

**STIGMATIZATION, SYMBOLIC DOMINATION AND BLACK IDENTITY IN
BRAZIL: BETWEEN THE CIVILIZING PROCESS AND STRUCTURAL
EXCLUSION**<https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2025.011-039>

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the historical, structural and symbolic foundations of racial exclusion in Brazil, focusing on the mechanisms of stigmatization and symbolic domination that affect the black population. The research is based on the premise that structural racism is sustained not only by material inequalities, but also by discursive and institutional devices that naturalize the inferiority of certain groups. From an interdisciplinary approach, the study investigates how such mechanisms affect the construction of black identity, the distribution of social recognition and access to full citizenship. The results indicate that racism operates both in formal structures and in everyday practices, and it is essential to understand its symbolic aspects in order to confront racial inequalities. The article contributes to the academic and political debate on racial justice, offering theoretical subsidies for the formulation of affirmative actions and more effective public policies.

Keywords: Structural racism. Symbolic domination. Stigmatization. Black identity. Racial exclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

Brazilian social formation was marked by historical processes that instituted and naturalized deep racial inequalities. From the colonial period to the present day, different forms of exclusion of the black and indigenous population have shaped institutional structures, social relations, and cultural practices. Slavery, the subsequent denial of integration policies in the post-abolition period, and the permanence of discourses of racial inferiority constituted the foundations of a system that, even transformed over time, is still sustained by racialized hierarchies of belonging, recognition, and citizenship.

In the contemporary context, racial inequality manifests itself in a structural way, reproduced by institutions, norms and representations that often operate in a veiled and diffuse way. Elements such as the denial of the existence of racism, the selective valorization of miscegenation and the naturalization of inequality contribute to the maintenance of the status quo and make it difficult to face the problem in its complexity. This reality highlights the need to examine the symbolic forms of domination that sustain racial exclusion, operating on subjectivity, the collective imaginary and social standards of legitimation.

This article is based on the premise that racial stigmatization is not only a reflection of material inequalities, but a phenomenon that is reproduced through discourses, values, and practices that attribute specific meanings to black identity and position it in historically subordinated places. The general objective of the research is to analyze how these dynamics of symbolic domination influence the construction of black identity, access to citizenship and the permanence of racial boundaries in Brazil. The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach, considering historical, cultural, social and political aspects that articulate exclusion, belonging and recognition.

The relevance of this study lies in the urgency of understanding the mechanisms that maintain and update racial inequality in Brazil, going beyond approaches focused exclusively on economic or legal indicators. By addressing the symbolic devices that sustain structural racism, it is intended to contribute to the academic and political debate on racial justice, providing elements for the elaboration of public policies, institutional practices and social actions committed to equity and the recognition of diversity as a founding value of democracy.

POPULATION DIVERSITY: RACIAL INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN BRAZIL

The historical constitution of the Brazilian population is deeply marked by the colonization process, which began in the sixteenth century, which imposed on indigenous

peoples and enslaved Africans a model of Eurocentric civility, based on domination, silencing and cultural subordination. Forced contact between Europeans, indigenous peoples and Africans resulted in a miscegenated but hierarchically structured society, in which the processes of racial exclusion were naturalized and institutionalized.

Rafael de Abreu e Souza's (2024) analysis of the explosion of Ilha do Braço Forte, in Rio de Janeiro, in 1954, offers a valuable micro-historical perspective for the archaeology of racism in the Brazilian style. By focusing on the trajectory of Antônio Luiz Aguapio, a black port guard, Souza connects ruins, criminalization, and destruction, illustrating how racism, capitalism, and the material excesses of modernity intertwine in Brazil's history.

This black archaeological approach, as the author proposes, is a racial literacy that integrates environmental sociology, anthropology, and social history from ancestral perspectives.

Slavery, sustained by more than three centuries of slave trade, consolidated a system in which the black population was treated as a commodity and deprived of any fundamental rights. As Siqueira and Atique point out, the black population, due to the slave trade, which generated the process of slavery, did not have the same social opportunities as the subjects declared white. Reduced to "object/animals of subservience", blacks were marked by stigmas of inferiority that resist to this day.

Diego Nascimento De Oliveira et al. (2024), in their study, address the impact of structural racism on education and work opportunities for racial minorities in Brazil, with a focus on black and indigenous populations. They argue that structural racism manifests itself through institutional norms and practices that, intentionally or not, perpetuate inequality and exclusion of these groups in various social spheres. The research by Oliveira and collaborators reinforces the need for joint actions to confront racism and promote social justice.

This slave heritage left deep marks on the Brazilian social structure. Brazil was the last country in the West to formally abolish slavery, and it did so without ensuring any form of reparation or integration for the black population. In 1888, with the enactment of the Golden Law, the millions of freedmen were thrown to their fate, without access to land, education, housing or decent work.

The absence of inclusion policies after abolition consolidated a process of structural marginalization. Moraes (2013, p.24) points out that "in 1889, just one year after Abolition, black and brown workers were removed from 'objective' market competition," being systematically passed over in favor of European immigrants, who began to be encouraged by state settlement policies.

Immigration policy, especially in the Southeast region, is pointed out as a deliberate strategy to whiten the population. Inspired by eugenicist ideologies and supported by nineteenth-century pseudoscientific theses, this policy aimed to "perfect" the national ethnic composition through selective miscegenation.

Immigration policy, especially in the Southeast region, is pointed out as a deliberate strategy to whiten the population. Inspired by eugenicist ideologies and supported by nineteenth-century pseudoscientific theses, such as those defended by João Batista de Lacerda and Oliveira Vianna, this policy aimed to "improve" the national ethnic composition through selective miscegenation.

This perspective was also shared by other intellectuals of the time. Nina Rodrigues (2010), in her work "The Africans in Brazil", originally published in the early twentieth century and later republished, dedicated part of her analysis to the prevailing racial theories and the belief in the superiority of the white race.

Although the main focus of the book is the culture and characteristics of Africans and their descendants in Brazil, the work reflects the intellectual context of the time, marked by the influence of eugenicist thought and the search for whitening the population.

Florestan Fernandes (1972), in a later critical analysis, demonstrates how this policy of whitening and the ideology of racial democracy contributed to the maintenance of deep racial inequalities in Brazilian society, even after the abolition of slavery. For Fernandes, the integration of blacks into class society was marked by structural obstacles that have historical roots in this project of nation.

Fernanda Telles Márques (2022), in her article, explores the interface between an ethnography of school violence and Brazilian structural racism. The author argues that the violence experienced in the school environment by young black people often reflects and is fueled by a racism that is rooted in the structures of society.

Márques' ethnography reveals how racism manifests itself "on the surface" in everyday school life, impacting the experiences and trajectories of black students. At the same time, the myth of racial democracy was constructed, which began to spread the idea of a harmonious coexistence between the different races in Brazil.

This narrative, however, served to camouflage institutionalized racism and make it impossible to formulate public policies aimed at confronting racial inequalities. According to Casseb (2010), this process reinforced a pseudo-democracy, sustained by superficial cordiality, but marked by the systematic exclusion of the black population. The "mestizo identity" was promoted as a national cultural sign, symbolically erasing black identity and denying its historicity, its pain and its resistance.

Roberta Gondim de Oliveira et al. (2020) analyzed racial inequalities and how the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted the black population in Brazil.

The authors argue that the social markers of differences in Brazil are deeply linked to racial demarcation, on which political-social dynamics and processes based on structural racism act. The analysis by Oliveira and collaborators demonstrates how structural racism contributed to the greater vulnerability and mortality of the black population during the pandemic.

Even after abolition, the black population remained subjected to conditions of extreme social vulnerability. The absence of public policies aimed at historical reparation resulted in the consolidation of a continuous cycle of exclusion and marginalization, reflected in all social indicators.

The "racial prison" to which blacks were impelled distanced them from formal schooling, the qualified labor market, decent housing, social mobility and spaces of institutional power. This historical exclusion not only deprived them of material possessions, but also of symbolic recognition, subjectivity, and belonging.

Jeferson Bacelar (2004), in his review of the book "Negritude sem etnicidade: o local e o global nas relações raciais e na produção cultural negra do Brasil" by Livio Sansone, discusses the complex racial and cultural relations in the country.

Bacelar's analysis of Sansone's work offers insights into the construction of black identity in Brazil and how local and global dynamics influence this construction. The review highlights the importance of understanding blackness beyond fixed ethnic categories.

This scenario reveals that racism is not a remnant of the past, but rather a persistent structure that operates in the daily reproduction of inequalities. Structural racism is not reduced to individual acts of prejudice: it manifests itself in norms, practices, and discourses that, even when seemingly neutral, perpetuate the exclusion of racial minorities.

It is a system that defines who has access to opportunities, whose values are rooted in institutions and sustained by the cultural and symbolic reproduction of racial hierarchy.

The notion of "racial contract", proposed by Charles Mills, contributes to understanding how Western societies have historically been constituted based on an implicit pact that privileges white people and legitimizes inequality. This contract manifests itself in the unequal distribution of goods, in the control of the means of production, in the monopoly of political representation and in the construction of imaginaries that perpetuate the black as the social "other".

In schools, courts, hospitals and the media, structural racism is updated in subtle and persistent mechanisms that limit recognition and access to full citizenship.

In the labor market, it operates in multiple layers: from the difficulty of accessing formal jobs and leadership positions, to the wage gap and the overload in precarious occupations.

In the educational system, it translates into a lack of representation, the school dropout of black students, and institutional practices that normalize symbolic aggression. Even in the field of public health, racism is revealed through inequalities in access, care, and outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic opened up this abyss by registering higher mortality rates among the black population — a direct reflection of historical inequalities and state negligence (Oliveira et al., 2020). The very absence of racial data in information systems reveals the persistence of institutional racism that makes diagnoses and assertive policies unfeasible.

The historical roots of racism in Brazil, rooted in colonization, slavery, and the omission of the State, remain active through structural mechanisms that update and sustain racial inequality in institutions, social norms, and everyday practices (Souza, 2024).

These mechanisms not only produce material exclusion, but also operate on the symbolic plane, shaping perceptions, behaviors, and social expectations. Recognizing the historical and structural complexity of racism is an ethical and political requirement for confronting its multiple forms of manifestation (Oliveira et al., 2024).

Overcoming this model requires the dismantling of the devices that naturalize racial hierarchy and the construction of a social order based on equity, the recognition of differences and the appreciation of diversity as a structuring principle of democratic coexistence (Bacelar, 2004).

CIVILIZING PROCESS AND SYMBOLIC DOMINATION

Racial exclusion in Brazil is not only manifested through material barriers, but is also structured by symbolic and subjective processes of domination. The concept of "civilizing process", formulated by Norbert Elias (2000), offers an interpretative key to understand how certain conducts, norms and values are historically naturalized as superior standards of behavior, while stigmatizing other forms of existence, especially those associated with black and indigenous populations.

The analysis by Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson (2000) in "The Established and the Outsiders" demonstrates how, even in small communities, power relations and stigmatization are established between groups with different levels of seniority and social capital. The "established", with their consolidated history and traditions, tend to exercise

symbolic domination over the "outsiders", often associated with negative characteristics and kept on the margins of power structures.

This dynamic, observed in a local context in England, offers an interesting parallel for understanding race relations in Brazil, where the white population, historically established in power, often stigmatizes and marginalizes the black and indigenous population.

In the Brazilian colonial context, civility was established based on the European reference, which positioned the "white man" as the holder of rationality, morality and order, and the original and African peoples as subjects to be "domesticated".

This domestication took place through the imposition of a dominant culture and the denial of the epistemologies and cosmologies of these groups, considered backward or dangerous. Elias (2000, p.24) observes that "the colonizing process imposed the domestication of the indigenous, black and brown people, who, even after the abolition of slavery, did not become completely free". State tutelage, forms of subaltern labor and exclusion from spaces of power reveal the persistence of this logic to the present day.

Symbolic domination is, therefore, one of the most effective forms of social control, as it acts directly on the constitution of subjectivities.

The individual, throughout his life, is questioned by social norms that shape his way of feeling, acting and perceiving himself in the world. Elias (2000) states that "the identity of each individual is inserted in a set of social relations and is associated with several interconnected factors between the individual and society, whose interference is mutual and symbiotic, because one does not exist without the other".

This interdependence between individual and society causes social structures to operate in the constitution of identity, naturalizing inequalities and internalizing hierarchies.

Identity formation, therefore, is not a merely biographical process, but a profoundly social and political one. As Honorato (2021, p 6) points out, "at birth, the individual does not depend exclusively on his natural constitution, because, to reach adulthood, he is subject to a process of individualization".

This process of individualization, however, occurs in contexts marked by tensions, inequalities, and power disputes. Black identity, in this scenario, is constituted in the midst of the devaluation of cultural references, the imposition of white standards of beauty and behavior, and the absence of institutional recognition.

The civilizing process acts invisibly and continuously, shaping behaviors through the internalization of social norms that regulate emotions, gestures, and speech. As Gebara (2009) points out, through self-control, in self-regulation, individuals differentiate and stand

out, thus constituting their identity, because since childhood they are conditioned by the other to have self-control due to social regulations (coercion).

The repression of emotions considered undesirable, the containment of affections and the adaptation to hegemonic models of conduct are part of a process that favors dominant groups and relegates the others to invisibility or marginalization.

The Brazilian civilizing process, conceived under the Eurocentric logic that guided the formation of the State and national institutions, was structured in a way that was inseparable from the symbolic domination exercised over racialized bodies.

This domination did not operate only by direct coercion, but above all by the imposition of cultural norms, moral and aesthetic values that elected the white European as a civilizational standard and, simultaneously, relegated African and indigenous cultures to marginality, silencing and inferiority.

In this context, the myth of racial democracy emerges as one of the most effective devices of symbolic domination in Brazil. This narrative, widely disseminated from the 1930s onwards, promoted the idea that miscegenation would have generated a harmonious coexistence between whites, blacks, and indigenous people, erasing racial conflicts and masking the effects of slavery and structural racism. The ideology of miscegenation was mobilized as a rhetorical instrument that concealed exclusion and justified the absence of reparation policies.

As several studies indicate, the myth of racial democracy functioned as a potent strategy for maintaining the social place of racialized populations and as a mechanism of symbolic control used by the elites to neutralize the political and social radicalization of the black population.

Fernanda Telles Márques (2022), when analyzing school violence from the perspective of structural racism, demonstrates how racial prejudice manifests itself in a daily and often subtle way in the school environment, affecting the experience and development of young black people.

The ethnography carried out by the author reveals that the violence directed at these students is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather a reflection of a racism that permeates institutions and social relations, marking their bodies and trajectories "on the surface".

Based on the belief in the biological and cultural superiority of whites, this ideology proposed the whitening of the national population through selective miscegenation and the policy of encouraging European immigration.

This symbolic operation had profound consequences: the devaluation of physical traits, aesthetics and black cultural heritage, and the imposition of whiteness as a universal model of humanity, rationality and beauty.

As critical studies on whiteness point out, this process internalized the perception that "everything that refers to blacks receives a negative valuation that is naturalized", establishing a form of persistent symbolic violence, in which black subjects themselves can reproduce socially constructed stereotypes and inferiorizations.

The Brazilian post-abolition period, marked by the absence of public policies aimed at the integration of the black population, consolidated a model of exclusion sustained by blaming narratives.

The blaming of the black population for its own condition of marginality replaced the recognition of the structural causes of inequality with a meritocratic and racially biased discourse.

The diffusion of the "ideology of the superiority of immigrants", especially in the first decades of the twentieth century, reinforced this picture, devaluing the national workforce – mostly black – in favor of the symbolic and economic valorization of European immigrants.

Diego Nascimento De Oliveira et al. (2024) investigate the impact of structural racism on education and work opportunities, highlighting the inequalities faced by black and indigenous populations in Brazil.

The study highlights how racism manifests itself in institutional norms and practices that perpetuate the exclusion of these groups in various social spheres, limiting their access to fundamental rights and full participation in society. This analysis reinforces the urgency of public policies aimed at racial equity and the fight against racism in its multiple dimensions.

Although sectoral research, such as the one that investigated Cervejaria Brahma, did not identify explicit wage discrimination against Afro-descendants in that specific case, the structural panorama reveals a persistent picture of racial inequality in multiple spheres, such as the labor market, education, and access to health.

Symbolic domination manifests itself in these spaces through the naturalization of inequality, the perpetuation of stigmas, and the reproduction of racial hierarchies in apparently neutral institutional practices.

Roberta Gondim de Oliveira et al. (2020), when analyzing racial inequalities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrate how structural racism manifested itself in the increase in vulnerability and mortality of the black population.

The research points to the deep anchoring of racial demarcation in Brazilian social structures, influencing political-social dynamics and processes and exposing the persistence of historical obstacles that continue to make black lives unfeasible.

The chronic difficulty of adequately recording the race/color item in social and health indicators is another face of this exclusionary logic. The statistical invisibility imposed on black populations is not a technical fact, but a symptom of institutional racism that prevents the formulation of effective public policies. The absence of racialized data is itself a mechanism of political erasure.

Despite this situation, resistance has been consolidated through the actions of social movements, critical intellectual production, and the dissemination of racial literacy practices.

These efforts aim to denaturalize racial hierarchies, deconstruct the founding myths of inequality, and promote the appreciation of Afro-Brazilian epistemologies and cultures as legitimate forms of knowledge and existence. The struggle for visibility, recognition, and racial justice is also a struggle against the symbolic devices that have historically sustained the Brazilian racial order.

Rafael de Abreu e Souza (2024), in his archaeological analysis of Brazilian-style racism from the explosion of Ilha do Braço Forte, demonstrates how destruction, criminalization, and black genealogies are connected in the materiality of racism. By focusing on the trajectory of a black port guard, the author illuminates the intricate relationships between racism, capitalism, and the excesses of modernity in Brazil, offering a critical perspective on the persistence of racial inequalities.

The reading of the civilizing process allows us to understand that racial exclusion does not occur only by omission, but also by continuous action, present in the provisions that regulate recognition and social belonging. This understanding is essential to problematize the forms of racialized subjectivation that operate in Brazilian society and that maintain inequality as a persistent structure. This analysis will be deepened in the next section, which addresses the construction of black identity in dialogue with the theory of social figurations and with the mechanisms of symbolic stigmatization.

STRUCTURAL RACISM AND SYMBOLIC EXCLUSION: BLACK IDENTITY THROUGH THE LENS OF POWER RELATIONS

The identity of the black population in Brazil was historically forged in the midst of processes of domination, silencing and stigmatization that have crossed social and institutional structures since the colonial period.

Slavery, in addition to legally dehumanizing, produced symbolic representations that associated the black body with subordination, dangerousness, and ignorance. Even after the formal abolition of slavery, these representations were maintained and updated by scientific, religious, and state discourses, contributing to the consolidation of a model of society based on racial hierarchization.

The construction of identity, in this context, cannot be understood as a merely individual process. It is a relational dynamic, which occurs in the intertwining between subjects and structures, between subjective experiences and social coercions.

Norbert Elias (2000), when dealing with the civilizing process, emphasizes that the development of identity is linked to the internalization of norms and the formation of self-control that reflects socially dominant values. The identity of each subject, therefore, is immersed in a social fabric that guides and restricts behaviors, emotions, and self-images.

The black population, historically subjected to the denial of its full humanity, developed its identity in a scenario of permanent symbolic dispute. Living with stigmas reiterated by the media, by the school, by religious and legal institutions requires constant negotiation between what one is and what one is expected to be. In this process, the black subject is often impelled to conform to white standards of sociability, aesthetics and rationality as a way of ensuring some degree of acceptance and symbolic survival. It is a mechanism of forced adaptation that evidences the normative force of racial domination.

Gebara (2009) observes that "through self-control, in self-regulation, individuals differentiate and stand out, thus constituting their identity, because since childhood they are conditioned by the other to have self-control as a function of social regulations (coercions)".

This process is not neutral: it is crossed by asymmetrical power relations, which delimit which identities are recognized, which are tolerated and which are excluded. Thus, black subjectivity is permanently tensioned by a double movement: of external negation and of internal affirmation.

This identity ambivalence is intensified by the logic of normative whiteness, which presents itself as invisible and universal, while racializing and particularizing everything that diverges from it.

Black phenotypic traits, body language, ways of dressing, and Afro-Brazilian cultural references are often read as deviations from the norm, as signs of threat or disorder. In this context, the recognition of the black subject is conditioned to his partial assimilation or exoticization, producing, in both cases, profound psychic and social effects.

Honorato (2021, p.6) contributes by stating that the construction of identity is linked to specific social figurations, which configure possibilities and limits for the development of

individuality. "At birth, the individual does not depend exclusively on his natural constitution, because, in order to reach adulthood, he is subject to a process of individualization".

This process, however, does not take place in the abstract: it is always crossed by concrete inequalities of access, representation and belonging. In the case of the black population, these inequalities have historically been sustained by legal and cultural devices that have limited their social agency.

To fully understand the constitution of black identity, it is also necessary to consider the persistent effects of coloniality. Developed in the field of decolonial theory, the concept of coloniality allows us to understand how the structures of power, knowledge, and modes of subjectivation instituted during colonialism continue to operate in postcolonial societies. It is not a historical residue, but an active logic that organizes racial, epistemological and economic hierarchies, sustaining racism as a technology of domination.

Coloniality produced and naturalized a global racial classification, in which European whiteness was elevated to a position of civilizational superiority, while non-white bodies — indigenous, black, and mestizo — were placed in subordinate positions. This hierarchy, far from being undone with formal independence or the abolition of slavery, continues to guide access to resources, rights and recognition. It is also at the base of national myths such as that of racial democracy, which by romanticizing miscegenation, erased racial conflicts and forbade the recognition of the founding violence of Brazilian society.

The myth functioned as a pacifying discourse, which camouflaged structural exclusion under the appearance of harmony and still makes it difficult to confront racism directly.

Articulated to this imaginary is the ideology of whitening, sustained by the belief in the superiority of whiteness and the devaluation of black phenotypic and cultural characteristics.

This ideology imposed Eurocentric aesthetic standards, denied black bodies, and legitimized practices of forced assimilation as a strategy of social mobility. At the same time, a deep symbolic violence was consolidated, in which black subjects internalize the values of domination, often reproducing stereotypes and negative perceptions about themselves.

Coloniality is not limited to bodies or imaginaries, but also operates on knowledge. The imposition of a Western rationality as universal implied the delegitimization of African and indigenous epistemologies, promoting a systematic process of epistemicide that still structures educational institutions, scientific production, and cultural policy.

Black knowledge, often confined to the field of orality or religiosity, was systematically disallowed, while white knowledge was institutionalized as criteria of truth and competence.

In the labor market, coloniality is expressed in the racial segmentation of functions, low wages, informality, and the invisibility of black subjects in spaces of command.

After abolition, the absence of reparation policies kept the black population in positions of economic vulnerability, while the most prestigious symbolic and material positions continued to be occupied mostly by whites. This structure remains in operation in contemporary statistics, demonstrating the continuity of historical inequalities.

Hildete Pereira de Melo et al. (2013), when analyzing the labor market in Rio de Janeiro in the First Republic, in the case of Cervejaria Brahma, observe the complexity of racial and nationality relations in the context of industrialization. Although the research did not identify explicit wage discrimination in that specific sector, it shows how black labor, the majority in the post-abolition period, was inserted in a scenario of dispute with immigrant labor, marked by racial hierarchies and the symbolic valorization of certain groups to the detriment of others. This dynamic certainly influenced the construction of the identity of black workers in that context.

Colonial logic is also manifested in what Achille Mbembe calls necropolitics — the power to decide who can live and who can die. In Brazil, this rationality translates into the selectivity of police lethality, the negligence of the health system, the absence of basic sanitation in racialized territories, and institutional indifference in the face of preventable deaths. The devaluation of black life, in this sense, is not only rhetorical, but operates materially, regulating the right to exist with dignity (Mbembe, 2016).

This situation is sustained by historically constituted power relations, which continue to organize the modes of production of racial inequality in Brazil. These relations are not restricted to the institutional field, but also operate on the symbolic and subjective plane.

Structural racism is the most visible expression of this logic, as it is ingrained in the ways society distributes opportunities, regulates belonging, and assigns value to lives. Symbolic domination, in this process, is a silent and effective mechanism: it imposes representations that legitimize inequality and are naturalized by the subjects themselves. The myth of racial democracy, the universalization of whiteness as an ideal and the marginalization of black references are forms of symbolic violence that hide conflicts and make it impossible to directly confront racism.

In institutions, this domination is expressed in the configuration of daily practices. The school, for example, often reproduces the silencing of Afro-Brazilian narratives, delegitimizes black ancestral knowledge, and reinforces the white standard as a measure of excellence. The same occurs in the labor market, where black subjects are underrepresented in leadership positions and overrepresented in precarious functions. It is

a logic of exclusion that operates through apparently neutral criteria, but marked by a profound inequality of access to power.

Cintia Rodrigues de Oliveira et al. (2015), when analyzing the relations of symbolic domination in a process of merger of financial institutions, using the perspective of Elias and Scotson, demonstrate how "outsider" groups can be stigmatized and marginalized even in contemporary organizational contexts. Although it is not directly about racial relations, the dynamics of establishing symbolic boundaries and attributing negative characteristics to one group to the detriment of another offers a parallel for understanding how black identity can be constructed and perceived in relation to the dominant white group in Brazilian society.

Despite this, power relations are neither static nor immune to resistance. The black Brazilian population has historically built forms of contestation and reinvention. The emergence of anti-racist social movements, the valorization of black epistemologies, affirmative action policies, and racial literacy processes are expressions of a struggle for recognition and redistribution. These movements not only denounce the injustices of the present, but also propose new modes of existence, which challenge consolidated racial and epistemic hegemony.

Understanding black identity requires, therefore, a complex reading of the power relations that constitute and cross it. It is a collective, historical and political construction, which involves disputes for visibility, dignity and belonging. The analysis that follows, based on Elias' theory of figurations, will deepen this reflection by dealing with the dynamics of stigmatization and symbolic exclusion that organize social spaces in contemporary Brazil.

STIGMATIZATION AND SYMBOLIC DOMINATION: THE ESTABLISHED AND THE OUTSIDERS IN THE BRAZILIAN REALITY

The structures of racial domination in Brazil do not operate only through material inequality, but are sustained by symbolic processes that produce and reproduce unequal social places. These processes involve the creation of moral and affective boundaries that define who belongs and who should be kept on the sidelines, acting on bodies, identities and collective narratives.

The systematic stigmatization of the black population, associated with historical practices of exclusion and silencing, is at the center of these dynamics. To understand how such mechanisms are articulated and perpetuated in social relations, it is necessary to resort to analytical categories that reveal the subtle and persistent modes of reproduction of inequality.

From the analysis developed by Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson (2000) in *The Established and the Outsiders*, it is possible to access an extremely fruitful interpretative matrix to understand the dynamics of exclusion, stigmatization and inequality that cross Brazilian society, especially in the field of racial relations.

Although situated in a small English community, the study shows how socially consolidated groups — the "established" ones — maintain their position of prestige and authority through the symbolic construction of the inferiority of the "outsiders", a group composed of newcomers, still without social cohesion or symbolic capital.

Although Elias and Scotson's analysis focuses on a specific location, the model they propose can be transposed to broader contexts, such as that of Brazilian society, marked by a deep history of racial hierarchization and systematic exclusion.

The figure of the "established" is occupied, in this case, by the white elites who, since the colonial period, have held the monopoly of spaces of political, economic and cultural power. The "outsiders" correspond to the black population, which, even after the abolition of slavery, continued to be prevented from fully accessing citizenship rights, remaining on the margins of social guarantees and institutional representation.

The central element of the established/outsider dynamic is stigma. According to Elias, stigmatization does not derive from objective differences or real capabilities, but is actively produced by the dominant group, as a way of justifying and perpetuating inequality.

The established group builds a positive moral image of itself—associated with order, discipline, and respectability—while projecting negative attributes such as disorganization, instability, and immorality onto outsiders. This symbolic strategy serves both to reinforce the internal cohesion of the dominant group and to legitimize the exclusion of the other.

As the authors state, "one group can only stigmatize another effectively when it is well established in positions of power that enable it to stigmatize the one whom it has made excluded/discriminated against"(Elias; Scotson, 2000).

An essential element in the analysis of these figurations is the role of symbolic recognition and collective memory in the construction of inequalities. As Elias and Scotson (2002) point out, the established tend to monopolize the legitimate definition of local history and norms of conduct, silencing the experiences of outsiders.

This pattern is repeated in Brazilian society, where official history often erases the contributions of the black population, reinforcing a monocultural narrative. As Oliveira et al. (2020) observe, the myth of racial democracy, far from representing an overcoming of racism, constitutes a sophisticated technology for the invisibility of the structural violence that affects black lives on a daily basis.

This logic is easily identifiable in the ways in which the black population is represented in the Brazilian social imaginary. Stigmas of criminality, excessive sexualization, disorder and incompetence are continuously projected onto black bodies, whether in the media, in schools, in public security institutions or in everyday relationships.

These stigmas operate as control devices, restricting access to prestige, recognition, and social mobility. As Moraes (2013) observes, this condition of negative hypervisibility is what characterizes the process of supravisibility: the black body is always visible, but under a distorted framework, which associates it with threat and transgression.

The logic of stigmatization that permeates the relations between established and outsiders is also manifested in the educational environment. Dantas' (2020) research shows how the school reproduces symbolic practices that devalue black identity, promoting the silencing of dissident voices and the internalization of inferiority by students.

The author shows that, even in institutions with a majority of black students, whiteness remains a normative reference, and the black body is often the target of control, disciplining and denial. This process reinforces symbolic domination and compromises the construction of a positive and critical black identity within the school space.

Symbolic domination, in this context, is exercised not only through the direct imposition of norms, but also through the naturalization of these social representations. Established people do not need to resort to physical force to maintain their position; They do so through the diffusion of discourses, values, and expectations that shape common sense and internalize inequality as something legitimate and expected.

It is a power that acts on consciences, forming subjectivities and guiding practices without, many times, its effects being perceived as violence. The strength of this mechanism lies precisely in its invisibility.

In the Brazilian reality, the racial structure is organized based on this same logic of moral differentiation. Access to urban space, the justice system, the labor market, and public policies is profoundly marked by devices of symbolic distinction that reiterate the position of inferiority of racialized subjects.

The "standard citizen" — white, heterosexual, middle-class — is taken as universal, while everything that differs from him needs to justify his presence, his competence and his legitimacy. The black population, in this process, continues to occupy the place of the social outsider, even when it transits through prestigious spaces or occupies prominent positions.

These dynamics are not restricted to formal institutional spaces, but also cross urban daily life. Souza (2024), in reconstructing the trajectory of Antônio Luiz Aguapio, a black worker from Ilha do Braço Forte, reveals how racial marginalization operates not only in

discourses and images, but also in the materiality of social relations. The criminalization of black bodies, the devaluation of their existence, and the erasure of their histories constitute what the author calls the "archeology of racism in the Brazilian style," in which ruins and silent memories denounce the excesses of capitalist modernity and the traces of coloniality that still structure the present.

The theory of figurations proposed by Elias allows us to understand that exclusion is not static, but is constituted in networks of interdependence in which power is distributed in a relational way. Although outsiders are, in general, the excluded, their presence is indispensable for the maintenance of the identity and cohesion of the dominant group.

The "we" of the established is only fully defined in opposition to the "they" of the outsiders. This relational structure reveals that racism is not only a problem of the discriminated against, but a fundamental cog in the way the dominant group recognizes, protects and perpetuates itself.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the dynamics of racial exclusion in Brazil reveals that racism is not expressed only through isolated discriminatory practices, but is incorporated into the institutional structures, symbolic devices and forms of sociability that shape daily life.

The historical construction of racial inequality, based on colonization, slavery and the subsequent absence of effective social integration, remains operative in contemporary social relations through the naturalization of stigmas, the maintenance of hierarchies and the invisibility of the violence that affects the black population.

By exploring the mechanisms of stigmatization and symbolic domination, this study showed how certain groups, historically excluded from power, are systematically disqualified through narratives, norms and practices that reproduce their condition of subordination.

Black identity, in this process, is crossed by symbolic disputes that involve belonging, recognition, and social legitimation, often regulated by universalized white standards. The internalization of these dynamics by the subjects, as well as their reproduction in institutional spaces, contributes to the persistence of an exclusionary social model.

By critically addressing the logic of structural racism and its effects on the constitution of identity, this article contributes to the unveiling of the most subtle and persistent layers of racial exclusion.



Understanding these forms of symbolic domination is indispensable for the formulation of public policies that address not only the material consequences of racism, but also the ways in which it operates on language, subjectivity, and the collective imagination.

In this sense, overcoming racial inequalities requires, in addition to institutional transformation, a profound review of the symbolic bases that sustain Brazilian society.

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