

Academic Success and Failure among Black Students in Rural Education

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ABSTRACT – Academic Success and Failure among Black Students in Rural Education. This study investigates the trajectory of black students in primary education and their experiences at rural schools. These students' conditions of access and permanence at school are presented within the general Brazilian context and more specifically for rural education, considering the reality observed at a school in a rural area of Bahia's Recôncavo. The analysis looks at the influence of social capital on the construction of individual and collective trajectories based on the concept of trajectories (Bourdieu, 1986), to understand the social environment and the actions of individuals in everyday life, paying special attention to how practices, language and norms can influence and/or modify favourable trajectories or limit social mobility.

Keywords: Trajectories. Rural Education. Race. Rural Environment.

RESUMO – Sucesso e Fracasso Escolar entre Estudantes Negros na Educação do Campo. A pesquisa investiga a trajetória de estudantes negros na educação básica e suas experiências em uma escola do campo. Apresentam-se as circunstâncias do acesso e permanência desses estudantes a partir do cenário geral no Brasil e, mais especificamente, da educação do campo, considerando a realidade vivenciada em uma escola localizada na zona rural do Recôncavo Baiano. A análise considera a influência do capital social na construção das trajetórias individuais e coletivas apoiada no conceito de trajetórias (Bourdieu, 1986), para a compreensão do meio social e das ações dos indivíduos no cotidiano atentando para como as práticas, linguagens e normas podem influenciar e/ou modificar as trajetórias contribuindo, ou dificultando a mobilidade social.

Palavras-chave: Trajetórias. Educação do Campo. Raça. Meio Rural.

Introduction

Debates¹ surrounding issues of access, permanence and post-permanence at school are ongoing and seek to understand the structural changes underway in education over recent years, particularly in higher education. For primary education, however, together with the historical challenges faced by education more generally, it is necessary to consider the promotion of a project for adherence to study for wide areas of public schooling, in addition to improvements to access, permanence and quality, both for teaching and the facilities on offer. This stems from the fact that the changes underway in higher education have not reached primary education to the same extent. Issues such as race, racism, gender, sexuality, and class, amongst others, have achieved prominence and show the difficulty of trying to understand the area of education without firstly understanding Brazil's history. Romão (2005, p. 11) argues that the majority of Brazilian teachers have no access to these ideas during their training, creating the mistaken understanding that the academic trajectory of black students as shaped exclusively by individual effort. The result has been that "[...] historical processes that at times impeded access, at times permanence, and in many cases, both access and permanence simultaneously, for this demographic in the education system" have tended to be ignored.

What sustains our main argument is observing how underrepresented groups have created new methods of cultural survival and social mobility amidst the violence and exclusion perpetrated by the state, by bourgeois society and by the economic elites. "Today, working in education means dealing with reports that show how schools are places that reproduce social inequalities, at the same time that we seek to create, in this same school, a space of contestation, where we can conceive of the tools to overcome these inequalities" (Brandão, 1983, p. 220).

Brazil's historical and sociocultural formation has structured race relations around a social hierarchy which contributed (and goes on contributing) to maintaining inequality in diverse sectors, especially education. To illustrate this, I employ the PNAD Contínua (2018, p. 02-12) as a starting point, which considers social inequality in Brazil, grounded in race and colour, as its main focus. Overall, this report showed that 1 in 5 black people who lived in rural areas were illiterate. The rate of illiteracy in rural areas among black and brown people is 20.7%, in comparison to 11% among whites, while illiteracy in urban areas affects twice as many black and brown people (6.8%). The rate of graduation from high school for black and brown people is around 61.8%, while it is 76.8% in the white population. Finally, regarding access to university, the numbers are also discrepant, with whites representing 53.2% while black and brown people represent 35.4%.

While the data shows a profound gap between blacks and whites in the education system in terms of access, permanence and completion more generally, the data for education in rural areas, my particu-

lar focus, also show and highlight inequalities. There are social, economic and cultural implications that need to be considered, given that non-completion of primary education inevitably leads to diminished access to higher education. For a black person, not reaching university has consequences, if you manage to reach university, there are even greater consequences that flow on to the community. However, if you do not reach university, one tends to enter precarious employment earlier on and in subaltern positions. It is not that these individuals compete for employment with whites, rather, they take on employment positions historically unoccupied by whites. Place of residence also reflects time spent in school, and if Brazil's allies and laneways have a colour and gender, it is a direct result of this ongoing process of exclusion.

According to Henrique (2002, p. 93), "[...] despite improvements to average levels of schooling of whites and blacks over the century, the pattern of discrimination, that is, the differences in education between whites and blacks remain stable across the generations". Lima, Rios & França (2013) show that the economic growth observed over recent years, despite improving access to education and reducing poverty to a considerable degree, has not generated a real growth in opportunities capable of significantly reducing gender and racial inequalities, with ongoing inequality due in large measure to the durability of the structures that sustain it.

The school environment has historically been geared towards the perpetuation of inequality, with the institutional context, mainly in smaller rural cities in Brazil, frequently being ineffective and even unable to contribute to meaningful change. Even so, schools are one of the few spaces where black children and adolescents have the opportunity to write a social story different to their parents' and/or grandparents', particularly given how schools in rural communities take in numerous students who carry the stigma in Brazil of having little education, of poverty and of ongoing inequality, leading to an even more complex scenario.

The state emerges as one of the vectors capable of generating change to this reality by way of public policy, laws and guidelines that mandate, in the judicial sphere, access or the possibility for access to fundamental rights for the population. At the same time, however, the state also establishes structures (social, moral, elitist, Eurocentric etc.) that make it impossible for these policies to be effectively implemented and to meaningfully reach the target population. Therefore, while Brazilian society "[...] can pride itself on having the most egalitarian and progressive Constitution and legislation on the planet, the laws remain, more often than not, inoperative" (Guimarães, 1995, p. 42).

In Brazil, the official language of the state has been characterized by the exclusion of the population from its formal discourse. Cavalleiro (2005, p. 09) explains that until recently "[...] the Brazilian state did not include categories of racism or racial discrimination to explain the fact that blacks have the lowest levels of human develop-

ment while whites have the highest". This reveals how Brazil, sustained by the fallacy of *racial democracy*, continues to not recognize and deal with the consequences and inequalities stemming from three hundred and eighty-eight years of slavery.

This study seeks to investigate the trajectory of black students in rural settings. In this context, we undertake a reflection about the social factors that influence their experiences in the school environment. Based on the perspectives of Elias (1993) and Bourdieu (1986), we argue that these trajectories are intrinsically marked by the social context they emerge from. However, what other trajectories could these students have followed if they did not come from rural communities or schools, or working-class backgrounds? What possibilities exist for them to break with these patterns given the diverse historical conditions in play? As with other authors, our intention is to problematize the relationship of students with their families, the school community and society at large, and their strategies for resistance amidst the social pressures and inequalities that affect them.

Notably, our research was undertaken in the Recôncavo region of Bahia, in the town of Sapeaçu. The Identity Territory (*Território de identidade*) of Recôncavo da Bahia corresponds to 0.8% of the total area of the state of Bahia, with an area of 4.6 mil km². The town of Sapeaçu, located in the south of the Recôncavo region, among many other towns of this Identity Territory, was chosen for this study given its specific characteristics: location; ease of access; racial makeup and demographic distribution of its population. By comparison with other towns of the territory, it is considered small, with a little over 17,548 inhabitants. Its demographic distribution is such that more than half (53%) its population lives in rural areas. According to data from the IBGE (2014), over 80% of residents in the urban area and nearly 90% of residents in the rural area are self-declared as either black or brown.

Another important factor in choosing this municipality was the data related to education and the influences on the academic success of residents of the town and surrounding rural areas. These offered us a starting point and revealed discrepancies between primary and secondary education. In 2017, when the Primary Education Development Indexes (IDEB) were released, the first years of primary education in the municipality received a score of 4.7 while the final years were around 2.9. Given this, we need to take into account the influence of the social context on schooling, looking at variables that can strongly influence academic outcomes. Among the factors we considered were: whether children who presented lower scores studied in schools in an urban or rural setting; if they needed to travel far to reach their school and for how long; and, did they engage in farmwork or work in another area.

The town of Sapeaçu presents education indexes similar to those observed throughout Brazil. They illustrate the historical conditions to which a part of the population has been subjected for centuries. Despite growth in access to schooling with the implementation of

Law n. 12.711 (Quota Law) and affirmative action policies, given the conflicting dynamics in play, what possibilities exist for a student from this environment to achieve a successful academic outcome? To be able to respond to these and other questions, we not only need to consider the data relating to the particular situation of the town of Sapeaçu, but also the social context and the education structures for black people in Brazil more generally.

Theoretical-Methodological Approach

Our main focus for this study was the Anativo do Sacramento Rural State School, located in a rural area of the Sapeaçu municipality. At the time of its inauguration, a school of its size was a way for the government to respond to the ongoing needs of surrounding rural communities. Prior to its inauguration, young people attending high school had to travel to schools in urban areas such as Sapeaçu and/or Castro Alves. However, while the school has a capacity for nine-hundred students including morning, afternoon and evening student cohorts, data from the EducaCenso (2022) show that high school enrolments were below 200 students (two-hundred). Furthermore, the physical space of the institution also receives primary school students from the Sapeaçu municipality, managed through an institutional agreement between the state of Bahia and the city council, which, in practical terms, means two administrations, with students from different school years occupying the same space. This is a school with a privileged location in a centralized community, the rural community of Murici, which is about 40 km from the municipal council headquarters. It has a health clinic, supermarkets, a butcher, bakery, beauty salon etc. Additionally, the school is near the Catholic church located in the town square where students meet in their break between classes or where they wait to catch the bus home.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, during which conversations needed to be carried out via messaging app, with students frequently taking days to respond, required me to further comprehend their situation. Many were involved with other activities and experienced a certain difficulty, principally at the educational level, given the start of classes on *Google Meet*. In research conducted via the internet, one needs to understand that the dynamic is different, and that, at that stage, it was no longer possible to interact with the day-to-day environment to be able to gain extensive insight, but only to glimpse this or that clue that the student might let slip or felt comfortable revealing.

Given the need to adapt my research tools and the manner of conducting conversations with students and the school, I found myself facing new challenges. My initial intention of considering their routines based on visits to the school itself had changed and now more than ever, listening became fundamental. Open or closed questions are important in face-to-face interviews, as they allow the researcher to observe the bodily postures of the interviewee, how they

react, and their silences and facial expressions. In the context I faced, however, interviews were not an ideal strategy. It became necessary for me to consider the environment these adolescents lived in and how they saw themselves based exclusively on their narratives.

As such, I employed public data bases and carried out empirical research by applying questionnaires. I accessed statistical data via institutional platforms such as the PNAD (National Study for Household Sampling), a study undertaken by the IBGE (Brazilian Geographical and Statistical Institute). These instruments present data related to education, housing, employment and salary etc; specifically, regarding education, we have the SAEB (Evaluation System for Primary Education) data base. This system aims to generate data about the equity, quality and efficiency of Brazilian primary education. Finally, another instrument I employed was the School Census. Its results are released annually, and it is the main statistical evaluation mechanism for primary education. It is carried out by the INEP (Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Study and Research), in collaboration with public and private schools, as well as with state and municipal education secretaries.

Furthermore, this study is composed, both from a qualitative and a quantitative perspective, of its collaborators and their stories, so much so that:

On arriving at the school in June, 2019, I had no definite plan of how I would conduct the research. I knew that the school was a very particular space which, despite its similarity to other such schools, made certain demands and required particular skills that would influence how I should plan the study's execution. I presented the study to ten classes of students from 1st to 3rd years in high school, seeking volunteers. However, despite their friendliness, many preferred not to participate in the study for a number reasons: not feeling comfortable handing personal information over to a stranger, or being unwilling or disinterested (fieldwork diary, June, 2018).

The questionnaires consisted of 18 blocks of questions, with each one containing 2 to 12 alternatives, where the students should indicate their race, age, economic condition, parents'/responsible guardian's education, and their aspirations for education and training, especially the continuation of studies following high school. Seventy students responded to the questionnaires, with thirty-five being from the morning period and thirty-five from the afternoon. However, some questionnaires had to be discarded due to inconsistencies that made their reading and subsequent analysis impossible. My aim in applying the questionnaire was to understand the trajectory of the children and adolescents based on the relation of their family to school/education, so as to understand how the social environment contributed to their stories of academic success or failure in the rural context. In this sense, Bourdieu has argued that:

Identifying totally different chances, life or employment conditions, and social origins is, of all the determinants, the only one that extends its influence to all areas and to all levels of a student's experience and primarily to the conditions of their existence. Habitus and the type of day-to-day existence associated

with it, the availability of resources, the type of feelings of dependence, variable according to the origin of the resources, as well as the nature of the experience and the values associated with their occurrence, directly and strongly depend on social origin at the same time that they substitute their efficacy (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 27).

Based on this perspective, the questionnaire adopted a broad view of how cultural and social inheritance can influence the choices these girls and boys made to continue, through education, in their search for greater social mobility. By investigating the family history of these students, notions of academic success or failure gained greater depth. However, in investigating education in rural areas, how do we define academic success, if we are adopting metrics which, when applied in other contexts, could signify a range of outcomes?

In telling a story or following a trajectory, the narrator of the story, armed with dates, notable events and a range of information, can choose to make certain connections between facts and possibly set out their story so as to deemphasise its linearity. Unsurprisingly, sooner or later, we discover that there is no linearity to be uncovered in a life, even when seeking to construct a systematic narrative. “Beyond oral practice, we find the production and preservation of objects – such as letters, mementoes and repositories of memory – asserting themselves as archives for individual/collective history” (Bragança, 2012, p. 37). It is necessary to highlight the difficulty in working with the image of black adolescents, their childhood memories and their school experiences. Facts that appear disjointed or even unable to contribute to our understanding, jump out every now and then from the stories, giving them a complex texture. The research process in this setting requires refined techniques of observation, analysis and the translation of reality.

In seeking to construct a narrative based on these trajectories we must understand that it is not enough to extract this or that detail from the information obtained from the questionnaire responses. First of all, it is necessary to work from what may not be so evident in the answers, verbal or otherwise. Lahire (1995, p. 34) argues that any researcher working with questionnaires should understand that the information obtained from this instrument is ambiguous and ambivalent. In certain contexts, it can be viewed as excessively vague such that “the traits, properties or characteristics obtained from social life should always be recontextualized if we wish to give sociological sense to statistical correlations”. Moving our focus to particular cases, or rather, to the evident singularity of any particular case when one starts to consider things in detail, “[...] the sociologist reveals what the theoretical models grounded in statistical knowledge and in the language of variables ignores or assumes: practices and forms of social relation that lead to cases of ‘success’ or ‘failure’” (Lahire, 1995, p. 32).

With the aim of accompanying these trajectories, we start from Elias (1993) when he argues that society is evidently made up of individuals, that is to say every “[...] society is a society of individuals”, a

condition we take to be clearly established. Therefore, we can assume that society and individuals are no longer an incoherent collective that mix together, but rather, manifest their incongruences while also being constitutive of a *whole*. Elias argues that even when considered in a more detailed and balanced way, both individuals and the society that they collectively make up are equally “[...] empty of purpose”. Given this: “neither one exists without the other. Before anything else, they simply exist – the individual together with the others, society as a society of individuals – in a manner empty of purpose [...]” (Elias, 1993, p. 16). As such, in seeking to understand the construction of the trajectories of these students, we must focus, together with Elias, on how the individual has little ability to change direction in relation to society, because individual actions do not interfere significantly in the structure. These trajectories, therefore, are components of this structure that command and direct their actions, negotiations and life, a condition which gains centrality in our investigation.

The black population and Access to Education – from the city to the countryside

As such, it is necessary to understand that the education of black people in Brazil has been and continues to be affected by the slave trade, slavery, abolition and post-abolition, while the delayed introduction of this population to education was due to the laws and regulations that underpinned exclusion and discrimination. For years, the academic community and society has accepted the myth that black people had no engagement with education, had no knowledge of reading or writing and, as a result, were subjugated and occupied social positions of little prestige. This, however, is not entirely the case. Despite the strong presence of laws created by the state to restrict the presence of black people in schools, we should highlight that the education of enslaved and/or freed blacks during the colonial period of slavery, in the form of reading and literacy classes, was provided by their peers. Some authors including Bergamini (2017); Moraes (2007); Barbosa (2009), Arroyo e Fernandes (1999); Barros e Fonseca (2016); Demartini (2011) have investigated this question, showing that, even when excluded from formal spaces of education, there were reports of educated blacks under conditions of segregation.

Cruz (2005, p. 21) argues that the historiography of education ignored the efforts of black people in search of education and over time adopted the discourse that black and brown people only attended school starting from the 1960s, neglecting the ongoing struggle and “[...] the intervention of black people in Brazilian society in the first years of the Republic, through black organizations for the creation of schools and a black press”. The scarcity of studies into the memories of enslaved blacks is the outcome of a narrative that Brazil has a single History.

It is evident that during the post-abolition period the black population was abandoned without being afforded the necessary condi-

tions for survival. For employment, they needed to compete with immigrant Europeans; in schools, there was specific legislation that excluded them from the school environment such as the Decree n. 1.331-A, which dealt with access to schooling, excluding men, women and children without clothes or shoes deemed appropriate to the environment; carriers of contagious diseases etc. Current inequalities between whites and blacks are, certainly, the result of slavery era policies and the exclusion that continued to permeate Brazilian society.

In article 205, chapter III, section I of the Federal Constitution we read that “education, is the right of all and the responsibility of the state and family. It will be promoted and encouraged with the collaboration of society, seeking the full flourishing of the person, their readiness for exercising citizenship and their preparedness for work” (Brasil, 1988). If on one hand, the right to education is guaranteed, in practical terms, it was not always, given that for centuries, access to diverse types of rights served a white, bourgeois elite that dominated not only access to education, but also to land, health and life.

In analysing documents that deal with the post-abolition period, such as the previously cited Decree n. 1.331-A, and Decree n. 528, from June 28, 1890, that stipulates who is eligible to immigrate to Brazil, we note that some laws created following the abolition of slavery sought to tacitly exclude the black population, whether immigrant or not, from Brazilian society. It becomes obvious how, based on an analysis of this social context, even after reforming this legislation, the black and indigenous populations were not able to achieve parity with whites in terms of education or social mobility. Rather, social inequalities became even more accentuated, causing a discrepancy between the realities of blacks and whites who lived in rural and urban areas.

Still today, it is possible to observe how these factors generate consequences, since “[...] these systems of social hierarchization [...] are grounded in dichotomies that have sustained slavery for three centuries: elites/the people and whites/blacks are dichotomies that mutually reinforce one another both symbolically and materially” (Guimarães, 1995, p. 35). We seek to analyse the history of education of blacks in Brazil, based on a discussion of racism. Guimarães’ argument (1995) presents a social and technical analysis of how racism is structured and of the social inequalities found in Brazil, associated with a mindset that underpins processes of exclusion, social division and the violent legacy of the post-slavery era.

The struggle for legislation capable of mitigating these inequalities is also an additional step in the deconstruction of a culture that stimulates violence. Cruz (2005) argues that these processes have been systematically marginalised, since, through these, we would be able to learn about the educational experiences of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian individuals, both within and outside the school environment. The author highlights the importance of understanding how this group became literate or about “[...] the education in quilombos; the creation of alternative schools; the emergence of an educated

black middle-class in Brazil; or the experiences of students in the first official schools that accepted blacks” (Cruz, 2005, p. 22-23).

The debate we began starting from Cruz’s (2005) observations intersects with what Kilomba (2019) calls the place of the *Other*, where the author argues that this does not indicate a lack of resistance, but rather a lack of representation: “[...] it isn’t that we haven’t spoken, the fact is that our voices, thanks to a racist system, have been systematically marginalized and viewed as invalid; or represented by white people, who, ironically became specialists in our culture, and even in us.” (Kilomba, 2019, p. 51) Similarly, Carneiro (2005, p. 97) focuses the debate on biases in knowledge production and access to education, to explain how for us “[...] in addition to the marginalization and disqualification of the knowledge of subjugated peoples, there is a persistent process of producing cultural indigence: through the denial of access to education, especially of quality; through the production of intellectual subjugation; through the different mechanisms of delegitimization of blacks [...]”.

Regarding the black population, stigmas were reproduced that historically underpinned the idea of little or no involvement with education and the arts and sciences. At the same time, black people were readily associated with manual labour in subaltern positions, which was due to the repeated and historic dehumanization they were submitted to over time and that was structured throughout society. This constitutes a type of what we tend to call epistemicide, that is, “[...] a form of kidnapping of reason in a double sense: through the negation of the rationality of the Other or through a cultural assimilation which, in other cases, was imposed” (Carneiro, 2005, p. 97).

Therefore, accessing school was not the only challenge faced by the black population in their search for education. Exclusionary laws marked an entire generation of free or freed black people during the period of slavery, who, following the end of slavery, were not offered any means of education by the state. How did this process play out in the rural context, especially in the Brazilian northeast and specifically in the state of Bahia? Considering education in rural communities is particularly to consider the education of the black population, given that these territories, specifically north and northeast Brazil, were the ones that most received the black population and are made up principally by this demographic, which, soon after the end of slavery (in numerous ways) migrated to the countryside and remained there. Veiga (2008) describes how, in the histories of Brazilian schools, public schools, at least in the first 60 years of the 20th century, were viewed as possessing significant prestige by society.

In analysing the constitutional texts of 1824 and 1891, while both included mention of school education, references to rural education were virtually non-existent. This shows that despite being a country with an agricultural foundation, political leaders from one period to the next placed little priority on rural education, while Brazilian cultural memory continued to be rooted in a large-scale, slave-based

agricultural economy that historically interfered in how educational policy was implemented in Brazil.

It is known that a strong and inclusive education system was not considered a priority by the economic elites of the time, given that an educated population represented a threat to the status quo of a society grounded in a racist, bourgeois and bureaucratic outlook. A detailed analysis of how the universalization of education in Brazil took place is necessary, and subsequently, of how the struggle of social movements and civil society as a whole drove the political environment so that specific legislation for each social group was implemented, given that initially they advocated for universal education based on official history.

As such, to be able to reconstruct official history, we need to approach it from the perspective of the marginalized. This can be better explained through Pollak's (1989) idea of *subterranean memory*: "[...] in privileging the analysis of the excluded, the marginalized and minorities, oral history highlights the importance of subterranean memory which, as an integral part of minority and dominated cultures, is opposed to official memory, that is, national memory" (Pollak, 1989, p. 03).

How could specific legislation targeting rural education facilitate the spread of sociocultural rights if, from the outset, the government excludes this population from access to basic rights? The establishment of certain laws dealing with this form of education led, in a very evident way, to the maintenance of violence and exclusion, by formulating a Eurocentric and eugenic pedagogy applied to a space where *ethos* was not merely a concept, but a particular form of social construction. We must understand how, at that time especially, specific laws dealing with rural education were a response to Brazil's economic needs. The social segregation and social division of labour present in the previously cited legislative articles demonstrated even more the essentially bourgeois and European values that were imported into and dominated Brazilian society.

It is important to show how teaching in rural schools has currently been structured, as a place where public policy arrives more slowly and reaches fewer citizens. A report published by the Secretary for Primary Education of the National Council for Education (Brazil, 2012), lays out a series of guidelines for rural education and details the history of its implementation over time in Brazil.

Neto (2016, p. 105) argues that Mennucci (1946), even while praising those who supported rural development, warned that there was a gap "[...] between what was taught in regular rural schools, whose teachers received a largely urban training, and what was required by students in the rural context, making the relationship of residents and teachers in these areas difficult". Schools were established in rural areas and became a disruptive element, given that the relationship between school and community was worsened by the imposition of teaching methods that did not correspond to the reality of

the environment. As such, its goals were not achieved nor did they assist the state in its aim of establishing the community in the area where it settled.

As the current academic debate has highlighted, there is a notable disconnect between the philosophy of rural education and rural education in practice. In this sense, Leite (1999) argues that the role played by the state is important for the development of what became known as rural extension, as well as in a context characterized by increased concern about education shortfalls, which affect rural and urban environments differently. In the development of rural education, as we saw, rural residents were associated with an image of backwardness, and education policy was formulated according to the interests of the capitalists dominant in each situation. As such, “[...] for social movements, fighting for rural education involved considering education from the perspective of the working class and is an attempt as such to advocate, from a class perspective, for the question of education policy” (Caldart, 2009, p. 53).

The rural education conceived of and demanded by social movements, renewed understandings of how to educate in rural areas, by deconstructing the image of rural residents as part of a socially ignorant and backward group with no engagement with literacy or technical training. This was a conception rooted in centuries of the Brazilian social imaginary and reproduced as an unquestionable truth. Successful teaching experiences in rural schools encouraged debates around education based on a specific teaching structure, where “[...] an interaction between the collective subjects that makes up organized civil society in rural areas, between each other, and between themselves and agencies of the Brazilian state in diverse spheres, developed and became visible to analysts and activists over recent years, or more precisely, over the last decade” (Munarim, 2011, p. 03).

The Heirs: trajectories of academic success and failure in the rural context

My focus here was to undertake my research respecting the particularities of each participant, despite my supervisor initially recommending that I focus on trajectories that they considered successful, meritocratic and reflective of dedicated individual effort. I adopted a different approach and maybe, via a *sociological intuition*, allowed the stories to emerge as the students got to know me and felt more comfortable to speak.

If we had had the opportunity within the scope of this study to meet up one last time, certainly we would have sat on the veranda of their house, speaking about trivialities, looking at photos in old albums, yellowed by the passage of time. We would have been interrupted every now and then by the sound of the arrival of a family member or from the barking of a dog, scenes commonly occurring in rural communities, so common in fact that we tend to pay them no

heed. Here, speaking of oneself is to speak of another; in rural communities, families, in my experience, are large centres of association, not always connected by ties of blood.

It is common to sit on the ground around an older family member to hear their childhood stories, stories that go from parent to child. These are family histories that are also the story of the community, a unique way of producing and recording knowledge and preserving these memories. As such, in deciding to write stories of people who share my background, I knew that I would have to provoke their memories and understand their narratives, and understand that they would not only be speaking about themselves, but rather about their whole community. This could be observed in the story of one of my interviewees when they revealed their decision, imposed by circumstance, to start working to augment the family income, *to help their mother*.

Can parents with little to no social capital contribute in a positive manner to their child's trajectory at school? In what way is this even possible? Based on what metrics can we determine the existence of social capital or not? Academic success as understood by upper-middle class individuals, from families with ample financial resources, mainly white people with university educations, is difficult to observe among poor, black individuals who live in *favelas*, in country towns or rural areas. However, it is necessary to understand that we are dealing with social beings, and "[...] we can only establish a link between capitals (economic, cultural...) and the academic context and performance, metaphorically. These are not capitals that circulate, but social beings who, in relationships of interdependence and in singular situations, can make their social gains circulate or not, can 'transmit' them or not" (Lahire, 1995, p. 33).

We can begin to answer these questions based on enrolment data from both the urban and rural areas of this municipality. Table 1 gives us a general overview of these indices, allowing us to understand student trajectories according to the context in which they are situated.

Table 1 – Active enrolment numbers for the municipality of Sapeaçu/BA

SAPEAÇU	URBAN AREA	RURAL AREA
Regular School Enrolment	3004	1110
Creche	108 enrolments	79 enrolments
Pre-School	152 enrolments	212 enrolments
2 nd to 5 th year	599 enrolments	448 enrolments
6 th to 9 th year	1183 enrolments	0
High School	729 enrolments	185 enrolments
EJA Primary	158 enrolments	33 enrolments
EJA High School	75 enrolments	0

Source: EducaCenso (2018).

Enrolment numbers and their differences between urban and rural areas, can be better explained based on Table 2, where the number of schools in the municipality in 2012 to 2018 both for the public and private administrative networks is outlined². Over a period of six years, we can observe four creches closing in the public network and one in the private, meaning 0.83 schools closed annually, while in primary schooling, there were ten schools closed at the municipal level, while the number of private schools showed a brief oscillation in 2014, but returned to the average in the following years.

Table 2 – School numbers by administrative network

SAPEAÇU	-	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR	YEAR
Schooling level	Administrative Network	2012	2014	2016	2018
Pre-school	Public	21	19	16	17
	Private	3	2	2	2
Primary school	Public	33	28	24	23
	Private	4	3	4	4
High school	Public	3	3	3	3
	Private	0	0	0	1

Source: Annual Statistical Report for Bahia (2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018).

Despite the inequalities and exclusion of this portion of the population for access to rights, in terms of the data presented up till now, 2016 to 2019 was the period when children had greatest access to education and when numbers were increasing. Data from UNICEF (2021) however, showed that inequalities persisted and to a certain extent grew. The PNAD (2019) shows that 1.1 million children and adolescents of between 05 to 17 years of age, that is, of mandatory school age, were not enrolled at or did not attend school.

For the black population, especially far from urban centres, education in the school environment can embody “[...] levels of overlapping symbolic violence, given that, beyond reinforcing the cultural capital of students coming from privileged backgrounds in the population, it convinces those who are not ‘heirs’ to the same educated culture that they are responsible for their own success at school” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 788). When this is analysed from the perspective of the geography where these students live, we see how this violence, which Bourdieu calls symbolic, can be found to have diverse characteristics and perpetuate itself both within and outside the school environment.

Here, we assess the relationships, subjectivity and processes of sociocultural exchange that students are subjected to at school. The community background of the students participating in this study is diverse. This is due to its being a catchment school, which receives students from a number of communities. Three of these are part of the Sapeaçu municipality while 4 are part of the Castro Alves municipality (Cova da Negra, Lagoa Seca, Petim and Cidade Nova). In terms of area, the largest communities are Cova da Negra, Murici, Lagoa Se-

ca and Cidade Nova. The majority of students indicated that they live in Cova da Negra, a community about 3 km from the Anativo do Sacramento Rural State School, with some coming from further away, which requires a longer trip by motorbike, school bus or even on foot. The numbers show a significant use of buses by students, where 83% use this means of transport as their main form of travel and the other 17% make the trip on foot. Travel times between communities vary according to the distance and the number of available buses.

It is worth noting that this study was carried out between 2018 and 2022. During this period, I was in constant contact both with students and school management. Chart 1 below, presents infrastructure aspects, such as teaching facilities and the technological equipment available in the teaching environment.

Chart 1 – Data for the Anativo do Sacramento Rural State School

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE			
Food	Filtered water	Tank	Public energy
Internet access (by radio)	Access to public water	Periodic rubbish collection	-
TEACHING FACILITIES			
7 classrooms	Teacher's lounge	Information laboratory	Open play area
Kitchen	Reading room	Toilets	School secretary Storage room
SCHOOL EQUIPMENT			
TV	DVD	Printer	Multimedia projector

Source: Formulated by the author with data from the 2020 School Census.

In 2020, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, students were not attending the school environment for over a year and had to deal with economic losses – poor students became even poorer – and educational setbacks, given that the ongoing pandemic meant students had to study at home and not all students in rural areas had access to technology – internet, or devices such as mobile phones or computers.

School Census (2021) Data showed that these trends were similar among Anativo do Sacramento students: 51% had no Wi-Fi; 82% had no desk to study at; 95% did not have a tablet; 78% did not have a laptop. Additionally, the situation of public schools in rural areas, characterized by marginalization, is reflected in the precarious infrastructure, which is considerably different to the problems faced in urban areas. Notably, the EducaCenso (2022) showed that 84% of rural schools do not have a library; 89% do not have a reading room, 87% do not have an information laboratory, 98% lack a science laboratory, 70% lack a teacher's lounge, and 51% lack a headmaster's office.

Lima & Bernardes (2020) highlight the need to understand how the public health³ emergency that we confronted created a new educational context, whereby what could be considered distance educa-

tion in the city, became emergency education in rural areas. The former required adjustments to content, synchronized and pre-recorded classes, and tutor support, involving innovative strategies and diverse platforms previously employed by teachers and tutors. Rural schools by contrast were “[...] facing Emergency Remote Education. Remote because technology became the substitute for in person classes; emergency in terms of the set of teaching strategies that had to be planned and adapted to the demands of the situation” (Lima; Bernardes, 2020, p. 37).

As previously shown in the empirical research, the analysis of questionnaires found that the majority of students were of normal school age, with 86% being between 14 and 18 years of age. The number of students older than recommended for conclusion of high school was still considered high, with 14% having an age equal to or older than 19. It is, or should be, the responsibility of the state and collective efforts of the community to guarantee a successful academic pathway for children and adolescents. The impact of age-grade discrepancies and/or school abandonment is felt not only by those directly involved with the situation of the families.

We can observe that 98.48% of students work on the farm outside of school hours and are equally affected by a lack of resources, which forces them to enter the labour market while still very young, generally without adequate or fair salary. This leads to difficulties with understanding class material, as well as in following the methodology used by the teacher in the classroom. Even in this environment permeated by a dynamic of exclusion, 61.90% believed they failed due to not having studied enough.

Table 3 – Future post-high school plans

POST-HIGH SCHOOL PLANS	%
Only continue studying	3
Only working	26
Continue studying and working	57
Do not know	14

Source: Elaboration by the author (2022).

Socioeconomic conditions are one of the markers that can provide an explanation for the difficulties of students to remain at school. However, even in the face of the scenario of hardship presented here, students dared to dream of a brighter future. Given the obstacles, education is seen as a possibility for change and social mobility, not only for themselves but also for their families. This debate is situated in what Lahire (1995) describes as *conditions of existence and conditions of coexistence* analysed through forms of property, capital, abstract resources and effective relations, as conditions that do not determine the individual. As such, even in the face of the social reality of poverty, and inequality of conditions of access and permanence at school, we

observe that students, despite everything, still seek to build possible pathways to success, even if escaping from this reality is unlikely.

When asked about hours dedicated to study, 7% of students used time outside of school to study while 37% were busy with work on the farm or domestic chores, which was also a significant percent, leaving little or no time for study.

Children however, did not reproduce their family's ways of acting, creating their own outlook that took their family situation and the relationships that they established with their family members into consideration. In terms of the context within which I write, we must ask: why are there students in rural areas with trajectories considered exceptional, taking race, class, and gender into account, among other variables present in this context? Does the family situation influence the education experience of students? This leads me to ask "[...] how is it possible that family situations socially generate children with such different levels of adaptation to schooling? What are the internal differences in the working-class environment capable of explaining the at times considerable variation in education of children?" (Lahire, p. 12).

The questions posed by Lahire in respect to France, equally reverberate in the current Brazilian context, with a somewhat bitter aftertaste, given that while Brazil underwent a process of slavery and the colonization of its original peoples, France was itself a colonising nation. We return to the question of how these (rural) students create tools for social mobility via education, despite the obstacles confronted throughout the years of their schooling, given the complex social context, which makes access and permanence in schools vastly different to that in urban centres, even when compared to the outer urban suburbs.

At least 13% of mothers or responsible guardians of students participating in this research, never studied at and/or went to school. It is a considerably high number, even given this social context. Students also indicated that 38% of their mothers or responsible guardians only completed between 1st to 4th grades in primary education, while 16% completed between 5th to 8th grades; 9% had incomplete high schooling; 18% concluded high school; 3% had been to university. It is necessary to emphasize the high number of mothers and/or responsible guardians who only had primary schooling (1st to 4th grades), taking into account the functional illiteracy that, in practice, made helping with simple homework tasks impossible.

Looking at the data related to parents or responsible guardians, 63% had never studied; only 13% completed primary education and 3% completed high school. There was significant variation in relation to levels of illiteracy, certainly when understood within the context where they lived. Fathers and mothers presented similar overall levels with commensurate difficulties in helping and/or encouraging their child's education. Regarding gender markers in both groups, they were affected by the same factors, with men being more affected dur-

ing the initial period of education. The education of parents and responsible guardians is extremely important as it allows us to understand the choices of their children, nephews and grandchildren better, even if it is not determinate. "The influence of cultural capital allows itself to be perceived through the often-observed relationship between the overall cultural level of the family and the educational performance of the child. [...]" (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1982, p. 42).

As such, the relationship of the family to education gives us clues as to cases of academic *success* or *failure* in school education. Certainly, in a family where education is a priority, children have greater access to information, reading, and study opportunities and form a closer more intimate bond with their school. Based on our analysis, we can show how the economic conditions, education and domestic environment, as well as the dedication of mothers, fathers and responsible guardians to education, are strongly connected to cultural inheritance. "[...] A precise assessment of the advantages and disadvantages transmitted by the family environment should take into account not only the cultural level of the father or mother, but also of the descendants from one branch of the family to another 'and also, undoubtedly, that of all the members of the extended family'" (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1982, p. 42).

Regarding material conditions, 74.70% of mothers worked on the farm, against 75.26% of fathers. Fathers and mothers had farm-work as their main occupation and certainly while differences could arise in terms of pay, it was not our intention to undertake this comparison here, given that in the environment of poverty and inequality under consideration, detailed analysis based on the answers of the students became difficult. In the majority of cases, poverty, racism and sexism were naturalized and resistance emerges in a veiled manner. The place that the school historically occupies in the life of a black student will shape their conceptions of success and failure.

Hope has a price for these boys and girls, who even when nurturing the dream of further education, will have their trajectories marked by the choice of whether they will work to provide conditions of subsistence for their families or if, in the case of acceptance into university, they will have the financial means necessary to realize their dreams. The opportunities that these students have are far from those of middle- or upper-middle-class white people. This is because, from the context within which I am writing, possibilities for social mobility based on education are associated with so many other factors that need to be met, mainly through public policy. As such, the student needs to have their basic rights as they are set out in our constitution, such as access to water, electricity, food, transport, and free, universal and quality education, respected.

In a society marked by inequality, the majority of black people are not aware of university as a possibility. This is due in large part, to the social environment we come from and the cultural capital we have access to. However, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1982, p. 41) argues

“[...] it is not sufficient to simply note inequality in schooling, it is necessary to describe the objective mechanisms that determine the ongoing exclusion of marginalized children”.

In narrating the experiences of these students, we observed trajectories that can be understood as failures, a direct result of a lack of access to basic rights guaranteed under the law. These students' social environment reveals cultural, social and economic disparities that influence social mobility, whether via education or through other means. We highlight the ongoing way the school environment is a place that reproduces inequality. Since the colonial period, its structure has privileged the bourgeois elites, and reinforced the exclusion of and control over black and indigenous populations. As Bourdieu and Passeron argues:

It is probably through an effect of cultural inertia that we continue to view the school system as a driver of social mobility, according to the ideology of 'liberating education', when, to the contrary, everything tends to show that it is one of the most efficient factors for social conservation, since it provides the appearance of legitimacy for social inequalities, and sanctions cultural inheritance and social privileges as natural (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1982, p. 41).

The claims found in Bourdieu's work are, as unpleasant as it is to admit, a reflection of our current Brazilian reality. The school where I undertook my research is a striking portrait of how social inequalities can lead students to socially reproduce a cultural inheritance experienced by their parents and grandparents and consolidated in their imaginations, denying them the possibility of imagining any other way of being in the world. As such, “[...] of all the factors of differentiation, social background is, without a doubt, the one whose influence is most strongly exercised over the student environment, more strongly in any case than sex and age and especially more than any other clearly noted factor” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1982, p. 27). The trajectories observed in the case of students from rural schools show that this reality continues to this day, demonstrating what Bourdieu and Passeron argues.

In Brazil, we cannot analyse only the influence of class, given that social inequality equally reflects race and gender, and these can significantly influence the academic trajectories of families, communities or even, as we have already seen, the entire nation. Although we have argued that social capital is not a deterministic factor, in contexts where students encounter little possibility for mobility from within the family, school or community, they can show a greater propensity to reproduce the social and cultural capital that they inherit from their environment. Now, however, we know that there is the possibility that a student, even while enjoying diminished cultural capital, will choose a different professional pathway to the one taken by their parents or grandparents. This is also the result of positive influences coming from the school or other individual examples, of experi-

ences in the community and of the wider network that has emerged in the rural environment through the advent of the internet.

Engagement with school showed how relations of race, gender and class permeate the trajectories of these students. Each one arrives from their community, bringing and exchanging experiences, and introducing their particularities into the interplay of social coexistence. The fact that research was undertaken in northeastern Brazil, in Bahia, in the Recôncavo region in a school situated in a rural community, contributed to the perception that the majority of its students are poor, girls and black, the demographic that makes up the majority of students in these schools. However, for a number of reasons (such as financial difficulties, marriages, children, and farmwork), they remain for shorter periods, or give up while still in the first years of school.

Pierre Bourdieu and Passeron (1982) describes how “[...] of all the factors of differentiation, social origin is undoubtedly the one that most strongly influences the student environment” (p. 27). The trajectories of these boys and girls show how, in the case of students from rural schools, this reality is reproduced, demonstrating Bourdieu and Passeron’s argument. I could indicate by name the students participating in this study who harboured dreams of continuing their education. However, the economic reality of their family and the context they came from weighed on their choices, placing them in an unfavourable situation where they were forced to choose between helping put food on the family table or continuing their studies. Among these young people, at least ten were accepted into university courses over the last five years, showing how, based on the encouragement of public policy, such as the quota law, the rural reality has begun to change.

It has been possible to see that the history of the Brazilian state is one of summary exclusion or feigned inclusion, and only recently public policy has begun to be implemented as a tool for historical reparation. As such, these girls and boys, students at the Campo Anativo do Sacramento Rural State School, narrate and show, each one in their own way, stories of resistance and patterns of change that were only possible through access to education. Students at rural schools, especially the one I focus on here, have revealed unexpectedly pleasant surprises in a place where dreaming is otherwise prohibited. They go forward with a pencil in one hand and a hoe in the other, but they no longer have as their inescapable destiny the exclusive trajectory of working on the land. They perceive a future where their origins are no longer deterministic and where possible social mobility is anchored in further education.

The violence that is perpetuated in the experience of blackness is structured, thanks to the idea of black people as alienated both from humanity and civil society, which feeds into a permanent state of warfare. It is both symbolic and physical, and the education of this part of the population is a real demonstration of how the colonial inheritance perpetuated in different ways, undermines the legislative efforts with which the Brazilian state seeks to correct the direction of

history. The struggle for universal education in the rural context requires an effort from government and civil society. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a practice of freedom* (2017, p. 35). bell hooks argues that:

When education is a practice of freedom, students are not the only ones called on to share and confess. Engaged pedagogy doesn't seek to simply strengthen and enable students. Every classroom in which a holistic model of learning was applied will also be a place of growth for the teacher, who will be strengthened and enabled by this process.

Therefore, in considering the school, family and community relationship, we can argue that "[...] academic 'failure' or 'success' can be understood as the result of a wider contradiction, of the most elevated degree of dissonance or consonance of forms of social relations in a network of interdependence with the other" (Lahire, 1995, p. 19). Speaking of success or failure in the trajectory of black students in rural schools requires an ample debate about the politics of access and permanence in primary education. It is not simply a question of enrolment numbers, but of the material and symbolic conditions that these students confront and that strongly influence their life and academic trajectories.

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Notes

- ¹ The discussion presented in this article is the result of a doctoral thesis entitled *Unequal Opportunities and Exceptional Trajectories: the academic journey of black children in primary education in rural areas of the Recôncavo da Bahia*, defended in 2022, in the Post-Graduate Program in African and Ethnic studies – UFBA, with scholarships from the Foundation for Research Investment of the State of Bahia (FAPESB). I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Dr. Patricia Alexandra Godinho Gomes and my co-supervisor Dr. Dyane Brito Reis Santos.
- ² It was not possible to determine from the Annual Statistical Report of Bahia, how many schools in the municipality are located in the urban area and how many are in the rural area.
- ³ I refer to the Covid-19 pandemic and to the consequences of the emergency education brought about by that situation.

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