"SEED OF EVIL": THINKING ABOUT THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW AND DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM, STIGMA, AND STEREOTYPES

"SEMENTE DO MAL": PENSAR A EDUCAÇÃO DE JOVENS EM CONFLITO COM A LEI E PRIVADOS DE LIBERDADE, ESTIGMAS E ESTEREÓTIPOS

"SEMILLA DEL MAL": PENSAR LA EDUCACIÓN DE JÓVENES EN CONFLICTO CON LA LEY Y PRIVADOS DE LIBERTAD, ESTIGMAS Y ESTEREOTIPOS

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to discuss socially constructed images in relation to young people who, as a result of infractions, came into conflict with the law and were deprived of their freedom. The basis of the discussion is based on the reflections of Goffman (2022) and the concept of Stigma, as well as related research in the area. The work materializes through efforts undertaken to develop the bibliographic research Incarcerated Youth: elements to understand the education of young people deprived of liberty in the State of Minas Gerais, in the process of development within the scope of the Postgraduate Program in Education, of the University of Ouro Preto. The reflections enabled a better understanding of the ways in which images of young subjects, in conflict with the law, are constructed and the reverberations of such stereotypes and stigmas in the experiences and trajectories of such subjects.

KEYWORDS: Stigmas. Stereotypes. Peripheral Youths. Young People in Conflict with the Law.

RESUMO: *Este artigo tem como objetivo discutir imagens socialmente construídas em relação aos/as jovens que, em decorrência de atos infracionais, entraram em conflito com a lei e foram privados de sua liberdade. A base da discussão está alicerçada nas reflexões de Goffman (2022) e o conceito de Estigma, bem como pesquisas correlatas à área. O trabalho se materializa por meio de esforços empreendidos para o desenvolvimento da pesquisa bibliográfica Juventude Encarcerada: elementos para entender a educação de jovens em privação de liberdade no Estado de Minas Gerais, em processo de desenvolvimento no âmbito do Programa de Pós-graduação em Educação, da Universidade de Ouro Preto. As reflexões possibilitaram uma melhor compreensão quanto aos modos como as imagens de sujeitos jovens, em conflito com a lei, são construídas e quais as reverberações de tais estereótipos e estigmas nas vivências e trajetórias de tais sujeitos.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Estigmas. Estereótipos. Juventudes Periféricas. Jovens em Conflito com a Lei.*

RESUMEN: *El presente artículo tiene como objetivo discutir imágenes socialmente construidas en relación a los/las jóvenes que, como consecuencia de actos delictivos, entraron en conflicto con la ley y fueron privados de su libertad. La discusión está basada en las reflexiones de Goffman (2022) y el concepto de Estigma, bien como investigaciones correlatas a la área. El trabajo se materializa por medio de esfuerzos emprendidos para el desarrollo da investigación bibliográfica Juventude Encarcerada: elementos para entender la educación de jóvenes en privação de liberdade no Estado de Minas Gerais, en proceso de desarrollo en el ámbito del Programa de Pós Graduação em Educação, de la Universidade de Ouro Preto. Las reflexiones posibilitaron una mejor comprensión respecto a los modos cómo las imágenes de sujetos jóvenes, en conflicto con la ley, son construidas y cuáles las reverberaciones de tales estereotipos y estigmas en las vivencias y trayectorias de tales sujetos.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Estigmas. Estereotipos. Juventudes Periféricas. Jóvenes en Conflicto con la Ley.*

Introduction

The present work aims to discuss the representations established from socially constructed images in relation to young people who, as a result of infractions, ended up being deprived of their freedom. In order to better understand the symbols contained in the stereotypical ways of representing such subjects in society, we were encouraged to dialogue with the reflections of Erving Goffman (2022) in his work *"Stigma"*, in which he works with the elements that construct and maintain the stains that they serve to establish who are *"normal"* and who do not follow the norm, and who, therefore, must suffer sanctions for this fact. In relation to young people deprived of liberty in the socio-educational system, we believe that these discussions will greatly help us understand the specificities experienced and the obstacles faced by such subjects in exercising their right to Education.

This discussion arises from the efforts undertaken to develop broader research that focuses on the study of educational experiences provided by the State to young people deprived of liberty. The research *Incarcerated Youth: elements to understand the education of young people deprived of liberty in the State of Minas Gerais* is developed within the scope of the Postgraduate Program in Education, of the Institute of Human and Social Sciences of the Federal University of Ouro Preto. We start from the question: what research in the area of Youth and Adult Education - EJA for people deprived of liberty is published and what data are made available by the public authorities of the State of Minas Gerais and which refer to public policies that cover educational experiences in this modality, provided to young people who are deprived of their liberty. Methodologically, the research is established as meta-research in the field of educational policies aimed at EJA (Mainardes, 2021). The work focused on research already developed in the area and the search to synthesize and analyze what knowledge had been produced up to the present day.

We dare to say that academic research, whatever it may be, brings with it the marks of the convictions and beliefs of the researchers who are engaged in it. And it would be no different with the research in question. By focusing on other research that addresses the educational experiences of young people in a context of deprivation of liberty, we demonstrate our understanding of education as a constitutional and inalienable right, of each and every citizen, even if they are deprived of their liberty due to some infraction. The fact that a subject is penalized, regardless of his fault, does not imply the loss of any other rights, such as the right to exercise his sentence in a humanly dignified manner and, consequently, access to education.

The penalty concerns the restriction of his freedom and social life and not a complete condemnation of ostracism, the non-existence in the society to which he belongs.

Even after approximately 75 years of the officialization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, in summary, systematizes the elements that establish the unrestricted rights of all people in the world to a dignified existence, in Brazil, common sense established distorted images as if Human Rights were simply privileges granted to criminals. This reality has a direct impact on the representations established in the face of research proposals, and their respective researchers, as they are predisposed to discuss the education of subjects deprived of liberty. The label of bandit defenders is easily bestowed. However, there are also those who consider this to be a courageous undertaking, as it faces taboos and faces necessary reflections in relation to social contradictions (Spagnol, 2008).

In the context of a Brazilian society historically marked by exclusion and social inequality, in which poverty is a factor in the criminalization of certain bodies, it seems prudent that research that focuses its analyzes on the educational experiences of young people in the context of deprivation of liberty At a minimum, also pay attention to the socially constructed images in relation to these subjects and the influence of these images on their life trajectory. We are dealing with a society that, as a rule, penalizes its less favored classes more severely, for potentially less serious crimes.

Although it is a reality that may outrage us, it is not something unusual throughout history. In his work *"The History of the Prison Penalty"*, Cláudio do Prado Amaral (2016), points out that since ancient times, sentences have varied in their intensity and rigor according to the person's social condition. Without fear of making mistakes, we start from the concreteness of a society that intrinsically links black, favela and peripheral youth to violence. Professor Sérgio Adorno, when presenting the book *"Lost Youth: a study on young delinquents in the city of São Paulo"*, written by Antônio Sérgio Spagnol, points out important questions:

> Since violence and crime became a public issue in this society, there are frequent images and representations, conveyed by the print and electronic media and, more recently, by national filmography, that associate being young with being violent. It's as if there was a kind of natural adherence between both terms of this equation. Being young appears as a threat, as a kind of unavoidable radicality, an epistemological limit to reasonable life, whatever that may or may mean. (Spangnol, 2008, p. 11, our translation).

Our intention is far from mitigating criminal acts committed by young people, whatever they may be, however, using an act, be it of any severity, to rape that person in prison, denying the minimum human rights of dignity in their process remission is also not correct. The State,

acting in this way, would be reproducing the executioner's logic, instead of being an enabler of effective experiences for remission. Discussing and analyzing the stigmas and stereotypes granted to these subjects, an aim of this article, seems to us to be a fruitful way to understand the social contradictions and the complexity that surrounds the trajectories of such subjects.

Elements for the debate

Despite advances in the field of research involving youth, their cultural manifestations, their formative experiences and their experiences of the youth condition in the current Brazilian social reality (Sposito, 2009), there is still a lot to look at if we intend to establish another look at youth deprived of freedom, starting from their primary condition as humans/subjects of rights. When it comes to young people in conflict with the law, we can say that there is an aggravated situation, since prejudiced and stereotypical images about black and peripheral youth reverberate in the functioning of a penal system that criminalizes poverty and blackness (Spagnol, 2008). As Soares (2004) points out:

> A poor, black young man walking through the streets of a large Brazilian city is a socially invisible being. There are many ways to be invisible and several reasons to be invisible. In the case of our character, invisibility arises mainly from prejudice and indifference. One of the most efficient ways to make someone invisible is to project a stigma, a prejudice, onto him or her. When we do so, we nullify the person and only see the reflection of our own intolerance. Everything that distinguishes the person, making them an individual, everything that is unique about them disappears. Stigma dissolves the other's identity and replaces it with the stereotypical portrait and classification we impose on it. Whoever is there on the corner is not Pedro, Roberto or Maria, with their respective ages and life stories, their defects and qualities, their emotions and their fears, their ambitions and their desires. The person there is the "dangerous kid" or the "lost girl", whose behavior becomes predictable. Placing a stigma on a person amounts to accusing them simply because they exist. Predicting their behavior encourages and justifies the adoption of preventive attitudes. As what is expected is threatening, the anticipated defense will be aggression or flight, also hostile. In other words, prejudice arms fear that triggers violence preventively. (Soares, 2004, p. 132-133, our translation).

To help us better understand this reality, we resort to the reflections of Philippe Robert (2011), when approaching elements of the sociology of crime. The author points out that the greater the feeling of insecurity, the greater the contact with situations that indicate behaviors to be penalized and the greater the perception that the State is not fulfilling its role of guaranteeing people's safety and well-being, the greater the fear around the possibility of suffering violence. Therefore, people exposed to violence that is trivialized in everyday

television networks enter into a state of social panic and pressure the state structure to increase sentences, believing that the greater the sentence, the greater the other person's fear of committing a crime. This reasoning, in theory, is supported by the argument that greater penalties can make criminals more afraid of breaking the rules and being imprisoned. Something that is not empirically supported.

As the images in relation to the research subjects are of young people who freely commit crimes without being duly punished, mobilization to imprison this subject for being a threat to order becomes essential. It is, however, a social problem that must be resolved by inserting these young people into a less unequal social reality and offering opportunities that present themselves as alternatives to the life they lead. The solution has certainly been given, allegedly, in recent years, through their invisibilization, their erasure, the construction of their non-existence with their incarceration and withdrawal from society.

In general aspects, penal and correctional institutions, which in theory should provide the subject with moral improvement, often go against the grain of the process. Some practices, used to condition subjects, even contribute to their loss of identity. For example, the use of numbers instead of names, which Goffman (2015) calls *"mutilation of the self"*. An aspect of great importance, based on a dialogue with Foucault (2007), in his classic work *"Discipline and Punish"*, is the fact that we can understand that the prison institution is beyond an institution that only gives legality to the punishment to which appears as a deviation from the rule and the commission of a fault. Prison also serves as a control factor for those who, in deviance, prove to be dangerous to the social order. When it comes to the Brazilian reality, when addressing elements about juvenile offenders in custody and the socio-educational system, Soares (2004) tells us about the existence of a caricature of penitentiary systems and institutions aimed at resocialization that end up not implementing their commitment.

Walking through this area of debate, it seems necessary to visualize the penalization processes. Robert (2011, p. 19) states that *"the law does not penalize entire behavioral classes, it divides them into segments, and not every type of violence is penalized, only certain forms of violence, under certain conditions"*. In view of this point, we begin to reflect on the ways in which the State criminalizes and penalizes the acts of black and peripheral young people and we see that the fact of living in the periphery, being poor and being black imposes more rigid and burdensome conditions on this subject case of any minimal deviant behavior, as well as placing them at a greater risk of death (Salatiel, 2019). As Julião points out, in his book *"Cartography of the Experiences of Youth and Adult Education Policies in Prisons in Latin*

America" (2020, p.29), *"cultural definitions are hegemonic and produced by a certain social group – the classes hegemonic. They are the ones who decide and determine what socialization and crime are"*.

Regarding police approaches, which will directly affect the number of arrests or not of the subjects approached, Ferreira *et al.* (2009), point out a much higher prevalence in relation to its occurrence among young, male, black and poor people. Along the same path of analysis, researcher Reis (2002), when studying the ways in which the Bahian military police establish the criteria for determining suspects to be approached, the *"ideal type"*, highlights that skin color, as well as the use of Tattoos and chains on the neck are elements that indicate characteristics of those who have the greatest potential to be involved in banditry. Such characteristics, addressed by Reis (2002), are similar to what type of young person? Would young black and white people be treated the same? Or rich and poor young people? Or residents of elite neighborhoods and favelas and clusters? We are led to say no. Becker's notes (2019), in his work "Outsiders", in which he studies deviant behaviors, allow us to believe that we are not wrong:

> The degree to which an act will be treated as deviant also depends on who commits it and who feels harmed by it. Rules tend to apply more to some people than others. Studies of juvenile delinquency make this very clear. Boys from middle-class areas, when detained, do not get as far through the legal process as boys from slum neighborhoods. The middle-class boy is less likely, when caught by the police, to be taken to the police station, less likely, when taken to the police station, to be charged; and it is extremely unlikely that he will be convicted and sentenced. This variation occurs even if the original violation of the rule is the same in both cases. In a similar way, the law is applied differently to blacks and whites (Becker, 2019, p.27, our translation).

Although we know that Becker (2019) analyzes an American reality, there is no way to dispute the elements of approximation and similarities with the national reality. Brazil, instead of worrying about public security policies for youth, is much more concerned with ways to coerce specific, black, poor and peripheral youth (Saliba, 2006). Such markers point out, to some extent, elements about the representation of such subjects.

Youth and violence

Socially constructed images, substantially, instead of materializing a concrete truth, tell us much more about constructions intentionally established to benefit and qualify certain subjects and disqualify others. In this sense, situations that may sound empirically as being

something real, can also, on the other hand, serve to manipulate situations and falsify truths (Goffman, 2022; Elias, Scotson, 2000). In addition to all the stereotypes given to youth, of incompleteness, immaturity, irresponsibility, lack of commitment, we highlight the fact that such subjects are characterized as being eminently violent (Trassi; Malvasi, 2010).

Official data regarding violence in the country tells us that young people are the biggest victims, with greater emphasis on crimes such as homicides and the victims being black, peripheral men and those with a low level of education. The data shows that the aggressors are also mostly young, however, it is vital to emphasize that in relation to the recording, investigation and typification of crimes, statistics can be misleading, as they portray a portion, sometimes considerably smaller than the real amount of what occurs in society. As demonstrated by Ferreira *et al.* (2009, p. 191), when it comes to the number of young people involved in crimes, *"studies show, however, that early criminalization, with repression policies focused especially on young people, without due care, tends to favor deviant behavior"*.

Such notes mobilize us to seek to better understand some emerging positions within the social reality in which we are inserted. We are talking about a situation in which every day, on open television, in the afternoon, when people arrive home after work, we have so-called journalistic programs[3], which seek to guarantee their audience based on the trivialization and fragmentation of violence explicitly, with the broadcast of murders, robberies, drug trafficking, among many other social problems (Jesus, 2006; Penso *et al.,* 2012). There is an overestimation of the presence of young people and adolescents in crimes:

> The numbers show that this is not a reality. What regularly occurs is greater exposure and repercussion in the media of violent episodes involving teenagers, which leads society to believe that they are more violent or are insufficiently affected by penalizing actions (Ferreira *et al*., 2009, p. 192, our translation).

In the midst of this daily and national process of explaining and trivializing violence, a portrait of a lawless society emerges in people's imagination (Torres, José; 2017), which does not punish criminals and which does not guarantee the safety of nobody. It is in this scenario that the images about black, poor and peripheral youth will amalgamate the fate of being considered criminals, the vast majority of them. Faced with this fact, such subjects are

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[3]Programa Brasil Urgente presented by José Luiz Datena on Rede Bandeirantes, Programa Alerta Nacional presented by Siqueira Júnior on Rede TV and Programa Balanço Geral presented by Luiz Bacci, are the great exponents of this type of supposedly journalistic programs.

"marked", stigmatized, with a wound that cannot be erased (Goffman, 2022). This subject becomes defined by society based on his stigma, his pejorative characteristic (Martino, 2021).

When it comes to young people in conflict with the law, common sense social discourse still says that they will be privileged because they will not be able to suffer the full severity of the sentences until they turn 18. Even the presenters of programs of this type refer to poor, black and peripheral young people as *"seeds of evil"* or even as *"CPF's"* to be *"cancelled"*. The *"good criminal is a dead criminal"* speech is recurrently used to deal with these subjects. For some years now, we have seen campaigns emerging on the political scene with the aim of reducing the age of criminal responsibility, as if the problem of violence in society were simply young people, minors, in conflict with the law, or even non-payment, or lack of of the payment due or as expected, by these subjects in relation to the seriousness of their acts (Sen, 2015; Liberatti, 2012).

Despite the alleged complete realities expressed by common sense discourse, we start from the conviction that the nuances contained in the reality of the young people approached in the work are marked by contradictions that tell us of a social complexity much greater than it appears. Therefore, there is a pressing need to debate such issues. We are talking about a country in which incarceration affects a population that exceeds 820 thousand individuals according to text 20 of the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook (2022a). This is the third largest prison population in the world and in which the largest number are young, black, male subjects, coming from the popular classes, who in most cases are arrested in the act for possessing or selling small amounts of drugs. Faced with police subjectivity, they are invariably classified as drug traffickers (Venâncio, *et al.*, 2021). As the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook points out, in Brazil there is the perpetuation of the incarceration of very specific subjects:

> In recent years, the profile of the incarcerated population has not changed. What we see, in reality, is the intensification of the incarceration of black people and young people: 46.4% of prisoners are between 18 and 29 years old and 67.5% are of black color/race. Over the past few years, the percentage of the black population incarcerated has increased. If in 2011, 60.3% of the incarcerated population was black and 36.6% white, in 2021, the proportion was 67.5% black prisoners to 29.0% white prisoners. (Brazilian Public Security Forum, 2022a, p. 11, our translation).

We are dealing with a public that, as much as it is the most incarcerated in the country, is also the one that suffers most from violence. We say this because we know how much violence has plagued these young people, notably the institutional violence of the coercive forces of the State, which increased exponentially during the last administration of the federal

government. Text 5 of the Brazilian Public Security Yearbook (2022b) brings disturbing data: police lethality fell in the country, but black mortality increased. This reality reinforces the need for research that focuses on Education and, also, on Young People in situations of deprivation of liberty with a view to opening up fields of possibilities regarding such a violent reality, against certain groups.

The data presented by another important analytical document, the Atlas of Violence (Cerqueira, 2021), undermines the structures of a racist society and clearly explains this mechanism through the violence experienced by the young subjects researched. In a period of 10 years, between 2008 and 2018, there was an 11.5% increase in the rate of homicides and violent deaths among black people and a 12.9% decrease among non-black people. Around 75.7% of victims of violent deaths in the country are black people (Cerqueira, 2021). In contrast to this reality, which is recurrently used as a factor to encourage discourses of social panic, lack of public security and impunity for criminals, ends up reverberating in the worsening of incarceration policies.

Faced with a social reality of worsening violence, the emergence and consolidation in the last 4 years of a conservative discourse and the criminalization of poverty, a large investment in an arms policy, which instead of reducing violence, increased circulation and access to arms by gangs of bandits, it becomes even more necessary for us to understand who these young people are and the images created around them. We are dealing with a social reality in which, according to Miguel Arroyo (2019), some subjects have their lives threatened by the previously mentioned conditions and the educational experience, despite not serving as salvation, can serve as a horizon for the establishment of other forms more worthy of living.

"Seed of evil": about stigmas and the reality of young people in conflict with the law or deprived of freedom

Social subjects are, to a large extent, linked to a place in the social organization, the expectations in relation to these same subjects and the actions developed to contribute to the maintenance of order and the proper functioning of society. Therefore, we can say that we are all represented socially, to some extent, and the way in which we are represented results from a series of factors such as socioeconomic condition, level of studies, sex and sexual orientation, race, among many others factors. When it comes to the demands that society establishes for social subjects, Goffman (2022) tells us about the existence of two manifest forms of identity when we deal with stigma. One based on social demands in relation to the individual and

expectations and imputations based on potential retrospect, this would be *Virtual Social Identity*. The other arises from the attributes he demonstrates to possess; this would be *Real Social Identity*.

The way we are represented, although it may contain elements that are specific to us, does not necessarily tell an irrefutable truth and a unique way about who we are. However, the dissonance, or distance, between a *Virtual Social Identity* considered as an expectation and the *Real Social Identity* considered as a representation of the individual, has an impact on the occurrence of stigmas. As Martino (2021, p. 67) points out, when approaching Goffman's work, *"anyone can define themselves in many ways, for example, based on their religion, their team or profession. For the stigmatized, however, these characteristics remain in the background: in the eyes of society, they are defined by the stigma"*.

In the current situation we can say that the ideal standard for a social subject is very close to a man, white, rich, with a strong body, without physical disabilities, heterosexual, with academic training and professionally successful. Anything that differs, in the slightest extent, from any of these characteristics, serves as an element of hierarchy regarding the places to be occupied and the privileges to be enjoyed socially. Given this and based on the ideal of a socially established subject, even if in a tacit or subtle way, those who will be *"normal"* and those who are abnormal, or stigmatized, will be established. *"Society establishes the means of categorizing people and the total of common and natural attributes for members"* (Goffman, 2022, p. 11). When we look at Goffman's writings, we find an important analytical key for understanding the images constructed in relation to young people in conflict with the law and deprived of liberty. Preconceived images about the subjects even before committing any infraction, as well as more incisive images in their process of complying with socio-educational measures and perhaps in an aggravated way, stigmas that are too difficult to break after leaving the institution where they were protected.

As the author points out (Goffman, 2022), stigma is a mark, a sign that serves as a way of identifying the person who carries it. Since ancient Greece, this resource was used, like marks and body signs, to highlight, for example, people who had deviations in character and behavior, thieves, criminals, traitors. This was a factor in distancing people from those who were stigmatized. According to the sociologist, the portability of a stigma can even affect the social recognition, or not, of humanity in relation to the stigmatized person. It is also important to point out that a subject can carry stigmas that overlap and that, consequently, can worsen the

situations of violence and exclusion experienced. Faced with this reality, Elias and Scotson (2000) bring us a powerful contribution:

> This is the normal self-image of groups that, in terms of their power differential, are surely superior to other interdependent groups. Whether it is social frameworks, such as feudal lords in relation to villains, "whites" in relation to "blacks", gentiles in relation to Jews, Protestants in relation to Catholics and vice versa, men in relation to women (in the past) [...], the most powerful groups, in all these cases, see themselves as "better" people, endowed with a kind of group charisma, with a specific virtue that is shared by all its members and that is lacking to others. Furthermore, in all these cases, "superior" individuals can make inferior individuals feel, themselves, lacking in virtues – judging themselves to be humanly inferior. (Elias; Scotson, 2000, p. 20, our translation).

This question about the recognition of humanity as a condition restricted to some social subjects and denied to many others is very well addressed by Freire (2011), in his classic book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The social reality that we face every day tells us of an uninterrupted process of searching for the prevalence of a capitalist logic as the only one possible. An ideology based on the insane search for capital accumulation, the search for happiness through the possession of material goods, and the abysmal social inequality that increasingly distances the poor classes from those who own capital. Such logic, in addition to a utilitarian intention of producing subjects who conform to their disadvantaged condition, to the point of hindering the understanding of social contradictions and the process of usurpation of the right to a dignified existence, also serves to bury any and all other possibilities of to see another world, to perceive imbalances, to understand social ills, to know that there are the privileged and the usurped, the oppressed and the oppressors. Resuming the dialogue with Elias and Scotson (2000, p. 24, our translation), we can observe that:

> Attaching a label of "inferior human value" to another group is one of the weapons used by superior groups in power struggles, as a means of maintaining their social superiority. In this situation, the social stigma imposed by the more powerful group on the less powerful group tends to penetrate the latter's self-image and, as a result, weaken and disarm it.

Given this impactful concreteness, let us move forward in the debate. Goffman (2022), in his reflections and writings, points out the existence of stigmas that fall into three types: 1) Stigmas of abomination of the body; 2) Stigmas involving individual guilt, imprisonment, addictions, etc.; 3) Tribal, racial, national or religious stigmas. A more eager reader and the more pragmatic and direct use of the author's reflections may lead us to understand that the class issue does not fit into the types mentioned. However, the analysis of social reality and the

images socially erected regarding the poorest classes tell us of a historical movement in our country towards linking the poor to barbarism, a lack of civility and, consequently, a greater propensity to vice, to involvement in crime, to being a criminal. Which fits perfectly into the stigmas of individual guilt. Consigned to this, with the focus on tribal and race stigmas, elements of a structurally racist Brazilian society emerge, in which class has a strong racial marker. The stigma of poverty is heightened by racial issues.

The State, in order to maintain order, reinforces the meritocratic conception and protects private property. In this context, any and all behavior that could, in the slightest, result in a possible destabilization of the *"order"* must be severely penalized. This is an explicit process of criminalizing poverty and incarcerating poor, black and peripheral subjects. According to Goffman (2022), the *"Stigma Theory"*, when intending to explain the construction of inferiorities in society and the danger it represents, brings together, among the various differentiations, the issue of social class. Still focusing on racial and social class issues, we bring the notes of Norbert Elias and John Scotson (2000), who show us that such conditions are seen as striking and recurring characteristics in the process of social distinction, when studying social representations and disputes between established players and outsiders. A person born poor in Brazil already carries a stigma with them.

Despite our intention to qualify the debate proposed in this work and give it greater support regarding its analyses, it is worth highlighting that stigmatization based on class conditions, with a violent bias towards the reproduction and maintenance of social inequalities is not a Brazilian particularity.

> The similarity of the pattern of stigmatization used by high-power groups in relation to outsider groups around the world – the similarity of this pattern despite all cultural differences – may seem somewhat unexpected at first. But the symptoms of human inferiority that very powerful established groups tend to identify with low-power outsider groups and that serve their members as justification for their high status and proof of their superior value are usually generated in members of the inferior group – inferior in terms of their relationship of forces – by the conditions themselves. In some ways, they are the same all over the world. Poverty – the low standard of living – is one of them (Elias; Scotson, 2000, p. 28, our translation).

In this context, it is relatively natural that society sees the incarceration of young, black, poor and peripheral people as a measure to be taken against *"abnormal"* subjects. This *modus operandi* contributes very little to an effective fight against social conflicts, the complexity of the issue demands a greater equalization of responsibilities (Gomide, 2012). In dialogue with the research by Vidal (2014), who in his dissertation analyzes the stigmas faced by young people

in compliance with socio-educational measures, the author points out that the way in which subjects are characterized is something unilateral, compulsory, violent.

> I find it very interesting to observe that the verb "infringir" [Portuguese], which means to break, violate, disrespect, when it comes into contact with these young people, turns into an adjective or noun: "infringer", which seems to carry the weight of permanence. The term "offender", then, does not only speak of a current moment, but also of the past and the future. It talks about someone who was born this way and has the characteristic of "infraction" in its essence. What I mean is that the offender is not simply related to the action of infringing, but to the way of being, of existing. Stigma has this power to naturalize negative attributes and reduce the stigmatized subject to them (Vidal, 2014, p. 83, our translation).

Still following this point of reflection, we turn to the production of Martino (2021). The author, when dialoging with Goffman's work, tells us that a stigmatized person has a *"damaged identity"*:

> A person who, for some reason, is outside the norms and standards considered acceptable in society. In the eyes of others, she is not what was expected – she is always out of place, out of tune. [...] Not all stigma is due to a physical characteristic. On the contrary, many social marks of inferiority are linked to factors such as class origin (Martino, 2021, p. 67, our translation).

In relation to images about poor youth, we don't need to go very far. Just turn on the television set to newspapers with great media appeal, such representations tell us about dangerous subjects, who, by breaking the rules, corrupt the social order. *"Stigmatized, these young people are treated violently by society and public services, they are treated as traitors, enemies of good citizens, outcasts who are unable to live in accordance with the social pact"* (Vidal, 2014, p. 84). In the midst of this stigmatization process, the link established between poverty and violence stands out. There are many instances where state police forces enter favelas and settlements and clash with criminals and end up killing innocent people. Before any investigation, the police forces attribute to the dead, whoever they may be, the stigma of being criminals. More common than it may seem, in such situations many of the dead are young workers and students, but because they live in favelas they are readily identified as criminals.

Other situations that serve as an element for analysis are the occurrence of crimes involving rich or middle-class young people. As pointed out by Gurski (2012), association with organized crime and the commission of crimes has increased among young people from these classes. However, the reports are recurrently marked by the discourse that portrays a subject who, despite having good living conditions, committed the crime, it is a situation that seems to cause astonishment in society, while in relation to the poor young man it is a very likely

expectation realization. Melo (2000, p. 19), when discussing stigma and its relations with the processes of social exclusion, points out that *"the stigmatized subject can be converted into something evil, bad and even dangerous in its interrelations"*. It seems to us that such practices are very similar to what happens with young people in conflict with the law and their images in society. What we cannot avoid understanding is that it is a historical and intentionally engendered process, which uses *"a relationship of power, capable of distorting the image of a human being into something inferior and monstrous"* (Vidal, 2014, p.84).

Inserted in this context are the ways in which stigma spreads throughout an entire society. The reach of the social imaginary is directly related to the impact on public opinion and the way in which the situation is conveyed. This scenario is strongly influenced by the media, newspapers, television programs and, currently, with greater force, by social networks. As the author points out, *"there is no doubt that the mass media play a central role here, making it possible for a 'private' person to be transformed into a 'public' figure"* (Goffman, 2022, p. 82). Resuming an issue previously addressed, which concerns supposedly journalistic programs that make urban violence a daily spectacle on Brazilian television afternoons, the image created around young people in conflict with the law is one, *"seeds of evil"*, bandits, and for such people the worst must be aimed at, after all, *"a good bandit is a dead bandit"*. When a certain group of subjects is seen as bestialized, they are also seen as impure, filthy and, consequently, inhuman. That is why speeches like those previously mentioned do not cause people greater surprise (Elias; Scotson, 2000).

Without the slightest fear of sounding repetitive, we emphasize that we do not defend impunity for acts committed by young people, but we also highlight that it is not correct to reduce such subjects to these acts and use such a situation as a way of denying basic human rights. Real situations, but located in a specific context, when properly dramatized, gain greater attention, generate greater commotion and culminate in the false idea that it is something generalized. Neder (2008), when looking at the stigmas granted by the written press to the *"minor"* offender, brings us important notes:

> In terms of social representation, the ideas circulating in the press shape what is consolidated as reality and truth in certain social groups. In newspapers, magazines, radio and television programs, these ideas are organized mainly in a discursive way. Metaphors, metonymies, slips of the tongue and semantic slips are the tools that outline and give expression to the ideas circulating in the press. When using its tools in the process of constructing what will be considered as truth, journalistic discourse also forges social roles, ideals of conduct, otherness, threats and collective consciousness. Social roles

classified as problematic, harmful or threatening are often constructed in a process of discursive stigmatization (Neder, 2008, p. 162, our translation).

Although we are aware of the great influence exerted by the media in terms of promoting stigma, especially when it comes to the subjects covered in this work, we must reinforce the existence of situations that greatly complicate these processes and that we have to pay attention to if we do not, we want to establish simplifications. Media images, to a large extent, find fuel for their spectacularization in attitudes recurrently practiced by young people themselves. Many are those who, when captured by police forces, use the media to reproduce the sophistry that nothing happens when they commit an infraction. An emblematic phrase populates the social imagination of these young people: *"It doesn't give me anything!"*. Despite the untruth contained in the phrase, as there are many sanctions suffered by young people, this situation demonstrates how much these individuals give a greater outline of irrefutable truth in relation to themselves when they act like this.

Returning to Goffman's (2022) reflections to help us understand this situation, stigmatized people build the same beliefs as *"normal" people*, after all they were socialized in the same concrete social reality and the materialization of stigma occurs in the social relationship established between the subjects. However, this same stigmatized individual, when understanding the specificities of his reality, when establishing his *"self"*, and that of his peers, and that of *"others"*, such as those who differ from him, can perceive the stigma as a mark that was attributed to him, when he felt its harmful effects on his skin. This can have repercussions on taking actions that represent the reinforcement of their stigma, but which can to some extent also express their indignation and revolt with their condition. In this context, it is fully understandable that a young black, poor and peripheral person, stigmatized as a criminal, reinforces characteristics of his stigma as a factor of affirmation in society. If society only sees him through the lens of fear, it seems to us that such attitudes imply the search to be perceived, even if it is as the criminal to be feared. As Elias and Scotson (2000, p. 30) point out, *"give a group a bad reputation and it is likely to live up to your expectations"*.

Still focusing on Goffman's (2022) notes, these lead us to reflect on another issue that seems unique to our analytical concerns. Starting from the *sine qua non condition* of a process of stigmatization that occurs in social relations, which determines whether or not certain privileges are enjoyed, and the fact that individuals, upon becoming aware of their condition, re-signify their experiences as stigmatized, we believe that the attempt at correction, or of extinguishing a stigma becomes a possible goal to be established by some stigmatized people.

Obviously, some stigmas cannot be remedied, for example, as pointed out in the case of some physical disabilities. According to the author, in cases of stigma of this nature, of a physical disability for which the subject cannot be rehabilitated, the stigmatized person can take actions to mitigate the mode of perception, whether engaging in causes related to the stigma or actions that enhance the establishment of other ways of being represented. However, a stigma such as that which arises directly from poverty, from a class condition, can be fully desired to be extinguished, even with illusory goals recurrently dispelled by capitalist society by saying that whoever works hard will one day become rich or when populating the dreams of poor people who play lotteries with the hope of one day becoming millionaires. However, as already mentioned, some markers overlap and some stigmatized individuals may be affected by more than one mark or characteristic. In the case of poor, peripheral people, if one day they become rich they may have to deal with other issues such as racism, if they are black, deal with the idea of being rude, poorly educated or incapable of occupying places destined for the upper classes, if do not have a level of training appropriate to established standards. This gives us clues to the complexity and contradictions inherent to the reality we are dealing with.

Specifically, in situations of subjects who are in socio-educational measures, who may be deprived of their freedom, who begin to be represented within a group imagery spectrum, the assimilation of certain markers can become a protection and security factor. Given the precariousness of the Brazilian penal system, in other words the socio-educational system and the prison system, in terms of guaranteeing the safety of those under custody, any slight demonstration of weakness or fragility may result in a risk to one's own life. Markers that could worsen the effects of stigma when the subject lives in society, such as tattoos, slang, the way of behaving, within the system can serve as an element of protection, of identification with other subjects in the same condition, can impact on their survival or not (Oliveira, 2013).

Since the beginning of this work, we have been dealing with a social problem of a structural nature. The young subjects we look at in their reality did not "spring" out of nowhere, they were not planted, they are people who were born into our society and were affected by conditions that, to some extent, may have resulted in truncated trajectories and in conflict with the law. However, data from the Brazilian prison system are categorical[4], in the month of July 2023, the prison population was 832,295 people, of which 43.1% are young people aged up to 29 years and 68.2% are black. In this part of the population, education is precarious, with less

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[4]https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2023/07/20/populacao-carceraria-do-brasil-e-maior-do-que-a-populacao-de-5-mil- municipalities-1-in-every-4-presos-nao-foi-julgado.ghtml

than 50% of people completing primary education. A markedly classist and racist system. But how to deal with this reality? Without intending to establish ready, quick and superficial answers, an important movement in our view involves public investments that advocate education, health, housing, social rights guaranteed by law, and not the expansion of the imprisonment of a certain social group. And after paying your sentence? Will the young person be guaranteed effective social reintegration? It's not always like that, or most of the time it's not like that. As Lauermann and Guazina (2013) indicate, even after paying the sentence and not *"owing"* anything to society, those who have left the system maintain the stigma resulting from such an experience, which reverberates in a lack of opportunities for reintegration and distrust. Although we know that young people in the socio-educational system do not carry records with them in their personal files, just the fact that they have gone through the system can be a complicating factor.

An important piece of information presented by Marquis (2023) in his research, in which he analyzed public policies for socio-educational services in Minas Gerais, with a focus on a specific school, elucidates aspects that seem vital to us to be appropriate. As for the profile of young people, there is practically a reproduction of the common reality, the majority of whom are poor, black and whose school career is marked by truncated experiences. This may not be new information, however, in relation to school it seems important to ask some questions. Such subjects are diametrically opposed to the ideals of what it means to be a student (Sacristán, 2005), whether due to behavior, cognitive difficulties, or the absence of a certain cultural capital that is expected of those who will be at a school. As a result, the functioning of the school institution, even in a way that may appear to be subtle, ends up promoting a process of separation. It would not be untrue to say that the institution is responsible for expelling such subjects and this has repercussions on the denial of an inalienable right, which is to be educated. When it comes to the images created by the school, still based on old idealizations, Arroyo (2005) declares that if the school wants to effectively fulfill its social function, the old images must be broken to make way for other images, from other subjects, who have the right to be educated and remain in school.

We agree with people who believe in education as a tool for the formation of social subjects, and even more so, we believe in the use of this tool to mitigate the vicissitudes and deleterious effects that such subjects will experience in the face of the stigma of being black, poor and peripheral. However, it seems to us to be clearly demonstrated that a social problem of this magnitude needs to be attacked on several fronts, with the guarantee of basic,

fundamental rights, even if we want to envisage a possible resolution in the future and no longer be the producers ourselves of such "seeds of evil". Without any romanticism, may we be producers of seeds of good, of more human and humanized people.

Even though we are engaged in research that focuses on analyzing other research that addresses educational experiences in the form of Youth and Adult Education, provided to young people in conditions of deprivation of liberty. We believe that the effort undertaken here to better understand these subjects did not occur randomly. We are convinced that the reflections systematized in this text can greatly contribute to the way we look at such young people, as well as to the results obtained and the quality of the analyzes contained in our research.

Final remarks

Moving towards some final considerations, we hope, at least, to have managed to demonstrate our intention and deepen a necessary reflection on the contradictory and complex social reality that young people deprived of freedom experience, with a focus on the stigmatizing and stereotypical images constructed in relation to poor and peripheral and violence. Far removed from the infantilization of young people and the attempt to mitigate crimes, or even the protection and defense of criminals, it was up to us to reflect on a reality that, abysmally unequal, and due to its markedly violent condition, affects an entire society.

Social and human sciences have social reality, its contradictions and conflicts as the main raw material for their analysis. That said, a movement that seems compulsory to us to better understand the empirical concreteness we are faced with is the ability to realize that not everything that is before our eyes is, in itself, an irrefutable truth. When it comes to socially constructed images, they suffer various influences, ranging from social *status* to economic power, and for this reason they can, to a large extent, amalgamate sophisms.

The feeling of social panic, heightened by the trivialization and exacerbated exposure of violence, to a large extent, reverberates in the stereotypical images in relation to young people in conflict with the law. The naturalization of the condition of poverty as a factor that can lead to a greater propensity for violence or crime has no real basis. The attempt to give the appearance of naturalness to such a reality helps us to understand that the privileged classes act in social reality with the aim of extirpating, removing, everything and everyone that could cause them the slightest imbalance in the order, their *status quo*, the enjoyment of certain privileges.

With this view, we fail to see the need for more qualified care for these young people deprived of their freedom, failing to provide them with what is right for them: health and education.

In this sense, we reinforce that the young people in question, understood solely from the perspective that sees them as a social "problem", will not cease to exist. Young people, despite their considerable presence in statistical data, as aggressors and victims, are not naturally violent, it is not an innate characteristic. Various factors influence this context, which needs to be understood and taken as a basis for actions, educational or otherwise, that can give meaning to the lives of these young people, whether deprived of freedom or not.

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