

**BOLSA FAMÍLIA: THE INSTITUTIONALLY MAINTAINED INEQUALITY  
REVERSAL PROGRAM IN THE HISTORY OF BRAZIL**

***BOLSA FAMÍLIA: O PROGRAMA DE REVERSÃO DA DESIGUALDADE MANTIDA  
INSTITUCIONALMENTE NA HISTÓRIA DO BRASIL***

***BOLSA FAMÍLIA: EL PROGRAMA DE REVERSIÓN DE LA DESIGUALDAD  
MANTENIDO INSTITUCIONALMENTE EN LA HISTORIA DE BRASIL***



Vinícius BERNARDES<sup>1</sup>  
e-mail: bernardesociais@gmail.com

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<sup>1</sup> São Paulo State University (UNESP), Araraquara – SP – Brazil. Student of the Social Sciences Department at the School of Sciences and Languages.

**ABSTRACT:** This work addresses a debate concerning a redistributive public policy formulated to address historically maintained inequalities within Brazil's institutional framework. The central question presented is understanding the trajectory of public policy formulation in the country as a process of improving the concept of citizenship, with the Bolsa Família Program serving as a foundation to support this argumentation. Through analysis, interpretation, and connection with academic texts, the primary purpose of this article is to demystify some fallacies disseminated in Brazilian society, which seek to undermine the program's effectiveness by labeling it as a populist and electioneering initiative. In conclusion, we find that tackling inequalities requires measures that go beyond income redistribution programs.

**KEYWORDS:** Bolsa Família Program. Inequality. Conditionalities. History of Brazil.

**RESUMO:** Este trabalho aborda um debate concernente a uma política pública redistributiva que foi formulada com o intuito de abordar desigualdades historicamente mantidas no âmbito institucional do Brasil. A questão central que se apresenta é a compreensão da trajetória da formulação de políticas públicas no país como um processo de aprimoramento do conceito de cidadania, tendo o Programa Bolsa Família como alicerce para sustentar essa argumentação. Utilizando análise, interpretação e conexão com textos acadêmicos, o propósito primordial deste artigo é desmistificar algumas falácias disseminadas na sociedade brasileira, as quais procuram deslegitimar a eficácia desse programa, classificando-o como uma iniciativa populista e eleitoreira. Chegamos, ao final, à conclusão de que o enfrentamento das desigualdades requer medidas que vão além dos programas de redistribuição de renda.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Programa Bolsa Família. Desigualdade. Condicionalidades. História do Brasil.

**RESUMEN:** Este trabajo trae un debate sobre una política pública redistributiva que se formulo a partir del ímpetu en lá resolución de las desigualdades que se mantuvieron institucionalmente em la historia de Brasil. La principal cuestión planteada es la de comprender cómo la trayectoria de formulación de políticas públicas em Brasil fue un processo de aumento de la categoria de ciudadanía, teniendo como sustancia argumentativa las metas y objetivos del Programa Bolsa Família. Con el análisis, interpretación e interrelación de textos académicos, el objetivo principal de este artículo es desmistificar algunas falacias generalizadas en la sociedad brasileña que buscan deslegitimar la efectividad del programa, pretendendo ser un programa populista y electoral, llegando a la conclusión de que eso la lucha contra las desigualdades debe incrementarse con medidas más allá de los programas de redistribución del ingreso.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Programa Bolsa Família. Desigualdad. Condicionalidades. Historia de Brasil.

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## Introduction

Providing an overview of Brazil's history is a challenging task, not only due to the vast number of events that have occurred in the last five centuries but also because of the many twists, advancements, setbacks, contradictions, and blemishes left by a past marked by policies detrimental to human rights. Authors such as Schwarz and Starling, in their attempts to biographize this period, "opted for a narrative in which Brazil appears as a character, endowed with interests, desires, and dilemmas" (ALVES, 2017, p. 424, our translation), demonstrating mainly the trajectory of labor force formation in Brazil and "the challenges and violence faced by and against Africans brought by force throughout Brazilian history" (ALVES, 2017, p. 425, our translation). This introduction provides a solid foundation for Cohn to initiate the discussion about "divergences of nature" among individuals in "Social Abatement Policies in Contemporary Brazil." In the first part, Costa reinforces and expands the debate on inequality, highlighting the vulnerability of the most disadvantaged, even in a more favorable context.

Therefore, the Bolsa Família Program emerges as a successful attempt to correct this dark past, whose impacts still echo today, leading to the joint creation of a "mythology of the favored poor," portraying them as complacent individual's incapable of participating in the labor market. The comprehensive work of Campello and Neri, entitled "Bolsa Família: uma década de inclusão e cidadania," serves as the argumentative basis to demystify these conceptions in the second part of the text. The focus of the work lies in Public Policies, addressing a historical perspective of a persistent phenomenon in Brazil's history - the perpetuation of inequalities - and the current efforts to resolve these contradictions inherited from the past, with the main program combating this aspect of Brazilian society as a guiding force.

The methodology adopted for this research is strictly theoretical-conceptual, as it did not involve any field work. The connections between the authors were established through direct reading and interpretation of the mentioned texts and references to other authors throughout the work. The selection of theoretical basis and authors was based on a preference for a less descriptive and more critical approach to maintaining inequalities in Brazil. For instance, authors such as Arretch and Costa, while recognizing the importance of the transformations brought about by the Bolsa Família Program, emphasize the fragility of formulating Public Policies in the country, perceiving them more as welfare benefits than consolidated rights.

The method employed describes the historical trajectory of the phenomenon in Brazil and identifies its agents and victims. Using the expression "institutionally maintained," the article's title positions the Bolsa Família Program as a reversal of this institutional maintenance, confronting myths propagated by the national bourgeoisie with statistical data from IPEA's research. The work also culminates in a debate between two authors about the need to move beyond social assistance.

The main objective of the research is to demystify some of the "popular beliefs" that seek to undermine the effectiveness of the Bolsa Família Program, refuting four fallacies spread in Brazilian society based on the text organized by Campello and Neri. These fallacies illustrate what people often have in mind when discussing the program. Furthermore, the work aims to highlight that despite having been perpetuated by institutions for an extended period, inequality has a historical explanation and can be addressed through the institutions themselves, with the Bolsa Família Program representing a positive response to these inherited stigmas. Another part of the objective is to present a critical dialogue between authors about solutions to inequalities that go beyond redistributive public policies, focusing on tax reform as a central theme in the conclusion of the work.

### **Social and Natural Inequalities in Brazil: A Contextualization**

In order to introduce the Bolsa Família program and, above all, to understand its intentions to change the income distribution structure in Brazilian society, it is essential to revisit the reasons why these inequalities exist. In this sense, we need to answer the following question: **why can this process be called the maintenance of inequalities?**

From the moment of "discovery" to the consolidation and social legitimization of the first institutions aimed at ensuring social justice, the inhabitants of our country were divided based on criteria of nature. There was a clear distinction between free citizens and possessors of material goods, who had access to public security and education services, predominantly white and descendants of various European nationalities, especially Portuguese and Italians, mainly in the south and southeast regions of the country. On the other hand, enslaved blacks were forcibly brought from their native lands to work in coffee plantations, sugar mills, and the households of landowners, known as the "*Casa Grande*."

By mentioning the "difference of nature," as opposed to a mere matter of social class, the emphasis is placed on a difference that cannot be overcome solely by eradicating the

material discrepancies in people's lives. This distinction in access to goods and services is intrinsically linked to the "divergent nature of races," as mentioned by Schwarz.

We have already mentioned, but it is worth remembering, that Brazil was formed from the language of slavery, which is, in principle, an unequal system in which a few monopolize income and power while the vast majority is denied remuneration, freedom of movement, and education. The colonial landscape was dominated by large monoculture estates, where landowners had absolute control and concentrated income (SCHWARZ, 2015, p. 127, our translation).

It is essential to emphasize that even during slavery in Brazilian history, citizenship was regulated and restricted. The term "citizenship" was used to refer to a privileged "caste" in society, as a difference of nature prevented a significant portion of the population from being considered citizens.

However, it was only with the advent of the Estado Novo (New State) that the idea of regulating citizenship gained greater strength. During this period, positivist social legislation was incorporated, and citizenship began to be managed "from the top down," seeking to create an apparent harmony between capital and labor. It is worth noting that during Vargas' time, figures like Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy also wielded power, and the category of "Regulated Citizenship" was not limited to a Brazilian invention, as it was also present in other parts of the capitalist world.

It was like this in Nazi Germany, with Adolf Hitler selecting blond children and teenagers who were moved by emotion and sang hymns of praise to the "motherland" in large stadiums or immense open squares, with the population accompanying them loudly and enthusiastically. It was like this during the Estado Novo of Getúlio Vargas, which also used stadiums traditionally used for soccer games, but which were converted into new and prominent venues of patriotism where students paraded, carrying the president's photo, animated by the national anthem (SCHWARZ, 2015, p. 142, our translation).

Cohn corroborates this, stating that

The issue of poverty and naturalized social inequalities, when not imbued with the prejudices inherent in a society of slave origins, is still conceived as inherent to our social "nature," in an order where each social segment must occupy its specific place (COHN, 2020, p. 133, our translation).

A second factor that accentuates the unresolved contradictions of the past and intensifies the inherent perversity of a slave-based model is "the fact that the forms of social regulation forged through social policies, despite their diversity, were essentially aimed at

supporting the market that produces these services and operates these benefits" (COHN, 2020, p. 132, our translation). The philosophy of personal merit is adopted as the regulator for access to goods and services offered by the market, and it is widely endorsed by the State, as "the economic project, thus, always prevailed over any social project, making them even incompatible with each other as a conception, since it was believed that economic development itself would lead to social development, a byproduct of the former" (COHN, 2020, p. 134, our translation).

Governmental models perpetuated this perverse legacy over the decades. Initially, there was the accumulation of capital in the hands of a small portion of the population, resulting from 300 years of forced slave labor of the Black population brought to America. Subsequently, governmental models used personal merit as a criterion to classify citizens into the category of citizenship. It is relevant to emphasize that this contradiction between a slave-based past and a meritocratic present represents a considerable challenge for social policies to combat monetary and non-monetary inequalities after 1988. For example, the Bolsa Família Program has become a target of criticism and disdain from the bourgeoisie, who benefited from the perverse institutions prevailing during those periods.

The term "institutional" is used because, in addition to referring to the set of rules that govern the State, it is also part of the criteria that lead governmental elites to make choices, favoring their class interests in an instrumental and rationalized manner. It is important to note that the formation of these governmental elites occurred simultaneously with historical processes such as slavery, which was an officially recognized practice.

In addition to the power invested in creating myths and discourses aimed at delegitimizing the program, there is also the dimension that "the implementation of Bolsa Família, quotas in universities, and other social policies as programs, **not as constitutional rights**, also has the perverse consequence that the institutional and political obstacles to remove them are small" (COSTA, 2019, p. 69, our translation). When we observe the last ten years of politics and the conjunctural changes, we can conclude that:

The fragility of the gains made during the PT governments for people with low incomes and the groups most affected by socioeconomic and power inequalities - such as the Afro-descendant population and women - became evident when Temer took office after Rousseff's *impeachment* (COSTA, 2019, p. 69, our translation).

To introduce the Bolsa Família Program as the primary solution to these past contradictions, we must answer the question: **why can our history of social policies be called**



**incremental?** Political, civil, and social rights were practically nonexistent before Vargas, with a tiny portion of the population benefiting from the institutional maintenance of privileges. The period that includes the Estado Novo until the promulgation of the 1988 Citizen Constitution was marked by advances and setbacks in formulating efficient "public policies" to directly combat inequalities in civil, political, and social rights. This resulted in a balance where the strengthening of one dimension often occurred at the expense of diminishing another. For example, during the military dictatorship, numerous organizations were created to ensure the protection of citizens and formal workers who fit into the category of citizens according to the prevailing context. However, at the same time, individual and political freedom of choice was severely restricted, denying citizens political and expression rights.

Since the promulgation of the Citizen Constitution in 1988, the path to implementing public policies focused on resolving issues related to inequalities in all areas has been facilitated by the new democratic approach of the governmental model. This process was expanded and intensified from January 1, 2023, with the inauguration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the implementation of new social policies, and the strengthening of those already existing in previous democratic governments, especially during FHC's administration. The term **incrementation** is used to describe this phenomenon because these social policies, which already existed in previous governments before Lula's, were raised to an unprecedented level in the history of Brazil — both in terms of serving a more significant portion of the population and about the investment allocated to these policies. The Bolsa Família Program is a notable example of this, as discussed by Costa based on Bielschowsky in his report titled "The development model proposed by Lula and Dilma."

While the previous program, created during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government, provided benefits to 3.6 million families in 2002, Bolsa Família benefited 14.1 million families, with monthly payments of around R\$ 142 million in 2013 — with a significant majority of women and Black beneficiaries (COSTA, 2014, p. 65, our translation).

The present work focuses on the Bolsa Família Program as its main argument. In this section, after contextualizing the need for the program, its practical relevance for the beneficiaries will be addressed, and the reactionary arguments seeking to weaken its efficacy by labeling it as a "creator of complacent and lazy people living off society's expenses" will be debunked.

An argumentative exposition will also support the program's validity through the established "conditionalities." These conditionalities represent an efficiency filter for several other social policies, as they function as requirements for families to benefit from Bolsa Família. It is worth emphasizing that, besides serving this function for the operation of other social policies, the conditionalities also refute the reactionary fallacies about populism and electoral loyalty.

It is essential to highlight that these conditionalities encompass a broad spectrum of social protection without gender and race distinctions, contradicting populist and fascist logic. These ideologies concern the stratification of citizens into categories and perpetuate a dependence from which it is impossible to escape.

### **The Bolsa Família Program as a mechanism for addressing the past: demystifying fallacies and promoting inclusion**

This section of the paper aims to discuss and debunk four fallacious conceptions related to the Bolsa Família Program: (1) the assumption that the program would encourage the beneficiaries' complacency; (2) the claim that the State would exert excessive control over the lives of these families; (3) the idea that an increase in the benefit amount would lead to a rise in women's fertility rate; and (4) the perception that the program is organized in a populist manner. It is important to emphasize that the reactionary bourgeoisie widely uses these arguments to undermine the direct positive effects on the material conditions of the beneficiary families. This attempt at delegitimization reflects a historical practice dating back to previous government models, from Brazil's colonial period marked by slavery to the authoritarian governments of 1964 to 1985. Consequently, it is understandable that the bourgeoisie would oppose any effort to reduce the disparity between their social positions and those of the proletariat.

The Bolsa Família Program represents an approach to breaking a vicious cycle of perpetuating privileges that have persisted for centuries in Brazilian society, which still generates depreciative discourses regarding redistributive public policies. Additionally, the program fulfills its initial promise to address monetary and non-monetary inequalities. The latter refers to access to essential services for all citizens, such as security, education, and leisure, while the former pertains to the issue of income. In this way, the Bolsa Família Program achieves its proposal to ensure citizenship status, which was previously restricted and regulated in earlier contexts but was redefined due to a **conjunctural change** during the Lula



administration, which prioritized social rights in its discourse. Consequently, the program addresses monetary and non-monetary issues, as well as belonging to the status of a more inclusive citizen. In light of the program's promises and accomplishments, a presentation follows to debunk the fallacious discourses mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter.

First and foremost, it is essential to highlight that the four points raised in the first paragraph would not necessarily be isolated events, as argued by reactionary sectors. According to their claims, these issues would co-occur, alleging that the goal would be to maintain the supposed "PT's project of domination" over the poorest by providing welfare benefits instead of promoting the development of their skills, which, according to them, would reinforce an old meritocratic practice. However, this standpoint disregards the historical formation of the country and, consequently, the lack of equal access to necessary resources. The Bolsa Família Program, from the outset, demonstrates a democratic character by proposing the adoption of **conditionalities** aimed at combating social vulnerabilities,

The non-compliance with conditionalities is now recognized as an indicator of social vulnerability or personal and social risk, allowing for the identification of families that necessarily require insertion into the service, as assessed by the reference teams of PAIF and Paefi (COLIN; PEREIRA; GONELLI, 2013, p. 59, our translation).

A populist social policy is often associated with its perpetuation at the expense of freedom and citizenship, similar to social policies developed in dictatorial governments, especially during the Médici administration. In contrast, the Bolsa Família program "has been consolidated as a state policy and today stands as one of the central elements of Brazilian social policies, at an unavoidable level within social protection" (CAMPELLO; NERI, 2013, p. 17, our translation), and "the direct payment to families, via magnetic cards, brings transparency to public spending, reduces operational costs, and strengthens user autonomy" (CAMPELLO; NERI, 2013, p. 17, our translation).

Another myth often reinforced by reactionary opinions is that the program would lead to a tendency for complacency among the beneficiary families, resulting in a decrease in the pursuit of employment. However, a survey conducted by AIBF II,

It is shown that the program does not cause a demobilizing effect on beneficiaries in the labor market in terms of employment, job-seeking, or working hours. Heads of beneficiary families aged 30 to 55 present activity levels, employment rates, and working hours very close to those of leaders of

equivalent socioeconomic status (JANNUZZI; PINTO, 2013, p. 186, our translation).

This confirms that:

The program's alleged "laziness effect" is, therefore, more myth than reality. Considering the different situations and attributes that affect the insertion into the labor market - age, family headship, gender, and motherhood - there is no difference between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries with equivalent income (JANNUZZI; PINTO, 2013, p. 186, our translation).

The program not only generates dynamism in the labor market but also drives the circulation and acquisition of durable goods, resulting in a significant and influential increase in the purchasing power of beneficiary families. Furthermore, the program contributes to combating the stereotype of the "natural place of women" as:

The female beneficiaries - who are the majority of Bolsa Família cardholders - are gaining greater autonomy and power in family decisions and the purchase of durable goods, medicine, and clothing, compared to non-beneficiary women (JANNUZZI; PINTO, 2013, p. 187, our translation).

It is important to emphasize that:

Women who are beneficiaries of the PBF gain in gender relations as they become more financially independent from their husbands, gaining greater bargaining power in allocating household resources and increasing their social interaction (SUAREZ; LIBARDONI, 2007, p. 187, our translation).

Thirdly, "there was also a widespread belief that beneficiary families would have more children, resorting to opportunistic behavior to access a larger volume of resources" (CAMPELLO; NERI, 2013, p. 17, our translation), given that "the amount received by families benefiting from the Bolsa Família Program (PBF) increases as the number of children and adolescents in the family grows" (ALVES; CAVENAGHI, 2013, p. 234, our translation). This conception is known as the "Malthusian argument," which suggests that an increase in income can result in higher fertility. In the case of the PBF, it implies that the increase in beneficiary families' revenue could trigger a population growth cycle.

Alves and Cavenaghi, based on the research "Impactos do Bolsa Família na Reconfiguração dos Arranjos Familiares, nas Assimetrias de Gênero e na Individuação das Mulheres" (Impacts of Bolsa Família on Family Arrangements, Gender Asymmetries, and Women's Individuation), conducted in the city of Recife in 2007-2008, show that there is no significant difference in reproductive behavior between women living in families registered in the Unified Registry, whether beneficiaries or not of the PBF. Although there is a tendency for beneficiary families to have slightly higher fertility rates, as well

as a somewhat higher proportion of women with three or more children (22.7% compared to 16.4% of non-beneficiaries), the fact is that the higher number of children tends to reduce *per capita* income, increasing the likelihood of families becoming eligible for program benefits. Thus, the direction of causality between the number of children and those benefiting from the PBF would be reversed. Women do not have more children because they started receiving the PBF; it is the opposite: having more children and thereby reducing the family's *per capita* income makes the woman eligible to participate in the PBF benefits (ALVES; CAVENAGHI, 2011, p. 235, our translation).

A correlation can be established between high fertility rates and lower income and education levels in Brazil. This is because families in these socioeconomic conditions tend to initiate procreation at earlier ages, often still in adolescence. Furthermore, the cause-and-effect relationship between access to family health services and contraceptive methods becomes more evident concerning the fertility rate.

When asked about the desired number of children ("If you could choose the number of children, how many would it be?"), women indicated a much smaller number than those obtained by the previous generation. It is observed that the percentage of women who expressed the desire to have three or more children is much lower than the number of children they or their mothers had (ALVES; CAVENAGHI, 2013, p. 237, our translation).

They reaffirm that:

What can be noted is that even the low-income population has shown a reduction in the average number of children as the country becomes more urbanized and the population gains access to public policies on education and health. Both women who receive and those who do not receive PBF benefits desire to have fewer children and have a high rate of unplanned pregnancies (ALVES; CAVENAGHI, 2013, p. 237, our translation).

The idea was promoted that the State would assume guardianship over the program's beneficiary families, establishing electoral and market loyalty. This approach reflects the imagery of liberalism, where everything is seen as a competitive issue related to the pursuit of the best service and the acquisition of "clients" in the market. The argument of state guardianship, claiming that the State is "winning" loyal clients, validates how the bourgeoisie views social policies in Brazil from the beginning: where every good or service must be acquired in the market, including the treatment of elections and decision-making processes as actual auctions. The bourgeoisie's argument regarding this guardianship is an attempt to expand its influence over civil society since "the traditional absence of the State to grant and guarantee

their rights kept them for a long time in the situation of people without the right to have rights" (REGO; PINZANI, 2013, p. 359, our translation). They add:

Thus, the Brazilian State decreed its "civil death" for many years. They were silenced because the right to public voice does not exist, as they lack conditions and institutional channels of expression. Millions of Brazilians have virtually no schooling, devoid of qualifications and skills for any job that requires, for example, writing and reading and the ability to obey specific, more qualified commands. This, *per se*, questions the nature of economic growth devoid of a substantive democratic project (REGO; PINZANI, 2013, p. 359, our translation).

Indeed, it can be concluded that the "guardianship" exercised by the State, molded to serve the market's interests, has been a reality for centuries and has played a significant role in forming Brazil as a nation. Treating citizens as wards, perpetually keeping them in a lower social position with no opportunity for upward mobility, has been a state policy from colonization to the last days of the military dictatorship, totaling more than 400 years of institutional stratification, and "in this context, the persistence of poverty at such high levels reflects, or instead points to, its profound inadequacy as a means of the inclusion of a country's inhabitants in the world of rights and the civilizational heritage of humanity" (REGO; PINZANI, 2013, p. 359, our translation).

### **Final considerations**

It is essential to maintain a constant balance as well as efforts to reverse the impacts left by this legacy. This is because we maintain a tax system that favors those who accumulate wealth. Costa acknowledges that:

In general terms, the governments of the PT (Workers' Party) did not represent a shift of power in favor of the working classes and the most impoverished segments. Evidence of this lies in maintaining a regressive tax structure, which exempts financial profits and capital gains from taxation and imposes a hefty burden, compared to more egalitarian countries, on consumption and income derived from labor (COSTA, 2019, p. 65, our translation)

And questions:

Now, if the PT, and even the ousted president Dilma, recognized the concentration impact of taxes on income and wealth distribution in the country, why didn't Dilma and her predecessor, Lula, change the regressive structure of the Brazilian tax system? (COSTA, 2019, p. 65, our translation).

The power relationship established between the organizational model inherent to capitalism and the widely accepted logic by the PT (Workers' Party) governments plays a significant role. Additionally, governability within a political context already dominated by austerity policies is another relevant factor, as observed by Costa.

Due to their conservative allies in the Brazilian Congress and the support received from various sectors that profit from the regressive tax structure – such as agribusiness, large companies in mining, beverages, construction, and banks – the PT governments did not feel strong enough to pass a tax reform contrary to the interests of the wealthy (COSTA, 2019, p. 65, our translation).

Arretche asserts that:

The contemporary democratic regime has not reduced the share of total income appropriated by the wealthiest 1% in Brazil, nor has it eliminated a set of factors that produce economic inequality, such as the inequality of educational opportunities at the intermediate and higher levels of education, resulting from the universalization of access to elementary education, the persistence of racial and gender inequality in the labor market, among many other factors (ARRETCHE, 2018. p. 17, our translation).

It can be categorically asserted that there is still a long way to go regarding the actual reduction of social inequalities, especially if attempts to reduce them are conducted within the logic of capitalism. In this regard, achieving a substantial reduction of inequalities is impossible, considering that the structure of work organization in the capitalist system is the root of the problem.

However, the PT governments demonstrated that it is possible to effectively use public machinery to combat the class privileges that have persisted for centuries in Brazil. Arretche's understanding of the evolution of the resolution of inequalities is relevant in this context.

The simultaneous decline of these inequalities in Brazil was not the result of any isolated factor but rather the combination over time of the effects of different policies oriented towards other groups, whose common characteristic has been the perspective of reversing the long trajectory of high inequality in Brazil (ARRETCHE, 2015, p. 454, our translation)

However, Arretche warns about the need to go beyond taxation, stating that:

If this is true, there are additional strategies to reduce inequalities, which include decisions regarding the allocation of public spending and the design of policies. But if these are the results of decisions, there is no *ex-ante* guarantee that they will not be reversed in the future, as shown by the recent

trajectory of democracies in advanced economies (ARRETICHE, 2015, p. 454, our translation).

The initial objectives of reducing inequalities were achieved during the period corresponding to the first two governments of Lula and the first government of Dilma. However, significant progress is necessary, considering that the Brazilian reality demands more complex and dynamic solutions. It is essential to aim for resolutions that effectively transform the structure perpetuating inequality, as pointed out by Arretche and also reaffirmed by Costa.

Whichever perspective is adopted, it becomes evident that the social policies recently implemented in Brazil had a low impact on inequalities compared to the redistributive potential of tax reforms (COSTA, 2019, p. 65, our translation).

The present PT government has the opportunity to take a significant step towards a structure that genuinely transforms the reality of monetary and non-monetary inequalities in Brazil. This can be achieved by improving income redistribution programs like Bolsa Família and promoting changes in the tax system to reduce the wealth disparity in the country. It is unquestionable that:

When adequately designed to understand inequalities based on their historical, relational, multidimensional, and interdependent nature, State intervention promotes the redistribution of material, environmental, and power resources in societies, leveling social hierarchies that are abhorrent from a moral standpoint and condemnable from a political perspective (COSTA, 2019, p. 72, our translation).

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### ***CRediT Author Statement***

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**Data and material availability:** All data and materials used to prepare this work can be easily accessed via the Internet (mainly through PDF files, among other written texts on websites). This method was used to access all the data presented in this work.

**Authors' Contribution:** The selection of authors for this work was based on the connection I wanted to establish within the theme: a relationship between the blemishes of the past and attempts to euphemize these blemishes in the history of Brazil. Authors such as SCHWARZ, STARLING, and COHN contribute to understanding certain aspects of the past that persist in present-day Brazilian reality, providing a historical overview of the "evolution" and maintenance of inequalities. Other authors, such as ALVES, BIELSCHOWSKY, CAVENAGHI, JANNUZZI, LIBARDONI, PINTO, PINZANI, REGO, and SUAREZ, aid in comprehending the impact of the Bolsa Família Program through numbers and statistics, with references taken from the work organized by CAMPELLO and NERI, titled "Programa Bolsa Família: uma década de inclusão e cidadania." Finally, ARRETCHE and COSTA provide commentary that helps us understand the trajectory of policies developed against inequality in contemporary Brazil, engaging in a discussion that goes beyond the Bolsa Família Program and encompasses inequalities on dimensions beyond the monetary aspect.

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