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ESSAY ON THE INDIVIDUALIZATION OF RISKS UNDER CONDITIONS OF EXTREME DISAFFILIATION

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ESSAY ON THE INDIVIDUALIZATION OF RISKS UNDER CONDITIONS OF EXTREME DISAFFILIATION

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Abstract

Given that disaffiliation represents a type of final stage of social vulnerability, is it still possible, in the contemporary context, to conceive of an extreme form of disaffiliation, resulting from the same neoliberal biopolitics that simultaneously renders marginalized populations socially invisible and economically functional? From this analytical perspective, the social remnants of the neoliberal society, either the homeless or the incarcerated population, illustrate the convergence between individualization of responsibility for social risks and the policy of privatizing services that were once monopolized by the State.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Disaffiliation, Homeless Population, Incarcerated Population.

Resumo / Resumen

ENSAIO SOBRE A INDIVIDUALIZAÇÃO DOS RISCOS EM SITUAÇÕES DE EXTREMA DESFILIAÇÃO

Seria possível, sendo o processo de desfiliação uma espécie de último degrau da vulnerabilidade social, ainda pensar, em se tratando da contemporaneidade, de uma desfiliação extrema, resultado de uma mesma biopolítica neoliberal que, ao mesmo tempo, invisibiliza socialmente e funcionaliza economicamente os marginalizados? Os resíduos sociais da sociedade neoliberal, quer seja a população em situação de rua e a população encarcerada, ilustram, nessa perspectiva de análise, o encontro entre a responsabilização individual pelos riscos sociais e a política de privatização dos serviços que, outrora, foram monopolizados pelo Estado.

Palavras-chave: Neoliberalismo, Desfiliação, População em Situação de Rua, População Encarcerada

ENSAYO SOBRE LA INDIVIDUALIZACIÓN DE LOS RIESGOS EN SITUACIONES DE EXTREMA DESAFILIACIÓN

¿Sería posible, dado que el proceso de desafilación es una especie de paso final en la vulnerabilidad social, aún pensar, en la actualidad, de una desafilación extrema, resultado de la misma biopolítica neoliberal que, simultáneamente, invisibiliza socialmente y funcionaliza económicamente a los marginados? Los residuos sociales de la sociedad neoliberal, ya sea la población en situación de calle y la población encarcerada, ilustran, desde esta perspectiva de análisis, el encuentro entre la responsabilización individual por los riesgos sociales y la política de privatización de los servicios que, en otro tiempo, fueron ofrecidos por el Estado.

Palabras-clave: Neoliberalismo, Desafilación, Población en Situación de Calle, Población Encarcelada

INTRODUCTION

A common trait has characterized State intervention in the social sphere since the nineteenth century. This trait emerged, among other factors, from the relationship between the process of industrialization and the growing demands placed on the State to intervene in national societies. These interventions cannot be reduced, even within the scope of reflections on economic liberalism, to the functions described, for example, by the economist Adam Smith (2008) in *The Wealth of Nations*. Authors, such as Karl Polanyi (2000) and Fernand Braudel (1987), have already examined the historical associations between the State and the development of capitalism through the formation of so-called national markets. The social question followed a similar trajectory, as the State socialized the costs of labor force reproduction during industrialization; thus, favoring the emerging national bourgeoisies. However, the demand for State intervention did not arise outside an environment of intense conflict, whether armed, through the repression of labor movements, or legal, through the emergence of modern law, which, according to Marx and Engels (1986), was developed to protect private property. O'Connor raises an important question regarding the mode of operation of the capitalist State:

"[...] the capitalist State must attempt to perform two basic and often contradictory functions: accumulation and legitimation. This means that the State must attempt to maintain or create the conditions under which profitable capital accumulation is possible. At the same time, however, the State must maintain or create the conditions for social harmony." (1977, p. 19)

The pursuit of "social harmony", notwithstanding the ironic implications of the expression, was decisive in the construction of the social question by the State. Castel (2015, p. 21) indicated that being protected is not a natural condition. Consequently, the State had to create and expand protective systems in response to the demands of the working class, which constituted most of the urban poor.

An unequivocal historical link exists between the emergence of the social question and the way the State, through administrative techniques, managed the dynamics of risks threatening the already fragile social cohesion. The nation-state has always functioned as a bureaucratic apparatus in the sense attributed by the sociologist Max Weber (2009), but also, as emphasized in the comprehensive study of Pierre Bourdieu (2014), as an apparatus of assistance, philanthropy, discipline, and related functions. This does not imply that, within a class society, different risks have been socialized equally among all individuals. Risks (environmental, social, or age-related) and exposure to conditions of risk, illness, or unemployment have a clear class dimension and have intensified since at least the period depicted in the *Germinal* by Émile Zola (Zola, 2006) and *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens (Dickens, 1968).

Another equally important point is that access to traditional protective networks, including social security, basic education, healthcare, social assistance, and related systems, determines the position individuals occupy, or will occupy, within society and, consequently, the degree of risk to which they are or will be exposed. Children outside the educational system are undoubtedly more vulnerable than those enrolled in public or private schools. The same applies to older adults without social security protection and to young people working in the informal labor market without labor protections. The social position that defines opportunities for upward mobility through formal employment, wealth accumulation, or inheritance is also a spatial position, since greater or lesser exposure to risk corresponds to housing conditions and, consequently, to life expectancy. Castel (1997) was among the sociologists who sought to interpret, through comprehensive syntheses, transformations in the dynamics of social protection under capitalism by linking two phenomena: the precarization of work and the erosion of the relational support systems of workers.

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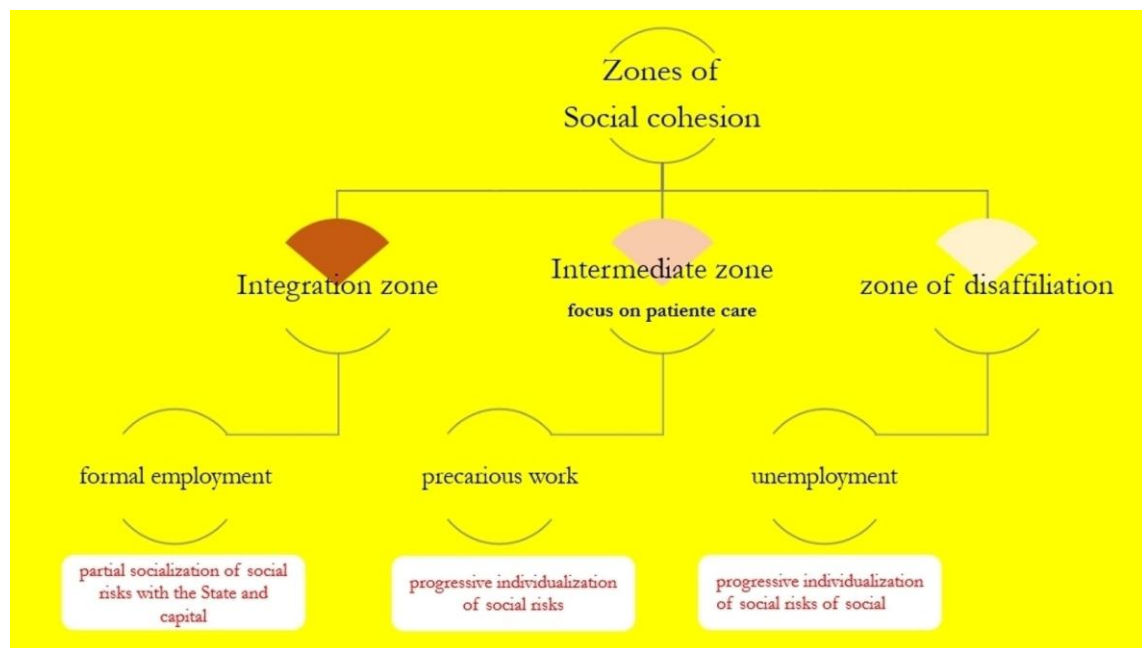


Figure 1 - Schematic representation of the zones of social cohesion and their respective connections with social risks. Source: Adapted from Castel (1997, 2005, 2015) and Lazzarato (2011, 2019).

*Some differences between the terminology originally used by the authors are intentional and were introduced to facilitate interpretation.

Based on the analysis of the transformations of the wage-based society, Robert Castel (1997, 2005, 2015) devoted considerable attention to social vulnerability and what may be described as the role of the State in containing and managing risks. Figure 1 provides a simplified representation of what the author described as an explanatory metaphor for this society. The model encourages reflection on how individuals integrate into the world of work and the degree of sociability that integration produces. At the same time, it allows conceptualizing a geometry of proximity-based support systems that provides collective protection under different risk conditions. Although this interpretative model is grounded in the European context, it is dynamic and permeable and, with appropriate qualifications, serves as a useful reference for discussing processes that are currently not restricted to Europe or the United States of America.

Within European liberal democracies, the integration zone corresponds to the fragile Fordist agreement through which the State and capital shared the costs of labor force reproduction. This arrangement is associated with the Welfare State, which financed the social costs of labor force reproduction through increased taxation. Broadly speaking, in Western liberal democracies, this model assumed a high degree of regulation of labor-capital relations and, through public financing, the provision of healthcare, education, social security, housing programs, and urban infrastructure. These policies benefited a relatively small segment of the working class. Collectively, these services helped integrate workers into the labor market with less inequality.

This unique historical period, commonly referred to as the Thirty Glorious Years, extended from the postwar era until the early 1970s, when the oil crisis occurred. Industrialization provided the basis for economic growth and, together with urbanization, absorbed, at least partially, the surplus labor force through a variety of protective systems linked to employment. Castel (2005) characterizes this period as the constriction of social insecurity.

Despite the need for caution regarding generalization, it is noteworthy that formal employment shaped a form of sociability that integrated individuals and their families into networks of relational support and cooperation, as inferred from the work of Richard Sennett (2012). In Europe during this period, working-class life was far from ideal, a qualification that recalls the iconic 1971 movie *The*

Working Class Goes to Heaven, directed by the Italian filmmaker Elio Petri (Petri, 1971). Cohesion, whether within trade unions, on the factory floor, or in working-class neighborhoods, enabled workers and their families to envision some degree of social mobility through access, via wages, to a modest share of the surplus they produced. The promise of social mobility in a wage-based society resulted from the combination of income from work and opportunities for advancement through educational attainment, reflecting the image of the "affluent society" proposed by the economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1987).

The intermediate zone, delineated by the remnants of the integration zone, is currently the most permeable, as the social landscape still retains traces of the possibility of social mobility through work; therefore, it serves as an explanatory model for the European context. Chronologically, this zone corresponds to transformations that began in the 1970s and simultaneously affected production systems, worker remuneration, and the financing of public services. Authors, such as Harvey (2008), Marazzi (2009), and Bihr (1999), have identified characteristics linking post-Fordism and neoliberalism. This period marks the emergence of a new phase of capitalist accumulation in which the financial sector increasingly assumed a central role, diminishing the relative importance of industrial production and, consequently, of the industrial working class. At the same time, individuals, regardless of their employment status, increasingly became individually responsible for the risks of social existence. Lazzarato (2019) argues that social risks previously collectivized became progressively individualized as the Welfare State eroded. According to the same author, indebtedness became a central component of the neoliberal disciplinary apparatus.

The protective security derived from the world of work gradually began to erode and, together with it, as Richard Sennett (2012) warned, the sociability associated with work and, above all, the prospect of intergenerational mobility. In *Weight of the World*, Pierre Bourdieu (2012) identified this process in the 1980s through a series of interviews with workers from diverse sectors of the productive sphere. This dimension can only be understood when work is conceived beyond the perspective of the exchange of labor power. As an activity performed to secure income, work is also characterized by the daily sharing and consumption of time; thus, becoming a source of sociability and inclusion within protective systems. Precarious work fundamentally alters this reality. Sustained by the corporate rhetoric of management and flexibility, it disseminates insecurity and erodes even the primary forms of sociability structured around kinship and neighborhood ties. This transformation is tectonic, as the organized structure of capitalism, particularly throughout the first three quarters of the twentieth century, regarded work as a fundamental domain of protective security and sociability.

Within this zone of insecurity, precarious employment coexists with informality and unemployment, requiring some degree of social assistance from the State. The State gradually accepted the progressive reduction of labor regulation while simultaneously expanding selected income transfer programs. In this context, it is not coincidental that labor and social security reforms have been accompanied by fiscal austerity policies.

The zone of disaffiliation represents, in a sense, the decline of the society of work. The concept, developed by Castel (2015) during the 1990s, reveals more than changes in the labor market. Castel (2015) argues that the condition of disaffiliation may help reconstruct individual trajectories and distinguish them, for example, from the concept of exclusion. This condition no longer concerns the residual orphans of the society of work. Its scale is that of the masses. At this point, the processes identified by the author diverge into two major tendencies: the first is the erosion of stable employment and protective systems, whereas the second concerns the impact of these transformations on systems of sociability. Lazzarato (2011) precisely characterizes these consequences:

"As unemployment became entrenched in socioeconomic reality as an 'endemic disease', the government of conduct relied extensively on the disciplinary dimension and constructed a disciplinary logic adapted to security. Unemployment came to be interpreted as the fault of the unemployed, as a moral disease of individuals. Subjectivation operates through responsibility, or rather, through guilt." (2011, p. 45)

Castel (1997) argues that the expansion of the zone of vulnerability, combined with the progressive erosion of social rights, such as labor and social security rights, increases the proportion of disaffiliated individuals. Expressions, such as "surplus population", "unemployable", and "useless to the

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world", provide important clues for identifying this zone. From the perspective of the labor market, the disaffiliated are no longer functional to either the economy or society. At the individual level, it is important to recall the discussion of Paugam (2003) about the experiences of social disqualification these individuals undergo, expressed through perceived failure in relation to family and friends. This appears to constitute the path of no return that, with rare exceptions, unifies workers throughout the world.

THE BRAZILIAN EXPERIMENT OF EXTREME DISAFFILIATION

Given the temporal and spatial context in which the concept of disaffiliation was developed, there is no direct equivalence between European and Brazilian realities, particularly in the 1980s, when Brazil had not yet experienced the expectations of political participation characteristic of liberal democracies. However, the 1980s, often considered a lost decade from an economic perspective, culminated in the enactment of the 1988 Constitution (Brazil, 1988), which established several social rights implemented during the 1990s. Nevertheless, these changes were insufficient to mitigate the transformations in the labor market, marked by increased precarization, informality, unemployment, and indebtedness, which placed a significant proportion of the Brazilian population in a condition of disaffiliation from the formal labor market. In *Living at Risk*, Lúcio Kowarick (2009) questions the applicability of the concept of disaffiliation:

"In the Brazilian case, disaffiliation cannot be understood as a consequence of the crisis of the wage-based society because, as previously noted, the latter presupposes a field of conflicts, negotiations, and achievements structured within firmly established social and political institutions." (2009, p. 86)

To avoid conceptual anachronism, it is important to briefly overview the labor market and income in contemporary Brazil. It is also worth recalling that the absence or insufficiency of income, expressed through precarious employment or unemployment, influences cycles of sociability; thus, helping explain how Brazil has, so to speak, become a vast reservoir of disaffiliated individuals.

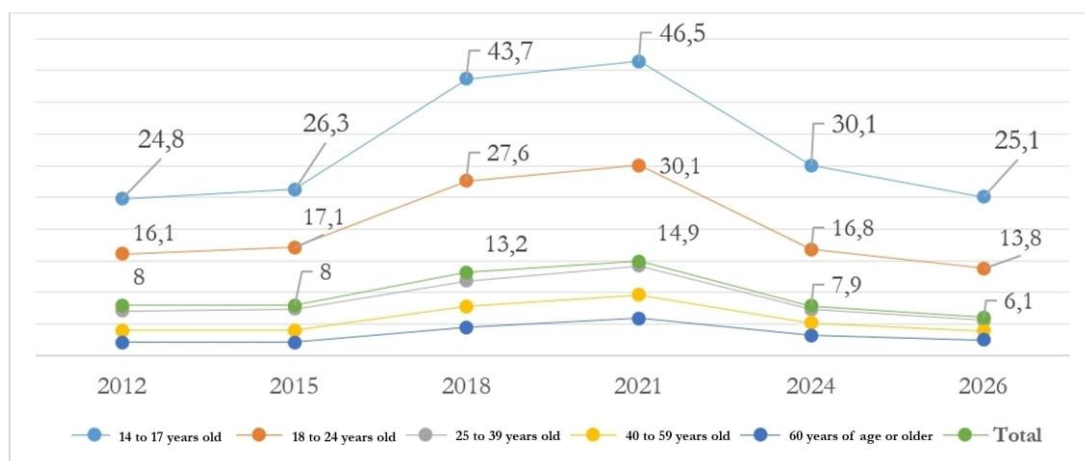


Figure 2 - Brazil. Evolution of the unemployment rate by age group during the first quarter of each selected year. Source: IBGE (2026).

The correlation of macroeconomic indicators examined in light of objective reality provides important insights into the erosion of aspirations among the young working population. The first indicator concerns unemployment, given that the generation and concentration of wealth by the Brazilian society is fundamentally driven by the sale of labor power. In recent years, declining

unemployment rates have created an undeniable sense of optimism, leading some observers to suggest that Brazil has approached full employment. The overall unemployment rate reached 8.0% in 2012, compared with 6.1% in 2026. However, in a country with the characteristics of Brazil, aggregate averages rarely capture the economic and social complexity of the territory. In 2012, the unemployment rate reached 24.8% among individuals aged 14 to 17 years and 16.1% among those aged 18 to 24 years. In 2026, the unemployment rate reached 25.1% for those aged 14 to 17 years and 13.8% for those aged 18 to 24 years. Unemployment primarily affects young and Black populations, with pronounced regional disparities.

The experience of unemployment among youth, including within the family unit, is not abstract. Without income from formal employment, and with the protections afforded by the Consolidation of Labor Laws substantially eroded, the remaining alternative is entry into the heterogeneous world of informal work. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (2026), 37.8% of the employed population in Brazil works in the informal sector. This corresponds to 38.5 million workers with no expectation of labor protection. A substantial proportion of these informal workers are young people employed predominantly in the commerce and service sectors. In the retail sector of small municipalities, occupations are typically characterized by low wages and long working hours.

This brief overview is fundamental for understanding what may, broadly speaking, be described as the stock of disaffiliated individuals. Given the transformations in the mode of production resulting from the displacement of variable capital, this stock can no longer be characterized, even in Marxian terms, as relative surplus population or industrial reserve army (Marx, 2015). Nor does it correspond to the migrant who is compelled to move into cities to sell labor power at increasingly lower prices. For part of this population, the expectations associated with the society of work no longer exist. Those expectations included, for example, access to durable and non-durable consumer goods and to public services that enabled workers to reproduce themselves while simultaneously reproducing capital.

Nevertheless, this army of disaffiliated individuals continues to coexist with remnants of the Welfare State, reflected in a residual commitment by the State to social assistance. This social mechanism enables part of this population to enter two conditions that may, as an analytical exercise, be described as extreme disaffiliation: surviving on the streets and surviving in prison. In both situations, political spaces are effectively nullified because of extreme vulnerability. The absolute and relative growth of the homeless and incarcerated populations provide evidence that these processes share a common underlying logic. What unites these two groups is not only their class and racial composition but, above all, the impossibility, within the framework of neoliberal governance, of reversing a condition in which they have become collateral consequences of a competitive social order. This is the sacrifice, to borrow Wendy Brown's (2018) expression, offered to the gods of austerity.

A structural difficulty arises when addressing the homeless population because Brazil has not yet conducted a nationwide survey that supported a comprehensive analysis and comparison of this phenomenon. Local census initiatives have been conducted in municipalities, such as São Paulo and Belo Horizonte. Empirically, however, the growth of this population is readily observed, particularly in the central districts of large cities. An important milestone in the development of national public policies was the establishment of the National Policy for the Homeless Population (Decree No. 7,053 of December 23, 2009)¹. The Decree defines this population as follows:

“For the purposes of this Decree, the homeless population is defined as the heterogeneous population group whose common characteristics include extreme poverty, disrupted or weakened family ties, and the absence of regular conventional housing, and which uses public spaces and degraded areas as places of residence and livelihood, either temporarily or permanently, as well as temporary shelter facilities for overnight accommodation or provisional housing.” (Page 1, Brazil, 2009)

The most reliable source for the quantitative assessment of the homeless population is the Single Registry for Social Programs (CadÚnico). Public facilities, such as the Social Assistance Reference Center and Specialized Reference Center for the Homeless Population (Centro Pop), are authorized to register information on the homeless population in the CadÚnico. In addition, the Centro Pop is intended to provide support services and facilities for the homeless population. According to the Observatório do Cadastro Único (Brazil-MDS, 2026), 267 Centro Pop units were distributed across 237 municipalities

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throughout Brazil in 2024. Considering that 3,018 municipalities had records of homeless individuals, this level of coverage is clearly insufficient. Even in municipalities with the largest homeless populations, such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Fortaleza, which had six, two, five, and two Centro Pop units, respectively, the available infrastructure remains inadequate. In São Paulo, based on demand recorded in the first half of 2026, each Centro Pop served an average of 18,000 homeless individuals. In Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Fortaleza, the corresponding averages were 12,215, 3,224, and 6,183 homeless individuals per Centro Pop, respectively. Even without considering broader infrastructure issues, the shortage of facilities and personnel (social workers, psychologists, administrative assistants with secondary education, higher-level professionals, and others) is evident, as described in the Technical Guidelines: Specialized Reference Center for the Homeless Population (Brazil-MDS, 2011)².

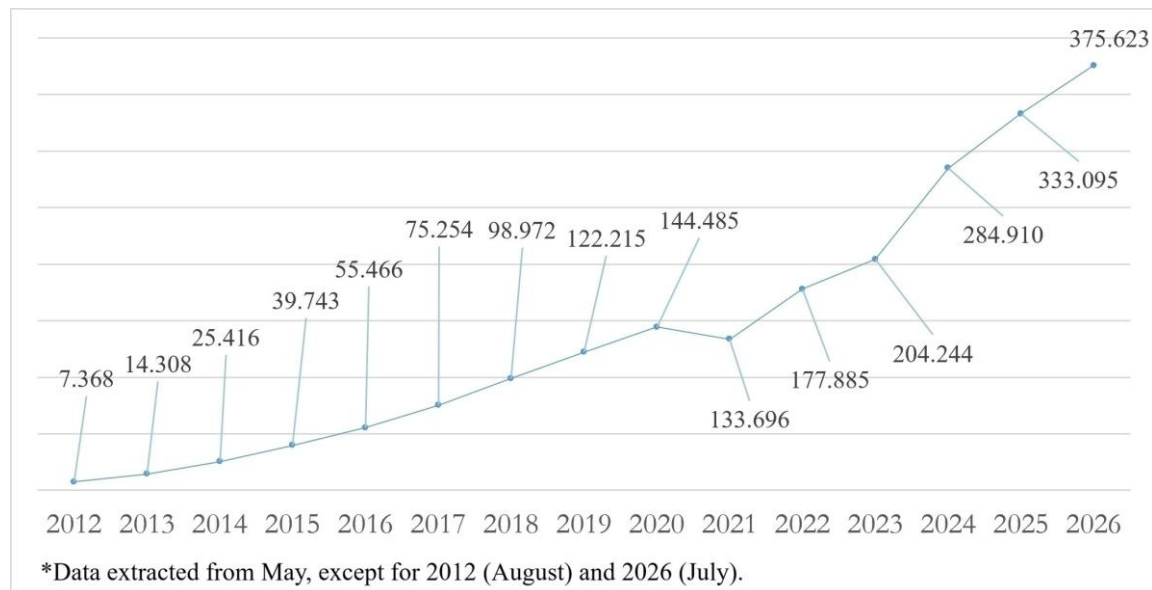


Figure 3 - Brazil. Evolution of the total number of homeless families. Source: Brazil-MDS (2026).

According to CadÚnico, Brazil had 371,263 homeless families in April 2026. It is important to note that most were single-person households, which explains why the total number of individuals (389,372) differs only slightly from the number of families. Across the available historical series (i.e., from 2012 to 2026), except for 2021, the trend is consistently upward. The total number of homeless families increased from 7,368 in August 2012 to 170,087 in 2022 and reached 375,623 in 2026. The increase in absolute numbers was accompanied by a corresponding increase in relative terms. In 2022, the homeless population represented 0.07% of the Brazilian population; by 2026, this proportion had risen to 0.17%. Considering the total number of individuals, the homeless population represented 0.18% of the Brazilian population by May 2026. In the municipalities of Boa Vista (Rondônia) and Guaratuba (Paraná), these proportions reached 2.17% and 1.23%, respectively. There is little doubt that the homeless population has increased year after year, making it one of the main challenges facing public policies in the field of social assistance.

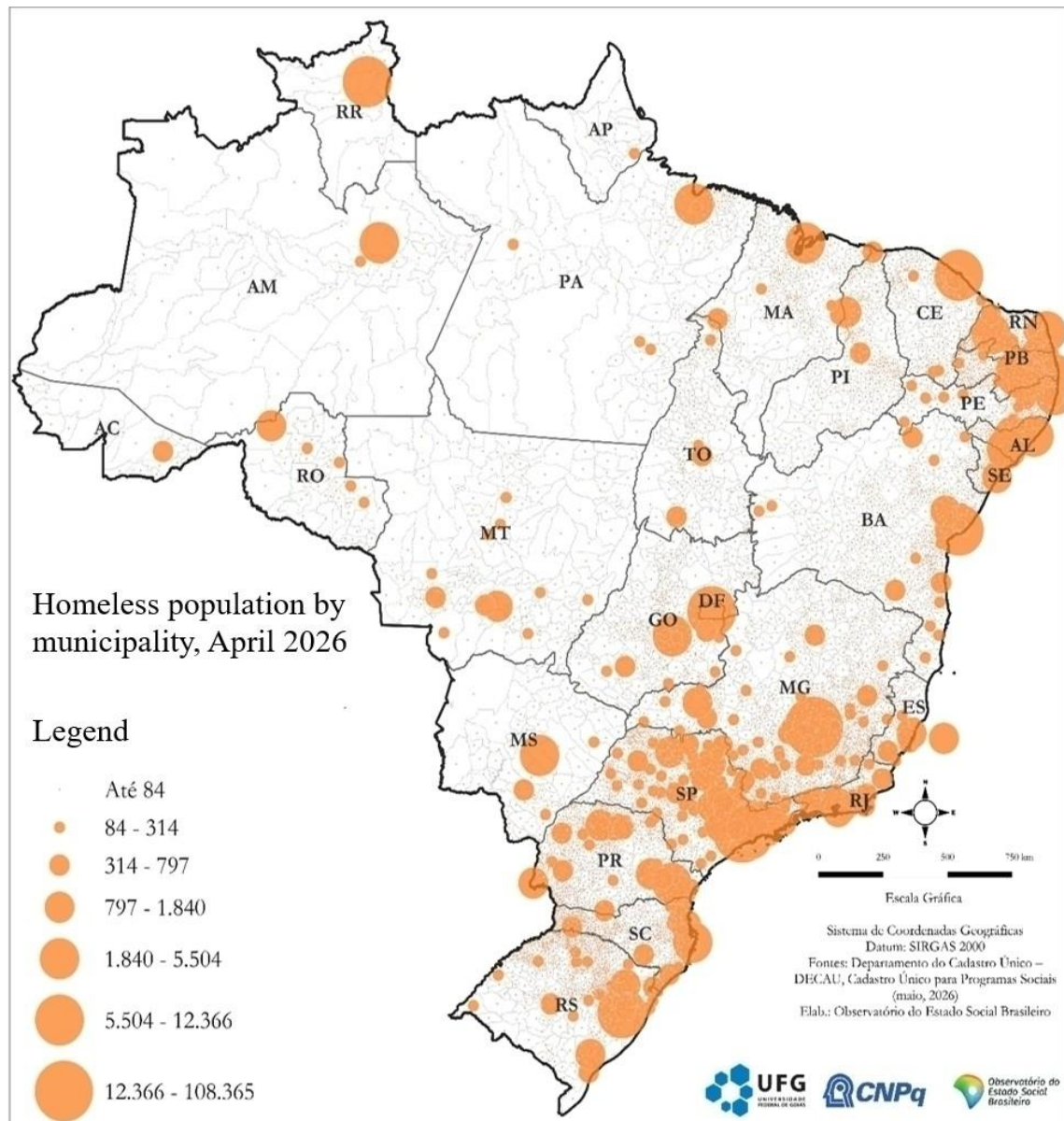


Figure 4 - Brazil. Homeless population by municipality, April 2026. Source: Brazil-MDS (2026).

The ten municipalities with the largest absolute number of homeless populations alone accounted for 209,650 individuals, corresponding to 53.84% of the national registries. Notably, 40 municipalities recorded more than 1,000 homeless individuals, indicating geographic expansion beyond State capitals. From a spatial perspective, this inland expansion (Figure 4) raises concerns because of the limited social assistance budgets available in smaller municipalities. This pattern also provides further evidence that homelessness is intrinsically linked to urban and rural land ownership, as consistently indicated in the literature and by social movements, such as the Homeless Workers' Movement.

From the perspective of the use of public space, the homeless population is readily identifiable. Their defining characteristic is the extreme difficulty in reproducing the conditions of daily life because of insufficient income and inability to maintain even the most basic aspects of everyday existence, such as personal hygiene. Race is the first characteristic that reflects social history in Brazil. According to the Observatório do Cadastro Único (Brazil-MDS, 2026), 49.99% of the homeless population is identified as mixed-race, 21.11% as Black, and 27.66% as White. This racial profile is closely associated with income. The Bolsa Família Program plays a particularly noteworthy role. According to May 2026 data, 277,480 of the 375,623 homeless families received benefits from the Bolsa Família Program. This

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income is frequently supplemented by earnings from precarious activities (e.g., collecting recyclable materials, occasional sidewalk cleaning, small-scale sales at traffic lights, and windshield cleaning) or small charitable donations.

The temporary occupation of public spaces (streets, parks, squares, and wooded areas), sidewalks, and unused private properties is also a recurrent source of conflict. The concentration of homeless individuals in central urban areas reflects the strategy of seeking safety through visibility after the disappearance of even the most basic forms of community ties. According to the Observatório do Cadastro Único (Brazil-MDS, 2026), 60.54% of the homeless population slept on the streets, while 29.5% stayed in shelters, underscoring the severity of their vulnerability, particularly when exposure to cold, heat, rain, and wind is considered. Exposure to adverse weather conditions is the norm, not the exception. These conditions are especially evident in locations, such as Praça da República (São Paulo), Largo da Carioca (Rio de Janeiro), Avenida Paranaíba (Goiânia), Praça do Ferreira (Fortaleza), and Praça da Estação (Belo Horizonte). Sleeping in city centers requires coping with hostile urban architecture and exclusionary practices adopted by local businesses (e.g., frequent pouring of creolin disinfectant onto sidewalks). Such hygienist strategies persist at multiple scales.

The continuous increase in the homeless population constitutes unequivocal evidence of the denial of rights that established housing as a social right, together with the criminalization of struggles for access to land. In this context, disaffiliation reaches its most extreme expression. It severs family ties and condemns individuals, when they are not subjected to compulsory institutionalization, to survive as nomadic collectors in urban environments.

The second manifestation of extreme disaffiliation is the direct result of incarceration policies, which have expanded continuously since the late 1990s. The use of the term mass is deliberate and reflects the scale of incarceration. The purpose here is not to examine issues related to criminal law or the prison system. Nevertheless, the structural roots of this phenomenon can not be overlooked, as summarized by Luiz Eduardo Soares:

“The States fail to comply with the Penal Execution Law enacted in 1984. This failure lies at the root of prison uprisings and many of their dramatic consequences. If the law were enforced, prisons would be smaller, administered more rigorously, overcrowding would not exist, sanitary and hygienic conditions would be respected, inmates would be separated according to the crimes they had committed, education and work opportunities would be provided, and the legal status of convicted individuals would be monitored to ensure compliance with sentencing periods and progression through the prison system.” (2006, p. 120)

In this context, it is appropriate to examine evidence explaining the growth of the incarcerated population, using what Wacquant (2001), in his analysis of the United States, described as the penalization of poverty. According to the National Penal Information System, Brazil had 964,074 individuals serving criminal sentences during the second half of 2025, including 730,993 incarcerated in correctional facilities and 233,081 serving sentences under house arrest, with or without electronic monitoring. The incarcerated population totaled 232,755 individuals in 2000 and increased to 496,251 by 2010, more than twofold within a decade. Between 2010 and 2020, this number rose from 496,251 to 758,850, representing an increase of more than 50% over ten years. By 2025, the incarcerated population had grown by an additional 30% relative to 2020 within only five years. Although Figure 5 shows the geographic expansion of incarceration, it does not distinguish between types of correctional facilities, such as local jails and prisons (both have substantially greater incarceration capacity).

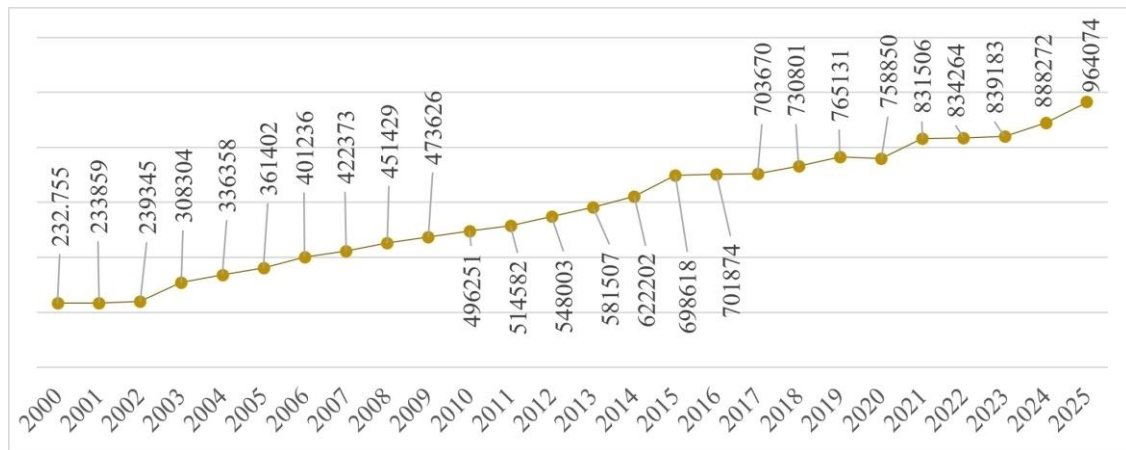


Figure 5 - Brazil. Evolution of the incarcerated population. Source: SENAPPEN (2026).

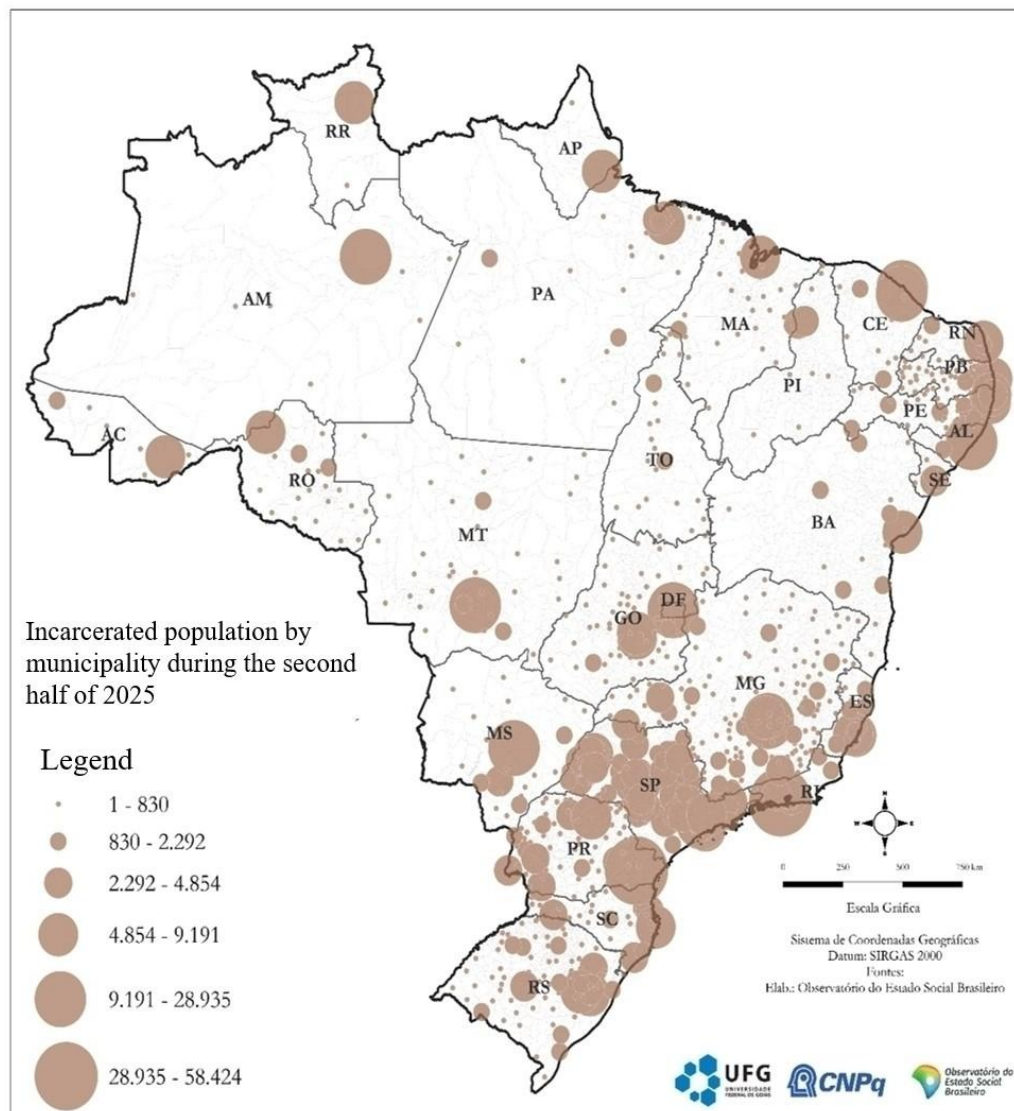
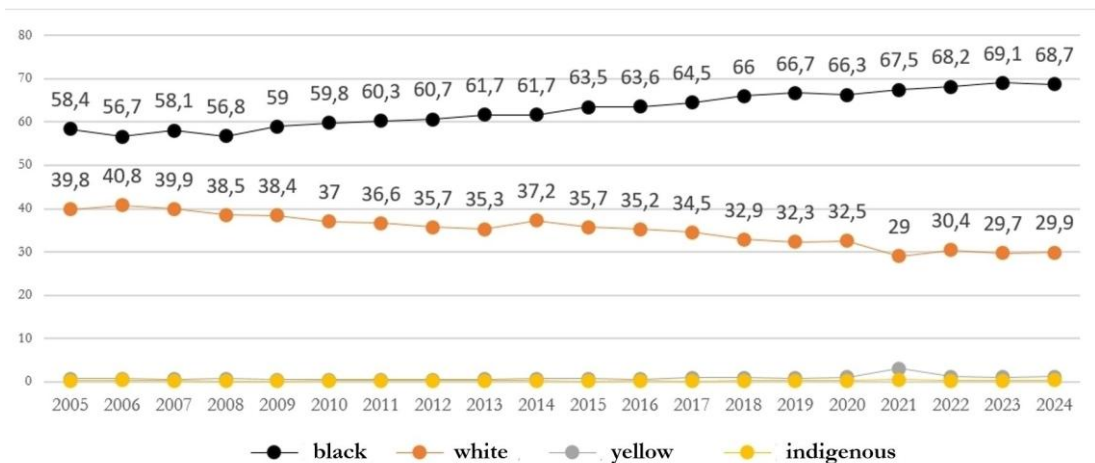


Figure 6 - Brazil. Incarcerated population by municipality during the second half of 2025. Source: SENAPPEN (2026).

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The increase in the absolute incarcerated population is mirrored by a corresponding increase in relative terms. In 2000, the incarcerated population represented 0.13% of the total population in Brazil, rising to 0.25% in 2010 and 0.36% in 2020. By 2025, this proportion reached 0.44%, representing a 3.38-fold increase over a 25-year period. According to data from the World Prison Brief, considering the total incarcerated population, Brazil ranks third worldwide, behind the United States (first place with an incarcerated population of 1.83 million) and China (second place with 1.69 million incarcerated individuals). Considering incarceration rates per 100,000 inhabitants, the same database indicates that Brazil ranks fifteenth, with 416 incarcerated individuals per 100,000 population.



*Note extracted from the yearbook. "The reported values for incarcerated individuals identified as Black and mixed-race were considered according to the IBGE classification".

Figure 7 - Percentage of the incarcerated population relative to the total Brazilian population. Source: IBGE (2026), SENAPPEN (2026), FBS (2026).

A qualitative pattern emerging from these data concerns race/ethnicity. The upward trend in the incarceration of individuals identified as mixed-race and Black is surprising, particularly when considering the historical trajectory that, as Kowarick (1994) argued in *Work and Vagrancy*, dates back to the period of enslavement. The incarceration trends reveal an increasingly pronounced divergence between the White population and the mixed-race and Black populations. Between 2005 and 2024, the proportion of incarcerated individuals identified as White declined from 38.9% to 29.9%, whereas the proportion identified as mixed-race or Black increased from 58.4% to 68.7%. The incarceration policy, as reflected in the upward trajectory of imprisonment and the marked racial disparities, closely resembles the pattern observed in the United States. Michelle Alexander attributes the expansion of incarceration in the United States, among other factors, to the so-called "War on Drugs", arguing that it transformed the nature of criminal justice, shifting its primary focus from crime prevention and punishment to the "management and control of the dispossessed". The argument of the author finds a clear parallel in the Brazilian context:

"Millions of people, mostly poor and non-White, were swept into prisons and jails as a result of a racially biased 'War on Drugs' and the political movement toward 'tough on crime' policies that destroyed families and devastated entire communities." (2017, p. 20)

The scale of incarceration in Brazil becomes even more striking when its effects on family structures are considered. At this level, the disintegration of the primary bonds of sociability is complete. The largest age group within the incarcerated population was 35 to 45 years (25.36% of all incarcerated individuals), followed by those aged 25 to 29 years (19.08%) and 30 to 34 years (18.03%). The incarcerated population aged 18 to 24 years totaled 128,836, corresponding to 13.40% of all incarcerated individuals. In summary, the demographic profile of the incarcerated population is characterized by a

predominance of young, male, and Black and mixed-race individuals. This profile is complemented by the level of education, with incomplete elementary education (303,189 individuals) and incomplete secondary education (131,735 individuals) accounting for 59.79% of incarcerated individuals who reported this information. At the opposite end of the educational spectrum, only 7,655 incarcerated individuals reported having completed higher education or a more advanced level of education. A clear relationship can be established among level of education, income, and access to justice, particularly given the financial costs associated with judicial proceedings. As a result, individuals frequently remain incarcerated even after completing their sentences, a situation repeatedly documented in media reports.

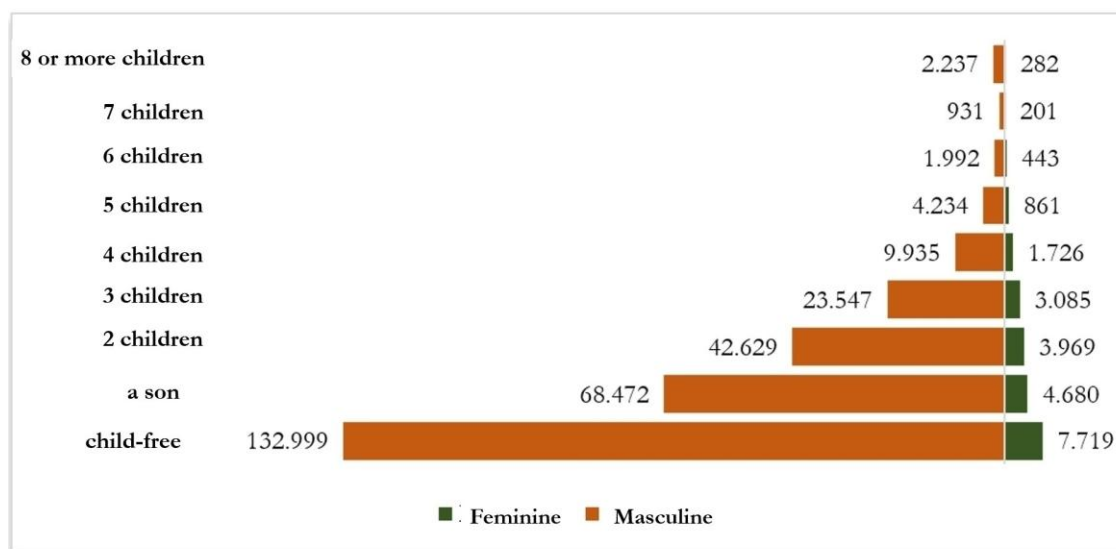


Figure 8 - Individuals who reported age, including those incarcerated in correctional facilities and those serving sentences under house arrest with or without electronic monitoring, at the State and Federal levels during the second half of 2025. Source: SENAPPEN (2026).

Another relevant aspect of the demographic and social profile concerns family composition, as presented in Figure 8. Among the incarcerated individuals who provided this information, 169,224 reported having children, whereas 132,999 reported having no children. Of the 169,224 individuals with children, 119,750 (mostly males) reported having one or two children. The total number of incarcerated individuals who reported the number of children reached 361,049 during the second half of 2025. These data highlight the vulnerability experienced by the families of incarcerated individuals and the difficulties, particularly for females, associated with maintaining family life under such circumstances. The cycle of social reproduction is evident. It is also noteworthy that, despite this extreme vulnerability, only 40,008 families were registered in CadÚnico, of which 23,129 received benefits from the Bolsa Família Program in April 2026.

Having established who these individuals are, where they are, and how they arrived there, the question becomes: how are they governed?

GOVERNING SOCIAL RESIDUES

The philosopher Michel Foucault is widely recognized for the persistent effort to understand the disciplinary mechanisms underlying the constitution of institutions, including schools, prisons, asylums, hospitals, and military barracks, as can be inferred from *Discipline and Punish* (1987). His analyses of conduct, bodies, and disciplinary strategies became the cornerstone of his concept of biopolitics. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault writes:

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"[...] the neoliberalism, the neoliberal government, does not have to correct the destructive effects of the market on society. It does not have to constitute, in a sense, a counterweight or a buffer between society and economic processes. Rather, it must intervene in society itself, in its very fabric and density." (2008, p. 199)

The issue addressed here may be summarized in the following question: how are social residues to be governed? These residues, here classified as the homeless and incarcerated populations, once occupied a central place in debates surrounding the social question. The well-known Beveridge Report (1942), developed in England during the Second World War, reflects these concerns regarding the social integration of the most vulnerable populations. Likewise, although to a lesser extent, the Social Security Act (1935) in the United States embodied a protective framework that marked the beginning of what became known as the golden age of liberal democracies. The present discussion, however, concerns a different historical moment, one that has, so to speak, unified almost the entire world under neoliberal political frameworks. Within this framework, the prevailing principle is the individualization of risk and, to borrow the words of Castel (2005, p. 31), "the dissolution of social ties and erosion of the psychic structures of individuals". Dehumanization constitutes the final act in the ritual through which individuals are transformed into commodities. Before this process can be completed, it is necessary to establish legal mechanisms (e.g., laws, decrees, and regulations) that enable institutions, as Foucault said in *Truth and Juridical Forms* (2002), to sequester individuals. Institutional sequestration serves, among other purposes, to appropriate the time of individuals and regulate their bodies. Although Foucault (2002) focuses on a historical period distinct from the contemporary one, it appears remarkably pertinent to understanding the governance of social residues:

"It seems to me that, whenever we examine these institutions of sequestration closely, regardless of their particular point of insertion or application, we always encounter a general framework, a broad mechanism of transformation: how to make men's time, men's bodies, and men's lives into productive forces. It is this entire set of mechanisms that sequestration secures." (2002, p. 122)

For social residues, there is no prospect of social integration through either employment or social assistance. Containment, confinement, immobilization, and segregation, which applies to homeless and incarcerated populations, have become the rule. At this point, it is appropriate to recall the precise synthesis of Wacquant (2001):

"Neoliberal penalty presents the following paradox: it seeks to remedy, through a more police and penitentiary State, the effects of a less economic and social State, which is precisely the cause of the generalized rise in objective and subjective insecurity in countries of the first and the second world." (2001, p. 7)

However, it is mistaken to assume that social residues are not functional to neoliberalism. In his characterization of liberal thought "on both sides of the Atlantic", the sociologist Loïc Wacquant (2013) identified three strategies for dealing with undesirable conduct. The first consists of the socialization of vulnerable individuals. The second and third strategies are of particular interest: medicalization and penalization. The following extended quotation is reproduced because it accurately captures the argument of the author:

"The second strategy is medicalization; that is, the assumption that a person lives on the streets because they suffer from alcohol dependence, drug addiction, or mental health problems. A medical remedy is, therefore, sought for what is hastily defined as an individual pathology to be treated by healthcare professionals. (2013, p. 20)

The third strategy adopted by the State is penalization. In this context, the objective is neither to understand a situation of individual distress nor to confront the social mechanisms that produce it. The urban nomad is labeled a delinquent (through, for example, municipal ordinances criminalizing begging or lying on sidewalks) and treated accordingly; the individual ceases to belong to the category of the 'homeless' once placed behind bars." (2013, p. 20)

The strategies described by Wacquant (2013) are part of a broader and systematic effort to render undesirable populations invisible, including homeless individuals and those incarcerated, regardless of the circumstances leading to their imprisonment. Since a "final solution" is neither possible nor acceptable, neoliberal policy seeks instead to make the social neutralization of these individuals economically functional. Urbanization provides the key to this process, as it simultaneously concentrates surplus populations and transforms social residues into market opportunities through the privatization of services.

What is ultimately at stake, as a troubling historical tendency, is the consolidation of what Wacquant (2001, 2013) and Dardot and Laval (2016) described as an entrepreneurial government, which renders marginality functional through criminalization. Embedded within this framework of social intervention is the assumption that social residues have individually refused work and failed to seize the abundant opportunities supposedly offered by a competitive society. The discussion concerns, therefore, the surplus of the surplus.

From the neoliberal State perspective, this strategy is presented as emancipatory. Having relinquished its responsibilities for social assistance, considered costly and inefficient by the advocates of fiscal austerity, while still needing to address the inconvenience posed by the visibility of these populations, the State increasingly relies on privatization to control, discipline, and conceal social residues. Neoliberal logic, borrowing imagery from Mike Davis (2006), resembles a combination of Baron Haussmann, Rudolph Giuliani, and the decaying rentier bourgeoisie of the city of São Paulo, which regards with contempt the activism of Father Júlio Lancellotti on behalf of the destitute occupying the center of the largest city in Latin America. The underlying transformation is a reconfiguration of social policy that, as Lazzarato (2015) warned, converts public services into corporate services, guaranteeing profitability and financial returns.

However, what is the numerical dimension of social residues capable of making them functional to the market?

The combined total of the homeless and incarcerated population reached approximately 1.36 million individuals. Within this zone of extreme disaffiliation, prospects for social integration through the traditional social policy mechanisms are minimal. Following the North American paradigm, the prevailing tendency is to transform this complex social problem into a business opportunity for the private sector. The privatization of prison systems and social assistance services has begun to expand through multiple institutional arrangements. Freire and Wolff (2024), referring to Decree No. 11,498 (Brazil, 2023), highlight a series of incentives, including financing through the Brazilian Development Bank, designed to facilitate the privatization of public services that were once State monopolies. Referring specifically to the security sector, the authors argued:

"The ongoing privatization process consolidates the relationship between the Brazilian punitive apparatus and the 'prison-industrial complex', while reinforcing the objective of generating profits for private enterprise. It adds another layer to the well-established process of criminalizing poverty, with its intersections of race, class, and gender. To sustain this relationship, we continue to ignore the problems already documented in existing experiences, the higher cost per incarcerated individual, and the irregularities involving the company that won the concession."

The synthesis, however uncomfortable, rests on the premise that incarcerated individuals, while under State custody, have become priced commodities. This suggests, to use Wacquant's (2008) expression, that the prevailing tendency is toward consolidating a prison-industrial complex, requiring the construction of prison facilities and the transfer of public resources to private corporations through the pricing of incarcerated bodies. In Brazil and the United States, this pricing has a distinct class and racial dimensions.

The paradigm is similar for the homeless population, which constitutes, so to speak, a guaranteed, renewable, and continuously expanding reserve for institutionalization in, for example, therapeutic communities. Data from the 2022 Demographic Census (Brazil, 2024) identified 160,784 individuals residing in nursing homes, 24,287 in psychiatric institutions, and 11,295 in shelters for the homeless population. The administrative status of these institutions is unknown. What is evident, however, is that

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the State no longer holds a monopoly over social assistance. Civil Society Organizations, regulated under Law No. 13,204 of December 14 (Brazil, 2015), which establishes the legal framework governing partnerships between public administration and civil society organizations across several sectors, including services for populations at risk and socially vulnerable, have become increasingly prominent. This new frontier of private social intervention combines initiatives linked to religious organizations with diverse forms of public financing that have expanded substantially in recent years. Despite the legitimate achievements of the anti-asylum movement, what appears to be reemerging, without undue exaggeration, is the enduring observation of Lima Barreto that "the asylum is a prison like any other" (Barreto, 2017, p. 234).

CONCLUSION

An essay neither emerges, nor should emerge, solely from metaphysical insights unsupported by the material conditions that justify inquiry into a particular subject. This essay, which may be regarded as pessimistic because it seeks to describe and relate emerging tendencies in the neoliberal management of the social question, follows the opposite path. Broadly, the history of capitalism reflects the progressive socialization of risks. One may argue that the history of risks, produced within specific places and historical periods, became virtually unified with the advent of the neoliberal paradigm. The State, which once socialized particular risks, now individualizes them. Within this process, the history of the most vulnerable has likewise become unified under the driving force of fiscal austerity. In summary:

1) What has been described is not unprecedented, since similar phenomena occur, albeit with varying intensity, in other countries. It is a mass phenomenon arising from the global expansion of neoliberalism.

2) What has been described is the product of history and, in the particular case of Brazil, of the persistent refusal to undertake urban and agrarian land reform. Therefore, it is a phenomenon marked by unmistakable class and racial divisions.

3) What has been described results from a political strategy aimed at rendering individuals invisible through the control of their time and bodies. The substantial transfer of public resources to private interests can be justified only in this way.

The interpretation of Michel Foucault (in "The Order of Things") of the painting "Las Meninas" of Diego Velázquez is well known. The central question concerns identifying, imagining, and deciphering, while observing the painting, who is the subject, and who is the object of the social scene. The spectator, while looking, also appears to be observed. The same sensation arises when walking through the deteriorated urban centers of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, or even Los Angeles, weaving among people begging or experiencing homelessness. This visual metaphor invites the question posed by Foucault: "are we seeing or being seen?" Refusing to acknowledge the present or indulging in the illusion of being protected from this reality will not alter the fact that our bodies, and the bodies of our children and grandchildren, may soon occupy the luminous canvas of austerity.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

Not applicable.

NOTES

1 - The Organic Law on Social Assistance, Law No. 8,742 of December 7, 1993, did not include the homeless population among its primary concerns. In 2005, the law was amended by Law No. 11,258 (Brazil, 2005), which established the following provision: "Art. 23. Sole paragraph. In the organization

of Social Assistance services, support programs shall be created: I – for children and adolescents in situations of personal and social risk, in compliance with Article 227 of the Federal Constitution and Law No. 8,069 of July 13, 1990; II – for persons experiencing homelessness." (NR).

2 - The Specialized Reference Center for the Homeless Population (Centro Pop) is a public institution within the Medium-Complexity Special Social Protection network and plays a central role in achieving the objectives of the National Policy for the Homeless Population. The activities developed by Centro Pop and by the Specialized Service for Homeless Individuals are intended to be integrated with other social assistance initiatives, agencies responsible for the protection of rights, and additional public policies (including healthcare, education, social security, employment, income, housing, culture, sports, leisure, and food and nutritional security) to establish a coordinated set of public actions aimed at promoting rights, strengthening the autonomy and capacities of this population, and supporting the construction of new life trajectories (Brazil-MDS, 2011, p. 10).

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