

Considerations on the Crisis and Social Responsibility in Brazilian Universities and the Political and Social Situation Science

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Received: 30 Nov 2021,

Received in revised form: 14 Jan 2022,

Accepted: 22 Jan 2022,

Available online: 31 Jan 2022

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Keywords— *University crises, Social Responsibility of the University. Government Funding, Public Educational Policies.*

Abstract— *The article deals with the complex relationship between the State and the University, commenting on the crises related to hegemony, legitimacy and institutional issues. The study in question highlights the most intricate of these crises characterized as institutional, which foreshadows the transformation of the university as an autonomous institution into a university-organization directly linked to the interests of the state since this sets and determines the main contexts of the institutional crisis present in the university of contemporary Brazil. Regarding its methodological outline, the article is characterised as a bibliographical review through a scientific investigation of already published works. It discusses the socio-historical transformations that nowadays can be designated as fruits of globalisation and that have been implicated in the complex transformations that have occurred in higher education. The article concludes by pointing out the need to retake the social, political and cultural meaning of the university by developing knowledge, professional formation and extension activities. It points out the need for a profound revision of the role of the State in relation to education in general, the university in particular and Brazilian society.*

I. INTRODUCTION

There is an expectation on the part of society that the university is a producer of knowledge and a constant trainer of professional staff who act effectively in the demands arising from the social context. However, this requirement with attributes focused on the social responsibility of the university is situated in a complex political and social context.

In this sense, the question is: What is the role of the university in the current context in relation to society's

demands regarding the academy's social responsibility and the actors involved in it in the current social situation?

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In the Brazilian conjuncture, structural transformations should have promptly entailed an agenda encompassing: the revision of the public debt and the tax system; the change of the tax structure, making it progressive, based on wealth rather than on labour income; agrarian reform, accompanied by the financing of small producers and cooperatives; the resumption of industrialisation, in order to improve the economic fabric of the country and reverse its reprimarisation and what some call the "commodities consensus"; the breaking of the communication oligopoly that compromises social discernment and support for the elevation of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) to a more advanced stage than that of a mere common market (Sader, 2016).

The defence of the principles of university autonomy and the null association between pedagogical research and extension are linked to a triangle of contradictory imperative interests. In this sense, understanding that reforms generate the whole political-economic and social movement means placing them in the context in which they were produced. And being so, public education policies, namely for higher education, are placed in the State reform and productive restructuring, which increased in the 1990s. This occurs due to a period of crisis of capitalism that in order to remain hegemonic needed to create overcoming tactics. It is alleged that the crisis would be the result of the inefficiency of the National State in the management of its actions, as it is essential to establish limitations of its interventionist activities in the economy, promote privatization and profitability of its companies, constituting the "neoliberalism" in this scenario.

Neoliberalism is a set of ideas in which the elimination of barriers between markets is exalted, subjecting the economy and social rights to its laws. This requires the creation of strategies that reinforce the free market, such as globalisation, productive restructuring and the third way. These strategies, derived from the globalisation of capital, are materialised by intensifying economic adjustment in all domains and are consolidated in the reduction of public expenditure on social policies. Education is one of the social policies, and it is essential to give it new contours in order to adapt it to the productive sector. This announces a series of measures guided by the principles governing the new configuration of capital.

It is worth emphasising that it is in the restructuring of capital that the crisis of the University is accentuated and, in a contradictory way, the demand to relate its activities to social responsibility. It is in this scenario of crisis and reforms that the training of specific categories of

professionals materialises. Thus, this study has chosen to focus on the analysis of the social responsibility of the University with its social body and society in this complex context.

Thus, one can reflect on how the crises of the university are materialized and especially the crisis of training, here namely teacher training. The examination of the current situation of Brazilian higher education and the teaching work developed constitutes an undeniable challenge. Firstly, Brazilian higher education is quite diversified. This differentiation is not a domestic brand, because the university system, at the international level, has also been undergoing transformations towards a post-secondary system widely diversified, with multiplicity of institutional arrangements, strongly encouraged by international organizations (Mancebo, 2015).

It should be remembered that from the mid-twentieth century, the author Boaventura de Sousa Santos identified in his studies three crises in which the university found itself: the crisis of hegemony, the crisis of legitimacy and the institutional crisis. These crises, in the long and medium term, condition the precariousness of the public university. After ten years, the same author, in 2004, makes an assessment of how these crises were incorporated by the university and points out perspectives, which he called counter-hegemonic globalization, as a response to political and economic determinism. Understanding this panorama requires the characterization of the three crises, establishing a parallel in relation to training, specifically teacher training and founded the framework for discussion of the problem of the social responsibility of the university.

"The factors of the institutional crisis occur in the period of disorganized capitalism (from the end of the sixties to the present) and derive principally from the crisis of the welfare state and the deceleration of industrial productivity in the central countries. The institutional crisis has appeared with greater acuteness in the last twenty years, in part because it reflects both the crisis of hegemony and the crisis of legitimacy. The basic values at stake in the institutional crisis are university autonomy and the specific organizational character of the university. The crisis of the Welfare State is manifested in the progressive deterioration of social policies, housing policy and health and education policies. The State has been rapidly moving from the condition of producer of goods and services (schools, teaching, companies) to that of

buyer of goods and services produced by the private sector and of regulator and evaluator of services transferred to the private initiative". (Filho,2015)

According to Santos (2010), the crisis of hegemony would be the result of the traditional functions of the university assigned throughout the twenty-first century. Thus, it highlights two movements that are articulated in a contradictory way. The production of high culture and the production of average cultural standards. In relation to the production of culture, the university is delegated in the elaboration of exemplary, scientific and humanistic knowledge allied to critical thinking. Such knowledge derives from the need to train elites, a task that the university has been concerned with since the Middle Ages. Already in correspondence with the production of average cultural standards the focus would flourish instrumental knowledge, useful in the training of skilled labour required by capitalist development. The crisis of legitimacy, according to Santos (2010) is based on the contradiction between hierarchy and democratisation. Hierarchy is linked to expertise through restrictions on access and accreditation of skills. Democratisation responds to the demand for equal opportunities for the children of the popular classes.

Finally, the institutional crisis is configured as the fruit of the contradiction between the demand for autonomy and the submission to criteria already defined. Autonomy is exercised through the definition of values and objectives by the university. However, strong pressure has intensified on values and objectives subject to "criteria of efficiency and productivity of a business nature or social responsibility" (Santos, 2010, p.10).

These analyses carried out that made the author project the path of the University. For Santos (2010) these three crises would be interconnected, and could only be confronted with broad action programs generated inside and outside the university, he predicted that focusing on the institutional crisis would result in the false resolution of the other two crises: "[...] A decision to refuse; the crisis of hegemony, due to the growing negative intellectual characterization of the university; the crisis of legitimacy, the growing segmentation of the university system and the growing devaluation of university degrees, in general" (Santos, 2010, p.15).

The following is a brief analysis of two of these dichotomies, given their greater relevance to the object of this work (Santos, 1995).

As for the dichotomy between high culture and popular culture, the author (Santos, 1995) continues by stating that:

"The high culture-popular culture dichotomy constitutes the central core of the modernist ideology. High culture is a subject culture, while popular culture is an object culture, the object of emerging sciences, ethnology, folklore, cultural anthropology, newly introduced sciences in the university. The crisis of this dichotomy results from the emergence of mass culture after the Second World War. This new culture, aspiring to subject-culture and with a logic of production, distribution and consumption distinct from and more dynamic than that of university high culture, began to question the monopoly hitherto exercised by high culture. Unable to transform this new cultural form into an object-culture, the university ceased to be the central producer of subject-culture and in this respect lost its centrality. Faced with the new challenge, during the 1960s the university tried to confront mass culture with the massification of high culture itself, which led to its increasing democratisation, with the consequent explosion of the university population and the expansion of university teaching and research staff. However, the massification of the university did not attenuate the dichotomy, but only displaced it within the university through the dualism it introduced between elite university and mass university, creating a hierarchy between universities and between these and other non-university institutions of higher education. The production of high culture was left to the elite universities and the distribution of high culture to the mass universities. This new reality of the university provoked another tension -the tension between high culture and mass high culture."

In relation to the dichotomy regarding isolation and engagement as already highlighted by Santos Filho (2013), in discussion about the purposes of the university, from the sixties of the last century the call for the practical engagement of universities in solving practical and concrete problems of contemporary society was justified as part of the "social responsibility of the university". The critical aspect of these purposes, besides denouncing the historical isolation of the university and its non-involvement in the solution of social problems, proposes "the mobilization of its institutional autonomy and its

tradition of critical spirit and free and disinterested discussion in the service of the dominated social groups and their interests" Santos, 1995, p. 178 in Filho (2005;n/p)

After some time, Santos, in making an evaluation of the path of research carried out on the crises of the university, confirmed his projection in the sense of saying that the institutional crisis monopolised the other crises.

The institutional crisis constitutes the weakest link in the public university, since "the scientific and pedagogical autonomy of the university is based on financial dependence on the state" (Santos, 2010, p.15).

Faced with such a finding, there are numerous questions that can be targets of multiple answers, since they focus on the sphere of practice and reduce the historical, political and economic conditions of the educational work and the conditions in which teachers are trained. However, Edgar Morin (2007) highlights the contradiction of the university as a place where this knowledge is created and not used.

"The crisis of the University is not, in synthesis, a circumstantial crisis, a mere problem of lack of means, but a more profound crisis, of objectives and goals. Many of the old ideals whose realization was sought through the University continue to be important, but they must be sought by other means. Some, like the rationalization of society and the homogenization of knowledge, were mistaken utopias that must be abandoned. Finally, it would be necessary to give more strength and relevance to some objectives that the University can try to reach, and that until now have not had the necessary emphasis. It is from this revision of perspectives that a new agenda should arise for the University in our midst (...) the ideal of giving people better opportunities to participate in the economic, social and political life of their country is, in itself, unquestionable". (Schwartzman,2013)

In view of what was exposed in the article and since this is nothing new in our society, it is known that Brazil lives a rare moment in which state higher education is criticized in the name of social justice. The state universities are occupied, free of charge, by the children of the middle and upper classes; the others stay in the private universities. (...) The injustice of the public university does not lie in the fact that only the children of the rich enter it - that is social injustice. The injustice of the university lies in the fact that all those who leave it work only for the

rich, due to the structure, the curriculum and the work methods. To form and be an intellectual elite is not a mistake, it is an obligation. What is wrong is to only serve the economic and social elite. Buarque (1994; p.117).

It is necessary that all segments of society reflect together on the directions that should be followed by the Universities in Brazil with proposals that aim to meet in a significant way all intellectual, professional and market demands without mismatches generated by the political hierarchy that ties the university to political and capital interests for funding and autonomy.

II. METHODOLOGY

This is a literature review article. The bibliographical research is inserted mainly in the academic environment and has the purpose of improvement and updating of knowledge, through a scientific investigation of works already published. For Andrade (2010, p. 25): Bibliographic research is a fundamental skill (...), since it constitutes the first step for all academic activities. A laboratory or field research necessarily implies the preliminary bibliographic research. Seminars, panels, debates, critical summaries, monographs do not dispense bibliographical research. It is mandatory in exploratory research, in the delimitation of the theme of a work or research, in the development of the subject, in the citations, in the presentation of the conclusions.

III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The reflections made so far have allowed us to study an approach related to the ways in which the multiple crises end up also reinforcing a tension that is revealed in university education. This decadence is established by the offensive of a neo-liberal State which, through regulatory measures, determines the activities of the university. It is believed that there is still today in the academy an attempt to redesign the social function of the university, to conceive that today it does not respond to the demands of current society. This fact is revealed in the midst of the reduction of public expenditure on public universities and the insignificant expansion of educational establishments whose focus is simply to offer a precarious and mostly technical and utilitarian education.

The search for a paradigmatic change with a solid education that addresses issues of human and social construction is replaced by the offer of a diploma or certificate. In this way, education as a public good becomes commercialised as a simple commodity, a strategy for many for social ascension. It must be emphasized that understanding these questions only as a

political-economic determinism can lead to the distancing of any educational process that advocates an emancipatory formation. By making the contradictions explicit, we profess here the pressing need to respond more consistently to the hegemonic project of capital. To retake the social, political and cultural meaning of the university is to develop activities of knowledge, professional formation and extension, linked to truth, to criticism, to ethics and, especially, to resistance.

This current decadence is established by the offensive of a neo-liberal state which, through regulatory measures, determines the activities of the university, which ends up being immobilised in the face of the interests of the political leaderships in power. The neglect revealed by the reduction of public spending on public universities and the "plastered" expansion of educational establishments is perceptible. In this way, education as a public good becomes commercialised as merchandise. To take back the social, political and cultural meaning of the university is to develop knowledge, professional training and extension activities, linked to truth, criticism, ethics and especially resistance.

IV. CONCLUSION

The relationship between the State and the educational system is complex and polarised. On the one hand, we have a bureaucratized and rigid system, and on the other, a predominance of private educational institutions, which excel in low quality and high costs for their demand. It is evident for all of society that public university education cannot afford not to be financed and supported by the State. In this sense, to find a way out of this labyrinth it is essential to find strategies to abolish the State's authority over educational institutions.

The important thing in formulating a new agenda to address this situation is not the validity of this or that isolated attitude, but the probability of reflecting in a comprehensive, problematized and plural way. In this way, it is imperative to review public educational policies in a neutral way, establishing new formative practices, committed to improving the level of training and increasing human potential, taking into account issues such as citizenship and social justice.

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