

Rituals and Ceremonies of Quality of Higher Education. New Academic Tribes and Challenges in Social Recognition

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Abstract: Quality has been the most relevance public policy on higher education worldwide in about three decades. Quality is, primarily, a product of a linear equation of an overall expansion and massification of higher education since the 1970s, and the lack of resources to ensure a long-term educational support. Therefore, it is evident the design and implementation of a public policy without a critical debate about the implications for the entire educational systems. Secondly, it implies a qualitative change in the process of evaluation from a pedagogical process based on significant curricular experiences, to the construction of a positivist system of evidence for each potential or de facto act of learning, producing an institutional evaluation based on productivity, competitiveness, achievement and treasure of economical, social and cultural capitals. It is about a substantial change in the concepts and practices of educational administration from an academic/knowledge regime to academic/knowledge capitalism regime, corporatizing educational institutions and promoting social fragmentation. Testimonies from scholars in facing this academic regime show a relevant erosion of the academic work and an epistemic reduction of educational disciplines, making the policy of quality of education, more than a well-intentioned educational improvement, a source of deinstitutionalization, discrimination and practices of social control and lack of social recognition. This work analyzes social configurations from scholars' experiences in Higher Education in Mexico facing the rhetoric and procedures of quality of education. Through ethnography and phenomenological hermeneutics analysis this research shows imaginaries that deform scholars' educational practices and a consequent ideological social recognition.

Keywords: Quality, Higher Education, ritualization, social recognition, identities.

1. Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that on these days, the globalization of grammar, rhetoric and discourse of the public policies in higher education. The way they are designed, constructed and implemented can be heard in all podiums, political, economic, social and even, in not few educational spaces. The managers of educational systems worldwide, the principals and academic directors in local (rural and urban), national and international institutions of higher education, and even some teachers and researchers are repeating the same formula of one general and homogeneous strategy: efficiency, excellence and academic success, as a sign of a new educational culture.

The efforts to achieve a wider registration of students, the procedures of validation and evaluation of institutions of higher education, the processes of productivity, efficiency and effectiveness validated by the so-called "Quality of Education" and the adscription to the honor top hundred prestige universities all over the world are actions drenched by the same grammar, rhetoric and discourse that shape the hegemonic ideology in the field of education: the academic capitalism and its market of goods of knowledge.

The contemporary public University, as we know it, in spite of the large historical transformations suffered several times on their historical evolution by diverse sectors of society (religious, political, social, cultural and economic), social movements and the education systems, maintains paradoxically, and in spite of its critical belief, the traditional structures that remind its own birth in the lands of Central Europe several centuries ago. This fact is especially evident in the contradictions of the development of its substantive functions: teaching, researching and the interaction with the social and productive sectors.

However, the transformations of the beginning of the last century can well be compared to the mutations of these institutions at the end of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, due to the profound changes pushed by technology, process of globalization and the necessary conscience of a global ecosystem. Complexes and accelerated changes that accompanied by a modernizing wave and a free market system, have succeeded in generating new roles, functions, nature and identities within the University. All these mutations require a deep socio-critical analysis that goes beyond the simple study of management, normally used as the unique approach at the time that University is analyzed through the design and implementation of educational policies.

This article aims initially to identify and analyze the different grammatical and rhetoric structures of the actual public policies that build the global educational discourse since the end of 1980's up to the present. This first analytical path of grammar, rhetoric and discursive thread of the hegemonic policies in higher education from a phenomenal hermeneutics

allows to test the first thesis presented, as the beginning of the development of this work: the implementation of policies in higher education has produced the birth of a new academic culture whose nucleus of rationality is framed in the limits, resistances and innovations of scholars in facing the academic capitalism.

Secondly, the analysis focuses on expressions, signs and symbols of the hegemonic culture within institutions of higher education: rituals, ceremonies, chants and dances, expressions and creations that make possible the implementation of educational policies especially focused in the central educational policy worldwide: *The Quality of Education*.

Finally, this paper analyzes from the critical theory approach, especially in the logic of the theory of recognition (Honneth 1992), the diverse identity configurations capable to build an ideological social recognition, which on the one hand restricts the academics' capabilities of saying, telling and to narrating themselves as members of a university community and a collectivity, and restricts the recognition of the scholars with their own institution; and by the other hand, produces the institutionalization of social control by fragmenting the educational community and implementing a general individualism among scholars.

Therefore it is possible to see the different mutations of the *ethos* –or ways how scholars do and performed their academic work, and the *habitus* –the systems of thinking the scholars use in interpreting and understanding their actions- in facing the hegemonic educational policies, at the same time that it is an excellent opportunity to access to possible futures of the University within a restricted field of options, good wishes, viable and limits options and utopias.

2. Institutions and imaginaries

Traditionally institutions have been defined from an operational perspective, identifying them as organizations that adopt a functionalist culture. From this logic, all expression, belief and practice should play a vital role in all kinds of civilization, which leads us to think that there is no institution without physical substrate (Malinowski, 1922).

Besides, institutions as the basis of a society are built according to Castoriadis (1975), from a collective imagination. The concept of imaginary equally present in Bazcko (1984), Durand (1960), Maffesoli (1991), Anderson (1991), among others, represents a key clue for the construction of languages, production of beliefs and images capable of forging a culture.

In this way, the institution as such, appears under the sign of desirable, imaginable, thinkable and feasible of a society in a particular socio-historical context. Thus, the institution of language, as first and foremost institution among all human institutions, found one space of construction of individual identities that are internalized/ externalized in ways of been perceived, imagined, thought, and seen in action (Castoriadis, 1975). Imaginaries that build an institution acquired the strength of concrete in the material world in the form of behaviors, expressions, and other elements that constitute the process of building a common group, which is expressed as a tribe or a community capable now to build a culture.

When we talk about imaginary we refer to things that already had been invented in advance, be it an object, a concept, a situation or a history, where, as it affirms Castoriadis (1975) there are available symbols that allow other meanings beyond the pre-established and canonical ones, and where occurs *slides of sense*. Consequently, the imaginary uses not only the symbolic to express itself, but it requires the presence of the symbols to exist as a subject, situation, myth, or thing, while "symbolism presupposes the imaginary competence, due that it accepts the ability to see into something this that is not and to see in another what it is. Finally, it is certainly, about the irreducible ability to evoke an image" (Castoriadis, 1975: 220).

In the same way, the imaginary in Ricoeur (2004) is an indispensable component of subjectivity that precisely orients the individuals towards to acquire the ability of recognition of him/herself and other individuals. Thus, the imaginary is not constitutive of an unreal or false construction of reality; it rather indicates the substrate of the social configurations as a truth *in situ*, meaning, situational, a reconstructed truth that represents fiction, in Aristotelian terms (fiction/story)¹, which is constitutive of the act of narrating.

The social meanings in Castoriadis are relate to the way of,

Understand, and even simply capture the symbolism of a society, is to capture the meanings that entails. These meanings are not displayed but circulated by significant structures, but this does not mean that they are

¹ Cf. Aristotle's Poetic.

reduced neither to them, nor to be uniquely a product of them, or finally nor that they can be determined by themselves (Castoriadis, 1975:238).

In capturing these configurations which are oriented by the meaning and the interpretative sense giving by particular individuals, it allows to rescue stories from a socio-historical matrix where individuals shown their most subjective dimension. It is important to note that these configurations identified are able to describe worlds of meaning and sense; therefore, it is necessary a descriptive and analytical process to understand how these configurations operate in the domain of the intuitions of higher education.

Each society defines and produces an image of the natural world, the universe in which they live, trying to increasingly make it a significant set, which should certainly find its place objects and natural beings that matter for the life of the community, but also this same community, and finally some kind of order in the world (Castoriadis, 1975:259).

3. Policies in higher education and University tribes: The Academics

Public Policies in Latin America in terms of the design, development and evaluation appeared at the beginning of 1980s due to the following facts: a) the increasing relevance of educational systems as a product of the great expansion of enrollment, particularly in higher education; b) a complex educational structure of higher education systems trying to answer the increasing social demands and to solve social asymmetries in the access and permanence in educational institutions; c) the subsequent interactions between the State, Society and the University on the basis of democracy, autonomy and participation of all educational community; d) the relevance of social movements in demanding accountability in the diverse political, economical and administrative activities of the State; and e) the high pressure inflicted on the nature and identity of public universities by the processes of globalization and the wave of *modernization* of State commanded by international bodies such as World Bank (WB), international Monetary Fund (IMF), etc.

Traditionally, public policies in Latin America have been understood as a matter under the action of politicians as State's agents, which has kept at first place, the image of the State as great designer and implementer of public policies through politicians, and then, society as a simple beneficiary of different policies with varied degrees of participation.

The enormous expansion of students' enrollment in higher education evidences the State's control of public policies in education, and the strong relationship between institutional evaluation and quality of education developed since the 1980s in Latin America. For instance, in Argentina and Uruguay in this decade the student enrollment reached the higher historical levels than ever, thanks to the decision of these governments to reject any regulatory action in the access to institutions of higher education. Argentina raises it up to 60%, Bolivian increased 45% and in Brazil and Mexico remained their annual growth rate from 1%-2%, in contrast, with the 10% of growth reached in 1960's and 1970's in these countries. However, towards the middle of the 1980s Latin American universities were impacted by economic crisis and adjustment programs, a factor that limited public financing possibilities. In the early 1990s, the economic downturn and the neo-liberalism logic changed the way of confrontation of the financial crisis, which have affected deeply the nature and administration of the educational institutions. It has also produced a strong trend of privatization and fosters the participation of private higher institutions in attending the students demand in this region.

According to Rodriguez (1999), in proceeding with the student's enrollment growth in higher education has demanded the liberalization of higher education market and the specialization and diversification of academic programs for public and private education. Specialization was due to the strengthening of some programs and academic areas and/or the creation of institutions with an educational offer correlated to the existing demands.

This diversification was accompanied with particular planning strategies (reengineering and strategy planning) and a significant shift of the University culture. In the early 1990s, the institutional evaluation performance was established as the central public policy in higher education, and prepares Quality as the nucleus of all public policies at the end of the 1990's up to the present. Both policies made possible to legitimize the process of accreditation of academic programs, the certification of educational institutions and the inclusion of instrumental and managerial methods in academic activities and educational making decision processes.

As a result of it, evaluation has been the vehicle for the institutionalization of the policy of Quality in Higher Education, changing the conception of educational institutions to a knowledge organization, and then evaluating their academics by

parameters of performance and productivity considered as "desirables"². This condition applied to educational establishments and the various scientific communities is beginning to tie higher institutions performance (evaluation/quality) to universities budget's allocation.

As for the academics Lendesman and García Salord (2003: 115), has defined them as:

A multifaceted actor and heterogeneous (teacher, researcher, technician, scientist, intellectual), whose common point is his/her membership to educational institutions and their adscription to the functions of production and transmission of knowledge and culture.

In this regard, scholars constitute a heterogeneous community, that are bond thanks to the nature, products and consequences of their own academic work, and as well as for their different interests that increasingly, are more imposed and manipulated by the needs of the society and not by the reflection of the Sciences of education towards the hegemonic model of society. This makes the construction of that tribe of the academic community also very different and complex. While the concept of tribe or neo-tribe Maffesoli (1991), is referred to the meeting of a given group around images that act as vectors of a community in which they remain to reflect on their emotions in common, it is necessary that there has been an initiation to new individuals so that they are able to share these emotions which are included into the imaginary space of this collectivity.

The initiation allows the exchange of emotions, as the basis for the community social link. So therefore is not a standardization of actions (both obligations and sanctions), but rather a process of normalization that Maffesoli calls an "aesthetic of ethics". This aesthetic will be regulated not by the moral, but by ways of being and living together. These individuals will imagine how better together they will be or they will be while they are controlled by the hegemonic rhetoric that leads them towards action.

The tribal logic allows, according to Maffesoli (1991), to think about action in terms of the meaning given to collective actions. It is the intersubjective action that gives meaning to reality. Thus, a choice or a decision of a particular individual not may be reduced to the single form of his/her individual rationality as the center of his/her action, but a choice under a control of a collective imaginary that has been already institutionalized in this community.

The culture of scholars as a result of the implementation of public policies of higher education is governed by a grammar that builds the bedrock of the community and it offers a common language in order to think, say, reproduce, innovate, etc. In fact, the rhetoric that has been formed from three already mentioned educational policies: expanding the students' registration, the institutional evaluation and quality of education are the sediments of the logic of the institutions of higher education. Predominantly, Quality of Education gathers the largest concepts, symbols and imaginaries of this new rationality in the educational field. However, this rhetoric has a scarcely and unclear epistemic content. Mistakenly *Quality* has been defined as a polysemy concept, but in reality the epistemic educational content of it is minimal, if not contrary to what would be precisely educational; while there are plenty of elements inside of its rhetoric that clearly are capable to guide the behavior and action of individuals towards an hegemonic ideology.

These components are guides for an individualized action focused on competition, success and excellence. So the academic culture will be based on ritualization of the hegemonic rhetoric: *Quality of Education*. The commemoration and ritualization of these components reinforces the conception of a society built on the basis of a savage individualism, typical of the late capitalism we are living in.

In this way, Lesli and Slaughter (1997), and Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) have well detected the expression of an *Academic Capitalism* whose major imperative in the educational field is the policy of *Quality* and the active participation by scholars as *best players* or *outsiders* within the global market of goods of knowledge. The *outsiders* are academics in the periphery of the institution with no possibilities to develop their academic work, and the first are scholars that "surf" in different academic, public and private sector spaces, wrap up with the capitals of their institutions while creating networks of academic work that at large scale will not include even the participation of their institutions. The clearest case of this new educational game market is the way the University of Phoenix is structured, where its owner builds the University based in an unregulated global market of knowledge changing the social aim of the university.³

² Cf. Program of improvement of teachers. PROMEP has as a main goal to permanently raise the level of teachers' habilitation based on profiles suitable for each subsystem of higher education. Thus, in driving substantial improvement in training, dedication and performance of research groups the quality of higher education quality rises. <http://promep.sep.gob.mx/>

³ Cf. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), when they bring up the case of Phoenix University.

4. New cultural constructions among scholars and challenges of social recognition

Culture according Geertz (1973) is "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life". Culture plays a key role by providing meaning to the world individual experiences making this world an understandable unit framed in a socio-historical context.

Thus, the symbols allow an interaction mediated by an interpretation and a particular valuation thereof. These symbols sediment ways of thinking and doing in the collective memory of individuals. Collective memory plays a relevant role in the maintenance of traditions, but also in the creation of new forms and fractures of old ways of thinking.

Geertz cites the idea of Weber which regards man as: "an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs" (Geertz, 1973:20).

Therefore, culture not strives to demonstrate nothing but reveal meanings that guide senses of social reality. These frames are recovered through ethnographic and biographical methods. Life stories tell us the trajectories of the individuals that put into scene their life through the story and tell us clues about their culture. As well Geertz affirms that "Culture is more understandable not as complex of concrete schemes of conduct – customs, practices, traditions, habits sets - as it has happened in general so far, but as a series of control mechanisms - plans, recipes, formulas, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call "programs"--which govern the conduct)" (Geertz, 1973:51). This means that culture is the network or plot of senses capable to give meaning to the events or phenomena of everyday life. In this way, culture is considered as production of senses, but it is through rites, celebrations and commemorations that it can be followed the cultural traits of a specific community.

The production of meaning and sense under the terms of the culture of the university is primarily associated with the language that is developed in the institution. This language ends up to be a hegemonic discourse regulating the imaginaries and desires of the individuals at the institution. This institutional language includes educational, socio-cultural, historical, administrative and political components. It is this continuous crossing of languages culture makes the most sense and complexity. Consequently, it is not possible to restrict the idea of the culture of the university as unique, but a cluster of cultures that overlap through various expressions and cultural creations that are not scattered evenly, nor are they universal.

The innovation of the policy of *Quality of Education* is to present his rhetoric as the center of culture of the contemporary university, as the only way of doing and living the complexity of the academic world nowadays. In several investigations in which this article is supported and in particular, in a study conducted between 2006-2010, at the University of Guadalajara, in Mexico, it was found that academics, embody quality of education through acts of ritual behavior. The institution encourages scholars act better and to live or be better by treasuring greater deal of material goods, to dress better and to get more "culture". At this point, *Quality of Education* becomes a synonym for quality of life or *bien-être*. Let see a comment from one of the scholars' interviews at the University of Guadalajara:

Quality is a way of life, is not a resource is not an end, but once you know it you don't want to leave it. But it involves effort, commitment, and hard work is not sporadic, it does not come by spontaneous generation (Teacher, CUCEA, University of Guadalajara, Mexico, 2007).

Ritual acts can be identified at the time institutions recognizes the scholars because their academic work. In these acts, the institutional authority and power is reinforced, because in this logic, it is from the institutional power that makes sense social recognition. In general, the institution will be the legitimate subtract to recognize their academics production and trajectories. Another element within the ritualization of Quality of Education is the construction of monuments and totems, either physical or imaginaries.

For instance, accreditation of academic programs is usually accompanied by a ceremony and a monument, a plaque showing the institutional recognition the university has accomplished. Administrators of the university join together behind the monuments in order to commemorate and honored themselves for the academic work done. These monuments remain as historical marks that recall the achievements of the institution. All these dispositive of control help the entrepreneurs of memory.

Quality as the main public policy in Higher Education is the responsible for putting social recognition at the centre of the scholars' concerns and struggles, via the production of academic goods and capitals. These connections is not coincidental, but attained thanks that the economic capital (money) scholars receive as recognition of their academic production, that in fact, not in few times, is more representative than their own salary. In the last years, it is clearly noticed the increasing of incentives programs to recognize with money or tools for academic work in teaching and

research, with representative and desirable amount of money, which favors the competition for these amounts of money among scholars. Social recognition presents here a deformation of its nucleus of rationality, since it is subject to the scope of reaching it through competition in order to gain cultural, social and economic recognition.

In this sense, institutional rites for recognition serve to legitimize the group in power at the university and instantly and they give the capacity to this group to recognize an academic trajectory that has been built from scholars through several years. This power becomes from the logic of Althusser (1976), as the most clear expression of reproduction and domination by the institution, but according to Honneth (1992), as the foundation of acts of an ideological recognition. Honneth (2007: 139) defines recognition as "the behavior of reaction from we respond rationally to value qualities that we have learnt to perceive in human beings according to an incarnation of a second nature in the world of life".

Thought the policy of quality of education, the institutions transmit to their members the sense of social recognition as a way of adscription and institutional reproduction, and at the same time, the promise for all scholars of self realization and autonomy. However, when institutions of higher education take a priority role in the production or detection of new value human qualities, in such cases they impose modified models of social recognition by regulations and practices before it reaches expression in a narrative praxis in the world of life (Honneth, 2007).

The fact to be officially covered of complements by certain qualities or certain competences seems to have become an instrument of symbolic policy, whose underlying function is the integration of individuals in social groups within a dominant social origin and to provide them with a positive image of themselves (Honneth, 2007: 245).

In this type of recognition among scholars the core of rationality seems consistent; thanks to the ritual that accompanies it: celebrations, rites, the podium, the rigorous and protocol acts. One may think that this recognition is authentic. However, recognition for Honneth (2007), it is an institutional behavior, meaning that institutions have to keep their promise given as a continuous behavior.

The ideological shift occurs when institutions despite having granted recognition to the academic, do not keep their promise in the physical world. This means that the protocol, rites and ceremonies acts loses their value, among the contradictions of the institutions in accomplish their promise in the short, medium and long term. The institutional recognition fails in meeting the conditions imposed by it.

A clear example correlated with the ideological recognition in institutions of higher education is that these institutions can recognize scholars in public events for its production in research, but in a short or medium-term, the institutions may removed all the financial resources so that this academic may not be able to continue his/her research or teaching in the properly way. However, this is just one example; the lack of the promise may be equally intangible but with fundamental elements to maintain the social recognition: abuse of power, changing the rules in a negotiation, cutting academic opportunities, etc. These elements show the way how academics are oriented to a culture which eventually distorted the social recognition of these individuals.

5. Conclusions

Public policies in higher education have evolved in such a way in the past thirty years, managing to align the expansion of enrolment, the institutional evaluation and the quality of education as a new rhetoric of institutions of higher education worldwide. This rhetoric is capable of building institutional discourses which contents imaginaries and symbolic of the late capitalism. The imagery of the success achieved through individual competition, the accomplishment of excellence and the institutional recognition through an ideological component are strategies to lead individuals to self control, maintaining at the same time the institutional controls. The academics are compelled to live the ontology of Quality of Education.

The world of quality of education appears as pre-established scenery with rites, ceremonies and celebrations, rhetoric, speeches and statements, to establish in the scholars a form of *habitus* and *ethos*, and enable them to participate in the global market of goods of knowledge.

Despite the fact that education has historically been an asset at the moment it becomes a key element in the capital market of knowledge and the institutional prestige of universities around the world. Facing this situation questions arise regarding social recognition of academics: How to establish an identification link of scholars with the contemporary university within the framework of the late capitalism? What are the actions of resistance beyond the whispering conversations of academics in the corridors of the institutions of higher education? Definitely *best players* and *outsiders* are new exclusive categories that emerge from universities, thanks to the policy of quality of education, are these new

academic tribes more the once that are going to lead the university in the future? Or actually are they guiding the university sense and meaning at the present?

The struggle for scholars' social recognition not only concerns the sanctions of educational policies, regulations or institutional control devices, they rather have to do directly with understanding the social, educational and professional trajectories of these individuals. In fact, it will not be only the academic programs, the structural policies of education or the different actions of the State or from the university's authorities, that will define the future of the University, but mostly it is from the interpretation, comprehension and actions of scholars before the new *habitus* and *ethos* imposed directly on the educational community by the public policy of Quality of Education where one of the structural debates of the contemporary University will lie.

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