracy, without considering its historicity based on permanent inconclusiveness and on the bet on a coming-to-be, on the other hand, there is the suggestion that the qualities of democracy are self-evident to the subjects of learning – teachers and students –, as if the pact around democratic values did not demand a continuous convincing of subjects, agents of political practices, as bodies in assembly (BUTLER, 2018).

And the teacher was absent....

The bodies and lives of teachers and students have been affected, and are being affected, by the governmental curriculum policies of the last ten years and are also immersed in other events. The ten years between the milestones of 2012 and 2022 include some time strata (KOSELLECK, 2014) in the association with the layers and rhythms of what is then perceived as rupture and continuity by the most varied individual and collective subjects.

In the political sphere, in terms of relations between State and society, there were a considerable number of events: the social demonstrations of 2013, the presidential elections in 2014, marked by greater polarization between candidates supported by the Workers’ Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, or PT) and the Social Democratic Party (*Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira*, or PSDB), the coup that overthrew the president elected Dilma Rousseff for her second term in 2016, the implementation of neoliberal reform agendas by the government of President Michel Temer (Social Security Reform, among others), the expansion of actions by conservative and ultraconservative groups, which culminated in the election of President Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018; and during his government, the implementation of new neoliberal reforms, such as in labor, the resizing of curricular policies and others associated with it within the scope of the Ministry of Education, the open space for the emergence of various denialisms, amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in 2020. Certainly, the descriptive enumeration of the events listed, and selected, does not account for plots and storylines where different subjects acted.

We could add other events, the ones mentioned here serve to highlight another key

to reading the 2012-2022 milestones: if there was, in 2012, an ongoing democratization process, with all its ills and contradictions, in 2022, we can talk of democratic crisis, in light of the actions of the current federal government, nostalgic for the authoritarianism of the Brazilian military dictatorship, riddled with environmental and scientific denialism. This reading key, which leads us to situate and question the Brazilian democratic order, appears for us as one of the contexts during which, with its own rhythms and questions, debates on curricula and structures of Basic Education were instituted and elapsed, particularly regarding the stage for High School.

In the Temer government (2016-2018), let us remember, the High School Reform was edited as a provisional measure, at the end of 2016 (MP 746/16), and later approved as law in 2017 (Law 13,415/17), redirecting the premises established in the previous versions of the BNCC, between 2015 and 2017, for the postulation of a BNCC for High School at the end approved in 2018. Such redirection does not seem fortuitous, meeting pressure from entities and groups that bet on the restructuring of High School, understood as the most problematic stage of Basic Education. Either because of the questions about its functions in the formation process of young people and adults, or because of the historical mark, in the Brazilian case, of being the funneled bottleneck where many entered, and few left, not completing the three series foreseen in the regular course. The fact that the BNCC for High School has adapted to the reform approved in 2017 seems to us to be an important fact to understand the very different designs of this curricular document compared to the BNCC requirements for the Elementary Education³.

The High School Reform, among other changes, instituted training itineraries under the premise of making the functioning of this stage of schooling more flexible and rational. In the materialization of this reform in the BNCC for High School, it is valued, among other prescriptions, the possibility of students opting for a formation with objectives and content emphases – the training itineraries - more in accordance with their tastes and preferences, or in terms of the which appears with many repetitions and emphases, in the “life project”, adapted to the challenges of the contemporary world and integrated with the “basic preparation for work and citizenship” (BRASIL, 2018, p. 461-479).

The reading of such considerations, in the way they are stated, led us to the perception that there are very different conceptions of “teacher subject” and “student subject”,

³ There is already an expressive bibliographic production, in a constant process of expansion, about the different versions of the BNCC and the impacts of the New High School (NEM), whose acronym opens to the criticism of the many rationalizations/simplifications then prescribed. Among such criticisms, we dialogue more directly with: FERRETI, SILVA, 2017; SILVA, 2018; LOPES, 2019; WHITE, WHITE, IWASSE, NAGASHIMA, 2019; ARAÚJO, SILVA, 2021 (Organized dossier). Within the limits of our reflections in this article, it would not be possible to carry out a more exhaustive inventory of this rich bibliographic production.

manifested, in particular, in the erasure of the teaching agency and in the valorization of spaces of deliberation of students under the topic of “youth protagonism”, regarding their “life project” and the choice of their “formation itinerary”, in a school taken as a “space that welcomes youth” (BRASIL, 2018, p. 465-468), expression highlighted in bold, and thus “shouted” at least four times between pages 464 and 468.

The erasure of the teaching agency is also manifested through the number of times the word teacher appears in the text referring to the High School stage in the final version of the BNCC of 2018: three times (BRASIL, 2018, p. 468, 529, 591). It is important to add that none of them appears in the specific part of the Applied Human and Social Sciences area (BRASIL, 2018, p. 561-579), the most dehydrated part, let us say, due to the absence of prescriptions more directly associated with the curricular components that it comprises, in this case, History, geography, philosophy and sociology.

When reading these prescriptions against the grain, emergent is the impression that the teacher was absent... And let us complement it in an imaginative way: the classroom projected in the text is an idealized space, filled of students exercising their youthful protagonism, with full autonomy and science of what they intend to do or study, welcomed by the school, in equal socio-cultural and economic conditions.

Dilemmas of contemporary subjectivity in teacher and student agencies

It is important to situate, so that we can continue our reflections, which conception of the subject and their condition in the world – of subjectivity – guide our interpretation and our criticism of the absence/presence of the agencies of teachers and students in the BNCC for High School. In the junction of reflections about education and subjectivity, in this text, we chose as anchor the considerations of Alicia de Alba and Michael A. Peters, in the collection *Sujetos em proceso: diversidad, movilidad y políticas de subjetividad em siglo XXI* (ALBA, PETERS, 2017), to cite them:

We need to re-examine not only the time, history and development of the subject, its multiple genealogies within the history of modern philosophy and its active reinterpretation and reinscription, but also its geographical place and movement, as a body in space and in motion. Across space, across margins and borders, on the limits of culture. This means, in part, the movement of bodies across borders – national boundaries, cultural traditions and, increasingly, in new and unexpected ways, across North-South configurations of rich and poor nations – to come to terms with intercultural and international processes, exchanges, hybridization, appropriation, cultural contact and creative style. (ALBA, PETERS, 2017, p. 20).

Alba and Peters’ emphasis on the examination of the subject as “a body in a space and in movement across margins and borders, within the limits of culture” seems opportune, bearing in mind that such an approach does not rule out historicities and

temporalities, intrinsic to conceptions of subject formulated by modern and postmodern philosophers. Thus, they seek to highlight the presence of diverse and plural subjects, in movement, in the bodies that enable and carry out their actions and perceptions in the world, mapped by the many inequalities between these bodies in the world, among them, those that demarcate borders between rich and poor nations, and we would add, the symbolic and political boundaries of the many inequalities of societies like in Brazil, among others with colonial pasts.

The demarcation of difference and inequality between subjects as bodies in the world, constituting themselves as subjects in negotiation/resistance in the face of the many manifested inequalities, sometimes, in cultural encounters and disagreements between individuals, peoples and communities, makes it possible to question the premise that there is a universal human subject exempt from any marker of race, class, gender and sexual orientation.

In Portuguese language, as pointed out by Grada Kilomba, the word subject is identified as masculine, for which there is no possibility of inflecting it in other genders, or being neutral, as in the case of the English language (KILOMBA, 2019, p. 11- 21). In Grada Kilomba's critical apprehension, this datum – apparently exempt from any homogenizing premises of the human condition – is one of the elements that make it possible to take as an equal who is different, in this case, as to the gender that identifies him/her before others, thus instituting one of the their identities as a person. In the way we speak and communicate, there are elements that say things, and as reiterated by Kilomba, there are phallogocentric footprints, sometimes patriarchal, in the semantics of the Portuguese language.

This semantic issue is also addressed by Adriana Cavarero. By analyzing how the traditions of Western philosophy of a logocentric character were based on generalizing abstractions such as Man, Subject and Being, Cavarero contrasted these traditions with the bet on a philosophy of vocal expression, taking the voice as an index of singularization and expression and the recognition of the uniqueness of each person in the dialogic relationship in which speech can only be deciphered if there is listening (CAVARERO, 2011).

The considerations of Alba, Peters, Kilomba and Cavarero, notwithstanding their specificities in terms of the questions that guided the works mentioned here, can be inserted in the debates and their developments about what some called the linguistic turn (PALTI, 1998; REVEL, 2010), and associated with it, the subjective turn (SARLO, 2007; ARFUCH, 2010) and the ethical-political turn (BEVERNAGE, 2012; RANGEL, 2019).

The reflection on the human condition as a being of language has resized analyzes of subjectivity, which, in the case of the so-called Social and Human Sciences, particularly in History, has had at least three shifts that we seek to highlight here: in the problematization of the narrative based on epistemological aspects associated with the scrutiny of their cognitive potentials; in the consideration that there are experiences

of time, being the key to the category of time also an object to be investigated in its cultural and sociological specificities; and in the opening for the historicization of the conceptions about the subject and its identities/alterities.

Certainly, the reflections on the narrative-temporality-subjectivity conceptual triad were not invented by the debates associated with the linguistic, subjective and ethical-political turns. In any case, the confluence of certain discussions and the publication of reference texts between the 1960s and the present, in academic spaces of different societies on all continents, created other configurations and instrumentalizations about the epistemological and cognitive dividends related to the conceptual triad mentioned in the scope of the so-called Humanities, including Education and the field of History Teaching (MONTEIRO, 2020; GABRIEL, 2020).

In the significant and extensive critical fortune about the “dilemmas of contemporary subjectivity”, in the appropriation of the analytical key used by Leonor Arfuch (ARFUCH, 2010), we chose to recover some of the reflections of Judith Butler (BUTLER, 2015) and Paul Ricoeur (RICOEUR, 2010).

When thinking about how a human subject can understand and take a stand on moral issues in the search for an ethical life, Butler presents a way of circumscribing subjectivity as something transitory, in formation, immersed in singular and socio-historical experiences, involved in the responsibilities towards life in society, under strong premises of historicizing and valuing the differences between bodies in the world. In Butler’s words:

When the “I” seeks to make an account of itself, it can start with itself, but it will discover that this “self” is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own narration capacities; indeed, when the “I” seeks to give an account of itself without failing to include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, of necessity, become a social theorist. The reason for this is that the “I” has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms. [...] **To some extent, the social conditions of its emergence always dispossess the “I”.** (BUTLER, 2015, p. 18, emphasis added).

The imputations of what is at stake with the account on oneself, the “becoming a social theorist”, refer to a subject that does not exist by itself, being, necessarily, a criticism of the conception that adheres to essentialist premises of the full autonomy and self-referentiality of rationalist bases in the scope of certain Enlightenment traditions. The apprehension that the “I” does not have a History that is not implicated in the norms and social temporality that establish it as a subject in the world underlies what Butler understands as its dispossession.

By postulating that we are not born an “I” possessing subjectivity, Butler both indicates the inexorable relational dependence on the other and underlines the vulnerability and uniqueness of this I that becomes subject to living and acting in the world; so that “the

self is not born without a previous encounter, without a primary relationship, without a set of inaugural impressions from elsewhere” (BUTLER, 2015, p. 79).

Butler undertakes to think about the social and historical implications that form a subject who recognizes itself as such in the light of its vulnerabilities, deliberations, and the normative imputations of living with others. Such postulation, however, is based on another, namely: that the lived and the livable do not fit in the narrated. As Butler ponders:

The singular body to which a narrative refers cannot be captured by a full narrative. [...]. **The subject always gives an account of oneself to another, whether conjured or existing, and the other establishes the scene of address as a more primary ethical relation than a reflexive effort the subject makes to give an account of oneself.** (BUTLER, 2015, p. 33, emphasis added).

By referring to the “I” that narrates itself as a singular body, highlighting that this body cannot be contained in the narrative, Butler signals to our corporeity as an expression of what we are and how we are in the world. Corporeality crossed by markers of race, speech, gender, and many others, discursively elaborated based on this corporeity, often consolidating power relations that normalize hierarchies, exclusions and degrees of precariousness in the living conditions of many subjects, in the most diverse societies, especially those ruled by patriarchal, misogynistic, racist and homophobic essentialities, and, let us add, colonial pasts.

By situating corporeality and the intrinsic limits of an operation of giving an account of oneself, Butler indicates the ethical and political developments from which we take responsibility not only for ourselves, but for others, deliberating on the conditions of life and living that need to be changed. In these terms, Butler states that:

The self in question is clearly “formed” within a set of social conventions that raise the question of whether it is possible to have a good life within a bad one, and whether we should, by reinventing ourselves with and for another, participate in the recrafting of social conditions. [...] The answer to the demand to give an account of oneself is about understanding at the same time the formation of the subject and its relationship with responsibility. [...] If certain versions of self-concerned moral inquiry lead us back to a narcissism supported through socially imposed modes of individualism, and if that narcissism leads to ethical violence [...], then it seems obligatory, if not urgent, to reformulate the question of responsibility as follows: **how are we formed within social life, and at what cost?** (BUTLER, 2015, p. 170-171, emphasis added).

The parts emphasized in the previous quotes, in our understanding, make it possible to complement the emphasis on bodies in movement/subjects in process alluded to in Alba and Peters’ considerations, having as a guide Judith Butler’s reflections, including “dispossession”, which marks subjects as bodies in the world formed by

social conditions over which they cannot account for authorship, but in which they are implicated, being also challenged by other subjects, so that they come (or not) to deliberate on acts that change social conditions and norms in force.

In Butler's "dispossessed" subject, there is a call for the ethical and political dimensions of the processes of subject and subjectivity formation, for the critique of the values of individualistic narcissism, dear to a conception of the subject that makes itself by itself, and for the self-centered possession of decisions about themselves and their lives that are uncommitted to other subjects and their living conditions.

The concept of "student-subject", in the way it appears in the BNCC for High School, especially regarding the "life project" and the choice of formative itineraries, seems to us to be very close to a self-referenced subject who exercises his/her youthful protagonism as something that was born along with him/her, since he/she assumed the nickname of young man/woman. Likewise, there is no consideration that emphasizes the crossing of this "student-subject" through contemporary ethical and political dilemmas, including the inequalities that hierarchize and exclude, with brutality and violence, the differences between individuals and groups in the ongoing democratic crisis. The young person who exercises his/her protagonism in terms of the BNCC for High School also does not seem affected by the many identity issues associated with social markers of class, race, gender, among others.

Such a conception of "student-subject" deals, in complementarity, through the emphasis on a school that welcomes youth, with the erasure of the "teacher subject", emptying the protagonism of this agent in the formative processes that take place in the school settings of Basic Education. In this way of conceiving, the teacher becomes an elliptical subject, being there, in schools, but not being named and referenced in the singularization and valorization of their intellectual and professional actions and identities.

Complementing Butler's reflections, we dialogue with Paul Ricoeur, in analyzes of the concept of narrative identity, which make it possible to reveal some of the procedures intrinsic to the act of narrating, in which the apprehension of historical temporalities and subjective identity constructions are instituted and re-elaborated. by words aggregated in plot (RICOEUR, 2010).

The act of narrating, when producing a plot, configures a temporal identity and a narrative intelligence, generating knowledge. The completion of this cognitive act does not end in the text itself, but in the reader. By having as a reference the value of reception manifested in the acts of reading, Ricoeur seeks to situate the interdependencies between narrative and life, adding how human life in its actions and perceptions in the world is symbolically mediated, a kind of virtuous circle between human experience, symbolic systems and narratives that we elaborate and listen to.

The apprehension and understanding of the world in which we live, made possible by the act of narrating, has a fundamental value for Ricoeur as it allows the apprehension

of our temporal experiences, in terms of building intelligibility for the relations between past, present and future. This apprehension of temporal experience would manifest itself for Ricoeur in our narrative identities, as he emphasizes:

I insist on this expression “narrative identity”, because what we call subjectivity is neither an incoherent sequence of events, nor an immutable substantiality inaccessible to becoming. It is precisely the kind of identity that only narrative composition can create through its dynamism. [...] This definition of subjectivity by narrative identity has numerous implications [...]. This is how we learn to become the narrator of our own story without becoming fully the author of our own lives. [...] Allow me to say [...] that what we call the subject is never given at the start. Or, if it is, it risks being reduced to the narcissistic, selfish and greedy ego [...] What we lose on the side of narcissism we regain on the side of narrative identity. In place of an ego in love with itself, a self is born instructed by cultural symbols [...] (RICOEUR, 2010, p. 210-211).

Ricoeur’s considerations on narrative identity complement Butler’s considerations in the sense of not only highlighting the criticism of the subject who makes himself/herself, in terms of “a narcissistic ego”, but also in the sense of highlighting the dimensions of construction of subjective identities, temporalizing them and implying them in a relational way with other subjects. As we are interested in emphasizing, in particular, such identities are constituted in the formative processes of subjectivities in which the reading, apprehension and deciphering of the world are carried out through many types of learning, among them the school ones, these, certainly, enable us to “become the narrator of our own story”.

In the case of schools, formative processes take place in communication situations where subjects - teachers and students - who are distinct in their identities, mutually imply each other in the enunciation of voices and in the sharing of attentive listening to these plural voices, on a democratic basis.

By erasing and eliding the teaching agency, the text of the BNCC for High School, particularly in the Applied Human and Social Sciences, establishes an ethic that invests in disregarding the teacher and, consequently, a conception of dialogic teaching/learning between teachers and students in the diverse, complex and conflicting universe of school spaces in contemporary Brazil. On the other hand, in the same text, it is observed the inflation of the protagonism of young people without emphasizing the school formative processes, in which teachers act, so that students can become “narrators of their own stories” on bases that problematize class, race and gender frontiers.

Such investment does not seem naive to us, if we recover the political conditions in which the High School Reform and the BNCC itself related to this stage came to be approved. Among these conditions, it is worth mentioning the situations in which teachers were affected by the attacks of the movement “School without Party” (PENNA, 2016), under the premise that their professional work was reduced to an assumed

ideological indoctrination. In this context of democratic crisis and depreciation of emancipatory educational practices, perhaps we can interpret what the text of the BNCC for High School informs without necessarily saying it in full. In this direction, it is worth reflecting on how the concept of democracy is mobilized in this curriculum document.

The student subject in the BNCC proposal: formation for democratic culture

In view of building a more just, democratic and inclusive society, a condition for citizenship and for the improvement of the student as a human person, schools must be constituted in spaces that allow students to value: non-violence and dialogue, enabling the expression of different, divergent or conflicting opinions and points of view; respect for the dignity of the other, favoring coexistence between different people; combating discrimination and violations of persons or social groups; political and social participation; and the construction of personal and collective projects, based on freedom, social justice, solidarity and sustainability. (BRASIL, 2018, p. 465).

The passage above makes clear the ethical-political orientation that supports the idea of the subject of learning proposed in the BNCC: the text projects a subject that is formed for the appreciation of democratic culture. The foundations of democracy provide the ethical regulation from which the curriculum and school culture must move. What is at stake is not just knowledge and adherence to the rules of functioning of democratic institutions in terms of liberal-representative democracy, but the formation of a student who guides his/her political practices in terms of substantial democratic values. In other words, in addition to the praise of representative democracy as a political regime, the BNCC text points to the formation of a student-subject who values ethically oriented principles for democratic practices in everyday life – in life and at school – such as: dialogue with difference, the expression of opposing points of view, the repudiation of all types of discrimination, the defense of freedom, social justice, solidarity and sustainability. We are talking, therefore, about a democratic program that suggests the development of civil, political and social rights as a condition for the improvement of citizenship and guarantee of social justice – without altering or compromising the development of the capitalist mode of production and its fundamental bases, such as private property, profit and social inequality.

In this sense, the BNCC maintains a link with previous documents and curricular guidelines, elaborated towards the Law of Directives and Bases of Education, of 1996 - a text that synthesizes, for education, the aspirations of the democratic program defined by the Constitution of 1988. Since then, many government actions, within the scope of curricular guidelines and prescriptions, were based on the commitment to the formation of democratic citizenship (BITTENCOURT, 2018, p. 142). It concerns a movement

started in the 1990s that gave the Union the responsibility of establishing principles for Basic Education together with states and municipalities. In addition to the national character, there was an emphasis on curricular guidelines and prescriptions in which “more important than learning content related to an area of knowledge is to develop procedures that allow the student to learn to know” (MAGALHAES, 2006, p. 53).

When mentioning the purposes of the Human and Social Sciences area for High School, the text highlights the need for subjective formation of the student in two major directions: formation for citizenship based on democratic principles and basic preparation for the world of work. Political life and the world of work appear as structuring axes of the skills and competences proposed for the area. It is expected, roughly speaking, that the student-subject of learning is able to identify the political and economic projects in dispute; understand the functioning rules of society, the logic of power, the theories around the State.

The study of the categories Politics and Work in High School allows students to understand and analyze the diversity of roles of multiple subjects and their mechanisms of action and identify the political and economic projects in dispute in different societies. These categories help students to act with a view to building democracy, in the midst of confrontations generated in production and work relations. (BRAZIL, 2018, p. 557).

This investment in the concept of democracy as an ethical-political framework for school curricula of History finds a link with another temporal layer of context: the aftermath of World War II and its unfolding throughout the second half of the 20th century. According to Circe Bittencourt (2018), in the context of political and ideological redefinitions, under the sponsorship of international entities such as Unesco, the dissemination of a teaching of “History for peace” was proposed, pointing to a curricular renewal on an international scale oriented towards the appreciation of democracy and human rights (BITTENCOURT, 2018, p. 139). The teaching of History was linked, in this sense, to a larger political environment in the post-war period: in the face of the enormous ethical ills promoted by Nazi-fascism, democracy acquired a universal value and legitimacy. According to Luis Felipe Miguel:

Since the Second World War, in a continuous process, democracy has gained universal legitimacy. In Western countries, it is the only political regime capable of guaranteeing the acceptance of the governed. All over the world, the most diverse regimes sought to adapt the label of ‘democratic’ to themselves, generating a myriad of adjective democracies, from the old ‘people’s democracies’ of Eastern Europe to the ‘Islamic democracy’ of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi from Libya; or, at least, they claimed to be necessary steps to build democracy, like the national security dictatorships in South America.” (MIGUEL, 2014, p. 12).

In this regard, it is worth highlighting the reflection of Cristian Laville (1999). It presents an overview of the relationship between the school curriculum of History and democratic perspective, also considering the post-war experience as a fundamental landmark. For the author, the valorization of democratic culture inaugurated in the post-war period gradually led to the substitution, in the teaching of History, of the perspective of forming the “subject-citizen” – focused on national instruction and the exaltation of national values and symbols – for the formation of the citizen-participant in terms of democracy (LAVILLE, 1999, p. 126). The objective became the instrumentalization of young people to participate democratically in society, developing in them intellectual and affective capacities, incorporating properly democratic characteristics, such as openness to dialogue and to difference, as a procedural element of teaching-learning and objective of learning. This novelty promoted a decisive change, according to Laville: “the pedagogy of History moved from a pedagogy centered on teaching to a pedagogy centered on student learning.” (LAVILLE, 1999, p. 127).

Understood in this way, the teaching-learning process is only effective in learning, and ethical validation criteria are related to the ways in which learning subjects apprehend the contents of History for life – in the author’s terms, “to form autonomous and critical individuals and lead them to develop adequate intellectual and affective capacities, making them work with open and varied historical contents” (LAVILLE, 1999, p. 127). In this sense, it is no longer a question of making use of the History taught for the purposes of national identity in 19th century terms, or as a mere means of disseminating historical research, but of orienting knowledge about History to an ethical-political sense according to which democratic values are at the center. It is the memory of Nazi-fascism and the holocaust that modifies the question about what is the purpose of teaching History: it cannot be at the service of violence and the persecution of minorities and, also, it cannot be exempt from the issues of the contemporary world.

Beyond knowing and valuing democracy through historical studies, what is at stake is to assume a democratic perspective of approach. In this regard, Abreu and Rangel (2015) help us extend Laville’s argument by proposing that this ethical-political reflection generated in the post-war period assigns to History teaching the task of incorporating and instrumentalizing the means to promote a trend towards democratization, assuming alterity as a decisive imperative (ABREU and RANGEL, 2015, p. 9). In this sense, History teaching would have the potential to produce multiple rather than unifying narratives, undertaking the transition from the production of delimited and ethnocentric identities that took care of organizing the meanings of truth and reality since the 19th century, to the post-war investment in the primacy of difference (ABREU and RANGEL, 2015, p. 10). By emphasizing the idea of the *tendency to democracy*, the authors highlight the character of movement that involves this concept.

And this movement, which emphasizes democracy in its historicity, elucidates fundamental questions for us to think about the text of the BNCC: when taking

democracy as a universal and ahistorical value, assuming the existence of student-subjects previously willing to consecrate it, would it not be promoting the political emptying of the concept? In the BNCC, the valorization of democratic culture presents itself as an ethical-political regulator for the formation of the student-subject, thus responding to an international context of agreement around the advantages of democracy for a life in common – but also of an expansion about the meanings of democracy. What Luis Felipe Miguel calls “adjectivized democracy” imposes the risk of emptying the concept itself, so that an authoritarian regime could legitimize authoritarian actions in the name of democracy. The crisis of contemporary democracy highlights the disputes over this concept: even though the discourses and practices of extreme right-wing leaders reveal the rupture of the consensus in relation to the fundamental ethical principles of democracy – such as the right to life, human rights and non-discrimination minority groups, for example – the exaltation of “true democracies” inaugurated by these leaders is still strong (RUNCIMAN, 2018; LEVITSKY and ZIBLATT, 2018).

But anyway, what is the place of the humanities and History as a school curriculum component in this process? If the BNCC suggests valuing democratic culture as a regulatory mainspring, is it possible to face the contemporary democratic crisis with the instruments offered by the BNCC?

Democracy as a historical concept in motion and the BNCC

Indeed, due to the tensions and uncertainties underlying it, democracy constitutes the political system in a broadly open field. If for more than two centuries it has appeared as the unavoidable organizing principle of every modern political order, the imperative that translates this evidence has always been as intense as it is imprecise. *As the founder of an experience of freedom, democracy never fails to constitute a problematic solution to establish a polis of free men.* The dream of the good and the reality of indeterminacy have long been united in it. What is particular about this coexistence is that it is not a distant ideal on which everyone would agree; the divergences about its definition refer to the means used to carry it out. [MY EMPHASIS] (ROSANVALLON, 2010, p. 74).

This is how the political scientist Pierre Rosanvallon characterizes the modern concept of democracy: not only in its potential to unify dreams of a fairer public life – endowed with greater freedom and/or equality–, but also assuming an essentially open, vacillating and doomed to indeterminacy character. For him, the definitions of democracy, in modern terms, would be linked to a permanent state of becoming, so that the limits of the democratic would never be clearly defined a priori. This opens the way for citizens to criticize and complement them – a state of continuous agency. Democracy is attributed a vacillating, unstable character, because in democratic societies the conditions of common life are never defined by tradition or imposed by

an authority; it presents itself, in this sense, as a kind of incomplete and problematic solution to common life, which leads to the production of a certain unease underlying its History, without ever “resisting a categorization free of discussions” (ROSANVALLON, 2010, p. 74). Such a characteristic gives opportunity to a History of disenchantment and indeterminacy based on democratic principles: “Such vacillation constitutes the impulse of a search and a dissatisfaction that strives simultaneously to become explicit” (ROSANVALLON, 2010, p. 75). In other words, it is a political regime that brings together the aspirations of social participation of the common man in political life, doomed to the vacillations and desires for progress that this man may come to seek, always causing a certain feeling of dissatisfaction that drives him to agency, to the search for improvement, but which, being so infinite, tends to cause frustration.

It is a temporalized concept, in the terms of Reinhart Koselleck (KOSELLECK, 2006). For him, the comprehensiveness and elasticity, proper to the concept of democracy, come from a modern way of grasping political concepts. A temporalized form, in the sense that it is crossed by the historical-social circumstances of production, marked by a present time that points to a becoming and to the possibility of change in the future. Thus, temporalized concepts bet on a present temporal circumscription, but are based “only partially on experience”, since “the expectation they place on the time to come is in inverse proportion to the experience they lack” (KOSELLECK, 2006, p. 297). Koselleck also explains that this change is a symptom of a broader use of political concepts beyond the circle of the nobility, the scholars, which shaped pre-modern state society in a hierarchical linguistic structure.

In other words, the modern political vocabulary based on the Enlightenment Political Philosophy and on fundamental experiences such as the Independence of the United States and the French Revolution, made the dissemination of that new political vocabulary more comprehensive, incorporating the common citizen as an interlocutor and potential enunciator and disseminator of such values, making political practices available to increasingly heterogeneous and plural groups, therefore capable of producing distortions of meaning – distortions not in the negative sense of the term. “There was a battle – in revolutionary France this was very quick – over concepts; language control became more urgent as the number of people who needed to be reached increased” (KOSELLECK, 2006, p. 300); “Temporization, which at first was inscribed in historical theory, from then on penetrated deeply into everyday life” (KOSELLECK, 2006, p. 301). In short, politics and the use of concepts instrumentalized the action of common people, including their aspirations for the future; fighting in the name of the Revolution, for example, grants another statute to experiences of civil wars.

In a temporalized perspective, traditional or recent concepts are now examined for their historicity, that is, for their ability to define hitherto unpublished experiences of the present, producing a past-present-future relationship no longer anchored in the possibility that the future could repeat the past. Faced with unprecedented conjunctures,

historical subjects behave in a varied and unpredictable way: “Men have lost much of their confidence in their pasts, in their power to rearticulate, to reorganize the present” (ARAÚJO and RANGEL, 2015, p. 320). It is this loss of trust in the past that launches the modern political agent into action, betting that the historical experience of politics is always susceptible to modification – Marx’s famous phrase that “all that is solid melts into air” summarizes these aspirations. The concept of democracy covers, in its vacillating and unfinished condition in Rosanvallon’s terms, this potential for action mobilized from its historicity.

If the concept of democracy appears in the BNCC text as an ethical-political regulator towards which the formation of the High School student subject is directed, the concept of democracy presented in the National Common Curricular Base does not incorporate the historicity that enhances political agency in the terms outlined here by Rosanvallon and Koselleck.

The excerpt below shows a general feature that is recurrent in the propositions of the BNCC for the area of Human Sciences: the emphasis on argumentative elaboration, based on the understanding of the mechanisms of the functioning of society in its historical dynamics.

In High School, analyzes of events that took place in different circumstances allow us to understand processes marked by continuity, by changes and ruptures. Therefore, **analyzing, comparing and understanding different societies**, their material culture, their formation and development in time and space, the nature of their institutions, the reasons for inequalities, conflicts, to a greater or lesser extent, and power relations within society or in the global context are some of the main challenges proposed by the area of High School. (BRASIL, 2018, p 550-551, our emphasis).

The suggestion is to get to know the historical experiences, the nature of institutions of power and the way in which they are historically articulated. The greatest effort, as highlighted, is to analyze, compare and understand different societies, providing the student with the tools to understand how the social world is constructed. What immediately draws attention in this passage and in the text as a whole is a descriptive purpose that seeks to highlight problems without facing them with the instruments made available by History.

Specific competence 6, which deals more immediately with the democratic issue, elucidates decisive issues for our argument:

SPECIFIC COMPETENCE 6 Participate, personally and collectively, in public debate in a conscientious and qualified manner, respecting different positions, with a view to enabling choices aligned with the exercise of citizenship and one’s life project, with freedom, autonomy, critical awareness and responsibility. In this specific competence, it is intended to deal with political language (aristocracy,

democracy, republic, authoritarianism, populism, dictatorship, liberalism, Marxism, fascism, Stalinism, etc.), showing how the terms have undergone changes throughout History. Therefore, each of the words needs to be explained and interpreted in specific historical circumstances. Interpretations can be varied and the use of certain words in everyday life can lead to conflicts, especially as they involve political doctrines that are often controversial. Faced with this great challenge, it is important to identify political and social demands from different societies and social groups, highlighting cultural issues, especially those that concern indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. The forms of physical and symbolic violence, the recognition of different levels of inequality and the unequal relationship between countries indicate the importance of expanding the theme of Human Rights, related to the acquisition of conscience and accountability both at the individual, community, national and international levels. (BRASIL, 2018, p. 565).

Reading the BNCC for High School together, and the passage above in particular, one gets the impression that it was prepared from a horizon of stabilization of the concept of democracy. In other words, it is assumed that there is a consensus among the subjects of learning about the advantages of democratic culture, as if it did not demand a continuous exercise of convincing citizens about the containment of authoritarian risks and the need to deepen democratic values. For the formative purpose of the text to be successful, it is necessary that the student already has the means of valuing democratic culture in advance. This would explain, for example, the proposition of a descriptive approach to political languages involving the emergence of authoritarian systems and the analysis of concepts such as fascism and dictatorship in view of their open and varied interpretations. The concern seems to be, strictly, the exposure of controversies.

Read in this time of democratic crisis that is ours – a crisis that does not seem to be passing – in which democratic values are no longer agreed upon, the solution proposed in the text seems insufficient. Faced with the crisis, we start from the assumption that the interlocutors in action on the public scene, including at school and in the classroom, are not previously convinced about the advantages of democracy. And this raises the need to historicize it, understanding democracy as a concept in motion.

But anyway, who is this subject? History teaching and tackling the crisis

This article was written considering the prerogative of the contemporary democratic crisis: the debate on the BNCC for High School, the circumstances of its elaboration between 2012-2022, the absent teacher and the concepts of democracy proposed for the student-subjects. A crisis that delimits the horizon of writing and reading of the BNCC itself: in a document so busy with the valorization of democratic culture, it is worth asking, how the reading of this text instrumentalizes the subjects of learning,

teachers and students, for the politic agency vocalized for the defense of democracy? This vacillating concept, unfinished and available for a coming-to-be. Even more: what if democracy is under threat, if the horizon of action becomes not only deepening, but reestablishment of democratic pacts established in the post-war period? And in the face of a fraying of the democratic pact, what is the place of History teaching in this context? The reading of the BNCC promoted here is guided by these questions.

By bringing up the subjects of learning and the conceptions of democracy proposed in the text of the BNCC for High School for the area of Applied Human and Social Sciences, we propose not only an examination of conceptual absences and presences in the document, but a reflection on the senses of democracy possible to be built in the school in these times of crisis. We are talking about subjects of learning, teachers and students, implicated in the dilemmas of their subjectivities in formation, in the establishment of a democratic pact, read and seized in the light of their historicity, in the perspective of enhancing the agency in the present time and in the expectation of the desire for change.

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Text received in 05/14/2022

Text approved in 10/21/2022