

UNIVERSITY AND KNOWLEDGE

UNIVERSIDADE E CONHECIMENTO

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1. The public university is the natural environment of scientific research in Brazil. The national scientific production rates not only prove that fact convincingly but do also attest to the quality of the education offered by our institution, as reported in a recent and widely publicized document by Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) on the performance and trends of research in Brazil⁽¹⁾. Despite this clear, quantitative and qualitative data, the public university is currently under constant threat and suspicion, as if we were inept as academics, ineffective as managers, and irresponsible as public servants. Consequently, it seems that the sacredness of this space of knowledge and education, i.e., its aura itself, has been broken, and it is up to us to ask (1) what is the nature of such threat, and (2) what path are we to follow at this moment?

2. The threat is both internal and external, resulting, in both cases, from a deep misunderstanding of the very value of the university, as a tangible reality, and a timeless project, to which society, in its aspirations to development and freedom, can never resign.

The threat is external in different aspects. In this case, the recently orchestrated press action seems to be a mere symptom of regression concerning the value granted both to public higher education, and to the meaning of its expansion. Indeed, the press does not seem to have any obligation with the future or with the past of expansion of the system, disrespecting in addition its specific characteristics. For this reason, it places the institution within a mere line of continuity with the public administration, on the one hand, and with the private educational institutions, on the other. Accordingly, the logics of management of supermarkets or other sectors are demanded from an institution that, by constitutional definition, is admittedly autonomous, or in other words, has the right and the obligation to publicly determine and justify its choices, according to its activities aimed at promoting learning, research, and extension.

However, the speed in issuing more and more certificates cannot be the measure of the public university institution, which cannot be evaluated as an undesirable cost, when in fact it is a continuous investment. By the same token, understood as a system and as a complex and integrated way of life, the university is not an indifferent component to the very constitution of the conditions through which the academic merit can be produced. Thus, everything that aims at reducing inequalities, such as the application of student assistance resources, is an essential part of the investment in merit, for the

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institution is part of a conscious education project based on citizenship, for which the mere reproduction of privileges achieved outside and before its own space does not suffice.

The university is not made of individuals deprived of context, and measured solely by a highly abstract pattern, towards which it would have no responsibility. Much on the contrary, the public university distinguishes itself for exercising and justifying its autonomy based on results, especially on procedures. Seen in these terms, nothing is more perverse than the progressive contingency of resources, which forces managers to resign either to student assistance or to the qualification of their faculty and technical staff, or either to the maintenance of laboratories or to the investment in infrastructure. And such draw back in funding has multiple facets, when we add restrictions in discretionary resources for university expenses and investments, and restrictive actions by other financial agencies, both federal and state. Thus, we must consider the decrease of resources and the reduction of policies both in the country, and in our state as serious external threats to the future, and to the development project of our society as well as symptoms of a strategic blindness, whether on the part of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), or, in our case, on the part of the Foundation for the Support to Research of the State of Bahia (FAPESB). There are many manifestations of our associations and societies – National Association of Leaders of Federal Institutions of Higher Education in Brazil (ANDIFES), Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), Brazilian Academy of Science, from among – about the contingency of resources for scientific research in the country, e.g., the joint note of these entities published for Brazilian Academy of Science⁽²⁾.

The threat has its own rhetoric, simulating rationality and good sense. Accordingly, it intends to justify itself, sometimes highlighting errors of the system (which must be fixed, without throwing the baby out with the bath water), sometimes showing more sensible and noble causes, but which will soon be harmful in the light of the academy capable of judging their effectiveness. For example, along the present time of attacks on higher education, a narrative is produced, as if it were a truism and therefore a measure of good sense, that the government may or even should desert higher education in the benefit of primary education. An example of this is the threat of extinction of the Institutional Program of Scholarships for Teaching Initiation (Pibid), which is a program especially focused on the training of future primary education teachers during higher education. In this case, if the academy were called upon to give an opinion, in the light of its own competence to analyze public policies related to teaching, the apparent good sense would become paradoxical and outrageous. After all, there can be no investment in primary education that does not go through higher education, through the training of teachers for primary education, and continuous production of new knowledge.

3. We must admit that the threats are not only external. The university can be an environment, like many others, riddled with competition, especially in times of shortages. Only a perverse logic could imagine that pure and simple competition should be more and more stimulated, with the wild notion that competition would bring the best of results, even if it usually unveils the worst of people.

We are not here feeding in an idyllic image. Conflicts and arguments are part of the university life as much as pure and simple argument for resources, status and power. Moreover, in its regularity, the university does not stop reproducing inequalities originated outside its space, being it still natural that, in many situations, it repeats knowledge uncritically. Nevertheless, having served for so long the interests of the elites, it may sometimes forget that the building of new elites may have a much broader function and a higher meaning, coinciding closer with the broader interests of society.

Thus, despite the major difficulties we all face, there is no other public institution that, such as the university, gives such an essential meaning to the practice of creativity, the reduction of inequalities, and the expansion of rights. Therefore, it is not a place of pure and simple competition, because it is, above all, the very place of academic collaboration. In “Thinking and Utopia”⁽³⁾, we develop these considerations more extensively. It is not a mere place of conflict, for it is a space for the practice of argumentation, of scientific demonstration, of proving, of attention towards the other and alike.

More and better than any other public space, the university takes the preeminence of the word over other instruments of power, being a place for confrontation of knowledge and cultures, of practice of a civic and critical spirit, of cultural and scientific vanguard, being moreover a touchstone of our sociability projects. When it is being threatened either internally or externally, we also observe the impairment of an institution that does not bend to political parties, governments or to the market, and these threats give rise to obscurantist results for the production of knowledge, as well as authoritarian effects for our daily life.

4. Once we have in mind both the external threats and the internal tensions, we can directly take up the second question. What to do? How to cope with this difficult time?

Well, currently, our path is, above all, of resistance, whereby we must remind both the State and society of the importance of the commitment to the financing, and the expansion of higher education. Resistance is mainly inscribed in the accomplishment of the best of our efforts. We do resist, persevering in maintaining our own academic nature and our autonomy. We do resist with the teaching of our best lesson, conducting the most rigorous research, the widest extension activity, and the most accurate publications. We do also resist with a greater mobilization of our decision-making forums, our assemblies, and gatherings. And furthermore, we do resist with the non-bureaucratic constitution of our deliberative bodies, which are not mere individual and stagnant departments, and must always be called upon to think about university life, committed to the institution as a whole, in addition to establishing bonds and producing paths.

Thus, we can find or invent the path through which the sacredness of the university space can be restored. Certainly, not by means of a throwback to elitist measures, but by means of the understanding proper of its role as a space for the expanding of rights, of good and effective management of resources, of academic production based on quality, and of a constant practice of universal values of humanity. We must, by this means of producing and forming a socially referenced knowledge, regain the feeling of the University not as a space of privileges, but rather as a privileged place in itself, where vocation and profession converge.

By doing so, we can combine our specific labor with the desire of society transformation, to which we add our own measure of the university condition, which is often ignored even by progressive forces. After all, it is worth reminding ourselves that if another world is possible, if we fight for building another society, no possible world would be worth without a public university of excellence.

5. Thus, we do resist with our carefully produced publications. These general considerations are, therefore, a context for the presentation of this volume 32 of the *Revista Baiana de Enfermagem*. Honored with the invitation, I could not fail to draw up the above considerations on the situation of the public university, and on the scientific production.

The *Revista Baiana de Enfermagem*, like other UFBA publications, represents the best spirit of our daily resistance, also exemplifying the idea that the academic task is productive, without incurring in mere productivism. Our *Revista* (Journal) has the critical brand of a relevant academic production, turned to the interest of society, associated with the strengthening of both the undergraduate and graduate education of the School.

In any space, the production of knowledge is never dissociated from interests⁽⁴⁾. Nevertheless, taking the *Revista* (Journal) as a pretext and example, this is the thesis that, after all, we wanted to defend. In the public university, by serving the constitution of an academic and scientific community, the interest of domination over nature and also over the other should not prevail over the greater interest of emancipation of our society, mainly in the production of knowledge or in the way in which it can be produced.

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