RACISM AND THE FORMATION OF BLACK PERSON SUBJECTIVITY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

RACISMO E FORMAÇÃO DA SUBJETIVIDADE DA PESSOA NEGRA: ANTECEDENTES HISTÓRICOS E PERSPECTIVAS DA EDUCAÇÃO ESCOLAR

EL RACISMO Y LA FORMACIÓN DE LA SUBJETIVIDAD DE LA PERSONA NEGRA: ANTECEDENTES HISTÓRICOS Y PERSPECTIVAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN ESCOLAR

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ABSTRACT: The formation of the subjectivity of black people in Brazil is affected by racism and colonialist values. Given this, this study aims to describe racism and the formation of the subjectivity of black people, thinking about school education as a space of possibilities for anti-racist practices. It is a reflective theoretical essay using bibliographical research. We note that the school must achieve critical thinking that provides students with an understanding of the social structures that maintain power and the subversive effort to change the whitened status quo. It is necessary to react critically to the rigidity of teaching and a commitment to anti-racist, diverse, and inclusive education. We conclude that education can be a powerful resource for the emergence of black people as an integral human being, with high self-esteem and an ideal that has their faces as a reference.

KEYWORDS: Racism. Subjectivity. Social construction of ethnic identity. Education. Anti-Racist Education.

RESUMO: A formação da subjetividade da pessoa negra, no Brasil, é afetada pelo racismo e valores colonialistas. Diante disso, esse estudo tem como objetivo descrever sobre o racismo e a formação da subjetividade da pessoa negra, pensando sobre a educação escolar como espaço de possibilidades de práticas antirracistas. É um ensaio teórico reflexivo valendo-se da pesquisa bibliográfica. Observamos que a escola deve alcançar um pensamento crítico que proporcione aos estudantes o entendimento das estruturas sociais de manutenção de poder e o esforço subversivo pela alteração do status quo embranquecido. É necessário reagir criticamente ao engessamento do ensino e o comprometimento com uma educação antirracista, diversa e inclusiva. Concluímos que a educação poderá ser um recurso potente para o irromper da pessoa negra enquanto ser humano integral, com a autoestima elevada e com um ideal que tenha como referência seu próprio rosto.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Racismo. Subjetividade. Construção social da identidade étnica. Educação. Educação antirracista.

RESUMEN: La formación de la subjetividad de los negros en Brasil está afectada por el racismo y los valores colonialistas. Ante esto, este estudio tiene como objetivo describir el racismo y la formación de la subjetividad de las personas negras, pensando en la educación escolar como un espacio de posibilidades para prácticas antirracistas. Es un ensayo teórico reflexivo que utiliza la investigación bibliográfica. Observamos que la escuela debe lograr un pensamiento crítico que proporcione a los estudiantes una comprensión de las estructuras sociales que mantienen el poder y el esfuerzo subversivo para cambiar el status quo blanqueado. Es necesario reaccionar críticamente ante la rigidez de la enseñanza y el compromiso con una educación antirracista, diversa e inclusiva. Concluimos que la educación puede ser un recurso poderoso para el surgimiento de las personas negras como un ser humano integral, con una alta autoestima y un ideal que tiene como referente su propio rostro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Racismo. Subjetividad. Construcción social de la identidad étnica. Educación. Educación antirracista.

Introduction

The Black population has participated in shaping Brazilian society in all areas, from arts and religion to the fields of economy and industry. Even though it was mostly Black individuals who populated and built the country, often under compulsion (Santos, 2016), their participation is constantly denied and rendered invisible.

Beyond this invisibility, Brazilian history and social formation are marked by the most heinous crime that can be committed against human beings: enslavement (Madeira, 2017). After the dehumanization suffered by this population, being Black meant being marginalized, associated with 'dirty', 'bad', and 'ugly'. Therefore, the denial of racial belonging emerges as a means of social affirmation for Black people. Within this space of social exclusion, the Brazilian Black individual shapes their subjectivity (Oliveira, 2017).

In a country like Brazil, with a history of slavery, racism is a constant presence in the lives of Black people. This type of discrimination is rooted in power relations that stem from a belief in racial superiority, which is structured in our society and persists in a veiled, cruel, and determined manner for people's stories (Almeida, 2018).

Racial relations in Brazil are interpreted based on the belief in the existence of racial democracy, an approach that hides the tensions caused by racism in our society. The racial issue fundamentally participated in the formation of capitalism and gave rise to the social inequalities in our country. However, the majority of current society does not understand the role of race in structuring class, and the lack of understanding of race as a pillar of social inequality hinders or delays the search for effective resolutions for social transformations (Madeira, 2017).

Regarding the formation of Black individuals' subjectivity, one way to exercise autonomy is through the elaboration of a discourse by Black people about Black people. Subjectivity is related to the peculiar historical construction to which it is subordinated and to the general aspects of the social formation in which it is inserted. Thus, with the experience of existing as Black in a whitened society, the Black individual is compelled to take the white person as identification in an attempt to become 'human,' as it is the white person who is treated and respected as 'human' (Souza, 2021).

Therefore, knowing oneself as Black is much more than the simple realization of the obvious. It is experiencing the annihilation of one's identity, of having been subjected to inaccessible demands and confused in one's conceptions. Furthermore, it is the commitment to reclaim one's history and rework one's potentialities (Souza, 2021). Therefore, in this whitened society, it is necessary to develop means for Black individuals to "discover the white man within

themselves" (Fanon, 2020, p. 208, our translation), in order to then be able to kill him. There are various paths we can follow to try to achieve this goal, but we will consider the path of education here.

Education programs, historically and culturally, have a Eurocentric education, so for other aspects, such as the lack of power, Black people have a sub-representation of the approach to their history and knowledge in general in schools. The school demonstrates in its practices exclusionary processes that reinforce white children's concepts of domination and Black children's concepts of subordination (Araújo; Rocha; Vieira, 2021; Hooks, 2020).

From a formal education that starts from the point of view of the white colonizer, many Black students do not self-affirm because their identity is predominantly related to negative aspects, with an emphasis on enslavement and subordination. In the midst of a school environment that emphasizes these characterizations, the self-esteem and self-confidence of Black children and adolescents are diminished, directly impacting the formation of their subjectivities (Bertasso, 2021).

Differences are present in school, and it is up to teachers and education managers to have the necessary political and anti-racist criticality to accommodate the demands of student diversity. Thus, we can hope for future generations of students who enjoy all the possibilities of knowledge and who understand the systems of social symbols so that they are equally creators of civilization (Souza, 2008).

Law No. 10,639/03, amended by Law No. 11,645/08, which makes the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture mandatory in the official curriculum of schools, is more than simply a curricular legislative rule. The Law is an action that has the potential to interfere with stereotyped imaginings about Afro-Brazilian culture, acting on aspects of the identity affirmation of Black people and providing appropriate teaching on the subject (Brazil, 2003).

With the commitment to implementing the Law in schools, education will contribute to the construction of a new mentality regarding Black culture, undoing misunderstandings that lead to distortion and alienation about Brazilian history and culture (Silva, 2021). We must understand that despite the logic of reason, directed by structured knowledge, being indispensable for people's insertion into society, it is not effective in changing adverse representations about the Black population. Hence, it is important to have the experience of Afrocentric pedagogical knowledge in an attempt at transformative educational practice (Munanga, 2019).

In light of the foregoing, and considering that twenty-one years have passed since the promulgation of Law No. 10,639, whose implementation is still irregular and scattered, diminishing its positive impact for the Black population in general, the following research question arises: How to make school education anti-racist, contributing to the affirmative construction of Black identity?

Thus, the article aims to describe racism and the formation of Black subjectivity, reflecting on school education as a space for anti-racist practices. It is a theoretical and reflective study with bibliographic research as the data collection procedure, using the main references of Frantz Fanon (2020), Neusa Santos Souza (2021), and Bell Hooks (2020).

The manuscript is organized into three parts. The first is this introduction, where we brought the study's objective and initial assumptions about racism and the formation of Black subjectivity. In the second part, we present the historical background of the Black population in Brazilian society, discussing the Brazilian social structure and the denial of Black history in schools. In the third part, we analyze the formation of Black subjectivity and perspectives on school education, considering possibilities for change through anti-racist practices.

Historical background of the Black population in Brazilian society

The conventional historiography taught in schools presents a version of African enslavement and the social formation of Brazil from the perspective of the white colonizer and Brazilian elites. It is essential to highlight aspects that contradict this version to understand that it was enslavement that destabilized and corrupted entire African societies, and contrary to what the Europeans and the church preached, Black people were not inferior and did not need saving (Schwarcz; Starling, 2015).

In fact, these individuals were abducted from their lands, histories, and cultures to be dehumanized and serve as labor and enrichment for European countries and later for Brazilian landowners in a hateful system of plundering human history. Unlike what conventional historiography teaches, several peoples in Africa had, in certain aspects, cultural and technical superiority compared to Europeans (Gennari, 2011).

Beyond physical violence, there was cultural violence in which families were separated, religion was prohibited, and the imposition of learning another language occurred. Enslavement was not only an economic system but, above all, a social organization that structured classes

and marked essential differences in society. Thus, the economy, family, justice, and politics were founded on slaveholding values (Chiavenato, 2012; Schwarcz; Starling, 2015).

Only from this understanding of Brazilian social structure can we comprehend the relationships organically existing in society. From these relationships arose many discriminations, and the main one, racism, has perpetuated throughout Brazilian historiography, which is inherent to the entire Black heritage and not just skin color (Chiavenato, 2012).

According to Souza (2019), the thinkers and intellectuals who report on enslavement and the educational systems responsible for educating about our histories and memories treat the subject carelessly, as something dated and localized. Abolition came, and sociological reflection on abolitionism must be done from an economic and political standpoint rather than from the nation's interest in liberating and granting dignity to its people.

Fernandes (2008) explains that the economic system changed but did not alter the existing order, and it was born in the incipient industrial capitalism. All sectors, whether in favor of abolition or not, profited from the slave system and the labor and profits generated by the Black population. Furthermore, after abolition, those in power and government reorganized and remained in privileged spaces.

An accelerated process of whitening the country began. Many landowners implemented measures that distanced the possibilities of social mobility for the Black population, and by the mid-1880s, a factor emerged that would give a new rhythm to free labor in Brazil: immigration. The intention was for the country to have a better, i.e., whiter, population, hence the significant openness to immigration from European countries (Chiavenato, 2012).

Miscegenation, highly acclaimed in the country and considered one of the primary characteristics of the Brazilian population, is primarily based on the sexual exploitation of Black women. With miscegenation, it was believed that the Black race would disappear under the "progressive whitening of the country's population" (Nascimento, 2016, p. 84, our translation).

From miscegenation arise the ideas of racial democracy, in which it is believed that skin color does not affect equality of opportunity. Fernandes (2008) understands the idea of racial democracy as a political and symbolic discourse used to demobilize the Black population. In reality, this discourse hinders Black people's self-affirmation and reduces the possibilities of racial identification. It is in this context, and with this entrenched ideology that the Black population seeks social mobility and forms its subjectivities.

Formation of Black Subjectivity and Perspectives of School Education: Possibilities of Change through Antiracist Practices

The history of the social ascent of the Brazilian Black person is also the history of the formation of their subjectivity. The Black person, lacking a positive conception of themselves, has been conditioned to view whiteness as a model while seeking strategies to structure their identity and social ascent (Souza, 2021).

For society, the respectable and valued model was the Eurocentric model embodied by the white person. To be respected and valued meant to be treated as white. It was from this perspective that the Black person sought social ascent, even if it meant denying their racial identity, desiring earnestly to resemble the white person in order to become "human" (Souza, 2021).

Therefore, concerning the development of Black subjectivity, without evasion and directly, Fanon (2020, p. 22, our translation) states: "The Negro is not a man." There exists for the Black person a zone of non-being as a result of various affective deformities instilled within them by a white society conceived for white people. Hence, the Black person desires to be white. The fact elucidated by the author, from which we cannot escape, is that white people deem themselves superior to Black people, and as a consequence, Black people strive desperately to demonstrate that they possess the same wealth and power of the mind.

For the process of Black de-alienation to occur, it is necessary to recognize the economic, social, and psychological reality of the population. If there exists a complex of inferiority within the Black person, it arises from the economic bias and the internalization of this inferiority. It is crucial to understand beforehand that this situation was not generated by the Black population. As a result of the colonizer's actions, since the historical process of enslavement, Black people have been in a state of alienation concerning their self-images, which have been distorted and diminished (Berth, 2018; Fanon, 2020).

The inferiority of the Black person is a creation of the racist collective that constructed the inferiorized based on embedded values of supposed Europeanized white superiority. Thus, alterity, for the Black person, is not the Black person, but the white person. The colonizer inflicted upon their colonized an absolute wound with consequences not only social but also psychological, in which the Black person has a constant need to make white society recognize their humanity (Fanon, 2020).

The Black person takes the white person as a reference to affirm or deny themselves. They are not entitled to spontaneity or simply being, as this was a denied right. Thus, they react

instead of act. The considerations derived from this situation are that the Black person yearns to be white, for they live in a society that feeds this desire by constantly asserting the superiority of one race (Souza, 2021).

To bring about a change in this scenario, it is necessary for Black individuals to become aware of the understanding of racist social structures. In other words, Black individuals need to recognize the aspects of this desire to whiten themselves, understanding the reasons that lead to it, and becoming aware of different possibilities of existence (Fanon, 2020).

Different perspectives can operate in this direction, and what we will consider here is the potential of schools to act from different perspectives, facilitating the reflection of Black individuals on the acceptance of their blackness. Despite schools appearing as a conflicting space that manifests the reproduction of discriminatory, racist practices, it is necessary to provide opportunities to work towards the deconstruction of society's structured racism.

Davis (2016) asserts that the right to learn is part of the Black struggle, as this right was denied to Black individuals for a long time. Slaveowners feared that reading and writing would instigate and facilitate rebellions and insurrections. Indeed, the desire for knowledge among the Black population was also related to freedom. Today, the struggle is for an education that encompasses Black knowledge.

Rosa (2019) points out that it is necessary to avoid the pretense of considering ourselves, as teachers, as saviors or bearers of good news through which we will provide the resolution to the problems of the Black population, as an egalitarian society is not achieved solely through education, but also through various other social layers that the school community cannot reach. However, given the lack of positive representations in different spheres, and even with all the limitations, the classroom remains a space of potential, and we have this commitment in our hands.

Therefore, we consider that anti-racist practices, in line with the lived experiences of Black school students, need to be widely included in schools. The school environment should provide conditions for Black students to affirm their identities among other non-Black identities, positively impacting their subjectivities so that they can consciously represent themselves as Black individuals.

In the meantime, the scientific literature presents studies that aim to evaluate the implementation of Law No. 10,639 in different educational contexts. Ferreira and Ferreira (2022) conducted an analysis of eight high school philosophy books and observed the non-inclusion of the law in this content. Fonseca and Rocha (2019) analyzed the institutionalization

process of the law in schools within the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific, and Technological Education, finding that there is a shallow level of implementation in this context.

However, even though implemented in a dispersed and irregular manner, Law No. 10,639/03 has been fundamental in supporting and driving anti-racist pedagogical initiatives. The efforts of educators who use the law and various transformative theories and methodologies have made it possible to rethink education, problematizing the school curriculum in relation to diversity and racial (in)equality and unsettling the racist and exclusionary power present in various educational instances (Gomes, 2023).

In this perspective, we can exemplify successful experiences through the works of Rosa (2019) and Tolentino (2018). Rosa (2019) developed an autonomous popular education project in the outskirts of São Paulo, which she titled "*pedagoginga*" using various disciplines such as history, geography, arts, and literature to connect everyday practices with knowledge of Black culture. Meanwhile, Tolentino (2018) presents in her work, expressed in chronicles, her pedagogical practice in public schools, recounting her experiences in primary education. Through her experiences, the teacher demonstrates how to fulfill the commitment against racism, sexism, and LGBTphobia in the classroom.

We understand that committing to an anti-racist education is a challenge, as we are continually consumed by a colonizing mentality that shapes consciousness and actions, requiring us to be vigilant and engaged in new ways of thinking. In education, we can swim against the tide; however, we also encounter difficulty conveying these perspectives to students who are equally immersed in the normalized values of the school environment (Hooks, 2020).

Engaging with Black culture provides opportunities for Black individuals to connect with their ancestries, whose values of whiteness sought to strip of humanity in every way possible, thus enabling a rearrangement of the foundations and features of their identities that have undergone existential shattering. Hence arises, the responsibility to find ways to address contemporary issues of Blackness while drawing from ancestral sources, guiding and legitimizing practices that are not aligned with the whitening agenda of the country's history (Rosa, 2019).

In this sense, we can act in three directions: gender and ethnic-racial issues, the effort to reframe curricula and knowledge, and the pursuit of a comprehensive and inclusive education. These directions are permeated by Freirean influences, aiming for reflective and problematizing activities, valuing and engaging with students' prior knowledge and contexts, with no room for prejudices and discrimination (Tolentino, 2018).

It is necessary to go beyond the promotion of an anti-racist, feminist, and inclusive education. It is crucial to clarify to students that they are part of a logic of social and economic exclusion that hinders the social mobility of Black children and adolescents in the capitalist system. Public schools, in particular, have filled the job market mainly with lower-prestige roles (Tolentino, 2018).

Showing the barriers so clearly may seem contradictory; however, as previously mentioned by Fanon (2020), only by understanding the social structures that place them in unequal positions will Black individuals acquire the necessary awareness to fight against these structures and seek new possibilities of existence. Tolentino (2018) corroborates these perspectives and asserts that insurgency against inequalities will only be possible through knowledge of victimizing oppressions.

In this context, it is valid to understand that education has been an instrument of colonialist ideals and teaching to maintain the status quo for students, making it complex to demand from teachers a different form of teaching than what they were taught. A significant revolution that has occurred in education in recent years is the questioning of educators' positions regarding the distortion of the Black population and Indigenous peoples' history and the reproduction of the colonizer's whitewashed discourse (Hooks, 2020).

To critically think about what is intended with a Black curriculum, and here we assume thinking in terms of action, is primarily to disrupt the curricular structures that are in place in everyday life. School content is monocultural and silences other cultures, with epistemic erasure of African contributions to the development of our knowledge as Brazilians (Machado; Petit, 2020).

An interesting starting point we consider for expanding thoughts regarding the colonization of knowledge is to ponder: How would Brazil's history be told if the narrative were from enslaved peoples and Indigenous peoples? Refuting the way Black people's history has been taught and demanding different narratives from those disseminated by whiteness is fundamental for the school to be a place of integrity in education.

Despite interventions, such as Law No. 10.639/03, there will be no effective changes if teachers do not acknowledge that working without discrimination requires a return to the learning environment, where there is a willingness to give new meanings to what has been learned from a culture of colonizing values.

It is necessary to recognize the rigidity of the current education system, respond to it critically, and commit to an antiracist, diverse, and inclusive education. This recognition

primarily concerns a political choice that conceives "the student as a collective subject who has memory, life history, tradition, values, and emotions that demand a place in society" (Costa, 2019, p. 119, our translation). In this way, education will be powerful enough to enable Black individuals to emerge as whole human beings with restored self-esteem and an ideal that has their faces as a reference.

Final considerations

The study presents theoretical aspects concerning the context of Black individuals living in a predominantly white society, with an education system skewed by colonialist values and the resulting detrimental effects on the formation of their subjectivity, which begins to take shape from childhood. To reflect on this scenario, we sought to consider, through scientific literature, some historical aspects and pedagogical practices, contemplating perspectives that address and overcome the issues surrounding the relationships between Black individuals and the school environment.

To explore the possibilities of antiracist education, the study highlights Freirean contributions that reject education's neutrality and recognize the educator-student relationship's positioning in the teaching-learning process as a political choice. Schools should aim to foster critical thinking that enables students to understand the social structures maintaining power and the subversive efforts to alter the white-dominated status quo.

In light of these reflections, we understand that such perceptions do not change overnight, as teachers and students are immersed in a society that still perpetuates colonizer thinking. Although issues of race, diversity, class, and other progressive principles are increasingly accepted in schools, it is still common for these issues to be addressed simplistically and overshadowed by structured content.

Despite this, it is necessary to find ways to escape the rigid logic of formal knowledge and promote antiracist education. In this way, we can harness the potential of education to positively impact the formation of Black individuals' subjectivity, achieving a truly democratic education that meets the needs of these individuals within the Brazilian context.

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