


YOUTH IS A RIGHT FOR WHOM? CLAIMING THE RIGHT TO YOUTH IN MARANHÃO¹

A JUVENTUDE É UM DIREITO PARA QUEM? PROCESSOS DE REIVINDICAÇÃO DO DIREITO À JUVENTUDE NO MARANHÃO

¿LA JUVENTUD ES UN DERECHO PARA QUIEN? PROCESOS DE REIVINDICACIÓN DE LO DERECHO A LA JUVENTUD EN MARANHÃO

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ABSTRACT:

Who is given the right to be young in Brazil? This question is the basis for this article, the field research for which was conducted in the cities of Codó and Imperatriz, in the interior of Maranhão, from July until September 2018. Using semi-structured and in-depth interviews, 5 youth leaders from the city of Codó and 4 from Imperatriz reflected on articulation, political education, and strategies for claiming youth citizenship. We identified how different social labels alter the perception and experiences of youths (Akotirene, 2019; Weller, 2005). We conclude that denouncing inequalities is a citizen-political aspect to develop new youth existences. Mobilization strategies structured through communication.

KEYWORDS: Youth; Maranhão; Citizenship.

1 Introduction

For a long time the definition of youth has been given labels that have limited the possibility of a complex questioning of this social segment. On one hand, youths are described as a specific age group, a projection of the future; they are inserted into an adult-centric logic that does not recognize them as subjects of the present, but of the future, preparing them for said future, inserting them into the labor market, and having them fulfill their respective family roles. On the other hand, we have the feeling of “being young”, which is an ideal pursued by the elderly in order to feel young in both body and spirit (Groppo, 2017; Reguillo, 2000).

In the social sciences youths are understood as a “social” and “historical” category (Groppo, 2017). It is a social category, according to Groppo (2017), due to its interconnection with groups, communities, symbolism and social status. It is historical because it has gone through some considerable changes, while its meaning and understanding can also change according to the society one may be studying (Groppo,

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2017). It is a category that carries a more prestigious social status with it than childhood does, but a lesser one in relation to maturity, particularly due to representations built around the idea that young people have fewer social rights as they still depend on the family and socialization institutions (Groppo, 2017).

In this article we defend and uphold the heterogeneity and dynamism of youth cultures, thus we found it relevant to refer to them in the plural. They are cultures that adapt to social realities but that also create their "own territories" (Feixa Pampols, 1998, p. 96), encouraging the appropriation of urban spaces and creating brands. Based on the idea of a "transient condition", young people are marginalized from the social order, separated from or partially integrated into societies. Youth cultures arise from the need to problematize the "dominant culture", seeking spaces for insertion into social logic, self-affirmation and authority. (Feixa Pampols, 1998).

(...) ideological and symbolic attributes associated with and/or appropriated by young people, youth cultures translate into more or less visible styles, which integrate heterogeneous material or immaterial elements from fashion, music, language, cultural practices and focal activities (Feixa Pampols, 1998, p. 88).

According to Pais (2008, p. 164) youth is a phase of life also marked by social diversity and resistance. Youth cultures are seen as deviant and resistant to dominant cultures. It is a phase of life marked by "socialization processes and shared meanings", and also by the struggle to access the labor market and access housing. Pais draws attention to the instability of the concept and the need for its dynamic use. Freire Filho (2008, p. 13), in turn, understands youth as a "universal biological phenomenon", which must be discussed from the "governmental artifacts" that "create political, academic and marketing discourses", proposing models of behavior and characteristics that should be followed (Freire Filho, 2008, p. 13).

In this text we seek to discuss the understanding of the youth category from an empirical perspective using field research conducted in the cities of Codó² and Imperatriz³, located in the interior of Maranhão state, in the northeast region of Brazil.

² The city of Codó is located in the cerrado of Maranhão. It has a population of 122,859 and an average monthly income of 1.8 minimum wages. Its GDP is R\$ 957,335.76. The city's economy is based on the service sectors (44.07%), administration (40.74%), industry (10.21%) and agriculture (4.97%) (IBGE, 2017). Data from the last census show that the black population in the city of Codó represents 85.7% of the population (black and brown) and non-black people correspond to 14.3% of the population (caucasian and asian) (IBGE, 2010).

³ Imperatriz has an estimated population of 258,682. Data from the last census show that black people make up 69.1% of the population (black and brown) and non-black people correspond to 31.9% of the population (caucasian and asian) (IBGE, 2010). Located between the cerrado and the Amazon, Imperatriz has a total territory of 1,368.988 km². In 2018, the average monthly salary was

More specifically, we conduct interviews with local leaders who work directly with young people in both cities.

Our decision to focus on these two aforementioned cities has to do with the “Plano Juventude Viva”⁴ that was created in 2017. A federal government initiative, in conjunction with the State Secretariat for Human Rights and Popular Participation (SEDIHPOP) and the State Secretariat for Youth (SEEJUV), the plan aims to prevent violence against black youths in Maranhão, thus extending the rights of this population. The program is mostly developed in nine cities located in Maranhão, including Codó and Imperatriz, which were highlighted in the 2017 version of the Violence Map (this map was the basis for the plan) as two of the 130 most violent municipalities in Brazil, with greater social vulnerability experienced by its black population.

More than 1.9 million people – 29% of the population of Maranhão – are youths (PNAD, 2020)⁵. 76.48% of these youths are black. More than half of the population of the state of Maranhão are women, 45.33% of whom are youths and mothers. More than 20 thousand young women between the ages of 15 and 17 have children, that represents 10.01% of girls in this age bracket. 45% are young mothers (Censo, 2010)⁶.

This data is important and led us to reflect on how different social markers of race, gender, class, territory, sexuality, and others affect and create obstacles for the exercise of youth citizenship. The analyses discussed here were developed from exploratory research⁷, which was built by communicating with local youth leaders.

In order to find the relevant youth leaders in the cities we contacted a few residents from the two cities who gave us contacts and suggestions. Our goal was to better understand particular aspects and characteristics about the youths in the cities of Codó and Imperatriz, although it was not an in-depth effort. The observations/reflections from the interviews are perspectives based on the experience of each leader.

2.2 minimum wages. The economy runs on service sectors (57.22%), administration (14.80%), industry (27.40%) and agriculture (0.57%) (IBGE, 2019).

⁴ More details about the plan can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/igualdade-etnico-racial/acoes-e-programas-de-gestoes-anteriores/programas/PlanoJuventudeVivaUmlevantamentohistorico.pdf>

⁵ According to data from the “Panorama of territories - Maranhão” published by the Unibanco Institute, which collects and organizes data from the Census and the PNAD. Available at: <https://observatoriodeeducacao.institutounibanco.org.br/panorama-dos-territorios/maranhao#territorio-select>

⁶ According to data from the “Panorama of territories - Maranhão” published by the Unibanco Institute, which collects and organizes data from the Census and the PNAD. Available at: <https://observatoriodeeducacao.institutounibanco.org.br/panorama-dos-territorios/maranhao#territorio-select>

⁷ Doctoral research funded by CAPES/PRODOUTORAL.

In the second half of 2018, between the months of July and September, we contacted a representative from Coletivo Núcleo – a collective which works with young black people, developing activities that instill cultural appreciation and fight against racism, sexism, and social inequalities of race and class. This is also a group of studies and reflections on the precariousness, prejudice and racism faced on a daily basis, motivating these youths in the city to value, recognize and embrace their cultural and identity differences.

In the city of Codó, we spoke with three representatives from the Pastoral da Juventude - a religious group that works with evangelization, social actions and citizenship, supporting the youths of the Catholic Church. In 2018, this group created the Brotherhood Campaign⁸ in an attempt to discuss the issues of gender violence and sexism with young people from the community.

We also contacted a representative from the *Unicef Seal* program, a program this representative had worked in for five years. He was in contact with young people and adolescents from the city and rural areas, mapping social inequalities and offering them training courses in audiovisual fields such as photography, audio production, and video, all with the goal of empowering youths with the ability to use these communication tools.

Three representatives from the Clube do Livro de Imperatriz (a local book club that talks about literature once a month) participated in the interviews conducted in the city of Imperatriz, and another representative from the Coletivo Juventude Anticapitalista (RUA) also participated in the interviews, who at the time also served on the city's Human Rights Committee. The RUA collective is dedicated to the demand for better social conditions and for the development of local youth.

The interviews conducted with youth groups in the cities of Codó and Imperatriz were semi-structured and in-depth. We used scripted questions based on the fundamental areas. These areas were expanded on by including the subjects' living-experiences. The questions aimed to identify: a) the social dynamics of cities; b) how youth groups/collectives operate; c) the main characteristics of local youths; d) aspects of public policies for local youths; e) barriers to youth protagonism; f) generational conflicts; g) realities of class, gender, race and territory; and others.

The text is divided into two fundamental areas: the first area addresses autonomy, articulation, and political education among youths. These subjects have resisted and produced citizenship, thus implementing new formats of political participation (Reguillo,

⁸ The official theme of the 2018 Brotherhood Campaign was "The brotherhood and overcoming violence".

2000). Criticisms and reflections on the ineffectiveness and lack of access to public policies for young people are also highlighted, particularly with those subjects who live on the outskirts or interior (Abramo, 1997; Aquino, 2008; Sposito E Corrochano, 2005). For the second area, we reflect on how the social labels of class, race, gender, and territory intermix and change perceptions and meanings about youths (Akotirene, 2019; Weller, 2005). Based on the experiences narrated by the youths in Codó and Imperatriz, we believe that youth 'recognition' is a place of privilege - not every young person can be considered and recognized as belonging to the logic of youth.

Lastly, our initial comparison of the accounts showed that young people from the cities of Codó and Imperatriz have tried to instill new forms of political participation, especially by developing new communication formats and political and citizenship awareness. As such, citizenship is produced, claimed and developed by the youths in the cities of Codó and Imperatriz by building political autonomy through individual and collective education and trying to work with institutions and various regulations in the hopes of building other realities.

Looking at studies from Manuel Castells (2013, p. 168) we understand autonomy as a process through which a social actor becomes a subject who actively mobilizes himself or herself outside of institutions, according to his or her own particular interests. We believe that young people want to put the realities they experience into perspective, which are affected by racism, sexism, class inequalities, and the general precariousness within the country itself. Social labels and marks of oppression are important and have the ability to change experiences within a generation (Akotirene, 2019). Social labels are also a way to prevent certain social subjects from recognizing youth (Akotirene, 2019; Weller, 2005).

We observed (through our interviews) that drawing attention to and denouncing the inequalities of sexism, racism, homophobia, gender regulations, and class and territorial inequalities are part of the political-citizenship demand for the rights of citizens to be recognized and identified as youths, to belong to that category.

2 Political autonomy and producing citizenship for youths in Maranhão

Reguillo (2000, p. 142) believes that young people get their information about what happens in the world through networks of connection and contact. Their identities are linked to the practices and interactions they establish with the "other" youth subjects. Reguillo draws attention to the fact that living on the outskirts of society means young people need the education and political participation to dialogue their current perspectives and demands.

As seen in data from empirical research carried out by this same author, youth movements have turned to discussing topics such as: 1. Global planetary awareness, which keeps them connected through “networks of interaction and consumption” (Reguillo, 2000, p. 142); 2. They believe that changes come from small everyday spaces; 3. Respect for the individual; 4. They carefully analyze the cause for which they are going to join; 5. They go outside their “neighborhood” when developing their practices (Reguillo, 2000, p. 142).

Reguillo (2000) believes that youth collectives have tried to establish elements of resistance and confrontation in the face of social precariousness. By initiating new forms of political participation and communication and enunciation formats, young people use visibility as their political strategy, understanding that citizenship is practical, active, and accomplished in practice (Reguillo, 2000). They encourage the understanding of citizenship through recognition and social identification and by claiming that cultural differences are not solely linked to a territory or the right to vote or social security. Citizenship as a claim for “cultural difference” (Reguillo, 2000, p. 151).

As expressed by Reguillo (2000), conversations held with youth groups in the cities of Codó and Imperatriz were important and helped us determine that the dynamics of living on the outskirts is a reality that young people face, building critical views about the inequalities, the particularities, and the norms that surround their lives.

The outskirts, however, are not unchanging/imprisoning places. This is due to the fact that the tactics and strategies youths use to discuss the issues that are important to them require them to move to different spaces: from the outskirts to the center, from the center to the outskirts. They end up practicing citizenship through their actions, struggles, inventiveness, and by reframing discourses based on new/other communication and enunciation strategies.

Most of the groups are resistance groups. It's people organizing themselves, the way the whole thing works, but it's really about value. I only know the rap people, so it's already a kind of marginalized culture that doesn't have support. The boys have a small sound box, you know? It's a type without a microphone. So, they are resisting (Sara, 2018).

Sara's statement addresses a fundamental perspective on citizenship: it is developed by resistance and confrontation, in everyday activities, experimentation and inventiveness. This is how youth self-organization makes it possible to discuss topics that are invisible. It makes it possible to reshape concepts and discourses. Also, political education is a fundamental and very important citizen confrontation strategy for youth groups and collectives, as it highlights:

So... in the collective that I participate in, you know, we always try to bring it, right? Work with political education. We are based on political education. We held some debates in the city that had never been held before. Like with feminists, we managed to have them participate in a debate on the legalization of abortion. A lot of feminists from Imperatriz had never addressed this topic before, you know? Some groups have been around for a while, others are newer, you know? But they never stop discussing it. And another thing is the question of sexual diversity, you know, which exists in Imperatriz. I think it was during Carnival last year, there was a councilman who said there wasn't going to... he called the pastor, I think... he said there wasn't going to be Carnival in Imperatriz, that the church there wasn't going to allow the festivities... And so, to counter that, we created the Tô Na Rua Sem Temer demonstration. It was a demonstration, not the first one, but at that Carnival it was the only LGBT demonstration in the city, you know, that claimed: "we're not going to the street", "we're going to Carnival", "we'll find a way", and we did, you know? The Tô Na Rua Sem Temer demonstration was an LGBT demonstration that we organized at that time. And we are always trying to use these guidelines, like, that are more controversial, let's say, that we usually see here in the city [...] nowadays this debate is even more advanced, but at the time it was a shock (Sara, 2018, emphasis added).

Feixa (2006) argues that young people seek ways to exist and make spaces of sociability and affiliation groups more stable. Weller (2005) dialogues with Feixa Pampols when he says that aside from forms of resistance, young people are thinking about solving everyday problems regarding ethnic and class inequalities. Resistance, in our opinion, is the fundamental element, the starting point for one to become aware of oppression and social control. The articulation and political-citizenship mobilization are born from resistance and use communication as a key tool for denouncing oppression and violence and for the political education of other young people through non-formal education (a strategy used widely by youth groups in the two cities) which is an important methodology for demanding the realization of citizenship rights, especially through the use of digital media platforms.

Related to the points of argument, we can look to Sara's account and expand on the reflections developed by Feixa (2006) and Weller (2005). It is through resistance, the struggle, and the destabilization of norms, regulations and impositions that the youths of Codó and Imperatriz have been able to organize political education and awareness, and develop new realities that mostly focus on the issue of gender, race and sexuality, as evidenced in the political organization that went into the Carnival demonstrations mentioned earlier.

The fact is that public policies designed for youths are based on the idea that youths are a violent age group that needs social interventions. As a result, these policies are more normative, and use these norms to "subdue" attitudes and behaviors in the

guise of “citizenship obligations”, as established by Loncle (2003, p. 15 apud Sposito and Corrochano, 2005, p. 146). These policies do not take into account the multiplicity of citizenship demands and the needs and expectations of youths to participate in political processes and to have access to education, health, transportation and politics with cultural appreciation. It is along these lines that Sposito and Corrochano (2005) believe it important that one understand the different youth segments in order to then realize that there is no one single movement capable of interpreting the policies that should be aimed toward youth.

As a result, young people remain “invisible” even with the existing public policies in place as only a few of these policies are based on the struggles of youths and even fewer advocate for youths. Abramo (1997, p. 27) identifies a kind of fear that exists of including young people “in the construction and consolidation of democracy”, even though this is a relevant category for thinking about contemporary issues. Abramo also points out that, in relation to citizenship and youth in Brazil, instead of holding discussions that address rights and participation, the discussions focus on the “problems” that are associated with young people, such as “prostitution, drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, early pregnancy and violence” (Abramo, 1997, p. 28).

The connecting point between the dialogues in the cities of Codó and Imperatriz has to do with a “lacking” or “scarcity”. Young people claim that the youth policies exist on paper, but do not reach many of them. Many of these policies are part of the general framework for other age categories; they are not specific and/or related to investments in art, culture, leisure and promote youth. Our findings have shown us that institutions continue to silence, marginalize and normalize young people, and as a result, these youths feel like they are on the outside looking in when it comes to decisions, political processes, and city spaces, as Reguillo (2000) points out.

For instance, when analyzing local social problems the leaders of Codó list the following: 1. The fact that the city is home to a lot of racial prejudice and prejudice toward any other religious manifestations that are not Christian, such as Protestant or Catholic – the two religions with the most followers in the city; 2. The lack of job opportunities and education, which leads to a strong migratory flow to other Brazilian states; 3. The lack and/or difficulty of internet access and the poor professionalism on the part of telephone operators in the city, which becomes an obstacle to autonomy and to the exercise of “digital citizenship”; and 4. School closures in the city, including important professional training centers such as Senac. Additionally, there are many young people who have to commute daily to the nearest city of Caxias (104 km from Codó) to continue

their studies as it is home to a Federal University of Maranhão (UFMA)⁹ campus, the State University do Maranhão (UEMA)¹⁰, and the Federal Institute of Maranhão (IFMA)¹¹; however, the number of courses these institutions offer is limited.

The youths we interviewed said that school closures and the lack of a wider range of higher education courses in the city of Codó led to a large migratory flow to several Brazilian cities, especially to neighboring Teresina, in the state of Piauí. To this point, Alexandre (2018) states that:

(...) It's not just the issue of studying, it's also a health issue, right? You see a crazy number of young people moving in order to study. I also moved, I went there, I studied for a while in Teresina, but since my course was available in Caxias, I went to Caxias right away. There are a lot of people, people from Timbiras, Codó, and Caxias do Sul who study in Teresina, even the 'older ones', for example, moms, dads, everyone goes to Teresina because it doesn't exist here. Unfortunately, we can't keep up with the developments in the big capitals, so the interior is inferior (Alexander, 2018).

The precariousness that Alexandre speaks of in terms of the youths of Codó and their access to health and education is also expressed by Kamila, who talks about the reality and class inequality experienced by many young people in Codó and the impact that the lack of education and qualification has on youths who are predominantly black, poor and live on the outskirts:

There is little qualification. Many young people need it... thanks to a small investment some colleges will be set up here. We have the Federal University of Maranhão and the state university, which is still trying to stay on its feet. (...), But then a young man from the interior comes to find work, to support himself, will he still have to pay for transportation, pay for private college to go to Caxias? Of course not! There's no way, right. (...) Anyway, back to education, the lack of young people in the job market, the lack of qualifications, this lack of public policies, which should not happen just for young people, you know, it has to start from basic education, kindergarten, because the interest in studying it doesn't come overnight, it's built over time, you know. The interest in continuing to study, in knowing how important education is, doesn't come when you're young, you know, it's built. So, it's a series of factors and, once again, our reality, most of Codó's youth is black, most of them are black (Kamila, 2018, emphasis added).

⁹ University degree in Human Sciences – History; University degree in Natural Sciences (more information on the UFMA site).

¹⁰ Undergraduate degrees in Administration and Accounting Sciences.

¹¹ Technical Courses: Agribusiness, Agriculture, IT, Environment, Agroindustry, Commerce, IT Maintenance and support. Undergraduate courses. Graduate Courses: Science and Mathematics Education. Undergraduate courses.

In addition to what the groups from the city of Codó demanded, the young people questioned the lack of public policies for youths and the lack of government support and incentives, which means that many young artistic groups in the city do not resist and stop their activities. In line with what the youth groups from both cities demand, we turn to what Loncle (2003, apud Sposito and Corrochano, 2005) addresses when claiming that youth policies do not provide autonomy. As a result, in times of crisis, they end up appearing as a public problem. These policies are seen as standard across “almost all state actions” (Loncle, 2003, p. 27 apud Sposito and Corrochano, 2005, p. 144).

Representatives from the Clube do Livro de Imperatriz made specific mention of the lack of places in the city for which to reflect on the importance of reading and, thus, reach more young people interested in the subject. They said that they need to protest at the Academia Imperatrizense de Letras as a way to demand their participation in activities in the city, in a political action to claim citizenship:

Now that they have opened their doors [Academia Imperatrizense de Letras], we hold our events there, sometimes we have a meeting, hold a festivity, we've done it twice now, including the first festivity we had which was in a bar and the guy goes: “In a bar? Ahh, that is not the place for it.” Then the other one, the artist said: “no, but I think you should go to the bar anyway”, trying to encourage him, you know? I think, like, youths do have a voice, they do have social movements that are claiming their rights, you know? When it comes to rights for youths, we go out into the street, create a movement, especially on social networks (Marcius, 2018).

Regarding autonomy and political mobilization for youths to claim and produce citizenship (using digital social networks as a powerful tool to make their demands heard), representatives from the Imperatriz Book Club also pointed out that some of the sectors need to reinvent themselves in order to reach an audience that is skilled at new communication languages and that transits in multiple spaces. They drew attention to the use of memes, podcasts and alternative narratives on the Club's social networks profiles in order to encourage other young people to read so they too can be part of the group, which is open and holds weekly meetings.

They also highlighted a movement called “Fora VBL”¹², run by the youths of Imperatriz in 2015, which protested against the precarious public transport in the city and the increased transit fares.

¹² The company that provides urban transit services in the city, called Viação Branca do Leste (VBL), was listed as the most expensive public transport fare in Maranhão in 2015. <https://imirante.com/oestadoma/noticias/2015/04/14/tarifa-de-onibus-em-imperatriz-e-hoje-ainda-mais-cara-do-maranhao/>. Access on September 07, 2018.

According to the young people's statements, demonstrations against poor transport conditions and the scrapping of public institutions, such as city libraries, were more recurrent and mostly led by local youths. There were diverse types of protesting involved, including the occupation of libraries by artistic movements, while also claiming and producing citizenship through actions and resourceful work:

It was a protest about public transport, which was scrapped, this occurred because the youth needed more from transport and it was scrapped and we needed to do something. And this movement came from the youths, it was headed by the UFMA youth, some members took the lead, it generated a lot of controversy, but we managed to change something. There were other movements as well, such as OcupArte, which was a youth-led movement about the abandoned libraries in Imperatriz. So we occupied the main library here in Imperatriz, the municipal library, and we held a social movement there, an art movement, a music movement, we occupied this space to claim people's right to have a library (Igor, 2018, emphasis added).

The issues identified in the interviews, conducted in the cities of Codó and Imperatriz, were similar in the sense that the local youths are characterized as autonomous and are adept at engagement, mobilization, and political movements when demanding rights and developing strategies for claiming citizenship. In both cities, there are clearly quite a few obstacles to political autonomy and protagonism, which require intersectional perspectives on understanding how the realities of class, race, territory, gender and sexuality present a struggle towards building and giving new meaning to the lives of youths.

In reference to the empirical data on the scarcity and/or lack of permanent public policies for youths in the two cities located in Maranhão, Sposito and Corrochano (2005) state that unanimity in the construction of social policies for youths is not a reality. Due to a lack of resources to allocate to social policies, young people are regarded as already receiving assistance from the existing health, housing, transportation and leisure policies, thus they are not considered for any further specific policies. Some defended the need for specific policies for youths, but ones that focused more on assisting youths who have been socially excluded or are considered socially vulnerable, which shows us the containment and normativity with which these policies were initially drawn up.

In an attempt to draw attention to reformulating public policies that present gaps and that fail to attract a large part of young people, Aquino (2009, p. 29) speaks of the "desynchronization of passages" that reveals the thought to other conceptions of youth, especially addressing the "plurality of youth (sub) cultures".

Based on perceptions from Aquino (2009) and Sposito and Corrochano (2005), we question the extent to which existing programs effectively integrate young people into a plural, diverse citizenship, one that provides them with a better quality of life based on access and basic permanent rights to education, health and leisure.

3 Youth experiences in Maranhão: thinking about the convergence of race, gender, class and territory

Who is given the right to belong to the category of youth? How do social markers of inequalities affect the recognition of “being young” in Codó and Imperatriz? These questions are the basis for an analysis on how the social markers of class, gender, race and territory can produce different and unequal experiences about what a youth is for each individual subject; it depends on what social markers they are subjected to and how these markers affect the way they build their individuality. Entry into the world of work, schooling, professional qualification, and access and obstacles to citizenship rights can change the perceptions and experiences of young people.

For instance, young people who have better financial circumstances are able to put off entering the world of work and pursue further educational opportunities to help prepare them for the job market (courses, training, qualifications). This is different from young people who are less fortunate financially-speaking as they often have to enter the job market immediately (even as an apprentice or informal jobs) in order to help their families survive (Akotirene, 2019). In addition to class, Carla Akotirene (2019) brings up a very important point when she talks about generational experiences. For her, race, gender and class are social markers that change the perception and experience of generations, especially for black people.

Akotirene (2019) argues that blacks are not classified as adolescents or young people, as they are required to behave as black men and women, with “early class responsibilities” (Akotirene, 2019, p. 45). She states that “generational experiences are differentiated by racism, judges in correctional facilities refer to blacks as minors and whites as adolescents when handing out sentences where race and gender intersect” (Akotirene, 2019, p. 45).

Thus, we can see that racism leads to a different generational experience for young people and black adolescents, who are not socially and legally viewed as the young people and adolescents that they are, as highlighted by Carla Akotirene (2019). The precariousness and vulnerability of the young black population also end up excluding them from the logic of youth, especially when the social markers of race and class converge (Akoritere, 2019). Expanding and directing Akotirene’s view (2019) toward

generational experiences that are altered by racism brings us to another fundamental dimension: gender. Maranhão ranks as the fifth Brazilian state with the highest number of working children and adolescents, and more than 70% of these children are young black girls¹³ (FEPETIMA, 2017, online, n/p).

In this sense, for many black and indigenous women and girls in Maranhão, the right to be young or be adolescent is not one they have as they are often sent to clean and take care of other families' homes and children in exchange for clothes, food, and a roof over their heads. A large part of the young population in Codó is women who, from an early age, are forced into domestic work and to look after their siblings, most of whom are men. Dácia (2018), a coordinator at Coletivo Núcleo, in the city of Codó, raises this issue:

We are in a city that has a huge contingent of people from African descent, you know? As much as the local identity as a black person is not known by everyone... everyone knows they are black, right? And they know they are black because of the violence and what racism causes in their daily lives, right? Most people who have jobs are underemployed or have informal jobs, those who are unemployed go from one part-time job to another, which in itself is already a super inhuman working condition (...) How does racial prejudice manifest itself or anything else in the city of Codó? It's built in! It's how the city lives seven days a week, you know? So, trade is something that we think about, right? When this person is a resident of the areas furthest from the center, right? Because actually Codó is kind of a rectangular city, you know? If you look at the map, this urban area goes around this central avenue here that goes down and separates the city overall. And the areas are getting further and further away from this place that receives benefits, lighting, paving, security, which for us is not plausible (Dácia, 2018, emphasis added).

Speaking about social markers of gender, Dácia understands that women in the city of Codó are "taught" from a very young age that it is their job to take care of their homes and that they cannot do whatever they want to – even if they support their homes financially and structurally. This logic continues indefinitely and places young people and adolescents as inferiors and subordinates:

(...) when you think that most young people in this city are women, and a large number of them will become mothers very early on, or will be placed in a family that already has a lot of women taking care of a lot of other women because the men are either in prison, dead, or have abandoned them. It's a lot of things all together like that. (...) And then, like, we still live in a city with a Northeastern culture which believes

¹³ According to the report "Child Labor in Brazilian Agriculture: a reading based on the 2017 Agricultural Census", carried out by the "State Forum for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of Adolescents at Work/ Maranhão – FEPETIMA".

women have their place, the place of the condemned, you know what I mean? And men have their place, which is the place of power, right? Which is the opposite [laughs], women can do everything because they take care of their families (Dacia, 2018).

The issues raised by the coordinator at Coletivo Núcleo are relevant to the contextual reality in the city of Codó and harken back to what Akotirene (2019) theorizes when she addresses how generational experiences are directly affected by racism. In addition, the construction of female gender roles is also evident in the way that girls and women are tasked with taking care of the homes and their siblings. Looking at this through the lens of convergence (Crenshaw, 2002; Akotirene, 2019) shows us that class, race, gender and territory are fundamental markers for building subordination which affects and changes the perception and sense of “being young” in the city of Codó.

From a gender perspective, it is necessary to highlight a gap in research on youths and youth cultures: the silencing and elimination of the roles of young women within these cultures which has existed for a long time. Most observations in studies on this subject are about white, urban, male movements (Weller, 2005). These studies talked about women in the private sphere but only in two domestic spaces: their parents' homes and their husbands' homes. It's as if these women do not even inhabit the public spaces of cities (Weller, 2005; Feixa, 1998).

“Advocating for women” from a young age is also a challenge when youth groups try to promote dialogue and reflection on the meaning and experience of youth for women. This is what the representatives from the Youth Ministry of Codó highlight:

So, this issue is not easy, you know, talking about gender, talking about women, well, it's not easy. (...) The Youth issue and advocating women, we have seen a lot of disapproving looks, you know? And we don't go far, we go back to our house, our church, you know, many disapproving looks, many people stopped helping us organize (...) for many people it is still not important to talk about women, about violence against women, or talk about gender. The other day I came here to the parish to print some documents, something for the church, I don't even remember what it was. And then someone came in and read the poster, there is a poster in the office, and the person said: “The Youth Ministry has to be very careful with this meeting they are going to hold. It is interesting, but you have to be very careful, because it can start to get into the young person's head that she can be a woman whenever she wants or he can be a man whenever he wants”, in short, the whole context of the meeting was distorted, you know? (Kamila, 2018, emphasis added).

Francisca, another representative from the Youth Ministry of Codó, goes even further than Kamila when she reflects on her personal experience as a black woman from the rural area of the city and the difficulties she encountered studying and working.

Regulations were also built within the family itself due to intergenerational conflicts. Far beyond the challenges imposed by class, there were also (and mainly) regulations related to the convergence between race and gender:

We still see these things today, mainly within the church, the Catholic church, within the evangelical church, which is more conservative. And we see people close to us..., "Ah, women can't travel", "If a man wants to, he'll date up to three women at a time, and it's normal, but you have to stay at home, don't go to parties". (...) I tell my grandmother, I live with my grandmother, I don't have a mother anymore, it's my grandmother, and I have my sisters. So I would go to Caxias, do my college there, I had to travel and leave the girls at home and my grandmother would say: "Francisca just wants a life of 'running around', she doesn't stay put anymore, women don't live like this. When are you going to become a housewife?" She's inside the house and wishes I didn't live this life of working and studying, I was supposed to stay indoors, take care of the house (Francisca, 2018).

Francisca alludes to an important aspect in her statement when her grandmother asked her when she was "going to become a housewife", which shows how taking care of the home and the husband is socially imposed on females. Francisca's words confirm what Weller (2005, p. 108) mentions about females in studies on youth cultures and how these studies mostly address "affection and sexuality in groups and gangs" or discuss "teen motherhood" (Weller, 2005, p. 108).

As Weller points out, the politics of care, the home, and the regulation/control of sexuality as a "social problem" were references to female roles in youth cultures. From this perspective, we can identify stereotypes both in relation to the castration of female sexuality and the reproduction of gender roles that pigeonhole women as being destined for motherhood or, as if it were the woman's problem for "getting pregnant" (Weller, 2005, p. 108). Another element highlighted by Weller to explain the female invisibility in studies comes from the stereotype that says young women do not demonstrate "an attitude of protest or resistance to ethnic and class inequalities" (Weller, 2005, p. 111), as if protesting and political participation were developed only by young men, as well as the role of family emancipation through work (Feixa, 1988).

In light of this gap, Weller (2005) argues that feminist studies also need to try to understand the ways in which young women deal with the multiple oppressions which they are subjected to. We expand on Weller's claim by understanding that, in addition to the role of women in these studies, it is essential to understand how the convergence between race, gender, class and territory also shows us that youth and adolescence can be viewed as a privilege that is not offered or accessible, and much less experienced (from a political-citizen perspective), by all subjects.

4 Final Considerations

In this article, our goal was to approximate perspectives on generational experience of youths in the cities of Codó and Imperatriz. We highlight the dynamics of their political-citizen education imbued by autonomy and developing forms of mobilization to claim and also produce citizenship – most of all to claim the right to youth, to be recognized and identified as youths. The testimonies show how the youths from the two cities try to open up new spaces and discourses by mobilizing, articulating and promoting activities of reflection and awareness about social inequalities. Mobilization is mostly based on confronting regulations and the control of some institutions.

It is important to point out that perceptions about youths in social groups/collectives/non-profit organizations seem to be a fundamental condition for the process of awareness and mobilization for the struggle for citizenship rights. Although institutions like churches, families, and education are important towards a young person's political education, conservative ideas related to gender and sexuality prevent full citizenship education from occurring. As a result, youths in both cities create resistance movements that, in addition to demanding basic citizenship rights such as health, education, job opportunities and income, also help toward fighting for the right to gender, race and class equality and for valuing and respecting sexual differences.

Even though fighting against and confronting norms, regulations, controls, and social impositions are a fundamental part of the struggle, the precariousness and inequalities arising from the convergence of race, class, gender and territory not only produce obstacles toward accessing basic citizenship rights but are also oppressions that alter the generational perception of youths (Akotirene, 2019) in the two cities: who can be considered young? Who is recognized and identified as a youth? Who is given the privilege of youth? These questions are most evident in the realities of youths in Codó whose population is mostly identified as black, poor and living on the outskirts.

It is not just about including groups and communities on agendas that have historically eliminated and silenced them from discourse and public policies that make the youth groups from Codó and Imperatriz stand up and fight for their rights. Non-formal education is evident here, and it is also about advocating to include the grievances, expectations, and wishes of a social group that experiences a large convergence of gender, race and class, which constitutes youth subjectivity. Thus, by debating the social control, norms and rules, and reflecting on the rights of women, the LGBTQIA+ communities, and the black population, these youth groups are educating

themselves politically and learning critical awareness and how to claim spaces of power/knowledge.

We look back at Akotirene's argument (2019) that generational experiences are impacted by racism. The youth condition for some of the subjects interviewed in Codó and Imperatriz seems to exist only in official reports. They are youths because that is how they are defined by the Child and Adolescent Statute, by age group. They are youths because statistically-speaking they are the segment most vulnerable to violence. However, youth or adolescence seem to be a distant right, one that is difficult to access. They are often only expressed as an age group and in the legal understanding of citizenship, which are completely exclusive and do not guarantee equal access to rights.

As literature on youths in Brazil points out, the public policies created for this social segment are not effective, so much so that governments can exclude pre-existing projects and actions. It is evident that doing away with professional training institutions in the city of Codó, municipal libraries in Imperatriz, and the lack of aggregating spaces for youths, in addition to the school, are a result of negligence on the part of public power that continues to put forth this idea that youths are a social problem who are already covered by the universal public policies of health and education. The government also views this segment as in need of constant social control and surveillance. Once again the role of youth groups is important: to fight against the effects of different social markers and convergences that subject young people in order that public policies include and consider the heterogeneity of Brazilian youth.

Looking at citizenship beyond legal guidelines and as an element of "political strategy" requires one to observe individuality and how it works in social reform. The lack of satisfaction with the legal-political sense of citizenship leads to the need for cultural and communicational citizenship, including the aspects of citizenship associated with communication, race, gender, and youth.

Thus, the youth-citizen claims were present not only in the accounts given by the groups we interviewed, they are also a fundamental part of the education and individual and collective political actions of these groups. The right to youth, to be identified and recognized as young, is claimed on a daily basis in terms of making demands and diverse existences visible, and not denied or silenced. Discussing issues such as sexism, racism, homophobia, gender regulations, class, and territory inequalities is not only achieved by fighting against the normative powers of social institutions, it is also about flying the political-citizenship flag for developing meanings about youths and having them recognized and identified as young people.

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RESUMO:

A quem é dado o direito de ser jovem no Brasil? Essa pergunta é a base de sustentação deste artigo que traz elementos de pesquisa de campo realizada nas cidades de Codó e Imperatriz, duas cidades do interior do Maranhão, durante os meses de julho a setembro de 2018. Através de entrevistas semiestruturadas e em profundidade, 5 lideranças jovens na cidade de Codó e 4 na cidade de Imperatriz, refletiram sobre processos de articulação e de formação política e sobre as estratégias produzidas para a reivindicação da cidadania juvenil. Identificamos como os diferentes marcadores sociais alteram a percepção e as experiências das juventudes (Akotirene, 2019; Weller, 2005). Concluímos que denunciar as desigualdades é uma dimensão político-cidadã para elaborar novas existências juvenis. Estratégias de mobilização que são estruturadas pela comunicação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Juventudes; Maranhão; Cidadania.

RESUMEN:

¿A quién se concede el derecho a ser joven en Brasil? Esta pregunta la base de este artículo que trae elementos dados de una investigación de campo realizada en las ciudades de Codó e Imperatriz, dos ciudades del interior de Maranhão, entre los meses de julio a septiembre de 2018. A través de entrevistas semiestruturadas y en profundidad, 5 líderes juveniles de la ciudad de Codó y 4 de la ciudad de Imperatriz, reflexionaron sobre los procesos de articulación y de formación política y sobre las estrategias producidas para la reivindicación de la ciudadanía juvenil. Identificamos cómo los diferentes marcadores sociales alteran la percepción y las experiencias de los jóvenes (Akotirene, 2019; Weller, 2005). Concluimos que la denuncia de las desigualdades es una dimensión político-ciudadana para elaborar nuevas existencias juveniles. Estrategias de movilización que son estructuradas por medio de la comunicación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Juventudes; Maranhão; Ciudadania.