



Counter-Hegemonic Higher Education in a Remote Coastal Region of Brazil: The Federal University of Southern Bahia as a Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, macroeconomic and macrosocial processes—forming what has been called globalization—have produced intense transnational mobilization of wealth and power, resulting in strong pressures on persons, groups, and institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2006). Over the past years, contemporary neoliberal policies have defined international agendas that challenge directly the sociocultural and historical mission of knowledge institutions in general, and of universities in particular (Altbach, 2016). As far as education is concerned, there has been political subservience of education institutions and systems to the logic of financial capital and to the hegemony of Western capitalism, which, above all, implies compliance to teaching and research requirements established by self-nominated central countries (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). In this current scenario of conflicts and accommodations,

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virtually in every sphere of organization in contemporary societies marked by Western culture, the university as an institution has faced serious challenges.

In Brazil, traditional models of universities have not responded to the demands of the new social, economic, and technological scenario and, particularly, in addition to that, the national public university system has not met the growing social needs for higher education (Almeida Filho, 2015; Santos & Almeida Filho, 2008). In this context, the current economic and political crisis has reduced funding and support for the institutional building process and for the operation of public universities. In parallel, student organizations, staff corporations, and faculty graduated in elite conventional universities have openly resisted proposed changes in planning, organization, curriculum structure, and learning contents, as well as the adoption of innovative pedagogical models by higher education institutions.

In this text, we introduce the Federal University of Southern Bahia (UFSB), the newest Brazilian public university, as a case study of counter-hegemonic higher education institution. With this aim, first, we present the historical and political backgrounds to Brazil's higher education context, outlining its features as a deeply intricate, regressive, and unfair system, emphasizing the social and political inequities that affect and thus define the country's educational structure. Secondly, we describe in broad strokes the territory and population of Southern Bahia, a remote coastal region of Northeast Brazil, where UFSB was recently established. Third, we present the main features of the university's Master Plan, focusing upon the meaning and relevance of each key issue for the institution's social mission: territoriality, social integration, metapresence, inter-transdisciplinarity, active learning. Fourth, we analyze challenges and obstacles for the implementation of the institution and achievement of its major goals as a popular university, effectively oriented toward sustainability, social integration, and intercultural commitment. Finally, we discuss further perspectives for the successful implementation of a counter-hegemonic model of university in Brazil, one of the most unequal societies in the Western world, dominated by globalized late capitalism.

BACKGROUND

In Brazil, education has been part of a major social debt, enhanced by liberal and totalitarian regimes that consolidated an oligarchic social system inherited from colonial times. After the last military dictatorship

(1964–1985), the country has experienced demographic, economic, and social changes along with a rapid, rich, and complex political construction toward democracy which turned the Brazilian State into an instrument for hegemony. Between 1992 and 2012, per capita average income increased around 20%, while the gross national product (GNP) more than doubled. Despite having reduced unemployment and increased income for almost a decade, the country did not overcome challenges and problems associated with an economic model based on the formation of an internal consumer market and on the exportation of raw commodities (Bresser-Pereira, 2009). Regarding inequality, there has been a significant and sustained reduction of the Gini coefficient, especially after 2001, from 0.637 to 0.527, due to a network of public programs for food security and social protection (Ham, 2014).

The combined effect of economic growth, rapid urbanization, more employment, and income redistribution has been a reduction in the proportion of the population below the poverty line, from 62 to 37%, along two decades (1992–2012). By 2012, more than 95% of homes had water supply and electricity, and 65% had access to sewage systems. Nowadays, the proportion of people over 60 years is over 13% of the population, the urbanization rate has reached 80%, the fertility rate dropped to 1.7, and life expectancy at birth is 75 years overall (71 years for men and 78 years for women). Infant mortality reduced markedly from above 30 deaths per thousand born alive in 1992 to 14.4 per thousand in 2014. With regard to education, in the past 15 years, school attendance has increased overall, the illiteracy rate dropped to less than 10%, and enrollment in higher education more than doubled. These improvements have been attributed also to social policies including universal health system, access to education, social security coverage, real increase in wages, and a national conditional cash transfer program called Bolsa Família (Ham, 2014; Wetzel, 2013).

In this context, there exists a political contradiction regarding education (Almeida Filho, 2015). The reduction of economic inequalities due to social protection policies occurs in parallel to increasing social inequities, mainly due to a wider top-bottom gap of the quality, type, and reach of public services. Therefore, more equity in the economic sense, with undeniable improvement in patterns of income distribution, paradoxically generates inequity in the social dimension—on the one hand, enlarging the gaps in education and, on the other, maintaining the unequal concentration of social and political capital. Economic equity

producing social inequity seems to be indeed a disconcerting paradox. Trying to understand this paradox, we would like to propose a hypothesis: In Brazil, in a subtle, discreet, and camouflaged fashion, the State has become a promoter of social inequities in the sense that some of its ongoing public policies mainly public education end up producing perverse effects.

In Fig. 7.1, we propose modeling education as economic and social reproduction of political domination based on intertwined cycles of inequality. In this model, taken from another paper (Almeida Filho, 2015), an unfair regressive tax system, supported by a legal and political structure bound for social reproduction, leads to social perversion primarily in education (but also in other sectors such as health, housing, and public security), therefore producing inequities in the educational system and inequalities in the social situation. Public universities, offering better-quality teaching, free of tuition and fees, are largely responsible for the professional and academic training of the ruling elite. In paradox, young students from poor families, who struggled for upward social mobility, are forced to enroll in paid private institutions to acquire lower-quality instruction in socially disregarded professional careers. The triple conjunction of perverse cycles, inter-articulated as dialectical

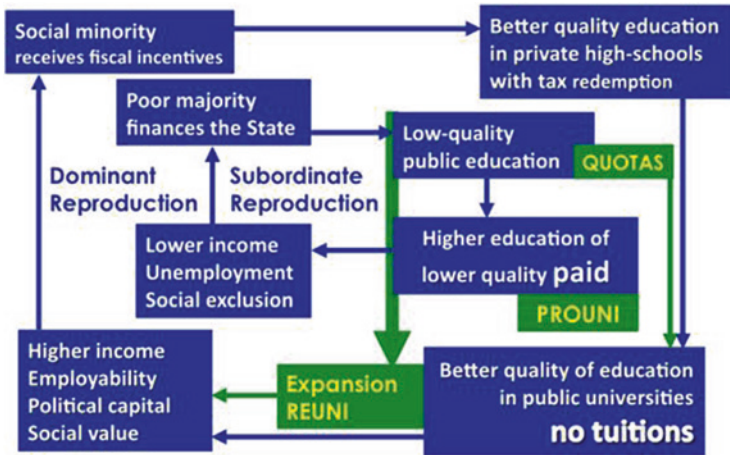


Fig. 7.1 Social reproduction of inequalities in education in contemporary Brazil

processes, feeds back into the political system that conditions the State as an overwhelming and contradictory inequality-producing institutional complex.

From this scheme (Almeida Filho, 2015), elaborated to organize the set of social vectors in the education domain in Brazil, we propose to consider three main perversions:

1. To a disproportionately greater extent, the poor segments of Brazilian society finance the State, through a distorted and regressive tax structure.
2. Those who are poorer receive few benefits from the State, among them, the constitutional duty of providing basic education for all citizens. The Brazilian State instead subsidizes, by revenue tax reimbursement, wealthier families that can potentially mobilize resources to account for this stage of education for their children.
3. The poor have to pay for higher education in the private-sector institutions while the rich, instead, go to the best universities, which in general are public and charge no tuition or fees.

In our judgment, the third perversion is the most serious from the point of view of equity in the public education domain (Almeida Filho, 2015). In addition to gaining priority access to free public higher education, if by chance rich families have to pay for a private college for one of their children, they will also benefit from income tax refunds from the time their students are in university up to the legal limit of 24 years of age. As the Brazilian career training structure is short and starts very early (for instance, entry into medical or law courses at the age of 17 and graduation around 21 or 22 years is not uncommon), unlike other countries in the world, in Brazil upper- and middle-class youngsters normally conclude their education before the age of 24, thus taking full profit from the socially unfair discounts in taxation. In opposition, lower class students, who tend to reach higher education later in life, take longer to graduate because, in general, in addition to studying, they have to work for survival. Therefore, their tuitions and fees are not reimbursable because they are above the age limits established for the tax rebate.

During President Lula's term, along with affirmative action programs such as quotas for poor, black, and indigenous students (Lloyd, 2015), two focused governmental policies for higher education—called *Programa Universidade para Todos* (PROUNI) and *Plano de*

Reestruturação e Expansão das Universidades Federais (REUNI)—have helped promote integration between the two cycles of reproduction. PROUNI is a massive scholarship program launched in 2005 to finance university tuition at private higher education institutions for students from low-income families (Brasil/MEC, 2006). Launched in 2007, REUNI is an acronym that summarizes investments for the expansion of federal universities with resources, infrastructure, personnel, curricular restructuring, and social inclusion, with incentives for efficiency and population coverage along with affirmative action programs (Brazil/MEC, 2007). It should be noted that this ambitious 10 billion dollar PROUNI/REUNI plan was out just before Brazil got hit by the world financial crisis of 2009.

The target of the REUNI initiative was expansion of the federal network of 56 universities eventually to overcome the hegemony of the private sector of higher education in the country. The 4 million students in higher education, with around half a million in public institutions, was projected to rise to 6 million in four years, with more than 1 million students in public universities. During 2008–2009, investments and budget increases planned for the network of Brazilian public universities were maintained and, in some cases, anticipated. Mass-scale construction of labs and classroom buildings, equipment acquisitions, faculty and personnel recruitment, all contributed to enhance economic activities and reinforced the government strategy to deal with the financial backlash. As a result, the expanded access to higher education for larger population groups was confirmed, elevating the participation of 18- to 25-year age groups from 9 to 15% in less than a decade.

Although effective for reducing some of the negative consequences of the perversion cycles, restricted to a few beneficiaries, these initiatives do not challenge exclusionary structural features of the Brazilian system of education. On the one hand, despite all changes, the private sector still dominates the current higher education scenario; as a result, demands for social inclusion and for training of specialized man power for promoting sustained economic development, remain unattended. Brazil has recently experienced a great shortage of engineers, ICT experts, social workers, health professionals, and especially school teachers (at all levels), particularly in remote areas of the impoverished North and Northeast regions. This indeed represents a real pressure on the country's system of higher education to form personnel faster and more effectively in the near future, thus inducing a wider territorial coverage.

Yet, higher education in Brazil maintains the model of direct entry into professional training courses consolidated by the university reform triggered by the French Revolution, a time of great turbulence in the history of Western Europe, that happened more than two centuries ago (Santos & Almeida Filho, 2008). French culture has influenced heavily our higher education model, and Brazilian universities have their academic structure even more distorted by the university reform of 1968, promoted by the military dictatorship (Cunha, 2007). Today, our universities are still operating on a rigid organizational structure, most of them fragmented in faculties, schools, and departments. As a result, the Brazilian higher education system has become more elitist and alienated from the people's needs, in spite of the implementation of affirmative action programs in several public universities during the past decade (Almeida Filho, 2012; Lloyd, 2015).

Nonetheless, the current crisis seems to have raised among a few Brazilian universities a deeper awareness of the importance of curriculum restructuring, internationalization, and “hinterlandization” to fully and effectively accomplish their intellectual, cultural, and social missions. This is the context of creation of the UFSB in a remote coastal region of Northeast Brazil, case study object of this paper.

THE CASE OF UFSB

The UFSB was founded in 2013 as one of the four new institutions of higher education proposed by President Dilma Rousseff's government to the National Congress. Officially, it was conceived to meet the highest educational requirements of contemporary universities, as well as to respect cultural, social, artistic, and economic specificities of the Southern region of Bahia State, considering national and planetary values.

Context: Southern Bahia

UFSB's campi are located in the cities of Itabuna, Teixeira de Freitas, and Porto Seguro, economic poles of the Southern region of Bahia. The territory covered by UFSB consists of 48 municipalities, on a surface of 40,384 km², situated on the Southern coast of Bahia State. Its population totals 1,520,037 inhabitants (2010 Census data). Most municipalities are small; only the city of Itabuna exceeds 200,000 inhabitants and

five others (Ilhéus, Teixeira de Freitas, Porto Seguro, Eunápolis, and Itamaraju) have more than 50,000 inhabitants. Geographical distances are substantial—the municipality of Mucuri, on the Southern border of the region, is 1000 km away from the capital city of the Bahia State, distances between each campus are over 200 km, and there are almost 900 km of secondary roads—a potential major obstacle to the operational efficiency of the institution.

The South of Bahia has a unique historical importance in the constitution of Brazil as nation, culture, and people, both from an economic and political point of view (Tavares, 2006). The region is the location that received the Portuguese fleet, led by Pedro Álvares Cabral, that started the colonization of Brazil in 1500. With the installation of the capital of the colony in the city of Salvador in 1549, Bahia State remained the center of the colonial economy for three centuries. With the change of the capital to Rio de Janeiro, and given the crisis of sugarcane production, Bahia experienced deep economic stagnation, from late nineteenth century to recent years. At that stage, the monoculture of cocoa had become the main bulwark of the State's economy during most of the twentieth century. The South of Bahia concentrated the largest cocoa production until the 1980s; at the time, one of the main agricultural commodities on the export list of Brazil. The introduction of “witch's broom,” a highly pathogenic fungus, practically decimated the cocoa agriculture in the region (Teixeira, Thomazella, & Pereira, 2015).

In the middle section of the Southern region, on the coast, tourist activity (regional, national, and international) has expanded in recent decades, especially after the construction of the BR-101 highway, main vector of regional development, leading to one of the largest hotel parks in the country. Tourism is, however, an economic activity with a high degree of seasonality, with serious sociocultural and environmental problems. In the Southern section of the region, recently a large area of eucalyptus cultivation was planted, raw material for pulp production, processed in plants located in the region, mainly for export.

The South of Bahia suffers from deep economic and social inequalities and has very poor educational indicators. About 290,000 students are enrolled in 1878 primary schools and 66,000 students in high school, in 165 mainly State public schools. Only 22% of graduates in the elementary school ascend to the high school level, with large variation between municipalities. Every year, about 14,000 students graduate from the public high school network in the region and 3000 students

from the private network. Therefore, considering a latency of three years for graduate students in high school and a dropout rate of 50% per year, we can estimate a potential demand for those seeking access to university education of around 24,700 candidates/year in all municipalities of the region. However, before the opening of UFESB, only 10,725 slots for higher education were offered in the region, of which 1475 were in public institutions.

Given this picture, the initiative to establish a medium-sized university of the federal system of higher education in the region, with institutional design adjusted to the regional context, was fully justified. To comply with the identified needs and demands and to overcome obstacles, the creation of the university had to be followed by development and implementation of organizational innovations. The immediate challenge was to articulate, on the one hand, open control and centralized governance and institutional assessment and, secondly, decentralized academic management supported by instances, strategies, and virtual management devices, focusing on the quality and effectiveness of the educational process.

Mission and Proposal

UFESB's Chart of Foundation (Brazil, 2013) announced its institutional mission as oriented by sustainability, democracy, solidarity, and sharing, as well as commitment to knowledge, skills, desires, dilemmas, and utopias that, in short, are the basis for an equal, just and fair world. In this perspective, its political-institutional agenda is formed by the following principles: academic efficiency, with optimal use of public resources; commitment to sustainability; expanded access to education as a means for regional social development; pedagogical flexibility and creativity, with methodological diversity oriented by inter-transdisciplinarity; systemic interface with the public education system; inter-institutional articulation of public higher education in the region; and promotion of national and international mobility for its community. Perspectives and solutions that support this complex and ambitious scope compose a Master Plan for institutional development, in dialogue with curriculum structures and pedagogical practices adopted by prestigious contemporary universities worldwide (Brazil, 2014).

Admission into the institution is only through undergraduate courses of two kinds: Interdisciplinary Bachelor (*Bacharelado*

Interdisciplinar—BI) and Teacher’s Licentiate Interdisciplinary Degree (*Licenciatura Interdisciplinar*—LI). The Interdisciplinary Bachelor comprises full degree courses, with a minimum duration of three years, offered in four areas of training: Sciences, Arts, Humanities, Health. The Teacher’s Licentiate Interdisciplinary Degree in the first cycle is intended to overcome important gaps in the educational landscape of the region and the State. This LI course is a training program for teachers for elementary-secondary education, organized in large areas or blocks of knowledge, articulated by a shared knowledge base, with a modular, progressive, and flexible structure.

UFSB offers education mediated by technology in a network of community colleges called *Rede Anísio Teixeira de Colégios Universitários* (CUNI), deployed in cities with over 20,000 inhabitants and more than 300 graduates of high school programs, as well as in rural settlements, Indian villages, *quilombos* (remnants of runaway slaves), and poor-income neighborhoods of larger towns. These community colleges operate preferably on evenings and weekends in available facilities of the State system of secondary education. Each point of the network features a suite of teleducation systems, connected to a high-speed digital network installed and maintained by the university.

There are two ways of access into UFSB undergraduate courses: (a) general application directly into one of the four Bachelor courses; and (b) in Basic Entry Area (*Área Básica de Ingresso*—ABI) with further options for BI or LI undergraduate programs. As defined by federal law, there are social-racial quotas for students who have graduated from public high schools, with half of the reserved slots for students from poor-income families. The social quota is 55% in the campi and 85% in community colleges for students who attended high school in municipalities participating in the Anísio Teixeira Network. Furthermore, supplementary slots are available for indigenous candidates from local villages and to lay school teachers, through special agreements with public institutions of the State education sector.

Learning Model

The pedagogical platform of UFSB is based on the following aspects:

1. curriculum architecture organized in cycles with progressive modularity (providing independent certificates for each cycle);

2. academic quarter (*quadrimestre*) calendar system, allowing for flexibility of professional training and academic projects of faculty, staff, and students, with optimization of equipment, facilities, personnel and financial resources;
3. pedagogical pluralism and intensive use of digital technologies for teaching and learning.

General Education training is offered both on campus and in the Anísio Teixeira Network of community colleges, at the level of municipalities and localities, on the entire coverage area of the university. It includes a *neo-quadrivium* approach: modern languages (minimally, Portuguese and English), instrumental knowledge processing (with digital literacy and connectivity skills), logical-interpretative thinking (with efficient use of analytical and rhetorical strategies), and global citizenship (eco-historical consciousness). In addition to General Education undertaken in the Anísio Teixeira Network or on campus, the student will perform vocational training activities, emphasizing notions of entrepreneurship, with practices, internships, and placements concentrated in specific course programs offered by partner institutions.

BI and LI graduates wishing to proceed to second cycle courses, aimed at academic or professional careers, must undergo selection processes based on performance in the first cycle, among other specific criteria. Second cycle courses will be taught in Centers for Graduate Professional and Academic Training, located on campus and offered with innovative curricular models, transferring part of their workload for specific training steps at the first cycle. In all cases, emphasis is placed on active methods by teaching-learning teams, with the use of digital technologies, strong emphasis on mentoring, self-instruction and focus in practice. Some second cycle courses may include, in partial or full mode, training in teaching skills through recognition of credits in teaching activities and practices, allowing double-degrees Bachelor/Licentiate.

UFSB third cycle graduate programs primarily consist of Professional Masters, offered in partnership with social institutions and business organizations. These programs are designed as in-service training programs, in the form of residencies redefined more broadly, supplemented with Research Methods modules and supervision-tutoring of theses that address concrete problems of the organization, institution, or network involved. Community colleges located in larger municipalities may serve as placements for some graduate programs, taking advantage of the

digital network infrastructure deployed and made operational, particularly the Multidisciplinary Residency in Public Policy and the Teacher's Residency.

To ensure quality education at all levels of training, UFSB has developed contents and, although in process, has adopted advanced technologies for teaching and learning. With this objective, virtual learning environments (VLEs) have been created, with virtual learning devices (VLD) as key teaching tools. VLEs comprise digital interfaces (games, Web sites, blogs, social networking, multimedia devices) and interactive media technologies through digital networks connected in real time, overcoming the traditional school environment through non-physical spaces and metapresence situations.

Students and teachers sign mutual commitment agreements for Significant Learning in each step/module of the training processes, formatted as "learning contracts" with rights, duties, and responsibilities. In relevant courses, three methodological choices may be offered to the student: in-presence (classes, seminars, workshops, etc.); metapresence and self-programmed learning. Pedagogical practices are structured by the following formats:

- Concrete Problem-Based Learning (cPBL), adjusted to the context and objectives of the course;
- Active Team Learning (ATL), by groups of 2–3 students in each year of the course, working at all levels of the practice field;
- Shared Learning Strategies (SLS), where students from each class of a course are Peer Tutors of students in less-advanced cohorts;
- Practice-Oriented Evidence (POE), Workshops for supervision, coordination, and validation of knowledge-based technologies.

Participatory Implementation

Since UFSB's implementation committee was formed in January 2012, our first task force traveled to almost all municipalities and localities in the region, presenting and debating the proposed model. More than 80 meetings and public hearings were held and in two years we visited nearly 100 schools, talking to teachers, students, indigenous *caciques*, community leaders, and NGOs, but also businessmen, politicians, intellectuals. When the University Senate was inaugurated in each of the campi, community representatives were included on an equal footing to professors.

For the institutional operation of the diverse, complex offering of courses in learning cycles, the UFSB structure has three levels of organization, respecting the broad regional coverage of the institution, with the following distribution of academic units:

Jorge Amado Campus (Itabuna)

Centre for Techno-sciences and Innovation (CFTCI)

Centre for Agro-sciences and Technology (CFACT)

Jorge Amado Institute of Humanities, Arts and Sciences (IHAC)

Sosígenes Costa Campus (Porto Seguro)

Centre for Human and Social Sciences (CFCHS)

Centre of Arts (CFAr)

Centre for Environmental Sciences (CFCAm)

Sosígenes Costa Institute of Humanities, Arts and Sciences (IHAC)

Paulo Freire Campus (Teixeira de Freitas)

Centre for Health Sciences (CFCS)

Paulo Freire Institute of Humanities, Arts and Sciences (IHAC)

The university started its activities in September 2014, offering 1080 slots for first-cycle options in Institutes of Humanities, Arts and Sciences (IHACs) and at the Anísio Teixeira Network of Community Colleges (CUNI Network). As of 2016, the university has a faculty of 188 teachers and 161 staff. It already hosts 2340 students in undergraduate courses, with 1276 enrolled in four interdisciplinary Bachelor degrees (Science, Arts, Humanities, and Health) and 976 in ABI. Of these, 88 students of the first cohort have already progressed to five Interdisciplinary Undergraduate (Mathematics and Computer Science, Natural Sciences and its technologies, languages and codes, Humanities and Social Sciences, Arts and its technologies). Only 122 students (5.2% of the total) are with suspended registration, which is a small proportion of potential dropouts.

With its full completion planned for 2020, the UFSB will be a mid-range federal institution of higher education. General Education Certificates will be offered in all 48 counties of the region, 12 Interdisciplinary Bachelor in four areas of knowledge (Arts, Sciences, Humanities, and Health), five Interdisciplinary Licentiate degrees (Natural Sciences; Human and Social Sciences; Mathematics, Computing and Technology; Languages and Codes; Arts and Technologies), 30 vocational graduate courses, 10 residencies, 19 masters, and nine Ph.D. programs. At the end of the envisaged implementation period, in both

cycles of graduation, it will offer 9100 slots in the first cycle (7000 in the CUNI Network), 1000 slots in second cycle, with over 700 slots in post-graduate totaling almost 11,000 entries. An overall total enrollment of almost 20,000 regular students is expected, considering all levels of education.

Besides the direct economic impact, this new university is not only intended to expand the offer of public slots at higher education levels of training in the remote hinterland of Bahia. In parallel and in line with improvement of relevant basic education indicators, it is thought to promote extension programs designed to increase quality of elementary and secondary education, above all bound for equitable social and human development of the region. Nevertheless, beyond immediate economic, scientific, and technological development, specific demands related to training proposals are referred not only to employability and entrepreneurship, but also for intercultural and social integration.

UFSB AS A PROJECT FOR POLITICAL CHANGE

The institutional model of the UFSB was designed to meet the circumstances of Brazil's economic and political position in the contemporary world as well as the social, cultural, political, and economic specificities of Southern Bahia State. This university is driven by the possibility of recreating public education as a vehicle for social integration and as a factor for promoting the human condition, aspects often undervalued in the educational model prevailing in Brazil. However, beyond regional and national borders, it is founded on a political-pedagogical conception of the university as a social and cultural institution for education and emancipation of the person and to promote profound, sustainable, critical changes in society. This statement implies that the curricular matrices of the various courses offered by UFSB should include cultural diversity, political dissent, and social equality in order to promote the construction of new forms of counter-hegemonic knowledge.

In this endeavor, understanding education as a primary civilizing and emancipatory task, the creation of UFSB has been openly conducted as an action-research project to promote social transformation of regional and national contexts, oriented by a set of key concepts: "territoriality," "social integration," "inter-trans-disciplinarity," "metapresence," and "active learning." We briefly discuss each of them in this section, adding our subjective evaluations of the emergence of these concepts as critical

achievements or, in some cases, contradictory points of compliance or resistance, internal and external, regarding the proposed or intended political project of a counter-hegemonic education.

Territoriality

Considering the process of globalization, with time-space increasingly compressed, and the world's cultural diversity, the renewal of the university as an institution needs a critical theory of society and culture for sustainable political-pedagogical projects. Although limited to the epistemological territory of techno-science, respectful of advances in science and technology, the thinking of Bahian geographer, philosopher and social theorist Milton Santos (2000, 2002 [1978], 2008) is a powerful tool for exploring the phenomenon of multiculturalism in building a counter-hegemonic globalization. From Santos' basic concepts of "territoriality" and "glocality," we have derived more expanded concepts like, for example, "ethnodiversity" and "epistemodiversity" in order to consider the unsettling issues of the clash between dominant and subordinate cultures.

In his seminal work *Towards a New Geography* (2002 [1978]), Milton Santos highlights two sets of general symbolic effects that structure contemporary society. On the one hand, the conceptual context of so-called knowledge society implies a dialectical relationship between different structural elements and contemporary macrosocial processes or, in his terms, the ideology of the modern world (Santos, 2000). First, the emergence of a new sort of space-time, mediated by the development and availability of information and communication technology; second, in this case segregated by social class, expansion of telematics sets up a unique individual and institutional type of connectivity in human history; third, to account for the increasing complexity of contemporary society, a new paradigm based on non-linear, complex system dynamics, instead of the Cartesian paradigm which simplifies the concrete reality. On the other hand, the acceleration of the historical process and the space-time compression produces "empirical universalism" and, paradoxically, fosters social diversity and ethnodiversity in unprecedented scale in human history.

According to Santos, however, the physical and symbolic presence of the subjects in the territory is required. Contradictorily, taking advantage of the enormous privilege of mobility and hyperconnectivity provided by technology which defines the modern world, the ruling classes do not

participate in the local world of territories and, therefore, “[...] they just see little of the city and of the world” (Santos, 2008, 80). Therefore, socio-ethnodiversity present and acting in local territories enables the production of new discourses, practices, and wisdoms, with solidarity constantly created by the contiguity of direct interpersonal relations. Here is the root of Santos’ political optimism: The perversion of globality is confronted and often suppressed by the singularities of locality (Santos, 2000).

In this process, almost as a historical mission, the university occupies a prominent place to review the past, to realize the present, and to imagine the future in contemporary multicultural society. However, for Milton Santos (apud Leite, 2007), authoritarian, ethnocentric, and bureaucratic models inherited by the Brazilian university stem from a colonized posture by the national intelligentsia, together with the elites who dominate the country. This attitude produces subjects whose singularities end up submitted to the roles imposed by the increasingly rapid transformation of contemporary society, particularly the rampant massification of technological and cultural goods spread out by globalization processes.

Inter-transdisciplinarity

When designing interdisciplinary first-cycle courses, first at the Federal University of Bahia since 2008, we have dealt with the possibility of educating human subjects following the classical German concept of *bildung*, as well as with the North American notion of General Education, adjusted to the context of contemporary Brazil (Almeida Filho & Coutinho, 2011). Now, at UFSB, our proposal is to radicalize the regime of cycles, in order to move beyond interdisciplinary education. The adoption of a General Education baseline, offering flexible, modular, and convergent learning programs for all students of the university, is intended to break inherited paradigms and to reaffirm a trans-epistemic vision of university education. Such a leap would involve transforming, and not only forming, in order to overcome known forms of education that are controlled by hegemonic conceptual frameworks. To face this challenge, we have relied first upon the notions of inter-transdisciplinarity, then to its evolution toward the concepts of ethnodiversity, epistemodiversity, and ecology of knowledges. All these concepts have been treated as tools to explain multiculturalism, a crucial feature of contemporary societies.

There is a huge confusion about the notions of multi-, meta-, inter- and transdisciplinary, more pronounced in the area of education, which would rather be interdisciplinary by definition (Almeida Filho & Coutinho, 2013). For a consistent and rigorous conceptual construction, it is necessary to distinguish between such terms. Multidisciplinarity is the mere coexistence between disciplines, without exchange or communication. Metadisciplinarity is more than that, since in this case disciplines are articulated within a communication framework provided by a meta-discipline, capable of functioning as a common language. Interdisciplinarity, in turn, implies three directions or modes: (a) interface between disciplines, enriching specific knowledge objects (e.g., Social Anthropology; Legal Sociology); (b) fusion of disciplines, resulting in also fused objects of knowledge (e.g., Biochemistry and Astrophysics); and (c) use of multiple approaches, coming from different disciplines to produce knowledge or action upon a concrete (and complex) problem. In the latter case, prospects or pertinence of passage or transit across different disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, for the complex process of formation of subjects, have been designated as “transdisciplinarity.”

At this point, it is necessary to bring to light the epistemic-methodological debate on post-colonial paradigms as a baseline to dialogue with subordinate and oppressed cultures, respecting their knowledge and practices that until recently were silenced or excluded from the Brazilian school environment. Sousa-Santos (2009) has designated as “sociology of absences” the reference to what is suppressed, marginalized, or not been allowed to happen, or has been silenced; in other words, counter-hegemonic forms of struggles and knowledges, local differences erased by hegemonic globalization. For him, “the universal and the global constructed by the sociology of absences, far from denying or eliminating the particular and the local, rather encourages them to envision what is beyond them” (Sousa-Santos, 2001, 191).

For the conceptual design of UFSB, the idea of an “ecology of knowledges” can be used to promote and enhance the epistemodiversity of the territory and society (Sousa-Santos & Almeida Filho, 2008). For Boaventura Sousa-Santos (2009, 118), the ecology of knowledge is non-hierarchical, because “the superiority of a given way of knowing is no longer assessed by its level of institutionalization and professionalization, but rather by its pragmatic contribution to a given practice.” To put this approach into practice, we have integrated masters of popular

knowledge (artisans, shamans, traditional healers, religious leaders, persons of wisdom recognized by their communities) as lay teachers in several learning programs, where appropriate. This approach is in opposition to the conventional divide of knowledge as scientific or traditional, rather indicating post-disciplinary, post-colonial approaches away from the framework of multi-inter-transdisciplinarity, leading further to a trans-epistemic transgressive perspective (Clavo, 2016).

Social Integration

UFSB's institutional goal is to expand and popularize the provision of higher education with its open, decentralized structure. With this expansion, requalification is needed because, throughout the region, only 1400 public higher education slots are offered, mostly in careers that have no impact on regional development. The main strategy for promoting access to higher education for students who graduated from public schools is the network of *Colégios Universitários* (equivalent to community colleges, as we saw above). By making possible overcoming territorial exclusion, this strategy is indeed an innovative form of social integration, because it opens the university to poor youth, indigenous villagers, *quilombolas*, and rural settlers. Remember that, in the region, poor students' opportunities for study are limited to public elementary, middle, and high schools, because there are no other schools in such remote areas. Of course, when the implementation process is complete, this model will inevitably transcend the issue of social and ethnical inclusion via quotas. Since the entire institution is structured for effective social integration, we do not actually need affirmative action isolated programs because everything we do is affirmative action for social integration.

According to the UFSB Master Plan (Brazil, 2014), the concept of *Colégio Universitário* was conceived by Anísio Teixeira in the 1950s, proposed at a public hearing in the National Congress on a 1952 Education Act, which was never approved. Other countries have adopted this modular higher education system for a long time. In the USA, it is called *community college* or *junior college*; currently there are more than 2000 of such establishments. In Canada, a similar system called *Collège d'enseignement général professionnel (Cégep)* includes a decentralized e-learning variant for distant provinces, *Cégep-distance*. Other European experiences in Sweden, Norway and Germany, were incorporated into the Bologna

Process already in 2004, with the so-called short cycle. In Latin America, despite political difficulties, conceptual and institutional proposals of this kind have also been implemented. Since 2003, the Bolivarian University of Venezuela has built a network of university “aldeas” (ALDEAS: acronym in Spanish for Local Alternative Environment for Socialist Educational Development) throughout the country (Parra Sandoval, 2010). In 2005, Cuba began a universal program of higher education—Plan Nueva Universidad—whose main strategy includes the implementation of municipal university colleges, called (SUM: Sede Universitaria Municipal), with universal access to first-cycle courses (Blanco, 2007).

Does the CUNI model really allow access to those who have been historically excluded from the university? We believe so, but only the action of implementing and testing the model will produce an answer to this and to other questions. This may happen on two grounds: On the one hand, being successful, the community college network may become in the future a kind of discriminatory democratic institution. The local middle class, and even those coming from other neighboring regions, will quickly discover the advantages of entering a federal university through the regional network of colleges. On the other hand, the question of a potential “ghettoization” of the CUNI system really concerns us. We are planning several measures to reduce this risk, which is not trivial and can jeopardize the entire project. These measures range from the implementation of a tutoring-mentoring-monitoring system, including integrating community outreach actions into the network of high schools, reaching all students without discrimination on town of origin, to the production of isonomic educational contents regardless of learning environment, both on campus and in the Anísio Teixeira Network. In addition, we anticipate intense national and international mobility programs, particularly the Paulo Freire Project, a new program of scholarships and other incentives for training elementary and high school teachers in interdisciplinary programs, such as the *Licenciaturas Interdisciplinares* (Teacher’s Interdisciplinary Degree).

However, social integration is not only community action programs, affirmative action, wider access and more inclusion of students from poor families or excluded social groups. As approved in UFSB bylaws, a Strategic Social Council is tasked to articulate the academic projects to the social demands of the regional community, compiled by a biannual Social Forum, congregating delegates from the community. This Council is composed by farmers, executives, environmentalists, politicians,

businessmen, and trade unionists, but also by workers, settlers, Indians, *quilombolas*, fishermen, street artists, and high school students, all elected by their respective ethnic, professional, or social groups. In addition to these and to advisory functions for the higher governance team, members of the Social Council also participate in the electoral processes for the nomination of the university authorities, including Deans and the President.

Metapresence

The institutional design of UFSB provides networking, both at intra-institutional level (the relationship of CUNIs with campuses) and as inter-institutional (at municipal, State, and federal level). Technologically, we are attempting to solve the region's huge gap in access to educational resources by deploying a high-speed digital network that interconnects small towns and villages of the Anísio Teixeira Network. This conception is based on the possibilities of using advanced technologies of information and communication as strategies for the construction of a counter-hegemonic logic for transforming teaching and learning, which seems counter-intuitive (Bates & Sangra, 2011). As a secondary gain, this will allow access of isolated populations to the outside world. Institutional and academic management of UFSB has been strongly based on information and communication technologies (ICT) with non-linear planning, decentralization and flexibility as key government strategies. To make this possible, open-broad institutional control and centralized evaluation are coordinated with decentralized governance, supported by strategies of e-management, with a main focus on quality of the educational process.

Aiming at a more rigorous conceptual formulation, we have designated the virtual presence (which is also real, although mediated by digital technologies) of the learning subject as “metapresence,” the situation arising therefrom as “metapresencial” and the concept that underlies this formulation as “metapresenciality.” In this line, we have proposed to rethink the idea of learning space, overcoming the conventional model of the classroom (or the laboratory), as a physical learning environment where everyone is at the same time in one place. We seek thus to avoid the trap of distance-education based on a hierarchy, also in terms of quality, in which some subjects at a distance have access to a mentor, to a guide, to materials and consultation systems not necessarily online or real

time, while others have all of this and more, with the privilege of sitting in a classroom with the not always warm-and-stimulating physical presence of a teacher.

At UFSB, we are set to overcome limitations of physical material presence through various structuring strategies of teaching spaces, VLEs and teaching–learning relationships, recognizing what is most valuable in the university education system: the experience of being in an educating atmosphere (Bowen, Chingos, Lack, & Nygren, 2014). Moreover, we can make feasible this teaching, learning, and sharing experience to be widely available on a network, including, but not confined to, the university campus. This move converges with the idea of integration of the university to society, to tear down the imaginary, symbolic, and real walls of the university campus, making it part of a territory and not a mere location of facilities and persons.

Learning Model

As clearly stated, our ongoing project is to create a university of popular roots, focused on the needs and wants of our society, with strong regional ties and, at the same time, open to the world. To comply with this objective, at the politico-pedagogical domain, we had to recover and try to recreate the historical conceptual basis of the Brazilian university. The main source of inspiration for our university's learning model was Anísio Teixeira (1971/2005, 1982) and Paulo Freire (1970, 1996), Brazilian educators and critical philosophers whose ideas and initiatives were repressed by the military dictatorship.

The curriculum structure proposed for the UFSB has been influenced by two models: the Bologna Process (organization of higher education in study cycles) established in European universities and the American model of higher education (community colleges). Critics have suggested that the proposal of UFSB is intended to be a synthesis between the two models, carrying on all the problems they revealed. Indeed, the Bologna Process is openly intended to adjust to the modular and progressive system that defines the American college model. The competitive advantage of the cycle-system in the international scenario of education was a threat to the university in continental Europe, fragmented in almost two dozen different national models. In addition, the difficulties of economic and political integration resulting from this fragmentation could be overcome. But, in our opinion, the creation of the European University Area

was not taken as an opportunity to promote interdisciplinarity and ethnodiversity toward a multicultural university education. We consider that this was perhaps due to the fact that, in most European countries, secondary education is of high quality and culturally dense. But beyond that, or perhaps because of it, the scope of the post-Bologna European university, in a context of a deep, broad economic crisis, has been reduced to rapid and early professionalization, with fixed, linear, fragmented curriculum frameworks (Delgado-Gal, Alonso, & Pericay, 2013).

At UFSB, we offer a three-year bachelor's degree prior to specific professional and academic training courses. This recalls the Bologna model, although with a curriculum more open to the students' choices. Our strong emphasis on General Education—integrating community colleges to interdisciplinary degree courses—resembles the undergraduate model of the USA and Canada. So, our curriculum model can be described as a proposal to combine the best of both worlds, avoiding some problems or drawbacks of each of them. In addition to promoting quality, flexibility, autonomy, mobility, and social commitment in the pedagogical practices of the Brazilian university, this model makes us better integrated into the contemporary landscape of higher education. By adopting an interdisciplinary regime of learning cycles, our open curriculum architecture is unique, frankly referred to ethnodiversity and epistemodiversity (Clavo, 2016).

Nevertheless, we have a critical position in relation to the classic tripod of teaching, research, and extension, first for being classic and then for being a tripod. The university as an institution was created in the Middle Ages to form clerical cadres and later on professional and corporate staff, State leaders, and organic intellectuals of the emerging bourgeoisie. With the Humboldt Reform, very late in history, the mission to produce original knowledge was added, initially for scientific and technological base and then in the humanities and the arts (Scott, 2006). Only in the last century has the university awakened to its social mission, first by outreach actions in the community, regional, and national development initiatives and political action, using different ways of social mobilization (Sousa-Santos & Almeida Filho, 2008). Following Teixeira (1971) and Freire (1996), the distinction between teaching, research, and extension sounds poor, superficial, and unjustified. Perhaps it is wiser to speak of hybrid acts as action-research, research-creation, research-training, research-transformation, learning-transformation, learning-creation, diffusion-learning, learning-innovation, and many other possible combinations, and still others that we cannot even imagine.

CHALLENGES, OBSTACLES, AND PERSPECTIVES

Here is the biggest challenge faced by our proposal of a critical university of a new kind: How is it possible to consider and promote cultural diversity and new counter-hegemonic epistemologies with personnel formed within a conservative hegemonic and eventually neocolonial paradigm? This question is crucial. We have tried hard to solve it creatively and efficiently. Indeed, the selection process of public employees in Brazil follows previously established rules, oriented by competition, but we started by modifying the system of recruitment of our faculty and staff. Before carrying out public tenders for all vacancies, as typically done by other federal institutions of higher education, we launched public calls for reassignment of teachers from other federal universities who identified themselves with the project. Many candidates showed up and, after selection of proposals and evaluation of curricula, they were invited to participate in what we call seminar-workshops, where we discussed scenarios, problems, and details of the proposal. This helped us also to identify applicants who demonstrated a critical stance to the current models, who understood the real intention to break paradigms and were eager effectively to incorporate UFSB's concepts and principles.

Only after that we opened public contests, testing a format of recruitment totally different yet feasible within the parameters allowed by Brazilian law. On the one hand, in our job descriptions, we do not require disciplinary degrees, restricted to professional education and specific training, as the conventional university usually does. Rather, the topics for selection are broad, defined inter-transdisciplinarily, and virtually any combination of knowledge area and graduate degree can be accepted. On the other hand, we have held a competition system in qualifying stages. The first stage consists of two tests, in electronic form, in the areas of expertise and, more importantly, in knowledge and appreciation of the university's Master Plan. The examination of the curriculum vitae is a second stage, which is a qualifying round to select the two best candidates who would finally be invited for the last step. This third stage consists of a lecture class and, instead of defense of a Memorial [evaluative document of the teacher's past experience], there is an oral examination of a research and teaching proposal to verify the candidate's position regarding counter-hegemonic epistemologies and prospecting for the future he/she foresees in our institution. We have performed a thorough evaluation and consider this experience very positive; so we have

improved the model for the next contests. Finally, we intend to leave a significant proportion of the teaching positions unfilled, reserved for international visiting professors, preferably coming from regions, contexts, and institutions that are partners in projects that take higher education as a liberating and civilizing action.

We endeavor to recover the university as a house of culture—that is, the space for a dialogical, critical, and productive encounter among the arts, the sciences, and the humanities. To carry on this project, we cannot be naive about the role of the public university in a social context, such as in Brazil, where education is a strong factor for promoting inequality and the domination of ruling classes. We agree with Muniz Sodré (2012, 14), who thinks it is time for Brazil’s formal education to face the crucial question, “whether or not education, as a double bottom of history, can open the possibility of circumventing monoculturalist claims of universal truth.” More specifically, this author addresses scientism, a perversion of scientific rationality, understood as “effect of social class upon subordinate knowledges and also of the coloniality that seeks downgrading the Other’s culture by interpretive monism,” representative of a “pan-European knowledge,” which many times operates as a sort of “doctrinaire racism” (Sodré, 2012, 51).

Converging with our proposal, Sousa-Santos’ early initiative of a *People’s University of Social Movements* is an appealing strategy for building a counter-hegemonic globalization through higher education. However, instead of becoming an institution that is co-opted by social movements and uses their strategies and tactics for higher education, the university should rather be a kind of academic branch of social movements. Despite being European in early historical roots, a new kind of university, to be radical and critical, has to emerge within a Southern perspective. This is the position we have defended in *The University of the XXI Century—For a New University* (Sousa-Santos & Almeida Filho, 2008).

At this point, to actually face and confront market and external political forces, the public university needs to be creative and efficient while maintaining quality and excellence, but not only to the heirs. The heirs—this is how Bourdieu, not without fine irony, referred to wealthy students who manage to enter elite educational institutions, which in Brazil may be public but do not belong to the people. For Bourdieu, the “elected few” are chosen from the dominant social group at an early age and

their social destiny is claimed to be a result of individual actions carried out throughout their life-course. The feeling of individual responsibility for success or failure is fostered by the ideological game played to convey the idea that the school is not responsible for giving the extra support to those that come from the dominant hegemonic culture even as a minority, conforming a white, bourgeois, male, Eurocentric way of life, and hence making invisible other agents who do not share these characteristics.

The university requires that all who wish to access it become part of a game in which the rules of competition follow features convenient to the school system that, in turn, coincides with the social system of reproduction of the ruling elites. Equality, among students, is formal but not real, because “this system finds its fulfillment in the contest, which fully ensures the formal equality of the candidates, but throwing into anonymity real inequalities before the culture” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2014, 92). Once in the university, students from a popular background actually need to learn a new culture, that is, to affiliate to a different and somewhat hostile environment (Coulon, 2008). This new culture—with rules and codes often not explicit and naturalized—acts as a promoter of “failures,” in that students who have not received certain elements of the dominant culture in the family and at school arrive at the university as doubly foreigners: either because the university environment is different from the school environment, or because the university reproduces the hegemonic culture and has historically neglected other forms of knowledge, skills, and practices. To accommodate the mass of excluded ones and to gain an important role in the social integration of these subjects, to produce local-regional knowledge, and to acquire relevance in national development projects, the university needs to recreate itself as a popular university.

Given all these challenges, this renewed university must increasingly demonstrate productivity in all dimensions of its action. And more than productive, it must be militant in a triple endeavor, in the formation of critically concerned citizens, respecting their cultural roots as much as in the production of research, creation, and innovation. And this productivity has nothing to do with the recent fashion of the university rankings. In practice, the effect of rankings has been consolidation and restructuring of knowledge institutions, especially in the North hemisphere. Throughout the past century, there was a clear dispersion

of universities in Europe. In these countries, recently, programs for regrouping institutions have been promoted as aiming at building new institutional arrangements to improve the relative position of the universities of these countries in international rankings. To the extent that this is essentially a competitive classification, based on performance measures in comparable criteria, the most prestigious universities tend to reinforce the instruments thus ratifying their original position of domination. In addition, there is another opportunity element that universities of international scope draw out of the rankings fashion, which we should not underestimate. Considering the necessary precautions, they function as a device for generating institutional distinction in relation to private and non-university models of higher education.

Let us take the case of public tenders for faculty recruitment, on which we spoke earlier. A tender notice for university teachers is full of items to ensure impartiality of the process, preserving rights of staff and teachers who are barely effective, but that hinder recognition and selection of the most creative and competent. The selection mode is for several reasons less academic and more managerial, allowing endless lawsuits and legal proceedings. On top of that, to make public procurement for technical and administrative staff, we have to follow the list of functions of the Ministry of Planning, Budget, and Management of the federal government. This submission of the university to the standards of the general public service hampers even the management oriented for social efficiency and academic productivity, which would entail greater flexibility to admit, to oversee, to evaluate, and, where appropriate, to dispense inefficient personnel.

And most of all, this set of constraints and disagreements among the public character and the social mission can become a glaring contradiction, actually setting obstacles to the viability of the concrete project of a popular university, as it is our intention in Southern Bahia. We argue that the mythical autonomy of the nineteenth-century Humboldtian or Newmanian University is no longer justified. Previously, the university presented itself as the *avant-gard* of an elite, as critical conscience of society, and for that reason was little questioned. The world has changed since then. Today the university must persistently demonstrate its political and social value as a tool necessary for economic and human development of a given nation. We need to regain our autonomy, paradoxically, by engaging the community in a participatory manner, so that society starts not to charge us for standards and well-enforced rules, but rather for socially relevant goals effectively achieved.

No doubt that UFSP must comply with the legal apparatus of our country, applicable to all federal universities, whether in management or evaluation or selection of professors. In this regard, the absence of a specific legal juridical apparatus in relation to the listed dimensions may be an obstacle to achieving a progressive, democratic, and popular higher education project. In our case, such a submission is inevitable, because we are a federal institution under the rules of the Ministry of Education, and our core funding comes from the public budget. Unfortunately, the Brazilian State is still in the reconstruction process after the military dictatorship. It has not yet dealt with the question of what university Brazilian society needs and deserves. We have to decide whether the university required for this twenty-first-century Brazil is a bureaucracy, another government agency, or a true institution of knowledge and creation. We do think the core issue is principles. The public management in general is governed by constitutional principles of fairness, legality, economy, impartiality, and efficiency. Excellence, scientificity, aesthetics, creativity, and plurality are to be taken as structuring principles of this peculiar institution called the university, which has the historical mission of higher education, knowledge production and original creation, respect for diversity, and the critical transformation of society. At times, there will even be contradiction between the bureaucratic spirit of public service and the university ethos: Efficiency can impair excellence; impersonality may reject talent and plurality; legality can stifle creativity; economic viability can compromise the aesthetic and the scientific.

FINAL COMMENTS

Before concluding, we have to consider the differences, from the political-pedagogical point of view, between UFSP's new institutional framework and traditional institutional matrices. The biggest challenge faced by public universities in Brazil nowadays reveals an apparent contradiction: how to make them socially responsible, at the same time reaffirming quality and competence, values that define the university as an institution. This challenge unfolds on crucial issues. How do we strengthen the scientific and artistic competence of the university and, at the same time, increase slots on a large scale, opening doors to social groups historically excluded, and thereby paying a debt of 200 years of inertia, immobility, and elitism? How do we instill political responsibility in the continuous search for autonomy and creativity, and simultaneously

foster the principles of efficiency and economy crucial to the duty of public administration? How do we reaffirm our social commitment and, in doing so, introduce the values of interdisciplinarity, versatility, mobility, and internationalization, which define the contemporary *zeitgeist*?

We intend to get involved in simultaneous movements of incorporation of global and regional peculiarities as a strategy for a counter-hegemonic globalization, producing knowledge appropriate to the context and forming people able to cope with the task of understanding and intervening in this complex, changing reality. But we know we are fighting against the current because the Brazilian conventional university has failed as an instrument or device of social integration. As part of our country's social reproduction system, it acts more as a keeper, if not a promoter, of inequality. Slots in better-quality public universities and in courses of greater social prestige were—and still to a great extent, are, despite compensatory affirmative action policies—aimed almost exclusively at a privileged minority. As seen above, this is when injustice becomes perversion, a really absurd triple perversion.

As a result, in Brazil, well-to-do people are trained in public universities that disregard the public character of the State, engaged in individualistic designs, in a relationship with the public institution of education, often predatory. These students relate to the public university as if it were theirs, the place where they will guarantee a professional future as their personal or family project, with no construction of solidarity or feelings of belonging to the university supported by the State. To challenge this perversion, it means that we have to break down the conservative culture of omission, producing creative forms of resistance.

So the dream-project of UFSB is intended, without prejudice and with imagination, to help make the Brazilian university an open institution, radically public, popular indeed. This brings a set of crucial questions: how to popularize without vulgarizing, how to scale up without losing quality? how to pay the social debt of Brazilian education without destroying the dream of a competent and creative university?

The model we have designed to tackle these challenging questions can be summarized in the following features: exposure to cultural diversity, recognition of an iniquitous and adverse socioeconomic reality, review of a painful historical context, openness to true community participation, immersion plans into concrete practices, breach of pedagogical roles, implementing post-disciplinary forms of learning, breaking disciplinary and epistemological boundaries, practicing shared and joint

self-reflexivity, promoting the active education of critical and politically engaged social subjects, without losing scientific, technological, and praxiological expertise ever. Each and every one of these points is controversial and prone to reactions, resistance, sabotage, and boycotts.

Nevertheless, even considering that we must confront the logic of marketization and productivity that threatens so many teaching-learning innovations that are supposedly emancipatory, the potential sources of reactionary pressures we have faced so far are not only external. In this regard, some faculty members, mostly graduates from Brazilian elite universities, have already organized a domestic opposition movement, joined by a few students and staff members, fueled by estrangement regarding several features of the UFSB project: (a) the cycle curriculum structure, (b) the academic quarter calendar, (c) the intensive use of digital technologies, (d) the innovative pedagogical model, and (e) the acceptance of popular leaders and traditional wise persons as lay teachers. But the most surprising is that they have openly disagreed with and are against the participation of the popular Social Councils in the governance of the institution.

This is not the time and place to analyze in depth the internal political context of our young university. Perhaps we shall do it elsewhere and afterward, waiting for the social and political unrest which followed upon the juridical-parliamentary coup that displaced the Workers' Party popular government that ruled Brazil for the past decade to pass. We have only to say that, in spite of the teachers' local resistance, our new university has been received enthusiastically by all segments of the social fabric of the Southern region of Bahia. Political bodies, government agencies, community organizations, and social movements have collaborated with us in every way, often embracing and promoting collective forms of support. However, many of the actors in this process are not yet aware that political activism, social control, and participatory effects are to be generated and promoted by our pedagogical action and transformative education. Maybe that is the reason why we still have not faced major obstacles in the process; in fact, we have found much convergence and enthusiasm from school teachers, peasant and indigenous leaders, high school students, and representatives of different segments of the *grapiúna* (Tupi word that designates people born in Southern Bahia) territory and society. In short, we have seen that the political forces of the Southern Bahia hinterland, and much of the population, are already galvanized by the social and cultural transformative potential made possible by the arrival of our university.

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