



# Race and gender intersections: the struggle for including the African diasporic perspective in the educational system in Brazil<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the challenges of utilizing an African diasporic approach in the field of education in Brazil. The study seeks to offer a historical overview of the context of Law 10,639/2003 and the National Curriculum Guidelines that regulate the teaching of history and African and Afro-Brazilian culture. Subsequently, race and gender relations will be discussed within this context, seeking to critique the preponderance of a male-centered perspective within the educational field in the country. Lastly, the article also aims at emphasizing the role played by the Black Diasporic Movement in the development of the Brazilian curriculum concerning issues of inequality.

**Key words:** African diaspora; education and racial relations; gender; curriculum; inequality.

My anger has meant pain to me but it has also  
meant survival, and before I give it up  
I'm going to be sure that there is something  
*at least as powerful to replace it on the road to clarity.*  
(Audre Lorde, 1984)

## Introduction

Gender, race, sexuality, and class representations have generated a large body of scholarship across different disciplines and have also been a site for (re)building educational knowledge and practices. Focusing on education and racial challenges in the African Diaspora in Brazil, this study aims at offering a historical overview, as well as reflections about the context of the legal apparatuses concerned with the teaching of African Diaspora history and culture in the Brazilian national curriculum. Subsequently, the racial and gendered gap in the Brazilian context will be addressed in order to highlight the fact that the issue of gender and education regarding black women is male-centrally oriented in Brazil. Grounded on the African Diaspora theoretical framework, I will engage with different studies ranging from the social sciences, anthropology to critical race theory in order to support the

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analyses of this theme. Furthermore, this paper will explore the approach of noted scholars who contribute to this multifaceted, complex, and vigorous analysis within the context of the African Diaspora. Throughout the text, I will unveil the oppositional forces that seek to delegitimize the mandatory inclusion of an African Diasporic perspective, history, and cultural traditions in mainstream school curriculum (both in primary and advanced education). Within this context, I seek to highlight the role played by a Black Diasporic Movement in the Brazilian curriculum, particularly concerning inequity issues.

In 2005, while working for the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC), I had to visit several states in order to provide support to municipal and state level educational departments. During one of my trips, I met a woman who shared with me her dilemma about her five-year-old son, as she realized that I was a teacher who worked for MEC. "I love my son, who is an adopted black child, but several times when he gets home, he tells me that he wants to change the color of his skin. 'I want to be white, mom.'" She told me as she burst into tears. Then she asked me a tough question: "What can I do? He does not accept the color of his skin and, indeed, children in his school direct offensive words at him, demonstrating prejudice towards him as well." Then, she wanted to know if I could provide an orientation and recommend any pedagogical material that could help him overcome this process. Consequently, she added: "He suffers of low self-esteem; also, he thinks that he is not a beautiful child and wants to belong to another ethnic group." The aforementioned may be understood as a fictional narrative but, unfortunately, it did take place.

Issues of inequality reflected in racial and gender relations within the educational system have been both a problem and a challenge since the first Eurocentric schools were created in order to benefit a select group of people. A large number of cultural activists and/or scholars have carried numerous educational studies about curriculum that could be employed as theoretical frameworks and enacted as policies seeking to improve and/or change the racialized and gendered educational system environment. These researchers and activists have both challenged Eurocentric power and knowledge and forged other alternatives. As pointed by Wade Noble, "power is the ability to define reality and have others accepting your definition as if it were their own." In general, many scholars have claimed the need for developing antiracist pedagogic structures; they have struggled for settling the effects of prejudice and racial/ethnic discrimination. Several works by Brazilian scholars (e.g. Pinto, 1987; Cunha Jr. 1992; Oliveira, 1992; Silva, 1995; Gonçalves e Silva & Barbosa, 1997; Gonçalves e Silva & Gomes, 2002; Cavalleiro, 2001; Cavalleiro, 2008; Paixão & Carvalho, 2008; UNESCO, 2008), have addressed this issue

and contributed to re-think racism and sexism in the Brazilian society. These scholars have to be adequately discussed, as well as praised for their efforts, since they seek to address issues of enormous significance in the challenging quest of eradicating poverty and oppression from the fabric of our society.

### **Racial and gender issue in the Brazilian context**

Nowadays, because of the social conditions of the Black population, re-shaping the educational system in Brazil and throughout the world has proved to be more difficult than previously presupposed. More specifically, in the context of Brazil, the application of an intersectional approach that considers race and gender, black women's impoverishment or the black feminization of poverty in the Brazilian society becomes undeniable (Sant'Anna & Paixão, 2001). Black women's economical situation in Brazil reveals that the Brazilian racial state has applied important instruments of domination of black women (Bairros, 1991 and Gonzalez, 1983). My standpoint for this study is grounded in an African Diasporic perspective that considers race and gender as organizing elements which employ technologies of power for oppressing black people and also informs racial inequality in the local and global outlook. Thus, I have "consciously chosen to employ the term African Diaspora to disrupt the traditional ways in which Africa and its peoples have been reified as sites of savagery and underdevelopment" (Gordon, 2007). This Diasporic approach allows us to position the contradictory process of racial formation in dialogue in Brazil and in a large sense across the world. Moreover, this Diasporic point of view is carried on from the Black feminism perspective, which has critically requested us to take into consideration knowledge and ways of knowing, methodologies, approaches, and political and strategic projects that not only come from below but are also located in multilayered dimensions of power (Gonzalez, 1983; Gonzalez, 1982; Carneiro, 1995; Collins, 2000).

There are studies developed by several schools of thought which show that racism is disseminated and sustained through a number of mechanisms, whether concealed or not. For instance, based on data from the Brazilian National Household Surveys (PNAD), Rosemberg (1987) verified that, in Brazil, black students, in comparison to white ones, have a higher rate of exclusion and failure. Moreover, she verified that this failure rate is 12 percent higher among black children in the first grade. Numerous other studies have also revealed that mainstream education systems are inefficient and leave fundamental deficiencies that do not create and/or promote a positive identification for black students within school systems (Silva, 1995); Cavalleiro, 2001). More importantly, positive contributions by Black pe-

ople throughout the world's history can hardly be seen in school materials, as they are relegated to secondary positions or role or simply rendered invisible.

More specifically, as for economical disparities among black women in Brazil, and based on reports of the National Sample Household Survey (2007) and PNUD/CEPAL/OIT (2008), among others, the Educafro Black Women's Group displays that (Educafro, 2008):

- the relative risk of maternal mortality for black women is 7.4% higher than that of non-blacks;
- of women-headed households, a black woman's salary is 60% lower than the minimum salary;
- literacy and schooling are 90% and 83%, respectively, for white women, and 78% and 76% for black women;
- black women account for 18% of the Economically Active Population (PEA, *População Economicamente Ativa*), which means 14 million people in accordance with the International Labour Organization (ILO);
- black women are more likely to be employed in lower status underpaid jobs, with less access to jobs that offer workers' rights;
- when compared to the salary received by a black male, a black woman's monthly salary is two times lower. Black men earn half of what white women earn;
- the total life expectancy for the Black population in Brazil is 64 years of age, six years less than that of the white population in Brazil; the SEAD Foundation provided a study of the Sao Paulo population revealing that 40.7% of black women die before the age of 50.

The above data illustrate disparities among different racial groups and reveal that the gap regarding black women still remains in Brazil. Such disparities also characterize socio-economic differences in the USA and the African Diaspora (Davis, 1990; Collins, 2000). Black feminist theorist Bell Hooks (2000) provides a critical analysis of inequalities between white and black women arguing that:

As women, particularly previously disenfranchised privileged white women, began to acquire class power without divesting of their internalized sexism, divisions among women intensified. When black women criticized racism within the society as a whole and called attention to the ways racism had shaped and informed feminist theory and practice, many white

women simply turned their backs on the vision of sisterhood, closing their minds and their hearts. And that was equally true when it came to the issue of classism among women (p. 16).

Moreover, as pointed out by Smith (1983) both Black men and women have employed the term "endangered species' regarding Black men because of the verifiable rise in racism in the last two decades; yet despite simultaneous attacks on women, including Black women who are also subjected to racism, Black women are often portrayed as being virtually exempt from oppression and much better off than their male counterparts" (p. xv). In that context, expanding this idea about Black female's oppression, this issue has to be better exploited regarding the educational system and its challenges. It has to take into consideration not only the quality of education received at all schools levels, but also the participation of Black women in school leadership, school administration and policy maker positions.

As previously demonstrated, most of the Brazilian educational system is currently marked by historical/structural racism. As a result, the absence of positive references regarding the knowledge and values of the Brazilian and African cultures has not been properly addressed (Gonçalves e Silva, 2005). Despite this, the system is still marked by the hegemonic discourse about the Brazilian society which have sustained the deceptive argument that black and white people enjoy the same rights, along with opportunities for access to wealth or economic advantages because as an ethnically and racially mixed population, they have the same opportunities. This is a fallacy, as we will see, which has to be uncovered in the everyday practice of efforts employed in order to address the oppression black people have been facing since the inception of the slave trade.

## The Political Battlefield in Brazil

Some of the recent developments that directly affected the curricular policy have their roots in different aspects that can be comprehended by the role not only of the Black and other social movements, but also by the role of Black and allied white intellectuals in Brazil, and ultimately, the political changes that culminated in the presidential election, when remarkably, Luiz Inacio da Silva<sup>2</sup> (Lula), from the Workers' Party (PT) became president in 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Lula belongs to the Workers' Party (left-wing). Since its foundation in 1980, this Party has struggled and made political opposition to right-wing parties. His election is considered a major historical achievement in Brazil. For the first time ever, a working class man without a university degree and who was born into an illiterate peasant family from the North-East Region of the country, traditionally regarded as one with lower educational and socio-economic development rates, takes office as president of Brazil.

The first intervention that sought to address the absence of Black history and culture in the Brazilian curriculum was sanctioned by President Lula upon his signing Brazilian Federal Law 10,639 of 2003. Thus, in the present context of the Brazilian society, African-Brazilian culture has become part of the educational agenda. It is fundamental to stress that the Brazilian educational legislation has undergone two significant changes. The first refers to the Law of National Education Bases and Guidelines (LDBEN) – Brazilian Federal Law 9,394/1996, altered by Brazilian Federal Law 10,639/2003, which turned the teaching of Brazilian History and Culture mandatory throughout the official teaching curriculum. The second refers to the role of the National Council on Education (CNE) in regulating these changes. The National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture were provided by the CNE/CP Determination 003/2004, and by Resolution 1/2004 from CNE/CP.

Since the inception of the Transatlantic slave trade, Black people have engaged in different forms of resisting, such as the formation of *Quilombos* or Maroon communities and organization of countless rebellions throughout Africa and the African Diaspora. However, the official curriculum has traditionally excluded such crucial perspective during the 17th, 18th or 19th centuries. In the 20th century, many black organizations complained about racial inequalities. The Eurocentric cultural power and knowledge, on the one hand, turned the African-Brazilian culture and history invisible and, on the other hand, propagated racist discourses and practices. However, grounded on the tradition of Black resistance that traveled throughout the African Diaspora as a response to the brutality of the slave trade, Black movements in Brazil have, for many decades, struggled against the hegemonic state force as brilliantly discussed by Gonzalez (1982), Davis (1983), Werneck (2001) and Carneiro (s/d). For instance, in the second mandate of former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), the Black movement organized the March of *Zumbi of Palmares against Racism, for Citizenship and Life* in the federal state capital, Brasília. As a result, an *Inter-ministerial Working Group* (GTI) for racial issues was created by Black activists in 1996. Thus, some affirmative action measures were established and along with many orientations sought to challenge racism and sexism. The World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance,

which took place in Durban, South Africa in 2001, was another strong moment for racial struggle against the State. One of the resolutions established by its Program of Action is that "... States to promote the full and accurate inclusion of the history and contribution of Africans and people of African descent in the education curriculum". Brazilian Federal Law 10,639/2003 is a response to the struggle of the movement before, during, and after this Conference.

Consequently, it was guaranteed that race issues such as affirmative actions would be included in Lula's governmental action plan and the aforementioned Law 10,639/2003 was signed. Moreover, the Special Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality (March 2003) from the Federal Government of the Republic of Brazil (SEPPIR) was created. Furthermore, the General Coordinator of Diversity and Educational Inclusion from the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy, and Diversity of the Brazilian Ministry of Education<sup>3</sup> (MEC) was established in February 2004, among other initiatives. Lastly, the federal administration included more black ministers, including two women. The racial issue mandate has been achieved mainly because of the role of the Ministry of Education through the General Coordinator of Diversity and Educational Inclusion. This coordination has aided the enactment of legal apparatuses and the development of an array of educational and political actions which has led Brazil to debate and face racial, social, and cultural changes. Such initiatives have not only challenged the white dominant cultural knowledge that remained in the power structure, but have also given voice to subaltern groups.

Black activists have acted in Lula's administration struggle to include an African Diasporic perspective and consciousness in the Brazilian federal sphere. For instance, since its creation in 1930, more precisely up to the mid 1990s, the Brazilian Ministry of Education had not triggered specific actions to address the race issue in education. However, the most important public policy before 2003 was the first attempt by MEC to incorporate the ethnic-racial issue in its National Curricular Parameters (PCNs), as a result of the demands of the Black movement. Race, in the transversal theme as cultural plurality, was treated inconsistently by the mainstream white writers of the legal document.

The discussion of the PCNs was established by the Black social movement which fomented a wide national debate about national identity, political power and knowledge. Based on what was stated by Mac-

<sup>3</sup> The Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity of the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) was created after ministerial changes, and its main goal was to articulate and promote the inclusion of educational policies regarding the specificity of the Brazilian inequalities and also guarantee respect and valorization of the Brazilian racial, ethnic, cultural, gendered, environmental and regional diversity. In addition, this Secretariat has been responsible for making a web among different instances: Municipal districts and State Governments, social movements, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and universities.

Carthy (1993) when discussing the teaching context in the USA, I would say that the Brazilian Black movement has “emphasized a variety of transformative themes, insisting that the curriculum and educational practices incorporate and adequately address the vital questions of community control, the distribution of power and representation in school, and the status of minorities in curriculum organization and arrangements” (p. 290). Certainly, the different philosophies and conceptions among the many black organizations interacting with the Ministry were both enriching and challenging within the exercise of democracy. At the same time, this context constituted some barriers to attain more advances.

According to Du Bois the (re)construction of a black history and identity is based on a political concept of racial relations. In this sense, Du Bois’ concept of “double consciousness” can be applied to a contemporary Diasporic dimension. To this scholar, double consciousness is the permanent state of black people, who struggle toward a paradox. Du Bois’ thoughts (1904) have highlighted ways to understand and challenge not only this double-consciousness process that black people have experienced in the quotidian State bureaucracy, but also the inconsistencies and paradoxes of the black identity and American liberal project of democracy about which black people have strived. In that sense, black minority groups in the Ministry of Education under Lula’s administration as a whole have been facing this double consciousness effect because, on the one hand, these groups struggle in order to stay faithful to the black social movement’s agenda. On the other hand, they struggle against the patriarchal, sexist, gendered and racialized cultural power and knowledge traditionally defended by the state which has impregnated and created obstacles. It becomes therefore crucial to take into consideration the matrix of domination interlocking the nature of race, gender, and class oppression (Collins, 2000), regarding power, knowledge and culture relations. This matrix of domination in the Brazilian state has left behind black women and their possibility of achievement in the education environment. In that sense, Collins (2000) calls for the need of:

shifting the analysis to investigating how the matrix of domination is structured along certain axes – race, gender, and class being the axes of investigation for African-American women – reveals that different systems of oppression may rely in varying degrees on systemic versus interpersonal mechanisms of domination, (p.230).

However, in spite of the aforementioned gains, it is crucial to highlight that the implementation of Law 10,639 has happened within the Brazilian patriarchal, in other words male-centrally oriented state, which

has caused gender issues to remain an unaddressed challenge. In fact, the Brazilian Black Movement has had some significant gains in the last couple of years with Law 10,639 in the post- Third World Conference in Durban. However, in terms of the gendered oppression of black women, through a critical assessment of its anti-black political practice, it becomes evident that there is a systematic refusal to address this ‘inconvenient truth’: Black women are behind in all social indexes (Sant’Ana & Paixão, 2001; Paixão & Carvano, 2008; Brasil, 2007). Yet, they are the ones who carry the black movement in their back – bringing to mind the anthological work developed by Barbara Smith (1983) and Moraga Cherríe and Gloria Anzaldúa (1983) in their brilliant assessment of Black women’s struggles in the reflection on ‘this bridge called my back’.

## Why or why not African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture?

As we have shown, the hegemonic struggle over the state has been both a site of endurance to white domination and for Black contestation, marked by the fact that the state has historically marginalized proposals or ideas from the Black social movement. The first argument from those who opposed the inclusion of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture is that in Brazil racial issue is not such a significant problem, but only class disparities. Such argument has no validity, nevertheless, but it is widely sustained in mainstream discourses and political practices because “this crucial variable [race] is largely ignored by experts on this topic. Brazil is considered ... an ... egalitarian society, and the great villains of history in regard to differential access to education are socioeconomic status and class inequalities,” (Hasenbalg and Valle, 1999, p. 5). Even though it is possible to realize gradual changes in the racial and social awareness in Brazil, the idea that the problem is only socioeconomic has been widely accepted by the academic circles, the state, and common sense notions about inequalities in the country. However, there is convincing evidence against such traditional perspective: “white Brazilians earn more, live longer, receive more education (...) than black citizens” (Rohter, 2003, p. 2).

Another argument against the mandatory inclusion of African- Brazilian-based curricula is that Brazil is a “racial paradise,” which alludes to the “myth of racial democracy.” This traditional view disseminates the erroneous notion that Brazil is a multicultural society which does “not segregate” but “integrates” white, yellow, indigenous and Afro-Brazilian people. Conversely, the ideology of racial democracy still remained a delicate is-

sue which has been built upon the despotic intention of refuting not only racial disparity but also impeding racial mobilization (Winant, 1999, p.100). Consequently, this situation must be continuously vehemently challenged in order to reverse the conditions of exclusion to which a large portion of Black Brazilians are subjected. This complex context is described by Elisa Larkin (2007) as what she terms *sorcery of color* and illustrates how white supremacy acts in Brazil:

I consider the historical roots of these inequalities, which prepares us to the study of their social and ideological aspects. The singularity of these aspects lies on the operation of the sorcery of color, which transforms domination into democracy and launches national identity on a permanent search for the stimulation of whiteness, which I call *virtual whiteness* ... the electronic image or impulse that is not concrete but become real because it generates affects (p. 42).

## Some Educational Initiatives for Addressing African Diaspora Knowledge and Culture

Western hegemonic whites should renounce to the privileges associated with “whiteness” to move towards the full materialization of humanity in each and every one of us. This is a fundamental requirement to achieve egalitarian global order (Carneiro, s/d<sup>4</sup>).

Along with promoting school curriculum reforms, the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC) has organized and published some educational materials: such as a collection of books entitled “*Coleção Educação para Todos*” (“Education for All”)<sup>5</sup>, also providing educational programs on TV and offering distance learning training courses. These publications attempted to show different aspects of African-Brazilian culture based on race relations, discrimination and prejudice in school practices, African and African-Brazilian history and culture, affirmative action in South America, black female characters in children and adolescent literature, the Black Movement, legislation, school management, African traditional religions (ATR), education in the *Quilombos* (Maroon communities), among many others.

Another experience was a series of educational programs on TV which provided great support for ele-

mentary and high school teachers, since the teachers were able to participate, ask questions, share their experiences, and exchange their daily practices performed in school environments. The programs addressed major themes such as *Afro-Brazilian repertory: between the cliché and classroom research* (2004); *Afro-Brazilian values in Education* (2005); *Program Afro-Brazilian and African voices*, broadcast on the Series *Tales and Other Tales: literature e recreation* (2005); *Curriculum, Ethnic and Racial relationships in Education* (2006) among others. Each program has been recorded and articles are available online<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, this collection of programs and proposals attempted to develop studies and practices for the enactment of unprecedented educational inclusion policies in the history of MEC. Furthermore, they aimed to give visibility to the voices and the knowledge produced by black intellectuals and activists concerned with the educational system, teachers, researchers, school administrators and students. Consequently, these actions aimed at encouraging the definition of an agenda of diversity, subsidizing the implementation of Brazilian Federal Law 10,639/2003 and disseminating the National Curricular Guidelines for Education and Ethnic-Race Relations and Teaching the History of Afro Brazilian Cultures throughout the educational system.

The Brazilian experience has not been radical (revolutionary in the sense of transforming the social order structure), but has strengthened a counter-hegemonic culture and knowledge that has challenged white supremacy and consequently the cultural capital of the dominant class, which aims to maintain social and class hierarchies, as developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2007) in his “*Outline of a Theory of Practice*”. The formulation of the concept termed *symbolic nature of capital* allows Bourdieu (2007) to construct a theory of practice beyond the economic rigidity of historical materialism. His concept of symbolic nature of capital, along with the reproduction of dominant social relationships, contributes to a better understanding of ideological discourse:

The system of symbolic goods production and the system producing the producers fulfill in addition, i.e. by the very logic of their normal functioning, ideological functions, by virtue of the fact that the mechanisms through which they contribute to the reproduction of the established order and to the perpetuation of domination remain hidden (2007, p. 188).

This set of planned actions developed for supporting the educational system included procedures

<sup>4</sup> Translated by the author.

<sup>5</sup> The Series’ main titles are: Braga, Sousa & Pinto (2006), Brasil (2005; 2006), Fávero & Ireland (2007), Munanga (2005), Romão (2005), Santos (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Source: [www.tvebrasil.com.br/SALTO](http://www.tvebrasil.com.br/SALTO)

such as listening to the teachers, getting to know their questions, difficulties, and fears, and measuring the degree to which the university training offered in Brazil is still deficient in terms of knowledge about “making operational” and “naturalizing” racial inequality in the schools (Cavalleiro, 2001; UNESCO, 2006). A critical analysis of the racial and gender agenda in Brazil demonstrates that the “differences are both affirmed and transformed as part of a broader struggle for a radical, cultural democracy” (Giroux, 1992, p. 33-34). It is important to highlight that the major part of the staff working in the General Coordination was compound by black women. Through informal conversations with these women, I learned that they faced issues of gender, sexual orientation, race, and class both in the dynamics and structure of the institution.

From the critical race theory’s framework we can also address the institutional racism faced in Brazilian institutions. Scholar Forster (2005) addressed the issue of institutional racism in the university: “developing and acting from the standpoint of a critical race-consciousness would undermine the institutional racism yet encountered by too many students on college campuses today” (p. 491). Nevertheless, this issue of institutional racism can be placed in the context of not only the Ministry of Education but also in other institutions in Brazil as appropriately pointed out by Silvério (2002). Foster (2005) explained this situation through the following analysis:

The “racial realism” of critical race theorists, along with the concept of institutional racism, provides a useful conceptual frame for understanding black students’ circumstances at Midwestern. *Racial realists* argue that race continues to be an important factor in American life and culture ... . They view racism not as anomalous to American society but as inherent to its operations, both historically and in the present (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Through their realist stance they call into question the idea that institutional structures are “logically self-evident, objective, a priori valid, and internally consistent”. (p. 492-493).

Thus, administrative and time management, race and gender in the policy-making, bureaucracy, lack of commitment, colorblindness, apathy, financial and pedagogical priorities, among other factors at the Ministry of Education were and are one of the most important barriers. As pointed by Foster, it is crucial that:

(...) consciousness, which corresponds with Loury’s argument for race-egalitarianism ... and Moses’s call

for race-conscious education policy..., would eschew colorblindness in policy and practice, and would acknowledge the existence of racism where it occurs, as well as the existence of incidents and circumstances where racial harm was not intended but was effected nonetheless (p. 491).

## Final Considerations

To summarize, given the whims of the educational policies of the various Brazilian governments, what we can highlight in this study about the Brazilian educational struggle in the African Diaspora is that the right to obtain adequate education has gained some expression in terms of official proposals. As discussed above, there have been advances in the legislative process and the organization of educators, as well as non-governmental organizations in defense of putting these rights into effect. However, there is still a lot left to be done in order to represent the thought and culture of African-Brazilians within the educational system. Brazilian scholar Gonçalves e Silva (2005)<sup>7</sup> has addressed this complex issue:

In other words, our White colleagues are often not open to producing dimensions of knowledge that are not rooted and grounded in their “own”. In my experience, there is a tendency among non-Black scholars to try to agree with or to try to understand our approach(es), but only if there is something in it to benefit them. In this sense, a very challenging question that we have to face is how to find strategies to have our scientific theories and research recognized by the scientific community on our own terms. Therefore, we must find the right way to link our knowledge production to mainstream White approaches without being subsumed by them (p. 308).

Catherine Cornbleth (1993) raises the issue of knowledge in order to offer some reflections about the relationship between power versus knowledge in the experience of curriculum policy-making. She states that “to control school or curriculum knowledge is a means of exercising power beyond school walls by shaping how we understand ourselves, others, our nation, and our world. Curriculum knowledge affects individual and collective identity, capacity, attitude, and action (p.31)”.

Unquestionably, uncovering the relation between power-knowledge and curriculum policy-making

<sup>7</sup> Until 2005, she was a member of the National Council of Education representing the Black movement. Also, she is the reporter responsible for the organization of the National Curricular Guidelines for the Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture.

is essential when thinking about Brazilian changes not only in the legislation but also in the educational and political system. However, rescuing the past goes beyond just changing curriculum in schools; major transformations, not merely reforms, in an educational system that continues to benefit male, female, middle and upper class white Brazilians at the expense of Afro-Brazilians must also be included. In fact, this issue is challenging; this process has generated gradual changes, since there are different minds, bodies and souls with diverse explanations and views about the issue. Yet, the works developed by black women and men in MEC as well as non-governmental organizations have led the educational system to rethink its performance. Moreover, it is important to highlight the role the Brazilian Black movement has played throughout its existence. This movement and several non-governmental organizations, working along with Afro-Brazilian communities, have been pressuring and demanding change from the government for decades. Thus, the African Brazilian movement continues to struggle against the legacy of racial and gender oppression which has maintained this black population dispossessed of enjoying its right to educational, social, cultural and economic benefits.

Within this context, the identity politics and power of the hegemonic group has been threatened, and its reaction has been an obstacle for the continuation of the process that sought to increase and challenge the cultural power, discourse and knowledge of both the educational system and the decision-makers. As in the US, Brazil has faced contradictory and correlated forces in the educational field somewhat "generative", as well as "conservative educators and commentators have responded vigorously [to some changes] ... [and] there has been a virulent reaffirmation of Eurocentrism and Western culture in debates over the school curriculum and educational reform" (McCarthy, 1993, p. 290). Also, we can claim through Giroux's words that "what is being valorized in the dominant language of the conservative offensive is an undemocratic approach to social authority and a politically regressive move to reconstruct ... life within the script of Eurocentrism, racism, and patriarchy" (1992, p. 5).

Moreover, it is important to highlight that curriculum is "... never simply a neutral assemblage of

knowledge ... it is always part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, some group's vision of legitimated knowledge" (Apple, 1993, p. 221). In fact, not only class, but also race, sexuality and gender is a serious matter which has varying effects on the social, cultural, economic and educational environments in the Brazilian Diaspora. These categories have to be considered together, without the predominance of one over the other. Unfortunately, the changes have not happened on a dramatic upswing. On the contrary, after Lula's re-election as president in 2007, the racial agenda has passed through modifications and was almost halted. Because of the pressure from reactionary forces, the discussion on this issue has been banished by the white, dominant class. Indeed, the dialects of oppression (Davis, 1998) regarding black women within the Brazilian social arena needs to be readdressed in order to achieve black liberation by designing specific public policy for Black women. "Because the structures of female oppression are inextricable tethered to capitalism, female emancipation must be simultaneously and explicitly the pursuit of black liberation and of freedom of other nationally oppressed peoples", (pp. 185).

The role the state has played in Brazil has certainly benefited the cultural habits<sup>8</sup> and power of domination<sup>9</sup> of Brazilian mainstream class after president Lula's leaving some small portions, actually crumbs, to minority groups. Of course, these interactions involve different and strongly contradictory levels of negotiation and struggle with the mass media and the reinforcement of "imperialist white supremacist patriarchal capitalism" (hooks, 2004) interventions to maintain this social order. On the other hand, the Black movement continues to face the challenge of subverting the ideological discourse and finding counter hegemonic practices to combat the political and cultural power that masks and interferes in the political process, in the canonical knowledge, in the social structure and in the school dynamics.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the legal measures discussed above are seeds for addressing African Diaspora history and culture in the educational system that have to be cultivated, challenged and improved. Their creation and legal recognition are fundamental, and can encourage a reflection within the educational system and lead to the enactment of

<sup>8</sup> According to Bourdieu "the habitus, the product of history, produces individuals and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history. The system of dispositions – a part which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles, an internal law relaying the continuous exercise of the law of external necessities – is the social world without being able to give them a rational basis ...." (2007, p. 82).

<sup>9</sup> The power of domination is behind all the objective and subjective or material and symbolic co-relations in the way that society works. In Bourdieu words: "If ... one considers only the particular case of exchanges of materials and/or symbolic goods intended to legitimate relations of reciprocity one is in danger of forgetting that all structures of inseparable material and symbolic exchange ... function as ideological machines whenever the fact states of affairs which their tend to legitimate by transforming a contingent social relationship into a recognize relationship is an unequal balance of power" (2007, p. 95).

antiracist and anti-sexist practices. The Black movement in Brazil has been successful in placing demands for planning and enacting legal measures in order to include these subjects in educational policy, along with several courses and training in the academic field, believing that those are fundamental to forge a liberatory educational system that is truly (and at last) anti-racist and anti-sexist in its practices. Within this context, Law 10,639 is just an example of the gains the

Black movement has achieved. However, as unveiled by the analysis proposed in this article, there is a contradictory aspect of the Black movement male-centric and patriarchal dimension and the Brazilian state systematic refusal to address the lack of voice from Black women in Brazil. Therefore, it is crucial that liberatory efforts seek to further unveil and adequately address the silence of the black women agenda in the politics arena of the Brazilian state.

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## ***Interseções de raça e gênero: a luta para incluir a perspectiva da diáspora africana no sistema educacional brasileiro***

### **Resumo**

Este artigo está centrado nos desafios da diáspora africana no Brasil no campo educacional. O estudo pretende oferecer um panorama histórico sobre o contexto da lei 10639/03 e as Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais relacionadas ao ensino de história e cultura africana e afro-brasileira. Subsequentemente, as relações raciais e de gênero serão tratadas nesse contexto, enfatizando a predominância de uma perspectiva ainda centrada numa visão sexista (masculinizadora) no âmbito educacional. O artigo também enfatizará o papel desenvolvido pelo do movimento afro-diáspórico no desenvolvimento das políticas curriculares no Brasil no que diz respeito as desigualdades.

Palavras-chave: diáspora africana; educação e relações raciais; gênero; política curricular e desigualdade.

## ***Intersecciones de raza y género: la lucha para incluir la perspectiva de diáspora africana en el sistema educacional brasileño***

### **Resumen**

Este artículo está centrado en los desafíos de la diáspora africana en Brasil en el campo educacional. El estudio pretende ofrecer un panorama histórico sobre el contexto de la ley 10639/03 y las Directrices Curriculares Nacionales relacionadas a la enseñanza de historia y cultura africana y afrobrasileña. Subsecuentemente, las relaciones raciales y de género serán tratadas en ese contexto, enfatizando la predominancia de una perspectiva aún centrada en una visión sexista (masculinizada) en el ámbito educacional. El artículo también enfatizará el papel desarrollado por el movimiento afrodiaspórico en el desarrollo de las políticas curriculares en Brasil en lo que dice respecto a las desigualdades.

**Palabras clave:** diáspora africana; educación y relaciones raciales; género; política curricular, desigualdad.

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