Policy discourses and multi-scalar interactions in curriculum development: Institutionalizing and translating ethnicity/race issues in Brazilian education
Soeterik, I.M.

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Context of the Study: Inequality, Race, and Education in Emerging Brazil

From the mid 1990’s, Brazil gained importance as a global economic power and as a country with a mission to reform international economic and political relations, both regionally and globally. Currently, as a so-called “middle power,” the country plays an important role internationally, well positioned to have influence in crucial arenas (Koonings, 2012: 16). These developments are in line with the expectation that Brazil, together with the other BRIC(S) countries, Russia, India, China, and later also South Africa, would become a single important “brick,” forming the base of wealth around the globe in 2030. However, analysis of macro-economic data and insight into income, consumption, and wealth needs to be accompanied by an investigation of the distribution of growth. Nowadays, it is known that these same BRICS, notwithstanding their growth, are still home to over half the poor population of the world (Neri, 2011: 12). Economic growth, in the way that it is currently dominated by a hegemonic form of globalisation (Santos, 2001b: 185), does not necessarily imply inclusive, emancipatory, and sustainable development. Accordingly, increase of national averages regarding, for example, income, participation in education, but also “expected happiness,” can mask important lived realities of “minorities in power,” or so-called “subordinate social groups” (Santos, 2001b). Henceforth, research that provides insight into whether Brazil is on the right track in developing a new development paradigm (Koonings, 2012), enabling it to become an example (or a “brick”) that other nations around the globe can build on, needs to include an investigation of present struggles for a more equal society.

This study engages with one of these struggles strongly present in contemporary Brazil: the struggle for an ethnically and racially just society. It focuses on this struggle in the education field, which is an important sector for social mobility. This chapter presents the relevance and rationale of this research in the context of current Brazil, by discussing the persistent inequalities in Brazilian society, specifically focusing on ethnic/racial inequality. Subsequently, the discussion turns to the development of the Brazilian education system, highlighting the current challenges and opportunities regarding ethnic/racial inequalities in education. It finishes by presenting the object of study.

3 In 2001 head of the section Global Economic Research of the Goldman Sachs bank O’Neill argued (O’Neill, 2001) that Brazil, Russia, India, and China would become the important “bricks” forming the base of wealth around the globe in 2030. The S was added more recently to the acronym, when South Africa was included in the list in 2010.

4 The Gallup World Poll project, realized by the International Development Bank, concluded that in 2009, on a scale from 0 to 10 on the “future felicity index,” the “average Brazilian” gave an 8.7 for expectations regarding happiness in the year 2014. This was considerably more than the 7 they gave to the present and the 6 with which they valued the past. Based on these outcomes Brazil was referred to as the “world champion where it concerns expectations of future happiness” (Neri, 2011: 10).

5 This concept, first heard from R.E. Santos, I believe, is useful as it clarifies that the reference to certain groups as “minorities,” has, in fact, not always to do with a certain group in society being smaller as percentage of the population (this is, for example, the case in Brazil regarding the Afro-Brazilian population). Referring to a certain group as a minority has often much more to do with access of these groups to power, therefore “minorities in power.”
1.1 Progress and Remaining Challenges in Brazilian Society

With an average annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of more than five percent, Brazil is at present the seventh economy measured by nominal GDP, one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world, and the largest economy in South America. The largest components of the country’s economy are the service sector, the industrial sector, and agriculture.

With regard to income, inequalities are slowly decreasing in Brazil; on average, the income of the poorest population has grown relatively more strongly compared to that of the richest sections of the population. The Human Development Index (HDI) of Brazil has also risen in the last thirty years from 0.549 in 1980 to 0.718 in 2011. However, as Figure 1.1 shows, the HDI of Brazil is still lower than the mean HDI of other countries in the region (Koonings, 2012: 20).

Figure 1.1 Human Development Index Brazil, 1980-2011

[Graph showing Human Development Index for Brazil and other regions]


With a Gini score of 0.53 in 2011, Brazil is still one of the countries with the greatest inequality in the world. Yet given the drop from 0.6 in 2001 to 0.53 in 2010, it is one of the top countries in

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6 Economy measured by nominal GDP is the measure most economists prefer when looking at per-capita welfare and when comparing living conditions or use of resources across countries. It indicates the gross domestic product or value of all final goods and services produced within a nation in a given year. “A nation's GDP at purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates is the sum value of all goods and services produced in the country valued at prices prevailing in the United States.” (see Indexmundi: http://www.indexmundi.com/g/r.aspx?t=10&v=65&l=en, accessed August 12, 2013).

7 Since the new millennium, the income of the poorest 50 percent of Brazil’s population increased 67.9 percent against 10.3 percent for the richest 10 percent (Neri, 2011: 23).

8 This index was originally created by the UNDP in order to measure the level of human development in countries based on education indicators, longevity, and income.

9 A Gini score is an economic measure of income inequality. A society that scores 0.0 on the Gini scale has perfect equality in income distribution. The higher the number is above 0, the higher the inequality. A score of 1.0 (or 100) indicates total inequality, where only one person possesses all the income (see also Neri, 2011: 21). With a score of 0.53 Brazil is still closer to maximum inequality than to minimum inequality.
terms of decreasing income inequalities. A more significant and continuous decrease started in the year 2003. A consequence of this decrease in income inequality was that since 2003 about 50 million people joined the higher socioeconomic classes A, B, or C (Neri, 2011: 23). The middle incomes form the fastest growing socioeconomic group in Brazil in the recent years. Currently, poverty and extreme poverty rates are reduced to half of the early 1990’s level when 43 percent of the Brazilian population was living below the poverty line (Koonings, 2012: 9).

The reduction of poverty levels is considered an important trend of the past decade in Brazil. This development is linked to the redemocratization process and the systematic introduction of anti-poverty policies slowly being introduced in the country since the mid 1990’s and which intensified during the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) government of Luiz Ignacio da Silva (commonly known as “Lula”) since 2003 (Morais & Saad-Filho, 2011). In this period the gradual (re)emergence of elements of a so-called welfare state could be observed.

In extending social provisions, the Lula administration focused on three issues: growth of social programs such as Bolso Família, which in 2011 reached 11.4 million households; the expansion of social security coverage, which was 51 percent in 2010 (compared to 45 percent in 2002); and a rapid increase of the (real) minimum wage by 67 percent between 2003 and 2010 (Morais & Saad-Filho, 2011: 35). Due to these policies Brazil currently has 24.6 million poor (13% of the total population) with a household income of no more than BRL 751, representing a decrease in the number of poor by 54 percent in the period from 2003 to 2011 (Neri, 2011: 34).

Some authors, however, point to the modest effects of these social programs when considered in the light of the huge economic growth Brazil went through in the last decade. For example, where it concerns the effect of the Bolso Família program, Koonings (2012: 9) rightly points to the fact that, in actual fact, the program consists of only 2.5 percent of the federal budget, which is just a half percent of the Brazilian Gross National Product (GNP). Notwithstanding the fact that in the period from 2001 to the present the inequalities in income in the Brazilian population have diminished, huge disparities still exist between various groups in society. In 2011 the richest 20 percent Brazilians owned 57.7 percent of the country’s wealth (compared to 63.7 percent in 2001), while the poorest 20 percent, on the other hand, increased their share of wealth from 2.6 to 3.5 percent during the same period (IBGE, 2012).

10 For example, in other BRICS, and in all European countries, with the exception of France and Belgium, inequalities have continuously increased since 1985 (Neri, 2011: 23).
11 The Brazilian Institute of Economic and Applied Studies (Ipea) states that the Brazilian population can be divided economically and socially in classes A, B, C, D, and E. Households belonging to class A have an income of above twenty minimum salaries, households belonging to class B between ten and twenty minimum salaries, households belonging to class C (also referred to as the middle class) between four and ten minimum salaries. Households belonging to class D have between two and four minimum salaries, while in class E households are grouped that earn up to two minimum salaries a month. The national minimum salary in 2011 was BRL 545 (at that time worth about EUR 231).
12 In 2009 the percentage of people living in poverty decreased to 20 percent, while the percentage of people living in extreme poverty was 7.3 percent.
13 Inspired by experiences in over 50 municipalities in Brazil, in 2001 the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso introduced the Bolso Escola program nation-wide (see also Koonings, 2012: 8). It provided cash payments to families with a monthly income below BRL 90 with children age six to fifteen, on the condition that those children enrolled in school and attended at least 85 percent of school days (Glewwe & Kassouf, 2010). The families received BRL 15 per pupil on a monthly basis, with a limit of BRL 45 per family. In 2003 President “Lula” merged other programs into Bolso Escola and renamed it Bolso Familia. Benefits were extended to include, for example, poor families with children 0 to 5 years old, or including a pregnant or breastfeeding woman (Glewwe & Kassouf, 2010).
14 Approximately EUR 279 (exchange rate December 7, 2012).
15 See also on the effects of the Bolso Familia program, specifically on education, Bonal (2012).
Several studies on income, employment, education, violence, and health have shown that opportunities for development in Brazil have a regional, gender, and ethnic/racial bias. Discrimination in political, economic, and social life prevails in the country against women, black, brown, and indigenous population groups, and people born in the Northeast and Northern regions of the country (Silva, 2010; UN Brazil, 2005: 8; Agénor & Canuto, 2013).

When analyzing regional inequalities, the size of the country should be taken into account. With its 27 federal units Brazil is the biggest country in Latin America in terms of geographical area and the fifth largest in the world, surpassed only by Russia, Canada, China, and the United States. Considering its large territorial area, with about 191 million inhabitants (IBGE, 2011) its demographic density is relatively low. Most of the population is concentrated in urban areas (84% in 2010), mainly in the large state capitals. Today, twelve of the capitals of the 27 federal units have more than a million inhabitants – São Paulo being among the ten largest cities in the world. The federal units are grouped into five regions: North, Northeast, Center West, Southeast, and South. As can be seen in Figure 1.2, a clear concentration of higher income levels, in terms of wages, can be identified in the Southeast, Center West, and South of the country, while the North East and North have the highest percentage of people with low incomes or living below national poverty levels.

Figure 1.2  Map of Brazil indicating percentages of population belonging to classes A, B, and C

Source: Neri (2011: 59), adapted by the author

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16 This comprises 26 states and one Federal district (Brasilia).
17 Households belonging to class A have an income of above twenty minimum salaries, household belonging to class B between ten and twenty minimum salaries, household belonging to class C (also referred to as the middle class) between four and ten minimum salaries
In the past two decades, Brazil has made significant progress in reducing gender inequality. However, while women are increasingly educated and active in the job market, professional segmentation on the basis of gender and wage inequality persists. Unemployment among Brazilian women is still higher than among men. Moreover, gender-based disparities in employment and compensation are illustrated by the fact that women engaged in market activities on average still earn about 30 percent less than men (Agénor & Canuto, 2013).

Where ethnic/racial inequality is concerned, several studies report on the discrimination of black and indigenous populations in political, economic, and social life in Brazil (UN Brazil, 2005: 8). The next section focuses on this dimension of inequality in Brazil, focusing on the Afro-Descendant population.

**Ethnic/Racial Inequalities**

More in-depth analysis of inequality along ethnic/race categories is only possible when data on ethnic/race identity are collected. The inclusion of a question on self-identification along race/color categories in the yearly household censuses since the 1970’s made it possible to more precisely analyze this dimension of stratification in the country. On the basis of census data collected since that period, five main categories were defined. These categories are *Branca* (white), *Preta* (black), *Amarela* (yellow), *Parda* (brown), and *Indigena* (indigenous) (see Petrucelli, 2000, 2007; Santos, S.A., 2006). As most research on race relations and racial inequalities in one way or the other builds on the statistical data collected by the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*, IBGE), these five race/color categories are often used in research and policies. However, as will be shown later in this chapter, the two categories black and brown are often combined as household census data show that the living conditions of these two groups are very similar and both groups share similar realities of racial discrimination (Santos, S.A., 2006: 42; see also Paixão et al., 2010). When combining these two categories, often the classification black/brown is used. The concept *Negro* is, however, also used in academic, social movement, and policy discourses. By reintroducing this word in the 1970’s, which was originally used by colonizers to pejoratively refer to the enslaved people of African descent, the Brazilian Black Movement gave it a new political meaning. In Chapter 2, I will elaborate on the political meaning of race/racial identities. Here it is interesting to highlight that since the 1980’s the number of people that identify themselves as black or brown increased. In 2011, for the first time ever the Afro-Brazilian population formed a slight majority of the country’s population (see Figure 1.3 below) (IBGE, 2011).
Research indicates that this increase is a result of a combination of increased recognition of African descent in recent years and higher birth rates among the Afro-Descendant population (Ipea, 2011).

**Figure 1.3  Race/color self-identification of the Brazilian population, black/brown and white, per 1,000 inhabitants, 1980 to 2010**

Source: IBGE (2010), adapted by the author

The 2011 national household survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2012: 49) concluded that 51.3 percent of the Brazilian population (100 million people) identified themselves as Afro-Descendant (black or brown, Preta or Parda\(^{24}\)). This gives Brazil currently the largest Afro-Descendant population in the world outside the African continent (Htun, 2004). Some 47.8 percent (93.3 million) people identified themselves as white, 0.4 percent (784 thousand) as indigenous, and 6 percent (1.1 million) as yellow (see Figure 1.4 below).

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\(^{23}\) Compared to the data collected in 2009, the census from 2011 showed a decrease in the white population of 0.4 percent, and in the brown population of 0.9 percent. The number of people identifying themselves as black rose by 1.4 percent, however.

\(^{24}\) Some 8.2 percent (16.0 million) people identified themselves as black (Preta) and 43.1 percent (84.1 million) identified themselves as black (Parda).
When the focus is on the Afro-Descendant population, several academic and government-linked publications in the last decades have shown that the country is profoundly stratified by color. In Brazil, ethnicity/race is correlated with poverty, uneven income distribution, inadequate housing, and inequality in education (see, e.g., Htun, 2004; Silva, 2010; Ipea, 2008, 2011; Pinheiro et. al., 2006, 2008; Theodoro, 2008). Authors of the chapter on racial inequalities in a report of the Brazilian Institute of Applied Economics already stated in 2007:

After extensive qualitative and quantitative production [of research], it is difficult to neglect the huge differences observed in almost all spheres of daily life. Black and brown people are born with an inferior weight compared to whites, they have a bigger chance to die before completing one year, there is a smaller probability for them to frequent a crèche and they suffer higher repetition rates at school, what brings them to abandon their studies with lower education levels than whites. A bigger number of black and brown youngsters die in a violent way then white youngsters and there is a smaller probability that they will find a job. If they find a job, they receive less than the half of the salary received by whites, what brings them to retire later and with lower benefits, if they do. During all life, black and brown Brazilians suffer the worst services in the health system and they end up living less in greater poverty than white Brazilians. (Ipea, 2007: 281)

The 2005 Human Development Report with a special focus on racism (UNDP, 2005) shows how the Human Development Index\(^2\) of the Brazilian population grew in the periods between 1980, 1991, and 2000. However, at the same time, inequalities between ethnic/racial groups did not decrease in relation to the evolution of the Index (see Figure 1.5).

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\(^2\) The Human Development Index (HDI) was originally created by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in order to measure the level of human development in countries based on education indicators, longevity and income.
Based on household census data from 2006, the report stated that, while the clear tendency of decreasing inequalities in income is celebrated, the slowness in which this happened should be lamented. If the decrease in income inequality between the black and brown population and the white population in Brazil continues at this pace, 32 years would still be needed for Afro-Descendant and white Brazilians to have, on average, the same income (Theodoro, 2008). A more recent national household survey (IBGE, 2012) shows how, in 2011, among the richest one percent of the Brazilian population, only 16.3 percent were Afro-Descendants. While this represents a significant increase from the 9.6 percent in 2001, the share is still very small. A similar observation can be made regarding the job market. In 2011, controlling for variables such as level of education, gender, professional activity and sector, and region of the country, an Afro-Descendant worker was expected to earn 60 percent of the income a white person would earn, while in 2001 this was 50.5 percent. Accordingly, while significant improvements from the beginning of this new century are observed, the gap is still huge.

Bearing in mind the fact that the last decades – marked by the positive effect of the increase of minimum income, social policies, and cash transfer programs like Bolsa Familia – reflect a positive political period, it must be stressed that it is not expected that this rate of decrease in inequality will persist. In the view of some scholars, this proves the positive effect of universal policies in reducing specific types of inequality such as ethnic/racial inequality, but also portrays its limits. A universal social system, access to universal education, and institutions that guarantee good results and access to the labor market for all are important for reducing racial inequality. In the current Brazilian context, nevertheless, they seem not to be enough:
In order to combat racial inequality more than universalistic policies are needed. Policies based on affirmative action are necessary. [...] Given the existence of personal and institutional racism, affirmative actions are transformed in the only way toward a more comprehensive reduction of racial inequalities in Brazil.26 (Theodoro, 2008: 13)

It would not make sense stating that the “race factor” (the effect on creating inequalities of ethnicity/race-based discrimination) explains all the asymmetries existing in Brazilian society (Paixão et al., 2010). Critical reflection is always necessary on models of analysis and processes of sense-making of data (both quantitative and qualitative) related to the issue. The challenge is to go beyond the collection of data captured through the use of already existing theoretical models (Paixão et al., 2010). For example, using new tools developed for qualitative investigation of this issue, several studies have pointed to the fact that in the context of complex race relations in Brazil, class and ethnicity/race factors continuously strengthen the others negative effects. In section 1.3, some studies reporting on discrimination and racism in education will be highlighted.

Since the mid 1990’s, Brazilian government has slowly started to consider racial inequalities in society and the need to formulate race-based policies. This was – and is – done very cautiously, as the myth of Brazil as a “racial democracy,” still sustains discourses that deny the existence of a race factor related to social and economic inequalities in Brazil.

The Myth of Racial Democracy
The myth of Brazil being a racial democracy has widely been propagated since the 1950’s, when Brazil started to make an important quantitative and qualitative leap in its process of industrialization (Santos, 2008).27 The politics and ideologies of whitening of the Brazilian population, propagated during previous decades (Dávila, 2006; Costa, 2010), were not sustainable for industrialization to be successful since the black population was also needed as workforce. Therefore, especially since the 1950’s and 1960’s, the need existed to create a new national identity through the propagation of a new collective imagination and ideology that did not exclude the black population. Accordingly, in the mid 19th century the Brazilian elite started to support the consolidation of an ideology that valued the uniqueness of the nation and its people. In this process of nation-building, the valuing of the mixing of European-white, African-black, and indigenous people and cultures took an important place (Paixão et al., 2010: 23). In this ideology there was no space for the history and experiences of (racial) exclusion, oppression and resistance between different ethnic/racial groups in the country. Hence, the myth of Brazil being a racial democracy also matched the propagation of the idea of the Brazilian people being cordial (o homem cordial). Hence, the ideology of the mixing of people of different origins was an important element in the symbolic constitution of what is dominantly understood to be “modern Brazil.”

Paixão and colleagues (2010) rightly point to the fact that the development of these ideas in the 1950’s and 1960’s should not be underestimated in itself. Considering the context of the growing strength of ideologies such as scientific racism and Nazism around the world, the ideas could even be considered quite advanced for their time. However, affirming the need to critically examine the ideologies on which the Brazilian model of socioeconomic development in the 20th century was based, the authors argue that “recognizing the important role these ideologies played in

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26 All quotes from literature in languages other than English were translated by the author.

27 It is widely affirmed that the founding ideas of the myth of the racial democracy were established much earlier. The work of the Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre is said to have played an important role here. Special reference is often made to his book *Casa grande e Senzala*, published in 1933.
the modernization of the country, the fact is that their capacity to bring new and energizing support for the contemporary dramas lived in Brazil have exhausted” (Paixão et al., 2010: 23).

Currently, the influence of the ideological framework described above is still strong. This framework can still be recognized in the dominant explanations given for the disproportionate impoverishment of blacks and their absence among Brazilian elite; given the unique Brazilian history of racial mixing, and the absence of state-sponsored segregation, class discrimination and the legacy of slavery are pointed to as the only explaining factors for the lack of blacks among the elites (Htun, 2004: 64). Accordingly, the myth forms the basis for the strong resistance existing to race-based policies. Ferez (2004) explains that discourses expressing resistance to race-based policies are based on the following ideas: 1) persistence of the idea that discrimination and racism do not exist in Brazilian society (or in other words: the persistent myth of Brazil as a racial democracy); 2) the conviction that universal policies (such as, e.g., policies to improve the quality of public education), instead of focused policies, should be promoted; and 3) the idea that policies that focus on promoting access to institutions for certain groups, like quotas for Afro-Descendants, by violating the criteria of merit would contribute to the decline of the quality of these institutions. Within this discourse, the perspective is often defended that equal opportunities for all Brazilians exist, and that success depends on individual performance. Failure to obtain success is explained by referring to factors pertaining to the personal background of individuals, such as family circumstances, socioeconomic situation, and culture.

Consequently, the racial factor involved in inequalities is neglected, and often the use of the concepts of “race” and “racism” are considered taboo when referring to Brazilian reality. In media and publications of a group of influential Brazilian intellectuals these concepts and use of the race/color categories are criticized as comprising the “racialization” of society and an attack on the so-called Brazilian “racial democracy.” This argument is based on the idea that using the concepts race, Afro-Descendant, black, brown, or white, when referring to the Brazilian population, implies stimulating polarization and conflict in society. The view is disseminated that the race/color categories – and mainly the distinction between who is Afro-Descendant (black or brown) and who is white – are invalid in Brazilian society. Accordingly, Santos (Santos S.A., 2006: 33) highlights that one of the principal arguments used against affirmative action-based policies for the black and brown population in Brazil is that, given substantial racial mixing in the country, it is impossible to know who is black. The author states:

[at] the very moment when certain progressive elements of the Brazilian government and society began to discuss and propose the implementation of affirmative action programs for blacks, the myth of racial democracy, […] once again resurged among social scientists with even more powerful and seductive appeal through such questions as the ubiquitous “Who is black in Brazil?” (Santos S.A., 2006: 33)

While on the one hand Brazil has a history of (partial) racial mixing, on the other hand decades of research have shown that the country is also stratified along ethnic/racial lines. It is true that studies indicate that both black and brown people maintained an unquestionably strong statistical presence and visibility in the national censuses, including when individuals were asked to identify their ethnic/racial identity in their own words (Santos, S.A., 2006: 33, see also Petrucelli, 2000, 2007; Paixão et al., 2010). Henceforth, in discussions about inequality in Brazil, “biological racial mixture” should not be confused with “sociological racial interactions” (Santos, S.A., 2006: 41). Santos (Santos, S.A., 2006), referring to the work of Hasenbalg, argues that actors resist recognizing racial
inequality and racism in Brazilian society, often building on the biological understanding of race. These actors often do not understand the functioning (and impact) of race as a social construct. Hence, touching directly on social relations and subjectivities, the strength of the ideology of Brazil as racial democracy still makes it difficult to unravel the social processes going on between the two. Santos (Santos, S.A., 2006) then concludes that:

[it] is impossible to answer the question who is black in Brazil not because Brazilians cannot identify blacks but because, when faced with the task of defining racial boundaries and admitting our society’s tremendous discrimination against those excluded from the inner sanctum of racial privilege, we inevitably fall back on the comforting myth of racial democracy and offer racial mixture and multiculturalism as definitive proof and symbols of our supposedly harmonious race relations. This myth of racial democracy, shrouded in the mantle of illusions such as the belief that racial mixture has made it impossible to tell groups apart, thus bringing an end to color distinctions in Brazil, is quite seductive and overwhelming. And with the elimination of color boundaries and affirmation of a Brazilian “moreno-ness” we would arrive at the utopian “meta-race” theorized by Gilberto Freyre, the principal proponent of the myth of racial democracy. (Santos S.A., 2006: 40-41)

Referring to the role played by the ideology of Brazil as a racial democracy in the complexity of race relations in Brazil nowadays, Santos (Santos, R.E., 2008) summarizes:

We [in Brazil] have moments, [...] contexts of interaction marked by integration, by symmetry, by racial equality, [...] where race is not an important regulator of social relations. While on other moments race is a marking element, a regulating element within social relations. And we have learned with the ideology of the racial democracy that that is not important, race is not important because we have integration, we have interaction. [...] It is an ideology that puts within the daily interactions the idea that when you talk about the existence of an inequality, when you point to the fact that there is a racial problem, you are bringing into that context a conflict that did not exist before. [...] Today there exist studies about racial inequalities in almost all the fields of social study. These studies provide evidence for the fact that we have a differentiated organization, a racialized structuring of the economic and social opportunities, and also in our daily life and interactions we are confronted with the practices of discrimination and prejudice, but we learn through this ideological construction to naturalize these practices. (Santos, R.E., 2008)

In sum, the often expressed resistance to the use of the concept of race and the difficulty of identifying who is black in Brazil should be understood as being linked to the still living myth of racial democracy.

While the difficulties and remaining challenges regarding investigation of race issues have to be understood in the context of the dominant discourses on race in Brazilian society, from the mid 1990’s onward more people started to be convinced by the idea that racism is pervasive in Brazilian society, and that something needed to be done about racial inequalities. In political discourses in the field of education, it also became increasingly recognized that in Brazil racism is manifest in social relations. Before turning to the new opportunities and challenges in the education field in this regard, the next section first discusses the development of the Brazilian education system.

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28 In Chapter 2 I will return to the discussion of the biological versus sociological understanding of race.
1.2 Development of the Brazilian Education System: A Process Full of Dispute

In order to understand the present state of art of Brazil and its developments in education, the historical frame of the formation of the society and (struggles related to) its education system must be considered. Though there is little space here to elaborate on this history extensively, it should be mentioned that part of the current issues and problems in the development of the Brazilian educational system have their roots in the country’s colonial history, the periods of authoritarian regime and redemocratization, and regional and global developments, such as globalization and the increased power of regional and global actors and organizations.

Brazil has made great advances over the last 70-80 years in creating a broad and diversified education system, ranging from early childhood education to the postgraduate level. In the 1930’s, the country was still essentially agrarian and education was only available to a few. At that time, only two in every ten Brazilian children attended school, and of those that studied, most only remained in school until the 5th grade of primary school (Souza, 2005). In the 1930’s, national educational policies slowly began to take shape due to the creation of the Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação, MEC) in 1930. In the first 30 years of the MEC’s existence, the state emphasized the development of quality public education. This objective was achieved to some degree; however, this was still at the cost of access to education for all (Souza, 2005).

In the period 1930-1960, the education field in Brazil was also characterized by the emergence of pedagogical conceptions that formulated alternatives to traditional humanist conceptions of education prevailing in the country (Saviani, 2005). This movement of “modernizers,” commonly referred to as “the pioneers,” propagated the transformation of what they called traditional reactionary education into a new type of education, in a new type of school. In this period, when the Roman Catholic church was still a strong actor competing with the state in the field of education, the movement campaigned for a state-led organization of one type of public, secular school, which would need to be compulsory and free for all (Saviani, 2005). Mainly due to this movement, in 1934 the new federal constitution defined education as a right for all, and a responsibility of families and of the state.

In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, processes of popular mobilization with regard to education intensified, putting cultural and popular education issues on the agenda. The Movimento de Educación de Base (Movement for Basic Education, MEB), linked to the Roman Catholic Church, and the Movimento Paulo Freire de Educación de Adultos (the Paulo Freire Movement for Adult Education) linked mainly to Catholic student movements played the most significant role (Gohn, 2005; Saviani, 2005). In the projects of both the Movimiento de Educación de Base and the Paulo Freire Movement a political-social orientation can be recognized that focused primarily on education of the poor. Hence, the focus was particularly on education as a process of development and liberation of oppressed people.

The early 1960’s was also marked by changes in the organization of the education system. Until the 1960’s, Brazil had a centralized education system, with all the states and municipalities following the same organization model defined by the central government. However, with the approval of the first National Education Act (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional, LDB), that

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29 Parts of the developments and the struggles surrounding it were related to the setting the agenda for the development of a curriculum that included ethnicity/race issues, will be more extensively discussed in Chapter 4. See also Appendix I for an explanation of the functioning of the Brazilian education system.

30 Until the 1950’s, 60 percent of the Brazilian population aged 15 and older was still illiterate (Souza, 2005).

31 This movement was led by Fernando de Azevedo. Many other important thinkers in the field of education, such as Anísio Teixeira, joined the movement.
established the National Curriculum Directives and Bases for Education in 1961, state and municipal institutions gained more autonomy, reducing the central role of the MEC. This reform fitted into the “first cycle of decentralization in Latin America” (Casassus, 2001; Sene, 2008). This cycle of reforms focused primarily on expansion of the education systems and increased enrolment rates in primary education. A focus on technical aspects of education to better qualify people for the labor market started to dominate (see Corbucci et al., 2009: 19). Inspired by theories of human capital, educational reforms in this period were strongly oriented to the economic value of education for the country (Saviani, 2005: 17). This was the official orientation of the group of military and technocrats taking power after the military coup in 1964, and dominated from the mid 1960’s onward. The productivist/technical approach to education resisted several critiques during the 1970’s and 1980’s and even gained new strength in the context of neoliberalism. In 1971, with the approval of the second education act, education became obligatory for all children between seven and fourteen years old.

From the 1970’s onwards, Brazilian society passed through a period of struggle for redemocratization that culminated in the transition from the military regime to a democratically elected government in 1985. In this period various groups in society campaigned for reinstating civil and political rights that had dissapeared during the dictatorial period. Various institutions and organizations within Brazilian society participated in this process. New social movements emerged and new mechanisms of representation of sectors of civil society within the structures of executive power were created (Burity, 2006: 70). Movements linked to the education sector, like the National Forum for the Defence of the Public School (Fórum Nacional em Defesa da Escola Pública, FNDEP)32 were important actors in this period (Gohn, 2005). Through this Forum, educators and other actors loyal to the movement mobilized around the reconstruction of the social and political functions and meaning of schooling.33 This happened in a context in which the average number of years of schooling of the population aged between 7 and 14 was only 5.1 years – significantly less than the eight years of schooling proposed in the 1971 education act. In this period twenty percent of the population in this age range still did not even complete a single year of schooling (Corbucci et al., 2009: 19).

The creation of new mechanisms for the representation of sectors of civil society in political decision-making in this period of redemocratization resulted in the 1988 constitution reflecting –at least in some points- the pressure of civil society (see also Corbucci et al., 2009: 24). For example, it affirms the public character of education where it refers to the responsibility of the state to provide free education from preschool to higher education levels. It also includes the principle of democratic management of public education (Article 206, clause IV, Brasil, 1988: 136). Likewise, redemocratization and growing political freedom, and the process of political organization in the field of education, together with the proclamation of the new constitution, set the ground for elaboration of a new Education Act (Lei 9.394/96 de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional [LDB], Brasil, 1996).34 The latter was a process in which various social movements (many joined in the above mentioned FNDEP) participated. Since the beginning of the 1990’s, many important

32 This was a national movement consisting of diverse entities and representations that, since the process of the drafting of the new national constitution in 1987, participated in the struggle for the defense of the public school.
33 Sarubi (2005) explains that the main issues on the agenda of the FNDEP were the improvement of the quality of public education, the democratization of education, and inclusion in the constitution of the principle of and democratic management of the education system.
34 After the 1988 Constitution had been drawn up, the 1996 Education Act was one of the first pieces of legislation to be considered by the Federal Chamber.
developments have taken place in the education sector. New powerful actors and events have profoundly influenced educational reforms taking place in the country. In this context the contents of the new Education Act, as originally proposed by the social movements, would also change radically (Frigotto & Ciavatta, 2003; Zanetti, 1998).

The situation of Brazilian basic education in the early 1990’s was still characterized by alarming figures regarding access, literacy, repetition, dropout rates, and quality. In that period, 12.5 percent of children in primary school age did not go to school. Among more vulnerable groups, such as children living in the Northeast Region, children from poor families, and blacks, this percentage was even higher (25% of children in the Northeast, 25% of poor children, and 20% of black children, respectively). Moreover, 17 percent of the population aged 15 and over was illiterate. Among youngsters between 15 and 19 years old around the country this was 6.8 percent, while in the Northeast Region this was 16.3 percent. High rates of repetition and dropout existed, resulting in a negative impact on school careers in general. The quality of teaching and teacher training was also low, and adequate teaching materials were absent. Furthermore the provision of vocational and higher education was extremely limited, and of low quality. The accreditation of new institutions also was a heavily bureaucratic process, and evaluation of and efficient spending of public funds was non-existent (Souza, 2005).

From the 1980’s onwards, reforms took place in several countries around the world that influenced various aspects of education, including school governance, teacher education, teaching and learning methods, school inspection, school financing, evaluation, and community participation (Altinyelken, 2010: 10). Hence, change became central to education discourses both in the Western world and in low-income countries. The focus on change was accompanied by a gradual substitution of humanistic, social justice, and the human rights orientations – propagated since the 1960’s by global actors such as UNESCO – by key concepts taken from the global economy discourse, such as productivity, competitiveness, efficiency, and profit maximization (Altinyelken, 2010). Hence “Neoliberalism has become the dominant ideology which perceives education as a producer of goods and services that foster economic development.” (Altinyelken, 2010: 11).

Starting in the 1990’s, education reforms were introduced in several Latin American countries. The influence of global\(^{35}\) and regional\(^{36}\) organizations on the reforms can indeed be recognized. In Latin America organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank started to propose agendas regarding the organization of the education system as well as ones concerning the pedagogical contents. The activities of these organizations in this period were characterized by their organizing major events, providing technical advice, and the production of learning material (Frigotto & Ciavatta 2003: 97). In line with the neoliberal agenda, these organizations considered education primarily to be the producer of human capital, and as such strategic in the overall process of development and competitive insertion of the country in global markets (Frigotto & Ciavatta, 2003; Sene, 2008).

In addition to education reforms in the 1990’s being linked to globalization and the diffusion of neoliberal political ideas, these reforms should be understood as being related to other

\(^{35}\) Examples include the National Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations development program, and the World Trade Organization.

\(^{36}\) In Latin America, Frigotto and Ciavatta (2003: 96) highlight the role played in the economic sphere by the Comissão Econômica para a América Latina e Caribe (CEPAL), while in the education field they point to the role played by the Oficina Regional para a Educação na América Latina e no Caribe (OREALC). Moreover, they indicate the influence of the Acordo de Livre Comércio das Américas (ALCA).
developments in the political sphere, such as the consolidation of democracy in several countries in the region and increasing technological-scientific developments.

In the education reforms taking place in Brazil in the 1990’s, a struggle emerged between demands for adaptation of the education system to the demand for new human capital and the demand for and effective democratization of access to knowledge at all levels of education coming from organized civil society. Frigotto and Ciavatta (2003: 106) - giving the example of the drafting of the new Education Act\textsuperscript{37} - argue that in the education reforms in Brazil, the voice of civil society was subordinated to the socioeconomic project of adjustment reforming educational organization, and the end result of three complementary strategies: deregulation, decentralization combined with autonomy, and privatization.

While political and economic developments in this period resulted in almost total access to primary education by children in the age of seven to fourteen years from the mid 1990’s until the beginning of this century (EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005), it is currently admitted that the education reforms and policies that mainly focused on access did not succeed in addressing the social and political meaning and function of schooling. In many regards, in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} and early 21\textsuperscript{st} century, the Brazilian educational system continued to replicate and increase the enormous social inequalities in the country (Senna, Glatt & Mattos, 2005; Souza, 2005). Senna, Glatt and Mattos argue that in Brazil “school inclusion has not managed to go beyond the level of simple integration into the institutional space of the school” (Senna, Glatt & Mattos, 2005: 17):

Over the centuries, a Brazil was created with on the one hand Brazilians aligned with modern culture – legitimate beings shaped through school education – and, on the other hand, Brazilians not aligned with modern culture – with or without schooling – constrained by the paradoxical feeling of inferiority in relation to others. [...] Brazilian modernity would draw up boundaries of national citizenship around itself, leaving most of the population of the country in exile. Access to writing – and, more recently, access to basic schooling – would take in modern Brazil the place of nationality. (Senna, Glatt and Mattos, 2005: 8)

Currently, Brazil is lagging behind on several goals included in the promise of Education for All by 2015 (see Box 1.1 below). It is clear to many that a lot still has to be done in relation to improving the quality of education. In 2007, an Ipea document already stated:

The near-universalization of access to schools in the 1990’s of the population aged seven to fourteen years old brought one of the principal advances in the Brazilian society in the educational field. However, as the improvement regarding job vacancies had been attained, new challenges came to the fore. In addition to the still considerable number of children and adolescents remaining out of school, among those registered there are those who do not learn or who progress very slowly, who repeat years, and in the end drop out of school. The factors that contribute to these difficulties are related to the quality of education, the management of schools and educational systems, the conditions of access and permanence, and – still – the social inequalities.\textsuperscript{38} (Ipea, 2007: 158)

\textsuperscript{37} The new Education Act was finally approved by government in 1996 after radically changing the proposal elaborated since 1988 by organized civil society (see Zanetti, 1998)

\textsuperscript{38} Translation from the Portuguese by the author.
In 2011, the national household census concluded that 98.2 percent of the children aged between 6 and 14 years old were attending school (IBGE, 2012). Research has shown, however, that in Brazil, at the level of primary and secondary education, attending school does not mean the same as to be schooled (Ipea, 2007). When liquid rates of registration are considered – meaning the percent of children visiting school at the right level according to their age – it turns out that only 64.9 percent of youngsters conclude the nine years of primary education at the right age (between 14 and 15 years old). Accordingly, repetition and late enrolment are still serious problems. The same applies to dropouts: in 2011 only 64.9 percent of youngsters aged 16 concluded primary education. These data show that currently in Brazil only about two thirds of children that enter primary school manage to finish it. The tendency towards repeating years and dropout seems to intensify along the way, from primary education through to higher education. Moreover, as part of this tendency the exclusion of members of certain groups in Brazilian society can be clearly identified. Here too, children and youngsters of Afro-Brazilian or indigenous descent, people born in the North Region and Northeast Region, and persons originating from families with low income per capita are structurally excluded from participation in formal education (UNESCO, 2012; see also Ipea, 2007).

The discussion in this section has highlighted that throughout the history of Brazil, education has been a field full of tensions and disputes. Different actors, operating in different areas and in various political arenas at all levels, constantly transformed projects with regard to the

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**Box 1.1 “Education for All” goals in Brazil**

**Goal 1: Expand early childhood care and education**
There is a strong possibility of achieving Goal 1 in Brazil.

**Goal 2: Provide free and compulsory primary education for all**
Progress regarding access conditions in primary education has been made and Goal 2 is highly achievable in Brazil. However, taking failure and dropout rates and poor school performance into account, access conditions are not very favorable. This implies that universal access to primary education has not led to universal access to basic knowledge.

**Goal 3: Promote learning, life skills for youth and adults**
There are unequal conditions with regard to access and school achievement of Brazilian youth and adults. This could jeopardize the achievement of Goal 3 by 2015.

**Goal 4: Increase adult literacy by 50 per cent**
Brazil is highly unlikely to achieve the reduction in illiteracy set out in Goal 4.

**Goal 5: Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015**
Brazil is very unlikely to achieve the gender parity and equality given as aim in Goal 5 by 2015.

**Goal 6: Improve the quality of education**
Even considering the efforts and the progress Brazil has made, it is also very unlikely that the country will achieve Goal 6 by 2015.

Source: UNESCO (2012), adapted by the author
organization, purpose, and the learning contents of education provided. Many challenges and battles still remain. Understanding that the Brazilian education system is a field of dispute, is also crucial towards understanding the object of this thesis. One of the challenges still existing in the Brazilian education system is combatting ethnic/racial inequality. This issue will be discussed in the next section.

1.3 Ethnic/Racial Inequality and Racism in Brazilian Education: Current Opportunities and Challenges

From the end of the 1970’s onwards, studies already showed that repetition and dropout rates in education existed to the disadvantage of the black and brown population (cf., Hasenbalg, 1979). This section discusses the current situation concerning ethnic/racial inequality and racism in Brazilian education. It shows that from the late 1990’s onwards, some aspects of educational inequality have decreased, while other inequalities still remain.

Access, Participation and Progress in the Education of the Black and Brown Brazilian Population

Access to school is a major dimension in assessing inequality in education. Enrolment in education at various levels is correlated with a significant reduction of ethnic/racial inequality in the last decade. As Figure 1.6 shows, in the age range corresponding to primary education (6-14 years old), in 2001, the percentage of black and brown children excluded from school was 5.8 percent (a difference of 2.3 percent compared to the group of whites excluded from school). In 2009 this difference was reduced to 0.6 percent (Barreto, Codes & Duarte, 2012: 13). Figure 1.7 shows that, for youngsters in the 15-17 age range, a decrease in inequality between Afro-Descendant and white Brazilians also took place. In 2001 the percentage of Afro-Descendants excluded from the education system was 6 percent higher than the percentage of whites. Towards the end of the decade, this gap decreased to 2.9 percent. Moreover, when children aged 4 and 5 years old are considered, the gap decreased from 4.5 to 2.4 percent (see Figure 1.8). Hence, inequalities between whites and Afro-Descendants regarding access to education decreased for all age ranges, except for the 0-3 year olds. In this age range the difference rose from 1.8 to 3.1 percent (see Figure 1.9) (Barreto, Codes & Duarte, 2012: 14).

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40 In this research factors such as the socioeconomic status of the family, profession of the parents, family structure, differences in participation were controlled (see eg. Hasenbalg, 1979).
41 This trend corresponds with the decrease in inequalities where gender, age, residence locale (rural/urban), and region are considered (Corbucci et al., 2005).
Figure 1.6 Percentage of the population aged 6-14 who are out of school, by race/color, Brazil 2001-2009

Figure 1.7 Percentage of the population aged 15-17 who are out of school, by race/color, Brazil 2001-2009

Source: Barreto, Codes and Duarte (2012: 13), adapted by the author
Figure 1.8 Percentage of the population aged 4-5 who are out of school, by race/color, Brazil 2001-2009

Source: Barreto, Codes and Duarte (2012: 14), adapted by the author

Figure 1.9 Percentage of the population aged 0-3 who are out of school, by race/color, Brazil 2001-2009

Source: Barreto, Codes and Duarte (2012: 14), adapted by the author
The data presented above show the need to recognize the improved situation of the Afro-Brazilian population regarding access to school. However, two points should be highlighted. Firstly, significant differences still exist between the groups concerning participation in education (see Figure 1.10 below). Secondly, increased enrolment does not say anything about success and progress, repetition and dropout within the education institutions. When the average number of years of study of the white, black, and brown population in the 1988-2008 period are analyzed, it is found that on average the white population aged 15 and older increased the years of study by 3.1 years, while the black and brown population aged 15 and older increased the years of study by 2.9 years (Ipea, 2007). Accordingly, with an increase of difference between the two groups from 1.6 year to 1.8 year of study a small increase in inequality between the white, black, and brown population occurred (see Table 1.1 below).

Figure 1.10 Percentage of black and brown children in the Brazilian population excluded from education, by age, Brazil 2009

![Percentage of black and brown children in the Brazilian population excluded from education, by age, Brazil 2009](source: Paixão et al. (2010: 215), adapted by the author)
Table 1.1  Average number of years of study, by age and race/color groups (white, black and brown), Brazil 1988, 1998, 2008\textsuperscript{42,43}

<table>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15+</td>
<td>25+</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>65+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black &amp; brown</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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Source: Paixão et al. (2010: 218), adapted by the author

\textsuperscript{42} The category “total” includes individuals in the race/color identities yellow and indigenous, and those individuals that did not report on their race/color identity.

\textsuperscript{43} In the years 1988 and 1998 populations resident in the rural areas of the North were not included in the household census, with the exception of those residing in Tocantins in 1998 (Paixão et al., 2010: 207).
In 2008 an IBGE report stated that the difference in average number of years of study remained the same over the years. It also indicated that among youngsters between 15 and 27 years old, in the year 2007 nearly 85.2 percent of whites were studying, with 58.7 percent in secondary education (the level that corresponds with that age group). Among the black adolescents and young adults in this age range, 79.8 percent were going to school; however, only 39.4 percent were in secondary education, indicating possible late enrolment and a high percentage of repetition among this group. Also, while in 2007 the percentage of white students in the 18-24 age range in higher education was 57.9 percent, the number of black students made up only 25 percent. The illiteracy rate among people aged 15 years and over in 2008 was 6.2 percent among whites, while among blacks this was still 13.6 percent (Paixão et al., 2010: 207).

Racial inequalities also exist when comparing educational achievements of white and non-white pupils in Brazilian education. Castro and Abramovay (2006), for example, discuss the analysis of the exams of the Evaluation System of Primary Education (SAEB) in 2003. Based on this analysis the conclusion was drawn that not only did white pupils reach a higher proficiency level in all analyzed year groups, but also that the differences between the mean scores of white students and the mean scores of the black and brown students had increased – to the disadvantage of the black and brown students. In sum, it could be stated that the higher the education level, the greater the differences in participation and achievement rates between white and black and brown pupils.

**Discrimination and Racism in Brazilian Education**

Studies investigating the factors that (re)produce racial inequalities in Brazilian education have also been conducted. Several of these studies (e.g., Carvalho, 2005; Castro & Abramovay, 2006) point to experiences of discrimination and racism undergone by black and brown pupils, and the existence of discriminating and racist practices in schools, both at primary and secondary levels.

For example, the annual National Exam of Secondary Education (ENEM) in 2007 brought to light that 55.7 percent of the pupils had at some point witnessed an act of discrimination or racism (60.2% of white pupils, and 63.7% of black and brown pupils). Moreover, 24.1 percent of the black and brown pupils confirmed that they had personally suffered discrimination regarding their physical appearance or ethnicity/race at least once in their lives (among white pupils this was 6.6%) (MEC, 2007 in Paixão et al., 2010: 237). Such investigations are essential, as they show the need to also investigate experiences and micro-processes taking place within education. These studies could shed a different light on the question of why black and brown pupils repeat more and show higher percentages of dropout in education. Paixão and colleagues (2010) for example point out that, given the context of low socioeconomic status, lack of role models, and absence of relatives in stable and valued professional positions, combined with experiencing low expectations, discrimination, and racism in educational context, could explain the relative early entry into the job market of black youngsters.

Castro and Abramovay (2006), focusing in their study on race relations in primary schools in Brazil, conclude that the differences in educational participation and achievement between white and black and brown Brazilians are caused by disadvantages that black and brown pupils face based on their racial attribution during their school career. The authors state that during school careers within the Brazilian education system, different processes of discrimination and racism create barriers for the academic development of black and brown students, barriers that do not affect the participation and achievement of white students.

In her study entitled *Educational Achievement and Racial Classification of Pupils*, Carvalho (2005) succeeded in unraveling how such processes of discrimination and racism work in classrooms. By
collecting data through observations of teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions in the classroom, from interviews and surveys, and through qualitative and quantitative analysis, Carvalho tried to unravel the relationship between school success (in terms of academic achievement, as well as behavior and discipline, among other things), gender, and family income and the racial classification of pupils by teachers. The study identified the dominance of the valorization of whiteness. It was observed that, as cultural construction, in the school whiteness was clearly valued as signifying being more beautiful, stronger, more powerful, and more intelligent. When asked to identify the pupils in the classrooms along the race/color categories, the category black was often left as the last option (Carvalho, 2005: 17). Moreover, teachers tended to predominantly classify the higher achieving pupils as white, leaving the category black for the lower achieving pupils. Based on her findings Carvalho concludes that racial attribution by teachers was not only related to physical characteristics of pupils, but also to academic achievement (Carvalho, 2005: 94). Hence, the study highlights how racial inequality marks daily processes such as the evaluation of learning in schools, reflecting the present challenges surrounding the recognition of ethnicity/race issues in general, and blackness in particular, within the school.

**Recognition of Racial Inequalities in School**

Research has also shown how resistance to recognizing racial inequalities and addressing race issues is still strong in certain educational contexts. Castro and Abramovay (2006) conclude that the majority of actors involved in schools deny the existence of racial inequalities. And when some actors do recognize the existence of racial inequalities in educational achievement, these inequalities are explained in most cases by referring to a lack of personal effort. Discrimination and racism go unmentioned. In addition, the responsibility of the school with regard to the school careers of all their students often is not considered (Castro & Abramovay, 2006: 26). The authors state:

> [...] inequalities in principle are neglected and the idea is defended that all are equal and all can put effort if they want in equal conditions. Those that agree that black and brown students have lower achievements, when the children and youngsters themselves are not blamed for it, their families are blamed, the families of the black and brown students [...] or the blame is transferred with general reference to the socioeconomic situation, considered inferior in the case of black and brown people. (Castro & Abramovay, 2006: 27).

Silva Souza and Croso (2007) make a similar observation when they state that in the schools of their study a “discourse of equality” dominates that masks existing differences and feeds the myth of racial democracy. The authors state that although 51 percent of the teaching staff of the investigated schools argued that they did not agree with the statement “In my school everybody is equal,” analysis of the answers showed that a lot of these participants still in some way affirm the idea that “We are all equal.”

In relation to investigation of the question how educational inequalities between black and white pupils were explained by the teaching staff of the school, Silva Souza and Croso (2007: 55) state that almost two thirds of them attributed the differences in access, permanence, and school success between the white and black population (to the disadvantage of the black population) to socioeconomic differences. Only six percent relates this fact to racism, and 4 percent to the dominance in society of the myth of Brazil as a racial democracy. The authors argue that racism and

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44 The author highlights that similarly a link was also found between school success and gender, and perception of the socioeconomic status of pupils’ families.
racial discrimination are still not recognized by many actors in the school as playing a part in the school careers of black pupils. This explains how “class” still is dominant as an analytical category to explain inequalities in Brazilian society in general, and in education in particular.

New Opportunities
The political context of Brazil since the mid 1990s offers new opportunities in the battle against racial inequalities. Several policies and laws have been constituted that help in the analysis and recognition of the structural and historically excluded position of Afro-Descendant Brazilians in society. Many of these policies envision improving the social, economic, and educational situation of this part of the Brazilian population. The actual political context and the policies and laws deriving from this context offer possibilities to de-naturalize the discriminatory treatment of Afro-Brazilians, and improve their de facto social position, also in schools. This transformation process could lead schools to become institutions that really can play a part in the emancipation of all citizens.

The focus of this research project – Law 10.639, passed in 2003 – is one of the outcomes of the new political context. Adding three articles and two sub-clauses to the 1996 Education Act, this policy instrument (see Box 1.2) indicates the necessity to revise educational content by explicitly recognizing and discussing (the history of) the contributions of the Afro-Descendant population in and to Brazilian society. The law affirms the need of transforming the existing curriculum in terms of what is taught, and also of how these contents are taught.

**Box 1.2 Law 10.639**

**LAW No. 10.639, FROM THE 9th OF JANUARY 2003.**
Modifies Law no. 9.394, from the 20th of December 1996 [1996 Education Act], that establishes the National Curriculum Directives and Bases for Education, in order to include in the official curricula of the education system the obligatory character of the theme “Afro-Brazilian History and Culture,” and other measures.

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC** announces that the National Congress declares and I sanction the following Law:

Article 1 of Law no. 9.394, of the 20th of December 1996, comes to force with the following Articles 26-A, 79-A, and 79-B added to it:

Article 26-A In public and private establishments of primary and secondary education, it will be obligatory to teach Afro-Brazilian History and Culture.

§ 1o The program content referred to at the beginning of this Article, will include the study of the History of Africa and of the African population, the resistance of blacks in Brazil, the Brazilian black culture, and the role of blacks in the formation of the nation state, reaffirming the contributions of the black population in the social, economic, and political sectors, of importance for the History of Brazil.

§ 2o The contents with regard to the Afro-Brazilian History and Culture will be addressed in the entire school curriculum, especially in the subjects Art, Literature, and Brazilian History.

Art. 79-B The school calendar will include the 20th of November as “National Black Consciousness Day.”

Source: Brasil (2003)
This thesis analyzes the process of agenda-setting and enactments related to Law 10.639 as a central policy initiative designed with the intention of responding to existing racial inequalities and exclusion of Afro-Brazilians in education. The policy initiative focuses primarily on promoting recognition of the identities, history, achievements, and struggles of this group in the Brazilian context through educational content. Law 10.639 is considered complementary to policies addressing institutional inequalities by promoting access, in that it focuses on revising and changing what is taught and how it is taught, allowing for a more profound transformation process concerned with changing visions of the self, the world and society. This study starts from the idea that focusing on educational content in this way, will contribute more effectively to creating a more just society in which all individuals independent of their identity have the same opportunities.

The next chapter presents the theoretical/analytical framework and the main concepts used in this study.