

(Re)reading Bourdieu through the works of Maria Helena Souza Patto

(Re)lendo Bourdieu a partir da obra de Maria Helena Souza Patto

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyse the discussions of the concepts elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu in the work of Maria Helena Souza Patto, a retired professor and researcher from the Psychology Institute of USP, whose intellectual production was a watershed in the field of psychology in interface with education in Brazil. From this set of writings, three books and one chapter will be highlighted: *Psychology and Ideology* (1984), *The production of school failure* (1990), *The misery of the world in the third world* (2000) and *Denied citizenship* (2009). The references to Bourdieu throughout Patto's work highlight the need for a critical dialogue by prioritising, in her analysis, the complexity of the Brazilian educational reality and considering the dangers in the use of concepts when they conceal the power relations present in their articulations with the problems studied.

Keywords: Pierre Bourdieu; Maria Helena Souza Patto; Educational research; Brazilian reality; Bibliographic analysis.

RESUMO

O presente artigo objetiva analisar as discussões dos conceitos elaborados por Pierre Bourdieu

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na obra de Maria Helena Souza Patto, professora aposentada e pesquisadora do Instituto de Psicologia da USP, cuja produção intelectual foi divisora de águas no campo da Psicologia em interface com a educação no Brasil. Do conjunto de escritos, será dado destaque a três livros e um capítulo: *Psicologia e Ideologia* (1984), *A produção do fracasso escolar* (1990), *A miséria do mundo no terceiro mundo* (2000) e *A cidadania negada* (2009). As referências a Bourdieu ao longo da obra de Patto dão relevo à necessidade de um diálogo crítico ao priorizar, em sua análise, a complexidade da realidade educacional brasileira e considerar os perigos na utilização de conceitos quando dissimulam as relações de forças presentes em suas articulações com as problemáticas estudadas.

Palavras-Chave: Pierre Bourdieu; Maria Helena Souza Patto; Pesquisa educacional; Realidade brasileira; Análise bibliográfica.

Introduction

This article aims to analyse the discussions of the concepts elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu present in the work of Maria Helena Souza Patto, a retired professor from the Institute of Psychology of the University of São Paulo. Graduated in Psychology in the same Institute, where she also defended her Master's and PhD in School and Human Development Psychology (concluded in 1965, 1970 and 1981, respectively), Patto is the author of more than 50 publications (among books, chapters and articles), being considered a watershed in the field of psychology in interface with education. From her work, it is common to highlight the publication of *A produção do fracasso escolar: histórias de submissão e rebeldia* [The production of school failure: stories of submission and rebellion] (PATTO, 2015), a book awarded by APEOESP in 1995, and recognised as a classic (CARVALHO, 2015).

Bourdieu is a constant reference throughout Patto's work, whose reflections give visibility to the danger related to some readings of the French sociologist's thought in Brazil. In this article, besides the classic book mentioned above, the following publications will be highlighted, in which the reference to Bourdieu is striking: *Psicologia e ideologia: uma crítica à psicologia escolar* [Psychology and Ideology: a critical introduction to School Psychology] (1984), *A miséria do mundo no terceiro mundo* [The misery of the world in the third world] (2000) and *A cidadania negada: políticas públicas e formas de viver* [Denied citizenship: public policies and ways of living] (2009a).

The trajectory of Maria Helena Patto is somehow mixed with the transformations that the so-called School and Educational Psychology went through in Brazil, especially in the 1980s (MACHADO; LERNER; FONSECA, 2017). Since her Master's dissertation, published as a book in *Privação cultural e educação primária* [Cultural Deprivation and Primary Education] (PATTO, 1973), Maria Helena demonstrates to be mobilised by social inequality and committed to the improvement of school education offered

to the people, especially the poorest ones. However, blurring the understanding of the phenomenon, such research was permeated by her adherence to environmentalist theories developed in the United States in the same decade (the Master's was held between 1967 and 1970). In the context of the research, such a contribution seemed convincing for its interactionist nature, which apparently overcame the biological reductionism typical of pre-determinist theories of psychology dominant in the country.

The Master's dissertation, shortly after, was criticised by the author herself. In a context of mobilisation around the political reopening of the country, immersed since 1964 in the authoritarian regime, in universities and research centres there was an intense politicisation and search for theoretical frameworks of Marxist inspiration that could contribute to the process of social transformation (CATANI; CATANI; PEREIRA, 2002). Alongside the reflections triggered by childhood memories and the visitation to compensatory education institutions in the United States, which contradicted in many aspects the environmentalist theses, Maria Helena Patto was touched by reading three books whose translations were arriving in the country and that significantly impacted the research in the educational field (ANGELUCCI *et al.*, 2004). They are: *Ideology And Ideological State Apparatuses*, by Althusser (1974), *The economy of symbolic exchanges*, by Bourdieu (1974) and *The reproduction*, by Bourdieu and Passeron (1975).¹

This resulted in a change of view that made it possible for the author to perceive and denounce the ideological character of various explanations of socio-educational inequalities produced by a science that claimed to be neutral and objective, although it was soaked in the political and ideological commitment of naturalisation of the human. At the heart of her criticism is a set of theories that justify school failure, blaming students and families of the popular classes for the difficulties experienced in a system ideally geared towards the common good. Since then, Patto has dedicated herself to denaturalising human social reality, historicising it.

In the intellectual journey of Maria Helena Patto, Pierre Bourdieu appears as an important and constant reference, although not central. From the historical point of view, the first mention of him occurred in a chapter published in the collection *Introdução à Psicologia Escolar* [Introduction to School Psychology], the first book organised by the author after her Master's degree. The title of the text reveals the movement of rupture

¹ According to Catani, Catani and Pereira (2002), the first translations of Bourdieu arrived in Brazil in 1968 and his greatest presence in educational research begins in the second half of the 1970s, with the publication of *The economy of symbolic exchanges* (1974), an anthology organised by Sérgio Miceli, and *The reproduction* (1975), the first book translated and the most cited work at the time. The authors also point out that, in a highly politicised academic context, the author's predominant analyses would revolve around the dichotomy reproduction x transformation, later put in terms of reproduction x resistance.

and redirection that was beginning: *From the psychology of the “underprivileged” to the psychology of the oppressed* (PATTO, 1981). At that time, quoting *The reproduction* (BOURDIEU; PASSERON, 1975), Maria Helena announces the turn that would come in her academic trajectory, in a paragraph at the same time succinct and forceful:

[...] the cultural manifestations of any group or social class are arbitrary (in the sense Bourdieu and Passeron give to this term) and the devaluation of some concomitantly with the imposition of others is nothing more than a social process that ensures the expropriation of the product of the labour of the exploited and the accumulation of capital by the class that holds power. Thus, for us to understand the phenomenon of cultural domination, whose result cannot be the simple difference between dominant and dominated cultures, nor even their identity, we must go back to a broader and more inclusive sociological framework, which reveals to us the ultimate determinations of the relations between social classes. (PATTO, 1981, p. 221).

Pursuing this complex goal, Maria Helena consistently engages in a commitment to critically analyse psychology and education. As a first important result in this direction, she published *Psychology and Ideology: a critical introduction to school psychology* (PATTO, 1984), a book of her doctoral research, carried out between 1977 and 1981. As we will see, Bourdieu’s reading was decisive in this work.

The encounter with Pierre Bourdieu’s theory in Psychology and Ideology

Originally published in 1984, *Psychology and Ideology* puts school psychology in focus, thinking it from its historical, economic, social and political determinants, in the context of the Brazilian public primary schools aimed at children from the subaltern classes.² The criticism of the hegemonic school psychology, called instrumental, denounces its ideological role and its commitment to the reproduction of class inequalities typical of capitalism. At the same time, Maria Helena points out that another psychology is possible, opening ways to lay it down on critical-transformative bases and indicating the rancidity that haunts this exercise. The ethical-political commitment in the fight against oppression is clear in the book and accompanies the author’s trajectory as a whole.

To meet the challenge proposed in the thesis, Patto resorts to different authors of the critical field, such as Karl Marx, Henri Lefebvre, Franco Basaglia, Louis Althusser, Paulo Freire, Marilena Chauí, José de Souza Martins, Ecléa Bosí, and Pierre Bourdieu.

² The author calls *oppressed classes* or *subaltern classes*, as opposed to *marginalised*, *underprivileged* or *disadvantaged classes*, which are expressions that often mask the structure of exploitation and domination.

As the author herself recognises in the preface, the thesis lacks theoretical unity, although she gives special emphasis to the reproductivist theory: “the Althusserian mark is clear” (PATTO, 1984, p. 3). In the set of references mobilised for the research, she makes use of some of Bourdieu’s concepts, putting him in dialogue with other critical thinkers, to weave her own synthesis.

Mentioned at first to criticise Dewey and Durkheim (PATTO, 1984, p. 26), the author dedicates a subsection to present her theory. Titled *Pierre Bourdieu: the role of the school in the economy of symbolic exchanges*, it is inserted in the section *Society and education in Althusser: the school as ideological apparatus of the State*, which closes the first chapter of the book *Raízes: a relação escola-sociedade* [Roots: the relationship school-society] (PATTO, 1984).

Initially, Maria Helena seems to insert Bourdieu into the framework of historical materialism (PATTO, 1984, p.32). The reading of the French sociologist’s work in the Marxist key was common in the Brazilian educational field in the turn of the 1970s to the 1980s (CATANI; CATANI; PEREIRA, 2002), the context of the publication of *Psychology and Ideology*. However, for Forquin (1995, p. 60), there are “great difficulties to situate and characterise the works of Bourdieu and Passeron”. Patto herself recognises this by stating later in the same book that Bourdieu uses theoretical concepts and methodological procedures present in the three great classics of sociology, Marx, Weber and Durkheim and that, “although it results in an extremely original, fertile and challenging product, it does not fail to present inconsistencies and ambiguities already pointed out by critics of his work” (PATTO, 1984, p. 45).

Regardless, she says that Bourdieu’s contribution to education is “undeniable”, mainly by helping to understand the “microphysics of power in the school institution” (p. 61), privileged institution because socially seen as “neutral par excellence”. In Patto’s reading, Bourdieu adds to the macrostructural approaches that think of the school as an ideological apparatus of State, the microstructure of domination that takes effect at the level of interpersonal relationships: “Far from wanting to invalidate the macrostructural analysis of the relationship between School and Society, what we want is to approach, in the equation of this problem, the dimension in which the psychologist transits: the personal or intersubjective dimension” (p.136). Bourdieu walks in this direction, by delving into “the way in which social dimensions affect individual practice and how the abstract concept of ideology is materialised in human actions” (p.54). With this, he allies “the knowledge of the internal organisation of the symbolic field to an analysis of the ideological and political role they play in legitimating an arbitrary order on which the prevailing system of domination is based” (p. 47).

To elucidate the domination mechanisms present in everyday school life, Patto (1984) resorts to the Bourdieusian theory, making use of the notions and concepts of cultural capital, *habitus*, social reproduction, cultural arbitrariness, symbolic violence, educational agencies, teaching system, pedagogical authority, pedagogical

action, pedagogical work, and school selection and elimination criteria. Her thought is synthesised in a long and dense paragraph:

Pedagogical work, exercised in the name of a class, therefore produces the internalisation of the principles of a cultural arbitrariness in the form of a durable and transferable *habitus* or system of schemes of perception of thought, judgment and action, and does so without necessarily resorting to external coercion or physical coercion. By producing ignorance of the double arbitrariness of pedagogical action through the recognition of the pedagogical authority and of the product it proposes, pedagogical work legitimates the cultural arbitrariness it imposes, in more or less subtle, more or less effective ways. [...] The value, as cultural capital, of the cultural goods transmitted by the different pedagogical actions is a function of the distance between the cultural arbitrariness imposed by the dominant pedagogical authority and the cultural arbitrariness inculcated by pedagogical action in the different classes. In this sense, Bourdieu not only establishes a hierarchy between the different instances of symbolic violence as to their efficiency (defending the primacy of pedagogical action, the basis of the efficiency of all the other subsequent ones), but he also shows that the specific productivity of a dominant secondary pedagogical work is the lower the more it is exercised on groups or classes formed by a primary pedagogical work that is further removed from the dominant pedagogical work. It is this fact that allows him to state that the dominant secondary pedagogical work does not completely produce the conditions of its productivity, thus privileging, in terms of the acquisition of socially valued skills, those who already have familiarity with the dominant cultural arbitrariness, that is, the dominant class or groups (PATTO, 1984, p. 52-53, emphasis added).

The reproductivist character of the school is embodied in the pedagogical authority of the teacher and in the importance of school verdicts, responsible for making viable the process of symbolic violence and the selectivity of the education system. If pedagogical work involves the imposition and inculcation of the dominant class *habitus*, it is neither innocuous nor indifferent to the oppressed classes: it produces “recognition of the legitimacy of the dominant culture” and simultaneous “recognition of the illegitimacy of popular culture” (PATTO, 1984, p. 53).

Bourdieu’s influence is remarkable in Patto’s analysis of our educational history. In 1961, after the promulgation of the first Law of Directives and Bases (LDB), the selectivity of the Brazilian education system became evident, legalizing contradictory trends long present in education, reinforcing the traditional duality between intellectual education, reserved for the dominant classes, and professional education, aimed at the poor. The LDB fulfilled a role of legitimising and institutionalising inequalities under the guise of democratising education, since professional high school courses were reserved for the popular classes, and, in general, offered by institutions of dubious quality, not offering real opportunities for university entrance. Thus, school became a source of

discontent for the poorest, or, in the words of Bourdieu and Champagne (1997, p. 483), “a lure and source of immense collective disappointment: this kind of promised land, always the same on the horizon, which recedes as we approach it”.

Patto (1984) also identifies strategies for maintaining the selectivity of education in the military dictatorship, through the increase in second-rate paid education, such as adult education courses and private higher education aimed at courses of lesser academic and professional prestige. The relegation of students from popular classes to devalued courses and disciplines that tend to mask inequalities is a phenomenon widely discussed in the field of sociology of education (FORQUIN, 1995) and so well explored by Bourdieu and Passeron in *Os herdeiros* [The Inheritors] (2014).

At the centre of the research that shapes *Psychology and Ideology* is the organisation of a counterpoint to the dominant theories in the field of educational psychology, especially the theory of cultural deprivation, on which Patto relied years before. This theory emerged in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, as a response to the growing discontent of the popular classes in the face of socio-educational inequalities, feeding the myth of equal opportunity, the mainstay of liberal ideology in that country (PATTO, 1984). According to her, the causes of the failure that traditionally plagues the students of the popular classes would be supposed deficiencies or shortcomings coming from the sociocultural environment. Thus, the school, as a determined social institution, is exempted from responsibility and poor children and their families are blamed for the production of failure. By asking “psychology of poverty or poverty of psychology?” (PATTO, 1984, p. 113), Patto exposes that such “theory” is a vehicle of the dominant ideology, with deep effects on the performance of teachers and psychologists, referred to in the book as police teachers and psychologists, an expression borrowed and unfolded from Maria Tereza Nidelcoff.³

Patto (1984) refers to Bourdieu to emphasise that the apparent neutrality of school is a strategy for the reproduction of class domination. By valuing a culture considered superior, the theory of cultural deprivation disregards its imposition as a cultural arbitrariness and participant in the process of domination. To give materiality to this understanding, the author brings into focus *the myth of language deficiency*, when she harshly criticises the thesis of dialecticism present in research on poor children in Brazil. Although imbued with goodwill, for her, it is a “liberal thesis, the belief that the school has the role of, in the long run, extinguishing poverty through a process of facilitating the passage of members of the so-called lower class to the so-called higher classes” (PATTO, 1984, p. 134).

In her criticism, such research do not realise that “the choice of language in its official form as a criterion for academic and professional success is an *act of domination*”,

³ Decades later, this debate remains in her work (PATTO, 2009b), updated in the expression “watchdogs of the system”, now borrowed from Paul Nizan.

and that “the arbitrary imposition of a cultural arbitrariness implies, whether we like it or not, the devaluation of other forms of language”. Such conception “collaborates with the intentions of the *perpetuation of the status quo* because it makes us believe that a problem, actually economic, social and political, is reduced to a psychological, linguistic or school issue”. As an ethical cut, Patto stresses the individual and group effects “endowed with a power of oppression which cannot be disregarded” (1984, p. 135). It is not by chance that she brings Fanon into the debate, from whom she draws support to affirm psychology and education as active institutions in the process of silencing expression and “the cassation of the word of the oppressed” (p. 135-136).

Maria Helena, already at that time, highlights the difficulties of overcoming the vices present in the dominant’s view concerning the oppressed classes. In the book, she analyses research crossed by this contradiction: although concerned with “unveiling the measures that install domination in the heart of the oppressed”, making use of theoretical and methodological approaches considered critical, such as the Bourdieusian contribution, these research maintain the underlying assumption of the inferiority of the poor inherent to environmentalist theories. Patto’s counterpoint gives value to engaged research and sensitive experience in the encounter with the other:

A longer and more relaxed coexistence of academic mediations with representatives of the people, especially in rural areas, has brought to those who opted for this path the certainty that their capacity to feel and think is much greater than the theory of cultural deprivation would have them believe. If there is deprivation, it is in terms of economic resources, political information and organisational opportunities, which allow them to open internal and external spaces for reflection. (PATTO, 1984, p. 154-155).

The preface of *Psychology and Ideology* indicates that Patto (1984) continues in the exercise of thinking her own thought, welcoming and sharing the criticisms of the examination board.⁴ The thesis is referred to by her as “a statement”, which tells of the “beginning of a difficult professional trajectory” and which at the end remains “ambiguous and halfway”, indicating that she will follow the path along the dialectical tracks (p. 1-4). The expression “halfway” is inhabited by the assumption of “carrying out the task outlined here”, and reinforced in the commitment that closes the text: this is “a challenge to all who are trying to bring to the centre of their lives Brecht’s words: ‘the only purpose of science is to alleviate the misery of human existence’” (p. 4).

In the exercise of broadening and deepening the thought, Patto gave materiality to what became her publication of greatest impact: *The production of school failure*. Without exhausting the complexity of this book, we will highlight below the way the

⁴ Composed by the Professors José de Souza Martins, Dermeval Saviani, Sylvia Leser de Mello and Ana Maria de Almeida, besides the supervisor, Ecléa Bosi.

author dialogues with Bourdieu's theory and its interpretation by Brazilian educational researchers.

Notes on Bourdieu's theory in *The production of school failure*

In 1990, the first edition of *The production of school failure: stories of submission and rebellion*, Maria Helena Patto's acclaimed 1987 thesis, was published. Of enormous repercussion, in 2015, the book was published in its fourth edition, revised and expanded, marking 25 years since its release (PATTO, 2015).

Patto (2015, p. 29) takes as a research challenge "to contribute to the understanding of school failure as a complex psychosocial process". Understanding the relevance of knowing the process of this production, the author undertakes a diligent critical review of the literature that discusses the causes of the production of school failure and, at the same time, presents dense research on the subject, carried out in a public elementary school located in a poor neighbourhood in the city of São Paulo, between 1983 and 1984, with intense participation of three student researchers. As a result, the author offers an original theoretical contribution and presents a way out of the theoretical and methodological impasses present in that context, with important reverberations in the Brazilian educational field.

At the time, a theoretical perspective was sought to think the school-society relationship that would overcome the functionalist conceptions, without bending the rod⁵ to criticism that would see the school as a reproducing whole of society, an aspect (self)criticised in the doctoral thesis. Thus, the place of the reproductive theory is resized, giving way to a dialectical reading. Without disregarding Bourdieu's contributions to thinking about the Brazilian public education system, the author creates important tensions about the limits imposed by the look that turns only to the power of continuation. Important references to historical and dialectical materialism emerge, such as Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, Eric Hobsbawm, José de Souza Martins, Marilena Chaui and, especially, Agnes Heller. It is in the complex concept of everyday life of the latter that Patto (2015) finds a theoretical and methodological way out to articulate the social and individual sphere and think about the tensions and contradictions present in school life.⁶ Since then, it has been a promising reference to reflect on the schooling of subaltern classes in countries located on the periphery of capitalism.

⁵ Famous expression used by Saviani, inspired by Lenin: "In effect, just as to straighten a rod that is bent, it is not enough to put it in the correct position, but it is necessary to bend it on the opposite side, so, also, in the ideological struggle, it is not enough to enunciate the correct conception so that the deviations are corrected; it is necessary to shake the certainties, to deauthorise the conventional wisdom". (SAVIANI, 2018, p. 48).

⁶ For further discussion of this debate, we recommend the reading of Patto (1990/2015) and Patto (1993).

In this book, Patto shares a critical examination of the main hegemonic explanations about the causes of school failure among the popular classes, highlighting their positivist bias and the predominance of the capitalist way of thinking. In her interpretation, some of the mistaken analyses of Bourdieu's theory in Brazilian educational research are situated there.

Initially, we emphasise that, for Patto (2015), the entry of Bourdieu in Brazilian educational thought is a real milestone, playing a strategic role in change, especially in three axes: bringing into focus the relational dimension of the teaching-learning process (opposing the technicism that relegated it to the background); emphasising the process of domination and social discrimination present in education (tensioning its naturalisation); and broadening the possibility of thinking education from social conditioning (countering the myth of neutrality), positions that composed with theories that discussed the mechanisms of reproduction in education and dialectical conceptions about society and school.

However, in her understanding, in Brazilian educational research, the Bourdieusian theory was crossed by important mistakes,⁷ especially in cases of studies focused on the production of school failure in our reality (being more subtle in theoretical essays on the author). As a fundamental misunderstanding, the author emphasises:

The coexistence of the theory of reproduction with the convincing theory of cultural deprivation, together with a positivist conception of the production of knowledge, resulted in conceptual distortions that led to the application of the conception of the school as an ideological apparatus of the State to theoretical detours. (PATTO, 2015, p. 137).

Epistemologically irreconcilable, the theories of cultural deprivation and reproduction were amalgamated in the Brazilian educational literature of the 1970s. This fusion responds to a fated attempt to suture a fractured discourse on the production of school failure: “from two initially unrelated information — ‘the causes are in school’ x ‘the causes are in the clientele’ — it was produced a third one that related them: *school is inadequate for poor children*” (PATTO, 2015, p. 120-121, emphasis added). In this logic, school failure would be the product of the cultural mismatch between the school, representative of middle-class values, and the “needy” child, carrier of deficiencies inherent to their sociocultural environment. Her criticism of the relationship between “inadequate teaching x students’ lack of interest” is accurate:

These interpretations of school failure are, in our view, irreconcilable. The way they are stated, it is not even possible to state that an uninteresting school is added

⁷ In the same direction, a decade later, Catani, Catani and Pereira (2002) point out that almost all the works published at the time in the main education journals were superficial appropriations of his work.

to an uninterested student; it is a simple question of logic: while the first does not improve, one cannot state the lack of motivation as inherent to the second. (PATTO, 2015, p. 113).

As a result of this incompatibility, the incorporation of Bourdieusian concepts into the theory of cultural deprivation led to the mischaracterisation of the role of the school in the theoretical scheme of the French sociologist. The school was seen as a form of social ascension possible for the popular classes and its reproductive character was disregarded. This is how the concept of domination ceased to be understood “as a cultural counterpart of the economic exploitation inherent to a society of classes ruled by capital” to be interpreted “as a mismatch between two distinct cultural segments that resulted in the segregation of the poorer groups and classes, supposedly bearers of cultural standards completely different from the standards of the middle class” (PATTO, 2015, p. 137). This emptied interpretation of Bourdieu has the a-historical tone typical of the American educational literature of the 1960s. Thus,

As the social and structural determinants of the different conditions of life were not made explicit, the existence of relations of production based on exploitation, of irreconcilable interests of antagonistic classes — indispensable concepts for the understanding of cultural domination — were omitted and these studies began to convey an interpretation of the social role of school in total disagreement with the conceptual architecture of the theory that inspired them. (PATTO, 2015, p. 138).

In this approach, from “legitimate concessionaire of symbolic violence”, the teacher starts to fulfil a socialising role of the dominated classes, valid in principle, but mistaken in its authoritarian character in face of the cultural mismatch between students and teachers. Such research argue that, in front of poor students, teachers, “by intolerance, moralism or inadvertence”, do not recognise “the existence of subcultures distinct from their own in the inclusive society” (PATTO, 2015, p. 137). Thus, it would be up to the school to enable the integration of the dominated classes to the values of the dominant class and, perhaps, to provide them with conditions of ascension.

The aim was not, therefore, to guarantee to the subaltern classes the appropriation of school knowledge as an instrument of struggle in the radical transformation of society, but to beckon to the poor with the possibility of improving their living conditions through an improvement of social and economic level, structurally impossible for most (PATTO, 2015, p. 138).

In the same sense, the concept of cultural capital was emptied when it was assimilated under the angle of the theory of cultural deprivation. From being a strategic asset used to think the process of domination and legitimation that takes place in society and at school, the concept is used to refer to psychological and behavioural attributes taken as ideal, but absent in the members of the popular classes, taken as “deficient” or

“culturally deprived”. She says:

The notion of ‘cultural capital’ was initially employed, in research on school failure, as a synonym for psychological development consonant with the criteria of a normative psychology, according to which all the results of psychometric tests situated below the average are considered indicators of poor development. (PATTO, 2015, p. 139).

Thus, once again, the causes of the production of school failure were attributed to children from popular classes, seen as dirty, sick, undisciplined, rebellious, unintelligent, needy, coming from unstructured families etc., reproducing stereotypes common to research in the area. Considering the inadequacy of the school to the needy or different children is an attempt to reconcile the fractured discourse that oscillated the accountability between the school and the student (PATTO, 2015). The author continues (p. 147-8):

Besides being unaware of the certainly heterogeneous *habitus* of the various segments of the popular classes that inhabit the periphery of large cities and filling this gap with assumptions based on prejudice, the researchers, in attributing the school failure of poor children to their lack of ‘cultural capital’ to cope with the cultural demands of the school, forget a fundamental aspect of the theory of reproduction: their authors refer to the teacher-student relationship in French university education, in which a high-level faculty demands from its students knowledge and styles of thought and language to which generally only the richest have access. Are Bourdieu and Passeron’s statements about the cultural demands of French higher education generalizable to Brazilian public primary schools? Do their teachers, especially in the first grades, evaluate their pupils according to criteria that pass for mental and verbal styles characteristic of an intellectualised elite? Do their teachers possess ‘cultural capital’ and demand it from their pupils? Does this school manage to convey ‘the knowledge of the dominant class’ and can the high rates of grade repetition be explained as student resistance to the imposition of this knowledge?.

Armed with such questions,⁸ Maria Helena embodies, in The production of school failure, a careful research on how such production synthesises historical, political,

⁸ Decades later, in The misery of the world in the third world, Patto answers some of them in a footnote that may go unnoticed: “The demands made by teachers in the public primary school network often do not pass through cultural capital in the terms defined by Bourdieu: what is demanded are not styles of thought and language of the dominant class, but mainly three things: obedience, submission to pedagogical rituals, always the same and devoid of meaning; extra-scholastic pedagogical help, without which ‘it won’t go’, as some teachers claim” (PATTO, 2000, p. 221).

social, economic, institutional, pedagogical and relational determinations that cannot be contained in simplifying formulations. In order to understand the concreteness of our reality in the smallness of life, she imposed on the research the long coexistence with the school routine. The historical-dialectical materialist contribution gave the concrete elements a consistent theoretical background, which allowed the author to shed light not only on the reproduction movements of the interests of domination, which still insist on being hegemonic in schools (from where it is important to know them in depth), but also to the movements of rupture to what is set. This is how she notices (PATTO, 2015, p. 423):

Rebellion pulsates in the body of the school and contradiction is a constant in the speeches of all those involved in the educational process; more than this, under an apparent impersonality, one can capture the constant action of subjectivity. Bureaucracy does not have the power to eliminate the subject; it can, at most, muzzle him. It is the simultaneous stage of subordination and insubordination, of the voice silenced by ideological messages and the conscious voice of arbitrariness and injustice, a place of antagonism, in short, the school exists as a place of contradictions which, far from being undesirable dysfunctions of human relations in a patrimonialist society, are the raw material of the possible transformation of the current state of things.

Seeing in the motor contradictions, her criticism does not imply the understanding that Bourdieu has no contributions to thinking our education, but stresses the importance of care in its use to interpret the Brazilian reality, which were put into practice in her trajectory. Attentive, she continues to read Bourdieu, who remains referenced in several of her writings. The book *The misery of the world* (BOURDIEU, 1997) has had a significant impact on Patto's academic career.

When *The misery of the world* hits Maria Helena Souza Patto

Maria Helena Souza Patto was hooked on reading *The misery of the world* (BOURDIEU, 1997). In this book, the French sociologist coordinates a team that seeks to understand the testimonies of people from the popular classes who depend on public policies in various fields of social life. For Patto, “against a ‘poor quality academic psychology’”, Bourdieu scrutinises “subjectivity within a concrete social order, divided and unequal as it has always been, but now managed by mechanisms of domination that give existence to new forms of egalitarian appearance”. Thus, it reaches “the intricacies of the production of the difficulty of living”, which has been “concealed by an increasingly refined democratic farce” (2000, p. 187).

More than referencing it, this book affects her academic production. Initially, Patto (2000) publishes the chapter *The misery of the world in the third world: on the*

democratisation of education. Not only the title and the content, but the form of the text clearly dialogues with the French book: to delicately understand the testimony of a high school student in a night adult education course, it is necessary to situate it in the context of the educational policy that constitutes it.

First, Patto summarises what she has read, especially in the chapter *The excluded within* (BOURDIEU; CHAMPAGNE, 1997) and then in the interviews with students and teachers: “The voices recorded confirmed the central thesis of the theory of the education system that Bourdieu formulated almost thirty years ago: under the appearance of democratisation, the reality of reproduction” (PATTO, 2000, p. 189). According to Bourdieu and Champagne (1997), this “contradictory system” gives shape to a “perverse educational policy”, which establishes “soft exclusion practices”, replacing the “brutal elimination” by the “subtle elimination”. As a consequence, there is in the schools “a new modality of school exclusion which keeps the excluded within”, not without the experience of “laceration of the victims of the lure”, who show they realise that the school they access is a “simulacrum” (PATTO, 2000, p. 190).

But how does the misery of the world affect those who live in the third world? What would this reality be like in Brazil? Driven by these concerns, Patto is careful not to make simplifying transpositions. At the end of the millennium, Brazil was still immersed in “procedures that blame the harmed for a school of poor quality and a school system based on a logic — the logic of the very social system that includes it — that promises, but cannot deliver the democratisation of educational opportunities” (PATTO, 2000, p. 192). Differently from France, however, here the “excluded within” were stationed in elementary education, being slow to rise through the school levels, in general in poor quality private institutions. She says, in light of the educational policy in force in that context:

Compared to the French scenario (in which the ‘excluded-included’ can go through the school career from end to end), the Brazilian situation is still one of ‘brutal elimination’, which is what the researchers coordinated by Bourdieu call schooling that ends in the first level of schooling, whether it is completed or not. But it is known that the current policy is characterised by attempts of school internalisation of the expelled, either by the creation of a network of paths within the primary school — which, under the pretext of including, prolong the illusion of inclusion, because even if they go through them, these students have not had access to an education that can be said to be of good quality — or by the loosening of the criteria for evaluation of learning, with the clear intention, but not confessed, to push the low-income students by any means through the school grades, when possible up to higher education. (PATTO, 2000, p. 193).

After these considerations, Maria Helena introduces Sandra, a 26-year-old young Black woman, a worker since 13 and a mother since 20, who had just finished high school through a precarious night adult education course. Following the structure of the

French research, there is a short text about the interviewee, to then share the interview, without analyses that shred it; what we access is the dialogue between Maria Helena and Sandra, filling dilemmas and decisions that appear on the horizon of the interviewee, sensitively touching us.

Instigated by this experience, Patto coordinated a collective research inspired by this study, published in the book *Denied citizenship: public policies and ways of living* (PATTO, 2009a). Conducted in the first years of the new millennium, between 2001 and 2005, the research aimed to understand the ways of living the presence/absence of the State in guaranteeing social rights by people who depend on public policies in the areas of work, education, housing, security, health, culture and leisure. Opening each area there is a text about the public policy in that field, after which 35 trajectories affected by the presence or absence of such policies are shared: first, a text presents the interviewees; then there are the edited interviews.

The chapter that analyses the educational public policies, *Under the sign of neglect*, makes a brief and forceful history of education in Brazil until it reaches the scenario of the time. In the Bourdieusian way, Patto (2009a, p. 187) states: “those excluded from school, now ‘included’, make school statistics grow and benefit, solely and exclusively, those who govern”. Having located the area, five interviews are presented, through which we get to know the stories of a teacher of the basic public education network; two mothers of students at an elementary public school; and three students, in distinct stages of schooling. Impressively current, after almost 20 years, we highlight that Patto interviewed Sandra again, “a clear case of ‘inclusion-exclusion’ in Bourdieu’s terms: a poor young woman who fought for schooling, but with illusory school ‘inclusion’. In fact, she had entered a dead end: paradoxically, she attended school but was excluded from the right to education” (PATTO, 2009a, p. 240).

Like the French study, the Brazilian research, due to its collective character, was guided by common principles, summarised in the chapter *To read the interviews*. When thinking about the research design, Patto makes ethical notes that reinforce the importance of protecting the interviewees from the so-called “deviations of meaning” resulting from the “misunderstanding” of their statements, being careful to write the short text that precedes each interview. The aim of *understanding* what people say in the interviews is neither simple nor fluid, but tense. According to her analysis,

besides shielding them [the interviewees] from the deviations that might come from the reader, the research was built on two theoretical pillars that would preserve them from the bad listening of the researchers themselves: the reinvention of research beyond the scientism that conceives the production of knowledge about human beings in positivist terms; the fundamental consideration that popular culture is produced, and can only be understood, within the social relations of power in force in a divided society. (PATTO, 2009a, p. 17).

On the horizon is the recognition of the humanity of all people involved in the research. The challenge was to build encounters that would seek to overcome any form of violent communication, a fundamental concern when we look at research as a whole, and one that is heightened when inequality runs through it. Also touched by Alfredo Bosi, Patto states: “What is at stake, in short, is the domination that the intellectual has introjected so deeply that he is no longer aware of it” (2009a, p. 19). Care not to be inquisitive, authoritarian, intrusive, mannered or a mere curiosity-seeker accompanied the research. The interviews resembled recorded conversations, in which interviewers engaged in building an “active and methodical” listening, while welcoming, seeking to understand, positioning themselves and provoking reflections. Such attention was sustained in the transcription, editing and composition of the final text, seeking to escape the “risks of writing” (BOURDIEU, 1997).

In the effort to understand the interviews, Patto stresses the importance of “considering that the recorded speeches are produced in a concrete social reality, made of exploitation and oppression”, which produces subjective effects. Articulating Bourdieu with Laing, a thinker of anti-psychiatry widely referenced in her work, the author reiterates: there is only intelligibility in the statements when we recognise them inserted in macrosituations, marked by tensions and contradictions that do not fit in one-dimensional flattenings of reality or of people.

In the book, Patto (2009) reaffirms that psychology, like other human sciences, tends to produce texts “*about the poor*”, legitimating conceptions that “are part of a kind of ‘academic conventional wisdom’ that aggravates prejudices and reductions by applying to them the seal of scientific truths” (p. 598). By confronting this hegemony, putting the focus on people’s speech, singular seams of appropriations, refusals and acceptances to what is given are unveiled. Although there are repetitions, typical of mass society, there are several “ways of living built in and against adversity that resist the readings that want to make them homogeneous” (p. 598).

A consideration present in her work, at least since *The production of school failure*, Patto assures, referencing Chauí: “there is no perfect submission”, nor “total alienation”, nor the “good conscience”. Reiterating that “in a divided society, consciences are also divided”, the author understands that we are all *hostages of the alienation ruses* “and” *bearers of resistance* (PATTO, 2009a, p. 596-597). In fact, even when the interviewees seemed to be glued to the speech of the oppressor, it was possible to “hear, in the gaps of adherence, the social awareness of the perversity of the situation imposed on them and the insistence of the desire to reduce the gap of lack historically deepened in industrial capitalist societies” (p. 598). This tunes the sensibility: even if aware of the “precision” of the “cutting” analyses produced by thinkers of the critical theory of society such as Marcuse and Adorno, and even if she acknowledges the power of reproduction, present in Bourdieu’s theory, her reading of the testimonies summons us to fine repair: “In all narratives, it is possible to hear some refusal of standardisation”,

to the extent that the accounts “carry the tension of conformism and resistance”, there being passages that “detach from ideology and reveal some perception of the perverse face of social reality” (PATTO, 2009, p. 596).

Her view of contradictions also turns to her territory of action:

The limitations imposed by the opacity of social life in contemporary societies are also present in the university. The misery of the world also affects us. On the one hand, because it produces and conveys a conception of scientificity that produces ideological knowledge; on the other, because it has been the object of an educational policy that wants it in the image and likeness of business logic. (PATTO, 2009, p. 599).

The study sought to go against this logic. As a result, an instigating and profound material, whose reading contributes not only with regard to its findings, but also, if not essentially, in relation to the paths built to reach them.

Final considerations

In this article, we sought to analyse the reflections made in the work of Maria Helena Souza Patto from the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu’s thought and its presence in Brazilian educational research. The option to place her in the centre of the debate was due to the importance of her work in the field of psychology and education, and also for the relevant analysis and criticism she makes of the author, which are still very current.

Her relevance grows in face of recent research about the production of school success or failure that claim to be critical, inspired by Bourdieu, but show the strength of the environmentalist rancidity, maintaining the fractured discourse denounced by Patto decades ago. This analysis is reinforced by the state of the art of research on school failure, by Angelucci *et al.* (2004) and the criticism made by Viégas (on press) to the research on school failure in the so-called “Brazilian rabble” (FREITAS, 2009).

The reading of Patto’s writings that refer to Pierre Bourdieu, carried out in this article, announces a vivacious thinker, who moves without losing rigour. As a result, there is an authorial composition, in which Maria Helena dialogues critically with the approach of the French thinker, putting it in articulation with the careful study of the Brazilian reality. With this, she weaves thought-provoking notes while using the author’s constructs to inspire the creation of theoretical and methodological paths in her research.

In this weaving, Patto captures not only the continuities and reproductions, dominant and suffocating in schools, but also the ruptures and creations, very real. In her journey, there is constant reference to the poem *A flor e a náusea* [The Flower and the Nausea], when Maria Helena emphasises life: “É feia. Mas é uma flor. Furou o asfalto, o tédio, o nojo e o ódio” [It is ugly. But it is a flower. It pierces the asphalt, boredom, disgust and hatred] (ANDRADE, 1945).

To conclude, we emphasise a reflection very dear to the author about the use of foreign theories to think the Brazilian reality (PATTO, 2005). Without neglecting the thoughts elaborated in another time and territory, it is a matter of not naturalising or universalising them, disregarding our specificities, historically determined. As she stresses in several of her writings, it is necessary to take care that ideas are not “out of place” (SCHWARZ, 2000). Aware of this need, her research focuses on the history of psychology and education in Brazil, as well as on the challenges of the daily construction of educational policies. In this movement, Patto invites us to prioritise the complexity of the concrete reality analysed and to take care of articulations with theoretical concepts carried out in such a way as to disguise the power relations at play.

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