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From university to commodity: or how and when, if education/formation is sacrificed on the altar of the market, the future of the university would be somewhere in the past

Da universidade à commodity: ou de como e quando, se a educação/formação é sacrificada no altar do mercado, o futuro da universidade se situaria em algum lugar do passado

De la universidad a la *commodity*: o de cómo y cuándo, si la educación/formación es sacrificada en el altar del mercado, el futuro de la universidad se situaría en algún lugar del pasado

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BIANCHETTI, Lucídio; SGUISSARDI, Valdemar. **Da universidade à commodity**: ou de como e quando, se a educação/formação é sacrificada no altar do mercado, o futuro da universidade se situaria em algum lugar do passado. Campinas, SP: Mercado das Letras, 2017. ISBN 978-85-759495-3. 14 x 21 cm.

Reflecting on the University, historically conceived as a *locus* of Higher Education, concerns all who live in its orbit - students, teachers, technicians - as well as those who see it as an important institution that produces scientific knowledge and integral human formation. For this reason, it was, over time, as a synthesis of the social relations in which it was inserted. In the 21st century, economic, political and cultural hegemony over this level of education are disputed, bourgeois social interests pervade the educational projects carried out in Higher Education Institutions (IES), coherently aligned with the current stage of capitalist development: the financial one. The discussions put forward for debate in the work object of this review - From university to commodity: or how and when, if education/formation is sacrificed on the altar of the market, the future of the university would lie somewhere in the past - authored by Lucídio Bianchetti and Valdemar Sguissardi situate the reader on the project of bourgeois class that dominates it, materialized in the mercantile forms that reach it.

In Chapter I, **University, tutelage and educational policies: from medieval to modern institution. Some antecedents of the present situation**, the authors aim to demonstrate how the University - previously privileged *locus* of the higher education - acquires different functions, depending on the specific interests that it attends. In each historical period the organization indicates how its proclaimed goals are intrinsically linked to its mentors. In the Middle Ages, the creation of the University by the Catholic Church contributed to the perpetuation of Christian hegemony, as well as "[...] to strengthen and protect the faith against heresies" (p.18). The initiatives of higher education were punctual and oriented to restricted portions of the population, focusing their action on what we currently characterize as teaching. With the reformist and counter reformist movements of the sixteenth century, the University acquired new tutors - Catholics, Protestants, aristocrats - but maintaining its line of action. In the nineteenth century, it was identified with the ideals of the French Revolution (1789). The "social question" emerged and, from the point of view of the authors, new advisers, the bourgeoisie and the State, were formed. Its attributions timidly point to teaching, research and extension, and to enlightenment ideas of universality, publicity, gratuity and secularity. In view of the interests of the new mode of social production - capitalism - the training of specialists carried out by it follows the logic of the technical and social division of labor. In this context of modernity, the authors begin the discussion about the current 21st century University, problematizing the flexible character of the "educational ideal" (p.28) and delimiting its new tutorship: the market; in fact, it is the tutelage of Capital. A set of instances and juridical forms compose the University (public and private), emphasizing what would have influenced its metamorphosis, subsuming its universalist form to the current notion of "Higher Education", perceived as "social organization", better known by its corporate units, led by national and/or transnational groups of companies that "dedicate themselves to offering education, seeking to profit from education as a commodity" (p. 30).

In Chapter II, **Brazil: from higher education institutions guided through fundamental experiences to regulation**, the authors briefly put the reader on the historical course of higher education in the country, from the arrival of the Portuguese Court in 1808 to the rise, in the 21st century, from this level of education to the Stock Exchange. They discuss, with pertinence, how the initial Brazilian experience of higher education denied the ethos of the "University", instituting a model of training carried out through "isolated faculties" (neo-Napoleonic model) - Law, Medicine, Engineering, mainly. Until 1920, the year of consolidation of what became the first Brazilian university (now UFRJ), the tutelage of higher education belonged to the State and to the dominant groups that used it to ensure its hegemony - forming the cadres of rulers and administrators - neglecting general human training, as well as teacher training. They problematize the implementation of three public universities, in the 1930s and 1960s, which embodied the desire for a neo-Humboldtian model of higher education (teaching and research), contrary to the rule of the neo-Napoleonic model (vocational teaching), characterized by courses practical knowledge, immediate and practical. The mentors of the Universities of São Paulo (USP, 1934), the Federal District (UDF, 1935) and Brasília (UnB, 1962), Fernando de Azevedo, Anísio Teixeira and Anísio Teixeira and Darcy Ribeiro respectively, intended to "original of *universitas*" (p.43). It is interesting to observe how the authors of the book related important educational documents of the time with the creation of these universities, such as the *1926 Public Education Survey in the state of São Paulo*, the *1932 New Education Pioneers Manifesto*, and the *Guidelines and Bases of National Education*, 1961.

For the reader interested in the teaching theme, they point out that these institutions were concerned with the formation of teachers and sought to implement institutes and colleges of education, species of "agglutinative institutions within these universities" (page 60). The authors also set out the political and cultural strategy for the creation of master's and doctoral courses as fundamental elements for "renewing, rebuilding, transforming university" (p. 61) through fourth level teaching. They mention the creation in 1951 of the Coordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) and *Opinion No. 977* of 1965, of the Federal Council of Education (CFE), essential for understanding the historical process of university education in the country. In discussing *Opinion 977/65*, they synthesize the creation of the Brazilian post-graduation, emphasizing that the master's courses aimed to train teachers and those of doctoral researchers. Still in this section, the authors contribute to the thinking of US imperialism and its materialization through education, through the debate on the models that gave base to both the name and the Brazilian postgraduate system. In addition, they add to the discussions the institution of a formation beyond the *stricto sensu* formation, the modality *lato-sensu*, the specializations.

In the last chapter, **On "commoditycity"**, they discuss the essence of the book: how HEIs, in these days, are regulated by market laws, moving away from the *universitas* ideal. They discuss its expansion through commercial privatization, as well as the increase in the number of enrollments in this type of institution, characterizing a new student profile: the student-client. Market action, regulating both the form and content of higher education,

signals the authors, is a "trend that is already hegemonic" (page 78) and summarizes the university's commodity process or its commodification or commercialization. In this process, education is conceived as a means of maximizing profits and, therefore, becomes marketable commodity in the "altar of the market" or the Stock Exchange. The student is the client who purchases a pragmatic and utilitarian teaching and the teacher is reduced to the figure of tutor, responsible for delivering the professional to the market.

They demonstrate the seriousness of the situation when addressing the case of the State Association of State Foundations (ACAFE), or ACADEMIC System, which for a long time was hegemonic in relation to private higher education in the state, disputing space only with public universities, the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) and the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC), a minority in terms of enrollment, although the state also has the newly created Federal University of the Southern Frontier (UFFS). The exhibition demonstrates how the advance of the private-commercial system on higher education confronts not only the public HEIs but also the public institutions of private law of the ACADEMIC System. Such HEIs would be "concerned with getting clients for their commodity education" (p. 84), for they would take education as a service. Graphs and tables show the evolution of enrollments in higher education, highlighting the confrontation between private, private and public law institutions, as well as, mark the exponential commercial advance in the years 2007-2008.

Here, the authors problematize the state's lack of responsibility for higher education, with the consequent subordination of the "university" to itself, demonstrating to the reader that the case of Santa Catarina merely exemplifies the privatization process underway at the national level. For both, the State does not have the tutelage of higher education, which would make it an Educator State, becoming, at the present time, an Evaluating State, responsible for ranking HEIs, among them those that sell higher education. By theming the transformation of teaching into goods – commodity -, materialized in the expansion of private-commercial education, they discuss the monopolized forms of their supply. The opening of the capital of educational companies on the BM&F Bovespa¹ stock exchange allowed shares to be traded by different investors, causing the formation of monopolies in the sector through the acquisition, merger or incorporation of educational companies. It is clear to the reader the linguistic exercise done with the word commodity, from which commoditycity derived, and its intention to describe the process of transformation of the classical conception of University into an institution that produces commodities to be traded in the financial stock market, but not only, whose educational purpose becomes the "trading session".

"Commoditycity", for them, would be part of a broader process of "transnationalization" in which investment funds in higher education follow the logic of the financial sector, "nowadays hegemonic in the national and international economy" (p. 96). As an example, they present shocking data about the merger or incorporation of important companies in the education sector - called companies -, exposing the process of expansion and commercialization of higher education via the financial market. The 12 largest companies cited, in order of representativeness, are: Kroton; Anhanguera; Estacio; Unip; Laureate;

Uninove; Unicsul; Anima; Be Educational; Whitney; Devry and Tiradentes. In 2013 and 2014, the first two consolidated a merger that resulted in the "largest educational group in the world, with around one million student-clients" (p. 98), and a potent oligopoly that resulted in the concentration of enrollments, leading to, in 2013 this group of 12 companies would hold about 40% of the sub-sector - or 2,140 million of the 5,448 million enrollments in higher education. They finalize their contribution by showing the role of the Evaluating or Regulating State, particularly *Bill No. 4,372*, of 2012, whose objective is the creation of the National Institute of Supervision and Evaluation of Higher Education (INSAES), "a kind of 'superagency' of regulation" (p. 103) in the service of Capital, an important tutor in presence. For them, it is necessary to regulate to rank and the most interested ones in these results are the entrepreneurs of the educational branch, that can handle the results at their convenience. The institutionalization of the evaluation concerned departs from the formative nature of the proposal of *universitas* to serve the mercantile interests and their game of buy and sell in the stock market. In this "altar", the yearnings of a public university, free and of quality, are sacrificed.

According to the main title of the work - From the university to the *commoditycity* -, the authors recover elements of history to discuss the privileged *locus* of higher education in the 21st century, Higher Education, and how the University, now secondary, lies in this path of conflicts between mentors within the class struggle that marks the capitalist society. In this process, they highlight the emergence of the phenomenon of financialization in this level of education, opening, along with few other researchers, a new field of studies. In addition to a historical periodization about higher education and the way it should be privileged - the University - Bianchetti and Sguissardi provide the reader with an accessible but no less complex language, a current and necessary debate: the tutelage of the Capital on the formation of the intellectual, the researcher, the teacher and, consequently, the worker in Brazil.

Reference

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