



Immigrants and Immigration in Portuguese Children's Literature

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The aim of this paper is to reflect on the existence and relevance of the theme of migrations in contemporary Portuguese children's literature and to analyze the representations of immigrants and their cultures in those literary productions. We also question the way those portrayals may contribute to children's global citizenship, to cultural exchanges and to a world without boundaries.

Introduction

Since the earliest days of colonization, Portugal has been a country of emigrants. Moreover, since the end of the twentieth century, Portugal has become the destination of different migration flows, remodelling Portuguese society and turning it into a plural community. Those first migration flows were deeply connected with decolonization and the political changes that occurred in Portugal in 1974, which led to the restoration of democracy. Indeed, in the 1970s, migratory movements were essentially associated with the repatriation of Portuguese residents from colonial territories in Africa (mainly from Angola and Mozambique)

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as well as the settlement in Portugal of people born in African PALOP countries (African Countries of Portuguese Official Language), who migrated to Portugal for security and economic reasons.

At the beginning of this new millennium, Portugal witnessed a sudden and unexpected change in the landscape of immigration and these, substantial migratory movements are related to the arrival of different immigrant communities in Portugal from Brazil, East European, and Asian countries. Portugal became a host country for several thousand immigrants, leading to an increasingly multicultural Portuguese society. This situation has created some challenges concerning the social integration of immigrants and their citizenship. Unfortunately, as in other countries all over the world, immigrant integration is not always successful due to racist and xenophobic attitudes, disturbingly present in Portuguese society.

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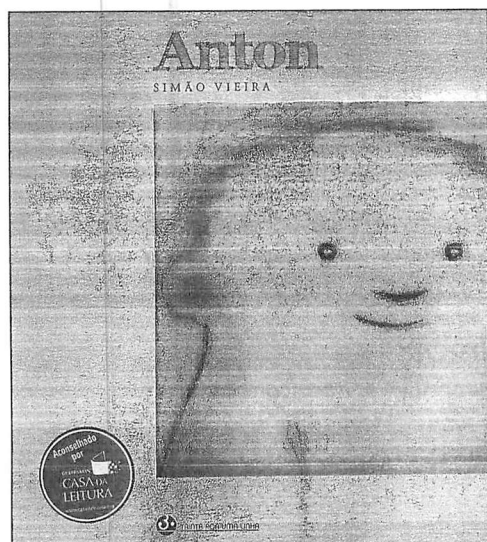
Since the Second World War, one of the core values of children's literature has been to promote awareness and respect for other races and cultures (Colomer 121). Several Portuguese authors have demonstrated the importance of children's literature in developing attitudes of respect, understanding and acceptance of cultural and ethnic differences. It is important to note that children's literature as a socio-cultural activity has repercussions in the social construction of reality and

in setting standards for social behaviour. As Morgado and Pires emphasize, children's literature cannot be separated from politics or history, representing and shaping social and cultural relations of power (14). Children's literature may be a setting for representing the cultural diversity that surrounds young readers, with an enormous potential for social transformation, because it can help to break down strong barriers, such as prejudices and stereotypes, thereby promoting cultural dialogue.

In this paper we reflect on the existence and relevance of the issue of immigration in contemporary Portuguese children's literature and to analyse the representations of immigrants and their cultures in those literary productions. In exploring the reasons for and consequences of immigration conveyed in those literary texts, we will identify the perceptions transmitted about people from other countries and question the way those portrayals may contribute to children's global citizenship, to cultural exchanges and to a world without boundaries.

Immigration and Immigrants in Portuguese Children's Literature

Firstly, we must highlight that contemporary Portuguese children's books dealing with immigrants and



immigration published in the last decades are not representative of the broader corpus of Portuguese children's literature. However, some contemporary Portuguese children's books introduce readers to the immigrant experience. Those books are stories of recent immigrant children and their families. Irina, in *O Primeiro Natal em Portugal* [The First Christmas in Portugal] is a Ukrainian girl (Soares); in another story, Katerina comes from Eastern Europe (Gonçalves and Forjaz), as does Anton (Vieira); Nunca Unca is an African boy (Gonçalves and Forjaz); the main character in *Café com leite* [Coffee with Milk] is an Angolan boy (Magalhães); Tino's parents seem to be from Cape Verde (Soares); Lia is a Chinese girl (Botelho) as well as Liung in *O Carro vermelho* [The Red Car] (Soares). Those narratives tell us the story of families who left their country, making a difficult journey to another land, looking for a better life and dreaming of a new future. Written from the child's perspective, those narratives invite readers to take notice of the problems and difficulties that immigration generates in the lives of the protagonists.

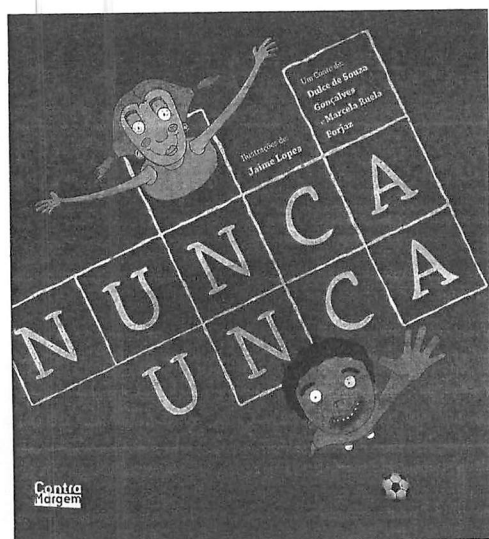
Apart from economic and/or professional reasons, reasons associated with safety and violence, among others, are cited as the main causes of migratory fluxes in the world (Klugman 55). Portuguese children's books present these reasons, which may help readers to understand this complex social issue. The main character of *Café com Leite* [Coffee with Milk] has immigrated because of war, to survive, in search of peace (Magalhães unp.); Irina's parents come to Portugal looking for a better life (Soares unp.); Djuku, a young African woman, leaves her village because she has no job in her country (Corbel unp.).

The various problems faced by immigrants (specifically by children) in a new country are developed in all these texts. Indeed, the nostalgia for the family left behind, (grandparents, brothers or close friends) is present in some books, but the difficulties of integration into a new society are essential elements to the plot of all the narratives we focus on here.

Some books stress the stigmas and prejudices of the Portuguese towards newcomers, essentially because of a physical difference, such as skin color, whether it is black or extremely white. "We don't like you. You are black... and you should have stayed in your country," say the schoolmates to the main character in *Café com Leite* [Coffee and Milk] in the school playground (Magalhães unp.); some of Irina's schoolmates sing this song ironically around her when she receives excellent results in mathematics, mocking her physical appearance:

"Irina, Irina
 what a delicate girl
 her skin looks like salt and
 her eyes like a pool
 her hair like margarine.
 Are you suffering because you miss your family and friends?
 Take an aspirin!" (Soares unp.)

Immigrant children are ridiculed, discriminated against, ignored at school by host country children and these narratives testify how those situations are painful for them (Gonçalves and Forjaz; Magalhães; Soares). They feel like strangers in the new country (Botelho), as if they were “aliens” (Irina’s words in “O Primeiro Natal em Portugal” [The First Christmas in Portugal]) (Soares unp.), from another galaxy, as Anton also says (Vieira unp.).

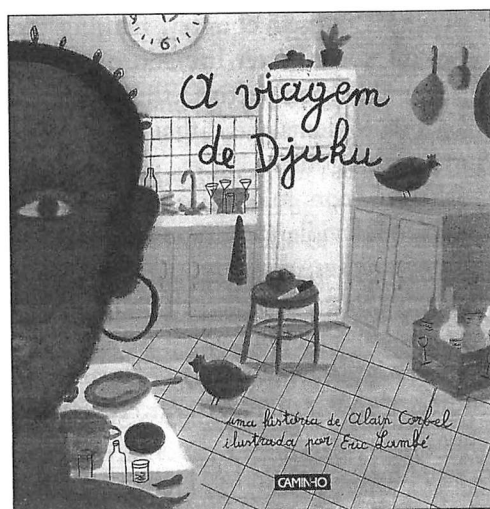


Furthermore, immigrant children are faced with prejudice because of their difficulties with the new language. This situation contributes to the discrimination and segregation of immigrant children. Moreover, this compromises the possibilities of communication and of creating friendship ties. For this reason, children remain

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isolated in a corner on the playground playing alone and feeling apart. The moment immigrant and Portuguese children speak to each other in

a friendly way is a crucial instant for the reconstruction of the identity of these children living away from their homeland. A new life begins for Irina (Soares unp.), for Nunca Unca and Katerina (Gonçalves and Forjaz unp.), and for Lia (Botelho unp.) because some schoolmates approach them and start talking to them and playing with them. In those books, as in what seems to happen in other countries, the plot reaches a stereotypical ending, with an event that breaks barriers between the newcomer and his or her classmates.



A viagem de Djuku [Djuku's Journey] tells the story of a young African woman who leaves her village where everyone knows her and reaches a big town in another country, searching for a job (Corbel unp.). Leaving the village is a painful experience, but Djuku keeps every single thing her eyes see for the last time in Africa in her heart. She discovers a new world during her journey and is fascinated by all the things she sees. She feels happy, excited by the emotion of the journey. She is stunned by the vision of the city with thousands of people running around all the time (a big marching forest, in her own words). Initially she feels a little lost, but she pursues her goal and finds a job in a restaurant doing what she likes to do, cooking (Corbel unp.).

A new life begins for this young woman, but she feels like a stranger because nobody knows her—the restaurant customers only see her hands working in the kitchen, serving meals. She sighs:

"Before, everyone knew who Djuku was, but now I am just a passing shadow, who goes in the morning to work and returns at night. Nobody knows me here, I am a shadow without a story." (Corbel unp.). She tries to find a way of connecting her present situation to her old life: "One day, she thinks, I will need that what I have lived through before marries what I'm living through now; that the restaurant becomes engaged to the village." (Corbel unp.).

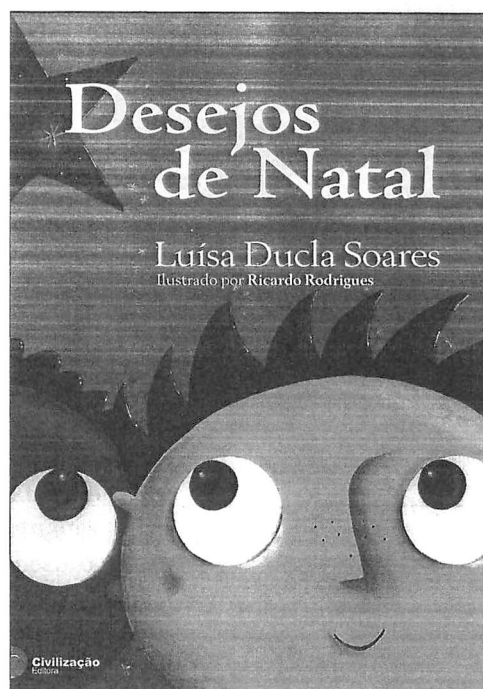
The moment Djuku leaves the kitchen and enters the dining room, because she hears the name of her village in the newsflash, is the moment she is finally perceived by the restaurant customers as a human being. They congratulate her on her marvelous food and she is understood as someone equal to them. This moment of sharing is an important turning point in the plot. Everybody listens to Djuku when she tells her story: how she left the village, the journey, the work in the town and her enormous loneliness. This is a magical moment, because old memories and new ones come together and Djuku is no longer a stranger; she has found her place in this new country. She brings with her new ways of cooking, new spices, but she learns other recipes, makes new friends and starts a different life (Corbel unp.). So, the immigrant experience is somehow seen as a positive condition, but this book also accentuates the

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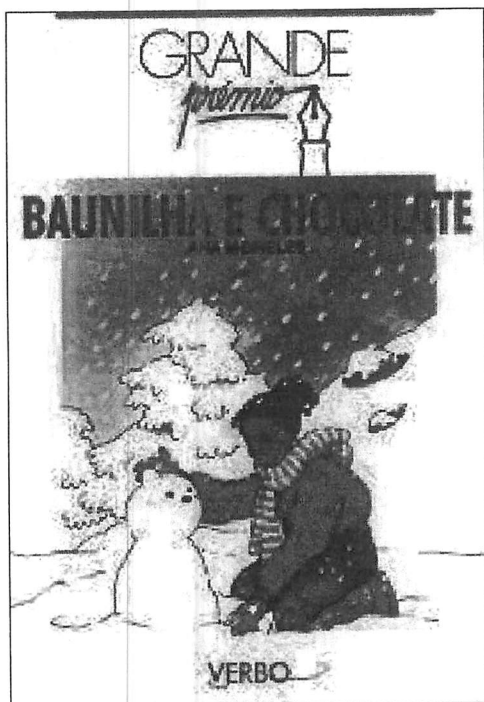
Portuguese children's books emphasize the social difficulties of immigrants' lives. In narratives already mentioned, "The First Christmas in

Portugal" and "The Red Car" (Soares), and also in "Na cova da Moura" ["In Cova da Moura" from the book Christmas' Wishes] (Soares), through the main characters, Irina, a Ukrainian girl, Liung, an eight-year-old Chinese boy, and



Tino, a boy of African descent, readers experience the unfortunate and dangerous conditions of immigrants' lives. Liung's parents share a house with other Chinese immigrants who work hard in stores and restaurants and, even if their uncles sell lots of toys, he cannot have just one red car for himself (Soares unp.). Irina and her parents live in a house with no indispensable conditions; Irina's father works hard in construction, although he was a doctor in his homeland (Soares unp.). Tino lives in Cova da Moura, which is considered a problematic neighbourhood near Lisbon where lots of immigrants live, and he is involuntarily involved in a robbery, forced by older boys (Soares unp.). Even when the living conditions of immigrants are presented in these books, whether in logistical, professional or personal terms, their dignity is always emphasized as well as the loneliness they go through before they make friends in their new country.

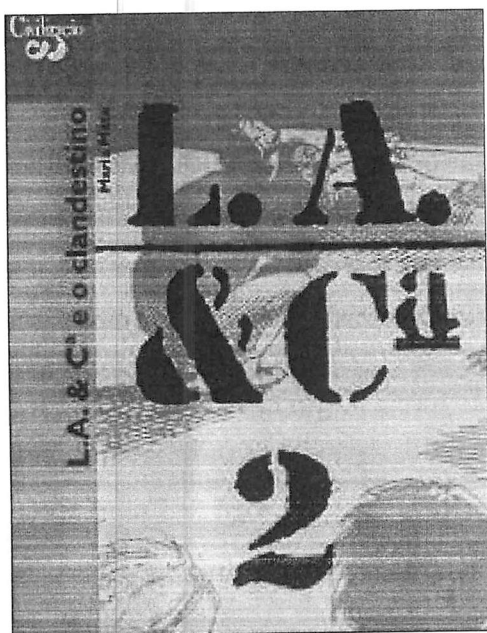
All these books and narratives help young



readers to come into contact with other ways of living, with other cultures, through the multiple cultural references presented, whether gastronomic, religious, or social allusions. Through these books, children know that in Ukraine people celebrate Christmas in January and they have special traditions; for Chinese people, Christmas is not a important festivity and they celebrate the Chinese New Year with family (*Soares, Desejos De Natal*). In Africa, people eat a different kind of food and use spices that we do not often use in Portuguese cuisine (Corbel unp.). Moreover, the Ukrainian and Chinese languages are different from Portuguese (Soares unp.; Botelho unp.); the way children live in African villages (their houses, their food, their toys...) contrasts hugely with European children's lives (Magalhães unp.). All of this information contributes to a deeper knowledge and understanding of the other and to intercultural dialogue.

Some Portuguese books for young adults also deal with the issue of immigration. In the book *Baunilha e Chocolate* [Vanilla and Chocolate] (Meireles), Jasmim, a teenager girl, tells the readers her life story:

I am from an African country, you can see a poor land in my face, and fires are around my mouth, which is always frowning because it is so closed. You can see it even inside my eyes, not to mention how this poverty is evident in my ridiculously varnished shoes and in my skimpy white dress. It is not difficult to realize who is poor whether it is a boy, a girl or a country. We always bear it written on our forehead. In my poor and desolate land I wanted to study. My parents also wanted to offer me a future. So, we came to Portugal, shaking off the remaining dust and trying to prepare ourselves to face the new world. (16)



Jasmim lives in a children's institution because her mother, a victim of domestic violence, dies. Life in a new country does not go as their parents expected and her father became an alcoholic and aggressive. Jasmim is discriminated against by some of her schoolmates because she has black skin: "Blacks are either smart or stupid. Which are you?" and she is an immigrant: "When we entered room 32 'We do not want black people, black people in Africa' was written on the blackboard in big letters. And next to these fat words was a sign that history teachers called swastika." (12).

Adolescent readers also encounter the topic of illegal immigration through the adventure book *L. A. & C.ª e o Clandestino* [L. A. & Co. and the Clandestine] (Mata)"event-place": "Porto", "author": [{"family": "Mata", "given": "Maria"}], "issued": {"year": 1996}}}], "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"]. The heroes of this narrative find a black boy miserably dressed and attacked by three adults and hide him in the cellar, giving him food and clothes. Later, their parents take the boy into their home. He has run away from Angola, because of systemic violence, and he is an illegal immigrant in Portugal, looking for a job for himself, his aunts and uncles (42). The consequences of war are explored in this book as well as immigration as an escape, which is not always successful, to a better life.

The book *O conto dos chineses* [The tale of the Chinese], written in 1959 by José Cardoso Pires, one of the most important Portuguese writers, was released in 2009 as a children's version. The book tells the story of a casual meeting between a Portuguese man, a security guard at a construction site who is eating his lunch on a hot Sunday, and two Chinese immigrants, looking for a place to eat. The Portuguese man shares his bread and soup with the immigrants and they all eat together. The immigrants and the Portuguese man talk about gastronomic differences between the two cultures, mainly because the native is curious about things he believes Chinese people eat, such as rats, cockroaches and swallows. They find out that, in Portugal as in China, people like to eat small fried birds. They share flavours and ways of catching birds and the two friendly Chinese men offer a pencil for the Portuguese man's daughters who are playing nearby. They explain some Chinese characters to the Portuguese man who is interested and amazed by the Chinese language. The Portuguese security guard finds out that there are no big differences between his life and the two immigrants' lives: "Like us, said the security guard, just like us. In eating and in everything" (Pires unp.).

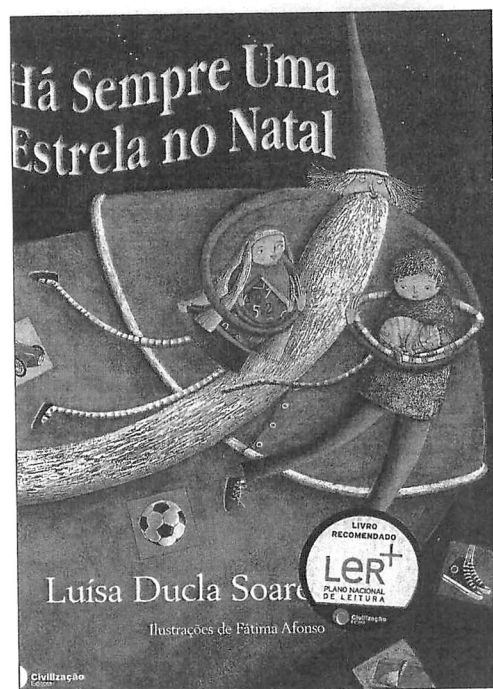
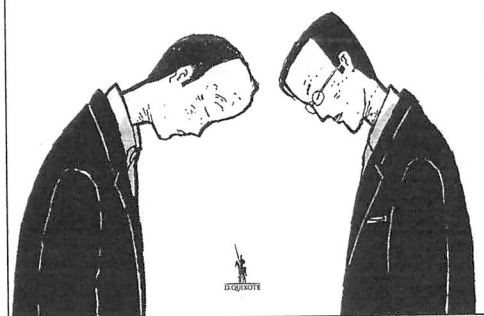
This powerful literary production makes readers reflect on stereotypes and prejudices and how they constitute barriers in the moment of interaction with people coming from another country and culture. On the other hand, the way the Portuguese security guard receives these immigrants is a positive lesson, an example of deep humanity. The message conveyed about immigrants' lives difficulties and the strength of the dialogue between cultures is enriching for children and young adults and contributes to promote global citizenship.

It must be said that, in all these children's books, illustration plays an important role in understanding explicit

O CONTO DOS CHINESES

José Cardoso Pires

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Henrique Cayatte



and implicit meanings of verbal discourse, in decoding the message conveyed about immigrants and immigration. Indeed, images provide "a visual prompt, a pictorial counterpart to the text; their role is to add to the reader's understanding, appreciation and enjoyment" (Salisbury 95). In those books, through words and images, readers can more easily understand, not only the difficulties and suffering of immigrants in a new country, but also the important issue of language in this context: in the tale "O Primeiro Natal em Portugal" (from the book *There's always a star at Christmas time*), readers come into contact with Ukrainian words (Soares unp.); in *O Conto dos Chineses* [The Tale of the Chinese] (Pires unp.) and *A Coleção* [The Collection] they come into contact with Chinese characters (Botelho unp.).



Conclusion

Contemporary Portuguese children's literature approaches the issue of immigration in a particular way. Indeed, in nearly all the books analysed in this paper, the main characters are children. Their childhood encourages identification with the reader. This facilitates comprehension of the message. All of the books focus on the question of the difficulties of being an immigrant, especially the barriers immigrants and their families face in terms of social integration. They emphasize the problems connected with integrating immigrants into a different society, making readers reflect and understand those difficulties. Those books present problems immigrants confront in helping children to understand and accept the other and contribute to reducing stereotypes and prejudices.

Even if these books deal with the question of racism and xenophobia, they use these situations to denounce incorrect attitudes and behaviors towards immigrants.

Specifically in the Portuguese school environment, we find students from various parts of the world (from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe countries) that face multiple barriers to integration into Portuguese society. These children's lives are not easy because, in addition to being involuntary immigrants, their integration depends on the host society and the construction of new social relationships. We think that the books analyzed in this paper help children to understand how difficult it is for anyone to leave her/his homeland and move to a foreign country with a new language, new mores and a different culture. This message allows readers to be aware of the other – of immigrant children.

All of the books highlight the importance of integrating immigrants into new societies, as a good deal of social research has concluded in Portugal. Indeed, those works show that young immigrants prefer integration, rejecting assimilation and separation (Neto 96). The children's books analyzed in this paper show that immigrants have a sense of belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group, but they also look for social contacts with colleagues from other groups and with their own culture, as part of the process of socialization and integration.

We must underline that all these books portray immigrants in a positive light and this is important, even if, in some narratives, it seems that children need to prove they are trustworthy. Irina and her father help a young Portuguese woman to deliver her baby (Soares unp.); the main character in *Café com leite* [Coffe with milk] saves a classmate from drowning and this situation leads the other children to accept him (Magalhães unp.); Djuku is a competent cook (Corbel unp.); the two Chinese immigrants are smiling, kind and pleasant men (Pires unp.); Nunca Unca is a likeable boy and so is Katerina, the girl from Eastern Europe (Gonçalves and Forjaz unp.). In all of these narratives, the immigrant character is valued and their courage, sympathy and humanity are enhanced.

Taking this into account, it must be noted that, by approaching the issue of immigration and portraying the immigrant character without prejudice or in a stereotypical way, children's books may help children to commit not only intellectually but also emotionally to the other (Fittipaldi 12) giving them, through identification, the possibility to experience feelings and other ways of thinking and living. Furthermore, these books promote intercultural communication skills and integrate new social and cultural visions of the world, allowing children to feel closer to other human beings. As Teresa Colomer argues, literature is a powerful educational tool to create a new representation of current societies which necessarily include diverse origins and cultures ("Escuela e Inmigración" 1). We live in a world without hiding places (Morgado and Pires 9), and children's literature can eliminate boundaries, presenting the world as a global village and humanity as a desirable community.

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