

# **SOCIAL INEQUALITIES AND YOUTH: RACIAL ISSUES UNDER REFLECTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The struggle against social inequalities in Brazil has been the center of analysis in several areas of knowledge. Scholars, public managers, researchers, and public policymakers strive to diagnose and implement measures to reduce inequalities in the Brazilian context. Among the multiple forms of manifestation of such inequalities, the social markers of gender, race, and social class are the most investigated. However, color or race occupies a central space in most of the debates given the process of the socio-historical constitution of Brazil. In this debate, besides the aspects that are related to the Brazilian development process characteristics, whose dynamics have produced erasures and silencing throughout the country's history, black youth are among those included. As a consequence, the partial inclusion of the black, brown, or indigenous populations in this process has translated into higher levels of economic and social vulnerability, with greater incidence in some communities. The present reflection analyzes the impact of the social racial marker among the black Brazilian youth. The bibliographical-investigative methodological procedure is used.*

**Keywords:** Brazil, Social Inequalities, Youth, Racial Issues.

## **1. Introduction**

The last nation in the West to abolish slavery, Brazil, between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, failed to create any conditions for the dignified insertion of the black population into society. Instead, various books, policies, and institutions have disseminated the idea of a mixed-race country, the myth of white superiority and black and Amerindian inferiority that runs through the fields of education, information, and image, reproduced daily and internalized by the whole society.

This way, structural racism has been built as a historical process and designation of thousands of lives to exclusion, vulnerability, and subalternation. According to Silvio Luiz de Almeida, from his book *Structural Racism* (2018), racism is not an act or a set of acts, nor is it a phenomenon restricted to institutional practices; it is, above all, a historical and political process in which the conditions of subordination clearly show the subordinate classes as part of society that is marginalized by the dominant/hegemonic class, being in the hands of constant exploitation and oppression. In other words, one has to consider racism as a daily reality of the subaltern classes as part of the structure, however, this relationship does not exempt people's responsibility to fight racism.

For the black intellectual Sueli Carneiro, the structural racism that accompanies racialized Brazilians is present in schools and generates traumatizing situations for black students. "The post-abolition does not restore this humanity taken away - the school reinforces this. It is not free that our first experiences with racism have to do with entering school." In this way, it can be said that every black body in some way bears marks of prejudice and racism.

When it comes to youth and education, it becomes necessary to constantly reflect on this condition imposed upon the black Brazilian population. So, the set of prejudices directed at the black population is rooted in the unconscious and in the subjectivity of individuals and institutions, expressing itself in regular, measurable and observable discriminatory actions and attitudes. Police violence affects, in the great majority of cases, the black population, the largest number of deaths in proportion to the patients in the current Covid-19 crisis, and all the data on inequality in education. The reflection is divided into three parts and uses the bibliographical-investigative procedure.

## **2. Colonialism, Colonialities and race**

Brazilian society was heir to "the ideologies of social classification (racial and sexual) and the legal-administrative techniques of the Iberian metropolises" (GONZALEZ, 2019, p. 343/345). From the legacy "of Portuguese absolutism and the Christian-Moorish family structure," a "society whose tradition was authoritarian power, whether in political terms or the master-slave, husband-wife, father-children relationship" (ALVES, 2019, p. 62) was built in Brazil. As a consequence, social engineering in colonial Brazil was permeated by well-defined hierarchies, "it can be conceptualized as a castes society, in which the various groups played rigidly distinguished roles" (NASCIMENTO, 2019, p. 259).

According to Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2005), the idea of race, in its modern sense, has no known history before America. Perhaps it originated as a reference to phenotypic differences between conquerors and conquered, but what matters is that from very early on it was constructed as a reference to supposed differential biological structures between these groups. The formation of social relations founded on this idea produced historically new social identities in America: Indians, blacks and mestizos, and redefined others. So, terms like Spanish and Portuguese, and later European, that until then indicated only geographical location or country of origin, have since acquired, in relation to the new identities, a racial connotation as well. And consequently, to the degree that the social relations that were being configured were relations of domination, such identities were associated with the corresponding hierarchies, places, and social roles, as their constitutive ones, and, consequently, with the pattern of domination that was being imposed. (QUIJANO, 2005, p. 131/134).

The creation of the conceptual symbolic fiction and projection of race was only possible thanks to the multiple separations in the West (which were not present in other cultures), in particular, the separations between body and mind/soul, reason and world (LANDER, 2005). From this "objectification of the body as nature", it was possible to create the idea of race, theorizing that certain "races are condemned as inferior because they are not rational subjects", consisting of just "objects of study, body, consequently, closer to nature", converting them, therefore, into "dominatable and exploitable" (QUIJANO, 2005, p. 129).

In other words, race and racial identity were established as basic social classification instruments

of the population and this stratification persisted widely, noting that at the time of independence (7.9.1822), although the majority of the Brazilian population was composed of blacks, natives, and mixed-race people, during the process of organizing the new Brazilian state these were prevented from participating in decisions about the cultural, social and political organization.

By adopting Eurocentric categories (economy, state, civil society, market, classes, etc.), time and space for all human beings were conceived and organized, elevating European cultural and historical particularities to the level of a "superior and universal standard of reference"; such constructions constituted parameters to analyze all realities and also meant "normative propositions that defined what should be for all the nations of the planet". That is, various ways of being, of knowing, of organizing society, were transformed "not only into different but into lacking, archaic, primitive, traditional, pre-modern", situated "in a previous moment of humanity's historical development, which, under the imaginary of progress, emphasizes their inferiority" (LANDER, 2005, p. 13).

In this context, the Western modernity was consolidated as an "abyssal thinking", splitting social reality into two worlds: "this side of the line", i.e. metropolitan (colonizing) societies, Law (legal or illegal, depending on the official state or international legal framework) and scientific knowledge; and the "other side of the line", i.e. colonial territories, "popular, lay, plebeian, peasant or Indian knowledge" (which are eliminated as "relevant or commensurable knowledge because they lie beyond the universe of true and false constituting mere "beliefs, opinions, magic, idolatry, intuitive or subjective understandings") and a "territory without law, outside the law, the territory of the a-legal, or even of the legal and illegal according to unofficially recognized rights" (SANTOS, 2007, p. 72/73).

At the other side of the abyssal line, in the "hidden and essential face" of Modernity, that developed "the colonial remote world, the sacrificed Indian, the enslaved black man, the oppressed woman, the alienated child and popular culture," that is, "the victims of Modernity," affected by "the irrational act (as a contradiction of the rational ideal of Modernity itself)" (DUSSEL, 2005, p. 29; BRAGATO, 2014).

Dussel (2005, p. 29), a member of the Modernity/Coloniality group, summarizes the myth of modernity:

1. Modern civilization describes itself as being more developed and superior (which means subconsciously sustaining a Eurocentric position).
2. Superiority compels to develop the more primitive, barbaric, crude, as a moral requirement<sup>3</sup>.
3. The path of such an educational process of development should be the one followed by Europe (it is, in fact, a unilinear and European style development which determines, once again unconsciously, the developmentalist fallacy).
4. Since the barbarian opposes the civilizing process, modern praxis must exercise violence as a last resort, if necessary, to destroy the obstacles to this modernization (the just colonial war).
5. This subjugation produces victims (in many and varied ways), violence that is interpreted as an inevitable act, and with the near ritual sense of sacrifice; the civilizing hero clothes his own victims as the holocausts of a redemptive sacrifice (the colonized Indian, the African slave, the woman, the ecological destruction, etcetera).
6. For the modern, the barbarian has guilt (for opposing the civilizing process) that allows modernity to present itself not only as innocent but as an emancipator of the guilt of its own victims.
7. Finally, and by the civilizatory character of Modernity, the sufferings or sacrifices (the costs) of the modernization of other backward peoples (immature), of

other enslavable races, of the other sex because it is fragile, etcetera, are interpreted as inevitable.

It is within this context that thousands of men and women have gone through processes of erasure and silencing for centuries and remain until the 21st century in the process of stigmatization, exclusion, and violence. That is, from the colonial experience across the Atlantic, "social existence" and "social relations" came to be controlled, observing that each of the structures of human life came to be submitted to the "hegemony of an institution" forged by the capitalist, Euro centered, global "pattern of power": (a) in controlling labor, its resources, and products, the capitalist enterprise was instituted; (b) in controlling sex, the bourgeois family was established; (c) in controlling authority, the nation-state was built; (d) in controlling intersubjectivity, Eurocentrism was set. (QUIJANO, 2005, p. 117 and 123).

## **2. Public policies and social inequalities**

The 20th century in Brazil's political history was marked by more than two decades of the military regime. During the years of transition from military dictatorship to representative democracy, Brazilian education was attentive to the new vision of educational issues in the face of the new political phase in which social inequalities were among the greatest collective demands. In this context of reconstruction among countless uncertainties, education played an important role, starting with discussions to face a scourge that had been going on for years: adult illiteracy. The concern with teacher training was also one of the themes discussed, however, without advances in the short term.

Besides the social distortions that have been present for centuries in Brazil, there is the aggravating factor of hunger, multifunctional poverty, socially vulnerable populations, and many others that impact mostly racialized and disadvantaged populations. The geographical extension of Brazil also contributes to the socio-economic and cultural diversity, limiting local actions that require federal or state incentives to reduce the distortion in the offer of quality education. This means that many factors affect the effectiveness and efficiency of the right to education in Brazil.<sup>1</sup>

So, education has its journey towards social equity interrupted by many variables in each period, usually due to a series of factors that require social, private, and, most of all, federal collaboration - the Union, the States, and the Municipalities.

It is well known that public policies recognize the complex relationship of social inequalities in the most diverse fields of Brazilian citizens' rights and when it comes to the right to education, this reflection dates back many decades. Since the establishment of the Republic, Brazil has been looking at the need to contemplate this right in its acts and effects; however, the collective demands and the organization of the civil society stand out in this process of ensuring rights in most of the history of Brazilian education.

There is a significant number of laws focused on the confrontation of inequalities in education and, in the 20th and 21st centuries, there is a greater incidence of the expansion of rights. Among them, as General Laws, are the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (LDB - Law 9.394/96), the National Education Plan (PNE - Law 13.005/14), and the Common National Curricular Base (BNCC - Law

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to stress that the quality of education, in Brazil, is measured by standardized exams that do not consider the cultural differences and much less the diversities that each part of the country presents.

13.415/17). The legislation that addresses the management involves the National Program of Books and Teaching Materials (PNLD), National Training Program for Municipal Education Councilors (Pro-Council - Ministerial Ordinance 3.272/03), Program to Support Educational Systems to Follow-up and Evaluate the PNE and the Corresponding State and Municipal Plans, and the National Network for the Continuing Education of Basic Education Teachers. As for financing, it is worth mentioning the Fund for Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and the Appreciation of Education Professionals (Fundeb).

The Law of Directives and Bases for National Education (LDB - Law 9.394/96) defines and regulates the organization of Brazilian education based on the principles present in the Federal Constitution. The LDB of 1996, based on the constitutional principle of the universal right to education for all, brought some improvements concerning the previous ones and the confrontation of inequalities in the following areas:

- democratic management of public education;
- progressive pedagogical and administrative autonomy and the financial management of the school units;
- free and compulsory basic education from the age of 4;
- inclusion of early childhood education as the first stage of basic education;
- forecast for the creation of the National Education Plan;
- a common base for the primary and secondary school curriculum and a diversified part according to local characteristics. (BRASIL, LDB - Law 9.394/96, 2021)

The National Education Plan (PNE - Law 13.005/14) establishes guidelines, goals, and strategies for the education policy during the period from 2014 to 2024, as well as it seeks to articulate the National Education System in a collaborative regime between the Union, States, Federal District, and Municipalities, ensuring the necessary conditions for the democratic management of education.

The current PNE establishes 20 goals for education at the national level, which must be met by 2024. These goals cover the different levels, from pre-school to higher education, and seek to ensure the right to education for all. It is important to emphasize that according to the balance sheet of the National Campaign for the Right to Education, released in June 2021, just 5 of the 20 goals of the PNE have been partially fulfilled.

The Common National Curricular Base (BNCC - Law 13.415/17) defines the progressive set of essential learning throughout basic education and aims to ensure all students their rights to learning and development, under the PNE. A national reference for the preparation of the curricula of the state and municipal school systems and networks and the school pedagogical proposals, the BNCC indicates that it may contribute to the alignment of other policies and programs, helping to overcome the fragmentation of educational policies, strengthen the system of collaboration between the three spheres of government and improve the quality of basic education nationally. (MEC, Common National Base, 2020)

Regarding management, we can mention some public policies that have leveraged education in the collaborative process to fight social inequalities. Among them are the following: National Book and Teaching Material Program (PNLD), National Training Program for Municipal Education Councilors (Pro-Council - Ministerial Ordinance 3.272/03), Support Program for Teaching Systems to Monitor and Evaluate the PNE and the Corresponding State and Municipal Plans, and National Network for the Continuing Training of Basic Education Teachers.

The National Book and Teaching Material Program (PNLD) was created in 1985 for the free distribution of teaching, pedagogical and literary materials, among other support materials for educational practice, to students and teachers in public basic education schools throughout the country. The program also benefits non-profit community, confessional or philanthropic institutions in partnership with the government.

Ten years later, in 1995, the PNLD started to produce the Guide to Textbooks, with analysis and evaluation of the pedagogical content of the books. Based on this Guide, teachers can select the books they consider most appropriate for their students' profile, their school and pedagogical proposals, and the local characteristics of their region. It is worth mentioning that the schools and educational spaces participating in the PNLD receive pedagogical materials systematically, regularly and free of charge. In this way, the program is one of the main instruments of support for teaching and learning in primary education. (BRAZIL, FNDE, 2021)

The National Qualification Program for Municipal Education Councilors (Pro-Council - Ministerial Ordinance 3.272/03) has as its main objective the development of municipal education councils, the strengthening of existing ones, and the qualification of civil society's participation in the task of evaluating, defining, and inspecting educational policies. It acts essentially intending to qualify managers and technicians from the municipal secretariats of education and representatives of the civil society to act with the school pedagogical action, to the legislation, and the financing mechanisms, distribution, and control of educational funds. (BRASIL, Pro-Council, 2021)

The Fund for Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Valorization of Education Professionals (Fundeb) stands out as a public policy focused on financing. This fund, of an accounting nature and statewide, is composed of resources from taxes and transfers from the states, Federal District and municipalities linked to education, as provided in arts. 212 and 212-A of the Federal Constitution. The new Fundeb became a permanent tool for financing public education through Constitutional Amendment 108/20 and was regulated by Law 14.113/20. (MEC, FUNDEB, 2021)

Fundeb is responsible for approximately 60% of the revenues related to education in the states, the Federal District, and the municipalities. Among the highlights of the new Fundeb are the increase of the Union's supplementation to the Fund from 10% to 23% by 2026; the hybrid system of distribution of resources; the allocation of 70% of the resources to the enhancement of education professionals and the incorporation of the Cost per Student-Quality (CAQ) as a reference for the expansion of the Union's financial support to states and municipalities.<sup>2</sup> (FNDE, FUNDEB, 2021)

As a public evaluation policy, the highlight is the Basic Education Evaluation System (Saeb). The system is a set of large-scale external evaluations, applied every two years in public schools, to diagnose Brazilian basic education and the factors that may interfere in student performance. Saeb allows public schools and municipal and state education networks to evaluate the quality of education offered to students. The results of the evaluation offer subsidies for the elaboration, monitoring and improvement of evidence-based educational policies.

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<sup>2</sup> Interministerial Ordinance 1/21, published in March, establishes the operational parameters for Fundeb from April to December 2021. The total estimated revenue for this year is R\$ 176.3 billion, of which R\$ 160.3 billion will be contributed by the states, Federal District, and municipalities, and R\$ 16.0 billion will be complemented by the Union.

### **3 Education and black youth**

The school trajectory of young blacks in Brazil reflects the markers of domination and power given the trajectory of the State's non-assistance, exclusion, and subalternation. From the earliest age, black children are victimized by the racial marker and are consequently more prone to violations and violence in external contexts.

Education has an essential citizen, emancipatory, historical, cultural, and social role when it comes to strengthening social bonds, developing skills, physical and cognitive abilities, and integrating the formation of the student as a social agent, active, and participant in his space-time. However, the daily mishaps and denials of the right to education increase the probability that young blacks will not continue their studies.

In this context, we can mention school dropout, infrequency, and other motivations such as hunger, immediate need for earning income to support the family, prejudice, racism, among others. It is during adolescence that the problem presents itself with greater intensity. According to IBGE data (2018), the school dropout rate is as high as 44.2% among men; a gender and race cutout also reveals that among black women of the same age group, school dropout is a reality for 33% of young girls.

Data from Pnad (2020) show that illiteracy among black and brown people is almost triple that of white people, and among black and brown people over the age of 60, the rate is 27.1%. For the same age group, among whites, this percentage is 9.5%. These and other indexes reflect on the Brazilian school reality for decades. It is known that educational practices, from early childhood education on, are linked to the structural racism that affects and influences the access and permanence, as well as the performance of black children in schools and universities.

It is necessary to reflect on the process of education and literacy of black boys and girls constantly, as well as to investigate the erasures, invisibility, and silencing that, from a historical point of view, have for centuries restricted the right to intersubjectivity and identities, as well as self-esteem and pride in being black, since the images built about this population, beyond the idea of the incipency of blacks, have created stigmas and segregation.

Another element to be highlighted is the school dropout process. School dropout is a reality in Brazil, especially in more vulnerable socioeconomic environments, such as in occupations, peripheries or rural areas, or regions farther away from large urban centers. According to figures from the PNAD Education 2019, released by IBGE in July of this year, blacks spend, on average, 8.6 years in school. In contrast, whites spend 10.4 years. Of the country's 50 million people aged 14 to 29, 20.2% did not complete any of the stages of basic education, either because they dropped out of school or never attended it. Of this total, 71.7% were black or mixed race. (IBGE, PNAD Continuous, 2020)

In 2019, 3.6% of people aged 15 years or older of white color were illiterate, a percentage that rises to 8.9% among black or brown people. In the age group 60 years or older, the illiteracy rate among whites reached 9.5%, and among black or brown people, it reached 27.1%. It is worth pointing out that it is not only in the large urban centers that the precariousness of education occurs. In the northeastern region of Brazil, there are numbers of school dropouts and illiteracy rates above the average, which reinforced even more to demonstrate structural racism present in society. (IBGE, 2020)

In the Northeast, three out of five adults (60.1%) did not complete high school. Among white people,

57.0% had completed this level, while this proportion was 41.8% among black or mixed-race people. The survey also showed that the illiteracy rate in Brazil is 6.6%, which corresponds to 11 million people, with more than half (56.2%) living in the Northeast region. (IBGE, PNAD Continuous, 2020)

At the governmental level - Federal, State, and Municipal - some discussions and initiatives concerning social and ethnic reparation policies emerged only in the mid-1990s. In 1996, the International Seminar "Multiculturalism and Racism: The Role of Affirmative Action in the Contemporary Democratic States" took place and was sponsored by the Ministry of Justice. The GTI (Interministerial Working Group) was born from this event. The purpose of this collective was to hold discussions and develop the preparation and implementation of projects in the political sphere that would ensure the appreciation and positive change in the standards of living of black Brazilians. (LIMA; OLIVEIRA; LIMA, 2020)

According to a UNICEF survey, 72% of young Brazilians felt the need to ask for help regarding their physical and mental well-being during the SARS COV 2 (quarantine) health crisis. However, 41% did not turn to anyone, and among them the majority are black.

In this scenario, the reality of black students in Brazil is impacted especially in high school, whether by dropping out, the National High School Exam (ENEM), remote teaching, multiple denials, or multidimensional poverty. Because they live in vulnerable areas with reduced health service coverage, less access to computers and the internet to follow the remote classes, they had more difficulties to continue learning in 2020 and 2021, since part of the school activities continues with the requirement of internet access and possession of technologies (cell phone, notebook, among others).

Another statistic to be highlighted is that at least 70% of the black population faces the pandemic without financial reserves, and in the country 75% of the black population is poor. In other words, these obstacles and others should worsen a reality that predates the pandemic: at the end of their school career, when they manage to finish high school, young blacks learn less and feel less motivated to take the Enem exam and enter higher education.

For Brazilians aged 60 and over, the illiteracy rate was 9.5% among white people. Among black or brown people of the same age group, the rate reached 27.1%. In Brazil, altogether, 11 million people were illiterate in 2019, however again the difference in access to fundamental rights is observed. Among the Brazilian regions, the Northeast has the highest rate (13.90%).

The most common forms of violence that affect children and adolescents in the slums and suburbs of large urban centers are multiple expressions of the social issue that are characterized by social inequality and structural racism; by the negligence of those responsible for them and the fragility of the social protection network; by the lack of access to social policies that guarantee minimum conditions for healthy eating, together with comprehensive education and health care; by domestic violence, which manifests itself through mistreatment, abandonment, threats, abuse of authority, torture, and sexual abuse; by the exploitation of child labor and commercial sexual exploitation; by ethnical-racial discrimination; by discrimination regarding sexual orientation; by religious intolerance; by lack of access to leisure and cultural policies; and, finally, by the vulnerability to criminal dynamics, due to the violence that crosses the territory, a local hypertrophied translation of urban insecurity.



## 4. Conclusion

Historically, it is known that Brazil consolidates the position of white superiority through structural violence originating in the process of occupation and settlement, extending to the enslavement developed for decades and that is still present in the 21st century, in the form of cultural violence, which ends up legitimizing and naturalizing the reproduction of a racist and unequal society.

Children and young blacks are more affected than non-whites and consequently, the reproduction of both structural and symbolic violence affects them more directly and intensely. Often because they live in vulnerable areas with a higher incidence of state neglect due to the lower coverage of health, safety, and health services - with less access to computers and the internet to keep up with the remote classes, they had more difficulties keeping learning in 2020 and 2021.

At least 70% of the black population was left without financial reserves during the pandemic process, and 75% of the country's black population is poor. These and other obstacles probably aggravate a reality that predates the pandemic: at the end of their school career, when they manage to finish high school, young blacks learn less and feel less motivated to take the Enem exam and enter higher education. (KREZINGER; SOARES, 2020)

The data collected by the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) in the last decade (2010-2020), points out that the illiteracy rates in Brazil, show disparities also among other racial-ethnic groups. The illiteracy rate among blacks (11.5%), considering the portion of brown and black people, remains double the rate among whites (5.2%). Moreover, when we compare the average number of years of formal education between population segments, based on information disaggregated by color/race, it is also possible to observe a significant difference. For the population declaring itself as white, this average is 8.8 years. In the case of the black population, it is 7.2 years. The infrequency and school dropout are also present in the trajectory of black children and young people.

In order to reduce infrequency and school dropout, it is necessary to provide conditions for young people and families with the state's recognition that it is necessary to grant more access to income and other proper public policy mechanisms to face the issue.

It is important to point out that the young black students' scenario in Brazil is impacted especially in High School, whether by dropping out, by the National High School Exam (Enem), by remote teaching (in times of the COVID-19 pandemic), or by exclusion, prejudice, and racism in the school environment.

## 5. Acknowledgement

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