

EDUCATION AND ETHNIC-RACIAL RELATIONS IN BRAZIL: MONOCULTURALISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF BLACK IDENTITY



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ABSTRACT

In Brazil, a country historically marked by structural racism, the school has been both a space for the reproduction of racial inequalities and a potential agent of social transformation. The monoculturalism present in Brazilian education makes it difficult to value black identities, reinforcing Eurocentric hegemony in school curricula and teaching

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materials and in this scenario, this study investigates the relationship between education and the construction of black identity in school spaces, highlighting challenges and possibilities for the promotion of ethnic-racial diversity. The justification for this research lies in the need to understand the impacts of monoculturalism on the identity formation of black students and in the search for more inclusive and representative pedagogical practices. After the implementation of Law 10.639/2003, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture mandatory, new perspectives have been introduced into the educational debate, but there are still challenges in the implementation of these policies. The study adopts a qualitative approach, based on the bibliographic review of authors who discuss education, identity and ethnic-racial relations in Brazil. The results indicate that, despite the advances provided by educational policies, the presence of a Eurocentric curriculum and the absence of specific teacher training still limit the promotion of an anti-racist education. The research highlights the need for more effective actions, such as the reformulation of the curriculum, the expansion of teacher training and the encouragement of pedagogical practices that value Afro-Brazilian history and culture.

Keywords: Monoculturalism. Curriculum. Identity.

INTRODUCTION

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN A COUNTRY WITH A SLAVE HERITAGE

Brazilian education cannot be understood without taking into account the relations between the various ethnic groups that formed this nation, because the "[...] four hundred years of slavery were definitive in shaping the *ethos* of our country" (Moura, 1983, p. 124). Therefore, it is necessary to highlight that the character of the formation of Brazil, based on slavery, had as one of its results the emergence of racist conceptions and practices that last until the present day.

Brazil, after the European invasion in the sixteenth century, lived under the aegis of exploitation and dependence. Inserted in the framework of the old colonial system, the result of maritime expansion and capitalist development on the European continent, the Brazilian colony according to Prado Jr. (1998, p.55) should be "[...] a simple producer and supplier of foodstuffs useful to metropolitan commerce and that could be sold at great profits in European markets". Portugal's objective with the colonization of Brazil was to exploit as much of its wealth as possible for its own benefit (Prado Jr., 1965).

In this sense, the advent of sugar activity replaced the initial types of exploitation of the colony based on the extractive system of products such as brazilwood (Ferlini, 1994). With the production of sugar, the productive system of exploitation was inaugurated, with large estates, monoculture and slave labor being essential elements for reducing expenses and increasing profits (Novais, 2001).

The large territorial extension avoided expenses with fertilization and technical care. Monoculture prevented the growth of small property, which was uninteresting for the metropolis; And slave labor was imposed for some reasons, among them the existence of an overseas slave trade was the most justified. As Novais (2001) shows, the slave trade made enormous profits possible for the metropolis and this determined the replacement of indigenous slave labor by African slave labor. The wealth that the Portuguese crown and the slave traders obtained from the slave trade made this activity, and consequently African slave labor, indispensable to the dynamics of relations between the metropolis and the colony.

According to Sousa Filho (2004, p.136):

[...] the slave trade and slavery, as tributaries of the European colonial expansion movement, are full of justifications used to characterize Africans as slaves and establish as legitimate the human hunting that they produced in Africa for several centuries.

The Europeans, therefore, used various arguments (biological, religious, economic, etc.) to legitimize the exploitation of Africans in Brazilian lands. Following the same reasoning, Carneiro (1999) and Moura (1983) emphasized that blacks came to be defined as inferior, barbaric, savage, similar to an animal, a simple instrument of production, where their verticalization and humanization were removed through physical and psychological violence. These conceptions and practices were the necessary pretexts for the use of African labor as slaves.

[...] The image of the black man had to be discarded from its human dimension. On the one hand, there was a need for powerful mechanisms of repression so that he could remain in those permitted social spaces and, on the other, his dynamic of rebellion that opposed this. Hence the need for him to be placed as irrational, his rebellious activities as a social and even biological pathology. (Moura, 1988, p. 23).

It is necessary to highlight that the formation of Brazil in the face of slave labor and the exploitation of its wealth, had as one of its results the appearance of racist practices not only in its specific context, but also for later centuries. In fact, post-abolition Brazil should be rethought and reorganized in order to insert it into the framework of international capitalism. According to the discourse of the elites, a developed country could not be marked by a black and mestizo population, or with racial conflicts that would destabilize it. In this direction, two ideologies initially emerged to "solve" the problem: the *ideology of whitening* and the *myth of racial democracy*.

The *ideology of whitening* put into practice with the encouragement given to European immigrants and the search, from them, to make Brazil a white country was "[...] a tactic to ideologically and existentially disarticulate the black segment from its self-analysis". (Moura, 1983, p.126).

The racial division of labor during slavery would be replaced by the "democratic competition" of capitalist society. Such thinking concealed the historical construction of the country and turned its back on the condition of the black population during this formation. This "democratic competition" embodied in the *myth of racial democracy* "disarticulates the consciousness of black Brazilians" (Moura, 1983, p.127), as they saw themselves as incapable of the professional and educational success of whites.

The black population was suppressed the job opportunities, now reserved for the native white segment and European immigrants, resulting in a division of functions in

Brazilian society, leaving the black segment with inferior social positions or rejected by whites.

It is in the specificity of ethnic-racial relations in Brazil, therefore, that we must reflect on the mechanisms and bases under which political, cultural, and educational institutions have reproduced and reproduce the values and standards of a dominant elite, to the detriment of other worldviews and cultures.

Taking this analysis into account, it is essential to understand the public school as an important institution responsible for the sociability of human beings. In it occurs the possibility of constructing identities, the formation of ethical and moral values. However, the school in capitalist society assumes a homogenizing character, with monoculturalism prevailing, excluding, for example, the black-African reference from the formation of Brazilian society (Candau, 2004). The guarantee of free access to all those who want to enter school does not contradictorily hide its role in reproducing the ideas and values of the dominant class.

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1992), such reproduction materializes, among other means, in the choice of contents by the dominant and in the imposition and inculcation of these contents to the dominated groups. A culture is imposed through a pedagogical action, through its double arbitrariness: the imposition/inculcation of contents marked by a selection/exclusion of them, carried out by groups or classes that hold privilege and power. The school, in this sense, presents itself as an institution that contributes to reinforcing the difference between the privileged and the excluded. As a result, we have the legitimacy of the dominant culture and the illegitimacy of the cultures of the subordinate groups and classes.

[...], although the school is only one agent of socialization among others, this whole set of traits that make up the "intellectual personality" of a society – or rather, of the cultivated classes of this society – is constituted or reinforced by the education system, deeply marked by a singular history and capable of shaping the minds of students and teachers both by the content and spirit of the culture it transmits and by the methods according to which it carries out this transmission. (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 227).

This reproduction can be better understood if we observe two fundamental elements in educational practice: the curriculum and the textbook.

The official curriculum is not a neutral element, but on the contrary is constituted by disputes, power relations and social control over the knowledge produced. That is why in the case of the ethnic-racial issue, for example, when black men and women are treated

in resumes, they are generally situated in the period of slavery as passive or inferior. There is also the "hidden" curriculum that permeates school relations. Through it, values are included that are made explicit in the gestures, looks, reprimands and attitudes of white teachers and students in their day-to-day lives towards black students. This symbolic violence affects the school existence of the children and young people subjected to it and has repercussions on their permanence in school.

Like the curriculum, the textbook has also become an important instrument of an ideological nature, serving the interests of hegemonic groups in society. Tourinho Júnior (2002), commenting on the textbook, informs us that textual and imagetic discourses are used, taking into account the implicit conceptual simplification, "to reify some essential notions for the standardization of a certain type of knowledge necessary for the maintenance of social order". (Tourinho Jr, 2002, p.91).

In this sense, the textbook is not taken to schools in an uncompromising way. On the contrary, it is controlled by official institutions, based on many decrees. And, despite the advances in their analysis and criticism, the absence of African ethnic references is still perceived, which, when they exist, are treated in a derogatory way. Silva A. (1995, p.31), analyzing 82 books on communication and expression in elementary school, points out that black children are rarely portrayed at school, their names are almost never mentioned, they are called by nicknames or blacks and a lack of human attributes is clearly perceived. "The textbook explicitly places the intention of inferiorizing and dehumanizing blacks, who are described and illustrated in a caricatured, deformed way, associated with destructive and dirty beings." (Silva, A., 1995, p.51).

In view of the above, we show that in addition to the apparent opportunities of access and permanence guaranteed to all in the right to education, what really exists are class and race discriminations reproducing dominant worldviews and instituting school failure for those who do not fit into an educational institution whose administrative and curricular organization, the teacher-student relationship, etc., lead non-white students to have a lower performance than whites.

According to Henriques (2001, p. 26-27):

[...] The average schooling of a young black man at the age of 25 is around 6.1 years of schooling, a white young man of the same age has about 8.4 years of schooling. The differential is 2.3 years of study. The intensity of this racial discrimination, expressed in terms of formal schooling of young adults in Brazil, is extremely high, especially if we remember that this is a 2.2-year difference in a society whose average adult schooling is around 6 years.

To deal with education in the context of a society where there is a slave heritage, one must therefore consider ethnic-racial relations. As many studies on education suggest⁹, from the perspective of the ethnic-racial perspective, the problems of the black population in schools are not only related to low income or family economic breakdown, evident in the majority of the Brazilian black population, but there are racial conditionings that cause multiple repetitions, violence, self-denial, school dropout, low performance among black students.

Apple (2005, p. 48) reinforces this assertion by stating that,

I have become increasingly convinced that *gender relations*—and those involving *race*, which are of fundamental importance in the United States and many other countries—are of equal relevance in understanding the social effects of education and how and why curriculum and teaching are organized and controlled.

This is evidently hidden and concealed within the school, because apparently its function would be to train and qualify its students for the job market or for citizenship, regardless of race, class, gender, etc. As Machado (1989, p. 107) states, "The bourgeois project of a unified school intends to achieve school unification by suppressing existing economic, political, religious, racial, and sexual barriers to access to school, conditioning them only to psychopedagogical criteria."

Such a discourse, undertaken by the dominant classes, ends up being incorporated by the black students themselves who believe that their professional and school failure is imminent, or due to socioeconomic problems; or for reasons of merit and competence, whose ethnic-racial issue does not interfere in any way, because in Brazil and in schools, everyone has equal rights regardless of race, sex, class or religious creed.

As Gramsci (1991) shows us, the apprehension of the worldviews of the dominant class by groups excluded from the apparatus of power becomes qualified and efficient with the interference of the school, an organized and systematized institution for human formation.

In effect, the reproduction of the dominant ideology in Brazil, which in the case of education is supported by a Eurocentric and monoculturalist vision, based on a supposed "*racial democracy*" and based on an apparent "democratic competition" has as a

⁹ Silva, A., 1995; Souza, 1997; Portela, 1997; Durans, 2002; Silva (ed.), 2003; Yolanda; DICK; SILVA, (2005); are just a few examples of the vast material published in this regard.

consequence the impediment of the formation of collective identity and the mobilization of the black segment that attributes its condition to strictly socioeconomic or ethical-moral issues (incompetence, laziness, trickery, etc.). This resulted in few blacks seeing the need to organize and fight against conditions of racial inequality.

The popular classes are exploited and oppressed to such an extent that they lose the possibility of forming their identity, thus generating what Freire (1997) called *existential fatigue* associated with historical *anesthesia*.

In relation to the black population, in the face of the Brazilian historical process and the interethnic relations within the official educational institutions, their identity was expropriated. Its historical and cultural references, its contribution to the construction of Brazilian society was hidden and/or mischaracterized, thus generating a negative self-image and imposing barriers to its organization and mobilization.

EDUCATION AND CONSTITUTION OF AN ETHNIC-RACIAL IDENTITY

Several studies¹⁰ have highlighted the Eurocentric pattern, not only in the school curriculum and the textbook, but in other fields such as literature and the teaching of Brazilian History, among others.

According to Pereira (1978), the study of Brazilian History, for example, has a heritage derived from cultural colonialism that overvalues European achievements and minimizes or excludes any reference to Afro-Asian history. The author in question states that the curricula are mostly Eurocentric and the Brazilian population would suffer from *myopia* and *cultural astigmatism*, in the sense that it is unable to establish relations – neither in the immediate plan, nor throughout the historical process – between Brazil and Africa. The way in which Africa, Africans and their descendants in Brazil are seen are examples of this cultural colonialism¹¹.

Africa is perceived as an amorphous totality, where diversity exists only through tribes. The different nations, ethnicities, languages that exist on this continent are ignored by most of the Brazilian people. The African region is seen as a space of primitive tribes where "civilization" is only occasionally, as this is a characteristic of Europe. In Africa there are exotic customs in counterpoint to European "universal values".

¹⁰ Pereira, 1978; Bernd, 1987; Moura, 1988; Azevedo, J.; Silva, 1995; Silva, A., 1995;

¹¹ Munanga, 1999; Lima, 2004; Mattos, 2003; Moreira; Silva, 2005; among others.

Consequently, the vision of the African continent unfolds to its inhabitants and descendants who form the Brazilian population. In the case of Brazil, the formation of nationality is concealed by relegating the African contribution only to cuisine, folklore, mysticism and language. Africa for most Brazilians is reduced to the image of the four "T"s: Tribe, Tambor, Terreiro and Tarzan. And so, Brazilians fail to recognize an important part of their historical roots.

As we have seen, however, none of this is random or spontaneous. On January 9, 2003, there was an important advance with Law 10.639, which amends Law 9394 of December 1996, establishing the mandatory theme "Afro-Brazilian History and Culture" in the official curricula of the school system. On the other hand, if this Law represents an advance, it is, on the other hand, the demonstration and official recognition that the country's schools still need to overcome in many ways the racial conditioning that devalues the cultures and historical references of blacks and Indians. Especially because the Law is being undertaken in a very precarious way by the Brazilian education system. An individual of the ruling elite, who considers European values "civilized" and, therefore, should be disseminated among the popular classes.

According to Gramsci (1966), the exercise of domination by the dominant classes has a fundamental educational dimension. The oppressor classes do not exercise domination only by the use of coercion, but by using the necessary consent of the oppressed classes. One of the institutions responsible for this legacy is the school, which maintains, through education, the reproduction of the worldviews of the dominant and oppressive classes.

As a result, the dominant classes impose a conception of the world that is theirs and use various means for this, including the school. The school will reproduce the oppressive ideology, providing its hegemony over the other classes, through consent. On the other hand, Gramsci (1991) overcomes the mechanistic view of perceiving school and education as mere reproducers of the dominant ideology and class conditions that privilege one to the detriment of the others. Education and the school can and should, according to this author, be used as an instrument of struggle by the oppressed sectors, because to the extent that it reproduces class domination, it also reproduces its contradictions, thus allowing the subalternized classes to envision the overcoming of domination through the practices of those who work in the school and the acquisition of universal knowledge necessary for conscious intervention in the world.

In this sense, we highlight the statement of Saviani (1991, p. 11) according to which:

The form of insertion of education in the hegemonic struggle configures two simultaneous and organically articulated moments: a negative moment that consists of the criticism of the dominant conception (bourgeois ideology); and a positive moment that means working on common sense in order to extract its valid core (common sense) and give it elaborate expression with a view to formulating a conception of the world appropriate to popular interests.

If the school has the function of reproducing the ideas and values of the dominant classes, instrumentalized by the curriculum and textbook, on the other hand, the school presents at the same time an ambiguous character, since the right to it does not mean a simple benefit of the public power, but also a contradictory process according to which organized groups have conquered this right as a means of formation and social change.

That said, we highlight the ideas of Munanga (1999) according to which in order to build a society with social justice and equity it is necessary to have as a starting point a mobilizing collective identity that makes it possible to break with the dominant ideology and, in this sense, with the other's view of oneself. With regard to the black Brazilian population, its identity has been, throughout our history, denied and/or mischaracterized, imposing a barrier to the constitution of a self-affirmative identity that would enable the mobilization and organization of this segment to claim rights related to racial discrimination.

According to Bernd (1987, p. 38) the "[...] The search for the identity of blacks is the search for self-definition", because they find themselves in the midst of values of a white world, of a Eurocentric culture, which alienates them in relation to their historical references.

The Brazilian historical process, as previously mentioned, based on slavery not only affected the culture, psychology, economy and society of its specific historical context, but also profoundly marked the dynamics of socioeconomic and cultural development in post-slavery Brazil. The end of slavery and the beginning of the capitalist system of production did not represent an improvement in their living conditions for the black Brazilian population, which remained extremely precarious. Former slaves and their descendants continued to be treated as inferior and discriminated against because of the color of their skin, relegated to misery and lack of prospects.

The society of the dependent capitalism model that replaced that of colonial slavery managed to present the problem of the black without linking him, or linking him insufficiently, to his historical roots, because [...] at the same time that it remanipulates the slave symbols against the black man, it seeks to erase his historical and ethnic memory, so that he remains as a floating man, ahistorical. (Moura, 1983, p. 125).

Without identity, the oppressed internalize the oppressive ideology and immerse themselves in the reality that oppresses them, becoming *double beings*, that is, they are oppressed, but with the worldview of the oppressor class, including themselves. They are *beings for the other* (FREIRE, 2005).

Because they do not have a mobilizing collective identity, the oppressed, in the case of this work the black population, do not identify the oppressor in their thoughts and actions and therefore have fatalistic attitudes. They believe in the oppressive reality as something fixed and predetermined by external forces, they perceive themselves as devalued. It is the internalization of the oppressive vision incident on her.

According to Memmi (1977),¹² the images that the dominator makes of the oppressed are transformed into a true institution in the sense that it essentializes certain characteristics supposedly associated with the dominated, such as laziness, trickery, marginality or even passivity, among other characterizations.

The dominant classes attribute a series of characteristics to the oppressed that are based on denial. Most of his qualities are disqualified. Even more problematic, according to the author in question, is the interiorization that the oppressed make of the visions constituted by the dominant class. "He ends up recognizing it as a detested nickname, but converted into a familiar sign." (Memmi, 1977, p. 83). This occurs through the mystification of reality.

Myth is not just a kind of ghost that hovers over society without influencing it. On the contrary, the production of myth by the dominant class establishes conducts, influences hierarchization and social division (Memmi, 1977, Freire, 2005). As we have seen before, the ideology of whitening and the myth of "racial democracy" are instruments for reading the Brazilian reality that has allocated privileged places to some to the detriment of the vast majority, who lose their identity, do not mobilize in search of improvements.

Silva, A. (1995, p. 25) reflecting on these forms of thought states:

¹² The classic study by Memmi (1977) concerns the colonial domination of Europe over African peoples, from the nineteenth century onwards.

As it is not possible to establish reciprocal relations of rights and respect in a system based on the exploitation of the other, an entire ideology has developed justifying oppression and inferiority, aiming at the destruction of identity, self-esteem and the recognition of the values and potentialities of the oppressed.

In view of the above, and taking into account the historical process and the mechanisms of reproduction of the dominant ideology, conveyed especially by the school, the black Brazilian population, in addition to having impediments to the formation of its identity, sees itself stigmatized in the face of values that deny its history, its art and its ways of living. Black and poor young people live with a series of stigmas that are imputed to them, thus contributing to their self-devaluation. A stigma is, therefore, a "[...] reference to a deeply derogatory attribute, but what is needed, in reality, is a language of relations and not of attributes. An attribute that stigmatizes someone can confirm the normality of another, [...]". (Goffman, 1975, p. 13).

According to Goffman (1975), a stigma is configured when we attribute values to others who supposedly escape from normality. The other becomes undesirable, we do not qualify him as normal and in this way he is treated as someone diminished, spoiled. Goffman (1975) warns that the undesirable attributes in question are only those incompatible with the stereotype we have for a certain type of individual. A stigma is a relationship between attributes established for certain groups or individuals and preconceived stereotypes.

In relation to Brazilian society, there is a whole stereotype of normality and beauty. Being white, if possible blond, with blue eyes, having a college degree, a good job, being a Christian, are attributes seen as good and desirable. An underemployed or unemployed black person, with incomplete school education, living in the periphery, on the contrary, completely escapes the stereotype considered desirable by a large part of the Brazilian population. Hence the stigmas referring to blacks seen as unemployed, lazy or marginal. The closer we get to the desired reference, the more we will have the chance to escape stigmatization and the social effects resulting from it¹³.

It is for this reason that the dominated seek to somehow escape from themselves and appropriate the dominant view. That is why black people have difficulty assuming their identity and embody the dominant classes' view of them.

¹³ It is important to highlight how the media and the State itself disseminate the idea of violence in peripheral neighborhoods as a result of the presence of poor, black and "marginal", without questioning how the process of marginalization takes place. In this regard, see Carrançá; Borges (Orgs.), 2004.

Here occurs what Freire (2005) calls *cultural invasion*, as the oppressed see reality through the eyes of the oppressors, perceiving themselves, in counterpoint, as inferior.

Cultural invasion is the penetration that invaders make into the cultural context of the invaded, imposing their worldview on them, while curbing their creativity, by inhibiting their expansion. [...], the cultural invasion has a double face. On the one hand, it is already domination; on the other, it is a tactic of domination. (Freire, 2005, p. 173).

In this context, two solutions present themselves: either the oppressed do everything to look like the oppressor; or regain their denied dimensions.

In the first response, the oppressed see themselves through the eyes of the oppressor, with whom they want to appear as much as possible. Self-shame becomes the hallmark of your personality.

According to Goffman (1975), the stigmatized person will respond to this problem of "acceptance" in society by trying to directly correct what he considers the objective basis of his rejection. That is why many blacks believe that by straightening their hair, lightening their hair, tapering their nose, attributing numerous chromatic patterns, such as the brunette, they will be able to move away from the unwanted pattern and get closer to what is considered "normal" or "aesthetically beautiful". It is the denial of their identity in order to get closer to values built by the dominant elite.

In the same line of reasoning, referring to the identity of dominated groups, Bourdieu (2004) conceives two perspectives. Either they accept the definition of their identity by the dominant class, even seeking its assimilation through the refusal of its identity characteristics (language, clothing, lifestyle, religion, etc.); or through a collective struggle, they eliminate the valuation of their stigmas in the sense of imposing a turnaround in the definitions produced by the dominant classes and thus define, in an autonomous way, the principles of organization of the social world and its identity.

In this case, it is similar to the second answer analyzed by Goffman (1975), that is, the reconquest of their collective identity, in the case of our study, ethnic-racial. It is up to the oppressed to objectify the dominated and break the grip they have in relation to the oppressor.

The struggle, in this sense, against the symbolic domination that imposes a negative view on the identity of the dominated, does not only attempt to conquer or reconquer identity, but the power to define one's own identity that one had abdicated to the detriment of the dominant view, at the moment when they refused to be recognized.

"Stigma produces the revolt against stigma, which begins with the public claim of stigma, thus constituted as an emblem, [...]". (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 125).

This is because there is a negative, symbolic and economic unity imposed by the dominant view that leads those included in it to revolt against the harmful effects of such stereotyped definitions. The struggle to modify the values contained in such stigmatizing definitions must involve the elimination of the conditions that allow symbolic and material domination. (Bourdieu, 1989).

[...] to exist is not only to be different, but also to be recognized as legitimately different, and in which, in other words, the real existence of identity presupposes the real possibility, juridically and politically guaranteed, of officially affirming difference – any unification, which *assimilates* what is different, contains the principle of the domination of one identity over another, of the negation of one identity by another. (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 129).

We can think of the myth of "*racial democracy*" that prevails very intensely in Brazilian society as a mechanism, therefore, of disarticulating the identity of Afro-descendants and thereby causing demobilization, enabling better control over the oppressed.

Black identity arises, then, from the conflicting dynamics between the dominant Eurocentric view, which denies black references, and the search for the valorization of these references by this segment of the population. That is, from a feeling of loss, denial, a positive and proud self-image of the black person is built. It is a political response to the situation of oppression in which the black population, descendants of enslaved Africans, found itself throughout the history of Brazil. It is, therefore, the negation of the negation.

[...] On the political level, it is possible, from the awareness of exclusion based on racial discrimination (race here understood in the sociological and political-ideological sense) to build a mobilizing black identity, because everyone is, despite offering different regional identities, collectively submitted to the domination of the white segment and constitutes the most subordinated social segment of society. Such an identity, although it involves the acceptance of blackness and black cultural particularities, has a political and not a cultural content, since some blacks do not live the cultural and religious peculiarities of their historical group and do not cease to participate in the dominant identities such as Catholicism and Protestantism, [...]. (Munanga, 2000, p. 32-33).

Following the analysis of Munanga (2000), ethnic-racial identity does not necessarily pass through the cultural aspect, but is a political position in the face of the common situation of oppression. Identity does not exist, therefore, only from an empirical

reference, such as skin color, but is defined by the relationship established with hierarchical society and dominant worldviews.

The black segments, when they recover their identity, cease to be less receptacles of the dominant directives and inscribe themselves as agents of the process.

We perceive that the constituted ethnic-racial identity is not only configured as a reference of affirmation, self-esteem, but constitutes an instrument of organization and mobilization. In other words, it is not a self-contemplative identity, or of *the first order*¹⁴ as Bernd (1987) says, but an identity that serves as a platform for activism, militancy and organization of the black segment in search of the transformation of the surrounding reality.

As long as blacks are not able to become historical agents for the destruction of the system that denied them for centuries, the cycle that was established with the first black quilombolas will not be exhausted: that of the search for their complete emancipation as a social being and as an individual being. (Bernd, 1987, p. 42).

It is necessary to get to where stereotypes originate, where there are those who appropriate the means of production for their own benefit and those who are exploited and oppressed to the detriment of their privilege.

In any sense, we find, in essence – both on the part of teachers concerned with a progressive educational practice and without discrimination, as well as on the part of black men and women in their daily battle for the definition and self-affirmation of their ethnic-racial identities – a constant struggle against socioeconomic inequalities and against the dominant school education that reproduces hierarchies, at the same time, they turn to the transformation of society aiming at the construction of a just and egalitarian world, where there are historical subjects undertaking their humanization.

After all, one of the reasons that differentiates us from other animals is our ability to humanize ourselves. Function of education? A project of all of us who work, intentionally, with educational practice.

CONCLUSION

Education plays a central role in the construction of individual and collective identities, being a fundamental space for the formation of the social and historical

¹⁴ First-order identity is that which is limited to looking at oneself, without perceiving the relationship with the other, with the exteriority and hierarchies arising from the relationship between them.

consciousness of the subjects. In Brazil, a country marked by a history of enslavement and marginalization of the black population, the relationship between education and racial identity becomes an essential theme for understanding social inequalities and the struggle for equity. The predominance of a Eurocentric perspective in the Brazilian school curriculum reinforces stereotypes, makes the contribution of the black population to the formation of the country invisible and hinders the construction of a positive black identity.

It is possible to see that the Brazilian educational structure was historically conceived within a monocultural paradigm, which privileges a homogeneous view of culture and knowledge, which is a model that reflects the colonial and slave-owning heritage of Brazil, which naturalized the exclusion of the black population from spaces of power and cultural recognition. Gomes (2017), the school has been a space for the reproduction of values that disregard ethnic-racial diversity, contributing to the maintenance of social inequalities and the denial of black identity. This reality has a direct impact on the subjective construction of black students, who often do not find positive references about their history and culture in the school environment, which can generate feelings of low self-esteem and devaluation of their own identity.

The construction of black identity, therefore, encounters significant challenges in an educational system that still operates under the logic of white hegemony, where the absence of Afrocentric narratives in teaching materials and the low representation of black teachers are reflections of this monoculturalism, which tends to reproduce a single history, erasing the plurality of experiences and experiences of the Afro-descendant population. For Almeida (2019), the structural racism present in Brazilian society is also manifested in the educational field, where there is a hierarchy of knowledge that devalues knowledge and epistemologies of African origin. This context reinforces the need for educational policies aimed at promoting ethnic-racial diversity, which recognize and value Afro-Brazilian history and culture as constitutive elements of national identity.

In view of this scenario, initiatives such as the implementation of Law 10.639/2003, which made the teaching of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture mandatory in schools, represent an advance in the attempt to break with the Eurocentric cultural monopoly, making it necessary to implement this policy that still faces challenges, such as the resistance of some institutions and the lack of specific training for teachers. To transform the school into a space for positive identity construction for black students, it is necessary to invest in pedagogical practices that promote the appreciation of diversity, the fight

against racism and the deconstruction of stereotypes. In this way, education can become an instrument of emancipation and strengthening of black identity, contributing to the construction of a more just and egalitarian society.

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