

## ARTICLE

# Necroeducation: reflections on the death of blacks in the Brazilian educational system

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### ABSTRACT

This essay brings to the debate processes of invisibilization of the black youth in the Brazilian educational system with one of its main consequences being their symbolic death, which contributes to other ways of dying in the context of a society marked by structural racism. We start from the concept of biopolitics, which will be enhanced with the contribution of Achille Mbembe, by bringing and deepening the discussion from the concept of necropolitics, which seems to guide part of the educational policies in Brazil. These, in turn, are marked by an incomplete set of laws that do not guarantee access to and permanence of black youth in school. In this context, the challenge arises to deepen the concept of necroeducation to think about the consequences of the elimination of black bodies from school spaces guided by a certain intentionality that goes in the direction of letting die.

### KEYWORDS

necroeducation; racism; black youth.

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## ***NECROEDUCAÇÃO: REFLEXÕES SOBRE A MORTE DO NEGRO NO SISTEMA EDUCACIONAL BRASILEIRO***

### **RESUMO**

Este ensaio traz para o debate processos de invisibilização do jovem negro no sistema educacional brasileiro tendo como uma de suas principais consequências a morte simbólica desse sujeito, que contribui para outras formas de morrer no contexto de uma sociedade marcada pelo racismo estrutural. Partimos do conceito de biopolítica, que será potencializado com a contribuição de Achille Mbembe, ao trazer e aprofundar a discussão com o conceito de necropolítica, que parece orientar parte das políticas educacionais no Brasil. Estas, por sua vez, marcadas por um conjunto incompleto de leis, não garantem o acesso e a permanência da juventude negra na escola. Nesse contexto, surge o desafio de aprofundar o conceito de necroeducação para pensarmos as consequências da eliminação dos corpos negros dos espaços escolares orientada por certa intencionalidade que vai na direção do deixar morrer.

### **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

necroeducação; racismo; juventude negra.

## ***NECROEDUCACIÓN: REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA MUERTE DEL NEGRO EN EL SISTEMA EDUCATIVO BRASILEÑO***

### **RESUMEN**

Este ensayo propone traer al debate algunos procesos de invisibilización del joven negro en el sistema educativo brasileño, siendo una de sus principales consecuencias su muerte simbólica, que contribuye a otras formas de morir en el contexto de una sociedad marcada por el racismo estructural. Para ello, partimos de referencias importantes, como el concepto de biopolítica, que será enriquecido con la contribución de Achille Mbembe, trayendo y profundizando la discusión desde el concepto de necropolítica, que parece guiar parte importante de las políticas educativas en Brasil. Estas, a su vez, están marcadas por un conjunto incompleto de leyes que no garantizan el acceso y la permanencia de los jóvenes negros en la escuela. En este contexto, surge el desafío de profundizar el concepto de necroeducación para pensar en las consecuencias de la eliminación de los cuerpos negros de los espacios escolares guiados por una cierta intencionalidad que va en la dirección de dejar morir.

### **PALABRAS CLAVE**

necroeducación; racismo; juventud negra.

*It is correctly said that racism is a plague on humanity.  
But we should not be content with this declaration.  
It is necessary to tirelessly search for the repercussions of racism  
at all levels of sociability.  
(Fanon, 2008, p. 82)*

To bring to the public agenda the debate about racism and its various forms of expression is an increasingly urgent and necessary task, especially since we believe that it is a key structural element of social relations. As Fanon does in the epigraph, researcher Silvio Luiz Almeida (2018, p. 27), for example, has reflected on how “racism is expressed in processes of subalternity and is reproduced in political realms of the economy and daily relations”.<sup>1</sup> This provides us with instruments to analyze the social exclusion of Brazil’s black population, because according to this author:

Racism is a systematic form of discrimination based on race and that is manifest by means of conscious or unconscious practices that culminate in disadvantages or privileges for individuals, depending on the racial group to which they belong. (Almeida, 2018, p. 25)

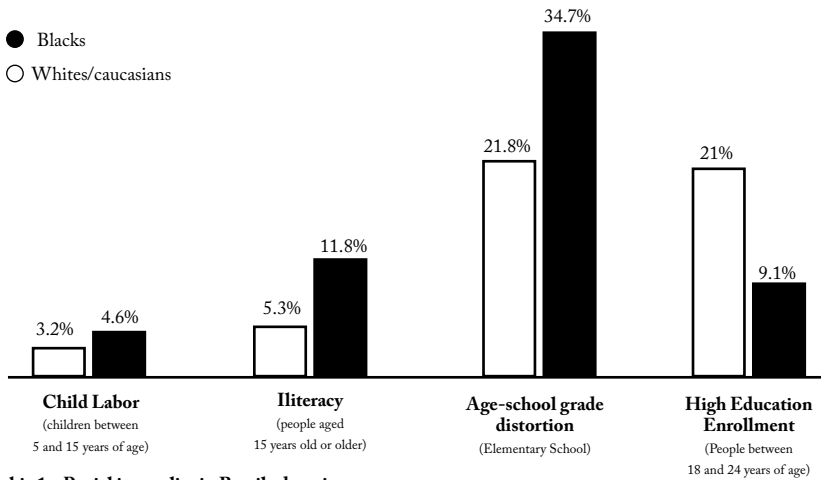
In this perspective, it is possible to understand racism as an ideological weapon that serves the domination and exploitation of peoples (such as blacks, Indians, and others) and that has historically produced — and still produces — severe processes of exclusion and extermination of part of this population. We understand that racial hierarchization had a preponderant influence on the exploitation and predatory pillaging of the African continent, which also allowed the colonization and instilment of slavery in Brazil. This set of beliefs in the superiority *versus* inferiority of races, which is necessary to perpetuate social exclusion, is found until today (Santos, 2002).

Social exclusion is established by providing individuals or populations with only precarious conditions for benefiting from the opportunities that the neoliberal capitalist society offers. This exclusion can be observed through the lack of access to basic social rights and forums of power. It results from economic insufficiency or unequal forms of distribution of income, goods and services such as healthcare and education, for example, linked to the absence of the State in the form of policies and programs that provide this access, in addition to the perpetuation of mecha-

1 For a deeper debate about racism, see Guimarães (2004), who “analyzes the formation of the thematic field of race relations studies in Brazil in the 1940s, and how it was surpassed by studies of racial identity and racism, in the 1970s”. Guimarães (2004, p. 9) suggests that since that year, due to this “surpassing and substitution of paradigms that nearly exclusively use a structural and institutional analysis, the concept of racism came to imprecisely denominate all of the dimensions of social life and interaction between ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’”.

nisms that promote the formulation of a structure dedicated to the maintenance of differences between social groups.

Thus, this non-recognition of the other causes their social experience to be constantly marked by growing inequality of access to the different instances of human life to which they should have rights. This involves a denial of basic rights, making it impossible for individuals to have access to work, and the opportunity to purchase goods. It prohibits their access to spaces of power and constructs a history of symbolic violence<sup>2</sup> that alienates them from being accepted and respected by society as subjects with rights. To better understand this context, take the graphic below as an example (Graphic 1).



**Graphic 1 – Racial inequality in Brazil education.**  
 Source: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2012).  
 Authors' elaboration.

The data presented graphic help us to reflect, for example, that within the universe of racial inequality in Brazil, physical violence has been only one aspect of exclusion of the black population. From the exploitation of child labor of black children, which directly influences their precarious access to basic education and, thus, to higher education, we perceive that the guarantee of basic rights is related to a racial perspective. In parallel with the author, Souza (2013/2014) offers reflections that corroborate the relation between socio-racial inequality in Brazil and its history of slavery:

2 For Bourdieu (1989) symbolic violence is everything that is sustained as a result of symbolic power, that is, which is not directly related to the process of physical coercion. It is exercised through reinforcement of naturalization of power relations and is characterized by the imposition of an ideology that is presented through discourse. Symbolic violence has a fundamental role in the construction and reproduction of stereotypes and social stigmas and is also manifest within institutions.

The low socioeconomic levels that portray the conditions of the majority of the black population, since the post-abolition period, is a social phenomenon that attests to the degree of exploitation and exclusion that is dominant in Brazilian society. Whether in historic reports or in a wide variety of surveys, it can be seen how much the black population has been suffering in terms of schooling, infant mortality, urban violence, location of housing, basic sanitation, labor market, concentration of wealth and other aspects that reveal the citizenship of a people. (Souza, 2013/2014, p. 6)

As the author indicates, the Brazilian State has historically denied the basic rights needed for the survival of the black population. This perception helps us to reflect that, within the universe of exclusion, physical violence has been only one aspect of the vulnerability of this population in Brazil. Thus, returning to Almeida's concept of racism (2018), we can say that this systematic form of discrimination against blacks has been the basis for Brazilian State policies, which are organized in contexts of exclusionary inclusion.

We understand the State to be the shaper of social and racial exclusion, given that public facilities are located far from the portion of the population that needs access to basic services, especially healthcare and education. Even when precarious access exists, it is marked by problems of other natures, such as a lack of investments for the universalization of these services.

Another facet of the process of exclusion is found in the total extinction of the opportunity to obtain rights. Hannah Arendt (1990, p. 330) indicates that the strengthening of anti-Semitism allowed us to experience what she considered the total destitution of rights, that is, total social exclusion, through the genocide of Jews. Arendt understood that there is "the existence of a right to have rights", based on a logic that understands that there are groups for which the only option presented is extermination.

## FROM BIOPOWER TO NECROPOLICY

From this perspective, Almeida (2018) revives Foucault's (2010) concepts, by indicating that racism, in addition to being an ideology and a practice, should be understood as a technology of power, implemented through the power to regulate, promote, and control life, denominated biopolitics, of which the Jewish holocaust was the maximum expression.

In biopolitics, the ancient power of the sovereignty of the monarchs, which justified torture — as a form of punishment and the spectacularized death of citizens — is transported, in modernity, to the control, exploitation, and extermination of colonized peoples. Yet, unlike what was found in European territories, where biopolitics was aimed at promoting and prolonging life of groups that held sovereign power, the *bio* is resignified in *necropolitics*, to which the black population is inscribed as a sign of death, as Mbembe demonstrates:

Biopower appears to function by dividing people between those who should live and those who should die. Operating based on a division between the living and the dead, this power is defined in relation to a biological field — from which it takes control and in which it is inscribed. This control presupposes the distribution of the human species in groups, the subdivision of the population in subgroups and the establishment of a biological incision between some and others. This is what Foucault labels with the term racism. (Mbembe, 2016, p. 128)

Mbembe (2016) points out that biopower is constituted as a policy by those who take power and belong to it and the group for which life is a political possibility.

Thus, there is a visible division of those who have the right to life, to have rights, while listing those who should not enjoy such rights and, in addition, they must be excluded, killed. Thus, contemporary forms of political and state construction are based on the need to subjugate life to the power of death and this death is related to the most diverse spheres of human existence. In this sense, necropolitics is characterized as:

The various ways by which, in our contemporary world, firearms are implanted in the interest of maximum destruction of people and of the creation of “worlds of death”, new and unique forms of social existence, in which vast populations are submitted to living conditions that confer them the status of “living-dead”. (Mbembe, 2016, p. 146)

Mbembe affirms that the politics of death is tied to race, given that necropolitics, like biopolitics, is built on a common characteristic. To that end, he cites colonialism, *apartheid* and slavery as some of the exemplary forms of exercising this necropower that even acts on the liberty conferred to individuals and their bodies, in this case, black bodies.

The Cameroonian author argues that the Foucaultian theory does not grasp the complexities that are established in power relations, if we use a perspective that considers colonizing processes. For him:

Is the concept of biopower sufficient for designating contemporary practices through which politics, under the mask of war, resistance or struggle against terror, opts to annihilate the enemy as a priority and absolute objective? War does not only constitute a means to obtain sovereignty, but is also a way to exercise the right to kill. (Mbembe, 2017, p. 108)

Mbembe defends that modernity had to fabricate the other, the different, to be able to justify the need to annihilate and destroy it. This manufactured other must be accompanied by a discursive construction that refers to danger: danger of destruction, of losing power, danger of stealing the place that Europeans understand to be theirs by right, even divine right, to dominate other peoples. Once this other represents a danger to the dominant model of life, they must be eliminated and this extinction is guaranteed through war, that is, the greatest representation of the

right to kill. It was this thinking that guided the scientific and political discourses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Mbembe affirms that this politics of death is not only executed by the figure of the sovereign (represented by the figure of the State), but that, within a colonial logic, the sovereign comes to be anyone who institutes power and wants to make decisions about the possibility for life and death of the other. Thus, Foucault helps our reflection when he affirms that:

Of course, by taking life I do not simply understand direct assassination, but also everything that can be indirect assassination: the fact of exposing to death, of multiplying for some the risk of death, or pure and simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, etc. (Foucault, 2005, p. 306)

Foucault's affirmation helps us to think about the various deaths to which blacks are subjected, whether effectively physical death, or the lack of access to education, healthcare, leisure, to spaces of politics and economic power, to the impossibility to construct dreams and to forge their own identity without the need to look for the approximation to the standard of the other (the white).

From this perspective, we can perceive that not only the physical death of individuals is raised as a necropolitical assumption, but also all the ways to expel certain groups from social conviviality and deprive them of basic human rights. Thus, to think of necropolitics also involves the understanding that the various social and political institutions in the country function as true arms for executing this power.

Lima (2018) presents us this concept, by saying that:

In Brazilian contexts, necropolitics is visible in the prison system, in the population living in the streets, in urban apartheid in large and small Brazilian cities, in relevant data, in the genocide of the black population, which in its majority is young and male, in the eclosion of vigilante groups, in psychiatric hospitals, in waiting lines for public defenders, in hospital emergency rooms, and other places. (Lima, 2018, p. 28)

The perspective adopted by Mbembe (2016) and discussed by Lima (2018), as seen above, reverses the perspective of observation from the power relations previously considered by Foucault (2005). From here on, the perspective becomes that of the colonized, of those whose discourse has not been broadly heard, because, based on this perspective, the politics exercised was that of death: physical, social, and psychological.

The colonized were always inserted in a process in which the power exercised by sectors of domination is based on their elimination, given that the politics of life has only been (and still is today) attributed to those who are historically considered humans. To those considered non-humans, death, elimination, is the ruling order.

This also takes place when black bodies are those that are not permitted the opportunity to move freely through different social spaces. There are places constructed for the presence of blacks, just as there are environments built for the

presence of whites. Generally, the formulation of these spaces obeys a logic of development, access, infrastructure, power relations, favorable to one and unfavorable to the other.

Thus from a racial perspective, the State comes not only to select who can live and who can die, but also acts directly on the exercise of “to live and let die”, indicating who or what groups should be exterminated, where all and any State action toward the colonized would be expressed in policies for death.

If we think, for example, of access to the city, to spaces considered, hegemonically, as spaces of culture and technology, the black body is not seen as an element that belongs to that landscape. It is always an intruder, who should be apprehended, expelled, because it involves an association of how that space should be maintained to allow it to function as planned.

The presence of the black body is historically disturbing, ever since thousands were left in the streets a day after the end of slavery, “staining” the image of the city that sought to be Europeanized. Until today, when present, black bodies should only be associated to previously established social functions: preferably, conducting activities of lesser prestige, serving whites.

There is a death of liberty, of enjoying the opportunity to move about, to experience the spaces like others, which is imputed to the black. That is, their experience in these spaces must be that which the white allows them to have; it is also a death of the opportunity to choose, make decisions. Thus, there are various other types of death, found in a wide variety of forms among the black population in Brazilian society, and they are seen in broad social data and in the most concrete and particular situations.

From this perspective, there is no doubt that the inexistence or ineffectiveness of public policies aimed at the black population is not accidental, but part of the strategy of the politics of death used in the genocide of Brazilian blacks, as indicated by Abdias do Nascimento (1978). Thus, to the degree that the State refuses to develop mechanisms to guarantee the basic rights of the black population, such as the right to life and dignity, the State is reaffirming its genocidal logic, mainly by the lack of effective intervention with public policies and programs to reduce the high rates of homicide among black youth in the country. Moreover, the State fails to create effective conditions to allow access by the black population to its basic rights, such as public and quality education that is expressed in the guarantee not only that they go to school, but mainly through the implementation of mechanisms that guarantee that they stay in school.

## FROM NECROPOLITICS TO NECROEDUCATION

According to the 2015 National Household Sampling Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílio* — PNAD), in Brazil, approximately 27 million children and adolescents have one or more basic rights denied (IBGE, 2016). Thinking of poverty in a greater dimension, one analysis made by United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) considers that poverty in childhood has other di-



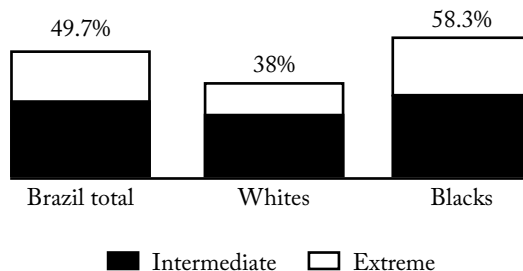
mensions, which are not only monetary, and directly influence the constitution of children as individuals and their education as citizens. Thus:

Poverty in childhood and adolescence has multiple dimensions, which go beyond money. It is the result of the inter-relation between deprivations, exclusions and the various vulnerabilities to which girls and boys are exposed and that influence their well-being. (UNICEF, 2018, p. 6)

The institution considers as elements of analysis, based on PNAD 2015, the relationship between the compliance or not with six basic rights: education, information, water, sanitation, housing, and protection against child labor. Thus, the less these rights are met, together with the presence or absence of income, the greater are the possibilities for there to be an insertion of these children in different situations of privations, which can be classified as:

- absence of privations: when a child has access to basic rights;
- intermediary privation: when some rights are met, though precariously; and
- extreme privation: when basic rights are nearly inexistent or null.

By this logic, by observing the data related to unequal access between blacks and whites, it is possible to note a disparity in meeting the basic rights analyzed (Graphic 2).



**Graphic 2 – Percentage of privation among white and black children.**

Source: Fundo das Nações Unidas para a Infância (2018).

Authors' elaboration.

According to the Graphic 2, we note that, among children and adolescents who have some type of privation, 58.3% are black, while among whites deprivation does not reach 40% of the total. Considering only cases of extreme privation, the discrepancy is even greater, in which the incidence of blacks is twice as high as that of whites (UNICEF, 2018).

These differences in privation of rights based on race lead us to reflect on why social difference in Brazil is directly related to race and that this process begins still in childhood. Thus, the black population, from an early age, experiences a reality of deprivation of basic rights, which will directly affect their living conditions in

contexts of complete citizenship, and in access to basic resources, material goods, and educational and thus professional development, perpetuating the social disparities between black and white populations in Brazil.

Moreover, Mbembe raises the following questions: “If we imagine politics as a form, we should ask ourselves: what is the place reserved for life, death and the human body (in particular the injured or murdered body)? What place does it occupy in the order of power?” (Mbembe, 2017, p. 108). By asking what is the place reserved to life, death, and the human body, Mbembe requires us to reflect on who is given the right to life; who has only death as an imposition and who is truly given the opportunity to be considered a human being, not only from a physical perspective, but also in terms of social and historic position.

The racialization of the non-European (or non-white) removes from colonized Africans and Indigenous peoples the opportunity to be seen (and see themselves) as a universal expression of the human genre, preventing any exercise of alterity, because, from the colonial experience, the other is always an enemy and, in Brazil, this enemy is materialized in the black population.

Thus, if we consider the racial experience in Brazil, from a perspective that considers colonization, the seizure of blacks on the African continent, their enslavement and dehumanization, as well as the entire current structure that is presented through the genocide of black youth and the low development rates, the questioning raised by Mbembe indicates routes for possible reflections.

According to the *Atlas da violência* (Atlas of violence) of 2018, between 2006 and 2016, blacks accounted for 40.2% of all homicide victims in this group, while that of the rest of the population was 16%, which is to say that 71.5% of all people murdered in Brazil each year are black or brown. As seen in the data, with regard to homicides, it is as if blacks and non-blacks live in completely different countries, because lethal violence is highly concentrated and black youths are the main victims.

In contrast, this same State, incapable of guaranteeing protection to black youth through its public safety institutions, has been directly responsible for the deaths of black youths. According to the *Anuário de segurança pública* (Annual report on public security) of 2017, 76.6% of victims of police intervention are black, most are male (99%), and youths represent 81.8% of the total.

Quijano (2005) affirms that, in America, the conception of race was used to guarantee legitimacy in the relations of domination imposed by the conquest of territories by the European nations, based not only on a proposal for domination, but also for extermination. Quijano also uses the idea of coloniality to define the regime of power (and knowledge) based on an idea of development, in which the dominator imposes on the dominated group standards of identity affirmation based on Eurocentric civilizing values, expropriating from this group their multiple identities.

Often, slave owners further removed their dignity through physical punishment and the destruction of religious and cultural symbols and identity markings, thus depriving the enslaved people of everything that reminded them of their cultures and identities as Africans, which is one of the genocidal practices committed against blacks.

Thus, resources and principles such as orality, cooperativism, religiosity, integration with nature, the body as sacred space, and many other African values were challenged and suppressed from the daily lives of the black communities in the diaspora.

Similarly, when thinking about school contexts, one can perceive that black and poor children, although formally inserted in the educational system, cannot fully exercise their rights. Poverty, problems of access and staying in school, mobility, the near-complete absence of government policies that guarantee meeting their most basic rights, make it impossible for them to access an education that can truly provide them some type of change or social mobility. In this way, truly making them citizens by promoting life and providing opportunities to construct dreams and places, is constantly made inviable.

A logic that generates a type of “exclusionary inclusion” is established, inserting individuals in the capitalist and educational systems, but simultaneously limiting the places they can occupy in society. According to Souza *et al.* (2011, p. 253):

**Inclusionary exclusion** is a logic that deprives subjects from fully participating in the world of labor, makes labor rights and education precarious, dialectically they are related: **exclusionary inclusion**, that is, the strategies of inclusion at various levels and modalities of school education sustains the capitalist system, creating reserves of cheap labor.

It is this reserve that marks public education, since the increased precariousness of education serves market interests, which impose an accelerated education on the school, to prepare them to perform labor that does not require technical knowledge and education. These individuals are registered in public school systems, but not in a satisfactory way, given that the preciousness of the public school system is marked by low salaries for teachers and other professionals, and a lack of institutional infrastructure, which is increasingly deteriorating, particularly with the recent approval of the Proposed Constitutional Amendment (Proposta de Emenda Constitucional — PEC) n. 241/2016, which froze public spending on education for the following twenty years. Thus, at the same time that they are included, they are socially excluded.

According to the *Anuário brasileiro da educação básica* (Annual report on basic education in Brazil) of 2017, a total of 97% of the students between six and fourteen years of age, from the poorer classes, are enrolled in school. However, these numbers also include the number of children and adolescents who do not go to school or do not conclude this level of schooling. The document also affirms that education can only be considered universalized in the wealthiest portion of the population.

By beginning from this context, and using a racial profile to discuss exclusion, the framework of inequality is shown even more clearly: in Brazil, to speak of the poorest portion of the population is, in parallel, to speak of the black population, understanding this, as indicated by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* — IBGE), as the group of people

self-declared brown and black. Among blacks, 11.2% cannot read, while 11% of browns cannot read, and only 5% of whites.

Brazil has the world's second largest black population and the largest outside of Africa. But this black population is a minority in a wide variety of social spaces and relations, that is, when it is represented it is often in a negative manner and through the reproduction of stereotypes. Schools also reproduce this situation, contributing to the perpetuation of racial prejudice and discrimination.

Understanding that necropolitics is constituted as a politics of death, extinction, erasure of all of that/those which are not considered to have a right to a full life, where the body is killed and all of the opportunity for existence (Mbembe, 2016), we can consider that education is one of its main branches. It exercises the same control over killing people and letting them die, to live and to let die, in both physical and symbolic senses.

What we note is an education for death. As seen in the data previously indicated in this study, blacks have less access to formal education and, when this access is allowed, it is precarious, or that is, not satisfactory, whether because of a lack of infrastructure, or the lack of means that allow better learning, such as adequate payment for teachers and other staff, or because of a lack of schools in marginalized regions, etc.

Black individuals are completely dead within the educational system. Either blacks do not appear physically, intellectually, and historically or they can be easily discarded. When they are not discarded, they are assimilated. That is, it is important that blacks appear as close to being white as possible. Black students are reserved a place of "non-being" as Fanon (2008) and Neuza Santos (1983) indicated, given that, as we said, they must always try to fit into the white ideal. Since they do not fit in, they must be ontologically eliminated.

From this perspective, we can think that a *necroeducation* (Silva, 2019) is built when we observe the erasure, subalternization, animalization, and silencing of black students and their (sub)representation in the educational system, if it is exercising the right to let die those it wants extinguished. School policies involve the epistemic, symbolic, imagetive, and identity death of blacks in schools, through curriculums, daily pedagogical practices, the words of teachers, and in the institutional structure and organization.

Thus, *necroeducation* is formulated based on a logic that seeks, not only to perpetuate the structural racism of society, but through a policy that allows the assassination of blacks in their various spaces, and which is politically and socially legitimated. It is built on bases, even scientific ones, which help to perpetuate the race war and death, real and symbolic, of black subjects in education.

Mbembe (2016) denominates this practice using the concept of epistemicide, which he describes as one of the mechanisms that causes the death of the black population, because beyond the legacy of deep inequality and social injustice of colonialism and imperialism, there is an epistemological legacy of Eurocentrism that prevents us from understanding the world based on the very world in which we live and the epistemologies which are specific to it.

## DENIED IDENTITIES: SCHOOL AS A SPACE OF SOCIO-RACIAL EXCLUSION

Another way to exemplify this “exclusionary inclusion” is by observing the uniformization of the educational system, which can be seen in the construction of curricula and school structures that remove the possibilities for a more diversified approach and make inviable other identity processes for students.

It is important to emphasize that schools have silencing mechanisms that strive to make invisible those practices that do not fit into the daily life of “institutionalized” schools, thus adopting a culture of standardization that is extremely violent against and exclusionary of black adolescents. In this sense, the school is constituted with the privilege of being able to provide support so that young people can develop their personal projects.

It is understood that school environments strongly contribute to the process of formation of a society and its individuals. For the latter, this includes the sphere of identity, that is, the construction of data about themselves that make them, simultaneously, different from others and participants of a certain group, locating them and their place in the world. According to Joaze Bernardino:

[...] by identity we understand both the “understanding that a person has about who they are as well as the understanding that the significant other has about them”. Therefore, we suppose that the construction of identity involves a dialogical process with blacks themselves, and with Brazilians who define themselves as white. Thus, this discussion about identity involves the need for a correct recognition. What is given is that “if a person receives a correct recognition, they will have their self-esteem intact”, and will identify positively with that which the other sees in them. (Bernardino, 2002, p. 265)

In this sense, we understand identity as a relational category, in which the “I” and the “other” are triggered. It is built through an individual vision and from recognition, or not, of those belonging to various groups in which we are inserted. Thus, I construct my identity based both on that which is specific to me and based on that which the significant other constructed about me.

In Bernardino’s discussion (2002), this relational construction of identity has effects both on blacks and whites: the difference is in how these effects will be seen. For Bernardino, when what the “other” sees are positive aspects, this identity will be positive; if the “other” sees negative aspects, identity will be constructed negatively.

In this regard, we can think about discussions concerning the representation and construction of identity and self-esteem of the black population in Brazil, in which these relations of recognition can be debated considering various social contexts.

Moreover, it is important to recognize another type of exclusion: black students are the majority in public school systems in the early grades, but are vastly underrepresented in the production of educational materials and discourses used in school spaces.

Schools have historically separated black students from a process of institutional socialization that allows them to develop as individuals, to know their history, and to construct a positive view about themselves. These students are made invisible by pedagogical practices or, what is even more cruel, are represented in practices and activities that place them in an inferior position, negativized, constituting another form of exclusion. Thus, not considering the presence of black students in school processes is a way to keep:

Alive a certain imaginary that tends to conceive of the school as a privileged space for whites, ignore the struggle made by blacks in the attempt to use education as a tool for affirmation in the social space and ignore the wide variety of aspects linked to the racial issue that, contrary to what is thought, are linked to basic elements of processes placed in course in education. (Fonseca, 2007, p. 35)

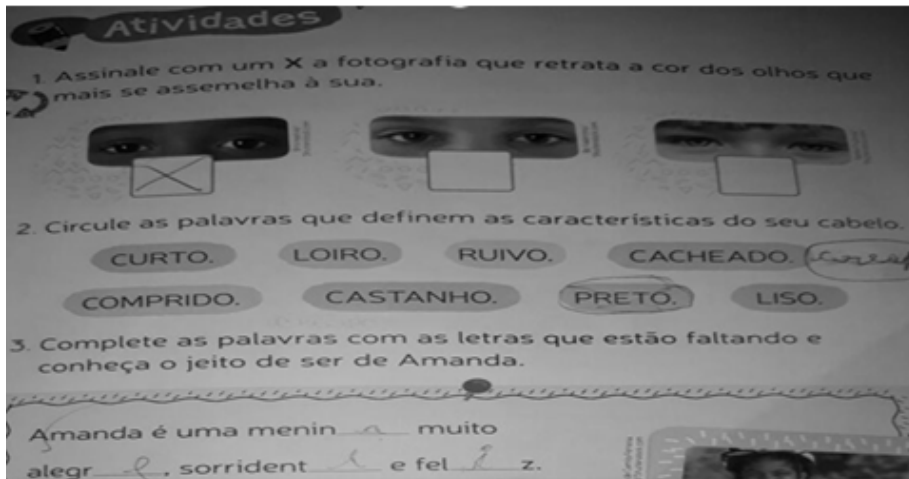
These privileges must be questioned if we are truly committed to the transformation of education in general — and of the school in particular — to attain pedagogical practices that give potential to the self-recognition of black students. One of the routes for this change is related to didactic materials, whose content produces significant changes in pedagogical conduct.

Isabel Aparecida dos Santos (2001) analyzed didactic materials and found various stereotypes attributed to blacks, which always conferred them to a position of inferiority in relation to whites. Among these she highlights:

The images of black women were always caricatures, with a scarf on the head, hoop earrings and animalized traits; black women were always “caregivers”, without a family, in a brutal reference to the “nursemaid”; in terms of work, they appear associated to non-qualified activities (in construction, as maids, etc.); [...] blacks as synonymous to slaves. In contrast, the inverse values, positive ones, were attributed to whites. (Santos, 2001, p. 103)

In addition, when this relationship does not emphasize black inferiority, it simply erases the presence of blacks, and their more specific characteristics, or totally silences them. For example, we can look at a didactic book aimed at second grade students from the *Trilhas Sistema de ensino* (Education system trails) series, published by Editora FTD Educação, in 2017. In the first chapter, “Como eu sou” (How I am), we see that black children are still not fully represented.

Although black children appear throughout the section, on page 217, exercise 2 presents the following instructions: “Circle the words that define the characteristics of your hair”. The characteristics presented for selection are: short, blond, red, curly, long, brown, black, and smooth. There is no option for tightly curled hair, for example. Moreover, kinky hair does not appear in this chapter on any of the previous pages (Figure 1).



**Figure 1 – Education system trails series.**

*Curto*: short; *Loiro*: blond; *Ruivo*: red; *Cacheado*: curly; *Comprido*: long; *Castanho*: brown; *Preto*: black; *Liso*: smooth.

Source: Trilhas... (2017, p. 217).

Authors' elaboration.

It seems to us that this invisibility, when not only contributing to the exclusion of these children, it creates a situation in which they cannot be seen positively by themselves or other students. That is, if characteristics are presented for various types of hair, but tightly coiled or kinky hair does not appear, it automatically becomes a quality that is no longer like any other, it is different, or even, an object. In this sense, we can say that making people invisible is one of the strategies that permit death.

Based on this, we can consider that establishing a policy of death involves not only physical death, which is legitimated and promoted by State powers and that is now presented as a new configuration of sovereignty, in which anyone claims the right to eliminate the other.

The Racionais MC's rap group said, in the 1990s, that "one who is not seen is not remembered" (Silva, 2011). So, when schools remove from their organizational structure any possibility to mention the existence of others beyond those considered true humans, they are automatically killing. The production of forgetting is characterized as a necropolitical mechanism, given that it also does away with the possibility for the existence of the other.

On the other hand, giving continuity to studies about the presence of blacks in didactic materials, Ana Célia Silva (2011) indicates that there have been positive changes in the representation of blacks in didactic books, concerning issues of subalternity and stigmatization. Blacks have also begun to appear as members of the middle class and no longer only as executors of professions of low prestige. She also found a rise of a new category: the assimilation to whites, both socially and culturally.

Although research data show significant improvement, Silva (2011) indicates that the low representativity of blacks is still a marked characteristic in didactic materials and that issues related to their cultural manifestations do not appear in the books analyzed, whether in descriptions or illustrations.

Silvério and Motokane (2019) reveal this aspect by presenting an analysis about the underrepresentation of black bodies in biology books in elementary and high schools. The authors affirm that this situation is one of the whitening processes, which reinforces the idea that the standard model of the human body is a white body. Thus, black bodies are established as a minority, although they are more than 50% of the Brazilian population.

A similar situation can be seen in the study by Martins and Pureza (2020), who emphasize the under representation of black people in geography materials, at the same educational level discussed above. They found that even 17 years after the approval of Law 10.639/2003, there is a great lack of preparation by educational professionals to put into practice the positive visibility of blacks in the history and formation of Brazil, which makes their positive representation inviable, and in turn, winds up making the demystification of racist stereotypes impossible.

When the denial of the black is not done in such a way as to extinguish them from spaces, whether physical or symbolic, it takes place through an attempt at assimilation of an ideal that seeks to make them as similar as possible to whites. To deny oneself as black is one way to try to survive, even physically, by approximating oneself to white standards, whether by smoothing one's hair, or by surgical incursions to "minimize" phenotypical traits like noses and mouths, for example, or using creams and treatments that whiten skin.

Thus, assimilation to whites, indicated in studies by Silva (2011), demonstrates that school practices, presented in didactic materials, seek to standardize black students, inserting them in the ideal of individuals and society, reiterating the hegemonic values that structure and guide it. In the past, black students were not inserted in didactic materials, although they are now represented physically, their history and individuality are not respected. A new ideal is presented: that of the assimilated black.

Jesus (2017) also finds this situation in a review of textbooks. He found, in an analysis of a book for elementary school children, a presentation about the childhood of the important black musician Chiquinha Gonzaga. She was presented in such a way that she was not identifiable as black. Thus, Jesus reveals how one of the ways to maintain racist stereotypes takes place through another practice: that of physical or illustrative whitening of important and historic black personalities in a leading role. This reiterates the idea that prominent positions are occupied by non-black people.

Assimilation can also be noted in school curricula. By adopting a grammar considered normative, for example, and excluding any opportunities for production of living and developed language and speech, not recognizing the speech patterns of students, as well as the peremptory correction of any



linguistic manifestation that is different from the ideal of the Portuguese language to be spoken in school, schools impose a process of assimilation of a language considered ideal: that of the white, the colonizer.

For example, a student who does not perform the nominal agreement in a grammatical construction such “*as casas*” (these houses) using the construction “*as casa*” (these house) is seen in schools as someone who does not satisfactorily master the language. Nevertheless, this ignores that there are other linguistic norms beyond the standard (that is privileged by the current teaching system) and that other influences shape the Portuguese language spoken in Brazil.

Nei Lopes (2007) indicates that in languages of the Banto group,<sup>3</sup> for example, the plural is placed at the beginning of words and for this reason there is no need to repeat the plural marking in a construction such as “*as casas*” as determined by the Portuguese norm. Thus, we can perceive that school institutions completely ignore the influence and legacy that African languages have exercised on the Portuguese spoken in Brazil, considering these influences to be grammatical errors or linguistic anomalies.

Fanon (2008, p. 33) affirmed that “to speak is to exist absolutely for the other”. Therefore, when a student is denied the possibility to speak based on their place and culture, this denies their opportunity to exist and is one of the cruelest facets of racism employed in the educational system.

The white elite comes to think of blacks and Indians as social categories, based on ideological constructions that help to formulate this type of classification. However, whites have not seen themselves as a social and ideological category as do blacks and Indians, and this removes whites from the racial discussion, even today (Gonçalves, 2011). Whites understand that they compose a universal category and schools adopt this ideal within their daily practices, contributing to the maintenance of differences and exclusion.<sup>4</sup>

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3 Bantu is the designation of a generic linguistic group, given to a family of some 2,000 African languages, by W. H. Bleck, in 1860. Bleck observed in his studies that the word *mntu* was found in nearly all of the idioms analyzed and had the same meaning, that of people, person, or individual. Nouns in Banta languages are preceded by prefixes, which distinguish, for instance, the individual, ethnic group, land of origin and language spoken. The prefix *ba-*, in this case, is used to locate by ethnic group. Thus, *bantu* designates the plural for the word *mntu* (people, individuals). For more information, see Lopes (2007).

4 The repeated association between blacks and slaves can be seen until today, even if not specifically in official documents or newspapers, but is present in speech and in didactic materials (even if indirectly). In general, greater attention is noted to issues related to racial questions close to the dates of May 13<sup>th</sup> and November 20<sup>th</sup>, which are the dates in Brazil that mark the abolition of slavery and the memory of the death of Zumbi dos Palmares, respectively.

However, we cannot think of schools and education based on a paralyzing bias that causes us to reflect on the impossibility of reinventing a new constructive perspective. If a necropolitical/necroeducational culture is imposed in school spaces, it is important to support a revival that affirms life and reinvents it. One of the ways to do so would be by creating the opportunity for a new sovereignty of individuals within this space, a sovereignty that does not lead to death but to an encounter with one's own life.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Considering that Brazil is constituted as a structurally racist country, in which necropolitics is the form of construction of power, we discussed in this text how a policy for death can be inserted not only in terms of physical execution of bodies, but is also manifested in the erasure, exclusion, imprisonment, and delegitimation of social groups. In this sense, we affirmed that various institutions function as necropolitical instruments that implement the death and exclusion of the subaltern groups and we have in the educational system a very marked way of executing this power.

It is important to consider that social exclusion is also racial in our country and is manifested by denying black children and youth access to their basic rights, for example, as well as their false inclusion in institutions, including schools.

In this context, we observe schools and their various mechanisms, such as didactic materials, instruments, curriculum construction and pedagogical practices, we noted that even today blacks are underrepresented, erased, and stereotyped, which thus establishes an education for death, a necroeducation.

While for Foucault power is constituted in macro- and micropolitical dimensions, to think of the relations between bio/necropolitics in the educational system is also to evaluate these relations. It is to think of who is given the right to live (whites, their culture, their aesthetic, their curriculum, their worldview) and who is left to die (blacks, their culture, speech, historicity, cosmogony, complexity).

We believe it is imperative that the discussion about an education for death be overcome, not in the sense of forgetting or ignoring the inequalities and the socio-racial structure and exclusion in which male and female black students are inserted, but so that we can find alternatives to the framework that is presented.

Thus, any measures, interventions, and public policies that seek to overcome the social exclusion of the black population must be structured in actions that allow the *(re)constitution* of the identity of these black individuals as those who belong to a people with memory, are ancestral and have a history of black resistance.

As addressed above, actions such as these will provide the black population not only access to their basic rights, but also entrance to educational institutions, and mainly an effective learning and permanence in school spaces.

Upon preparing to construct a society that concretely promotes access of all to education, it is necessary to act with consideration for opportunities for pedagogical interventions and educational policies that promote equitable opportunities and socio-racial justice through education.

We believe, therefore, that new narratives, pedagogies, and modes of constructing a black race are needed to allow (re)approximating students within school spaces, and creating alternatives to a culture that has made blacks invisible, erased, and forgotten, and has caused the death of black students in the educational system. These narratives and pedagogies can initiate steps toward the true construction of a policy of life through which education gives life.

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