

CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORISTS: CONCEPTUAL RELEVANCE OR UNNECESSARY APPLICATION? THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES AND THE TEACHING MATERIALS USED IN STATE SCHOOLS IN LUCAS DO RIO VERDE, MATO GROSSO

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Abstract

Broadly speaking, this study seeks to outline the relationship between teachers in the state public education system of Mato Grosso and the teaching materials distributed to educational institutions by the State Department of Education, as well as their positive or negative perceptions of those materials. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered between October 18 and 29, 2022, at the five state schools operating in the municipality of Lucas do Rio Verde. Eleven teachers responsible for teaching Sociology, History, and Geography to upper secondary school classes participated in the study. The central aim was to assess teachers' perceptions of the references made to the three classical sociological theorists, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, and of the degree of relevance assigned to them in the teaching materials distributed by the state government. In parallel, the study sought to determine whether classical sociological concepts such as social fact, class struggle, social action, and bureaucracy were addressed in the teaching materials, even indirectly, through suggested readings, research topics, or films for students. The data collected were subsequently organized into graphs and analyzed either directly or by cross-referencing the information contained in the questionnaires returned by the teachers.

Keywords: Classics of Sociology, Public Education, Quantitative Research, Teaching Methods, Upper Secondary Education.

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INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian education system and its practical outcomes for society have attracted the attention, and concern, of various researchers over the past two centuries. During this period, many proposals emerged. Some were partially implemented, while others never left the drawing board, and almost all ultimately encountered entrenched problems that caused projects which, under more favorable circumstances, might long ago have transformed Brazil, to fail into a major breeding ground for intellectuals and scientists.

One of the failings that most clearly exposes the setbacks suffered by Brazilian education concerns the model through which education is delivered to students. Centralized policies, particularly following the establishment of the Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação – MEC) in 1930 under the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, generated more problems than solutions because they consistently treated Brazil as an amalgam, a kind of monolith that could be understood from a single perspective; a question for which a single answer would suffice; a uniform public, without conflicting behavioral, cultural, or economic nuances, that could be addressed through a single social project. In short, under the positivist outlook inherent in the political class of the time, an understanding emerged that it was necessary to guide all the remaining “proto-citizens” of a monolithic society with little will of its own, which could be driven

according to the prevailing *Spencerianisms*² and Comtean Platonisms³ in effect⁴.

It is from this perspective that Oliveira Viana would defend, among other ideas, the thesis that the Brazilian people of his time tended to obey meekly and obediently...

“... the decisions of their superiors, especially their rulers, who knew how to govern large landed estates with mastery and an ‘iron fist.’ It is as though the people, in general, lacked the capacity for self-government. Put differently, it is as though the people were a flock without a shepherd, an ‘orchestra without a conductor’ (...) ultimately, this corresponds to the idea of a people deprived of a will of their own and in need of a guide, a trainer to channel that will.” (Cf. Baade and Bonin, pp. 222 and 223)

Following these perspectives, the State would become the guiding agent of the country’s entire education policy. From behind closed doors, impervious to the opinions of the “*unanointed*,” the vanguard of enlightened intellectuals in the Vargas government would decide what every student in every school, from northern to southern Brazil, should study in order to develop fully as a citizen and worker,

² The English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer argued that there was a strong connection between Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and human behavior. This association influenced societies in their choices, cultures, and particular representations and could be observed in various forms. His “Social Darwinism” was very well received in the economic and political circles of his time, which sought to justify social inequality and slavery through ostensibly scientific and therefore verifiable criteria. (Author’s Note)

³ In this text, Comtean Platonism refers to positivism’s tendency to reinforce Plato’s proposition that only philosophers, because they possess a stronger sense of moral rectitude than other social groups, could order the city, or *polis*, so as to bring peace and justice to society as a whole. In the words of Fernando Mauricio da Silva:

“When Plato posed the question of the nature and genesis of justice, we saw that this problem directed the discourse toward the will to justice, which in turn can be resolved only through a will to knowledge. Book VII is explicit regarding this difference in the will: ‘And thus we shall have a city for ourselves and for you that is a reality, not a dream, as is presently the case in most cities, where people fight one another over shadows and struggle for power as though it were a great good’; and it explains: ‘Do you know of any other way of life that despises political power apart from that of the true philosopher? The truth is that those who are enamored of power should not attain it.’” (SILVA, p. 247)

In Comte, this proposal would acquire still more severe overtones because positivism, through the Law of Three Stages, established, or, more precisely, authorized and even encouraged, those who had already reached the scientific stage of human progress to guide social groups that remained at less developed stages, the theological and metaphysical, toward order and progress. Society could therefore develop if, and only if, its most enlightened members, in Brazil’s case, the agricultural export elite composed of university graduates educated in Europe, became the legislative, judicial, and executive organizers of public administration, centers for disseminating knowledge, and private enterprise. (Author’s Note)

⁴ It was from these philosophically hierarchical perspectives that figures such as the writer José de Alencar and the sociologist Oliveira Viana developed their socio-racial theories. Baade and Bonin make this point as follows: “Oliveira Viana did not believe that all ethnic groups evolved uniformly. Each ethnic group or race develops differently. Indeed, he believed that certain races or ethnic groups would never reach the level attained by others that were more highly developed” (BAADE and BONIN, p. 221). With this safe-conduct provided by what had conventionally come to be called science, every kind of abuse, apartheid policy, enslavement, and usurpation of dignity in Brazil from the late nineteenth century throughout the twentieth century could thus be justified. (Author’s Note)

contributing their labor to the nation's progress.

For this project to be implemented effectively, everything had to pass through the filter created by these “*enlightened figures*”: teacher education, the internal ethos of each educational institution, the content of each subject, and, consequently, the teaching materials distributed to and used by every teacher.

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the present moment and determine how these historical failings continue to reverberate within our schools. This necessarily raises a question:

To what extent are the teaching materials distributed in Mato Grosso's public schools, or, more precisely, the Sociology materials distributed to teachers and students in these schools, capable of fostering genuine critical awareness and an ability to view the world beyond the ideological interests of those who produce, distribute, and teach the content of the textbooks provided?

To prevent the study from becoming excessively long, the assessment was limited to the classics of Sociology, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, and their applicability as structuring frameworks for students' analysis of society. These authors, it is virtually unnecessary to say, developed a range of perspectives on social groupings and continue to provide the foundations for the work of leading social scientists worldwide. Determining their presence is therefore more than urgent, given the foundational nature of the educational stage in which these students are enrolled.

To provide the text with greater conceptual depth and robustness, excerpts from articles, books, and theoretical notes will be used throughout as cohesive and critical elements through which to examine the responses obtained from the quantitative study. Readers will thus be able to engage both with the results and with the theorists whose work informs this debate.

The bibliography will also include other researchers who have examined the subject and analyzed similar situations in other regions of Brazil. References to similar studies will provide a basis for dialogue with the present study while offering readers a broader informational framework.

For greater clarity in presenting the ideas, the article will be divided into two distinct but complementary parts: (1) the first part will present the main findings drawn from the teachers' responses

to the questionnaire; and (2) the second part will provide a theoretical overview as an instrument for reflecting on the situation under examination and broadening the analytical perspective.

It is believed that this structure will give readers greater freedom to develop their own interpretations of the analyses conducted within the scope of this brief text.

THE POPULATION STUDIED

The study was conducted in *four schools*⁵ within the Mato Grosso public education system. A fifth institution could have contributed additional data and broadened the scope of the analysis. According to the school administration, however, the principal did not authorize the questionnaire to be administered to the upper secondary school teachers, and this refusal partially hindered the compilation of the results.

Nevertheless, 11 questionnaires were collected from state teachers working in the municipality of Lucas do Rio Verde. Although this sample is limited in comparison with the full scope of Mato Grosso's education system, it provides an opportunity for analysis that may prompt broader research in the near future.

The choice of Mato Grosso was not accidental. The state forms part of an economic expansion plan, with a strong emphasis on the agricultural export sector, that began in Brazil during the administration of President Juscelino Kubitschek (1956–1961) under his Targets Plan and was expanded under the Second National Development Plan (*Segundo Plano Nacional de Desenvolvimento* – II PND),⁶

⁵ The schools participating in the study were Dom Bosco, Ângelo Nadin, Márcio Schabat de Souza, and Manoel de Barros. For reasons that were not adequately explained, the pedagogical administration of the Tiradentes Military School Soldier Adriana Moraes Ramos (Escola Militar Tiradentes Soldado Adriana Moraes Ramos) refused to distribute the questionnaires to its teachers. These data will therefore remain unknown, at least for the time being. (Author's Note)

⁶ Both Kubitschek's and Geisel's plans were marked by the expansion of national-developmental policies based on the principles of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Comissão Econômica para a América Latina e o Caribe – CEPAL) and the regional development theories of the economist Raúl Prebisch. Prebisch followed a theoretical tradition strongly influenced by the thought of John Maynard Keynes. Contrary to the claims of classical economists, particularly David Ricardo, he argued that the strategy whereby each country entered the international market by specializing in the economic sector in which it was most competitive could not respond uniformly to the needs of every sector. While industrialized economies invested in technology and efficiency, reducing product costs and increasing profits, commodity exports from peripheral economies remained at the same level and yielded lower returns. In the medium and long term, this created what Prebisch called a deterioration in the terms of trade:

"Prebisch questions the validity of the international division of labor. According to this division, technical progress in the central economies would be distributed to the periphery through lower prices for manufactured goods, resulting from increased

– organized and implemented by President Ernesto Geisel between 1975 and 1979.

These two movements created the minimum conditions necessary for the state, over the following three decades, to achieve increasing output of primary products such as soybeans, corn, cotton, and animal protein. This increased producers' income and generated growing demand for *labor*⁷ on farms, in agribusiness companies, and in the regional commercial sector that subsequently developed, with pronounced dependence on agricultural exports.

A second wave of regional development began in the 2010s, when the first industries arrived in the fastest-growing areas, particularly those connected to biotechnology and meat processing. In both cases, the regional market was not the primary focus, and production lines operated almost exclusively to meet external demand at both the national and international levels.

The establishment of these companies led to a significant increase in state government revenue. Between 2020 and 2022, the amount collected by the State Department of Finance rose from R\$23.82 billion to R\$26.58 billion, with revenue projected to approach R\$30 billion in 2023⁸. If this expectation were confirmed, the state treasury would record a 25.94% increase in *tax revenue*⁹ over three years.

Much of this performance is attributable to the agricultural sector. According to data presented by

productivity. Primary products from the less productive periphery would consequently acquire greater purchasing power as technology advanced in the central economies, making industrialization of the system's periphery unnecessary. Prebisch refutes this assumption concerning the distribution of technical progress, arguing that, since the late nineteenth century, the prices of primary products have deteriorated in relation to those of manufactured goods from the central economies. In other words, because productivity gains have not been passed on through lower prices, technical progress has remained concentrated in the central economies.

This deterioration was explained by the cyclical movement of the economy. During the downward phase of the cycle, the decline in the prices of primary products was greater than their increase during the upward phase. Meanwhile, the prices of manufactured goods produced in the central economies resisted decline.” (COUTO, pp. 50 and 51)

⁷ The labor demanded is not uniform and follows a system of social division of labor highly characteristic of other Brazilian economic sectors. To manage the production, storage, and sale of commodities, companies established in Mato Grosso's more developed regions seek to hire technically trained specialists, offering salaries that are relatively high compared with the national average. By contrast, workers engaged in planting and harvesting crops, apart from certain exceptions such as operators of agricultural machinery, including tractors, harvesters, and trucks, receive wages very close to the subsistence level, approximately US\$232.18 at the December 2022 exchange rate.

⁸ Mato Grosso tax revenue in US dollars:

US\$4.6 billion, at the December 2020 exchange rate; US\$5.03 billion, at the December 2022 exchange rate; US\$5.75 billion, at the projected December 2023 exchange rate. (Author's Note, based on data provided by the Central Bank of Brazil)

⁹ The data presented form part of the balance sheets prepared by the State Department of Finance and are available on its official website: <http://www5.sefaz.mt.gov.br/web/sefaz/balanco-geral> (Author's Note)

the Mato Grosso Department of Economic Development, based on information provided by the Ministry of Development, Industry, and Foreign Trade (Ministério do Desenvolvimento, Indústria e Comércio Exterior – MDIC), state exports increased by 55.4% between the beginning of February 2021 and the end of January 2022, rising from US\$2.4 billion to a total of US\$3.8 billion.

Despite all these figures, the education provided in Mato Grosso's state public schools remains virtually stagnant near the bottom of the national quality ranking published every two years by the Federal Government through the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira – INEP).

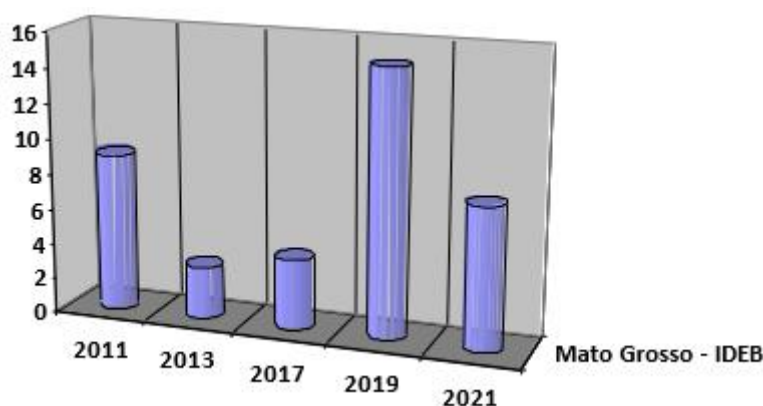
According to these indicators, the state's public education system has shown highly unstable progress compared with Brazil's other federative units, and its overall situation remains precarious.

An overview of the past decade confirms this perception regarding upper secondary education in Mato Grosso. In 2011, Mato Grosso ranked 18th nationally for the quality of upper secondary education; in 2013, it fell to 24th place; in 2017, it rose one position to 23rd; in 2019, it showed significant improvement, ranking 12th; but it fell again in 2021, when *it ranked 19th*¹⁰, as shown in the following graph.

¹⁰ The data further reveal that only 20% of Mato Grosso's upper secondary schools achieved the target score of 6 established by the Federal Government as the minimum quality standard. This proportion was far below those of other states, including São Paulo (65%), Santa Catarina (57%), Minas Gerais (54%), Paraná (53%), Ceará (33%), and Goiás (30%). (Source: INEP – Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2021; Author's Note)

Graph 1

Trends in the quality of education in Mato Grosso according to the Basic Education Development Index (Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica – IDEB), 2011–2021



Source: Author's own work (2026)

This profoundly contradictory situation, marked by substantial economic development over the past five decades while Mato Grosso has remained among the lowest-ranked states for the quality of state public education in Brazil, will provide the background for the analyses that follow.

WHAT THE TEACHERS SAY

The data analyzed were collected through a structured quantitative questionnaire containing 21 questions designed to understand how Social Sciences teachers, in Sociology, History, and Geography, perceived the presence of the classical theorists Durkheim, Marx, and Weber in the teaching materials distributed through the state public education system in Lucas do Rio Verde, Mato Grosso, as well as the applicability of their ideas to contexts inherent in contemporary society. The responses were grouped into a dataset presented in graphs, which will be used to identify, to a greater or lesser extent, the teachers' interpretations of the subject.

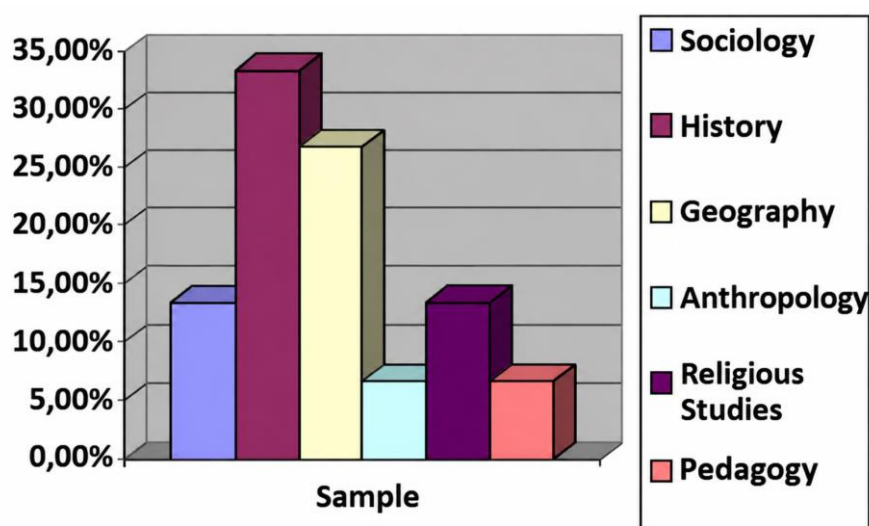
The teachers interviewed presented a fairly distinctive profile. Most had considerable classroom experience, with 11 or more years of teaching experience (54.54%). Most also reported having taught in Mato Grosso's state public education system for more than a decade, with the largest proportion falling within the range of 11 to 15 years (36.36%).

Regarding educational background, only two teachers held degrees in *Sociology*¹¹ (18,18%). The others held degrees in History (33.33%), Geography (26.66%), Anthropology (6.66%), Religious Studies (13.33%), and Pedagogy (6.66%). Three reported holding more than one academic degree, as shown in the following graph.

These initial data are highly relevant because they show that most respondents had substantial classroom experience and had worked with several different teaching materials over the years, enabling them to assess the issues raised with greater precision.

Graph 2

Educational backgrounds of teachers who teach Social Sciences subjects (Sociology, History, and Geography) in state public schools in Lucas do Rio Verde



Source: Author's own work (2026)

¹¹ Complaints concerning the shortage of teachers specifically trained in Sociology to teach the subject to upper secondary students are recurrent in Brazil. Rather than being merely corporatist in nature, these complaints seek to highlight the shortage of professionals properly trained to work with this particular field of knowledge. These authors argue that this situation contributes to the precarious state of Sociology teaching in the country's regular educational institutions and perpetuates the false idea that the subject has no practical relevance.

Martins and Moser identify this issue: "*Professionals in the field play an essential role in introducing sociological knowledge into the everyday school lives of young people and adolescents. The first Sociology teachers were lawyers, physicians, and members of the military, a problem that persists today because professionals from other fields continue to teach Sociology. As a result of this substitution, Sociology acquires a historical, geographical, or psychological character, producing a set of concepts placed within a common framework and creating challenges such as young people's and society's lack of interest in the subject and failure to perceive its meaning.*" (Cf. MARTINS and MOSER, p. 120)

From this point onward, the study sought to determine teachers' perceptions of the quality of education provided by Mato Grosso's public schools, the teaching materials supplied by the State Department of Education, and, consequently, the teaching staff's understanding of Social Sciences content for upper secondary students enrolled in the schools participating in the study.

Regarding the overall quality of teaching in the state public education system, the responses were highly varied and balanced. In response to Question 04, three teachers assigned scores of six, seven, and eight to the content. Two other teachers rated the quality of public education in Mato Grosso at four and five. The overall mean *score* assigned to Mato Grosso's public education system was 6.54¹².

The assessment of the quality of Social Sciences teaching, comprising Sociology, History, and Geography, in the public education system was more positive under the same criteria. Scores ranged from six to nine, with the greatest concentration at eight. On average, the teachers who responded to the questionnaire assigned Social Sciences a score of 7.36.

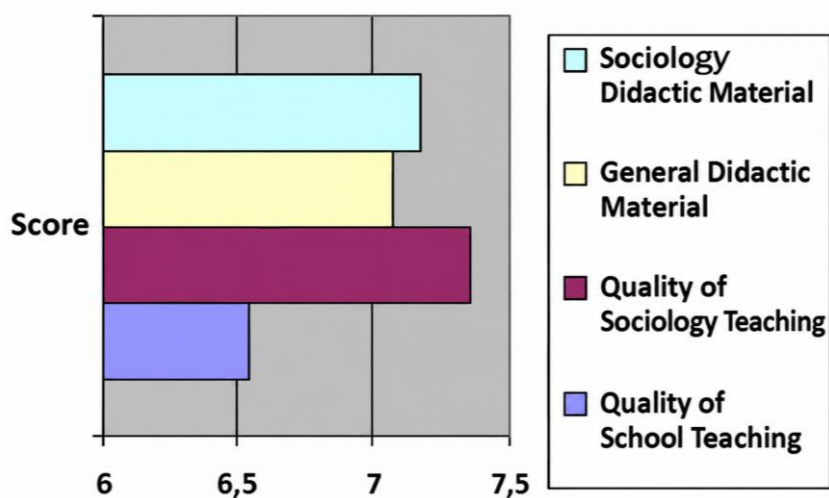
The teaching materials were also assessed using the same criteria from an overall perspective. On a scale from zero to ten, the teachers' assessments were widely dispersed, ranging from five to ten, with the greatest concentration at seven, resulting in an average score of 7.09.

When the teachers were asked specifically about the teaching materials for Social Sciences subjects, with an emphasis on Sociology, the assessment was slightly more positive. Scores ranged from five to ten, with the largest concentration, three responses or 27.27%, at eight. According to the teachers, therefore, the teaching materials specifically intended for Sociology received an average score of 7.18, as shown in the following graph.

¹² The teachers' assessment, which assigned such a low score to the quality of education in Mato Grosso's public schools, was not arbitrary. Their perception is consistent both with the results of the Basic Education Development Index (Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica – IDEB), measured by Brazil's Federal Government, and with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). According to the latter, the Brazilian education system ranks among the lowest in the world for quality, occupying 57th place among 80 countries and assessing the performance of more than 600,000 students. Among other findings, the index indicates that, in Portuguese language studies, only 2% of Brazilian students perform above average, while 43% do not even attain the minimum acceptable score. (MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO, 2019)

Graph 3

Interviewed teachers' perceptions of the quality of education in Mato Grosso's public school system and assessment of the teaching materials used in the classroom



Source: Author's own work (2026)

In the third stage of the study, the questions were designed to directly assess the use and relevance of the classics of Sociology, Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. The findings indicate that most teachers did not assess the teaching materials favorably, as 66.66% of the responses agreed that the materials distributed by the State Department of Education addressed these theorists *inadequately*¹³, with six responses, representing 50% of the cases, indicating that the content referred to these authors only superficially.

The position reflected in the teaching materials conflicts with the teachers' views of the classics, since 54.54% believed that these thinkers had concrete or absolute relevance to understanding Sociology

¹³ The teachers participating in this study answered another question that was not addressed directly in the body of the paper but should be mentioned to facilitate interpretation of the issue concerning the relevance of the classics in the teaching materials. At one point in the interview, the following question was asked: *In your opinion, what is most important in appropriate teaching materials?*

Responses to this question were concentrated in the item *"enabling students to assess society by combining theory and practice,"* selected by 31.25% of respondents. This was followed by *"the theoretical concept,"* selected in 18.75% of responses. In third place, reinforcing this perspective, was *"basic scientific methodology for assessing data and concepts,"* accounting for 12.5% of responses.

The respondents perceived that teachers and teaching materials should provide students with better interpretive mechanisms. They stated, however, that teachers encounter resistance to this practice within the teaching materials themselves, which reduce debate concerning the spheres of social reality to a tangle of events that must be "criticized," even when students lack the minimum conceptual and epistemological tools needed to do so. (Author's Note)

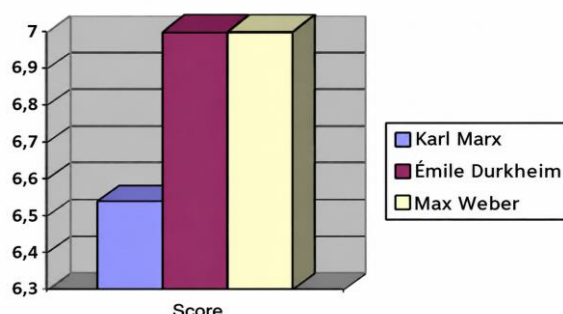
as an instrument for comprehending the social environment in which students live. Two other teachers (18.18%) stated that the classics had relative relevance, while three responses (27.27%) assigned little relevance to the theorists mentioned.

Finally, the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the *degree of relevance*¹⁴ that each classical sociological theorist should have in materials considered appropriate for students in Mato Grosso's state public schools:

- **Karl Marx** - The scores indicated that Karl Marx received the lowest level of approval from the group studied. Scores ranged from one to ten, with eight being the most frequent score, recorded three times or in 27.27% of cases. His average score was 6.45.
- **Émile Durkheim** – Durkheim's sociological methodology received scores ranging from zero to ten, with eight occurring most frequently. The final average score was 7.
- **Max Weber** – Weber's approach to social analysis also received a more positive assessment from respondents. Weber's concepts received scores ranging from zero to ten, with seven and nine being the most frequent, each cited three times or in 27.27% of responses. Weber's theoretical approaches also received a final average score of 7.

Graph 4

Degree of relevance assigned to each classical sociological theorist in developing tools for interpreting social space, according to the teachers interviewed



Source: Author's own work (2026)

¹⁴ Two respondents provided answers to this question that ultimately introduced noise into the final average. In one questionnaire, the respondent assigned Karl Marx a score of 1 and Émile Durkheim and Max Weber scores of eight and nine. In the second case, precisely the opposite occurred, with the respondent assigning Marx a score of nine and Durkheim and Weber scores of zero. (Author's Note)

IN SUMMARY...

The findings revealed a critical position among the teachers who taught Sociology in the schools participating in the study, regardless of their original academic backgrounds, regarding the content of the teaching materials distributed to schools in Mato Grosso's public education system.

In summary, the responses indicated that most teachers interviewed considered: *(a)* the quality of teaching in Mato Grosso's public education system to be deficient, with a score of 6.54; *(b)* the teaching materials intended for Sociology to require improvement, with an average score of 7.18; *(c)* the coverage of the classics of Sociology to be limited, in 66.66% of cases; and *(d)* more robust approaches to scientific methodology to be necessary in order to enable students to interpret social facts and social action in a more interconnected and in-depth manner, avoiding superficial readings or interpretations heavily tied to common sense.

These criticisms are consistent with the responses to the questionnaire's final question, which assessed respondents' perceptions of the body of information provided in the teaching materials distributed. For most respondents (63.63%), the content, although still satisfactory, required corrections. Another 27.27% of teachers stated that the materials contained serious deficiencies requiring immediate correction. Only one teacher (9.09%) considered the materials entirely satisfactory.

The findings therefore showed that the teachers interviewed wanted teaching materials that would help them provide their students with a conceptually better-structured, deeper, and broader sociological education. Such materials would contribute to developing critical awareness that is not a tautological practice, narcissistic and Parnassian in orientation, forever closed in upon itself, but instead becomes a genuinely useful tool throughout each student's life. It would provide a solid basis for students to interpret themselves, their surroundings, and the economic, cultural, and political forces acting upon reality, as well as to apply their knowledge so that they can position themselves more effectively as agents of the changes they consider best for the environments in which they live.

Finally, it was possible to conclude that the teachers perceived an excessive, and at times

exhausting, burden of sociological, historiographical, and economic discourses associated with classical Marxism and its subsequent reinterpretations. This does not, of course, represent a complete objection to Karl Marx's ideas. It does, however, highlight a clear tendency to reduce the excessive importance assigned to this theorist and his later interpreters in the teaching materials provided to students. From the standpoint of these teachers, it should be emphasized, this position seeks to shed equal light on other theoretical and methodological traditions that have also been valuable to the Social Sciences over the past two centuries.

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

The contradictions found in Mato Grosso's public education system are consistent with conditions observed in Brazil since the colonial period, as a direct result of the policy of placing education under state control implemented by the Marquis of Pombal. By expelling the *Jesuits*¹⁵ from all Portuguese territories and closing schools, Pombal reduced almost to nothing the number of teachers qualified to teach even the rudiments of reading, mathematics, or manufacturing techniques, particularly in small rural towns. He ultimately *restricted education*¹⁶ to economic groups capable of paying for extended periods of

¹⁵ Del Priore draws attention to the innovations introduced into education by Jesuit priests:

"The Jesuits helped make the transition from the schools of the Middle Ages to the colleges of the modern era. They replaced technical instruction indiscriminately directed toward young and old alike with rigidly hierarchical social and moral education provided in classes separated by sex and age. They were also the first educators to attend to the specific characteristics of childhood, showing concern for knowledge of child psychology and for developing a teaching method compatible with that psychology." (DEL PRIORE, p. 59)

This observation calls into question the relatively widespread interpretation, frequently found in teaching materials distributed to upper secondary schools and in texts intended to train teachers who will work at this educational level, that Brazil has always had a dichotomous education policy. According to this interpretation, purely philosophical instruction was provided to the wealthier classes, while preparation for manual labor, with little appeal or connection to intellectual practice, was intended for poorer groups, with the sole purpose of perpetuating the colonial system of exploitation.

Although the educational structure provided in urban centers at the time differed from that found in Jesuit missions, the tacit and immediate interpretation advanced by certain authors, particularly those following classical Marxist traditions, which reduces the history of the Brazilian education system to a structure of "*class struggle*" in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Brazil, is far from accurate.

It should therefore be emphasized that the differences in the nature of urban educational institutions and missions served a plan to strengthen the Portuguese presence in the Americas far more than a predetermined system for exploiting labor through a particular symbolic caste. In this respect, it was as necessary for Lisbon to train a minimally capable bureaucratic corps to administer state services as it was to increase the number of workers, whether settlers or Indigenous people, capable of cultivating the land, exploiting natural resources, and consequently increasing the Crown Treasury's tax revenue. (Author's Note)

¹⁶ Cardoso states that, following the intervention of the Marquis of Pombal, an education system intended purely to serve the interests of a bureaucratic elite may be said to have been established in Brazil:

study in *Europe*¹⁷.

This twofold policy, dismantling the education system intended to train the working class, on the one hand, while maintaining a small number of educational centers designed to serve the interests of hegemonic economic groups with the required level of quality, on the other, became a defining feature throughout the history of education in Brazil, producing an ever-increasing opportunity cost.

Initially, these opportunity costs were obscured through a highly particular interpretation of David Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage, whereby the principle of specialization became a kind of "*Law of Exclusive Investment*"¹⁸ in market niches, specifically the agricultural export sector. Contrary to what might be imagined, this understanding was not confined to nineteenth-century¹⁹ coffee growers, livestock farmers, and sugar-mill owners, but remained firmly established as a guiding principle of

"... education was not compulsory and (...) was not intended for the general population, since the government proceeded from the assumption that establishing a school network covering the entire territory of the Portuguese Kingdom and its domains was impracticable. In the interests of the public good, subjects were therefore classified into different groups. In other words, the government considered only (...) the professional destinations of the prospective students who would benefit from the increased provision of schooling." (CARDOSO, p. 184)

¹⁷ Nogino corroborates this interpretation by emphasizing that "the result of the Marquis of Pombal's decision was that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Brazilian education had been reduced to virtually nothing. The Jesuit system was dismantled, and nothing approaching it was organized to continue the work of education in the colony." (NOGINO, p. 15)

¹⁸ Luz (1975) argues that the imperial period was characterized by consensus concerning the agricultural vocation of the Brazilian economy. Leading participants in the debate at the time, including the Viscount of Cairu, José Maria da Silva Lisboa, and Tavares Bastos, (...) argued that Brazil should specialize in agricultural activities and mineral extraction because of its existing comparative advantages, particularly the abundance and quality of arable land. Specialization in agricultural production and trade with manufacturing countries would be central to increasing the economic prosperity of Brazil and its trading partners. (CURADO, 2013)

This perspective is corroborated by Castro, who states: "Tavares Bastos, for example, explicitly argued that Brazil had no industrial vocation and 'should not struggle against its own nature.' In fact, the development of industrial activities would create several problems for the economy, particularly higher food prices and a worsening labor shortage." (CASTRO, 1985)

¹⁹ Curado, for example, explains that between the 1890s and the 1920s, despite the industrial sector's development in comparison with the preceding period:

"... discussions concerning the role of industrialization in Brazilian development may be classified as marginal, both from an academic perspective and in terms of their influence on the implementation of economic policies directed toward industrial development. Furtado (1968), among others, argues that the economic policies introduced by the government up to the 1930s served the economic interests of the coffee-growing bourgeoisie."

national macroeconomic policy at least until the *New York Stock Exchange crash*²⁰ of 1929²¹.

Another factor that served to conceal the disparities and imbalances between the educational models applied to Brazil's social classes was the belief, developed among landowners from the mid-nineteenth century onward, that investing in more technologically advanced equipment would be sufficient to increase productivity and improve the profitability of their farms. They argued that the available workforce would adapt to the new technologies after a short period of use and that no substantial investment in *workers' education and training*²² was therefore necessary.

These ideas, which were common among Brazil's nineteenth-century agricultural export elite,

²⁰ This event in particular broke the hegemony of this perspective and brought to the forefront the school of thought advocating national-developmental concepts directed toward an import-substitution program, particularly according to the theses of the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch, which later received support in Brazil from Celso Furtado.

After observing movements in the international market over several decades, Prebisch opposed David Ricardo's theses on comparative advantage. Contrary to the English theorist, he argued that there would be a "*deterioration in the terms of trade*" between central economies and peripheral countries. In other words, Prebisch questioned:

"... the validity of the international division of labor. According to this division, technical progress in the central economies would be distributed to the periphery through lower prices for manufactured goods, resulting from increased productivity. Primary products from the less productive periphery would consequently acquire greater purchasing power as technology advanced in the central economies, making industrialization of the system's periphery unnecessary.

Prebisch refutes this assumption concerning the distribution of technical progress, arguing that, since the late nineteenth century, the prices of primary products have deteriorated in relation to those of manufactured goods from the central economies. In other words, because productivity gains have not been passed on through lower prices, technical progress has remained concentrated in the central economies.

This deterioration was explained by the cyclical movement of the economy. During the downward phase of the cycle, the decline in the prices of primary products was greater than their increase during the upward phase. Meanwhile, the prices of manufactured goods produced in the central economies resisted decline." (COUTO, pp. 50 and 51)

²¹ The view that Brazil should maintain an economic path aligned exclusively with an agricultural export policy continued to attract fervent support within the country's most important decision-making spheres even after the New York Stock Exchange crash. These economists included Eugênio Gudín, who argued that, "*if the expansion of the industrial structure continues on the basis of protection through heavy customs tariffs and a declining exchange rate, we shall continue to be a poor country alongside the rich country that is Argentina*" (CURADO, p. 618).

At the time, even more than today, Argentina's economic activity was based on exporting primary or minimally processed products, with particular emphasis on livestock production. Gudín's viewpoint therefore remained strongly attached to David Ricardo's concepts of a "*natural economic vocation*," reflecting the position commonly adopted by nineteenth-century liberal theorists. (Author's Note)

²² Cano illustrates this preference for technology over investment in education by referring to the introduction of certain agricultural implements on coffee plantations from the 1850s onward, when the Brazilian Crown prohibited the slave trade, increasing the cost of the existing workforce:

"The rise in slave prices, which had been occurring since the beginning of the 1830s, accelerated after 1850 (...) This abnormal price increase led to the transfer of enslaved people previously assigned to urban services into coffee production.

[Beginning in 1870], the plow came into wider use and, because of the more favorable topography, part of this agricultural activity could introduce the mechanical cultivator, which, using one man and one animal, advantageously replaced the work of six enslaved people (...) Economic productivity would increase still further with the introduction of coffee-processing machinery. ... the introduction of new equipment made it possible to improve the quality and presentation of coffee considerably, resulting in gains equivalent to 33% of the price received [on the external market]." (pp. 39 and 40)

Another relevant factor in reducing production costs for São Paulo coffee growers beginning in the 1860s was the implementation of railway lines: "*The introduction of the railway system unquestionably produced a considerable reduction in the cost of transporting coffee, which had previously been transported by ox cart or pack trains to the nearest river and seaports in the region*" (CANO, p. 36).

meant that most *Crown*²³ initiatives relating to education policy had few positive effects on Brazilian society. In summary, although the State's objective was clearly to reverse the chaos created by the Marquis of Pombal's reforms and *expand educational provision for the Brazilian population*²⁴, the recorded outcome was almost the *opposite*²⁵.

The third factor that must be considered in order to develop a more robust understanding of the circumstances that brought Brazilian education generally, and education in Mato Grosso specifically, to its current condition concerns the *racist position*²⁶ that developed within the agricultural export elite of the period. In this context, the prevailing discourse defended by landowners involved: (1) the legitimization of the slave system, concealed in the late nineteenth century beneath an *ostensibly scientific discourse*²⁷,

²³ Boaventura notes, for example, that immediately after arriving in Brazil, Dom João sought to equip the Portuguese territories in the Americas with the minimum number of institutions capable of supplying the country with qualified professionals in various fields of knowledge. He states:

"As soon as he arrived in Brazil, during his stay in Bahia, the Prince Regent opened the ports to friendly nations and established a course in Medicine and Surgery at the Military Hospital.

His practical initiatives extended to the economy, politics, and agriculture, with particular emphasis on education. Courses that had not previously existed were established in various fields. The medical course marked the beginning of a new period for public higher education, since until then only religious higher education had existed. In this regard, when analyzing higher education under the Empire (1822–1889), Luiz Antônio Cunha (1986, p. 67) observed that the National State emerged in 1808, creating a need to introduce changes into the higher education inherited from the colonial period. 'Courses and academies intended to train bureaucrats for the State and specialists in the production of symbolic goods, and, as a by-product, to train members of the liberal professions,' were established." (BOAVENTURA, p. 129)

²⁴ As soon as he assumed the Crown of the newly established Empire of Brazil, which became independent from Portugal in September 1822, Dom Pedro I began directly advocating the expansion of the education system to as many of his subjects as possible. Like his father, the new Emperor included in Brazil's constitutional legal order the principle that *"primary education shall be free to all citizens as a universal civil and political right."* This principle is set out in Title 8, Article 179, item XXXII, of the Constitution of the Empire of 1824. (Author's Note)

²⁵ Despite all the measures taken by the State, however, the Black population remained invisible with regard to citizenship. As Viveiros states regarding the children of Black people, including freed persons, *"... they had no educational options; their duty was to become useful and productive citizens on the plantations, while the children of the elites were taught by private tutors"* (VIVEIROS, p. 04)

²⁶ Peixoto Parron recalls, for example, the anonymous pamphlets published during the three decades preceding the abolition of slavery in Brazil, which defended the thesis that Black people possessed physical characteristics associating them with brute strength and intensive physical labor:

"... only the Black man, because of the organic structure of his skin, can withstand the effects of exposure to the sun; this same being, because of the particular action of his lung, an organ whose functions differ greatly from those of white people, is the only one who can be exposed to highly rarefied air, which kills a white person almost immediately; and only he, because of his particular respiration, can descend into mine shafts in order to entertain [sic] and advance the effects of mining, which sustain and give life to the State, which support and give life to the State." (PEIXOTO PARRON, p.48)

²⁷ In this regard, Silvio Romero, for example, strongly criticized racial mixing as the cause of Brazil's social and economic backwardness compared with other nations of the world:

"A people descended from a corrupted and decadent branch of the ancient Latin race, to which were added two of the most degraded races on the planet, the Black people of the African coast and the redskins of America [...] resulting in the servility of the Black man, the indolence of the Indigenous person, and the authoritarian and narrow-minded disposition of the Portuguese, which produced a shapeless nation without fertile or original qualities." (AURELIANO, SANTANA, and DIONÍSIO, p. 263)

and (2) the parallel claim by these social actors that they, and no one else, were capable of leading Brazilian society toward progress and civilization, even justifying the existence of governments with *antidemocratic tendencies*.²⁸

Despite these initiatives, the interests of regional leaders connected to landowners and the slaveholding regime led laws to be interpreted and applied according to patrimonial and personal interests. In other words, if a law were enacted requiring the *expansion of schools and teaching staff*²⁹ in a particular region or province, it would be implemented only insofar as it served the interests of *local political leaders*³⁰. Because these political actors formed a single interest group responsible both for implementing and overseeing imperial ordinances, the likelihood of punishment for any failure to comply was remote.

²⁸ One example of this position, already cited in this study, is that expressed by Oliveira Viana, who viewed the Brazilian people as inept, devoid of a will of their own, and inclined to follow a leader capable of governing the State with an “*iron fist*”: “... the [Brazilian] people are accustomed to the decisions of their superiors, especially their rulers, who know how to govern large landed estates with mastery and an ‘iron fist.’ It is as though the people, in general, lacked the capacity for self-government (...) ultimately, this corresponds to the idea of a people deprived of a will of their own and in need of a guide, a trainer to channel that will.” (Cf. BAADE and BONIN, pp. 221–223)

²⁹ Beginning with Dom João, proposals were made to expand the provision of vocational courses. In addition to the Military Academies and courses in Chemistry, Pharmacy, Medicine, Mathematics, and Engineering, the establishment of professional courses in Economic Sciences and Agriculture was decreed:

“Certain initiatives addressed vocational education. While still in Bahia, by decree of February 23, 1808, the chair of Economic Science was established and was to be taught in Rio de Janeiro by José da Silva Lisboa, the future Viscount of Cairu, a follower of Adam Smith’s classical liberalism and an expert in economics (...) A broader concern led to the establishment of the Agriculture course in Salvador, Bahia, the second most important city because of its busy port and its exports of sugar, tobacco, and other products.” (BOAVENTURA, p. 135)

Another relevant measure was implemented by Dom Pedro II through the establishment of Normal Schools, whose central objective was to increase the supply of teachers for elementary schools for children. By establishing the first Normal Schools in Niterói, RJ (1835), Salvador, BA (1836), Fortaleza, CE (1845), and São Paulo, SP (1846), the Empire planned to provide more properly trained teachers for schools, particularly in cities where the rate of complete illiteracy still approached the entire population, thereby fulfilling the requirements of the 1824 Constitution, as previously noted. This model derived from a proposal briefly implemented in postrevolutionary France in 1795, which reinforced the idea of an educational foundation based on secularism, free provision, state action, and universal education. (Author’s Note)

³⁰ At this point, due attention must be paid to the observations made by Xavier, Ribeiro, and Noronha concerning Normal School-trained teachers who taught in public schools funded by the provinces and small municipalities. According to these researchers, teachers in small towns faced circumstances that differed considerably from those of their counterparts employed in schools in the provincial capitals. Consequently, few people were willing to attend the courses and become teachers:

“Salaries were low and job stability was precarious because of the regional political disputes that marked the entire imperial period. The expansion of Normal School education was limited not only by the lack of teachers, but especially by the absence of students.” (XAVIER, RIBEIRO, NORONHA, p. 86)

According to a 2021 OECD report on the overall situation of teacher education in Brazil, the problem persists. The organization: (1) identified challenges relating to teacher quality, observing that recruitment generally requires low skill levels compared with other higher-education graduates in Brazil and that salaries are comparatively low; (2) observed that levels of support and in-service training are highly heterogeneous throughout the country; and (3) emphasized that school management is frequently of poor quality, partly because of political appointment practices. (OCDE, p. 08)

The cumulative outcome of these interconnected circumstances shows that the twentieth century began in Brazil under highly unfavorable conditions: *extremely high rates*³¹ of complete illiteracy, eugenics justified through ostensibly scientific discourse, and access to high-quality education restricted to the country's largest urban centers. To these factors must be added the Spencerian-positivist idea, widespread among the national intelligentsia, that the unrefined and mixed-race population urgently needed to be "*civilized*"³². Schools, particularly those in small towns and rural areas, were expected to contribute to the success of this task:

"Examples include the various forms of isolated schools, single-teacher schools, district schools, rural schools, urban schools, model schools, unitary schools, first-letters schools, and rudimentary schools. These 'types' of schools, however, began to coexist, albeit incipiently, with a more rationalized form of primary education: the school groups, which highlighted the process of establishing another type of school during the period studied. At the same time, they pointed to a republican civilizing project through education, with school groups serving as an important setting for understanding the strategy of state intervention intended to civilize the popular classes." (Ferreira and Carvalho, p. 02)

The idea of "*civilizing the popular classes*," defended by the intellectual and political elite in the first years after the Republican Coup, was therefore grounded in the concept of reshaping Brazilian society, not for the exercise of democracy or active citizenship, or even for technical and vocational education, but according to what was viewed as the finest example of national rationality at the time: the university graduate born into the country's wealthiest castes, fluent in French or English, and educated at

³¹ Federal Government data indicate that, in 1900, 65.3% of the Brazilian population was completely illiterate. This situation remained unchanged until the 1920 census, which found that 65% of Brazilians continued to declare themselves completely illiterate. (Source: IBGE, in INEP, p. 06)

³² From Sílvio Romero's perspective, for example, it was the role of state education to provide Brazilians with the necessary civilizing direction, eradicating any Black or Indigenous heritage. For Romero, schools therefore had a civilizing function insofar as they reinforced Brazilians' Portuguese and European heritage:

"Thus, if we study our origins from the point at which the foundations of our nationality were laid, we find our genuine European ancestor: the people of Camões and no other... What are we? An extension of Portuguese civilization, a Luso-American people, which means that this people, who did not exterminate the Indigenous person they found in this land and with whom they became associated, teaching him their civilization, and who did not reject the Black person, to whom they communicated their customs and culture, nevertheless prevailed through the just and powerful influence of religion, law, language, morality, politics, industry, traditions, beliefs, and all those irresistible impulses and indelible bonds that stir souls and bring people together." (ROMERO in SOUZA, P. 83)

In his view, only by valuing legitimate Portuguese culture could Brazilian society free itself "*from the conditions of our extensive racial mixing without altering the nation's historical physiognomy; this prevents us from becoming another Haiti or another Santo Domingo without incurring the danger of becoming conquests of Germany or Italy*" (ROMERO in SOUZA, p. 83).

a European university:

“The university graduate was conflated with the intellectual in the cultural context of the period, and criticism of the two was often the same (...) The graduate’s cultural education, however, was characterized more by dilettantism grounded in classical and literary learning than by professional specialization. What distinguished the graduate and served as a marker of cultural distinction was a certain veneer of culture, generally eclectic and dilettantish in form. The graduate therefore embodies a contradiction: an individual with a university education who, because of that eclectic education, ultimately proves to be self-taught and indiscriminately consumes a superficial culture. The limits of the debate in which the graduate participated were, in turn, the limits of Brazilian liberalism, of which he became the emblematic figure, for better or worse (...) The graduate therefore represented the possibilities and contradictions of Brazilian liberalism, and it was largely through criticism of the graduate that criticism of liberalism itself was developed.” (Souza, p. 60)

Ultimately, civilizing also meant constructing, within Brazilians’ symbolic universe, concepts capable of uniting everyone, regardless of ethnic origin, under the aegis of state patriotism or, in Habermas’s words, *constitutional patriotism*³³. Schools thus became instruments of the State intended to erase the diverse cultural characteristics both of Brazil’s mixed-race population and of the children of German, Italian, Lebanese, Japanese, or Polish immigrants enrolled in them.

This state patriotism, which already had strong appeal within the positivist movements that created the conditions for the *Republican Coup of 1889*³⁴, gained further substance with the establishment

³³ Habermas drew on Hegel’s “dialectic of recognition” to present his theory of constitutional patriotism. According to him, multicultural societies face an underlying difficulty in establishing cohesive social bonds through the traditional foundations of patriotic sentiment, such as religion, language, family, folklore, and history. Drawing on the experience of the Nazi and Fascist totalitarian states that emerged in Germany and Italy in his time, Habermas proposed that a new system of recognition and citizenship should be applied to the formation of the concept of patriotism:

“The answer, which began to take shape in Sternberger under the influence of Jaspers but acquired more solid contours in Habermas and Müller, appears to involve valuing constitutionalism, insofar as the principles and values of the Constitution would seek to reproduce not the consensus of a particular group or ethnicity, but that of the entirety of the people, formed from a heterogeneous plurality, inhabiting a particular territory constituted as a nation-state.

Here the idea of constitutional patriotism emerges. The expression ‘patriotism’ may not appear entirely self-evident, but it is employed by the philosophers examined precisely to emphasize the need to respect and cultivate the Constitution, because it contains the pillar capable of sustaining a multicultural and democratic society.

Nevertheless, the mere formalization of a Constitution is insufficient to guarantee social cohesion. ‘Patriotism’ is also required, that is, the constant encouragement of individuals to recognize themselves in the Constitution. This does not, of course, mean that everyone must agree with every provision of the Constitution, but rather that they should be willing to recognize themselves in it and understand it as the historical outcome of the internal dialectics of a particular society. One may argue in favor of changing and improving elements of the Constitution, but not against its supremacy as a means of preserving or fostering social cohesion. This process involves what Hegel defines as the dialectic of recognition, whereby the Self leaves itself and recognizes the Other through the We.” (SOARES, p. 03)

³⁴ This political and economic elite had to tell its own version of history and explain how Brazilian society was constituted from the perspective most favorable to those governing the country. Medeiros comments on the function of historiography during this period:

of the MEC - Ministry of Education - under the government of Getúlio Vargas. The MEC was therefore created:

“As a feature of the centralization through which the government now approached the structure of Brazilian education, content and methodological guidelines for pedagogical work were henceforth prepared by the Ministry of Education (...) Local schools no longer had the freedom to develop their own programs, standardizing education throughout Brazil under greater federal government control. (...)

Brazil was presented as a racial democracy that was gradually ‘whitening’ its population because of higher European immigration rates and Europeans’ greater ‘physical robustness,’ in addition to the prohibition of the slave trade. It can therefore be seen that teaching materials disregarded the Black component of Brazil’s ethnic formation because Black people were considered an inferior race, an idea widely disseminated by certain scientific movements of the period based on so-called Social Darwinism. (...)

... the educational projects of the period situated education within the project of capitalist development, especially when the implementation of technical and vocational courses is considered. These courses sought to train skilled labor for the growing industrial sector. Indeed, this was one of the characteristics of the education system at the time: secondary education for the elites and technical education for the less privileged classes, a fact that contributed to the development of the capitalist system.” (Medeiros, pp. 847 and 848)

This situation deepened further beginning in 1937, when another coup d’état established the Estado Novo. From that point onward, the Ministry of Education became part of an *ideological propaganda network*³⁵ modeled on other *totalitarian regimes*³⁶ operating during the same period, such as

“... historiographical production was long associated with the construction of nation-states because it contributed to creating a national identity and a sense of belonging to the nation through the narrative of a glorious past, which the dominant elites used as an instrument for legitimizing power.” (MEDEIROS, p. 844)

Because Brazil had just experienced the destruction of its institutions through a coup d’état that resulted in the fall of the Empire and the imposition of a republic, an even greater effort of another kind would be necessary: retelling history, replacing its figures, and deconstructing facts and narratives while presenting in their place a new theoretical framework and context better suited to the aspirations of the country’s new rulers. (Author’s Note)

³⁵ Medeiros notes that, beginning in 1938, the MEC included the “National Textbook Commission,” whose central purpose was to filter, according to criteria serving the State’s interests, the information and doctrines transmitted to students in Brazilian schools. In other words, this commission may be understood as having the function of censoring subjects contrary to the Federal Government’s interests while promoting the prevailing ideological structure:

“Education was understood as a vehicle for publicizing the new regime and served as a propaganda instrument, with images and symbols disseminated in the school environment that evoked a new national consciousness. Primers were instruments for indoctrinating children. These publications, as well as textbooks themselves, were both products and producers of the political and social contexts of the period and were used as instruments for legitimizing power and transmitting values and ideologies. Two educational primers produced or funded by the DIP are analyzed by Schmitz and Costa (2015): ‘Getúlio Vargas: o amigo das crianças’ [‘Getúlio Vargas: The Children’s Friend’] (1940) and ‘Getúlio Vargas para crianças’ [‘Getúlio Vargas for Children’] (1942). According to the authors, both were simple, readily accessible texts intended for students of various ages. Their objective was to ‘shape the desired behavior’ and disseminate the Estado Novo’s conception of the nation.” (MEDEIROS, p. 850)

³⁶ “In addition to using propaganda to disseminate the regime’s political ideas and legitimize its power, the subject of History and the teaching of morals and civics were directed toward the same objectives. Themes and methodologies involving a critical

Hitler's Nazism, Mussolini's Fascism, and Stalin's Communism.

Allowing for the appropriate differences in scale and specific nuances, it may be stated that this education policy, centered on the State as the primary rationale of Brazilian socioeconomic life and on rulers as those responsible for leading the people toward progress, survived the Vargas period and continued throughout virtually the entire twentieth century. It reached a point of relative exhaustion in 1985, with the end of the military regime established in 1964 following another coup d'état.

This implies, with some degree of certainty, that throughout almost the entire first century of republican rule in Brazil, public education policies fluctuated between exclusion and indoctrination. Under a system that was sometimes decentralized and sometimes vertically organized, these policies primarily benefited the political and economic interests of dominant regional groups and were rarely used as instruments for the population's professional training, intellectual emancipation, and citizenship.

In the same vein, the exhaustion of the Ministry of Education's original characteristics is described as relative because, despite certain limited advances, it continues to retain authority over the principal decisions affecting virtually the entire Brazilian education system. From elementary schools to university graduate programs, most education policies and *public funding*³⁷ are, at some stage, subject to review by

historical approach were rendered unviable under the Estado Novo. The humanities were taught according to traditional models based on triumphalist and simplified historical narratives and the glorification of Brazilian heroes, with the aim of fostering a strong State whose supporting pillars included strengthening the sense of national identity. (...) The president was also the object of a personality cult, with his personal achievements and those of his government magnified in official propaganda and within the school environment." (CAVAZZANI and CUNHA, 2017)

³⁷ Through the Ministry of Education, the Federal Government directs and distributes resources to every municipality in Brazil. Between 2018 and 2022, R\$467.07 billion was allocated as follows:

2018 – R\$95.59 billion (US\$25.15 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2018) 2019 – R\$94.47 billion (US\$24.66 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2019) 2020 – R\$88.08 billion (US\$16.61 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2020) 2021 – R\$96.06 billion (US\$19.60 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2021) 2022 – R\$101.51 billion (US\$19.55 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2022)

(Source: Federal Government of Brazil, Transparency Portal: <https://portaldatransparencia.gov.br/funcoes/12-educacao?ano=2022>)

the Federal Government through the MEC and *other bodies*³⁸ *directly or indirectly*³⁹ associated with it.

One of the most striking examples of this continuity is the National Textbook and Teaching Materials Program (Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático – PNLD). Directly linked to the National Fund for Education Development (Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação – FNDE), the PNLD is responsible for selecting, purchasing, and distributing teaching materials annually to public educational institutions throughout Brazil.

Although it presents itself as an instrument intended to “*democratize access to sources of information and culture; promote reading and encourage students to adopt an investigative attitude; and support teachers’ professional development, continuing education, and autonomy*⁴⁰”, under the principle of ensuring “*respect for pluralism of ideas and pedagogical approaches; respect for social, cultural, and regional diversity; and respect for the pedagogical autonomy of educational institutions*⁴¹”, what is observed in the PNLD, as in the past, is the selection of textbooks aligned with the political interests and ideological orientations of the groups occupying the central spaces of power⁴².

³⁸ One of the principal agencies used to distribute Federal Government resources to Brazilian municipalities is the National Fund for Education Development (Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação – FNDE). Between 2018 and 2022, this autonomous federal agency alone distributed R\$228.1 billion to municipal governments. These resources are used to fund investments in elementary schools. During these years, the distribution was as follows:

2018 – R\$47.68 billion (US\$12.54 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2018) 2019 – R\$43.59 billion (US\$11.47 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2019) 2020 – R\$37.66 billion (US\$7.17 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2020) 2021 – R\$45.56 billion (US\$9.29 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2021) 2022 – R\$53.61 billion (US\$10.32 billion, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2022)

(Source: Federal Government of Brazil, Transparency Portal: <https://portaldatransparencia.gov.br/orgaos/26298?ano=2022>)

³⁹ Another agency receiving federal resources is the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico – CNPq), established in 1951 under the name National Research Council. Between 2018 and 2022, the CNPq received R\$5.85 billion from the Federal Budget, divided as follows:

2018 – R\$1.24 billion (US\$362.3 million, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2018) 2019 – R\$1.39 billion (US\$365.78 million, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2019) 2020 – R\$1.20 billion (US\$228.57 million, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2020) 2021 – R\$1.04 billion (US\$212.24 million, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2021) 2022 – R\$981.23 million (US\$189.6 million, at the average US dollar exchange rate in June 2022)

Source: Federal Government of Brazil, Transparency Portal: <https://portaldatransparencia.gov.br/orgaos/20501?ano=2022>

⁴⁰ Although the program claims to guarantee teachers’ autonomy in choosing the teaching materials distributed, what is observed, *broadly speaking*, is the provision of a limited number of titles selected through a top-down process under the same methodological and ideological guidelines. Consequently, teachers’ autonomy regarding their ability to decide which approach to use in the classroom is effectively taken away because a small group of people has already evaluated, purchased, and supplied the books before the teachers can make that decision. (Author’s Note)

⁴¹ These principles are set out in Decree No. 9,099/2017, which regulates the responsibilities and purposes of the PNLD. The document is available on the Chamber of Deputies Portal: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/2017/decreto-9099-18-julho-2017-785224-publicacaooriginal-153392-pe.html>

⁴² It must be considered that, despite the legislator’s good intentions, most elementary and upper secondary schools in Brazil operate with scarce financial resources. This fact makes it necessary to recognize that virtually all of them become dependent on

PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIOLOGY IN UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Martins and Moser note that Sociology received very different treatment in Brazil from that observed in Europe, where it originated as an autonomous science. In France, for example, it was added to the list of subjects in the standard elementary and lower secondary curriculum in 1887. In Brazil, the same occurred more than a century later and, even then, remained highly *precarious*⁴³ for ten years, becoming an effective component of the school curriculum only in 2006⁴⁴.

Nevertheless, even after legislation ensured its consolidation as a subject in Brazilian school curricula, Sociology still appears to suffer from a significant lack of legitimacy, not only among teaching staff in public education systems throughout the country, but also within the Federal Government itself. Since the Ministry's establishment, the Federal Government, through the Ministry of Education, has concentrated all the principal guidelines governing the structure of Brazil's education policy within its own authority.

Apart from the fact that Brazil has experienced few years of effective democracy since the Republican Coup of 1889 and that, even today, it still cannot claim to be a country in which individual

the teaching materials distributed by the Federal Government through the PNLD, given their inability to reject this policy and adopt their own system for selecting teaching materials better suited to their circumstances or to the methodology adopted by their teaching staff. (Author's Note)

⁴³ "The year 1887 is generally identified as marking Sociology's introduction into official curricula through Émile Durkheim in France, whereas in Brazil Sociology did not reenter the country's educational curricula until August 11, 2006. In 1996, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law indicated the need for sociological knowledge in the exercise of citizenship, but the subject remained optional in the upper secondary school curriculum." (MARTINS and MOSER, p. 119)

⁴⁴ The importance of the subject is recognized in the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases – LDB), Article 36 of which establishes that, "at the end of upper secondary education, students shall demonstrate (...) mastery of the knowledge of philosophy and sociology necessary for the exercise of citizenship." Similarly, Article 10, item I, paragraph 2, of National Education Council Resolution No. 3/98 states that "schools' pedagogical proposals shall ensure interdisciplinary and contextualized treatment of (...) the knowledge of philosophy and sociology necessary for the exercise of citizenship." Finally, the National Curriculum Parameters (Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais – PCNs) for Upper Secondary Education, Human Sciences and Their Technologies (2000, p. 11), state that "the objective was to affirm that knowledge from these (...) disciplines is indispensable to citizens' basic education, both with regard to the principal concepts and methods with which they operate and with regard to concrete situations in everyday social life." (MARTINS and MOSER, p. 119)

*freedoms*⁴⁵ are fully *respected*⁴⁶, other factors contributing to Sociology's distance both from school classrooms and from its role as a substantive instrument for analyzing the nuances of Brazilian reality must be considered.

Among these factors, perhaps the most relevant is the failure of most early Brazilian sociologists to commit to a broad and systematic approach to the objects and issues they analyzed. Although their discourse did not depart substantially from a traditional scientific structure, their methodology was never concerned with grounding itself in measurable data or objectively verifiable events. *As a rule*, it combined rhetorical devices with personal conceptions to construct theses that justified diffuse subjectivities within an economically and politically dominant group. Positivism and Social Darwinism therefore consistently provided a comfortable space in which these authors could ground their beliefs and concepts.

Far from absolving later sociologists of the theoretical failings of this first generation, this fact also helps explain the tacit adherence of many intellectuals to other ideological traditions. Rather than defending rational freedom and full citizenship, these traditions also viewed society through a vertically structured lens in which the State apparatus, if not dictatorial power itself, merely changed hands without disappearing. Within this context, the worldview advanced by the doctrines of classical Marxism acquired particular prominence, especially during the Cold War.

The confrontation between these two currents may have reached its height in the discussions

⁴⁵ Brazil ranks 110th in the global press freedom ranking prepared by the international organization Reporters Without Borders. The country's situation improved slightly between 2021 and 2022, but is still considered a cause for concern. In South America, Brazil's situation is better only than those of Bolivia (126th), Colombia (145th), and Venezuela (159th). (Source: Reporters Without Borders: <https://rsf.org/pt-br/ranking>)

Another similar ranking, prepared by the English nongovernmental organization ARTICLE 19, indicates that the country is experiencing a new wave of attacks on freedom of expression and ranks 89th in a list of 116 nations. Between 2011 and 2022, Brazil lost 38 points on a scale from 0 to 100 and saw its status fall from an "open nation" to one with "restricted freedom." During the same period, its performance was better only than those of China and Afghanistan. (Source: ARTICLE 19: <https://artigo19.org/>)

⁴⁶ According to the Democracy Index, prepared and published by the British magazine The Economist since 2006, Brazil currently ranks 47th, with a score of 6.82, placing it in a slightly better position than the average for other Latin American countries (6.37). Nevertheless, the country's situation is worse than those of Bulgaria (7.03), South Africa (7.24), and Botswana (7.81). Although unofficial, the ranking seeks to measure relevant aspects of democracy worldwide and considers the following factors when calculating its scores:

(1) the electoral process and the pluralism of represented ideas; (2) civil liberties; (3) the functioning of government; (4) political participation; and (5) political culture. (Author's Note)

surrounding Guerreiro Ramos and Florestan Fernandes, particularly regarding the construction of a Sociology with genuinely Latin American characteristics.

On the one hand, Ramos agreed with Sílvio Romero, Oliveira Viana, Euclides da Cunha, Alberto Torres, and Caio Prado Jr., arguing that the Sociology practiced in South America generally, and Brazil specifically, had a “*consular and canned*” character. It was reproduced indiscriminately, uncritically, and without any filtering, exactly as it had been produced in Europe and the United States. Sociology, he argued, should instead be applied to:

“... studies devoted to understanding the nation and clarifying possible paths toward development, whether through general and synthetic explanations, such as those developed by Alberto Torres, Oliveira Vianna, Azevedo Amaral, and Caio Prado Jr., or by illuminating relevant individual aspects of Brazilian reality, such as *Geografia da fome* [The Geography of Hunger] by Josué de Castro and *A vida privada e a organização política nacional* [Private Life and National Political Organization] by Nestor Duarte.” (Bariani Jr., pp. 11 and 12)

Florestan Fernandes would respond to this nationalizing interpretation of Sociology by observing that abstract theory and “*the endogenous factors of knowledge are more important, universal, and capable of being transferred from the most developed centers to Brazilian conditions*”⁴⁷. Fernandes proceeded from the perspective, established in other countries, that:

“... in a country such as Brazil, which is excessively heterogeneous, the way to ensure reliable knowledge of the national and regional social structure would be to develop studies of particular features, since only on the basis of these, and within the requirements of scientific rigor, could the findings be generalized. To neglect such studies would be to disregard all the progress achieved through the empirical and inductive development of sociological research over the past seventy-five years.” (Bariani Jr., p. 14)

In relation to the role of the *intelligentsia*, the two thinkers also presented divergent views. Luiz Werneck Vianna identified this dichotomy and described it as a field of tension in which Florestan Fernandes defended the direct action of an institutionally active scientific community, while Guerreiro

⁴⁷ Bariani Jr., p. 20;

Ramos proceeded from the principle that action should focus on the mechanisms and structure of the State (Cf. Bariani Jr., pp. 22 and 23).

“Where Florestan sees institutionalized science operating according to universal standards of performance, Guerreiro sees intellectuals participating in the organization of a social consciousness consistent with national particularities in the corresponding historical ‘phase’; where Florestan, from the perspective of an innovator and organizer, sees structural obstacles within society and adopts an institutional position, Guerreiro, closer to national decision-making centers, sees obstacles in the agents of power and adopts a more directly political position. Consequently, where one seeks structural change in the social conditions of existence, the other turns toward changing national consciousness; where Florestan emphasizes applied social science and rational planning, Guerreiro advocates constructing an effective ideology for a national project⁴⁸.” (Cohn, p. 04)

It is important to emphasize that, even at that time, these two theorists, as well as other sociologists, were already addressing the question of introducing Sociology into Brazilian school curricula. In 1953, Guerreiro Ramos defended the thesis that:

“... teaching sociology in schools would not merely be a way of popularizing information, but a means of disseminating critical awareness of national problems and promoting a degree of emancipation from cultural colonialism. It would constitute another front in the struggle against the evils of transplantation, now with reference to everyday life, common sense, and the non-specialist population’s perception of Brazilian reality. Sociology, even as a school subject, would serve a liberating and awareness-building purpose, as a form of knowledge capable of overcoming alienated naïveté.” (Bariani Jr., p. 13)

Florestan Fernandes addressed this question one year later, during the First Brazilian Congress of Sociology, held in São Paulo. He appeared highly skeptical regarding the tacit introduction of the subject into Brazil’s core school curriculum and was described by Bariani Jr. as follows:

⁴⁸ Cohn further concludes his argument by stating that this dichotomy took this form because the two theorists adopted different, although not entirely divergent, frames of reference:

“For Guerreiro, what matters is a political environment par excellence: the replacement of mere class predominance with the capacity of that same class to assume effective leadership of society, with a view to achieving the objective that matters to him, namely, an autonomous, that is, noncolonial, nation. For Florestan, by contrast, the central concern is structural change in society through appropriate social techniques aimed at establishing a democratic, that is, nonoligarchic and still less autocratic, society. (...)

Guerreiro viewed the world through political eyes. He was far more a party man focused on mobilizing support within society than Florestan, who, in this debate, appeared more as an engaged academic professional, committed to participation but unwilling to dispense with well-grounded knowledge when participating.” (COHN, pp. 4 and 25)

“Florestan Fernandes appeared somewhat skeptical about the prospects for successfully teaching the subject within the Brazilian education system of the time. Changes would be required to make the undertaking viable. If it were properly directed, however, it could ‘help prepare new generations to use rational techniques for addressing economic, political, administrative, and social problems, which will presumably have to be employed on a large scale in the country within a short period of time.’” (Bariani Jr., p. 15)

These two perspectives on Sociology and its role in society can therefore still be observed today in various respects, but most profoundly in the central dichotomy between Fernandes and Ramos:

- (1). On the one hand, Florestan Fernandes’s view that sociological practice should occupy a place as an institutional instrument for interpreting social facts, individual action, and conflicts between agents and groups;
- (2). On the other, Guerreiro Ramos’s view that Sociology could not merely be a theoretical tool available to academics, but should instead be realized through direct activist intervention in society, shaping it with appropriate emphasis on political action.

Neither of these perspectives appears to have become hegemonic. It may nevertheless be argued that both contributed to constructing another arena populated by various players whose sole interest is to secure control, through political and ideological activism, of the State and its most important institutions, including the Brazilian education system, so that they may impose their doctrines and ideologies upon society.

In this battlefield, the Social Sciences generally, and Sociology specifically, appear to be acquiring the status of increasingly useful and powerful weapons for recruiting followers through ideologically directed discourse. Respect for scientific rigor and the comprehensive examination of facts for understanding reality, developing critical thought, and fostering full citizenship are assigned little importance.

Students, subjected to textbooks previously selected by the MEC and to teachers’ classroom discourse, face the difficult task of taking sides and becoming activists in the realm of ideas, confronting divergent viewpoints without receiving the theoretical and methodological framework needed to

understand what is actually at stake.

Ultimately, the first victim of this war of narratives is unquestionably students' intellectual autonomy. From the outset, they are assigned one of two roles: at best, priests of prepackaged ideological doctrines and, at worst, merely another member of a flock of educated parrots.

THE SUMMARY OF A TRAGIC OPERA

The situation revealed by the responses provided by the teachers interviewed may be described as challenging for everyone involved in the school environment.

First, it must be considered that the population studied forms part of a national reality of social exclusion that has historically divided the Brazilian education system into two groups: one intended for a minority able to pay for quality, and another, *far more numerous*⁴⁹ group, subjected to public policies that are largely ineffective in *educating individuals*⁵⁰, both for exercising citizenship and for participating in the labor market.

Regarding the relationship between formal education and preparing students for the labor market, it may be stated, as already observed, that this perception dates to the late nineteenth century. According to Oliveira, however, it gained still greater force beginning in the 1980s. From this new perspective, he explains, views regarding the relationship between education and the economy changed because of the expansion of new technologies:

⁴⁹ Data published in INEP's 2020 Education Census show that 84.1% of upper secondary students in Brazil are enrolled in public schools, leaving the average recorded in previous surveys virtually unchanged: 2016 – 84.8% in public schools and 11.3% in private educational institutions; 2017 – 84.4% in public schools and 11.2% in private educational institutions; 2018 – 84.7% in public schools and 11.4% in private educational institutions; 2019 – 83.9% in public schools and 12.2% in private educational institutions; 2020 – 84.1% in public schools and 12.3% in private educational institutions. (Source: INEP, 2020 School Census, p. 27)

⁵⁰ According to an OECD report on Brazil's results in the most recent PISA assessment: "... multidimensional inequalities relating to parental education, geography, and race, as well as socioeconomic background, indicate that universal solutions alone will not be sufficient. Brazil must implement comprehensive measures tailored to the individual circumstances of its most vulnerable citizens. Brazil must also improve the quality of basic education: half of Brazilian students failed to achieve the minimum level of proficiency, PISA Level 2, in reading in 2018, while only 1.4% were high performers, at Level 5 or above. The OECD averages for these measures were 23% and 8.8%, respectively. (...)

The OECD also observed that Brazil faces high dropout rates in upper secondary education, reflecting a low level of fundamental social and cognitive skills. It also identified the continuing challenge of ensuring that every young person leaves school with the skills required by the labor market." (OCDE, p. 05)

“Since the 1980s, the national and international literature has included various studies highlighting the importance of changes in educational processes aimed at training a new type of worker. Most of these publications, taking productive restructuring and economic globalization as their points of reference, demonstrated that the productive sector was beginning to demand a new type of worker (...) The only way for schools to demonstrate that they remained current in terms of their contribution to this new environment would be to restructure their practices and adopt the development of competencies as the guiding principle in preparing their students. This would provide a means of acquiring new capabilities that would ensure entry into or continued participation in the labor market.” (Oliveira, p. 80)

Although some aspects of the new structure of Brazilian education generated disagreement, certain issues were amenable to consensus among theorists, government agents, and business leaders. These areas of convergence included:

- (1) recognition that the high student dropout rate exposed the poor quality of teaching in schools;
- (2) agreement that the low level of learning among graduates and the high number of students repeating grades constituted critical problems that had to be addressed;
- (3) recognition that, as a result, schools made little contribution to helping young people obtain suitable positions in the labor market; and
- (4) growing concern that, without a place in the labor market, many young people would be recruited by organized crime and violence would reach proportions indicative of social anomie.

The solution adopted was therefore to align government efforts with initiatives that expanded the provision of labor-market training in parallel with the *conventional education system*⁵¹. Almost a decade after the conclusion of the last major attempt in this direction, it can be said that the positive outcomes

⁵¹ “Given the certainty that reversing the tensions experienced by society, resulting from increased violence involving young people, would not occur merely by guaranteeing access to school, numerous government initiatives were established with the aim of reversing, through the actions of state, municipal, and especially federal governments, the lack of future prospects experienced by Brazilian youth. Accordingly, programs directed toward young people’s vocational training were implemented during the past two decades.” (OLIVEIRA, p. 81)

This idea became virtually a mantra repeated by every administration occupying the Palácio do Planalto since that time. Between 1995 and 2014, three major government plans were launched with the intention of integrating young Brazilians into the labor market: the National Worker Qualification Plan (Plano Nacional de Qualificação do Trabalhador – PLANFOR), which operated from 1995 to 2003; the National Qualification Program (Programa Nacional de Qualificação – PNQ); and the National Program for Access to Technical Education and Employment (Programa Nacional de Acesso ao Ensino Técnico e Emprego – Pronatec). (Author’s Note)

originally envisaged were only partially achieved. Although many young people succeeded in gaining access to employment opportunities previously denied to them because of an absolute lack of qualifications, these initiatives did not help resolve the problem of educational quality in Brazil. Some researchers have even questioned the Federal Government's capacity to develop an adequate education policy for the *country*⁵².

As if this were not enough, the racial issue underlies the problem. Although 134 years have passed since the enactment of the Golden Law, the clear remnants of the racism that shaped the thinking of a significant portion of Brazil's political and economic elite until the beginning of the twentieth century remain *highly perceptible*⁵³, if not in discourse, then at least in their *consequences*⁵⁴. For many young Black Brazilians in the twenty-first century who have been denied access to any form of high-quality education, the only remaining option continues to be *low-paid*⁵⁵ informal employment, which tends to

⁵² "... certain studies of an essentially critical nature criticize the government's superficial treatment of the problem and the lack of foundations for the proposals presented. (...) ... the proposals for reforming upper secondary education presented by the Federal Government and adopted by the states lack solid foundations and cannot be justified on pedagogical, economic, or institutional grounds. In fact, despite the rhetoric of globalization, industrialized countries with greater experience in education are moving in the opposite direction from that proposed by the Brazilian authorities. In other words, the reform runs counter to what is being done in upper secondary education in the world's leading industrialized countries. (...)

... the great risk associated with this type of initiative is that it will further disadvantage students from the poorest segments of society." (ARAÚJO E OLIVEIRA, p. 02)

⁵³ "According to Fonseca, other factors contributed to the crystallization of this mentality. The first was that heavy labor and manual occupations were assigned to enslaved people. This not only aggravated the widespread belief that such occupations were intended for those abandoned by fortune, but also prevented free workers, for economic reasons, from practicing certain professions. Another factor was that the predominantly intellectual education provided by the Jesuits to the children of settlers distanced 'the socially highest elements' from all forms of physical labor and manual occupations. Fonseca emphasizes that this attitude was so deeply rooted that one requirement for holding public office was that the candidate must never have performed manual labor." (GARCIA, p. 01)

⁵⁴ The School Census published by the Ministry of Education in 2021, using data from 2020, indicates that the highest rates of age-grade distortion in upper secondary education occur in public schools, in 32.9% of cases, and typically involve male, Black, and low-income students, with the rate among male students reaching 38.2%.

Some of these students attempt to return to school as adults, after the age of 20, by attending classes through specific programs such as Youth and Adult Education (Educação de Jovens e Adultos – EJA). In this case, 68.1% of enrolled students are Black and 30.7% are white. (Author's Note; Source: INEP, Ministry of Education, 2021, 2020 School Census)

⁵⁵ Many of these people, finding themselves unable to maintain the dual burden of employment and schooling, ultimately leave the classroom permanently. School dropout therefore results from economic needs that must be met immediately, but it deprives these young people of opportunities to obtain better jobs in the future. Oliveira offers the same interpretation:

"Entry into the labor market has a direct impact on the continuation of young people's schooling and vocational training. Because, for most poorer young people, basic education is virtually their only opportunity to acquire the minimum knowledge required by the labor market, any measure restricting access to school knowledge increases social inequality." (OLIVEIRA, p. 84)

Melo Rodrigues uses data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística – IBGE) to corroborate this claim by presenting objective data:

"According to the results presented, the 2018 Continuous National Household Sample Survey (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua – PNADC) indicates a substantial difference in upper secondary completion rates when compared by

become permanent.

In addition to the economic dimension, equal attention must be given to the inclusion of young people as citizens or, more precisely, as social agents equipped with the minimum technical and theoretical instruments required to act upon their reality and modify it according to their particular needs and aspirations. In other words, from the students' perspective, if school discourse, texts, subjects, and assignments cannot equip them to strive for a future with a higher quality of life, then the effort required to attend school every day is not merely burdensome but *useless*⁵⁶.

These students' withdrawal from school must therefore be understood through a threefold prism. On the one hand, it constitutes a choice in favor of immediate survival. At the same time, it represents a rejection of theoretical, encyclopedic, and credentialist knowledge associated with the tradition of an ostensibly scientific cultural veneer that sustains the "*civilizing*" discourse of part of the national *intelligentsia*. Finally, it constitutes a rejection of the political and ideological proselytism of teachers and authors who reduce classrooms and textbooks to revolutionary pamphlets serving a particular political party or interest group. None of these paths, in any event, is fully capable of engaging with students' realities or with the environments in which they live.

Using *Human Capital Theory*⁵⁷ to illuminate the situation, it may be stated that, by rejecting

color or race and sex. The upper secondary completion rate among Black or Brown people between the ages of 20 and 22, 61.8%, is lower than that of the white population in the same age group, 76.8%. (...)

The lower upper secondary completion rate among Black or Brown men between the ages of 20 and 22 consequently affects entry into higher education, given that they fall below the qualification level required to continue their education. It also directly affects these individuals' living conditions because it is recognized that, in many situations, those with higher levels of education are more likely to earn higher incomes in the labor market." (MELO RODRIGUES, pp. 04 and 05)

⁵⁶ This perspective is corroborated by Sposito and Pochmann, as Oliveira emphasizes:

"We assume the existence of a crisis in the relationship between young people and schools. Young people question the influence of school on their future lives because the institution has little significance for them in the present (Sposito, 1993). Public upper secondary schools generally disregard the fact that their students have histories of their own beyond the school walls. Although the increase in the level of education among young Brazilian workers is unquestionable, it has not been sufficient to ensure that they obtain employment (Pochmann, 2001, 2008)." (OLIVEIRA, p. 82)

⁵⁷ Developed by Dr. Theodore Schultz, a Nobel laureate in Economics, and subsequently expanded by Dr. Gary Becker, Human Capital Theory seeks to incorporate individuals' knowledge and skills into the mechanisms involved in producing goods and generating wealth.

Fundamentally, Human Capital Theory seeks to demonstrate that knowledge is as important as factory labor in increasing the economic performance of a company, sector, or country. Improving workers' access to quality education, expanding the provision of technical and vocational courses, and ensuring broad support for health and well-being would therefore generate better economic outcomes in the future.

conventional education, these young people would be choosing to abandon an *investment*⁵⁸ that, from their perspective, would yield little or no return at that stage of their lives. It would therefore seem more viable to invest their time and effort in work that provides sufficient income to support themselves and their dependents.

From the perspective of the *Theory of Comparative Advantage*⁵⁹, it may be argued that these students become captive to the market because, by relinquishing any form of specialization, they cease to be competitive and capable of securing *higher earnings*⁶⁰, in the labor market. Here too, the loss is twofold: the worker, who can offer the market nothing beyond physical labor, will be employed in an increasingly limited number of tasks; and the employer, who, lacking better-qualified workers, will suffer reduced productivity.

Drawing on the *Theory of Economic Development*⁶¹, the conclusion is that students subjected to low-quality education and young people who leave school will experience a *deterioration in the terms of*

Expanded human capital would produce benefits in two directions: workers could sell their labor at a price consistent with their new skills, while business owners would gain greater efficiency and productivity within their companies. (Author's Note)

⁵⁸ "... a worker's decision to increase their human capital will be determined by the expected lifetime return on that investment, weighted against the costs involved and the available alternatives. The investment is expected to be made as early as possible so that the individual can fully maximize the resulting benefits (HECKMAN, LOCHNER, and TODD, 2003).

In this context, various factors may exert an influence, including individual characteristics, social status, labor-market uncertainty, and age. Human Capital Theory states that investments in vocational training and schooling are concentrated in youth." (SOUZA, p. 06)

⁵⁹ David Ricardo argues that, within the international organization of economies, each country would become more competitive by seeking to specialize in exploiting the economic sectors in which it possessed a comparative advantage over other countries. According to his thesis, commercial relations among nations would therefore generate cumulative gains for all participants. (Author's Note)

⁶⁰ "It should be recalled that, in Neoclassical Theory, a worker's wage is equal to the marginal product of their labor. The remuneration received by workers would therefore be equivalent to the value of their economic contribution to the company in which they are employed.

According to Neri (2006), scholars of growth, development, and labor increasingly emphasize the importance of schooling in the lives of nations and individuals, as well as the fact that education is the principal isolated observable determinant of income." (SOUZA, p. 04)

⁶¹ In his Theory of Economic Development, the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch argues that David Ricardo was mistaken in predicting that equilibrium would emerge in the international market if the Theory of Comparative Advantage were applied. Drawing on Keynes's theses, Prebisch argued that technological development and direct engagement with a workforce operating within this context would allow industrialized economies always to retain competitive advantages over countries supplying raw materials, thereby establishing, over time, a hierarchical commercial relationship between the two blocs. (Author's Note)

*trade*⁶². As time passes, in the absence of any *significant change*⁶³ in overall labor-market conditions, their raw material, namely, their capacity for efficient production, will encounter twofold difficulties. On the one hand, they will compete with other, better-qualified suppliers; on the other, they will have to sell their product at a lower price to anyone willing to purchase it.

As this process is repeated generation after generation, the Brazilian education system, by structuring itself in a manner that excludes most of the population, creates an opportunity cost for the social fabric generally and the national economy specifically. This cost deepens and reinforces Brazil's position as a minor supporting actor on the international geopolitical stage.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Although it is recognized that a problem as extensive and complex as Brazilian education cannot be easily resolved, several proposals may be developed from the responses provided by the state public school teachers who participated in the study underlying this paper:

- (1) ***Ending bureaucratic centralism:*** – Despite the extensive discussion of autonomy for schools and teachers in the numerous articles and provisions composing the legal framework governing the Brazilian education system, discourse clearly does not correspond to practice. Brazil continues to reproduce practices associated with the statist, centralizing, and inefficient model introduced by the Marquis of Pombal and reinforced under every dictatorial regime the country has experienced since the Republican Coup of 1889.
- (2) ***Autonomy for schools*** – As a consequence of the first point, it is necessary to agree that schools must be guaranteed autonomy. Among other things, this means that educational

⁶² In the case of students and young workers, the deterioration in the terms of trade proposed by Prebisch occurs when employers select candidates to fill job vacancies. The best positions will be occupied by candidates with stronger technical qualifications, better skills, and more substantial résumés. As the higher-paying positions are filled by these individuals, only subordinate jobs remain. Although these require fewer qualifications, they also pay lower wages and, in many cases, demand a greater volume of work. The labor supplied by this second group therefore enters the calculation at a comparative disadvantage relative to that of its competitors. (Author's Note)

⁶³ *Ceteris paribus* assumption. (Author's Note)

institutions require greater freedom to select the teaching materials and methodology most appropriate for their students. Contrary to the claims of some commentators, decentralizing practices have proven effective in various countries and reduce the degree of direct interference by ill-intentioned politicians and bureaucrats in school teaching materials and education policies.

- (3) ***Full-time education*** – Unlike Brazil, the countries achieving the best results in educational quality worldwide provide full-time schooling. In addition to having more time to address relevant content, teachers can devote greater attention to assisting students with research and extracurricular assignments. With greater autonomy, as proposed in the second point, and more time to serve students, teachers can develop mechanisms that facilitate learning.
- (4) ***Greater financial investment in basic education*** – Brazil has a long history of imbalance between investment in basic education and investment in higher education. Although many theorists have examined the subject, little progress has been made over the past four decades, and schools continue to depend on inadequate resources to teach literacy and prepare students to make vital decisions in the future. As long as elementary education is treated like a beggar, our students will remain in the state of intellectual destitution in which they have historically been confined.
- (5) ***Improved technical training for teachers*** – Although many teachers make considerable efforts to provide their students with appropriate and useful knowledge, it must also be recognized that a substantial proportion of the teaching profession enters the classroom primarily in the service of ideological movements, trade unions, and political parties. These teachers devote little attention to teaching students anything beyond a pale reduction of reality based on their own particular and class-based interpretations. Universities, university centers, and colleges must train professionals who are genuinely committed to knowledge rather than to ready-made, fully formed discourse repeated ad nauseam and easily found in any pamphlet

cast to the wind.

The convergence of all these observations lies in the central subject of this study: the quality of teaching materials and the application of sociological theories.

Without disregarding the criticisms made by the teachers participating in the study, it must be recognized that the teaching materials retain familiar shortcomings observed throughout the history of Brazilian education:

- (1) teachers did not participate in selecting the teaching materials distributed and were required to accept them tacitly;
- (2) the content fluctuates between tedious encyclopedism that alienates students and pseudoscientific pamphleteering, to use Florestan Fernandes's expression, that seeks to recruit minds for an army of young revolutionaries;
- (3) the content lacks sufficient analytical or practical depth and avoids criticizing the authors presented, implying that all these theorists possess a universal truth that must be accepted without question; and
- (4) the supplementary resources proposed in the teaching materials are accessible only to a very small proportion of students attending Mato Grosso's state public schools, reinforcing the historical practice of "*comprehensive education for the minority*."

Finally, the relevance of classical sociological authors to teaching the subject must be emphasized. Authors are recognized as classics when, regardless of when they published their ideas, they continue to serve as theoretical and analytical points of departure for contemporary sociologists. The relevance of Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber must therefore be acknowledged, since their names continue to contribute to complex reflections on numerous issues of importance to different social groups throughout the world. In Shiota's words, the classics:

“... remain important to contemporary researchers because they establish the discipline’s basic criteria; define fundamental problems and theoretical perspectives that continue to be revisited; possess a remarkable capacity for empathy, perception, intuition, interpretation, and understanding of human action; are masters at selecting and reconstructing aspects of the social world and establishing relationships, interrelationships, and comparisons; and display acute social sensitivity and powers of observation, together with a rare ability to capture the modern world in shorthand, thereby grounding sociology as a scientific discipline.” (Shiota, p. 251)

The presence of the classics of Sociology in any teaching material for the subject is therefore a *sine qua non* for understanding Sociology itself as an independent science. Far from constituting an archaeological examination of ideas, their analysis continues to require profound reflection, regardless of whether one agrees with them.

Issues such as traditional or charismatic authority, culture and morality, coercive power, the division of social labor, conflicts of interest, and labor exploitation remain before the eyes of sociologists and society generally as points of departure for debates, seminal scientific articles, reflections, lectures, books, and doctoral dissertations.

Beyond the scientific sphere, these classical theorists also inspire numerous fields, including *culture, economics, communication, law, labor, the arts, and politics*⁶⁴. Without their contributions, much of what is now understood as “*public opinion*” would exhibit an immense representational deficit that would be difficult to remedy in any respect.

Regarding Brazilian society, for example, the influence of these three authors, alongside Auguste Comte, is striking. Shiota emphasizes that, without Weber and Marx, much of the reflection on Brazilian society produced throughout the twentieth century would have suffered significant conceptual deterioration:

⁶⁴ “... it is impossible to read a classic without becoming immersed in reflection with every sentence or set of ideas because such reading requires readers to go beyond appearances and the literal meaning of sentences. A classic, he explains, differs from other works precisely because it contains something different, original, and unpredictable for the reader. Consequently, in general, ‘these are books which, the more we think we know them through hearsay, the more, when actually read, they reveal themselves to be new, unexpected, and unprecedented.’” (MENEGETTI, p. 697)

“Concern with nation-building as a means of resolving national problems associated with underdevelopment and dependence created a cognitive identity for sociology that is evident in the reception of the authors we consider classics.

Weber and Marx are the authors who exerted the greatest influence on native social and political thought. They are among the most frequently cited authors in theses and dissertations and constitute the principal reference points in the major controversy animating the literature on interpretations of Brazil. (...) Our social conditions and the cognitive identity of Brazilian sociology guided the appropriations of these classics’ work.” (Shiota, p. 252)

Because of its current configuration, inherited both from Comtean positivism and from contemporary demands for the education and training of young people for the labor market and the exercise of citizenship, the presence of these classics in upper secondary teaching materials used in public schools is essential. Their reflections provide points of departure for diverse interpretations of the reality surrounding these young people.

Rather than promoting purely encyclopedic knowledge and equipping students with a handful of catchphrases useful in student union debates or as a form of intellectual *pedigree*, engagement with the questions raised by Durkheim, Marx, and Weber should introduce concepts with which students themselves can interact throughout their school lives and beyond. Providing these mechanisms for reflection is the central challenge facing teachers and textbook authors. The more intellectually honest their teachers’ lessons are, the better students will be able to engage with the world.

Pamphleteering and ideological proselytism therefore have no place in the debate because these positions occupy the space that should belong to scientific doubt and genuine inquiry. If a “*truth*” is imposed *a priori*, there is nothing left to question or doubt, since science has given way to radical dogmatism. Respecting this principle means providing students with the freedom necessary to develop their own intellectual autonomy.

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