

# Federal Institute of Education: current dilemmas and challenges

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the ideological character of Brazilian education, with a focus on the professional education offered by Federal Institutes. From a historical perspective, it examines how education in Brazil has been shaped by specific contexts, meeting the demands of different periods and class interests. It emphasizes the importance of understanding education as an ongoing process that requires informed planning and critical knowledge. It concludes by highlighting Federal Institutes as a relevant alternative to promote omnilateral formation and contribute to a transformative educational project aligned with contemporary needs.

KEYWORDS: Professional education, Federal Institutes, Professional education, Historical context.

### **RESUMO**

O artigo analisa o caráter ideológico da educação brasileira, com foco na educação profissional oferecida pelos Institutos Federais. A partir de uma perspectiva histórica, examina como a educação no Brasil tem sido moldada por contextos específicos, atendendo às demandas de diferentes períodos e interesses de classe. Ressalta a importância de compreender a educação como um processo contínuo, que exige planejamento fundamentado e conhecimento crítico. Finaliza destacando os Institutos Federais como uma alternativa relevante para promover uma formação omnilateral e contribuir para um projeto educacional transformador e alinhado às necessidades contemporâneas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação profissional, Institutos Federais, Educação profissional, Contexto histórico.

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### 1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyze education's historical role in Brazil, focusing on the technological professional training offered by the Federal Institutes (in Portuguese, IFs)<sup>2</sup>. Based on authors who investigate the relationship among education, historical context, and ideology, we seek to understand how omnilateral<sup>3</sup> education is promoted — or limited — throughout the historical process, considering the economic, political and social transformations of the country.

The topic is especially relevant given the challenge of Federal Institutes to solidify their goals as a "new" proposal, even after 15 years of existence. More than simply meeting the demands of the job market, these institutes are presented as an alternative that aims at the whole formation of human beings, based on the construction of a conscious, fair, and humane society. However, this proposal faces tensions imposed by political-economic forces and by Brazilian educational history itself.

The structure of the article is organized around three main axes. The first revisits historical elements related to education in Brazil, highlighting how these moments reflected and reproduced power relations and social domination. The second addresses the contemporary demands of education, analyzing the challenges imposed by economic and ideological interests that shape the educational system. Finally, the third encompasses a critical reflection on the educational model proposed by the Federal Institutes, discussing its potentialities and limitations in the current context.

To support these reflections, the article employs the analytical categories of "mediation", "historical context", and "omnilateral formation". The analysis is guided by central questions: how does the history of education in Brazil reflect the social and economic transformations of the country? What were the predominant purposes of education in different historical periods? How do political-economic forces influence the conception of education in the Federal Institutes? And, in a globalized scenario, how can IFs contribute to an emancipatory education project?

Throughout the text, interventions and consents<sup>4</sup> of economic groups, of the national and international capital and of the Brazilian government are problematized. These elements, frequently neglected, are fundamental to comprehend the contradictions and possibilities of the technological

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>SILVA, Maria Abádia da. *Intervenção e Consentimento*. Campinas: Autores Associados: Fapesp, 2002.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Law 11,892, of December 29, 2008, established, within the scope of the federal education system, the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific, and Technologic Education, related to the Ministry of Education, of which the Federal Institutes of Education, Science, and Technology are a part.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> "Omnilateral" is a term that comes from Latin and whose literal translation mean "all sides or dimensions". Omnilateral education, thus, entails the concept of education or human formation that seeks to take into account all the dimensions that constitute the specificity of the human being, and the real objective and subjective conditions for their full historical development. These dimensions involve their material bodily life and their intellectual, cultural, educational, psychosocial, affective, aesthetic, and ludic development. In summary, omnilateral education encompasses the education and emancipation of all human senses, as they are not simply given by nature. What is specifically human in them is their creation by man himself (Mészáros, 1981, p. 181).

education. As Cury (1989, p. 43, nonofficial translation<sup>5</sup>) states, "mediations open spaces for theories to materialize, becoming guides for actions. Without mediations, theories become empty; mediations become blind". In this sense, education — including the proposal of the Federal Institutes — can only be fully understood as part of a historical process articulated with the multiple determinations of society.

Paraphrasing Álvaro Vieira Pinto<sup>6</sup>, the article defends that "without an ideology of education, there is no education" (original quotation: "sem ideologia de educação, não há educação"<sup>7</sup>). This perspective emphasizes that education is not neutral, but always connected to projects of society. Hence, this work proposes a critical reflection on the role of Federal Institutes in the construction of an educational model that goes beyond the immediate demands of the market, contributing to the formation of individuals able to transform social reality.

### 2 Historical context

# 2.1 Brazil as a "special case": education and its historical disputes

Throughout its historical trajectory, Brazil has been a "special case" in the educational process, marked by dynamics of dependence and subordination to international capitalism. Octavio Ianni (2004, p. 11, nonofficial translation) reflects on this particularity when he states: "One of the singularities of Brazil's history is that this is a country that thinks about itself continuously and periodically. It thinks about itself in a particularly systematic way, in the context of critical junctures or based on dilemmas and perspectives that arise when historical ruptures occur". This analysis highlights how moments of crisis and rupture in the country have provoked structural reconfigurations, including disputes over the role of education.

According to Octavio Ianni, among the recurring themes in studies on the formation and transformations of Brazilian society, the following ones immediately stand out: the three ages of Brazil, that is, Colony, Monarchy and Republic; Centralism and federalism; strong State and weak civil society; bloodless history and white revolutions; conciliation and reform; Lusotropicalism and racial democracy; primary export economy and import substitution industrialization; emerging market and neoliberalism; ... Hence the plurality of visions of Brazil, and the plurality of "Brazils" (Ianni, 2004, p. 12).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Original quotation: "as mediações abrem espaços para que as teorias se concretizem, tornando-se guias das ações. Sem as mediações, as teorias tornam-se vazias; sem as teorias, as mediações tornam-se cegas".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Álvaro Vieira Pinto was born in Campos - RJ on November 11, 1909, and died in Rio de Janeiro on June 11, 1987. He was a medical doctor, mathematician, physicist, professor of Philosophy at the National University and executive director of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB), exiled in 1964 by the military coup, author of many works, including *O conceito de tecnologia* (The concept of technology).

According to Côrtes (2003, p. 20, nonofficial translation), "Ultimately, everything can be summed up by the fact that Álvaro Vieira Pinto represents the most well-elaborated historical intelligence on the national reality" (original quotation: "É no limite, tudo pode ser resumido ao fato de Álvaro Vieira Pinto representar a mais bem elaborada inteligência histórica acerca da realidade nacional").

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> "Sem ideologia do desenvolvimento não há desenvolvimento" of Álvaro Vieira Pinto's work *Ideologia e Desenvolvimento Nacional*. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, MEC/ISEB, 1958.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Original quotation: "Uma das singularidades da história do Brasil é que este é um país que se pensa continuamente e periodicamente. Ele se pensa de forma particularmente sistemática, no contexto de conjuntura crítica ou a partir de dilemas e perspectivas que se criam quando ocorrem rupturas históricas".

When treated as a "possibility", education in Brazil is also the scene of intense ideological disputes. For Pereira (2011, p. 10), school education reflects the purposes of historical projects that serve class interests. In this sense, it is essential to understand educational formation as a dialectical process, which not only reproduces structures of domination but also opens paths for emancipatory practices. As the author suggests, "Education, school and work do not have an explanation in themselves, but in the multiple determinations of the social formations of the current mode of existence" (Pereira, 2011, p. 14, nonofficial translation<sup>10</sup>)<sup>11</sup>.

While revisiting the history of Brazil after its "discovery", it is possible to observe that the country's insertion into the capitalist world-system did not occur autonomously, but as a dependent economy, structured to serve the interests of the metropolis. Even after independence, the characteristics of a colony remained, as Guerreiro Ramos (1957, p. 12, nonofficial translation) highlights: "Independence was really a promotion, which, however, did not change the nature of the historical situation, and simply conferred important formal requirements, surrendering the political guardianship of our territory"<sup>12</sup>.

In the colonial period, education was aimed almost exclusively at the elite, as an instrument for the reproduction of power structures. With the arrival of the royal family, the opening of ports and the introduction of schools for technical and military training, education remained subordinate to the needs of the ruling classes. During the Empire and the Republic, economic power remained in the hands of the agrarian oligarchies, as Ramos indicates, and the government ensured conditions for the exploitation of the labor force, reinforcing the country's dependence on hegemonic nations.

Understanding the historical context of Brazilian education requires a critical analysis of the mediations between global economic and political conditions and local demands. Guerreiro Ramos warns against a spontaneous view of development, alerting that history should not be interpreted as an inevitable sequence of events. On the contrary, each historical period carries ideologies that guide and legitimize educational projects.

Thus, analyzing Brazilian education as a cornerstone of ideological disputes and social transformations means understanding that nothing is ready or finished. It is necessary to uncover the historical relationships that condition education, seeking to confirm or overcome them in the construction of emancipatory educational practices. In the words of Pereira (2011, p. 14, nonofficial

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Original quotation: "A independência era realmente uma promoção, que não alterava, no entanto, a natureza da situação histórica, e simplesmente conferia requisitos formais importantes, rendendo a guarda política do nosso território".



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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Original quotation: "A educação, a escola e o trabalho não têm explicação em si mesmos, mas nas múltiplas determinações das formações sociais do atual modo de existência".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> I would like to begin by recalling that the history of Brazil, after the event of "discovery", is a history that reveals its deep insertion in the international development of the expansion of the capitalist mode of production. We have never had, after the year 1500, an economy whose essential characteristics were not of the capitalist economic order (Pereira, 2011, p.10).

translation), "[...] discovering the relationships we experience to confirm them and/or enhance promising emancipatory educational practices for all humanity".

Therefore, while addressing the historical changes in Brazil, it is clear that education has always been at the service of class projects. However, this same education can and should be conceived as a process of resistance and transformation, articulating historical conditions and the possibility of a more just and equitable future.

# 2.2 Colonial period (1500-1822): education in the context of capitalist expansion and mercantilism

Comprehending education in the Brazilian colonial period requires an analysis of its ideological character, articulating the historical conditions that shaped social relations and dominant interests. During this period, the world was experiencing the transition from the feudal system to competitive capitalism, marked by the formation of National States<sup>14</sup> and the consolidation of mercantilism as the central axis of economic, social, and cultural transformations<sup>15</sup>.

Portugal<sup>16</sup>, a pioneer in the centralization of state power, played a crucial role in this scenario. The alliance between the Portuguese monarchy, the merchant bourgeoisie, and the Catholic Church shaped not only its economic politics but also the educational guidelines imposed on the colonies. Education, in this context, was set as an instrument for the maintenance of the colonial order, ensuring the reproduction of social and economic structures aligned with the interests of the metropolis.

The lands granted to noble allies in wars during the formation of the Portuguese territory were, ultimately, part of the royal patrimony. Basically, these are the reasons that lead us to affirm that the Kingdom of Portugal was the first centralized State in Western Europe, since the fragmentation of the Carolingian Empire. The political alliance with the merchant group, however, would only be established at the end of the 14th century, during the Avis Revolution (from 1383 to 1385) (Available at: <a href="http://educacao.uol.com.br/disciplinas/historia/estados-nacionais-burguesia-se-une-ao-rei-e-forma-o-estado-nacao.html">http://educacao.uol.com.br/disciplinas/historia/estados-nacionais-burguesia-se-une-ao-rei-e-forma-o-estado-nacao.html</a>).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Original quotation: "[...] descobrir as relações que vivemos para as confirmarmos e/ou potencializarmos promissoras práticas educativas emancipatórias para toda a humanidade".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> The factors that contributed to the formation of National States were: a) peasant revolts (creating the need for a strong army to contain them); b) urban revolts (the king used them to reduce the power of the nobility and co-opt the bourgeoisie); c) development of trade (a need for expansion that only a centralized power could meet); d) wars (wars require discipline and a centralized command. The most important in this context were: the Hundred Years' War (between France and England), the Reconquista (between Portugal and Spain), and the War of the Roses). National States emerged with the decline of feudalism in Western Europe through the alliance between the King and the bourgeoisie legitimized by the Catholic Church. This alliance would be a big deal for the emerging bourgeoisie (Available at: <a href="http://idademoderna.weebly.com/estadosnacionais.html">http://idademoderna.weebly.com/estadosnacionais.html</a>).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The period of transition from a feudal world, from crafts to manufacturing; Renaissance, Humanism, Protestant Reformation, Counter-Reformation, Council of Trent (1545-1563), the foundation of the Society of Jesus, the foundation of National States, Age of Discovery/Great Navigations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Portugal was the first case of centralized power. In this respect, it is worth noting that Portugal came out on top; since its separation from the Kingdom of Castile in 1139, the kings of the Burgundian dynasty never relinquished control of the laws and courts, nor the exclusive right to mint coins.

Mercantilism<sup>17</sup>, as an economic system, intensified the exploitation of natural and human resources in Brazil, consolidating the logic of dependence and subordination to the European economy. At the same time, it promoted a new worldview, in which material progress and social control were legitimized by the dominant ideology. As Paiva (2000, p. 56, nonofficial translation) highlights, "order continues to be an irreplaceable value" (original quotation: "a ordem continua a ser um valor insubstituível", reinforcing the need for submission to the absolute values of the time.

The education practiced in colonial Brazil, directed by the Church and guided by the Counter-Reformation, aimed to meet clear objectives<sup>18</sup>: to catechize the indigenous peoples, to discipline the enslaved workforce, and to train the administrative and religious elites of the colony. In this sense, the colonial school was not a neutral space, but a mechanism for the reproduction of the cultural and economic hegemony of the metropolis, legitimizing relations of exploitation and inequality.

Hence, the Brazilian colonial period cannot be understood in isolation, but rather as part of a global process of capitalist expansion that determined education as a field of ideological dispute. This dynamic remains a central issue for understanding the historical formation of education in Brazil and its implications to the present day.

## 2.3 Brazil: education as an instrument of domination in the Portuguese colonial project

The colonization of Brazil by the Portuguese was, from the beginning, a political and economic project linked to the mercantilist needs of the metropolis. When the trade route with the Indies started to become less profitable, Portugal turned its attention to Brazil, reorganizing colonial exploitation as a complementary economy, essential to sustain the European development model. As Cunha (1980, p. 21, nonofficial translation) indicates, "colonization consisted of the organization of an economy complementary to that of the metropolis [...], guided by the mercantilist doctrine"<sup>19</sup>, with strong Portuguese control over economic and political operations.

Within this context, education was incorporated as an essential part of the colonial project. In 1534, the Society of Jesus<sup>20</sup>, linked to the Counter-Reformation and hired by the Portuguese State,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> The Society of Jesus was created by Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish knight, in the 16th century, in 1534. Its main purpose was to combat the Protestant movement, using religious teachings specially prepared for this purpose as a method. European aristocrats and Roman Catholicism were increasingly concerned about the strong and influential growth of reformist Protestantism, or the Protestant Reformation, as it is more commonly known (Available at: <a href="http://www.historiabrasileira.com/brasil-colonia/companhia-de-jesus/">http://www.historiabrasileira.com/brasil-colonia/companhia-de-jesus/</a>).



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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> The contact with other worlds, cultures, the new class that begins to emerge from the identification of a new power structure — commerce — and new ideas that will provide a slow confrontation: humanism, theocentrism, geocentrism, heliocentrism. Instability and discomfort haunt the still medieval man.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> The need to know for the best imitation of Christ; an educational perspective classified as humane.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Original quotation: "a colonização consistia na organização de uma economia complementar à da metrópole [...], guiada pela doutrina mercantilista".

implemented an educational plan in the colony, inspired by the Ratio Studiorum<sup>21</sup>, a pedagogical model already established in Europe. This teaching model, based on a Thomistic and essentially Christian vision, considered education as a means to salvation and social conformation. More than a process of instruction, Jesuit education was integrated into the faith project and the ideological control structure of the Portuguese State, reaffirming the political and religious values of the time<sup>22</sup>.

The alliance between Church and State was central to the consolidation of this model. In the 16th century, the definitions of "education" were determined by the policies of the Catholic Church and disseminated by movements such as the neo-scholastics, Jesuits, and Dominicans. Education served as a tool to legitimize the colonial order, disciplining the indigenous and enslaved populations while promoting the formation of an administrative elite aligned with the interests of the metropolis<sup>23</sup>.

This educational system reproduced the contradictions of a colonial society, marked by economic exploitation and the imposition of European cultural values. Education, in this sense, was not neutral, but played a fundamental role in maintaining power structures and naturalizing social inequalities. By being situated within a broader colonization project, the Jesuit educational model reveals the intersection among faith, politics, and economics, highlighting how intellectual formation in the colony was deeply subordinated to the interests of Portuguese hegemony.

# 2.4 Jesuits in Brazil: education and ideological control in the colonial period

The work of Jesuits in Brazil was fundamental to consolidate the political and economic project of the Portuguese State. The Society of Jesus, founded in 1540, represented a new religious approach, marked by its militarized organization and evangelization through education. Based on the thinking of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Jesuits argued that human nature needed to be molded and regenerated, positioning education as a tool for moral and spiritual discipline. This view was aligned with the Counter-Reformation and the guidelines of the Catholic Church, contributing to its expansion in Europe and in the colonies (Cunha, 1980)<sup>24</sup>.

We intend to pay special attention to the significance of Trent in the Portuguese historical and cultural horizon, from the most diverse points of view, namely, the ecclesiastical and pastoral reforms and the Christian spiritualities and experiences, as well as the impact on culture and missionary activity. Deserved emphasis will be given to the analysis of the degree of participation



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ratio Studiorum — studied here in its first edition, from 1599 — constituted the set of didactic-pedagogical guidelines and teaching method of the Society of Jesus.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Saint Augustine, sinful human nature, decadent nature; Saint Thomas, possibility of salvation only through the church. This issue of Patristics and Scholasticism is once again being debated: the "decadent man", with all his deficiencies, can be regenerated, and this regeneration can happen through education.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> The Church needed to contain the advance of Protestantism, and the Portuguese State needed to protect the newly discovered overseas lands.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> The Council of Trent was held between 1545 and 1563. The council was developed, more precisely, in three phases: 1st: 1545-1548; 2nd: 1551-1552; and 3rd: 1562-1563, with some of the sessions taking place in Bologna, in the years of 1547 and 1548.

Upon their arrival in Brazil in 1549, along with Tomé de Sousa, the Jesuits implemented the Ratio Studiorum, a systematic study plan that aimed to discipline minds and behaviors. This educational model, initially applied to indigenous populations, included learning the Portuguese language, catechesis, and the incorporation of European cultural values. Education, therefore, was not neutral: it served as an instrument of ideological and cultural control, ensuring the integration of colonial populations into the interests of the metropolis. As Cunha (1980, p. 40) indicates, the Jesuit system controlled almost all education in Portugal and in the colonies, from secondary education to the University of Coimbra.

Despite its efficiency and longevity, the Jesuit model diverged from the emerging interests of the European bourgeoisie, which demanded an education focused on economic and industrial development. The centrality of faith in Jesuit education was perceived as an obstacle to mercantilist and colonial objectives, which prioritized profit and the exploitation of local resources<sup>25</sup>.

The expulsion of the Jesuits in 1759, under the command of the Marquis of Pombal, marked the collapse of this educational system. This event occurred in a context of profound transformations in Europe, including the Enlightenment, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the consolidation of liberal thought. Portugal, however, faced difficulties in keeping up with these changes, remaining tied to an ecclesiastical aristocracy that did not favor industrialization. As a result, the expulsion of the Jesuits dismantled the colony's educational system, as Fernando de Azevedo observes: "all its schools were closed from one moment to the next [...], completely collapsing the educational system" (Cunha, 1980, p. 51, nonofficial translation<sup>26</sup>).

Later on, Pombal introduced the royal classes, a model inspired by Encyclopedic ideals and Enlightenment rationalism. Nevertheless, this reform failed to replace the cohesive and centralized structure of the Jesuits, resulting in a fragmented and limited system. Although influenced by European liberalism, the educational changes promoted by Pombal were rooted in the colonial context and aimed to meet the economic and political demands of the time. According to Cunha (1980, p. 44, nonofficial translation), "it is possible that there was a certain anti-capitalist content in the preaching and teaching

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Original quotation: "fecharam-se de um momento para outro todos os seus colégios [...], desmoronando-se completamente, o aparelhamento da educação".



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in the council by Portuguese bishops and theologians, among which the following stood out: Friar Bartolomeu dos Mártires, Friar Jerônimo de Azambuja, Friar Luís de Soto Maior, and João Pais.

The Council of Trent awakened, in the Church, the need to mobilize to face the new challenges of universal evangelization, raised by the maritime voyages promoted by the Iberian kingdoms of Portugal and Spain. The discovery of new spaces, peoples and cultures offered the Church a field for proclaiming the message of Christ that had never been seen before. The horizon of expansion referred to in the Gospels as reaching the "ends of the earth" was gaining new meanings, with an increasingly evident and inescapable outline, and provoking unusual movements (Available at: <a href="http://www.congressotrento2013.net/Ptg/ViewGallery/2">http://www.congressotrento2013.net/Ptg/ViewGallery/2</a>).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> The priests of the Society of Jesus (1540) arrived in Brazil in 1549, along with the governor-general Tomé de Sousa. Their mission was to fulfill the royal mandate of converting the indigenous and to provide religious support to the colonists, for which they received subsidies from the State, as well as land grants (*sesmarias*) destined for the maintenance of the establishment they would create (Cunha, 1980, p. 25).

of the Jesuits in the first centuries of the Society of Jesus, which could explain the persecution carried out by Pombal'<sup>27</sup>.

Thus, the path of Jesuits in Brazil underlines the central role of education in the colonial project, highlighting its function as an instrument of cultural and political domination, while the Pombaline reforms reflect the tensions between aristocratic traditions and the new bourgeois paradigms on the rise.

## 2.5 Joanine period: education, power, and the construction of the State in colonial Brazil

The transfer of the Portuguese royal family to Brazil in 1808 marked a moment of structural transformation in the country, especially in the educational field. By moving the seat of metropolitan power to the colony, the Portuguese State found itself compelled to create an administrative and technical structure that could meet the demands of an emerging political center. In this process, the foundation of technical and higher education institutions aimed at training bureaucrats and specialized professionals stands out. According to Cunha (1980, p. 62, nonofficial translation<sup>28</sup>), "courses and academies were created to train bureaucrats for the State and specialists in the production of symbolic goods; as a byproduct, to train liberal professionals"<sup>29</sup>.

Among the educational initiatives implemented, courses focused on strategic areas such as medicine, surgery, mathematics, agronomy, chemistry, technical drawing, political economy, and architecture stand out. The military and naval academies, fundamental for the defence of the territory and the expansion of colonial power, also reflected the efforts of the State to align educational training with the political and economic demands of the time. This transformation represented a rupture with the predominantly religious educational model that had been in force since the Jesuit period, allowing the emergence of state-run and completely secularized higher education institutions (Cunha, 1980, p. 78).

From a philosophical perspective, the changes promoted during the Joanine period reveal an attempt to consolidate a political project to modernize the colonial State. Inspired by the Enlightenment ideals that permeated Europe, investment in technical and scientific training sought to legitimize monarchical power and prepare the colony for a more diversified and autonomous economy. Yet, these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> During his time in Brazil, *Dom* João, advised by capable ministers, took numerous important initiatives that gave Brazil a determined administrative and cultural framework. In economic terms, the decree of *Dona* Maria I that prohibited the installation of industries in Brazil was revoked; also, in economic terms, the Casa da Moeda (the Brazilian mint) and the Banco do Brasil were created; in military terms, the Military and Naval Academies were founded, and a munitions factory was established; in cultural terms, the Royal Press, the Royal Library, the Royal Theater of São João, the Botanical Garden and the Medical Schools of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro were created, in addition to contracting the arrival, after the fall of Napoleon, of an important French Artistic Mission (Available at: <a href="http://www.curso-objetivo.br/vestibular/roteiro-estudos/periodo-joanino.aspx">http://www.curso-objetivo.br/vestibular/roteiro-estudos/periodo-joanino.aspx</a>).



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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Original quotation: "é possível que tenha havido certo conteúdo anticapitalista na pregação e no ensino dos jesuítas nos primeiros séculos da Companhia de Jesus, o que poderia explicar a perseguição movida por Pombal".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Original quotation: "foram criados cursos e academias destinados a formar burocratas para o Estado, e especialistas na produção de bens simbólicos; como subproduto, formar profissionais liberais".

initiatives were still limited to an elite, reinforcing the structural inequalities that characterized Brazilian society at the time.

Though brief, the royal family's stay in Brazil enabled the creation of a higher education system that would influence the country's cultural and scientific development, albeit late and unevenly. The construction of this educational framework reflects the tensions between tradition and modernity, faith and reason, and the search for an educational model that would serve the interests of the State and the ruling elite. In this sense, education became not only a tool for technical training, but also an instrument of political and social control, essential for the consolidation of the royal power and the maintenance of the colonial order.

# 2.6 Industrialization and education in Brazil: contradictions between modernization and social exclusion

Industrialization in Brazil, which began in the late 19th century and was consolidated throughout the 20th century, brought with it structural transformations that had a profound impact on the educational field. As highlighted by Ramos (2011, p. 126), the country was beginning to feel the effects of modernization, and the educational debate revolved around the tension between technical and scientific education. Inspired by the German model, technical education was initially conceived as a tool for economic development, but was often relegated to the poorest classes of society. According to Romanelli (2014, p. 164, nonofficial translation), "this educational system was transformed into a system of social discrimination" (original quotation: "esse sistema educacional se transformava em um sistema de discriminação social") reflecting the structural inequalities that permeated the Brazilian society.

In this context, the First Republic<sup>30</sup> was marked by sociocultural heterogeneity that made it difficult to implement a unified educational system. Despite the diversity of ideas and proposals, conservative forces predominated and guided the expansion of education in a fragmented and unequal manner. The dispute between sciences and humanities and the separation between technical and propaedeutic education revealed the perpetuation of an educational model that primarily served the elite, leaving the working classes on the margins<sup>31</sup>.

The New School movement, a broad group with the support of society, makes up the elite, forms the race, the nation, and the development. It is a time when sociology is born. It is also a group interested in the development of the country. Development is present at the end of the 19th century.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Beginning of the formation of the working class; work begins to be analyzed politically; 1917: 1st strike of dockworkers at the Port of Santos; 1914 to 1918: Europe recolonizes the world with one of the justifications of the superiority of white people, expressing this conception in education and economy; the bourgeois economic interest was above ethnic values.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> The New School movement is an American and European movement, made up of intellectuals from various sectors of society who participate in the educational system and, at the same time, produce knowledge. They are theorists who express themselves pedagogically, speak of the main schools, and are also men who express themselves theoretically, a group that moves between and reconciles theory and practice.

With the rise of the bourgeoisie and the consolidation of the urban-industrial model from 1930 onwards<sup>32</sup>, education gained centrality as a mechanism for legitimizing power and ideological diffusion. As Cunha (1980, p. 276, nonofficial translation) highlights, "the objective of the State bureaucracy was to use the school system as a mechanism for ideological diffusion, in order to not only inculcate the ideology that legitimized it, but also to prevent the emergence of alternative ideologies"<sup>33</sup>. During this period, the Manifesto of the Pioneers of New Education (1932) emerged as an attempt to break with educational dualism and propose a single, democratic, and inclusive school; however, it met resistance from forces that sought to preserve the social hierarchy.

Under the influence of Enlightenment and liberal ideals, the Brazilian educational project of the time reflected not only economic and political demands, but also the contradictions of a country in transition. Technical education, aimed at meeting the needs of the industrial market, contrasted with humanistic education, seen as a privilege of the elite. The duality between modernization and social exclusion became a striking characteristic of the period, highlighting the need to understand education as a field of dispute between conservative and progressive forces.

In summary, the industrialization and the economic changes that accompanied it brought advances and challenges to education in Brazil<sup>34</sup>. While they expanded the offer of technical and higher education, they also reinforced social and educational inequalities, revealing the centrality of education in the project of construction of a modern nation, but one deeply marked by structural contradictions.

## 2.7 The Vargas era and the development project: between contradictions and possibilities

From 1930 onwards, Brazil underwent profound transformations driven by a development project that sought to align the country with global industrial capitalism, albeit in a belated and dependent

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Therefore, from 1930 onwards, there was a reorganization of the Brazilian market, replacing the agrarian capitalist economic model focused on the foreign market with the also capitalist model, now urban and industrial, which became hegemonic from 1945 on. According to Romanelli (1998, p. 193), in the political sphere, during the period from 1930 to 1964, the relations between politics and economy were characterized by a more or less stable balance between Getúlio Vargas's political model, with populist tendencies, and the model of industrial expansion. And, according to Cunha (1980, p. 276), the objective of the State bureaucracy, from 1930 onwards, was to use the school system as a mechanism for ideological diffusion, in order not only to inculcate the ideology that legitimized it, but also to prevent the emergence of alternative ideologies.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Getúlio Vargas takes power. 15 years of the Vargas era. From 1930 to 1934, understood as the Provisional Government; 1934 to 1937, Constitutional Government; 1937 to 1945, *Estado Novo* (New State). The Vargas era appropriates the fascist system, but it is not a one-man coup: it was backed by capital, a political and economic group.

From Getúlio Vargas onwards (Ministry of Education and Public Health), laws and legislation for education are instituted. The educational concern is with the formation of the elite, with technical training.

The government delegates to industries the role of qualifying its employees. Then, SENAI (Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial, the National Service of Industrial Training) was created, and, later on, SENAC (Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Comercial, the National Service of Commercial Training).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Original quotation: "o objetivo da burocracia do Estado era utilizar o sistema escolar como mecanismo de difusão ideológica, de modo a não só inculcar a ideologia que o legitimava, mas, também, impedir que surgissem ideologias alternativas".

manner. In this context, the Vargas government consolidated the role of the State as a planner and regulator, developing an institutional and bureaucratic structure capable of promoting industrialization and economic modernization, but also marked by contradictions. According to Ramos (1957), Brazilian development was, largely, a reflection of international circumstances and of interests of restricted economic groups, characterized as dependent and subordinate to foreign capital.

Import substitution industrialization, which intensified in the post-war period, revealed the need to modernize agriculture, diversify the production system, and develop an energy matrix compatible with the demands of economic growth. In parallel, social movements and struggles for democratic rights pressured the State for greater citizen inclusion. According to Ianni (2004), the role of the State was fundamental in boosting productive forces, although under the aegis of a capitalist logic that favored the reproduction of unequal class relations.

Antonio Gramsci offers an important interpretative key to understanding this period: the State as a "manufacturer of manufacturers", responsible for shaping both the forces and the productive relations that were decisive for capitalism. In Brazil, this role took on specific contours, with an optimistic discourse about progress and national development, according to Álvaro Vieira Pinto (1958), but which frequently came up against dependence on external resources and ideas<sup>35</sup>.

Although there was a moment of reflection on the future of the country and the need to build a national project, development initiatives lacked an autonomous and sustainable basis. Education, in this scenario, gained prominence as an essential tool for making progress possible, but the internal contradictions of the economic model limited effective advances. As Romanelli (1998) pointed out, the period from Vargas to the military regime evidenced a fragmented educational project, often subordinated to immediate and disconnected interests<sup>36</sup>.

Post-war optimism<sup>37</sup>, nevertheless, did not translate into a truly national development pattern. According to Pinto (1958), development is not the result of sudden events or punctual solutions, but rather of an ongoing process that demands planning and profound knowledge of national realities. This understanding, although present in discourses of the time, was often neglected in favor of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Cold War scenario, 1955, Juscelino Kubitschek government: energy issue, national developmentalism, golden years (1955 to 1960), creation of universities, creation of technical schools. Brazil experienced a period of optimism, as it seemed that everything would work out, since there were elements to resolve the delay; a policy of 50 years in 5.



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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> According to Pinto (1958, p. 16, nonofficial translation), "Either we take the path of development, which will happen as we become capable of using scientific data and technical instruments in the service of an ideology of progress, or, if we do not do so, we will take the road to pauperism, which will lead us to the condition of the great Asian masses".

Original quotation: "Ou tomamos o rumo do desenvolvimento, o que se dará à medida que formos capazes de utilizar os dados da ciência e os instrumentos da técnica, a serviço de uma ideologia do progresso; ou, se o não fizermos, enveredamos pela estrada do pauperismo, que nos conduzirá à condição das grandes massas asiáticas".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> See footnote 35.

megalomaniacal projects or those aligned with the interests of foreign capital, especially during the military regime.

Thus, the Brazilian development project of the Vargas era revealed itself to be a combination of structural advances and ideological setbacks. The centrality of the State, while promoting modernization, reinforced external dependence and deepened social inequalities, without consolidating an educational project integrated with national development.

## 2.8 The military regime of 1964: modernization, dependence, and class hegemony

The military regime established in 1964 represented a historical phase marked by the deepening of relations of economic dependence and political repression in Brazil. According to Germano (2011), the military State should be understood in its historicity as an expression of a stage of Brazilian capitalist development, structured to serve the interests of international conglomerates, large national economic groups, and State-owned companies. This power bloc, led by sectors of the Armed Forces, especially the Army, had the decisive support of technocrats and economic elites, even though there were divergent factions within the regime.

Although the military justified their permanence in power as a temporary solution to the political and economic impasse, the regime lasted longer, consolidating an authoritarian and centralizing model of governance. Systematic repression reached its peak with the Institutional Act 5 (AI-5) in 1968, inaugurating a period of strong State control and silencing of civil society. The Médici government (1969-1974) intensified this process, establishing a repressive apparatus that crushed social movements, students, intellectuals and workers (Germano, 2011, p. 94)<sup>38</sup>.

From the economic point of view, the military project was marked by a developmental modernization associated with large international capital, which Florestan Fernandes characterized as a "modernization of the archaic" (Ramos, 2011, p. 12, nonofficial translation; original quotation: "modernização do arcaico"). This modernization was not autonomous, but rather subordinated to external interests, keeping Brazil trapped in a model of structural dependence. The expansion of technological education, although significant in terms of expansion, served mainly as an instrument for reproducing the dependent capitalist model, aimed at meeting the demands of a subordinate labor market.

In the educational field, the National Development Plans (*Planos Nacionais de Desenvolvimento*, PNDs) incorporated technological education as a strategic element, but this policy was guided by a State

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Brazilian society, between 1964 and 1985, went through cycles of repression and political liberalization. The cycle of greatest repression began with AI-5, in December of 1968, and continued throughout the Médici government (1969-1974). The State attempted to suffocate civil society, especially those segments that opposed it, such as students, intellectuals and workers. Here the State won the confrontation, silencing civil society through terror, made possible by the assembly of a huge repressive apparatus (Germano, 2011 p. 94).



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that, as Marise Ramos (2011) argues, is not neutral. On the contrary: the State is an institution with a structural and organic link to the capitalist production model, working as an instrument of bourgeois hegemony (Ramos, 2011, p. 14). In this sense, the State not only exercises repressive functions, but also seeks to obtain consensus, shaping the political and cultural direction of society in favor of dominant interests<sup>39</sup>.

The neutrality of the State, therefore, is an illusion. As Ramos (2011, p. 20, nonofficial translation) points out, "not only are the political-ideological functions of the State subordinated to its economic role, but also the economic functions are responsible for reproducing the dominant ideology"<sup>40</sup>. In the case of the military regime, this dynamic manifested itself in the implementation of a modernization project disguisedly associated with foreign capital, reinforcing dependence and making the construction of an autonomous development model unviable.

Therefore, the coup of 1964 not only established an authoritarian regime, but also consolidated a project of dependent capitalist modernization, committed to maintaining class hegemony. Political repression and social control, combined with economic policies subordinated to international capital, created a period of profound contradictions that shaped the future of the country.

# 3 Professional education in Brazil: history, contradictions, and sovereignty projects

The path of professional education in Brazil reflects the disputes surrounding the societal project and the educational policy, always linked to the dynamics of economic development and the class contradictions that shaped Brazilian society. Historically, until the 19th century, the country's propaedeutic education system was geared toward the elites, aimed at training leaders, and oblivious to the demands of the working majority. Only at the beginning of the 20th century government initiatives emerged, focused on the professional training of workers, albeit with a strong moralizing and welfare bias<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> The 20th century brought to light the concern with the preparation of workers for professional practice. According to Kuenzer (2007), it was from 1909 on that the Brazilian State took on professional education and created 19 schools of arts and crafts in different units of the federation, which were the precursors of State and federal technical schools. Even so, contextualized in a period in which industrial development was practically non-existent, these schools had "the moral purpose of repression: to educate orphans, the poor, and the needy through work, taking them off the streets", characterizing themselves as a moralizing public policy of character formation through work (Kuenzer, 2007, p. 27, nonofficial translation; original quotation: "a finalidade moral de repressão: educar pelo trabalho, os órfãos, pobres, e desvalidos da sorte, retirando-os das ruas").



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> When we approach professional and technological education as a policy, we are led to do so through a conception of State, this demarcation being a theoretical necessity, a point that underpins the methodological and ethical-political direction of the analysis. Our starting point is the denial of the neutrality of the State and the affirmation of its structural and organic link with the capitalist production model, as we find in the Marxist philosophical tradition (Ramos, 2011 p. 13).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Original quotation: "não apenas as funções político-ideológicas do Estado ficam subordinadas ao seu papel econômico, como também as funções econômicas ficam encarregadas da reprodução da ideologia dominante".

According to Kuenzer (2007, p. 27), the creation of 19 arts and crafts schools in 1909 marked the first movement by the Brazilian State towards the institutionalization of vocational education. However, these schools served a context of incipient industrialization and had a disciplinary function: to "educate through work" orphans and the disadvantaged, keeping them off the streets and shaping their behavior according to the bourgeois values of the time. In this context, vocational education emerged not as an instrument of emancipation, but as a public policy subordinated to the reproduction of exploitative relations.

Throughout the 20th century, the transformations brought about by modernity and capitalism reconfigured the relationship between productive work and education. According to Frigotto (1999), modernity altered the link between production and education, transferring the organization of capital and labor relations to the market. In this scenario, schools play a central role as a space for the reproduction of values, ideologies, and knowledge that legitimize the capitalist model of production. This critical perspective reveals how vocational education, during its history, has often been aligned with dominant economic interests, reinforcing Brazil's structural dependence on industrialized economies.

With the creation of the Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology, Brazil took an important step forward in the field of professional education. Inspired by historical-critical theoretical frameworks (such as those of Marise Ramos, Gaudêncio Frigotto, and Dermeval Saviani), these institutes sought to integrate teaching, research, and extension, promoting advances in areas such as curriculum, teacher training, and assessment. Despite this, the Federal Institutes face significant contradictions, operating in a capitalist and neoliberal context that imposes pressure to meet the demands of the labor market, often to the detriment of emancipatory educational projects.

One of the main critiques of the development of vocational education in Brazil lies in the fragility of its historical starting point. As Marise Ramos points out, the legal and structural constraints that limited previous proposals required profound changes for a national project to emerge. The expansion of the network of Federal Institutes during Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's administration represented not only a quantitative advance, but also the consolidation of a concept of education focused on sovereignty and inclusive development. In this model, vocational education is understood as part of a national project that articulates technology, qualification, and autonomy in relation to industrialized countries.

Nonetheless, the consolidation of this project is not exempt of challenges. The founding logic of the Federal Institutes — which advocates the training of technicians and specialists as a condition for overcoming economic dependence — faces resistance from both sectors linked to the market and groups that defend educational models based on neoliberal logic<sup>42</sup>. Furthermore, the coexistence of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> In Marx's Theory of Alienation, Mészáros (2006) argues that omnilateral education should be understood as a formation that encompasses all human dimensions, overcoming the fragmentation imposed by capitalism. For him, education cannot be



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contradictory interests within public policies for professional education highlights the class disputes that permeate the educational field.

In this sense, according to Schlesener (2009, p. 179, nonofficial translation), "it is important to remember that social conditions influence the entire educational process, and it is essential to question the structure that supports schools. This, ultimately, is the main challenge for public schools, especially in the context of neoliberal policies"<sup>43</sup>.

Vieira Pinto argues that education is always ideological and linked to social projects, and states that "all development presupposes an ideology that guides it" (Pinto, 1982, p. 103, nonofficial translation; original quotation: "todo desenvolvimento pressupõe uma ideologia que o oriente"). In the IFs, this implies overcoming the dichotomy between technical and humanistic education, as proposed by Gramsci (1975, p. 156, non official translation) when defending an "integral conception of the world" (original quotation: "concepção integral do mundo").

The historical analysis of Brazilian dependence takes on philosophical contours when articulated with the Marxist critique of fetishism, developed by Mészáros (2002, p. 312). In the IFs, this manifests itself in the contradictions between technological autonomy and subordination to international capital, a problem identified by Álvaro Vieira Pinto (1958, p. 112).

In summary, the history of vocational education in Brazil is marked by advances and setbacks, reflecting the contradictions of a country whose modernization has often reproduced its structural dependence. The contemporary challenge is to consolidate an educational model that transcends the immediate interests of the market, promoting a sovereign and inclusive development.

## 4 Final considerations

Brazil has been experiencing a period of paradigmatic transition, in which traditional educational models are proving to be insufficient to meet the historical and social demands of the 21st century. Postmodernity, with its fragmentation and fluidity, poses new challenges to education, demanding critical reflection on its ends and means. In this context, a historical analysis of Brazilian education reveals a path marked by interruptions, contradictions, and subordination to political and economic interests, which

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Original quotation: "é importante lembrar que as condições sociais influenciam todo o processo de formação, sendo essencial questionar a estrutura que sustenta a escola. Esse, em última análise, é o principal desafio da escola pública, especialmente no cenário das políticas neoliberais".



limited to preparing for the job market, but should aim at human emancipation, developing the intellectual, affective, aesthetic, and practical capacities of individuals. Mészáros criticizes capitalist education for reducing human beings to a mere labor force, denying their creative and transformative potential. In this sense, the proposal of the Federal Institutes (IFs) for whole formation can be seen as an attempt to overcome this logic, as long as it is not limited to meeting the immediate demands of the market.

reinforces the need for an educational project that overcomes the duality between humanistic and technical education, between preparation for university entrance exams and training for the job market.

The history of education in Brazil evidences a policy marked by dichotomy, discontinuity of plans, and clashes of interests and values. The lack of political representation, combined with the distance between educational institutions and the real demands of society, contributes to recurring crises. These structural characteristics demonstrate that, as in the past, education remains subordinate to political and economic interests, and is often used as a bargaining tool, and to perpetuate inequalities.

However, the creation of the Federal Institutes of Education, Science, and Technology represents a historic opportunity to confront the chronic problems of Brazilian education. Even though they face challenges related to funding, teacher training, and teaching quality, the Federal Institutes have the potential to build an omnilateral formation that overcomes the traditional duality between a school focused on college entrance exams and another focused on the job market.

This omnilateral education must be based on a critical understanding of the national reality and the needs of those who make a living from work, rejecting a reductionist approach that limits education to the immediate demands of the market. A reordering of values that prioritizes the individual as a historical agent, capable of understanding and transforming the world of work, rather than merely adapting to its demands, is needed. Such critical education requires a reading of the world that allows students to develop historical awareness and intellectual autonomy.

In this sense, authors such as Gramsci and Mészáros offer important contributions to this discussion. Gramsci argues that education should be whole, encompassing all human dimensions, and criticizes the division between manual labor and intellectual labor, arguing that education should prepare individuals to fully participate in society. Mészáros complements this view by arguing that omnilateral education should overcome the alienation imposed by capitalism, allowing individuals to develop their full potential. For him, education should be a space for emancipation, where individuals can recognize themselves as historical subjects capable of transforming reality.

Despite the transformative potential of Federal Institutes, significant contradictions in their implementation persist. Practices such as streamlining training to meet seasonal demands — such as international events — and alignment with political and ideological interests limit their emancipatory reach. Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize that, in a society controlled by capital, qualifications alone do not guarantee employment or economic security. Vulnerability to unemployment remains a constant, especially in a market ruled by the dynamics of capital.

Therefore, for Federal Institutes to fulfill their promise as spaces for critical and transformative education, it is necessary to go beyond superficial reforms. A political-pedagogical project that consistently articulates science, technology, and humanities, in dialogue with the real needs of the working



class, is required. This implies guaranteeing appropriate material and human conditions, as well as a clear philosophical orientation that rejects technocratic and market-oriented reductionism in favor of a polytechnic and emancipatory education.

The history of Brazilian education, marked by dependence and inequality, imposes concrete limits on any transformative proposal. However, IFs represent a window of opportunity to build an education that not only qualifies for work, but also forms citizens who are aware of their historical role. Their success will depend on their ability to resist the pressures of capital, to deepen the philosophical debate about their purpose, and to consolidate themselves as a counter-hegemonic project — a space where education is, in fact, an instrument of liberation and not of reproduction of inequalities.

In this regard, and once again, authors who discuss the role of education in capitalist society, such as Gramsci, Freire, Mészáros, and others, can offer conceptual tools to think about education as a vector of social transformation and human emancipation.

Thus, this article concludes that education, as a social practice, cannot be dissociated from the power relations and historical contradictions that shape society. Federal Institutes, as institutions that aim to promote omnilateral formation, have the opportunity to break with the alienating and fragmentary practices that characterize the current educational model. However, for this to occur, it is essential to overcome the limits imposed by capitalist logic and invest in the construction of an educational project that values human integrity, critical autonomy, and social sovereignty. Only in this way will it be possible to contribute not only to economic development, but also to the emancipation of individuals and the construction of a more just and egalitarian society.

Hence, the full realization of Federal Institutions as emancipating institutions demands not only institutional advances, but also a structural change in society, in which education ceases to be a privilege of a few and becomes a right for all, guided by the search for a fair, sovereign and truly democratic society.

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