Can ethnography help raise voice, participation and identity awareness? Notes from fieldwork with Portuguese children in Germany

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Résumé :

Cet article présente une partie des résultats d'une étude anthropologique menée auprès d'enfants de descendants portugais vivant en Allemagne. Très peu d'études ont analysé en profondeur l'expérience de ces enfants, laquelle est révélatrice de la négociation des identités ethniques qui imprègnent leur vie quotidienne à la fois comme interlocuteurs et médiateurs de la culture, mais également comme participants actifs de la construction de leur propre citoyenneté. Cette étude ambitionne de promouvoir "une vision de l'intérieur", telle que défendue par Knörr (2009: 24), et corrobore le paradigme de James & Prout (1990:8-9) dans lequel l'ethnographie est l'approche méthodologique la plus adaptée pour écouter et percevoir les voix des enfants et rendre visible leur agency. Si, d'un côté, elle illustre le potentiel de l'ethnographie, cette étude met également en lumière des dimensions de l'ethnographie qui peuvent entraver sa pratique avec les enfants en suggérant les implications de portée épistémologique de son usage.

Mots-clés : enfants, ethnographie, diaspora portugaise, voix

Abstract :

This article presents partial results from an anthropological study conducted with children of Portuguese descent living in Germany. Very few studies have gone deep into the experience of these children to reveal the negotiation of ethnic identities that permeates their daily life as interlocutors and mediators of culture, and their roles as active participants in building their own citizenship. The study aims to provide "a view from within", as argued by Knörr (2009:24), and corroborates James & Prout's paradigm (1990:8-9) which proposes ethnography as the most adequate methodological approach to listen to and perceive children's voices and give visibility to their agency. At the same time as it shows ethnography's potential, the study also gives evidence to aspects that may hinder its practice with children, suggesting implications of epistemological concern.

Keywords : Children, Ethnography, participation, Portuguese Diaspora, participation, voice

Introduction

After many years in which I studied childhood in indigenous societies in Brazil, changing to a European urban research context presented a huge challenge in many aspects. One of them was the time and space constraints for doing ethnography. The passage from a research setting marked by continuous field immersion (in terms of geographic location) and involvement with the subject to another marked by spatial and temporal discontinuity raised methodological questions about the potential of, and limitations to, ethnographic practice, especially within the frame of studies with children. Keeping in mind the paradigms set up in the early 1990´s for the social study of children and childhood – among which ethnography is indicated as the most adequate methodological approach to listen to and perceive children's voices and give visibility to their agency (James & Prout 1990; Toren 1993, 2003; James & Christensen 2000) – in this article[1], I will reflect on both potential and limitations as I present partial results from ethnographic research conducted with children of Portuguese descent living in Germany. Data were collected over 2 years in the context of mother language classes attended by school children in 3 cities, and in a few other educational and cultural activities and settings.

To begin, I briefly present a profile of Portuguese emigration to Germany and of how according to the available literature this community is socially and politically viewed. I also refer to the very few studies devoted to childhood within the Portuguese Diaspora in general and in Germany. Then I present some of the challenges faced to establish the research settings and access the interlocutors in order to conduct the study, as well as some epistemological reflections regarding and limitations imposed on ethnographic practice with children. Next, I introduce a few situations where identity(ies) play a role in children's negotiation of sociability in different interaction contexts. The described situations were chosen because they i) offer insights that may help to illuminate aspects mentioned in literature on children of Portuguese descent living abroad, ii) provide details that can only be revealed through an ethnographic approach, and iii) put in evidence time-space constraints that limit ethnographic practice. Defending the potential of a "view form within", as argued by Knörr (2009:24), and discussing the role of ethnographic practice, I question its viability in current academic agendas.

The Portuguese in Germany

Portuguese immigration to Germany intensified significantly in 1960's, when borders opened to guest-workers(*Gastarbeiter*) from Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain, former Yugoslavia and Turkey (Corceiro 2004; Pinheiro 2010; Soares 2010). The labor agreements with Portugal went from 1964 to 1973 and in this period around 120,000 Portuguese received temporary contracts: men came to work mainly in manufacturing, construction and mining, and women in manufacturing and households. Many 1- to 5-year contracts could be extended and a large number of families stayed longer than initially previewed. The end of the Portuguese dictatorship and colonial wars in 1974, Portugal's accession to the EU in 1986 and the free movement across borders that followed, as well as the possibility given by Germany in the mid-1980´s allowing guest-workers to withdraw the total amount of their retirement pay, caused return migration. It can be said, however, that Portuguese immigration to Germany has continued to the present, supported by family and friends still living in the country and presently by social networks. The present worsening the economic situation in Portugal is leading to increasing emigration flows of academics and high skilled technical workers,

artists and intellectuals as well. Recent census data indicate around 115,000 Portuguese living in Germany, just below than the number registered during the labor agreements. Beyond statistical data, however, and confirming observations of Soares (2010),there is little qualitative information available on these five decades of continuous Portuguese migration to Germany.

The Portuguese in Germany have been a migrant minority nearly unnoticed (Klimt 2005, 2006; Corceiro 2004). Europeans, belonging to the majority religion of the country, they form a quiet and discreet community of reliable workers, who do not cause problems, do not complain, and do not make it into the headlines. Klimt refers to their image as "good foreigners" that helps the Portuguese migrants prevent prejudice, in contrast to the Turks (2006:220). As an ethnic group, Portuguese immigrants in Germany have achieved little social, cultural, political visibility and this certainly has an impact on how children perceive their origin and how they see themselves in their host society, and within a migration context. Klimt says "the Portuguese community is usually apparent only to insiders and the handful of Germans especially interested in Portuguese things" (2005:106), stressing that not even in Hamburg, the largest concentrated Portuguese community (about 10,000), do the Portuguese hold more political power in terms of ethnic affirmation[2]. Caroline Brettell, one of the few anthropologists who dedicated more than four decades of her career researching Portuguese emigrants in different countries, the effect of the Diaspora in Portugal and the returned migration, points out: *"The Portuguese Diaspora is extensive and significant and yet, ironically, it does not hold a central place in the historical and scientific literature on global migrations and diasporic communities"* (Brettell, 2003, p.xviii). Brettell called attention to migrant women in her work, those who leave and those who stay, providing a pioneer perspective (id. 1986).

Research in social sciences that specifically reveals and discusses the experiences of Portuguese children living abroad, or of adults whose childhood was deeply marked by migration, is scarce. Exceptions are the works of anthropologist Rocha Trindade regarding school education for the children of emigrants (1988), of sociologist Fernando Nunes in Canada (1999, 2003) focusing on school achievement and youth work access, and of educational psychologist Guida de Abreu *et al.* who also have researched school achievement of Portuguese children in the UK and overseas (2003). In Europe, and Germany is no exception, social sciences research on childhood migration concentrates on groups of extreme risk, particularly unaccompanied and undocumented minors,refugees, trafficking of children, juvenile delinquency, and the integration of children belonging to families of Islamic origin. Portuguese or Portuguese-descendant children fall out of this mainstream concern. The above mentioned study conducted in England says that "the invisibility of children of Portuguese origin is not a new phenomenon," along with other countries of southern Europe, and argues that making them visible is essential to prevent school failure, risk of isolation, non-participation and social exclusion (Abreu, Silva & Lambert 2003:10), which are key influential factors affecting self-esteem and respect, with impact on those entering youth and adulthood. This suggests that though perhaps not evident in terms of extreme risk, these children need attention as well. Agreeing that "the investigation of these processes is not only of scientific interest but can also give important impetus to the development of strategies and modes of integration that appeal to children and serve their needs" (Knörr & Nunes 2005:16), it seems to me important to reflect on some of the circumstances that may provoke this invisibility and carefully examine the role they play in social, educational and cultural dynamics of integration.

Referring to Germany, Andrea Klimt very briefly mentions Portuguese children while discussing family issues regarding identity and authenticity (2005, 2006), Ingrid Gogolin (2007) has researched

linguistics/bilingualism in official school settings where Portuguese children are a representative group, and Sarah Fürstenau included Portuguese children/youth in her studies of intercultural dynamics at school (2009) and youth's entrance in work market (2005). First results of a recent psycho-linguistic research based on draws done by Portuguese children who attend mother tongue classes in Germany have now started to be published (Melo Pfeifer & Schmidt 2012). Though important because of their different perspectives, theoretical and methodological approaches, social contexts and historical moments, these few studies are far from covering the wide diversity of childhood of Portuguese Diaspora. There is still a lack of empirical and qualitative social studies that go deep into the experience of these children, giving accounts of ethnic identity negotiations that permeate their daily life as interlocutors and mediators of culture, and as active participants in building their own citizenship.

This essay offers a reflection based on ethnographic notes collected with children of Portuguese descent living in three cities in the Ruhr area, NRW, Germany. It aims to provide *"a view from within",* as argued by Knörr (2009:24), and corroborates the methodological proposal initially by James & Prout's paradigm (1990:8-9). Yet, pursuing ethnographic and participative research with children encloses time-space limitations, as well as paradoxes that may risk the study, thus raising epistemological questions. In the next section I present some of the challenges I faced to establish and access the research settings and to develop the study.

Ethnography practice: potential, difficulties and challenges

To conduct ethnographic research in an indigenous village in Brazil is certainly difficult because of distant locations, permission to enter the area, and local political interests, but once these are solved and we manage to get to the village or research setting, we can do ethnographic work 24 hours a day. In general, it is not difficult to have contact with children, not only because most daily life is played outside in open areas and they do not avoid being seen, but also because they are curious about the researcher and follow her or him everywhere, providing lots of interaction situations. In contrast, for the research I pursued in Germany, while I did not have problems accessing the main area where research would take place (big cities, free movement everywhere), the difficulties of contact started when I was already in the specific settings for conducting the study. Though research was to be focused in an urban area of dense migrant population, including Portuguese[3], it was hard to locate them and, most of all, to locate their children. And when I managed, the next problem was the impossibility to spend enough time with them in order to conduct ethnographic research. Yes, because ethnography takes time!

I started my search by going to Portuguese clubs and cultural associations, as I thought these were places where people gather. There I found mainly men playing cards or watching football. Women and children would come more at weekends, they said. I tried at weekends, in fact there were a few women and children, but contact was short and very reserved, at that point not actually helping me much. Second, I went to the educational department, but due to data protection requirements they could not give me any information about Portuguese children enrolled in school, nor say which schools had bigger concentration of them. Then I tried different NGOs and local social institutions that help migrants in their needs of integration, documents and such, but the social workers I spoke to could not recall of Portuguese migrants going there nor could give me any further hints. At the Portuguese Consulate, at first, I only had access to numbers and statistics, which was important at least to locate the cities with highest concentration of Portuguese population and their age sets.

I was also referred to Portuguese as Mother Language courses for school-age children taking place in those cities and I was given contact information for a few teachers. These courses became the best gate-keepers for access to the Portuguese community. More than this, though, they turned into important research contexts on their own, as they were, and still are, a regular meeting point for the families with children, and for the children themselves. I stress this here because my initial intention was to avoid the most recurrent context and age settings in social research with children – schools and children of school age. Not because they are not important, but because they continue to be overvalued at the expense of other ages, contexts and circumstances(Ferreira & Nunes 2014). The fact was that for my ethnographic practice, where time and continuity are crucial factors, I could not have access to any other more suitable research settings than the ones I first considered merely as gate-keepers. The consequence was that a significant part of these children's lives could not be considered in research (or at least not in equal proportion), as I was not allowed access to it, thus hindering the construction of a more complete frame to understand several observed aspects. This calls attention to epistemological implications linked with the limitation of direct contact with the children in highly structured institutional space-time contexts, mediated and controlled by adult authority.

Once contacts were done, before entering the Portuguese courses I officially needed to explain my goals and ask permission to Portuguese and German authorities, teachers and parents. I was lucky no one raised any objection to my presence. If they had said no, I would not have had any chance of contact with the children and the research would not have been possible. Only when all formalities were solved could I finally talk with the children (ages 7 to 16). I told them about my project and got no reaction. Either they did not understand what I said (depending on their language skills – teachers helped translating), or my unusual situation did not mean anything to them. In one of the classes, when I asked if they would agree to my presence and collaborate with me, before they could say or ask anything, the teacher said "even if they do not want, I do, and that is decided". The already quiet kids became even quieter and it was not possible to get their opinions. Of course, not all teachers reacted this way and most of them were concerned that the children be informed and in agreement. No children reacted against my research. But they also did not express traces of a convincing acceptance. These examples are surely useful to reflect upon the ethics of consulting and whether permission to start research with children really depends on children's agreement or on the adult's, and on how abstract the explanation about the research must sound to all, but especially to children. My experience has told me that children's agreement or collaborative acceptance can only show up in their attitudes towards the researcher and her/his work over the time it takes place.

I have followed Portuguese courses in three different cities for two school years, each one once a week, except when it was not convenient for the teacher or when I had other appointments. At this point I should explain that Portuguese is not an optional language subject in German school system. Children of Portuguese descent who want to keep on learning their mother language and have it considered in their school report must enroll in one of these courses[4]. They take place after regular school time, once a week, for 2 or 3 hours. Children from 1st to 10th grade come from different schools and nearby cities to the school that hosts the course. Groups (boys and girls) of at least 15 are extremely heterogeneous regarding age, school grade, proficiency of Portuguese and of German, some were already born and raised in Germany and some just arrived. Most are just of Portuguese descent, but there are children of mixed couples, as well as some from Brazil and Angola. The teacher's task is absolutely not an easy one.

My research was not intended to focus on pedagogic or didactic aspects of learning Portuguese as a mother or heritage language, and I made it clear to the teachers that I was interested in observing the sociability among the children in that specific context, as well as in bridging contact with families and the community. But more than just sitting in the back of the class taking notes, sometimes I helped in different activities and took part in discussions. On these occasions, children answered some questions I asked about this or that, but rarely addressed me on their own. They were busy and concentrated on their tasks. As they arrived on time and left immediately after, these moments also did not provide further chances of getting closer to observe or interact. In order to finish sooner, some of the courses did not even have a break. Therefore, and despite the times children were absent, those brief and discontinuous weekly contacts were my best chance to be with the children.

My field notes in the first year consisted basically of observations of children's interaction with each other in class and their responses to topics they were learning regarding Portugal, such as history, politics, culture and language. With teachers' permission, I took any possible chance to pick up some of these occasions to focus and zoom on issues like identity, belonging and participation. In those very short talks it was often difficult to get reactions. Limited language skills, unusual approach of the topic, shyness, lack of interest? Perhaps everything together. A couple of issues related to a situation they considered unfair provoked some reaction, though: why is the Portuguese language not an official language integrated in school; why must it be studied during extra-curricular hours when friends and colleagues do sports or other free activities, hang out, play or prepare for a test the next day, and why must it be studied in distant host schools; why could they not get support to do this or that in cultural events because they were just a few, contrasting with the Turks or Russians. I perceived these reactions as genuine, but they would quickly move on and forget about what seemed to have bothered them for a little while. It was difficult to understand whether they did not care much or had simply adjusted and accepted the facts as they were. These reactions or comments did not seem to express a concrete wish to change what they were in disagreement with, or suggest that anybody would consequently take their opinions regarding those issues seriously.

During the time these children are learning Portuguese language, history and culture, they are the only ones in the school building[5]. Regular school time is over, the playground and corridors are deserted with the exception of the caretaker and cleaning team In the winter months, it is already dark when the first group takes a break or the second group starts. These conditions are in no way inviting for teachers who work in completely professional isolation. They often resent the lack of exchange and contact with colleagues. It is not inviting for the children as well. Rather, it arouses feelings of rejection and discrimination, even for the few students who show genuine interest for the courses. These, assuming the overload, conform, because there is no alternative. Others keep going because their parents force them.

Next, I present a couple of situations where identity(ies) played a role in negotiating sociability in different interaction contexts. I choose these examples, first, because I think they offer insights that may help elucidate the invisibility, self-esteem, identity awareness, voice and participation mentioned above; second, because I consider they provide details only possible to achieve through ethnography; and last but not least, because of the time-space constraints that limit accompanying the children more widely to witness the unfolding of these situations in their social world.

"I was born here! I am fully German! Yes, I attend the Portuguese classes. And so what?"

The sentence above was spoken by 4th grader Paula[6] during her HSU break. She was reporting on talks with her school peers, at the time it came out her grades would probably qualify her for an *Hauptschule*[7], a secondary school considered for kids of low school achievement, usually attended by many migrant kids[8]. Paula was the daughter of a Portuguese mother and a German father and with a passive knowledge of Portuguese language, and her migrant background emerged critically among her peers when they associated her bad grades with her mother's origin. She could not accept being identified by others as a migrant, as she did not consider herself one. Migrants, in her view, were Turks, Russians, and Africans. Not her, said Paula! This situation was making her very confused. Besides pressure from parents and teachers to improve her grades, otherwise she would go to that school for low-achievers, she had her peers with an eye on her as well. At that time, she could not concentrate and started disturbing her classes, often getting in conflicts with others. It was after one of those fights on the playground, when the teacher tried to calm her down, that she started to talk about the situation at her school and what the other kids were telling her.

I asked Paula how the others knew about her links to Portugal. She said sometimes she wanted to join her peers doing something in the afternoon, but she could not because she needed to attend the Portuguese classes and she told them so. She also told them about her holidays in Portugal and showed them what she had brought back from there. The others found it *geil* (cool). Then, what is the problem, I asked? She said she wanted to stay with her peers and did not want to go to that other school. They make fun of me, she said. In fact, born in Germany, she was not a migrant child. On the other side, in that delicate context she was denying or at least not assuming part of her ancestry, protecting herself from prejudice. Attending those Portuguese classes and going on holiday to Portugal did not seem to be enough to provide a conscious and positive feeling of identity or belonging to the country and culture of her mother, which at any time or circumstance could emerge with pride and without being or presenting a problem. What we were witnessing was exactly the opposite. I regret that I could not accompany her on family holidays nor witness her together with her peers at school, when the comments or discussions about this matter would arise.

Paula's mother said the girl is loved by her peers and discrimination or bullying was never an issue. She could not see any relation between the girl's reaction and her own migrant ancestry. The mother is proud of being a daughter of guest workers and often refers to her childhood, how she arrived in Germany not knowing a word of German and how quickly she learned it. With the daughters she spoke Portuguese at home until they went to Kindergarten at the age of 3. After that, as the father does not speak Portuguese, German language dominated at home as well. She feels "guilty" about that and so she drives almost 80 km once a week to take the girls to the Portuguese course. Paula's anxiety was over as soon as she achieved the desired school score.

Another example is given us by Madalena, a 14-year-old girl. She was born in Portugal and moved to Germany when she was aged 6-7 to join her parents who were working in this country for a couple of years and whom she missed badly. She speaks Portuguese fluently with the northern pronunciation (her family's region) and says over and over "I love Portugal, adore it, Portugal is everything to me, when I'm big I'm going to live there forever." At the same time, in a text she wrote about her holidays in Portugal she referred to missing friends back in Germany and a life which she already "got used to". During the Football World and European Cups she often wore t-shirts with Portuguese colors and emblems and wrote "Portuguese until I die!" on a sheet of paper which she hung on a classroom wall. Interestingly, however, she rarely speaks Portuguese to peers during breaks and the teacher struggles constantly to get her to speak Portuguese in class. The same was

true for her two cousins, close in age, both with similar life paths. Probably, this was a reflection of the effort they have made to learn the German language, needed to achieve good grades and for integration into the school social environment. Being in the HSU course was not enough to switch from one language to the other. At school, speaking German is "automatic" while at home it is Portuguese, she said. I could testify to this in a couple of visits to the family, but I could never go to her school, where she says she never speaks Portuguese except with her cousins when they do not want others to understand. Her school peers are from various nationalities and "they all speak German with each other, but not the Turks". I asked which language she talks with her cousins when they are in the city, at the shops or walking up and down the road. "German! But sometimes also Portuguese," she replied with a little embarrassment, after hesitating for a few seconds. I met her and the cousins in the city-centre in several occasions and they were speaking German to each other. The same happened during Portuguese cultural events, though at the same time they said they became very emotional when they met other Portuguese. When I asked if it mattered that strangers of other nationalities know their origin, after a short silence she shrugged her shoulders and not convincingly said. "they can know".

Even not applying to all, I have observed that most Portuguese families do not speak Portuguese with the children, some not even when they are taking or picking up the kids at the MSU or LCP courses, except the ones who arrived recently and/or have very limited knowledge of German. Very few insist consequently on speaking Portuguese at home or in meeting places like clubs or in events. I have seen children who arrived in Germany just a couple of years ago insisting on speaking German with their parents when they are together with their peers or in public, even when parents reply in Portuguese. It also happened that when I suddenly met the kids in town with peers, they felt uneasy when I spoke with them in Portuguese. The pressure to learn German, the language needed in educational, social and professional settings, can provoke a turn toward a passive knowledge of Portuguese. This may lead towards what Portes, Haller & Fernandez-Kelly (2008:18-19) refer as "dissonant acculturation" in which the need to acquire dominant cultural values and the host society's language goes along with a rejection of values and language of their own family or country of origin, eventually hindering social inclusion, instead of leading towards a "selective acculturation" in which values and language of host society co-exist with family or heritage key-values and language. Therefore, it would be important to have the possibility to follow up with these children for a longer period or repeatedly across different ages.

The third example I would like to present refers to a school project developed by the children. At the end of the school year, as families were going on holiday to Portugal, I asked the children to observe eventual differences and similarities between them and their cousins or other children living in Portugal or coming from another country. I wondered whether it was possible to provoke some discussion about it. In two of the classes, kids returned with stories to tell and interesting comments on comparing themselves to others. Many shared the pleasures of being in a sunny country, comparing them with the long winter and grey weather in Germany, contrasting the freedom they would experience there with the controlled routine in their life in Germany. Some compared the modernity of their German city with the precarious settings in grand parents' villages. Some compared habits like eating, time for sleeping, greeting people, or driving. And there were even some referring to different ways of talking and writing, life styles and economic constraints that may lead to migration. It seemed to me they had fun doing this and were proud they had so much to say about it.

A couple of weeks later I told them I was going to Portugal. They wished me nice holidays. For

them, going to Portugal is always synonymous with holidays. I said I was going to an international congress to share with colleagues what I was learning with them, about how they felt and thought as children of Portuguese descent living abroad. They looked surprised. "Is that really so important?" asked Tomás, 14, living in Germany for 4 years, quite fluent in Portuguese and one of the most active kids in our small discussions. I said "much more than what you think." Then he proposed that they should be the ones going there and telling the people about their lives in Germany, and that the ones in Portugal should come to Germany and see for themselves how they live. All faces were kind of glowing waiting for an answer. With immediate agreement of the teacher, this talk was the cornerstone of an exchange project whose objective was to share and meet (virtually or personally) Portuguese children living in Portugal and/or in other countries. To their argument that such a trip is expensive, I said they could do something to raise money. When I returned from Portugal they presented a list of actions to help finance their travelling costs: tombola and raffle tickets, selling old toys and cloths, selling cakes, coffee and pop-corn at events, organizing film afternoons, planning discos and a dance competition, and so on. Though planned within the classes, those actions took place on weekends, mostly at the local Portuguese association which was willing to support the project, and at street events. They raised money during the whole school year. At the same time we looked for potential partners all over the world interested in the exchange. A 5-day study trip to Lisbon, where they met up with their exchange peers at a Portuguese school, took place a couple of months later.

This exchange project became a very dynamic and interesting context of ethnographic research. I could increase the chances of contact with the children at school and at other social contexts, with some families, teachers and other individuals and institutional supporters. The teacher and I were about to consider it an example of interdisciplinary best practice, but at a certain point something broke down due a family conflict at the local association. Suddenly, an adult issue demanded a lot of effort and energy to prevent a shadow from coming over the project or dividing the children. After the trip to Lisbon, although students, the teacher and most parents evaluated the project positively and identified where it could be improved, it was decided to discontinue it. There were structural and institutional difficulties, but also private ones nicely summed up by one of the boys: "I would like to keep on, but my parents messed it all up."

Amid lots of joy and fun, the road to the goal was not an easy one, nor one without disappointments and tears. But they got where they wanted. Even though a few months after the return from Lisbon some were not able to remember how it all started, they are all proud and at least a bit aware they have something worth telling the others, something that makes them different and unique, something that is theirs. They have managed to put their friendship and common objective above the adult conflicts, protected each other, and did not reveal what adults, the ethnographer included, should not know. They grew stronger as a group that shares a specific identity and transnational experience[9].

Final considerations: what role for ethnography?

A recent study on the analysis of the representations contained in drawings made by Portuguese school children attending mother languages classes in Germany concludes that "most children seem to have very positive attitudes regarding cultural linguistic diversity" (Melo Pfeifer & Schmidt 2012:25). My study, so far, points out something different and is rather closer to what Maria Isabel Barreno writes, reflecting on her experience with the Portuguese community in France: "Crucially,

we must take care of the problem that students see the Portuguese lessons as a form of punishment and do not realize that their bilingualism is something they should be proud of" (Barreno 2003:121).

From the ethnographic examples given above, one might perhaps infer that for children to experience and express a positive attitude towards linguistic diversity in their everyday lives, including the language and culture of their ancestors, there is still much left to do at the level of language politics1 and in the many niches producing research on migrant children. These different scientific niches need to communicate and exchange in order to reduce distances between the various areas of knowledge, and social and political action. In studies I have conducted in Brazil focusing on the introduction of official schooling in indigenous societies, I have constantly stressed the need to deeply know those societies, their way of learning and constructing knowledge and, in first place, their children, as "no educational project will be successful if it ignores the child to which it is intended" (Nunes 1999:71). I think the same can apply to this context. But how can we get to know these children better? More mutually challenging than contradictory, the different results indicated in the above statements from Melo Pfeifer & Schmidt, Barreno, Abreu et all, and my own are an invitation to a closer look at this problematic. The anthropological approach defends a view obtained through ethnography, participant observation, and a long stay on field. The question is how feasible is this methodology for research on children in urban settings, within a dispersed and closed community? How to deal with strict rules of data protection, research agendas and budgets in order to pursue ethnographic research?

This study with children of Portuguese descent living in Germany confirmed to me that children's voices speak in many different and unexpected ways, and the biggest challenge for the ethnographer is to be able to catch them and make them understandable for others. Going back to the question in the title of this article, I would answer, yes, I think ethnography and participant observation can help raise voice, participation and identity awareness, either as a non conscious or as a reflexive process. At this point the differences I found between doing ethnographic work in indigenous communities in central Brazil and the urban settings in Germany nearly dissipate. If the freedom and spontaneity of the Auwe-Xavante children unexpectedly managed to provoke a debate about gender roles in the village (Nunes 2005), the children taking part in the school exchange project managed to stay together above institutional hurdles and adult conflict. Some already finished school but the project group still meets and enjoys being together. Honestly, I do not think that they formally discuss identity, transnational or multicultural issues when they meet. I think what makes them stick together is the positive feeling of a shared experience that brought them the chance to construct a link with their cultural heritage without considering it a burden.

Cultural diversity is a very popular concept in all environments, but how difficult is it actually to be different? How hard is it for these children to carry on the legacy of the ancestors? I do not consider the inertia, apathy or indifference I have first observed as a no-voice but rather as a silent voice, perhaps a reaction to exclusion and conformity. Silent voices need to be heard and understood as well.

"Childhood research is not simply about making children's own voices heard in this very literal sense by presenting children's perspectives. It's also about exploring the nature of the 'voice' with which children are attributed, how that voice shapes and reflects the ways in which childhood is understood, and therefore the discourses within which children find themselves within any society" (James 2007:266).

The key factor in this research has been time. Ethnography takes time, much time… time to invest in building up contacts, to be there and participate, to understand what is going on or what hides behind the most obvious assumptions, to catch what moves people or prevents them from moving, to search for interlocutors and gain their trust, to organize and classify data, think, discuss and write about it. Without such time, the "view from within" advocated by Knörr (2009:24), as well as what Allison James tells us above, has no chances at all to be achieved. But time is exactly what we do not have as long-term research has become absolutely incompatible with present academic and scientific agenda and budgets. And this puts huge limitations on our work as ethnographers, no matter within which theoretical discipline you use this methodological approach (Ferreira & Nunes 2014).

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Notes

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2 See F. Nunes (2003) on the isolation and lack of political representation from Luso-Canadians. However, in Canada and in other countries, this situation may be changing through second and third generations and due to present high-skilled migrant flows.

3 In NRW the migrant portion of the population stands at 10.2%. There are around 36,000 Portuguese, corresponding to 1.8% of the migrant population in the state (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland, Ausländische Bevölkerung Fachserie 1 Reihe 2 – 2011).

4 Though Mother Language Classes (MSU) were created in the 60s by the German government and the church to allow children of guest-workers to keep on track with school in their home country so that they could reintegrate at the end of the period previewed for family residence in Germany, they have continued (called today HSU/Heritage Language Classes). There are courses organized and funded by the Portuguese government as well (called LCP/Portuguese Language and Culture). Despite a few institutional differences, HSU and LCP courses have very similar programs, targeted groups and profiles.

5 With the exception of courses starting in early afternoon. As more and more schools adopt the full-day model of attendance, the after-school activities are pushed to late afternoons. See details about the HSU courses in (Ferreira & Nunes 2012).

6 Names are fictitious to preserve privacy.

7 The German School System has different tracks leading to different professional or academic certification. The Hauptschule does not lead directly to university but rather to apprenticeship of professions like backer or hairdresser.

8 In recent decades, prejudice towards the Hauptschule increased significantly because of the contingent of migrant children filling up its classes.

9 Details of all phases of his project will be presented and discussed in another article, still in preparation. You can visit the project blog at: http://projecto-intercambio.blogspot.com