

The academic capitalism and neo-liberal reforms in Brazilian higher education

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Abstract

This article aims to understand the political economy of higher education based on the contextualization and the description of the main government programs developed throughout the Lula and Dilma governments. The academic capitalism category will be explored for an initial analysis of neoliberal reforms in Brazilian higher education. The category seeks to identify the multiple forms and meanings through which market and pro-market behaviors have been adopted by the US universities to create processes of integration to the new economy in search of alternative funding sources. When Brazilian government programs are approached to the perspective of academic capitalism, we identify that the changes imposed by the amendments in legislation contribute to the restructuring of academic practices and create conditions for implementation of the academic capitalist regime. However, the functional-systemic-structural bias of the category and the need to mediate with the 'concrete' imposes limits for the understanding of higher education reforms in the country. Thus, in order to reflect on the implications of neoliberal logic for reforms in dependent countries such as Brazil, it is necessary to resume the thinking of the Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes and submit the dependent pattern category on higher education formulated by him in the 1970s to contemporary historical-concrete mediations to understand how ongoing reforms are related to that pattern.

Keywords: Academic capitalism. Brazilian higher education. Neoliberalism.

Capitalismo acadêmico e reformas neoliberais no ensino superior brasileiro

Resumo

Este artigo tem por objetivo apresentar o exercício de compreensão da economia política do ensino superior a partir da contextualização e descrever os principais programas governamentais desenvolvidos nos governos Lula e Dilma. Exploramos a categoria *capitalismo acadêmico* para um exercício inicial de análise das reformas neoliberais no ensino superior brasileiro. Essa categoria busca identificar as múltiplas formas e significados, por meio das quais comportamentos de mercado e pró-mercado têm sido adotados pelas universidades estadunidenses para criar processos de integração à chamada *nova economia* em busca de fontes alternativas de financiamento. Ao aproximar os programas governamentais brasileiros à ótica do capitalismo acadêmico, identificamos que as mudanças impostas pelas alterações na legislação contribuem para a reestruturação das práticas acadêmicas e criam condições para a implementação do regime acadêmico capitalista. Entretanto, o viés funcionalista-sistêmico-estrutural da categoria e a necessidade de mediação com o concreto impõem limites para o entendimento das reformas no ensino superior do país. Vislumbramos que, para refletir sobre as implicações da lógica neoliberal nas reformas em países dependentes como o Brasil, é necessário retomar o pensamento do sociólogo brasileiro Florestan Fernandes e submeter a categoria padrão dependente de educação superior, formulada por ele na década de 1970, a mediações histórico-concretas coetâneas para compreender como as reformas em curso se relacionam com aquele padrão.

Palavras-chave: Capitalismo acadêmico. Ensino superior no Brasil. Neoliberalismo.

Capitalismo académico y reformas neoliberales en la educación superior brasileña

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar el ejercicio de entender la economía política de la educación superior a partir del contexto y la descripción de los principales programas de gobierno desarrolladas en los gobiernos de Lula y Dilma. Exploramos la categoría *capitalismo académico* para un ejercicio inicial de análisis de las reformas neoliberales en la educación superior brasileña. La categoría tiene como objetivo identificar las múltiples formas y significados, a través del cual el comportamiento del mercado y pro-mercado ha sido adoptado por las universidades estadounidense para crear procesos de integración a la nueva economía en la búsqueda de fuentes alternativas de financiación. Al acercarse a los programas del gobierno brasileño a la perspectiva del capitalismo académico, identificamos que los cambios impuestos por las modificaciones en la ley contribuyen a la reestructuración de la práctica académica y crean las condiciones para la implementación del régimen capitalista académico. Sin embargo, una influencia funcionalista-sistémico-estructural de la categoría y la necesidad de la mediación con el concreto establece límites a la comprensión de las reformas en la educación superior en el país. Vemos que para reflexionar sobre las implicaciones de la lógica neoliberal de las reformas en los países dependientes como Brasil, es necesario retomar el pensamiento del sociólogo brasileño Florestan Fernandes y someter la categoría estándar dependiente de la educación superior a las mediaciones coetâneas histórico-concreto para entender como las reformas en curso pueden contribuir al mantenimiento del estándar.

Palabras clave: Capitalismo Académico. Educación superior en Brasil. Neoliberalismo.

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INTRODUCTION

This article aims to understand the political economy of higher education based on the contextualization and the description of the main government programs developed throughout the Lula and Dilma governments. We recognize the need and relevance of programs aimed to increase access to this education level and the achieved relative quantitative success. However, we consider essential to reflect on the concrete articulations of these initiatives with the entire social context. For this reason, we will contextualize and describe initially the main governmental programs for this area; we will proceed presenting the category of academic capitalism, developed by U.S. authors, analyzing policies and programs developed predominantly in northern countries. We will then approach the Brazilian government programs to the academic capitalism perspective and conclude with reflections on the implications entailed by the neoliberal logic incorporated in decisive programs for social transformation in Brazil.

Such approach in the context of Organizational Studies is not only pertinent, but also a necessary exercise, since it involves us in a metareflective process and challenges us to broaden the understanding of the way in which higher education is organized, directed and who it serves in Brazil.

In the present study, we first present the academic capitalism category, developed from the transformations in higher education systems in the hegemonic countries, to analyze how universities were responding to neoliberal tendencies of dealing higher education as a subset of economic policy (SLAUGHTER and LESLIE, 2001). It is assumed that the neoliberal state reduces the funds introduced directly in universities, leading them to seek alternative sources of funds (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004). This theoretical category is focused on the analysis of practices and university structures that are close to the market, and points out the economic logic as guiding of the academic practices.

The choice of a theoretical category built based on an exogenous context is consistent with the historical formation of higher education in Brazil, which imported education models from other countries (FERNANDES, 1975). Considering that neoliberal policies for higher education are also in force in the country and that, therefore, the conditions for the academic capitalist regime are being implemented, we have challenged this category against the Brazilian specificities for the development of capitalism. To this end, we sought for the concept of dependent capitalism in the sociological conception of Florestan Fernandes (1968; 1975; 2009). When suggesting the validity of Brazilian academic capitalism, Leher (2010) considers and alerts that understanding it through mediation with concrete is necessary. In this respect, we consider that the concrete conditions of Brazil's social formation have specificities and peculiarities that should be observed in the analysis of the transformations in higher education. Florestan Fernandes also linked development-dependent pattern and higher education-dependent pattern¹ (FERNANDES, 1975), which was pointed out by Lima and Pereira (2009) as one of the pillars of higher education in Brazil.

In the next section, we present a brief contextualization followed by the educational policies developed in the Lula and Dilma governments identified as the implementation of neoliberal reforms in higher education.

Neoliberal reforms in Brazilian higher education

Changes in the organization and orientation of higher education in Brazil have produced recently relevant consequences on the work of the different categories and segments that compose this level of education, as is explicitly the case of the so-called

¹Fernandes (1975) originally used the expression dependent pattern of higher education when referring to the implementation characteristics of the first higher education schools and that subsequent reforms were maintained. We have chosen to use the expression dependent pattern of higher education similarly as other authors (LIMA, 2005; 2009; LIMA and PEREIRA, 2009) in order to encompass the current composition of the Brazilian higher education system.

academic productivism², which was largely discussed. Indeed, the “productivist conception of education” had already been present in higher education since the University Reform of 1968, when it was incorporated “to teaching legislation in the military period in the form of the principles of rationality, efficiency and productivity, based on ‘maximum result with the least expenditure’ and ‘no duplication of means for identical ends’” (SAVIANI, 2008, p. 297).

In addition to defining the basic principles for the functioning of university institutions, such as the establishment of a full-time regime and exclusive dedication, career progression linked to qualification and the demand for research activity associated with teaching (CUNHA, 2001), the 1968 Reform guidelines evidenced the pressure exerted by business groups on the goals of higher education in Brazil³.

The organizational scenario, built under the civil-military dictatorship, was changed only after the approval of the new law of directives and bases for national education (LDB) in 1996. The draft law was prepared by the senator Darcy Ribeiro and was supported by Paulo Renato Souza, the Education Minister of the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Since then, numerous amendments have allowed diverse experiences, including new organizational forms and adherence to mechanisms for optimization of existing funds. It is also worth highlighting that the new LDB was implemented simultaneously to the rise and strengthening of neoliberalism in Brazil, contributing to the emergence of new guidelines in the field of organizational management and the provision of public services.

The Master Plan of the Reform of the State Apparatus (PDRAE), proposed by the Minister of State for Administrative Reform, Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira, in 1995, provided for the need to reduce public spending and increase the quality of services and, for this reason, defended a managerial conception in state activities. One of the pillars would be the separation between exclusive and non-exclusive activities of the State including, among the latter, education. The LDB of 1996 and the National Plan for Education (PNE) were added to the PDRAE as important instruments in the new order of higher education in Brazil.

The LDB loosened the concept of university and encouraged differentiation among higher education institutions (LEHER, 2010), admitting universities, university centers, isolated colleges, integrated colleges and higher institutes⁴. The university autonomy was referred as one of the principles of higher education management and allowed the opening of courses without prior authorization from the Federal Government, significantly favoring the growth of private education in the country⁵. Within the context of public universities, autonomy was limited to the authorization, to incentive and then to the need for the search of additional funds through the supply and provision of services to public and private entities. According to Sguissardi (2009), the LDB consisted of the legal platform for higher education reforms recommended by international organizations under the modernization discourse of the country’s higher education system.

²Academic productivism is apparently a “general phenomenon derived from whether or not official processes of regulation and control, supposedly of evaluation, characterized by the excessive valorization of the quantity of scientific-academic production, tending to disregard its quality”; in the Brazilian case, intensified after the implementation of a new model for graduate evaluation by CAPES (SGUISSARDI, 2010, p. 1). However, the analysis of its essence reveals the decisive insertion of the capitalist logic transforming all material and symbolic goods into merchandise. It also expresses and demands the predominance of a technical and pragmatic rationality in the daily work of teachers and universities (MAUÉS, 2011), imposing an analogous rhythm and organization, on one hand, to Taylorism-Fordism, through a social division of academic work into a production line; and, on the other hand, to Toyotism, through the formation of groups or *teams* at various scales (research groups, graduate programs, universities) that, by internalizing control mechanisms, are engaged in competing spaces for the construction of increasingly strict metrics to leverage their competitive potentials. By entangling teachers and students at the hectic pace of socially and economically alienated production, the academic productivism is fueled and subordinated to a “*world system of knowledge production*” in which those figure as workers in a production line (OURIQUES, 2011, p. 103, emphasis added).

³Namely, the Institute of Research and Social Studies (IPES) was created in 1961 by a group of businessmen from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo articulated with multinational entrepreneurs and the Superior School of War to confront the national developmentalism formulated by the Higher Institute for Brazilian Studies (ISEB), created in 1955, which included Alberto Guerreiro Ramos, Alvaro Vieira Pinto, Nelson Werneck Sodré, Hélio Jaguaribe, among others.

⁴According to the Brazilian Education Census of 2012, faculties predominated among the higher education institutions (HEI), with 84.6%, followed by universities (8.0%) and university centers, with 5.8% (BRASIL, 2014).

⁵The privatization scale is emphasized when examining the most recent data on higher education. In 2006, 4.7 million students were enrolled in the undergraduate program, from which 74% were enrolled in private institutions. The private for-profit sector absorbed 41% of enrollments. Federal institutions accounted for 12%, state ones for 10% and municipal ones for 3% of total enrollments. There were 2,270 undergraduate institutions of different sizes and with diverse academic vocations, from which 89% belonged to the private sector. The for-profit sector accounted for 78% of all private institutions” (MARTINS, 2009, p. 27).

The PNE 2001-2010⁶, provided in article 214 of the Federal Constitution and included in the LDB, should be elaborated by the Federal Government together with the States, the Federal District and the Municipalities, presenting the “guidelines and goals for the next ten years, in line with the World Declaration on Education for All” (BRASIL, 1996). Despite the several debates in the National Congress with the participation of parliamentarians and various entities, such as The National Union of Teachers of Higher Education Institutions (ANDES), The National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPED), The National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education, ANDIFES, and others, the Plan was approved in 2001 to be valid until 2010, sanctioned by vetoes presented by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and maintaining predominantly the formulations of the government proposal. Under the 2001-2010 PNE in force, the Lula government not only maintained the proposed guidelines and goals, but also supported programs aimed to increase access to higher education.

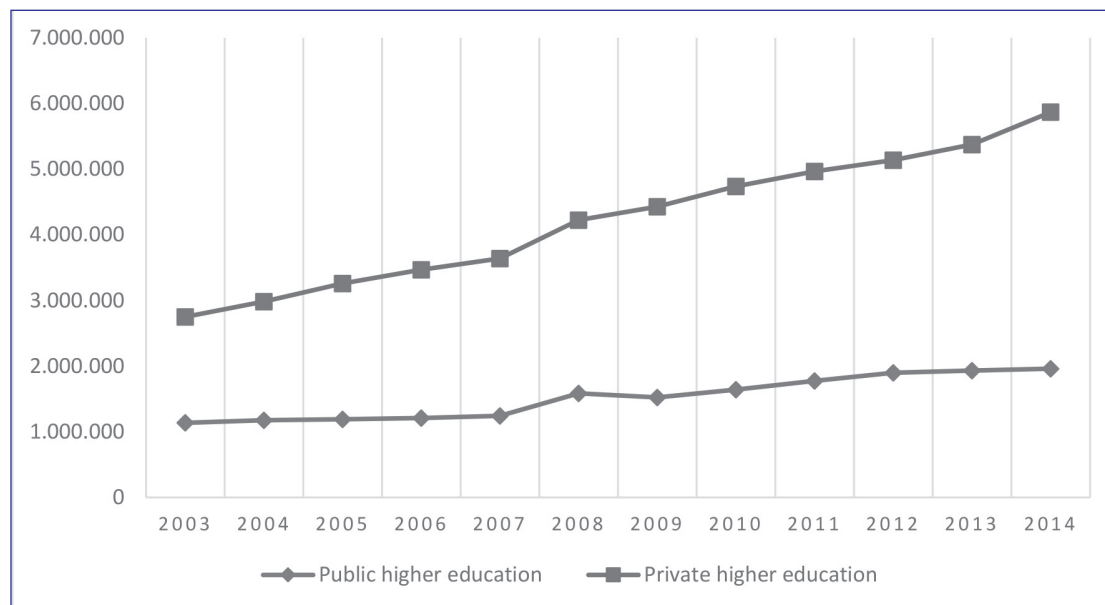
Three of them are listed on the present study: the University for All Program (ProUni); the Student Financing Fund (FIES), both focused on private education; and the Support Program for Restructuring and Expansion of Federal Universities (REUNI), aimed at public universities. Created by Law No. 11,096/2005, ProUni allows the granting of full and partial scholarships in private higher education institutions to Brazilian students who have not yet graduated from this level of education (BRASIL, 2015b) through tax exemptions. Besides the scholarships offered through ProUni, the Federal Government has increased the funds allocated for the FIES in order to finance students enrolled in paid institutions. The REUNI, instituted by Decree No. 6,096/2007, was structured with the objective of expanding the vacancies in public education and occupying the existing physical and personnel structures with greater rationality. The program was based on the discourse of education as a public good (UNESCO, 1998) and based on the premise that federal universities are strategic for economic and social development (BRASIL, 2008). Another argument used to increase access in public universities was the history of social exclusion in higher education along the country. The Program has expanded the number of federal universities from 45 in 2003 to 63 in 2014, expanded the coverage of the counties served by federal universities from 114 in 2003 to 237 by the end of 2011 (BRASIL, 2015b). The number of enrollments from 2003 to 2014 in onsite and distance undergraduate and graduate courses from federal universities increased by 72.5% (BRASIL, 2014). However, as warned by Leher (2010), this expansion was not followed proportionally by the increase of budgetary funds.

These three programs significantly contributed to expanding access to higher education. In 2002, only 9.8% of students aged between the 18 and 24 years were enrolled or had completed higher education; in 2012, the percentage of enrolled students increased to 15.1% (BRASIL, 2014). Nevertheless, enrollments in public higher education represent only 25.1% of the total (BRASIL, 2015a), despite the 30% minimum predicted in the PNE 2001-2010. When considering the numbers of educational establishments in the country, the private sector represents 87.4% of HEIs, and only 12.6% are universities (BRASIL, 2014). The increased access occurred actually; however, it contributed significantly to the expansion of supply in private institutions, as shown in Figure 1.

⁶The privatization scale is emphasized when examining the most recent data on higher education. In 2006, 4.7 million students were enrolled in the undergraduate program, from which 74% were enrolled in private institutions. The private for-profit sector absorbed 41% of enrollments. Federal institutions accounted for 12%, state ones for 10% and municipal ones for 3% of total enrollments. There were 2,270 undergraduate institutions of different sizes and with diverse academic vocations, from which 89% belonged to the private sector. The for-profit sector accounted for 78% of all private institutions” (MARTINS, 2009, p. 27).

Figure 1

Growth of enrollments by administrative nature



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The expansion of private education may seem as paradoxical to public higher education policies in Brazil due to the rhetoric of the access democratization and valorization of public education. Throughout the 2002 election campaign, the Letter to the Brazilian People, released by candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, affirmed that

education and health remain as huge challenges for Brazil. My government is committed to invest heavily in these areas. Without neglecting the complementary role of private initiative, I state here my fundamental commitment to public health and the public education, from pre-school to university (SILVA, 2002, p. 6).

The claim have been fulfilled apparently by its inverse, i.e., the public school, more particularly the public university, seems to play currently a complementary role to private institutions. Not only by the number of enrollments in this sector but also by the volume of funds provided to the public financing for the private system, through FIES, ProUni or even in assistance to Pronatec, managed by the S System⁷. The REUNI, which hardly conceals the much dreamed management contract of the PDRAE, has deepened the precariousness of working conditions and the physical structures in the universities, besides stimulating the creation of new universities in a fragmented way from an organizational and pedagogical point of view, such as the multi-campus model and the intensive training at the technological level, similarly as in the Federal Institutes.

The privatizing and commercial bias decisively reached the production of knowledge in the University with the promulgation of the so-called new Framework of Science and Technology. Law 13,243/2016 inaugurates a new phase for research and technological innovation in Brazil, since it amends other nine federal laws in order to facilitate the interaction between the Institutes of Science, Technology and Innovation (ICTs) and companies in projects of innovation. It is known that the vast majority of ICTs are public universities, since they concentrate most research activities of the country. The new framework

⁷S System corresponds to the set of organizations of the corporate entities focused on professional training, social assistance, consulting, research and technical assistance, such as: the National Service of Industrial Learning (SENAI); Social Service of Commerce (SESC); the Social Service of Industry (SESI); and the National Business Apprenticeship Service (SENAC), the National Rural Apprenticeship Service (SENAR); the National Cooperativism Learning Service (SESCOOP); and the Social Transportation Service (SEST) (BRASIL, 2018).

seeks to reduce the procedural steps and streamline public-private relations within the research scope. Moreover, it provides facilities, equipment and personnel (characterized as intellectual capital) to the business sector; allows the minority holding of public ICTs in the social capital of companies with interests in innovation projects and guarantees intellectual property to companies, except in cases where the public authority, in advance, conditions its corporate share to the forecast of intellectual property licensing for meeting the public interest.

It is feasible to assume that this Law in universities will require flexibility in teaching activities, including the distribution of the workload of those involved in projects. To attract partners, the commercialization of innovations generated in universities together with private partners or not and complementary salary of researchers through paid research activities will also be simplified and encouraged. In order to streamline procedural steps and fund management, the Law also encourages relations with support foundations. In short, the new framework transforms public universities into production and service organizations, whose sales will bring funds, replacing the reduced budget from government sources and public investments in science and technology. The national and international business competitiveness intended to be promoted will be established between groups and institutions very quickly, with consequences for the national systems of education and scientific and technological research, built almost exclusively with public funds throughout more than 50 years.

We call this set of programs and actions as neoliberal reforms in Brazilian higher education, since they constitute ways of adjusting to phenomena typical of the current phase of capitalism (LEHER, 2004). As we can see, both the programs and the promulgation of the new ICT framework fulfill the role of making room for private capital in new areas of exploration. Through the increasing lack of accountability of the State and the maintenance of the public system of higher education (SGUISSARDI, 2009), the mechanisms to attend a renewed neoliberalism or, as indicated by Puello-Socarrás (2008), to the new neoliberalism are adjusted.

Subsequently, the category of academic capitalism will be explored for an initial exercise in understanding what we have contextualized so far.

Academic capitalism and neoliberal reforms

The formulators of the academic capitalism category (HACKERT, 1990; SLAUGHTER and LESLIE, 1999; SLAUGHTER and LESLIE, 2001; SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004) have assumed that the reduction of funds from the neoliberal state has led public institutions to seek alternative sources for supplying their financial demands (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004). Such need, considered by Slaughter and Leslie (1999) as an influence from external environment into the organizations under the traditional functional-systemic-structural approach, redefined the way as universities organized the academic work.

In a first study, the authors examined changes in public universities from four countries - the United States, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. Changes in funding policies have modified the structure in all of them, directing more strongly to research activities as a strategy for obtaining funds through the provision of services to governments and the private sector. They also observed that national higher education policies were directed towards the creation of national wealth, prioritizing academic work in technological areas, creating new fields of knowledge that reshaped undergraduate education. The most significant changes reached the field of research; in three countries (Australia, Canada and the United States), fundamental and basic research lost ground to applied research under the argument of national wealth creation (SLAUGHTER and LESLIE, 1999), i.e., the production of scientific and technological knowledge was redirected to the research and development sector. This redirection generated growth of technological parks in universities or very close to them often subsidized with governmental funds, besides creating licensing structures that approached universities to corporations, dividing research royalties among the financing state agencies or corporations (SLAUGHTER and LESLIE, 1999). In that study, the authors focused on the university-industry relationship.

In 2004, Slaughter and Rhoades extended the concept of academic capitalism and formulated the Theory of Academic Capitalism (TAC), whose main objective was to explain the integration processes of colleges and universities to the new economy, based on a study of the U.S. higher education system which involved from public and private nonprofit organizations to community colleges. The authors observed that groups of actors - teachers, students, managers, academic professionals - use a variety of state resources to create new knowledge circuits linking higher education institutions to the market; and analyzed their

role in creating discourse and the pro-market behavior in academia. For Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), academic capitalism is characterized by the development of new networks of actors, in which there would be no distinction between public and private. This assumption is based on the transformations that occurred from the so-called new economy.

For the authors, there is a transition in the new economy from a knowledge/learning public good regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning consumption regime (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004). This transition is resulting from a change in the country's economic policy, as well as the action of multiple networks of agents and organizations. "The idea of an academic capitalism knowledge/learning regime captures the many ways and means through which market and marketlike behaviors as well as ethos and market ideology have been incorporated into postsecondary education" (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004).

For Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), the state keeps playing a central role in providing most of the funds that contribute to change the knowledge and learning system. The neoliberal state diminishes the funds introduced directly in public universities, leading institutions to seek alternative sources of funds while providing public funds to private institutions indirectly through student financing.

Such fund-seeking scenario leads to the emergence of new processes to interconnect universities, state and market. New knowledge circuits are created, appearing intermediate organizations and activities that link public, private or non-profit organizations. Universities and/or departments also seek to expand their managerial skills. These changes contribute to the restructuring of work in the universities (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004).

For Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), two federal initiatives in the United States contributed to forming the political foundations for the academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime: the change in federal student financial support policy and competitiveness policies aimed at predominance of the country in the global market. The change included patent, copyright and information technology laws. The authors do not indicate federal policies as the sole drivers of academic capitalism. They observed amendments in state legislations in the United States, as well as a change in the behavior of university managers (rectors) as important drivers in implementing this regime.

The change in federal student financial support policy in the United States consisted of replacing the direct transfer of funds to universities by direct student funding to the student. The higher education funding policy was modified based on lobbying pressure from managers of private institutions (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004). Its main consequence was the commercialization of education as a product, once the universities began to displace students, now seen as consumer and customer.

Changes in patent policies have generated more significant changes in research universities, especially in the fields of science and engineering, with a more diffuse impact in the other fields of academic research (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004). The study noted that this change has altered academic study in the United States, since researchers have begun to invest and to direct their study more strongly to the production of applied research. This change highly increased the number of patents, despite decreasing the number of publications. For Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), this is one of the consequences of encouraging the generation of patents, i.e., the creation of new knowledge circuits. Knowledge ceases to flow primarily in the academic community to be connected to new circuits that apply knowledge directly, especially to the corporate world (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004).

Changes in patent policy and especially the pursuit of the profits generated by them have led U.S. universities to create structures to manage their creation, including a sector responsible for identifying potentially patentable innovations (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004). Universities have also created centers, usually linked to engineering and science, to facilitate cooperation with business enterprises. In this context, they needed to expand their managerial capacity in order to participate in external markets, leading them to hire a higher number of management professionals. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) observed that several universities that adopt the academic capitalist regime create offices for technology transfer, trademark registration, economic development and corporate relations.

Besides the change in patent policy, the copyright policy also reveals traces of academic capitalism. The resources from publications up to the 1980s represented a very limited source of funds for universities, but the development of communication and information technologies, and mainly the distance education, allowed that instructional material became a new source of

funds. Universities began to develop copyright policies and teachers received royalties for the use of developed instructional materials (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004).

Most U.S. universities started to offer courses in this modality, also changing its structure, requiring the hiring of new professionals and provision of physical structure for the development of courses, besides offices for continuing or distance learning. Many universities have developed partnerships and consortia for offering distance learning courses. This modality represents new student markets for universities, increased funds from enrollment, educational product resources, and increased efficiency of educational services (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004).

Another aspect characterizing the academic capitalist regime is the creation of new levels of commodification and consumption within universities, transforming them into brands (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004). Licensing of products with the institution's logo has become a widespread practice among U.S. universities since the 1990s. Additionally, as already evidenced by the study of Slaughter and Leslie (2001), the universities began to dispute the students and compete for their enrollments. To attract consumers, they sell the brand, educational products and services in the "student market". In this market, enrollment counseling organizations are emerged and university rankings become relevant, since they create consumer value for university institutions (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004).

In the academic capitalist knowledge/learning system, the student is not only seen as consumer, but also as product/output of the educational process. Information about the body of students formed by a particular university can even be sold to corporations. There is interest in the market performance of graduates as a guarantee of quality and subsistence of universities; they can represent not only excellence in training but also potential future donors, which are extremely important for the maintenance of U.S. institutions (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004).

In short, the academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime structures new circuits of knowledge; modifies academic work; creates new structures within universities; modifies student-teacher relationships; increases control over the work of teachers and the products of their work; introduces the university into the new economy through university-business partnerships; and increases competitiveness among universities. All these new relationships make education as a product to be consumed like any other (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004). In Box 1 is shown the major changes that have altered practices and structures of U.S. universities.

Box 1

Changes and practices in the academic capitalist regime

Topics	Changes and practices in the academic capitalism
Education financing	The change in federal student financial support policy in the United States consisted of replacing the direct transfer of funds to universities by direct student funding to the student, creating a market for dispute of students and funds, besides a space for the banking sector.
Competitiveness policies	Changes in competitiveness policies to strengthen the country's presence in the global market. They include patent, copyright and information technology laws.
Patent policy	Changes on academic work: researchers began to invest and direct their study to the production of applied research, and universities created centers to facilitate university-business partnerships.
Copyright policy	Changes allowed knowledge being offered for sale as a source of funds for universities.
Distance education	The offering of courses in the distance education increased the funds coming from enrollment and educational products. changed the proportion between costs and number of enrollments, and favored the salary complementation of teachers providing services and producers of didactic material.
Levels of commodification	Commercialization of products carrying the brand of institutions and by the expectation of expansion of graduates' donations.

Source: Slaughter and Leslie (2004).

After presented the main processes and practices that evidence the academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime, it is highlighted that the neoliberal state has played an important role in its promotion through the (de)regulation of higher education (IBARRA COLADO, 2003; SLAUGHTER and LESLIE, 2001; SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004). In this regime, with all its nuances, university autonomy becomes gradually less possible, since there is an increasingly intrinsic relationship with the State and with capital (SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004), deepening its association with the market (SERAFIM, 2011).

Ibarra-Colado (2005) noted the articulation between agency and structure in the understanding of transformations in U.S. higher education in the theory of academic capitalism proposed by Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) and the advent of neoliberal policies in higher education in the interpretation of the specific changes in institutions. For him, the key problem for the implementation of academic capitalism lies in the incorporation of economic logic to the structuring of higher education systems; and this logic transmutes the function and ways of organization of the university in its relationship with the State, the economy and the society.

Academic capitalism in Brazilian higher education: signs of change and limitations to the analysis of the political economy of higher education

Although there are not several studies on the changes in higher education in peripheral countries under the context of academic capitalism (IBARRA-COLADO, 2003; 2005; LEHER, 2010; MARTINS, 2008), we can suggest that there is a possible analogy between that characterization and the guideline of programs and actions that have been developing in Brazil in this field. For Ibarra-Colado (2008), the academic capitalism is undoubtedly becoming a reality in peripheral countries. Leher (2010, p. 45) also identified that “many of the characteristics of academic capitalism can be identified in dependent economies [...]”, despite making a reservation that we will explore later. As an initial exercise of understanding, we illustrated, in Box 2, the reform elements of Brazilian higher education since the emergence of the PDRAE propositions, the LDB regulations and the PNE promulgation, as well as the resulting programs and actions approaching it to the notion of academic capitalism.

Box 2

Signs of changes and practices in the academic capitalism in Brazil

Topics	Signs of changes and practices in the academic capitalism in Brazil
Education financing	The restructuring of the financing of higher education from the creation of programs that direct public funds to private universities, through financial credit to students (FIES) and offering of public vacancies in private institutions through tax exemption (ProUni). In the public universities, the vacancies were expanded based on management contracts established with the MEC (REUNI). These contracts aimed at curricular flexibility in courses, creation of training cycles, extension of distance education and academic mobility (LIMA, 2009).
Competitiveness policies	Regulation of relationships between federal institutions of higher education and scientific and technological research and the support foundations by the Decree No. 7,243/2010. Approval of the Public-Private Partnership Law (Law No. 11,079/2004), regulating public-private partnerships in public administration, with implications in higher education, providing the collection of courses and sale of “educational services” by public HEIs (LIMA and PEREIRA, 2009). New Framework of Science, Technology and Innovation (Law 13,243/2016) established measures to encourage innovation, scientific and technological research in the productive environment.
Patent policy	Approval of the Law of Patents (Law No. 9,279/1996), with the purpose of protecting the rights related to industrial property, considering its social interest and the technological and economic development of the country. It provides the legal protection and commercialization of patents as a source of funds for universities and partner companies.
Copyright policy	Approval of the Copyright Law (Law No. 9,610/1998), which regulated copyright in Brazil with predictions similar to the Patent Law.

Continue

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Distance education	Distance education in Brazil was regulated by Law No. 9,394/1996, by Decree No. 2,494/1998, by Decree No. 2,561/1998 and by Ministerial Ordinance No. 301/1998. Furthermore, in 2006, the Open University of Brazil was created and expanded the offering of courses in the open and distance learning (ODL), becoming a new source of funds and loosening working relationships in federal universities, including the production of didactic material.
Levels of commodification	Up to the present, the universities' brand (logo) commonly used in material marketed by the Student Academic Centers and the organization to obtain donations from graduates are still incipient, however, they are already being highlighted in some units.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The changes in topics, based on legal instruments, contribute to the restructuring of academic practices in Brazilian higher education and create the conditions for implementation of the academic capitalist regime. We called signs of changes and practices because, unlike Slaughter and Leslie (2001) and Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), we have not yet performed empirical research to verify the effective changes in university practices that show us the full validity of academic capitalism in Brazil. However, we have also done because we are attentive not only to the functional-systemic-structural bias of the category and to its threshold imposed for the understanding of what we call the political economy of higher education, but also to the alert made by Leher (2010, p. 45) that although the academic capitalism characteristics in recent reforms are identified, "[...] the transposition of the concept without mediations with the concrete would be a theoretical and methodological mistake."

Thus, the understanding of the changes that have been occurring in the Brazilian university demands that we recognize it as a synthesis of multiple relationships endowed with contradictions, captured in a concrete totality. Understanding reality as a concrete totality means understanding reality as concreteness (KOSIK, 2002). As a methodological principle of the dialectic investigation of social reality, the concrete totality allows us understanding each phenomenon as a moment of the whole.

"A dialectical conception of totality means that the parts not only internally interact and interconnect both among themselves and with the whole, but also that the whole cannot be petrified in an abstraction superior to the facts, because precisely in the interaction of its parts does the whole form itself as a whole" (KOSIK, 2002, p. 50).

Therefore, only from the conception of social reality as concreteness (totality) is possible to eliminate pseudoconcreteness (KOSIK, 2002). This conception of social reality as totality means to conceive reality as a structured, dialectical whole, and that facts or sets of facts can be rationally understood from this whole (KOSIK, 2002).

In this sense, it is necessary to describe not only changes and practices of Brazilian public universities but also to understand them in social totality, analyzing the national and international context to understand their occurrence. Public policies to increase access to higher education are part of a development project and are integral part of the State policy ongoing at this historical moment. Neoliberalism is the particular context of emergencies of policies aimed at the reconfiguration of higher education systems, especially in peripheral countries; thus, it is necessary to deepen the understanding of its advancement to all spheres of social life.

As stated by Harvey (2014, p. 12),

[...] neoliberalism, is in the first instance, a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the State is to create and preserve an institutional framework for such practices [...].

For Puello-Socarrás (2008; 2013), neoliberalism is not restricted to a set of economic (or social) policies, but aims at a broader (class) political project in late capitalism. Public policies would be only concrete expressions of the current actions of neoliberalism in a particular time and space. In addition, neoliberalism is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon involving different types of realities (PUELLO-SOCARRAS, 2013).

Harvey (2010) also stated that neoliberalism had unequal geographical developments in all spheres between 1980 and 2010, despite identifying some similarities between the effects of neoliberal policies on the world stage. For Paula and Lima (2010), the structural adjustment policies directed by the World Bank (WB) from the 1980s facilitated the expansion of the U.S. foreign policy, reinforcing its global hegemonic character. In Latin America, the adjustment measures highly influenced the structural and institutional reform of the State apparatus and the reform of the educational system.

For Sguissardi (2009), the reforms in higher education promoted in Brazil were an attempt to maintain its subaltern condition in the global economy, since they occurred under the guidance of international organizations such as the World Bank, the UNESCO and the World Trade Organization. The World Bank recommended that developing countries should adopt four strategies to achieve efficiency, quality and equity in the reform of higher education in their countries: a) foster the diversification of higher education institutions assuming that the existence of public, private universities and non-university institutions are necessary; b) provide incentives for public institutions to increase their funding source, recommending also the collection of fees in public institutions; c) redefine the role of government in higher education; d) adopt policies that prioritize the quality and equity of higher education (BANCO MUNDIAL, 1994). The UNESCO, despite adopting the rhetoric of higher education as a social public good, a human and universal right and a duty of the State and standing against the privatizing conceptions of higher education of the World Bank, has created guidelines that tend towards its commodification (LIMA, 2011). Finally, since 1998, the World Trade Organization has been disseminating the idea of higher education as a tertiary service, which can be regulated according to the economic logic of free trade, i.e., it is opposed to the concept of education as a public good and as a fundamental human right (BORGES, 2009).

Therefore, and because of our activism practice of retaking the Brazilian social thought in order to qualify the research in our field, we consider as pertinent to seek the dependent pattern category on higher education of Florestan Fernandes (1975). This pattern consists of importing models and conceptions of education, of knowledge developed in other contexts and displaced from actual national needs, without creative and innovative capacity, as well as in the format of a simple work-oriented education system. For him, even under conditions of expanding access to university banks, maintaining those characteristics, cultural heteronomy is either maintained or aggravated (FERNANDES, 1975), since what happens in education is closely linked to the development-dependent pattern. This pattern configures

[...] a specific situation that can only be characterized by a doubly polarized capitalist market economy, which is not self-sufficient and has at most limited autonomy. In terms of structure, operation and differentiation of the economic system, the double market polarization raises a new and unmistakable reality. It deals with a capitalist market economy built to operate structurally and dynamically as a specialized entity, at the integration level of the world capitalist market; as a subsidiary and dependent entity, at the reproductive application level of the economic surplus of developed societies; and as a tributary entity, at the cycle level of the international capitalist appropriation, in which it appears as a source of increase or multiplication of the economic surplus of hegemonic capitalist economies (FERNANDES, 1968, p. 36-37).

For Fernandes (2009), the concept of dependent capitalism is not restricted to economic issues, since social, cultural and political institutions corroborate with the dependence. In the stage of monopoly capitalism, the corporate enterprise is the most visible of these institutions, but the less visible ones become more harmful to the subordination relationship. Fernandes (2009) presents public and private entities as examples of such harmful institutions responsible for conducting the policy of global control of finance, education, scientific research and technological innovation.

Dependent pattern of higher education is articulated with the dependent development. For Fernandes (1975), there would be an intrinsic relationship between the development of higher education and the attempts of university reform, constituted

based on external stimuli and exogenous models that created the dependent pattern of higher education. The introduction of colleges and the constitution of the conglomerate university into a dependent society consisted of structural and historical adaptations under cultural heteronomy conditions. The dependent pattern of higher education meant that the growth moments of the sector were oriented by interests and social values directed towards the continuity of cultural dependence (FERNANDES, 1975). Thus,

the educational structure of dependent underdeveloped capitalist societies can never reproduce the models of central or hegemonic nations. [...] since socioeconomic dependence is translated into a relative inability frustrated in free production and free use of wealth" (FERNANDES, 1975, p. 145).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We used the word reforms in the title of the present article to name the changes that have been occurring in Brazilian higher education purposely, since the act of reforming, according to the Houaiss (2012), means "to form again; rebuild the old way of"; or "give better shape to; to correct, to amend [...]". This seems to occur in Brazil in the field of higher education. Its historic fragmentary formation (in isolated institutes), its hierarchy corresponding to class structure (courses for the rich and courses for the poor), together with the traditional servitude of the state to the interests of the ruling class, make the changes turn to the reconstruction of old (hidden) ways of separation (which could be overcome in an effective popular project). Or still to better shape the capital accumulation, either by the direct exploitation of this sector by large financial groups or by the formation of labor for simple work.

Academic capitalism provides theoretical subsidies to understand how the commodification process of higher education redraws the higher education institutions of the hegemonic countries through a structural perspective. Thus, academic capitalism (SLAUGHTER and LESLIE, 1999; SLAUGHTER and RHOADES, 2004) is exemplified in the present study as the American higher education model introduced by neoliberal policies. However, we argue that the analyses of neoliberal public policies of higher education should be understood in peripheral countries from historical elements for the formation of capitalist system in the country, therefore from a macrosocial perspective.

The concrete conditions for the implementation of higher education must be considered in the understanding of its most recent changes, inasmuch as the specificity of the capitalism development in the country is a structural constraint limiting real transformations in higher education. We sought the structural and contextual constraints in the dependent pattern category on higher education (FERNANDES, 1975), arguing the current view of Florestan Fernandes for the understanding of changes in higher education.

It is clear that in order to avoid theoretical and methodological errors, it will be essential to subject the theoretical formulation of Florestan Fernandes to historical-concrete mediations, to the present reality. Clues to this challenge may derive from the analysis of transformations occurring in contemporary capitalism and its implications for dependency relations. The cyclical crises of capital generated a search for new sources of its reproduction. The search for greater profitability has advanced on two fronts since the 1970s: the capital transfer to peripheral countries in times of economic stagnation in the hegemonic countries; and the search for new sectors (telecommunications, culture, health, education) for the capital multiplication against the low profitability of the industry.

In the specific case of Brazilian higher education, the capital advanced based on the implementation of neoliberal policies since the 1990s. The intensification of the commodification of higher education in Brazil can be observed by the change in the financing policy of higher education; by the predominance of private institutions; by the high concentration of educational enterprises, i.e. for-profit higher education institutions; by professionalizing the management of educational establishments; by stimulating the direct and competitive search of private partners to supply budget deficits in public universities; by transforming universities and university centers into large conglomerates or holdings; by commercializing the shares of private institutions in stock exchanges; by increasing the investment of the international education funds in the country. All these actions have been intensified in the last three decades and do not show signs of setback. To seek for inspiration in our classics can contribute to illuminate, at least, the challenges that reality imposes on us.

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