

BLACK CLUBS AS EDUCATIONAL SPACES: a contribution to the History of Education

Os clubes negros como espaços educadores: uma contribuição à História da Educação

Los clubes negros como espacios educadores: una contribución a la Historia de la Educación

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Abstract: This article analyzes the historical experience of the so-called black clubs as educational spaces. Based on the study of the trajectory of an isolated, mixed, multi-grade school subsidized by the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil, which operated between 1935 and 1937, created within the Clube 28 de Setembro, in the city of Pouso Alegre, the organization of its formal schooling strategies, school practices and the formation of a school culture are identified. It also discusses the meanings that its community gave to projects to expand the hegemonic idea of school and the schooling of the social and to the processes of definition and extension of citizenship rights through access to formal schooling, structured by the State. Using dialogue with the theoretical framework of the history of education of the black population and with a varied set of sources, such as documents from the executive and legislative branches (laws, opinions, minutes), school inspection reports, the press and records produced by the Clube 28 de Setembro itself (minutes, statutes and internal regulations), it was possible to recognize which forms of racial contestation gave meaning and configuration to the school form and culture of the political-educational projects developed within the scope of black associations, in the first half of the 20th century.

Keywords: social schooling; citizenship; racism; Brazil.

Resumo: O artigo analisa a experiência histórica dos chamados clubes negros como espaços educadores. A partir do estudo da trajetória de uma escola isolada, mista, multisseriada e subvencionada pelo Estado de Minas Gerais, que funcionou entre os anos de 1935 e 1937, criada no interior do Clube 28 de Setembro, na cidade de Pouso Alegre, identifica-se a organização das suas estratégias de escolarização formal, as práticas escolares e a conformação de uma cultura escolar. Discute-se, ainda, os sentidos que a sua comunidade deu aos projetos de ampliação da ideia hegemônica de escola e da escolarização do social e aos processos de definição e extensão dos direitos de cidadania através do acesso à escolarização formal, estruturados pelo Estado. Recorrendo ao diálogo com o arcabouço teórico da história da educação da população negra e com um variado conjunto de fontes, como documentos do poder executivo e legislativo (leis, pareceres, atas), relatórios de inspeção escolar, imprensa e os registros produzidos pelo próprio Clube 28 de Setembro (atas, estatuto e regimento interno), foi possível reconhecer quais formas de contestação racial deram sentido e configuração à forma e cultura escolares dos projetos político-educativos elaborados no âmbito do associativismo negro, na primeira metade do século XX.

Palavras-chave: escolarização social; cidadania; racismo; Primeira República.

Resumen: El artículo analiza la experiencia histórica de los llamados clubes negros como *espacios educadores* (espacios educativos). A partir del estudio de la historia de una escuela aislada, mixta y multiserial subvencionada por el estado de Minas Gerais, que funcionó entre 1935 y 1937 y se instaló en el interior del Clube 28 de Setembro, en la ciudad de Pouso Alegre, identifica la organización de su proyecto de desarrollo de estrategias de escolarización formal, prácticas escolares y formación de una cultura escolar. También discute los significados que su comunidad dio a los proyectos de ampliación de la escuela y de la escuela social y a los procesos de definición y ampliación de los derechos de ciudadanía a través del acceso a la escolarización formal, estructurados por el Estado. A través del diálogo con el marco teórico de la llamada historia de la educación de la población negra y con un conjunto variado de fuentes, como documentos de los poderes ejecutivo y legislativo (leyes, dictámenes, actas), informes de inspección escolar, prensa y los registros producidos por el propio Clube 28 de Setembro (actas, estatutos y reglamentos), fue posible reconocer que las formas de contestación racial dieron sentido y configuración a la forma y a la cultura escolar de los proyectos político-educativos elaborados en el marco de las asociaciones negras en la primera mitad del siglo XX.

Palabras clave: escolarización social; ciudadanía; racismo; historia de Brasil.

INTRODUCTION

Since at least the 1980s, the field of research and teaching in the history of education has undergone important transformations in theoretical, methodological, epistemological and political terms. This inflection, based on new historical problems and alternative interpretations, reshaped the debates and expanded the possibilities of investigation of/in the historiography of education (Vidal & Faria Filho, 2003). Following the path opened by this historiographical renewal, researchers began to insist on the need to include black experiences as an object of study and a problem of research in the history of education.

Barros (2022, p. 181) pointed out that, more than simply studying the absence of black people in the historiography of education, it is about “[...] addressing the association of black people and education, recognizing the proximity between these subjects, education and the literate universe, denaturalizing racial relations, education, school and all the processes involved, recognizing black agency, racism present in different ways and the struggles against it [...]” as the result of the actions of men and women, as historical subjects, woven into their diverse experiences, immersed in a vast network of social relations.

Thus, black experiences in the field of education have increasingly been investigated, leading to different questions about the historical interpretations and explanations traditionally accepted regarding the history of education. For example, the review of the thesis of the legal prohibition of access by black people (enslaved, freed and free) to formal schooling during the slave regime; the idea that being black was synonymous of having experienced only the experiences of slavery, slave labor and; in relation to the post-abolition period, the reinterpretation of the notion in which the school, as a social institution, recognized the legal equality of subjects and indiscriminately served everyone – to name just a few thematic developments – are good examples of these new questions¹.

With the intention of contributing to the questions and problems raised by the current study of the history of education of the black population, this article analyzes black clubs as educational spaces. In this sense, what Gomes called the “Black Educator Movement”, despite referring preferably to political actions in the field of education developed by contemporary black social movements (which emerged from the 1970s onwards), has a timeless (but not ahistorical) exegesis that can, with due

¹ The bibliography that has taken the education of the black population as a form of historiographical approach in the history of education is currently extensive. For a panoramic view of the theoretical debates, historiographical approaches and intellectual perspectives that are shaping the history of education of the black population as a historiographical field, I suggest checking out the collections Romão (2005) and Fonseca & Barros (2016) and the Dossier “Blacks and education”, *Revista Brasileira de História da Educação* (2002) and Dossier “History of education and black populations”, *Revista Brasileira de História da Educação* (2022).

care in historiographical analysis and interpretation, encompass the experiences of black associations in the early 20th century with the issue of education, especially with formal schooling. In the author's interpretation:

In its educational role, the Black Movement educates and re-educates society, the State and itself about race relations, racism and the African diaspora. And, if there is an educator, it builds pedagogies. And, if it builds pedagogies, it interferes in the educational processes and educational policies. The Brazilian Black Movement is part of the process of producing the pedagogy of social movements. The main task of this social movement is the fight against a phenomenon that Brazil insists on saying does not exist or, if it does, it occurs in a milder form in our country than in others: racism (Gomes, 2017, p. 17).

Without intending to invent various meanings that exist regarding the concept of a black club, an effort that I have already made in previous texts and that has also been the subject of discussion in the historiography dedicated to the subject, I consider that black associations, in general, and black clubs, specifically, can be interpreted as modalities of black sociability that, in different contexts and chronologies, and with different purposes, created political-educational projects informed by specific values, habits and knowledge (Silva, 2017; Ribeiro, 2021; Domingues, 2023). In fact, the idea of education forged in black clubs did not refer exclusively to a sense of formal schooling, but rather to a set of values and representations as experience, culture and mode of sociability. Even so, formal schooling (in its various senses) was present on the political agenda of black clubs throughout the 20th century (Domingues, 2008; Lucindo, 2010; Ribeiro, 2018; Perussatto, 2022; Sousa, 2022).

This means that black clubs were educational spaces par excellence, but in certain contexts, they adopted formal schooling as part of their collective projects. This approach assumes that educational spaces and processes were not necessarily limited to materiality, nor were they experienced in formal schooling institutions and/or through the knowledge produced in these spaces, but perhaps mainly in other platforms for the exchange or circulation of knowledge (Zica, 2021).

From this perspective, the investigation of the historical experiences of black clubs makes it possible to think about education beyond the school configuration and its norms throughout the 20th century. The exercise I developed here is the study of the political-educational project of the Clube 28 de Setembro, a black association, created in 1904 in Pouso Alegre, a city located in the South of Minas Gerais. I considered it as one of the several political-educational projects constructed by the club throughout its eight decades of existence as an expression of a school culture, that is, as a set of norms

that defined codes of behavior and knowledge (schooled or not) and the mechanisms of transmission and incorporation of this knowledge (Julia, 2001).

The Clube 28 de Setembro of Pouso Alegre, like many other similar associations, built political-educational projects based on educational practices and investment in forms of formal schooling. Obviously, aspects of its trajectory cannot be extended as a parameter or rule to consider the multiplicity of experiences that made up the universe of black associations and their many political-educational projects in Brazil in the first half of the 20th century. Even so, I recognize that the analysis of the long historical trajectory of the Clube 28 de Setembro may allow a broadening of perspectives and historiographical approaches on the history of education, citizenship, anti-racism, and the struggles for rights carried out by the black population in the First Republic.

In the chronological period in question – the 1930s – the community of Clube 28 de Setembro considered that the access to formal schooling (especially primary education) would play a fundamental role in alleviating or reducing social inequalities, since the mastery of elementary knowledge disseminated in formal educational institutions could have implications for social mobility, sociability, access to citizenship rights, forms of social distinction and employability. Thus, by studying its trajectory, it is possible to develop a discussion about how primary education was interpreted and instrumentalized as a right that many black men and women understood as a condition of citizenship, and its provision as a duty of the State.

In this sense, the study of political-educational projects of black clubs, such as the 28 de Setembro, presents the “[...] possibility of questioning the historical process of their production, changes and permanence, contributing to the discovery of infinite possibilities of living and, within life, infinite ways of doing and of the doing of school and its subjects” (Faria Filho & Vidal, 2000, p. 21). Thus, in order to understand the idea of school outlined by the Pouso Alegre black association and the historical construction, that is, the historicity of this space as an educational institution, as well as to study the modality of formal schooling created within it, I focused the investigation, from an empirical point of view, on the minutes of meeting from the Pouso Alegre City Council, the press, reports of the technical education inspectorate, annals of the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais and the records produced by the Clube 28 de Setembro itself (minutes of meeting, statute and internal regulations).

FORMAL SCHOOLING PROJECTS: ONE ASPECT OF THE DISPUTES OVER CITIZENSHIP STATUS

The project to create the Clube 28 de Setembro school only makes sense if interpreted as part of the political context and power relations that marked the realities of Pouso Alegre, Minas Gerais, and Brazilian societies in the 1930s. In general, the club community, at least at that time, interpreted formal schooling as a mechanism for achieving good positions in the world of work and qualifying for the exercise of political citizenship, that is, the right to vote, something very dear to the notion of civic spirit and political participation in the First Republic, especially for black men, and which was only possible for those who demonstrated mastery and use of the literacy skills offered by formal education. This is the understanding that appears in an article published in the press in the mid-1930s, which indicated that “[...] education forms man and puts him in a position to decide on the multiple paths that life offers him: the placement of an honest job, the exact understanding of the civic condition and participation as an element of the nation’s progress” (Reclamação, 1935, p. 3).

If schooling is understood as “[...] both the ways in which the State and the ways in which social groups organized and produced the school as a social institution for controlling populations and transmitting culture” (Vidal & Biccás, 2008, p. 28), it is valid to consider that forms of formal and school education – knowing how to read, write, count and master rules of civility and morality – have long been one of the means by which the black population has sought to access hegemonic knowledge. The trajectory of the Clube 28 de Setembro is yet another element of what we can glimpse as black experiences in the field of education, so much so that, in the early 1920s, its members planned to “[...] create a school for the education of the children of colored men” (Instruction, 1922, p. 2). Apparently, the project never got beyond the idea stage, but the proposal presented the club members’ expectations regarding formal schooling, that is, the agency of these individuals in the construction of school-based educational processes and their valorization within the club’s political agenda. Shortly after this first initiative, in 1924, the club members managed to create a “first letters” course – which apparently lasted only a short time – at their headquarters:

Registrations are now open at the headquarters of the Clube 28 de Setembro in Pouso Alegre for the instruction course that the board of directors of this Society has created for its illiterate members due to the interest in the first letters noted in them and which will begin on the first day of the coming month of September, from 7 to 9 pm, under the direction of Miss Professor Rosalina Carvalho (Escola..., 1924, p. 3).

Although the records of the Clube 28 de Setembro present a supposed perspective of collective and coherent sharing among its different members in relation to their political-educational projects, it is important to highlight that the ephemeral life of such initiatives may indicate the existence of different educational projects in dispute within the association itself, as well as different needs, expectations and interests among the members of its community. This may have been the case of the “instruction course” created in 1924, about which I found only a single record, thus suggesting a short life.

In the 1930s, another formal schooling experience was developed by the club. At the beginning of 1935, a new school began operating in the association, subsidized by the state government, with a multi-grade and isolated mixed class (which served boys and girls). Its creation took place in the context in which the State conceived political projects informed by a concern with the construction of a national identity that should have formal education (especially elementary education) as its main political foundation. In fact, this was not a new issue or problem for the republican governments and ruling classes, as it had already been part of their political agendas since the 19th century, but it is certain that, at the end of the 1920s, the social function of the school, or of a certain image of it, gained a new political and cultural dimension (Carvalho, 1989).

Formal education began to be conceived as a way of transmitting social orders and principles to the population, as well as education to the individual to build a new society. In other words, primary school was supposed to be a space for the representation and dissemination of a certain ideology of national character (Peixoto, 1983). Thus, the pedagogical role of the State and, therefore, of the school in the formation of citizens was one of the main challenges faced by the political and ruling classes in the 1930s. In this political scenario, the debate on school as a space destined for the formation of (and for) citizenship was purposefully confused with the notions in vogue of nationalism and patriotism.

Several studies have shown that, by adopting a policy based on the belief that schools should culturally homogenize society, the State avoided creating legal definitions and legal status regarding notions of citizenship (Nunes, 2001). Thus, this social mechanism was not designed based on the progressive attribution of civil and political rights to all citizens, who were considered equal. Elementary school and the culture of formal schooling produced by it continued to be interpreted as devices for reproducing current social structures. This approach assumed the existence of unequal subjects, vertically situated in social relations traversed by distinctions of class, race and gender.

The educational reforms undertaken in Minas Gerais from the 1920s onwards were deeply compromised by this unequal social schooling. This reveals the direction given by the Minas Gerais governments towards an asymmetric democratization

access to formal education. Between 1926 and 1930, the state government of Antônio Carlos Ribeiro de Andrada, through its Secretary of the Interior, Francisco Campos, developed an education reform that intended to make primary education in Minas Gerais its most important instrument for the formation and socialization of future generations, in order to make them orderly, rational and productive elements (Vidal & Faria Filho, 2002). The most general aims of this reform appeared in *Pela civilização mineira* [For the civilization of Minas Gerais], a kind of manifesto of this educational reform, organized by Francisco Campos himself. In its pages, the school – as a social institution – appears as a space destined for the socialization, expansion, guidance, disciplining and adaptation of man to social life (Campos, 1930).

For the purposes of this article, it is important to emphasize that this process began in the Antônio Carlos government, with the reform of Francisco Campos, and continued (with adaptations and changes) in the state governments of the 1930s, with a certain concern with control over educational spaces and their practices of elaboration and transmission of knowledge, whether schooled or not. The speech given by the then Secretary of the Interior, at the opening ceremony of the legislative year of the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais, which took place at the beginning of 1929, exemplifies this concern. In his words:

Religious, moral, scientific, artistic, literary and recreational associations and societies, in their mission to educate for life, multiply around us: but the State is not there. [...] An ever greater effort is needed by the government to efficiently create strict control over the type and morality of education offered in these auxiliary institutions of our school. There is no doubt that they greatly cooperate in the literacy of our youth and, therefore, vigilant government supervision will help them to contribute effectively to raising the intellectual level of Minas Gerais (Campos, 1929, p. 7).

It was in this political context marked by a new process, of a secular, public and mandatory nature, of nationalizing education and institutionalizing elementary schools to a large part of the population with the members of the Clube 28 de Setembro achieved a great feat of creating an elementary school, recognized and subsidized by the state government of Minas Gerais and supported by sectors of the ruling classes and political elites of Pouso Alegre. Despite a collective perspective that the club itself said about the success of the enterprise, especially in its publicity in articles in the press, it was the result of the political articulations of three of the main association representatives – the civil servant Isidoro da Silva Cobra (1880-1960), the secretary of the diocese of Pouso Alegre Mirabeau Joaquim Ludovico (1886-1982) and the tailor Cassemiro Luiz de Abreu (1888-1973).

All of them, with different intentions and through different means of dialogue, established forms of communication with one of the main representatives of the local political elite, the then diocesan bishop Otávio Chagas de Miranda (1881-1959). Since he assumed the diocese of Pouso Alegre in 1916, the bishop had been seeking strategies to expand and strengthen the power of the Catholic Church in the field of education within his ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In fact, as a “[...] legitimate representative of ultramontanismo” (A escola..., 1930, p. 1), as he defined himself. His political articulation with Catholic educational militancy in the 1930s reflected the disputes between Catholics and liberals that marked the educational scenario at the national level.

In the case of the September 28 Club, the constant presence of its three main leaders signing articles in the pages of *Semana Religiosa*, the official publication of the Diocese of Pouso Alegre, suggests that the bishop used this partnership as a strategy for political mobilization in favor of his educational project, while at the same time seeking to co-opt this movement of the club community, and of the Pouso Alegre population in general, to the cause of his political agenda in the field of education. The club members, in turn, saw this collaboration as an opportunity to carry out their project of developing formal schooling strategies, school practices and the formation of school culture. An article published in the diocese newspaper, unsigned, but which may have been written by Cassemiro Luiz de Abreu, one of his frequent collaborators, publicized the arguments that were being used to define the partnership between the figure of the bishop and the club members in the achievement of the educational project:

The Most Excellent Bishop finds the idea of creating a primary school at the 28 de Setembro Club to be very good and timely, an initiative for which he has given his support. Like the eminent priest, we believe that when the number of educated children, sons and daughters of this great land, is greater than it is now, the people of Pouso Alegre will understand their mission of patriotism even better. With this understanding and consequent esteem, this essential element of the national character will be greatly enhanced. To the people, schools! (Notes..., 1932, p. 1).

Negotiations between the club members, the diocese, the municipality of Pouso Alegre, and the government of Minas Gerais began in 1932 and were conducted through the intermediary of the then president of the city council and agent of the executive branch (current mayor) João Tavares Corrêa Beraldo (1891-1960). The circumstances that preceded and followed them are at the center of the analysis undertaken here. I begin by paying attention to the way in which many people involved in the agreement considered formal education as a fundamental part of disciplining society and propagating nationalist values and practices, a perspective evident in the article on the project to create the school and published in *Semana*

Religiosa. Furthermore, the discussions surrounding the proposal to create an educational institution provided a visualization of how a political project to universalize access to formal elementary schooling took shape in the 1930s.

Throughout the years 1932-1933, the board of directors of the Clube 28 de Setembro sent motions to the City Council and promoted dances and other leisure activities with the aim of putting pressure on public opinion on the need to create a school on its premises so that “the evil of ignorance could be eradicated, making Brazilians a mental and conscious force, committed to their duties of contributing to the greatness of Brazil” (Minutes of the Meeting..., 1932, p. 15). This was a resource widely used by the association in that context. In the historical archive of the City Council, a collection belonging to the Museum Tuany Toledo, in Pouso Alegre, I found records of some of these motions issued by the club, among the minutes of plenary meetings and the communications received and dispatched by the agent of the municipal executive².

One of them was published in the local press in early 1933, in which the club’s board expressed its interest in “founding a primary school that should be set up and paid for by public funds, because, above all, it will serve the children of the land free of charge” (O Linguarudo, 1933, p. 3). Pressure to obtain support from the public authorities for its project to create a school also came about through the holding of social events. In May 1933, for example, the club organized an “artistic festival at Largo do Rosário” to “[...] benefit the creation of a school at its headquarters, during which Dr. João Corrêa Tavares Beraldo gave a lecture on primary education” (Festival..., 1933, p. 3).

The club’s political action strategy was carried out on three fronts: through partnership and protection of the diocese and its bishop, through the externalization of the demand in the public arena and as a social demand to the City Council. These actions, in their specificities, were perceived by the club as effective channels for mediating interests. The dialogues – asymmetrical or not – that several members of the club, especially its leaders, established with the diocese and the bishop were part of a long-lasting network of political collaboration, which dated back to the founding of the association in the early 20th century. The fact is that there was intense dialogue between the club and the local Catholic Church.

Furthermore, the diocese invested heavily in the region’s education sector. The two main educational institutions for the children of the white elite in Pouso Alegre (Colégio São José, for boys, and Instituto Santa Doroteia, for girls) were owned by the diocese. The formal education of the less affluent classes was also the target of political action by the bishopric, which founded and administered the Delfim Moreira

² Of the five motions located, only one contains details about its proposal, which was subsequently published in the press. All the others appear described as a communication received and dispatched by the municipal executive’s agent.

Professional School (1917) and the Santa Terezinha Domestic School (1929) (Espíndola, 2016). The club members were aware of the diocese's hegemony in the educational field in Pouso Alegre and sought to gain some political advantage by inserting themselves into the networks of power and favor that marked social relations in that society. This may explain the bishop's, and, by extension, the diocese's support for the project to create the Clube 28 de Setembro school.

Furthermore, occupying the city's social spaces was part of the political culture, that is, the forms of action and behavior in the public sphere, of the 28 de Setembro Club. Its balls and parties, beauty contests, football matches, carnival festivities, civic celebrations of May 13 and September 28, fairs and picnics were consciously organized and held in different spaces of the city, especially public ones, as expressions that should transform these cultural experiences into spectacles, places of conflict, of struggles, of affirmation of a certain conception of blackness and of the cultural heritage of Pouso Alegre society. The "artistic festival in Largo do Rosário" to "benefit the creation of the school" was part of this cultural policy.

Another aspect of what we can consider the club's cultural policy was its insertion into local political networks, as was the case with the diocese. Regarding the motions in support of the creation of the school sent to the City Council, this was an action that had the clear intention of demonstrating to the local political class that the club interpreted the provision of formal schooling as a duty of the State and a civil right of the people. I did not find any possible responses from the City Council or the executive agent to the club's requests, but it is possible that they were read in the light of the cult of personalism, a striking characteristic of the political elites in the first half of the 20th century, for whom show publicly paternalistic ties of subservience – instead of appreciation for some democratic form of political representation – was a criterion for the participation in collective life (Ferreira & Pinto, 2008).

As the reader will see in the following pages, it seems unlikely that the club members interpreted their approach to the executive agent of Pouso Alegre in terms of any interpretation of subordination, but they were certainly aware that clientelistic and paternalistic relationships were part of the political structure of local oligarchies, and also that, through them, it was possible to build mechanisms for access to and maintenance of political citizenship. In this sense, many of the club members, by focusing their interests on traditional political institutions, were making readings about the paths, misdirections and possibilities of effective political participation in that society.

It is therefore not surprising that the club publicly expressed its support – in terms of interpreting the legitimacy of the citizenship status of many of its members – for Corrêa Beraldo's candidacy for the position of federal deputy to the Constituent Assembly in 1934. An article published in the local press and disseminated in the "A

Pedidos” section of *O Jornal*, one of the most important newspapers in the country published in the federal capital, helps us understand the dynamics of these alliances:

A man of public vocation marked by a noble tradition of work and honesty, intelligent and cultured, Dr. Corrêa Beraldo has rendered important services to the State and the Nation. As a parliamentarian, his performance was among the most brilliant and patriotic, for he was always guided by the interests of the nation, deserving, for this reason, the esteem of his peers and the recognition of true citizens (A Candidatura..., 1934a, p. 2; Grande..., 1934, p. 3).

The negotiations over the publication of this article show how the club’s political projects, which were based on the legitimacy of its presence in local politics, were formulated. In a deliberative meeting held in September 1934, the club’s board considered that “[...] sending a telegram of support for the deputy to the friendly press [...]” was a sign of “extreme patriotism” and “[...] a manifestation of [its] enthusiasm for the democratic cause” (Minutes of the Meeting..., 1934, p. 26). By incorporating the vocabulary of political arena of the time, as it is not without reason that terms such as “patriotism” and “democratic cause” were used. The members of the club’s board were framing the issue of supporting the deputy’s election in terms of citizenship, as an effort to achieve what were understood as civil and political rights.

Cooper (2018), when discussing the historical concept of citizenship, observed that the presence of individuals with rights did not presuppose the existence of prerogatives of universal equality, especially in nations that were built on the experience of slavery, slave labor, and colonialism, as it is the case of Brazil. For the historian, the condition of citizenship did not overcome differences and injustices, nor did it establish forms of equity among citizens; in other words, citizenship was not synonymous with equality. Thus, in the recent history of Western societies, the many notions – legal, political, or moral – of citizenship, and their diverse uses, functioned more as triggers of inequality of rights and less as frameworks for promoting forms of equality of conditions among citizens (or among individuals who could access this status).

The members of the September 28 Club probably understood the paradoxes surrounding the political and legal precariousness of citizenship status, which in many ways impacted their lives. It was certainly because of this understanding that they saw their involvement in political patronage relationships with local elites as a viable strategy for achieving their collective projects, but also their individual aspirations. In a certain sense, public support for Corrêa Beraldo’s election can also be read through this lens. In any case, the club’s demands for political and administrative classes in Pouso Alegre were successful. In the second half of 1933, a financial subsidy project for the maintenance of several isolated schools in the

southern region of the state, including the Clube 28 de Setembro, was presented to the Minas Gerais Consultative Council by then deputy Lúcio José dos Santos (1875-1944), an ardent representative of the Catholic Church interests, the traditional oligarchies of Minas Gerais, and a political ally of Bishop Otávio Chagas de Miranda and deputy Corrêa Beraldo³.

The project was the subject of discussion on several occasions over the course of months and was only voted on by the plenary of the previous Constituent Assembly of Minas Gerais in August 1934. It was approved and enacted by means of Decree n° 11.606, of October 8, 1934, which created two urban and mixed schools in Pouso Alegre, one at the Clube 28 de Setembro and the other at the União Operária (Minas Gerais, 1935). The long time the project took to be processed in the Chamber of Deputies demonstrated the importance of the subject and the wide range of interests it mobilized. Although the *Annals* of the Legislative Assembly provide little information about the debates surrounding the project, the reason for its success may have been the ideology of the traditional oligarchies that controlled the political arena in Minas Gerais, who were openly in favor of a decentralized model of power and administration (Bomeny, 1980). Thus, in this struggle for financial resources and political support, the interests of the representatives of the South of Minas Gerais prevailed.

FOR A SCHOOL “WITHOUT DISTINCTION OF COLOR AND WITHOUT RACIAL HATRED”

The 28 de Setembro Club enthusiastically recognized and celebrated the creation of its new school, which was recognized and subsidized by the state. Between October and December 1934, it sent at least three telegrams to the intervening governor Benedito Valadares, to the Secretary of Education and Public Health, Noraldino Lima, and to Guerino Casasanta, the general inspector of Education of Minas Gerais⁴. In Pouso Alegre, in mid-November 1934, the club held a festival at Largo do Rosário, according to the press, “in honor of the intervention of the State of Minas Gerais for granting the subsidy to the primary school”. The festival also included a “parade, picnic and tombola” and the participation of the “[...] Rio Branco Jazz band, under the direction of maestro Isidoro Cobra Júnior” (Nova..., 1934, p. 2).

In fact, this “festival” can be considered one of the first activities linked to the routines that marked the internal practices of the club’s new school. This is explained

³ Without disclosing any details, the project was presented only as a demand from representatives of the South of Minas Gerais, on August 1, 1933 (Minas Gerais, 1933).

⁴ The *Minas Gerais*, the official organ of the state government, registered the receipt of these telegrams in the editions of November 6, 1933, November 27, 1933, and December 8, 1933, without, however, presenting their contents.

by the fact that, in the school culture developed by the association, parties could fulfill an educational role. In fact, since the school's classes began in March 1935, as reported in the press, the club transformed some of the elements of its associative culture into what Vincent *et al.* (2001) called the “school form”.

This was the case of the celebration of May 13th held that same year. Considered by the club's community as one of the most important dates in the country's political history, May 13th (the date that marked the end of slavery in the country) incorporated a school ritual during the period in which the school existed. The celebration in commemoration of the date, held in May 1935, presents the ways in which the schooling process at the club was being shaped. According to the press, the “school party” celebrated the “grand date of May 13th” and included the following program: “[...] games in the party room, the club's anthem and the national anthem sung by those present and accompanied by the band, poems recited by the children, refreshments in the club's hall and a movie session” (May 13, 1935, p. 2).

The parties were spaces in which the club community, but not only, organized their ways of learning and transmitting knowledge and daily practices, that is, a process in which the subjects educated themselves not only based on their experiences, but also with resources through which it was possible to have contact with the social uses of the school knowledge transmitted by the school. Thus, it is valid to consider that beliefs, habits and customs constructed through values and the strength of tradition could impose new ingredients on the configuration of school knowledge. Thus, as pedagogies, both the space and the school time forged in the club “[...] taught, allowing the internalization of behaviors and social representations. From this perspective, they acted as prominent elements in the social (and historical) construction of reality” (Faria Filho & Vidal, 2000, p. 20).

Possibly, the club's school activities became familiar even to those who were absent from their school, but who maintained dialogue and coexistence with it through its parties and other school activities, showing that its political-educational project was not interpreted only as a space for learning school knowledge, but also mainly as a place for incorporating social behaviors and habits.

It is important to note that these educational situations were somewhat different from those of the formal school model. Therefore, determining the specificity of this educational practice is an opportune exercise for understanding the political and pedagogical organization of the Clube 28 de Setembro school. Throughout its existence, the educational establishment produced few records. The education inspector, Antônio Gomes Tavares, responsible for the first examination of the school's activities, carried out at the end of 1935, left a rare and interesting description regarding the space (building) and aspects of the school form of that educational establishment:

It is an old and very defective mansion, but it is in the best part of the city, where there are four spacious and airy rooms, all with windows facing the front. It has a kitchen with furniture and installation of electricity and running water in all rooms, but the sanitary facilities adopt the obsolete system of septic tank and well, incompatible with the ideals of healthy education. The room used for the classroom is a spacious room with many windows. It has a slate [blackboard], and on the right side there is a planisphere and a panel with the letters of the alphabet, all in good condition, and 2 paintings, one with the image of Mr. President [of the Republic] Getúlio Vargas and the other with that of Mr. Interventor [of Minas Gerais] Benedito Valadares. The tables and chairs are old and useless, but I was informed by the club management that 20 desks, 2 benches, 1 table and 2 chairs were purchased from the carpentry shop of the Professional School [Delfim Moreira]. It is provided with teaching materials (chalk, pencils and notebooks for writing and drawing) sufficient for the smooth running of the work, which will enable the learning of the subject, and therefore, discipline and good order in the school routine. The bookkeeping is regularly done and organized in a file designated for this purpose. There are 47 students enrolled (22 boys and 25 girls), 32 classified in the first year and 15 in the second year. The pedagogical work is progressing well (Tavares, 1935).

Through the school inspector's observation, it is possible to glimpse the material culture that constituted the school practices and form of that educational establishment: the presence of school furniture (desks, chairs and benches) may indicate that students were distributed in rows; materials such as blackboards, chalk, notebooks, pencils, the "panel with the letters of the alphabet" and the planisphere suggest the presence of support for reading and writing. The paintings with figures of prominent politicians certainly indicate that there was an appreciation for civic and patriotic education, in vogue at that time. Thus, such fragments of the school culture of the club school demonstrate "[...] the various educational projects put into play by social movements or groups in the creation of educational establishments, in the definition of educational models and in the functioning of initiatives in permanent dialogue and negotiation with official investments" (Vidal & Biccás, 2008, p. 28).

Defined and classified by the education inspector as "urban, isolated and mixed", we can consider the school model adopted (or forced to adopt) by the Clube 28 de Setembro school as a result of the debates about multi-grade schools versus graduated schools, which prevailed in the educational field in the 1930s. Although the State, throughout the first half of the 20th century, created investments in order to build, disseminate and consolidate a notion of school culture, having as its articulating axis the school groups, which, in turn, should constitute a basic reference for the organization of school models in the educational universe, until the second

half of the century, the school, organized in an isolated way and in multi-grade classes, prevailed.

Souza (2016) noted the need to recognize the important role that isolated schools played in disseminating models of school culture in small urban centers, neighborhoods, towns, districts, and, above all, in rural areas in various parts of the country throughout the 20th century. According to the author, some of these schools operated in their own buildings, with qualified teachers, and had high enrollment, attendance, and approval rates. In addition, many of them adopted school models based on the serial organization of classes, rationalized use of school time and spaces, and systematic control of pedagogical work, similar to what occurred with the graduated school model. Perhaps this reality explains the predominance of isolated schools in Brazilian society during the First Republic, which, together with school groups, contributed, at least in numerical terms, to the project of expanding the access to formal elementary schooling.

However, one cannot disregard a dimension of social inequality that was embedded in the polarity of proposals for formal elementary schooling that oscillated between the contested school model of isolated schools for many and the school form of school groups for a few (Schueler & Magaldi, 2009). Following this logic, educational institutions, such as the Clube 28 de Setembro, may have been seen by the political and governing classes as spaces suitable for propagating this – unequal – form of school model.

In any case, according to the technical inspector's report, the club's school, in its first year of activity, served 22 boys and 25 girls. Although it does not provide details about their ages, it is possible that they were children of primary school age, that is, between 7 and 14 years old, as defined by the educational legislation of the period. Although the club's records do not allow us to advance this discussion, they do allow us to conjecture the various social meanings that have been historically attributed to childhood (or childhoods).

In fact, the 1930s marked the beginning of the consolidation of a long process of social and cultural construction on the identification of formal school as a specific space to produce a culture of schooled childhood. Perhaps one of the main characteristics of this representation of childhood and its schooling was the slow development of mechanisms aimed at bringing together the ideal and real ages of children, in accordance with the legal prescription regarding the so-called age-grade for primary schooling (Souza, 1999).

The experience of the Clube 28 de Setembro school helps us visualize the various historical contours of the constitution of elementary schooling for children. The description that the press made of some of its educational celebrations follows this perspective. For example, in 1936, to celebrate the end of the school year, a “lavish picnic” was held, which was attended by the “families of the children being

cared for”, including “many small children”, as highlighted in the article (Pelas Escolas, 1936). I believe that the notion of child (and small child) used by the newspaper referred to the social concept of childhood in vogue in that context, that is, individuals under the age of 15.

It was not possible to invest in finding the trajectories of the children, or their families, who were served by the club’s school. It is likely that they belonged to their community; even so, I do not rule out the possibility that children from families not belonging to the club occupied the school benches offered by their school. Less with the intention of providing concrete answers to such questions, the public debate promoted by the club on formal schooling and the denunciation of school exclusion, especially of black children, presents interesting elements for the debate.

Among the educational processes that were part of the club’s school culture was the condemnation and fight against the practices of discrimination and racial prejudice faced by black students in the schools of Pouso Alegre. Shortly after the founding of their school, the club members went to the press to denounce a case of racism in one of the local schools. The complaint stated that “[...] a renowned educational institution [had decided] to select students based on color, to only accept whites on its premises”. In an indignant tone, the note observed that “[...] what should have been done was to choose students based on their good behavior and not on the color of their skin [...]”, a procedure that would provoke the emergence of “[...] color prejudice and, through it, the resentment of students who [were] not white and who, however, [had] more intelligence and better education than many of the privileged color”. To condemn such a case of racism, the note also stated that “[...] blacks, mulattos and mixed-race people formed the majority of the people, and it was not natural that renowned schools, due to a paltry prejudice, condemned them on suspicion of bad conduct”. Finally, in a tone of protest, the complaint declared that “[...] the abominable prejudice of color could not be tolerated among us. Against this petty hatred, we would fight with the good weapon: morality and integrity” (Complaint, 1935, p. 3).

In fact, the complaint by the community of the Pouso Alegre club was part of a broader process, spread across several regions of Brazil. Some studies have shown that, in the first half of the 20th century, the dropout rate of black children from formal educational institutions was not caused by some cognitive deficiency or by a supposed inability to learn. In practice, this device represented, above all, a way out, an escape from places where black children and young people did not feel, in fact, included and respected in their condition as humanity. Furthermore, in many cases these individuals were subjected, in the school environment, to repressive mechanisms that ranged from forms of unconditional subjection to corporal punishment. Many black families, fearing a school routine marked by violence of all kinds, withdrew or prohibited their children from attending school (Bicudo, 2010; Domingues, 2008, Lucindo, 2010).

These experiences of racism in the school environment occurred in a context of dissemination of a differentiated and unequal school offer, which, in Veiga's interpretation (2019), contributed to the production of subalternity of poor and black children and the stigma of their inferiority, what she called the "production of subaltern childhood", that is, the social schooling and schooled childhood project, created by the State, was permeated by conceptions of race. This is precisely the main element of the complaint reported by Clube 28 de Setembro in the press. Its community expressed that they were aware that the existing school model was designed in terms of race, which transformed this social institution into a space for the production of differences in schooling, so they created strategies to denounce and reverse this situation.

For the club members, as well as for many other black men and women, as historiography has shown, education, especially formal schooling, was conceived as a privileged space for the dissemination of their political projects of racial contestation (Gomes *et al.*, 2017). This type of anti-racism project, or forms of anti-racist struggle, was a link in the construction of solidarity and identities among black people and was also present in the meanings that these subjects attributed to formal schooling and to being in (and feeling like they belonged to) school benches. In this sense and resuming the dialogue with Gomes's thinking (2017), we can consider that this was the main political foundation that contributed to the formation of a "black education movement" in the first decades of the 20th century.

Even though the complaint filed by the members of the Clube 28 de Setembro did not provide further details about the case of racism, it is likely that this stance of condemnation and combating forms of racial prejudice was linked to projects aimed at constructing a pedagogical concept in which anti-racist practices were part of a school culture and form, which, ultimately, may have had a political basis in what was considered anti-racism. A note published in the press to commemorate the first year of the existence of the club's school presents the meanings attributed to it by its community:

Our school has the august function of educating the people, creating their collective soul, inspiring noble and elevated purposes in individuals, directing their social action to, thus, contribute to the superior work of building the nation, in which all, without distinction of color and without racial hatred, are equal before the law (O Trabalho, 1936, p. 2).

The defense and implementation of this schooling program were successful and lasted for several years. It continued to be implemented at least until 1937. In that year, the club community published a note in the press celebrating the school's third year of activity. In it, they expressed their hopes and dreams of aspirations for respect,

equal treatment and opportunities, and highlighted the centrality that access to school, symbolically or not, had in the fight against the numerous constraints on the exercise of their status as citizens:

It would be unforgivable if we did not continue with the task to which we have dedicated ourselves to such right hope and of which we feel, with reason, proud and honored. Our school is, therefore, a workshop for lessons, exercises, the acquisition of knowledge: it is a temple for the Fatherland, for virtue, for goodness (The Mission..., 1937, p. 3).

The experience of the Clube 28 de Setembro community with its school shows that individuals and groups of the black population used the access to formal schooling as an instrument of belonging and political struggle in the first decades of the 20th century. In (and from) these spaces, in concrete or symbolic ways, black people constituted themselves as political subjects, discussed and set forth citizenship rights and demands, created practices of sociability and collaborated with the debate on the dynamics of racism in school spaces. We are therefore talking about actors responsible for the invention of school cultures, even if they were not hegemonic or had not been recognized as such.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In an article on proposals for disciplinary decolonization of the field of research and teaching of History of Education, Barros and Bezerra (2020) considered the urgency of building political, epistemic and intellectual strategies to overcome the hegemony of a single History of Education. For the authors, this is one of the main ethical challenges that this field of knowledge needs to face.

Is it possible to overcome the monocultural model of knowledge and teaching that still predominates in the History of Education? How can we think of new ways of constructing curriculum, research and teaching procedures? There is no ready-made recipe, nor are there efficient formulas. However, historical experiences such as those experienced by the community of the Clube 28 de Setembro in Pouso Alegre, with the creation, dissemination and defense of political-educational projects, whether formal or not, can – as a theoretical and methodological contribution to a critical look at the canons of the History of Education – offer an epistemological critique of social reality and the mechanisms of social organization of knowledge in the History of Education. In this sense, I conclude this article in reciprocity with the recommendation of Viana and Gomes:

Re-signifying black historical experiences – in images, narratives, speeches, memories and sources – in the process of constructing school knowledge can, to a certain extent, contribute to expanding positive views about black people, formats of inclusion, memory and citizenship for black and non-black students. Likewise, it can contribute to interventions against racism and prejudices forged in the historical process of Brazilian social formation, largely reproduced in classrooms or in the textbooks made available (Viana & Gomes, 2022, p. 245).

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