

# STRUCTURAL-URBAN POVERTY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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## Abstract

This article presents a theoretical reflection on interpretations of poverty, principally contemporary urban poverty, inspired by the works of Milton Santos. It is based on Geographical critical theory and other potential dialogues that contextualize and analyze poverty, understood here as the result of structural violence in territorial formation and Brazilian metropolises. It is concluded that poverty is structural-urban and can inform a qualitative debate (not only quantitative) on the lack of human dignity seeking to recognize the legitimacy of existence in places.

**Keywords:** Violence, Urban Poverty, Metropolises, Socio-spatial Formation.

## Resumo / Resumen

### POBREZA ESTRUTURAL-URBANA NO SÉCULO XXI

O presente artigo apresenta uma reflexão teórica sobre as interpretações da pobreza, sobretudo a pobreza urbana no período atual, com inspiração nas obras de Milton Santos. Fundamenta-se na teoria crítica da Geografia e outros diálogos possíveis para se contextualizar e se analisar a pobreza, entendida aqui como resultado da violência estrutural na formação territorial e das metrópoles brasileiras. Conclui-se que a pobreza é estrutural-urbana e pode estar direcionada para um debate qualitativo (e não somente no âmbito quantitativo) sobre a falta de dignidade humana, para buscar reconhecer a legitimidade da existência nos lugares.

**Palavras-chave:** Violência, Pobreza Urbana, Metrôpoles, Formação Socioespacial.

### POBREZA ESTRUCTURAL-URBANA EN EL SIGLO XXI

Este artículo presenta una reflexión teórica sobre las interpretaciones de la pobreza, especialmente la urbana en el período actual, inspirada en las obras de Milton Santos. Se fundamenta en la teoría crítica de la Geografía y otros diálogos posibles para contextualizar y analizar la pobreza, entendida aquí como resultado de la violencia estructural en la formación territorial y las metrópolis brasileñas. Se concluye que la pobreza es estructural-urbana y puede encaminarse hacia un debate cualitativo (y no sólo en el ámbito cuantitativo) sobre la falta de dignidad humana, para buscar reconocer la legitimidad de la existencia en los lugares.

**Palabras-clave:** Violencia, Pobreza Urbana, Metrópolis, Formación Socioespacial.

## INTRODUCTION

"The fear of indefinitely continuing to plan for poverty is a sufficient stimulus to attempt to approach the problem differently." Milton Santos (2013, [1978], p. 77).

Poverty is a social problem that has deepened rural and urban crises, especially in the peripheral countries of the capitalist system; it has been tackled by scholars from various theoretical perspectives, especially the humanities. It is addressed predominantly in Economics, emphasizing a quantitative approach, whereas a more qualitative political understanding of the issue permeates disciplines such as Sociology, Anthropology, History, International Relations, and Geography, among others.

However, as it is a fact that reflects the structure of how society and its environment are organized, we understand that the study of poverty needs to be carried out considering the transformations of geographical space and the dynamics of the places where it occurs (SANTOS, 1978). From this perspective, Geography has contributed profoundly with a rich theoretical-methodological input: concept systems and operational analytical instruments. These seek to understand poverty not as a mere result of the contradictions of the capitalist accumulation system and social inequality but also from the debate on how places' geographical conditions reinforce the deepening of poverty and often prevent the construction of a political economy that favors the construction of a more egalitarian society in terms of opportunities, income, consumption, culture, and education.

Thus, the debate on poverty gains complexity by integrating readings on the dynamics of places and their daily lives and the political actions that structure the socio-spatial arrangement. Hence, our methodological principle starts with comprehending banal space (SANTOS, 1999; 2000) to understand the place and geographical space. All hegemonic and hegemonized agents transform reality in a conflict in the banal, contained space of action and practice, inheritance, and presence of events. In the banal space, objects (technospheres) and actions (psychospheres) contradict and complement each other hierarchically and jointly in everyday events.

Inspired by (re)reading the works of the geographer Milton Santos, this article aims to theoretically discuss the problem of structural poverty and its manifestation in urban spaces in Brazil in the light of a geographical approach to the fact. To this end, we start by reflecting on some Geographic concepts and categories that help us critically analyze the issue, especially in metropolitan contexts.

Through a literature review, we present some interpretations of the causes and dynamics of structural poverty and point out possible directions to discuss and reflect on the problem in socio-spatial formation and Brazilian metropolises. Therefore, the article addresses the multifaceted framework of poverty resulting from structural violence in the territory and takes up the timely proposals and definitions of poverty discussed by Milton Santos (including poverty, marginal poverty, and structural poverty). Finally, it mobilizes the need for a critical social theory that geographically interprets structural-urban poverty in the twenty-first century.

## THE MULTIFACETED FRAMEWORK OF STRUCTURAL POVERTY

Poverty is felt, but it can also be objectified and transformed into anything; it can also be stereotyped. The selective and modernizing character of the capitalist mode of production means that infrastructures, income distribution, employment, and access do not reach all people and social classes equally. The presence of poverty is most evident in the metropolises, and especially in their peripheral areas.

Looking at these settings from within and from below in the peripheral areas of Brazilian metropolises reveals the unequal planning of the local factor, where, in some cases, having dignity in life is a privilege. Here, a situation is exposed that makes us reflect on poverty, its formative process, and its relevance. According to Cesaltina Abreu (2012, p. 97-98), in the period of economic globalization, poverty is related to the

"inability to support their basic needs due to low income, adding, in this perspective, the lack of conditions to live longer, lack of access to education and health facilities, difficulty in escaping a situation of chronic under or malnutrition, lack of access to drinking water, electricity, decent living conditions and a healthy environment, and a lack of access to culture and leisure. These result in almost insurmountable disadvantages to compete in the labor market, and which, in turn, are at the basis of reproducing the vicious circle of poverty: without work or income, there are no objective or subjective conditions for access to education and health, undernourished and poorly educated or illiterate mothers put more children in the world with disadvantages at birth, who will face the same problems, often aggravated, that their parents face and who will not be able to change them in their favor" (emphasis added).

From the author's perspective in her literature review, the notion of poverty is directed to all socio-spatial formations where achieving well-being and social progress is limited, thus covering underdeveloped and developed countries (more so in the former). The elements mentioned in what Abreu calls the vicious circle of poverty allow us to understand the unfeasibility of configuring poverty based on indexes since poverty differs in each place and is combined with "the absence of voice and power, it is insecurity and anxiety" (ABREU, 2012, p. 109).

For Cataia & Silva (2013, p. 58),

"[when] considering the aspects selected to understand the functioning of urbanization in Third World countries, it is essential to recognize that they play different roles in the world economy. There is no lack of development in the periphery, but this development carries a contradiction that also authorizes its coexistence with broad poverty in these countries."

Given the above, according to the authors, a principle of duality manifests itself in the organization of space, between luminous areas functional to capital flows and opaque areas (SANTOS, 1994b) functional to the dominant rationality, mainly comprised of the impoverished layers of the population. The changes in the labor market caused by the crises of the Fordist regime led to the social transformations underway since the 1980s. Thus, when examining the current conjuncture of the social structure and how these changes affect urban spatiality, the paradigm of post-industrialization is hegemonic.

"The mechanism of dependence of peripheral countries in the process of incorporation into the capitalist system is largely responsible for the peripheral situation of the system" (CATAIA & SILVA, 2013, p. 58). The relationship between underdeveloped countries' technical, scientific, and informational dependence on developed countries is the main impetus for inequality and poverty. Hence, according to Santos (2000), we speak of globalized structural poverty to deal with the current period.

As Álvarez (2007, p. 80) explains, this form of poverty production "is due to forces that are neither individual nor contingent, but to socio-historical and structural processes [and their] reproduction that has more to do with social relations that were previously conjunctural or contextual. It is also true that, in its production, different factors are combined: economic, political, social and cultural." Territorial factors can also be included.

For Cimadamore and Cattani (2007, p. 07), "poverty is the result of the concrete action of agents and processes that act in long-term historical structural contexts." In this sense, since their territorial formation, peripheral countries, especially Latin America, have had a selective and unequal structure in the distribution of goods between societies that "affects all social, economic, and political processes" (CATTANI, 2007, p. 214). Therefore, we can also speak of a reproduction of poverty to the extent that this process is intrinsic to inequalities in the capitalist logic. Therefore, how long will many lives be usurped to sustain capitalism's modus operandi that only considers gross domestic and international product in ascending curves?

For example, Brazil has recently experienced a gradual increase in the poor population, which worsened between 2019 and 2021. According to the Map of the New Poverty Report<sup>2</sup>, published by the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV), based on data from the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNADC) released by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the population with a per capita household income of up to R\$497 per month totaled 62.9 million Brazilians in 2021,

representing 29.6% of the population. During the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19), 9.6 million people began to live in poverty.

For comparison, the graph in Figure 1 shows that among the highlighted capitals, São Luís do Maranhão is one of the metropolises with the highest proportion of poor people in the country: 37.86% of its population in 2021. The State of Maranhão was the Federative Unit with the highest rate of poor people, representing 57.9%, concentrated in the Coast and Baixada Maranhense, with 72.5%. In turn, the metropolis of São Paulo had 17.46% of its population living in poverty, while the State of São Paulo totaled 17.40%, the lowest rate among the Federative Units.

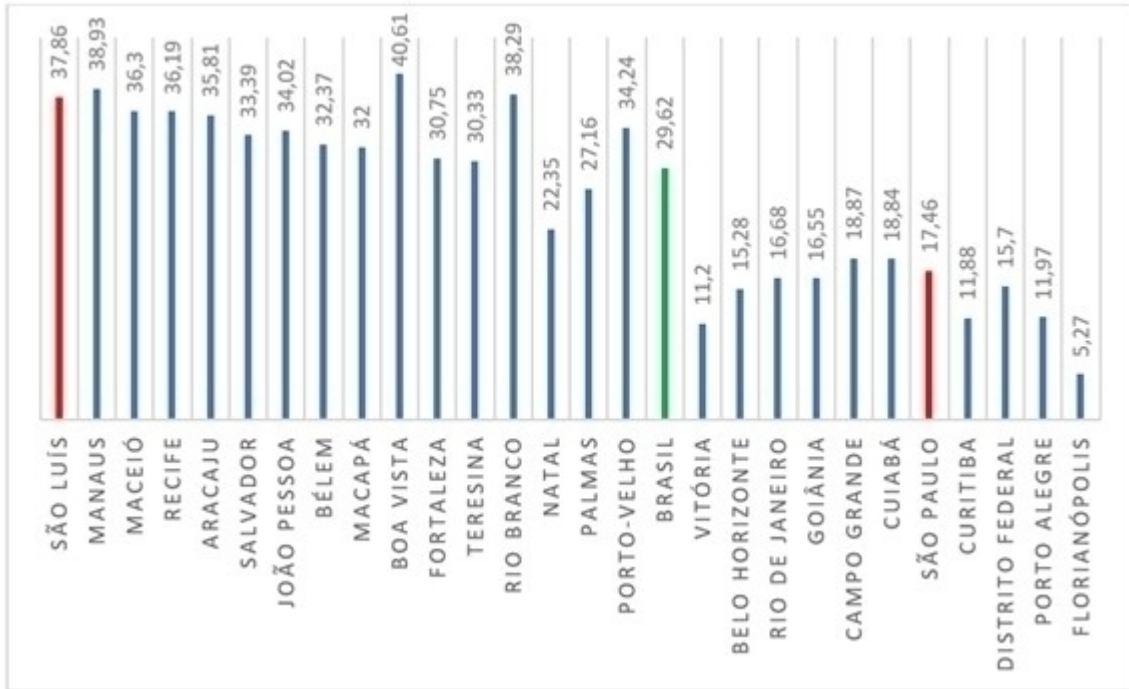


Figure 1 – Proportion of Poor by Capital in 2021 (%). Source: FGV Social (microdata from PNADC/IBGE). Adapted by the author.

Without exaggeration, structural violence permeates the current period and the era of metropolises (SANTOS, 2000). For Santos (2000, p. 55),

"[...] structural violence results from the presence and joint manifestations, in this era of globalization, of money in a pure state, of competitiveness in a pure state and of power in a pure state, whose association leads to the emergence of new totalitarianisms and allows us to think that we live in an era of globalitarianisms much more than globalization. At the same time, we have evolved from situations in which perversity manifested itself in isolation to a situation in which a system of perversity is installed, which, at the same time, is the result and cause of the legitimation of money in the pure State, competitiveness in the pure State and power in the pure State, consecrating, after all, the end of ethics and the end of politics."

Metropolises are increasingly aligned with market competitiveness, the neoliberal State, and money, and they are conditioned by informational power and the exercise of fear. Fear introduces itself as a functional whole of this structural set of violence. In peripheral areas, structural violence is found in excess civic-military security, neglect of better health services, lack of quality education, precarious public transport, unemployment, poverty, and hunger for food and information. Poverty and the hunger accompanying it "ceases to be an isolated or occasional fact and becomes a generalized and permanent circumstance" (SANTOS, 2000, p. 59).

## POVERTY AND ITS APPROACH IN THE WORKS OF MILTON SANTOS

The naturalization of poverty is a functional element of structural violence, both due to capitalist perversity and the fading of the population. In this sense, Santos (2000) presents three definitions of poverty: included poverty, marginality, and structural poverty.

Included poverty is defined by the author as "an accidental, sometimes residual or seasonal poverty, produced at certain times of the year, an interstitial poverty and, above all, without communicating vessels" (SANTOS, 2000, p. 69). In this form of poverty, the occasional nature of the situation was not yet governed by the rationalization of space, or rather, the process of technification of places. It still occurred in social life until the 1930s.

Territorial dynamics were poorly integrated into the communication field and occurred in isolation, and "the solutions to the problem were private, welfare-based, and local; poverty was often presented as a natural or social accident. Poverty was less discriminatory in a world where consumption did not constitute an obligatory social nexus. Hence, one can speak of the included poor" (SANTOS, 2000, p. 70, our translation).

There is the issue of marginality as a content-form of poverty "produced by the economic process of the international or internal division of labor. It was acknowledged that it could be corrected, which was sought by the hands of governments" (SANTOS, 2000, p. 69). Marginality is the product of capitalist socialization and, simultaneously, a social edema of urban-industrial society between a class characterized by consumption and one familiar with scarcity.

Under the conditions presented above, the territory experiences the rationality of its selective uses. "Expanding consumption thus gains the necessary material and psychological conditions, giving poverty new contents and definitions. In addition to absolute poverty, relative poverty is created and recreated incessantly, which leads to classifying individuals by their ability to consume and how they do it" (SANTOS, 2000, p. 71, our translation).

According to Crespo & Gurovitz (2002, p. 04), absolute poverty "is observed when setting standards for a minimum or sufficient level of needs, known as the poverty line or limit, determining the percentage of the population that is below this level." Relative poverty is "described as the situation in which the individual, when compared to others, has less of some desired attribute, whether income, favorable conditions of employment or power." Thus, the first is associated with basic needs, and the second with daily survival.

The evil of poverty ends up falling on the poor. A psychosphere based on a neoliberal ideology is created, in which the poor are responsible for the situation of poverty. "Contemporary poverty is multidimensional, cumulative, and transmissible. It has historical roots, but it is also an effect of the power structure" (CATTANI, 2007, p. 216). Both negligent, the State and the local bourgeoisie have based the deepening of poverty on ideology. Inequalities and exclusion are consolidated and materialized in situations of marginality, leading to entrenchment, favelization, and, finally, rampant peripheralization, especially in metropolises<sup>3</sup>.

Moreover, we face a definition of poverty in the present, transient, and turbulent time: globalized structural poverty. For Santos (2000, 69), there is a "structural poverty, which from a moral and political point of view is equivalent to a social debt. It is structural and no longer local, not even national; it has become globalized and present throughout the world [...] However, it is also a scientific production, and therefore voluntary of social debt."

This last definition of poverty is more complex due to its manifestation on a globalized scale. Increasingly, technospheres and psychospheres have formed a deliberate arrangement in the rationalization of territories, thus indoctrinating governments and rulers that are increasingly exempt from actions oriented towards social welfare policies for the broad group of society. The State embodied by neoliberal policies (HARVEY, 2005; DARDOT & LAVAL, 2016), such as the one present in Brazil since the 1990s, has reinforced the functional framework of structural violence linked to poverty.

Santos (2000, p. 72) states that "current poverty results from the convergence of causes occurring at different levels, existing as communicating vessels and as something rational, a necessary result of the present process, an inevitable phenomenon, considered even a natural fact." Poverty is structural, as it is



planned and internalized in places. The coexistence between poverty and wealth, scarcity and abundance, and deprivation and access reveals the forever selective modernizations (SANTOS, 1988; SOUZA, 2000) in the transformations of banal space<sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, in marginal poverty, the social relations of production are taken for granted. The question of class and the capital and labor struggle prevails, as expressed in the urban labor force's condition, where industrial wage earners, the workers, are in force. They are marginal in the face of the economic process, as Santos (2000, p. 71) reminds us, and now "consumption imposes itself as an important fact, as it is central to the explanation of differences and the perception of situations," in the game between absolute and relative poverty as defined by the effects of modernization (SANTOS, 1978) to consider the generation of employment and accelerated unemployments<sup>5</sup>.

This modernization regime is the content-form of the technical-scientific environment, the product of science in the stages of the production process, the universalization of intellectual production, capital, contemporary acceleration, and the flow in labor displacement (SANTOS, 1985; 1994a; 1996a; 2002 [1979]). Here, technological-industrial urbanization follows a new economic logic in the territory, which, based on its internal integration of spaces, goods, and people, prioritized expanding accelerated consumption to meet an extroverted production. The tertiarization, metropolization, and peripheralization of life are concomitant processes of this period, leading to what Lúcio Kowarick (2000) called urban dispossession<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, according to Milton Santos (2000), a scientific, globalized, and voluntary production of poverty has occurred. It is permanent in the face of the exclusion promoted by reduced State participation in a concept linked to economic globalization and the bodies managing this rationale, such as the programs led by the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank (WB). "Manifestations of poverty are functionally attacked, while poverty is structurally created at the world level" (SANTOS, 2000, p. 73, our translation).

The contemporary scale of poverty is planetary due to the globalization of capital and the related transformation of the technical-scientific environment into a technical-scientific-informational environment (SANTOS, 1994b; 1996a). According to Santos (2002) [1979], "territory starts to be commanded from its information capacity, and these information flows are structuring space" in such a way that the impacts are noticeable in the rearrangement of the social division of labor in large cities, where the poor are concentrated, creating a multicultural territoriality rooted in new economic and social forms of survival.

In the face of structural poverty, social debt inherited from included poverty and marginality accumulates, resulting in exclusion. In the neoliberal logic, the "responsibility" for the self falls on the individual, regardless of where they live. It resembles the slave iron muzzle by silencing the legitimation of the being's existence in space because "one ceases to be poor in one place to be poor in another." Unemployment, poor housing conditions, health, education, and lack of access to the full rights of the ordinary citizen directly affect the lives of any individuals who are constantly violated by exclusion and have their hopes eliminated<sup>7</sup>.

## FOR A CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY TO CONSIDER STRUCTURAL-URBAN POVERTY GEOGRAPHICALLY

To think about and analyze structural poverty in our times, one must reflect on the perspective of inclusion and possible content forms to produce socio-spatial justice in the face of inequality in places. As Almeida (2019, p. 204) points out, "inequality is a permanent fact of capitalism, which, depending on historical circumstances and specific political arrangements, can be, at most, greater or lesser." Furthermore, Ribeiro & Silva (2004, p. 348) state that

"inequality manifests itself in the economic distance between those who have learned to make a systematized partiality of the Whole (present and future) and those who live the consequences of this action, in the parts or fragments that fall to them in the current modernization, once again partial and marginalizing."

For Jessé Souza (2000, p. 267), "inequality appears as a natural result, often perceived as one's failure." It is not news that the actions taken by States/national governments to seek "solutions" were engendered by minimal action and the repression of movements and organizations that reacted to the forms of inequality contained in structural poverty. In this sense, changes occur and will occur from "within" and from below in the slow time of everyday life. So, the foundations and meanings in manifestations, such as feminist movements, LGBTQIAPN+ collectives, Hip-Hop Culture organizations, and rap (Rhythm and Poetry), among others, evidence the demand and search for the construction of a fairer society.

However, exclusion as structural poverty is a summative process of multiplying forms of structural violence; this is its determining factor. Therefore, its dissemination through the national and local territory is only carried out by realizing the notion of rationality. The more significant presence of the technical-scientific-informational environment (SANTOS, 1996) is intertwined with Brazilian socio-spatial formation governed by the manifestation of this rationality, in which the forms of poverty coexist.

As Santos (1994b, p. 30) explains, "space itself, the technical-scientific- [informational] environment, has the same content of rationality, thanks to the intentionality in the choice of its objects, whose location, more than ever, is functional to the designs of social actors capable of rational action." If poverty is a mark of capitalism and is reinforced with neoliberalism, it also coexists in different periods and spaces as new technical means enter territories to enable accumulation strategies.

In included or induced poverty, without communicating vessels and related to human subsistence in places, consumption and money have interfered little in social life. "It was a succession without continuity or a relationship of dependence" (SANTOS, 1985, p. 54). The rationalization was unintentional, as techniques were not comprehensively present in an earlier urbanization period, whose formation followed the logic of local practices in subspaces with internal centralities but without more significant exchanges between urban centers.

In the case of the largest cities, as discussed by Milton Santos (1990, 1993), poverty deepens due to the consolidation of the corporate urbanization process. This form of urbanization produces housing objects bargained for by clientelist government practices that facilitate the action of large companies in the management of public resources, a process analyzed extensively in geographical dissertations and theses. Among the many elements composing this process, Santos (2005) notably proposes two vocations: symbolic and mercantile. In the latter, a psychosphere is formed around private property, the acquisition of goods, and urban revitalization. Commercial vocation concentrates economic investments above social investments, facilitating the action of contractors and construction companies.

A dominant logic prevails, in which, according to Milton Santos (1993, p. 123), "public power itself becomes a privileged creator of scarcity; thus, stimulating speculation and fostering the production of empty spaces within cities; unable to solve the housing problem, it pushes the majority of the population to the peripheries." In this context, an example of a central government action was the policy designed for the National Housing Bank (BNH) in the 1970s. The body ended up acting as a real estate speculation agent, accentuating peripherization in the most important Brazilian cities, such as the formation of the Grajaú neighborhood in São Paulo-SP (MOYSÉS, 2023; SILVA, 2016).

Furthermore, in the twenty-first century, urban relations in our territory aligned with neoliberal-global logic have aggravated poverty, making the city a company (or the city as a business). According to Carlos Vainer (2000, p. 86), the city-company

"essentially means conceiving and establishing the city as an economic agent that acts in the market and finds the rule and model for planning and executing its actions in this market. Acting strategically as a business means, first of all, having the market as a horizon and making decisions based on the information and expectations generated in and by the market. It is the very meaning of the plan, and no longer just its abstract principles, that comes from the world of private enterprise."

In this context, citizenship is now treated as a business, atrophying constitutional laws, making it even more impossible for the poor to access and have the right to the city. Under these conditions, urban planners and managers in cities, especially metropolises, aim to face poverty by exterminating the

meaning of life (existence) of the poor. Structural poverty must be viewed as an event. Santos (1985, p. 36) states that "events on a global scale, whether today or yesterday, contribute more to assisting subspaces than social phenomena." Consequently, structural poverty, simultaneously a phenomenon and a social problem, becomes an event to be planned; therefore, it has an intentional action according to the rationality that commands the territories' production, organization, and regulation.

In different periods, capitalist accumulation adopts models of territorial planning and ways of leading and alienating the population and territory (CATAIA, 2001) without demagogy. This results from the functional violence of measures that impoverish the population, conditioned to the consumption of alienating goods and exempt from access to social rights. The falsification of the elimination of poverty is always planned. "This planning anticipates a remedy for poverty: the improvement of consumption levels as well as the productivity of the poor sector of the economy" (SANTOS, 2003, [1979]).

The issue of poverty, a capitalist functional violence, is interwoven with other forms of violence, whose contents are intertwined. The political dimension of territorial and urban planners is aligned with the mass media discourse employing the maxim that poverty must be eliminated by eliminating the poor. Hence, in the capitalist city, a company-city, "the contemporary forms that subjugate life to the power of death" prevail, pertinently conceived as necropolitics by Achille Mbembe (2016, p. 146). In addition, the effects of planning poverty directly reflect on the psychosocial condition as humiliation and shame, as "actions and feelings experienced daily by people in this condition" (ESTANISLAU & XIMENES, 2016, p. 130)<sup>8</sup>. All this perniciousness stems from structural violence.

According to Santos (2000, p. 61, emphasis added),

"the triumph of the new pragmatic virtues, the ideal of full democracy is replaced by the construction of a market democracy, in which the distribution of power depends on realizing the ultimate ends of the globalitarian [totalitarian globalization] system itself. This is why everyday life is subject to structural violence that is the mother of all other violence" (emphasis added).

It is evident that "poverty is materially expressed in cities through extremely precarious patterns of territorial occupation" (ÁLVAREZ, 2007, p. 98), reinforcing the poverty that we view as structural-urban, as it focuses vehemently on urbanized areas, where most of the population is concentrated, living perversely with unemployment, low income levels, precarious cultural facilities, and the absence of public State policies. Furthermore, inequality and dependence are dramatic when reaching, as is the Brazilian case, the black and peripheral population.

Structural-urban poverty should be perceived as a reflection of the capitalist urban way of life, where the unequal market and State relationships are reproduced, as well as their territorial division of labor that reconfigure society and city planning, whether through the imposition of regulations or resistance to scarcity (MESTRE, 2015; RIZZATTI, 2020). "Poverty is structural and not residual. It increases as the city grows" (SANTOS, 1990, p. 15).

Poverty is observed as a social debt in the production of urban space. According to Silvio Almeida (2019, p. 206), "fiscal austerity cuts the source of financing of social rights in order to transfer part of the public budget to the private financial sector through interest on public debt," which, from a political standpoint, is also a social debt.

The "aspects of poverty directly linked to urbanization" (SANTOS, 2013, [1978], p. 78) need to be discussed based on analytical variables that allow us to go beyond defining this phenomenon to help understand it. Here, it is presented by three variables, namely: infrastructure (housing and sanitation), work (income, unemployment, and demographic structure), and access to services (education and health). The absence of these variables for much of the population demonstrates the lack of opportunities and the size of structural-urban poverty in a given municipality or metropolitan region.

However, choosing variables and forms of quantitative and qualitative treatment for structural-urban poverty studies is challenging. As Fernando Silva (2017, p. 30) explains, it is a constant exercise to situate elements "within the dynamics of each period and in each regional context, because, without this update, the weight of each variable in the definition of a situation of poverty is not known, which ultimately makes it impossible to make comparisons between different periods."



One issue to be considered is that socio-spatial ascension requires better conditions of income, housing, and dignified living, as well as the right to opt for opportunities. It is a great mistake to guide the socio-spatial rise through the consumption of goods (constantly promoted by the mass media), especially those ordered by hegemonic production systems. Hélio de Almeida (1982, p. 32) pointed to this issue, affirming that "the intrinsic urban causes of poverty generation (which recycles itself) can be dealt with adequately, if not eliminated once and for all, at least the economic problem and reorganization of these spaces will be significantly reduced."

Thus, despite solving immediate individual needs, income transfer policies such as the Bolsa Família<sup>9</sup> do not result in the socioeconomic emancipation of the poorest population. They depend on other inclusion and citizenship policies to overcome poverty, such as basic sanitation, public health system, popular housing, access to quality fundamental and higher education, employment, and an adequate minimum wage. The population's weakness (considering the middle class and the poor) occurs in the relationship of perfect consumers (SANTOS, 1988) exempt from the right to exercise citizenship. Therefore, the population needs to recognize its existence, legitimize its essence, and give reason for its awareness.

Given our point of view, it is straightforward to highlight Milton Santos' proposal to end consumerism by stating that "in order to eliminate its domination, we advocate the cause of changing production's objectives, that is, the production structure itself (SANTOS, 2013, [1978], p. 84)". Furthermore, as Abdias Nascimento (1980, p. 75) proposes, we must configure quilombismos<sup>10</sup> "in the African experience, in the sense of opportunity [and] consider as enemies all those who, even unconsciously, cry out for modernity."

From our point of view, we give rise to the freedom of subjects and the autonomy of being in places. Structural-urban poverty, a form of planned violence, must be overcome. Paulo Freire (1987, p. 35) reminds us that

"This overcoming cannot occur, however, in purely idealistic terms. Suppose it is indispensable to the oppressed, for the struggle for their liberation, that the concrete reality of oppression is no longer for them a kind of "closed world" (in which their fear of freedom is generated) from which they could not leave, but a situation that only limits them and that they can transform. In that case, it is fundamental that, in recognizing the limit that the oppressive reality imposes on them, they have, in this recognition, the engine of their liberating action".

According to Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro (2012, p. 87), in modern times, people "demand more equality, better conditions, and more citizenship [because] we have a tradition of modernity". As Santos (1979b [2002], p. 178) points out, "the problem of equality is inseparable from an adequate spatial organization, based on an adequate production structure." The all-important questions are: How can structural-urban poverty be overcome in the face of selective and spatial hegemonic rationality? How long will the space of the poor be a space lived by injustice and exclusion?

## CONCLUSION

What is most thought-provoking in the problem of poverty goes beyond questions but rather reflections for future investigations in the dynamic monitoring of reality. The theory proposed by Milton Santos offers the potential to understand the phenomena of poverty. The dimension of the materialization of structural-urban poverty reflects the lack of some spheres of material life and people's emotional condition.

Therefore, as discussed and presented in this article, we cannot rule out the analysis of the conjuncture of absences as opportunities for happiness, access, information, and social and spatial rights. In this sense, dimension attributes a connotative value that is not necessarily related to the absence of material and consumption goods destined for income and/or urban infrastructures.

The accelerated growth of metropolises historically accompanies the integration of the national territory, meeting the demand of internal and external productive circuits and disintegrating internal sociability. Thus, the accumulation and concentration of capital are intensified; simultaneously, the

migratory flow of people increases at the most extreme points where poverty is deepest, and life is maintained. In urbanization, investments are materialized for greater capital fluidity to the detriment of social investments to the population.

A knowledge of structural-urban poverty and its experience is vital, as it leads to awareness. Structural-urban poverty may be directed towards a qualitative debate (not only quantitative) on the lack of human dignity seeking to recognize the legitimacy of existence in places.

Therefore, living, feeling, and coexisting leads to self-knowledge and organizes subjects to transform their local realities and collective life (family, work, schools, religious temples, unions, NGOs, etc.). This is especially true in metropolises and their peripheries (favelas and dysfunctional areas), offering the possibility of opening up the current period.

## NOTES

1 - This work originated from the discussions presented in the doctoral thesis entitled "Banal space and everyday essence: counter-rational actions of RAP for overcoming structural-urban poverty in São Paulo-SP and São Luís-MA," defended at the Institute of Geoscience of Unicamp in November 2023, and which tried to analyze how the RAP (Rhythm and Poetry) musical circuit became an important factor of counter-rationality and critical cultural resistance of the population to the context of structural-urban poverty, especially in large metropolises.

2 - Fundação Getúlio Vargas - FGV Map of the new poverty: A study reveals that 29.6% of Brazilians have a family income of less than R\$497 per month. 18-Jul-2022 Available at: <https://portal.fgv.br/noticias/mapa-nova-pobreza-estudo-revela-296-brasileiros-tem-renda-familiar-inferior-r-497-mensais>.

3 - We take due care in this approach to not show that structural poverty is only a fact of metropolises, as it also occurs in small and medium-sized cities and rural spaces. However, our focus is on metropolitan issues.

4 - According to Santos (1988, p. 48), "The results are closely related to the interests of the system on a global scale and also on a local, regional or national scale. Through this we can, perhaps, explain the so-called differences in development." Furthermore, according to Souza (2000, p. 260) this selective modernization is aggravated as "the result of a process of fragmentation of consciousness that virulently affects our subaltern classes".

5 - Santos (1978, p. 43) points out that "current technical progress profoundly changes the technical composition of capital and rapidly and drastically reduces the demand for labor, especially in the sectors most affected by modernization. If the classic idea of an industrial reserve exercise is not modified, taking into account new realities, it will lose its meaning when applied to underdeveloped countries".

6 - According to Kowarick (2000, p. 107), urban dispossession refers to "the absence or precariousness of collective consumption services that, together with access to land, are socially necessary for the urban reproduction of workers."

7 - The gravity of the issue deepens when "the feeling of injustice is not articulated, it remains an indeterminate feeling, a malaise, which can result in pre-political protests of extraordinary violence such as riots, looting or pure and simple criminal violence" (SOUZA, 2000, p. 267).

8 - On the other hand, the authors demonstrate that "the understanding that, despite the experiences of humiliation and the development of an individual marked by the feeling of shame, listening and welcoming can strengthen the power of life. This is an ability of evolution, which generates resistance, creativity to face the troubles, and that yearns for expression. The power of life is also loaded with affections waiting for an authentic relationship of trust and respect" (ESTANISLAU & XIMENES, 2016, p. 144).

9 - The Bolsa Família Program (PBF), a Brazilian cash transfer program, was implemented in 2003, in the 1st term of Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva and extinguished in 2021 in the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro. The program is relaunched by the Federal Government on March 2, 2023, with Lula's return to the presidency. The program comprises policies that carry out monetary transfers to

people who have not contributed directly to any fund, even if they are physically able to sell their work (SILVA, 2007, p. 27). Its action is similar to the social welfare policies originated in the core countries of capitalism in the 1970s as a result of the multiple bankruptcies of neoliberalism.

10 - Thesis written in the 1980s by Abdias Nascimento, senator, deputy, playwright, painter and writer for the Republic. To support a proposal for the political mobilization of the Afro-descendant population in the Americas based on their own historical and cultural experience, Quilombismo suggests using this heritage. It goes even further, outlining an Afro-Brazilian vision for the modern national state – a multicultural and multi-ethnic Brazil.

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