

The Dynamic between Culture and Education in the Brazilian Context: The Antagonisms that Generate the Lack of Quality and Access

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Abstract— This article seeks to discuss the political antagonisms present in Brazilian cultural and educational perspectives, reflecting them as possible causes for the lack of access and quality in public policies. For this, we approach the dynamic relationship that is established between these categories in the Brazilian context, which are subordinated to the dominant perspective that uses them as a form of control over workers. This fact generates a lack of responsibility of the State, which builds public policies aimed only at the elites, offering public education restricted to technical training without caring about its quality, and little is focused on cultural policies, naturalizing social inequalities, and removing the Brazilian population access to their basic rights as citizens.

Keywords - Education in Brazil, Culture in Brazil, Popular culture, Popular education, Social inequalities.

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of our society is the history of class struggle. This is due to the way the social system is organized, based on unrestrained profit making. For this, there is a dominant section of the population, the bourgeoisie, which uses the labor of the working class, subjecting it to exhausting working days with low wages, so that most of the gains of what was produced remain concentrated in your hands. This model, although undergoing some modifications throughout history, is still the basis that sustains the capitalist system in contemporary times. This process occurs more pervasively in countries with peripheral capitalism, such as Brazil.

Based on this premise, this work aims to reflect on culture and education along the lines of this mode of production. Both themes accompany the socio-historical formation of our society, being co-opted by the interests of the dominant class. And both are used by this same class to propagate a perspective of naturalization of capitalism, which guarantees its hegemony.

At the same time, as they are endowed with a dialectical and political perspective, these two theoretical categories – work and culture – may also contain aspects that oppose the alienation propagated by the prevailing logic. As a result, they have a contradictory character, with antagonistic conceptions disputing the prevalence of the central ideal that defines them.

In this context, as a way of guaranteeing its hegemony, the ruling class distances the critical perspective from cultural circles and schools, so that its logic is widely disseminated and naturalized. As part of this process, in Brazil, the educational political project is built to serve only as a regulator of the working class, preparing children to meet the demands of the world of work. Intrinsic to this dynamic,

culture is the field that establishes this panorama as the only correct one, in the common sense of society. It is through cultural means that the idea that capitalism is the best social system is propagated, in addition to propagating the idea of the impossibility of overcoming it.

Thus, anchoring in historical-dialectical materialism, which starts from the premise that it is necessary to understand the movements of society, so that the position in which the Brazilian conjuncture finds itself becomes clear, this work will seek to address the dynamics between Brazilian culture and education and their political antagonisms, considering them part of the problem that makes it difficult for students from the working class to access quality cultural and educational means. For this, we will use bibliographical and qualitative research, based on texts, books and scientific articles that address this theme to support the debate proposed in this theoretical essay.

II. THE ANTAGONISM BETWEEN HEGEMONIC CULTURE AND POPULAR CULTURE

If we look up the meaning of “culture” in a dictionary, we will find something related to the act of planting and cultivating the land, or its biological concept. Furthermore, when we think about culture, suddenly, it tends to come to our minds, especially when we focus on Brazilian culture, the diversity of cultural expressions that we find in the regions of Brazil, such as in music: “Frevo” and “Congada”, or the food: “Acarajé” and “Feijoada”, just to exemplify. However, the conception of culture that underlies this article goes far beyond these perceptions that hover in common sense.

According to Marilena Chauí [3], that based herself on the ideas of the Marxist philosopher Antônio Gramsci, culture is the space in which subjects elaborate and institute their practices, values, and conceptions about the world around

them. Through it, they define what their concepts of law are, what is or is not accepted in their society, and how one should act and draw up social relations. It is this conception of culture that will guide the discussion to be carried out throughout this theoretical essay.

In this sense, thinking about delicacies from Brazilian regions, when approaching the culture of Brazil, is not entirely wrong. These things represent the cultural expressions of certain peoples, their practices that express some behaviors that they delimited in their territory. However, as presented, the concept of culture constitutes something much more extensive than what these cultural expressions mean.

It is important to point out that the history of capitalist society is marked by the movement of antagonism between social classes, in which one imposes itself on the other, exploiting it for profit. Thus, there is a dominant class, the bourgeoisie, which uses coercive means to guarantee its hegemony over the dominated class, the working class.

This ends up creating an internal split in society, which generates a cultural division, weaving two types of predominant cultures in the current situation: formal culture, corresponding to the dominant classes, and popular culture, which spontaneously expresses the relationships and practices of the working class.

In this direction, it is through culture that the bourgeoisie disseminates the project that maintains it as dominant over the others, legitimizing economic exploitation and political domination through everything that permeates society. In this way, it separates cultural means between “cultured” and “uncultured”, and to have access to the former, a high economic value is usually charged, so that not everyone has direct access to cultural productions – which ends up determining a conception of the popular mass as “ignorant”, considered intellectually inferior.

There is, then, a cultural industry, which commodifies cultural expressions, such as the arts, with the aim of maintaining the dominant ideology. To this end, it creates the impression that there is freedom for the consumption of culture, in which everyone has access to the same products, and, if they do not consume them, it configures as their own demerit, explicitly ignoring the unattainable economic values of many of these products for most of the population. What each class must read, listen to and watch is determined by the opportunity to access that product, which is based on its financial value, determined by the industry.

It is noticeable that in television media there are always narratives that are very similar to each other. The story and the characters change a little, but in the end, there is always the same plot, in which exactly who the villain and the hero of that story is clearly defined. Thus, behaviors that are accepted within society are disseminated, how one should or should not act and be, and what are the consequences of thinking differently from the dictated “norms”. It is through these standard narratives that society is convinced to act

according to the bourgeois agenda, guaranteeing its dominance through the ideologically constructed consensus.

In this way, the cultural industry determines repetitive artistic expressions as entertainment, which only reproduce what is dictated by common sense, summarized to the mere consumption of what is in fashion, that is something passing. Instead of being configured as a connection with reality, they exert an opposite action, which deceives the spectator, publicizing the propaganda that living in the capitalist order is something pleasant, in a way that it is alienating. Therefore, in the same way that the wealth of the country, which is socially produced, is unevenly distributed, knowledge, cultural means, which are also socially constructed, are not accessed equally. Furthermore, thinking that society is marked by the domination of one class over another, access to culture becomes a basic right of citizens, as well as the right to produce it.

Linked to this scenario, it is necessary to explain that access to culture in Brazil has always been based on an elitist view, and has never been treated, in fact, as an obligation on the part of the State. Thereby, following the hegemonic cultural logic, cultural policies have as a framework to privilege great artistic expressions that are aligned with their interests, based on business initiatives such as the promotion of culture.

As a landmark of actions aimed at culture by the Brazilian State, there is the “Rouanet Law”, created in 1991, but radicalized as a model of federal intervention in the cultural sphere during the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2003). This law situates the posture of post-military dictatorship governments in the country (1964 – 1985), which has as its agenda tax waivers as an incentive for the arts. This fact culminates in the benefit of large cultural productions to the detriment of small ones, which struggle to obtain funding because, generally, they do not meet the basic requirements of the law.

In that manner, culture and its expressions, such as art, are no longer a space in which subjects express their reality, and their vision of it, and become mere replicators of the dominant ideology. This is one of the ways that culture ends up being one of the main means in which the dominant logic is propagated, through the affirmation of the process of alienation.

On the other hand, in the same way that cultural expressions, when summarized as entertainment, have been used in a perspective of dissemination of capitalist ideology, when in a critical perspective, they can generate an inverse process.

That being so, popular culture, treated by Chauí [3] as the culture of the working class, is produced by the people, collectively, demonstrating their local customs and habits, such as folklore. This form of culture is seen by many as inferior, “uncultured”, as the author works, in a sense of invalidating everything that is not dictated by the ruling class. These cultural expressions are not limited to the world

conceptions of the bourgeoisie, but of the people themselves, exposing their reality through their own creativity.

We perceive, then, from the perspective that triggers the critical-dialectical rationality, that there are cultural expressions that are not linked to the interests of the ruling class. There are ways of producing art and culture through a critical perspective, which differs from that proposed by the current order. Therefore, in the same way that culture can be one of the main means through which the bourgeois perspective is propagated, it can also play an opposite role and guide those who encounter it towards a process of social transformation.

The alienation generated in the process of commodification of everything by society, including the subjects themselves, makes their identities, their ability to produce and think critically invisible. Scherer [7] states that alienation separates individuals from their human-generic character, so that they cease to perceive themselves as protagonists of their own life and become just a "simple object on the scene" (page 27), consumed by the act of working to be able to survive.

Thus, when having contact with a cultural expression that has a critical nature, that is, it does not walk in line with the interests of the ruling class, there is a break in this process, which generates concerns and reflections on the conjuncture. When used to expose new understandings of reality, elucidating life perspectives that are usually made invisible, cultural expressions like arts, can lead subjects to perceive their totality, helping in the process of understanding themselves as social beings and holders of rights.

In that manner, the mentioned author approaches art as capable of generating a process of counter-hegemony of the prevailing logic. Through the creative process that this cultural expression forms, individuals can manifest their reality, exposing their worldview, thus understanding the scenario in which they are inserted.

From this perspective, it is noted that it is urgent to think about democratizing access to culture. As exposed at the beginning of this text, it is not by chance that there is a differentiation between the culture that is considered "cultured" and "uncultured", being one with a high financial value. Keeping the working class away from transforming culture potential is one of the strategies used by the bourgeoisie to guarantee its hegemony. Although necessary due to the "leisure" perspective, the accessible arts are those that propagate the alienating perspective convenient for the dominant class.

With the considerations exposed in this article so far, it becomes clear that culture plays a great role in our society, defining our habits and conceptions of the world, which, because we are inserted in a capitalist system, corroborates with the logic of the ruling class. Therefore, when thinking about the Brazilian context, appropriating cultural expressions that have a critical perspective becomes urgent, if we want to think of a country that considers and respects the

culture of its people, prioritizing their well-being.

III. EDUCATION AND ITS DYNAMIC WITH CULTURE

When approaching the theme "education", it is necessary to explain that this theoretical category is also permeated by contradictions. Because we are immersed in a bourgeois society, as previously discussed, Brazilian education is characterized by an elitist formation, with the purpose of keeping intellectual and scientific knowledge condensed in a minority segment of the population that enjoys better economic conditions. Even so, education can also start from a critical perspective, which seeks the transformation of subjects, so that it becomes the podium of social disputes, typical of our society divided into classes.

We need to expose, first, that throughout its history, the Brazilian conjuncture of accumulation of the capitalist system walked at a different pace than the northern hemisphere of the world. While Europe went through a process of strengthening the Social Welfare State, here we experienced a worsening of neoliberalism, based on unbridled production. The Brazilian author Almeida [1] explains that this phenomenon generated a partial change in accumulation, impacting only some spheres of production. This issue ended up accentuating social inequalities in the country, rescuing archaic labor relations, such as hiring child labor.

With this scenario, there were changes in the requests regarding the technical-professional training of workers, leading to an expansion of professional and technological education networks. Still according to what Almeida [1] presents, this issue led to a new phase in education, as there was a shift from the center of the world of work to the area of knowledge.

These examples of Brazilian socio-historical formation expose that there is a specificity in the relationship between education and work in the country, generating the contradictions present in this theme. "The work-education relationship continues to engender contradictions that are particular to capitalist social formations, accentuating them mainly in situations where social inequalities crystallize as a necessary component of the model of concentration and centralization of wealth, as in the case of Brazil" [1] page 171.

With the military dictatorship that devastated the country from 1964 to 1985, the debate about the basic rights of citizens only gained space with the return of democracy, conquered from the social mobilization that culminated in the approval of the Federal Constitution of Brazil, in 1988. Although in the scope of Brazilian educational policy lot has been said about the "democratization of education", what we had was an expansion of access, which does not necessarily guarantee quality education.

In this scenario, as much as the Federal Constitution of 1988, known as the "Citizen Constitution" has ensured

education, as well as access and permanence in school as a right for all, the gap between the law and its effectiveness has always guided the historical trajectory of this social policy. In the current context, when the State has taken the neoliberal ideals in an exacerbated way, it puts into question the social policies that aimed to guarantee social rights, among them the educational policy. In general, there is a historical and current precariousness in the scope of the realization of rights, revealed in the frequent dismantling of areas that guarantee social protection, health, and social assistance, which constitute the tripod of social security, as well as in other social policies.

Therefore, this constitutionally promised right to access was given in a contradictory way. Particularly in relation to education policy, even though the right is related to compulsory schooling from 4 to 17 years of age, and consequently free of charge, the expansion that occurred in public schools took place at the level of vacancies offered, disconnected from the commitment to the quality of education offered. This generated a “proletarianization of the teaching profession”, [1] page 176, with an overload of teachers, who worked, and still work, without the proper working conditions, and often without adequate qualification, mainly to meet the demands of the educational space that becomes more complex in view of the change in the profile of students from working-class families.

In addition, the proposed teaching-learning pedagogy offered has the perspective of educating the worker in a period in which they still don't carry out their work, to start the process of adapting them to capitalist molds even before starting their journey. The school behaves as a space that seeks to guarantee rights, while disseminating an entrepreneurial and meritocratic perspective, focused on the employability of students, hoisting the capitalist mode of production. These issues mark the antagonism present between the opportunities for access by social classes to schooled education, confirming the structural dualism in Brazilian education: a school for the poor, trained for simple work, and another for the rich, trained for intellectual work [6].

In this relationship - work and education, the economically lower classes are left with “minimum instruction for low-skilled functions versus evasion of the school education process due to the need for survival” [1] page 172. In this way, the system seeks to guarantee the formation of a qualified workforce only to perform its function, without the possibility of retaining intellectual and scientific knowledge so that they can ascend socially and financially. Distinctions are produced within the educational system, so that there are different curricula and schools for each demand that needs to be met by the production system, which tends to aggravate social inequalities and reinforce the division of social classes.

Brazilian schools are also marked by strong dropout rates. UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) carried out research that indicated that in the year 2022, 11% of young

people between 11 and 19 years old are not attending schools. Almost half of them (about 48%) dropped out of school to work and support their families economically. The research also points to an alarming dropout rate throughout the year: 21% of young people in the same age group did not finish the school year in 2022. Among the reasons, more than 50% of them claim that is because they cannot follow the classes and activities passed by the teachers.

There are several factors that contribute to this issue, which are not limited to school, and permeate the living conditions of students and their families. With the struggle for subsistence, added to the precariousness of this space, the educational system loses its social attractiveness, as well as its importance to avoid social exclusion.

Although crossed by so many questions, the school plays an important role in the socialization process. In addition to the relationships between family, school, and work, and offering different experiences in childhood and youth, it also configured a space capable of reaching subjects in areas that public policies in general face difficulties to penetrate. Almeida [1], in page 177, says that the institution is a “space for living together, for social protection, which in a country that has restricted its conception of social security, contradictorily fulfills certain functions of care and human training”.

In this direction, the referred author [2] complements the thought by stating that even though the capitalist system has transformed the school and other educational spaces into fields destined to regulate the population by the State, it still constitutes itself as a dimension of social life. Therefore, the ontological character of education remains, accompanying the socio-historical formation of human life. Education participates in the process of conformation of the capitalist system, but, contradictorily, it constitutes an important “stage” of struggle for overcoming this same system, these two phases being inseparable. In this direction, it is proper to bourgeois logic to commodify and co-opt this process, transforming it into one of the instruments for its maintenance.

It becomes clear that education is intrinsic to a political perspective, which in the current scenario corroborates the hegemony of capital. It is then possible to think of an education that opposes this panorama, endowed with a critical content that aims at the social transformation of the subjects. On the other hand, it is part of the foundations of educational policy to make it difficult for schools and other instances of education to permeate ideas that are opposed to what is proposed by the current system.

Corroborating with the perspective pointed out in the first moment of this text, in his works, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire [4], in page 21, classifies culture as “the result of human activity, of man's creative and recreative effort, of his work to transform and establish relationships of dialogue with another man”. In this perspective, Almeida [2] explains that education as a dimension of human life is directly related

to the dynamics of culture, as it is the “stage” for disputes over cultural hegemony. Thus, the historical formation of educational policies seeks to ensure that the perspective of the dominant culture continues to be bourgeois.

To the same extent that education and the policies that instituted it in Brazil followed the changes in production of the capitalist system, to meet its demands, culture experiences the same phenomenon. The appreciation of capital permeates society through culture, which spreads the perspective of the mode of production with abusive working hours, spreading a worldview that naturalizes capitalist sociability, making people believe that there is no alternative to overcoming it.

The alienating culture, previously discussed in this text, massifies subjects, so that they conceive the capitalist perspective as correct, as the only possible one for society, even becoming its defender. And bourgeois education, institutionalized by the State, becomes one of the spaces that spread this perspective. In this way, subjects can transform their own culture, and it is in this perspective that detachment from the alienating logic must occur, overcoming the bourgeois worldview through criticism of it. For this, following what was exposed by Almeida [2], this criticism can be made within educational experiences, articulating with other segments of society, to oppose what has been hegemonically considered correct.

Paulo Freire [4] argues that for education to provide a transformative perspective, it needs to walk in accordance with the culture of the population, starting from its reality. Educational processes need to be built collectively, stating that only then will there be a coherent construction of the critical formation of individuals, considering that they have their own history, and need to be aware that they can change it.

The educational practice proposed by Freire has the purpose of acting as a promoter of the construction and reconstruction of the world by the population, so that they are influential on their own reality. Freire [5] also shows how much the school influences popular culture. At school, students find a space where they must follow rules and standards, adapting to the established norms of that space. There, they already learn how to behave in society according to their social class, following the standards dictated by the alienating culture.

In this way, so that there is no imposition by the educator on the student, the author argues that it is necessary to understand how students think and act, what are their conceptions of the world, so that the educational practice occurs horizontally, in a dialogic and collective construction. Students must have space to express their “voices” in the classroom, expanding their social relationships and establishing a participatory dialogue. With society based on an oppressive perspective, the population is afraid to express itself, to emit its ideas and thoughts at the risk of suffering discrimination. Therefore, the classroom needs to be set up in

a safe environment so that they can break this silence.

Regarding the perspective of popular culture as “unculture”, as also presented at the beginning of this article, related to education, Freire [4] states that the Brazilian elite usually dictates a concrete worldview, that is, the culture that is considered “valid” can only come from intellectual professionals. That is why the molds of education that is considered classical in Brazil occur in a hierarchical way, dictating what is considered right and wrong attitudes for students, so that they only obey. For the ruling classes, everything that comes from the people is considered “ignorant”, so that they discard the need to listen and understand popular culture to organize educational activities.

In this scenario, if education is one of the main means by which the alienating culture is disseminated, it becomes the main manner for this hegemony to be broken. Education accompanies individuals from their childhood, dictating behaviors that reaffirm the “place” of subjects in their respective social classes, reinforcing their division throughout their lives.

That is why it is necessary to strengthen initiatives of educational actions and activities that aim at the affirmation of critical perspectives in the spaces of school education. Educational practices need to value subjects, without subjecting them to massive alienation from the naturalization of work in capitalist terms. Society was built by the people, and it is up to the people to change it. For this to happen, there must be an awareness of reality, so that they understand themselves as an active part of it, capable of molding it to their will. Therefore, recognizing that education can have the potential to transform reality consist in treating knowledge as capable of acting to overcome the prevailing logic. A transformative education aims to promote this process of awareness of the population, so that they see themselves as capable of changing the society that exploits them.

However, educational policies are historically constructed to prevent critical education from permeating the school environment. So transformative educational practices need to go beyond the walls of the school. The way the pedagogical organization is instituted in the school environment, based on a business approach, builds a consensus that guarantees capitalist maintenance. In this way, any other practice that does not corroborate with the hegemonic perspective is left aside.

That is why educators who try to permeate the transforming perspective in their approaches use strategies that consist of demanding and fighting for the institutionalization of counter-hegemonic pedagogical practices. The struggle consists of trying to change the political idea of what education is, in a sense of strengthening and expanding social rights. The meritocratic foundations that Brazilian teaching is based leave little room for teachers to be able to teach a critical educational perspective on their own.

Paulo Freire [4] argues that for there to be a critical perspective, popular education and popular culture need to walk together. With educational policies having been created by an elite that sees popular culture as inferior, it becomes a challenge for educators to achieve a popular education in the classroom.

Furthermore, in Brazil, culture and education from a bourgeois perspective are supported by the same strategy to distance the working class from access to its critical understanding. Just as, to have access to quality education, even if not based on a critical and transformative perspective, it is necessary to enter private schools, a culture that is not limited to the molds of entertainment, which only propagates the same alienating perspective, has also stipulated tickets and entries with high values. With this, they guarantee that the production of culture, whether based on cultural expressions or knowledge, remains condensed in the hands of those who have better economic conditions.

The way out is found in the collective struggle, involving all segments of society, so that there can be this change in the consensus of what education means. It is configured as one of the main pillars that support the capitalist system, disseminating the alienating culture, and therefore we urgently need to intersperse it with a critical perspective. But, for this, the battle begins in the search for the conquest of a quality education, which democratizes intellectual and scientific knowledge, instead of excluding the classes considered inferior and keeping them focused on mechanized work, which guarantee a minimum subsistence and is based on population control.

Finally, we note that the best way out of the alienating culture comes through an education that starts from a critical principle. In all areas of our society, permeating our habits and conceptions of reality, we envision a process that naturalized the social inequalities. This panorama justifies the non-investment by the Brazilian State in cultural and educational policies. As a result, there is an intense lack of access by the population to cultural media, such as theater, music, and cinema, while in the educational field, there is no guarantee of quality teaching.

As a final highlight, we reinforce the idea that popular culture, through education, can counteract the State's lack of responsibility for the population's quality of life. Quality education and access to culture are basic rights of Brazilian citizens, as they constitute a dimension of human life and a fundamental part of the dynamics of our society. Therefore, debating critical perspectives on popular culture and education is a fundamental mechanism for collectively thinking about how to face social inequality naturalized in our society.

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