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The Expansion of Higher Education in Brazil: Credentials & Merit*

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Abstract

This article tries to outline an exploratory sociological approach to higher education in Brazil. Its specific contribution would be to raise hypotheses to explain some of the social and economic inefficiencies in Brazilian system of higher education. Beginning with the increasing differential returns this level of education, this article explores the case of technologists in order to develop hypothesis on the social meaning of third level schooling. We use studies on the relationship between education and work and two sociological models (meritocratic and credentialist) and the contribution of sociology of professions to comprehend the role of knowledge and social position in determining the returns to education.

The domain of academic bias in Brazilian education system seems to organize social forces that tend to generate some of its inefficiencies. They can appear in inability to adequately qualify to job market or in the production of innovations and patent registration. The most outstanding inefficiency would be that new groups who manage to get college degree are excluded by the devaluation of some titles and by the subordination of certain careers and types of training to the academic model.

Keywords: Brazilian higher education, technologists, academic bias, credentialist model, social inequalities

La Expansión de la Educación Superior en Brasil: Credenciales y Méritos*

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Resumen

Este artículo trata de presentar una perspectiva sociológica exploratoria de la educación superior en Brasil. Su contribución específica radica en proponer algunas hipótesis que pueden explicar algunas de las ineficiencias económicas del sistema de educación superior brasileño. Comenzando por el aumento de los diferenciales del retorno educativo en estos niveles de educación, este artículo explora el caso de los llamados "tecnologistas" para desarrollar la hipótesis sobre cual es el significado social de la escolarización terciaria. En este sentido, se utilizan estudios sobre la relación existente entre educación y trabajo, sobre los dos modelos sociológicos (el meritocrático y el credencialista) así como sobre las aportaciones de la sociología de las profesiones con el objetivo de comprender el rol del conocimiento y la posición social en determinar los retornos educativos.

El sesgo académico en el sistema educativo brasileño parece organizarse a través de fuerzas sociales que tienden a generar sus propias ineficiencias. Estas aparecen a través de la inability de acreditar adecuadamente a las personas para entrar en el mercado laboral o para generar innovación y registrar nuevas patentes. La ineficiencia más significativa es que los nuevos grupos que consiguen graduarse de la universidad son excluidos debido a la devaluación de algunas titulaciones y a la subordinación de determinadas carreras y tipos de formación dentro del sistema académico.

Palabras claves: Educación superior brasileña, tecnologistas, sesgo académico, modelo credencialista, desigualdades sociales

The expansion and diversification of higher education during the last two decades in Brazil have generated important discussions about its social meaning. Expanding higher education has become a particularly important issue in a country with very low levels of schooling. This article tries to participate in this debate, proposing an outline of a sociological approach, with an exploratory character. The questions analyzed here are part of the work in a research group that brings together professionals from many states and institutions to make a systematic survey of Brazilian higher education and produce indicators that would allow for reliable evaluations of this system. This inclusive research program is based in a methodological and conceptual framework that should deal with this diverse and complex reality, more or less efficient, more or less unequal, and more or less fair.

The specific contribution of a sociological approach, then, would be to raise hypotheses that offer explanations for some of the social and economic inefficiencies in the system of higher education in Brazil.

The empirical basis of the problem

For many years we know that in Brazil, there are quite substantial individual economic returns to schooling, which would be a normal situation, considering the progress made in terms of modernization of social relations in the country. However, the difference between the individual returns for different levels of education is changing and, ultimately, making room for questions about the very legitimacy of education as a criterion for the distribution of socioeconomic positions. As shown in the work of Naércio Menezes, the balance in the returns for different levels of schooling is changing with increasing returns to higher levels, indicating that even if the poor are more educated the high levels of inequality persists in Brazilian society. This graph (figure 1, next page) shows this important evolution in the value (and meaning) of education.

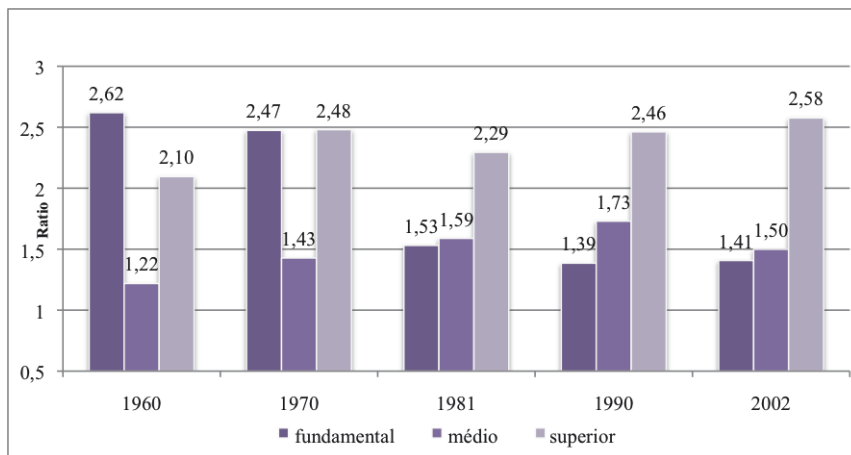


Figure 1. Salary differentials among educational levels in Brazil (1960-2002).

There is another side to be considered in relation to these returns: even among economists huge doubts exist. That's what Alison Wolf's study shows. In this study, the general problem would be defined around a series of questions about what qualification is and how it is seen or worked in public policy. What would be the effects of these policies? Education can effectively be seen as the basis of economic growth? Does it deserve everything that governments spend in it? More educated individuals actually earn more, but does it happen because they are more qualified? There are indications that this is not true. There is evidence that the qualifications pay well, however, unevenly. We would have more qualified people than those that are necessary. There would be signs that the personal benefits with higher education are becoming more important, not less. And increases in income inequality would be occurring mainly INSIDE groups. It would be interesting here the warning made by the author about the importance of analyzing the gains from education more accurately so that we could distinguish the net contribution of schooling.

This strong questioning of the meaning of education resonates in international publications such as the magazine "Economist" that published a study illustrated by the cartoon reproduced below and which explains the difficulties in economic valuation of university graduates, even those of highest degrees.

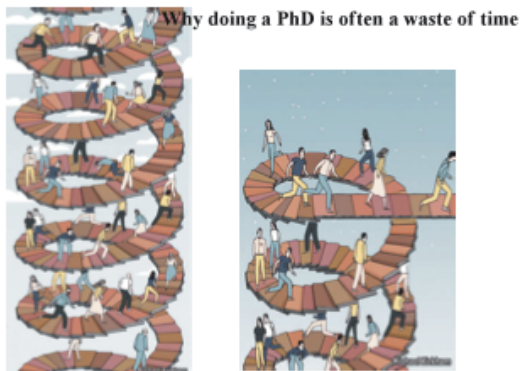


Figure 2. Why doing a Ph.D is often a waste of time.

One of the important conclusions of the text by Wolf, and that guide our research questions would be that income reflects more than individual productivity: it depends strongly on the way in which society is organized. Including the ways it distributes education and health, or how much the culture values equality and how tasks and professional fees are regulated (Guimaraes, 2011; Velho & Sobral, 2010).

Even if the meanings of the economic returns would be debatable, in recent years there has been an exceptional expansion of research on the strategic nature of higher education and its impact on scientific development and innovation production, in addition to those classic dimensions such as the possibilities of generating and improving employment.

Regardless of this debate, the Brazilian higher education expanded quite significantly during the last two decades, accompanied by an intense process of diversification that could be viewed from two main angles: the substantive one with new school tracks (new objects, theories, training areas), but also the social and bureaucratic one, with the creation of new types of diplomas.

Surely this expansion means an increase in costs and investments in education, both by governments and by the private sector. But two questions are drawn as essential for sociological research: the first is about the production processes of socially distinct values for the different diplomas and the second on the more or less democratic nature of this expansion.

As it is well known (Barbosa, 2010), the evaluation of the various differentiated diplomas configures a research problem that encompasses two dimensions. The first one would be the sociological discussion of the meanings and definitions of merit as organizing factor of modern social hierarchies. The second can be expressed as the correct understanding of the ways of functioning of education systems and the production of school credentials.

The economists have primarily analyzed the themes and issues on inequalities in contemporary societies and they have an important contribution to the development of the sociology of social hierarchies. There is a growing Brazilian literature (e.g. Hasenbalg & Silva, 2004; Scalón, 2004) on these questions which were mainly inspired in the perspective developed by British researchers, especially Goldthorpe, Jackson & Mills (2002) and Goldthorpe (1997). These studies highlight the relationship between education and work, seen as key feature of the system of inequalities. As Bills (2004, p.2) underlined in the introduction of his book *The sociology of education and work*:

[...] how a society's broader beliefs and practices about the relationship between education and work influence (but never entirely determine) what that relationship will be, and how these relationships in turn affect such things as life chances, socioeconomic inequality, and personal development.

Also according to this author, two main strands explain this relationship in sociological terms: what he calls the credentialist model and meritocratic model.

The credentialist model defines the social and monetary appreciation of credentials, mostly diplomas and school certificates, as the main characteristic of modern society and one of the basic elements in the construction of social inequalities. Modern societies are the reference to this model in which acquired characteristics (attainment) gain more relevance than those ascribed (social origins).

This ideal-typical version of a modern society is not effective and receives harsh criticism of the credentialist model. In this critical perspective, diplomas and school certificates are not valued for their contents or the knowledge that they should recognize. The diplomas

have a social value but no technical or scientific content. Also according Bills (2004, p.56):

Thus, in a strong credentialist position, the linkage between education and socioeconomic success lies not in merit in Young's sense of IQ plus effort, but in processes of "social closure" by which educational credentials are "misrecognized" as merit."

In this more radical approach, the school titles or academic credentials would be simple social tags, without any relevant content: In this ideal-typical model of credentialist society there would be no reasonable connection between what the school teaches and what you do at work. In such models the academic institution would appear only as a mechanism to legitimize the social heritage through the granting of diplomas to children from more affluent families, without any important role in the transmission of knowledge or technical preparation to work.

The second ideal type or model mentioned by Bills (2004) is that of the meritocratic society. In this model it is assumed that a positive association between what is taught in school and what is needed or that is used in economic life, labor market and business. Thus, the discussion on the place taken by science in modern societies becomes relevant: the scientific knowledge acquired enormous legitimacy and displaced traditional knowledge (religious or mystical) to become the main basis of legitimacy of hierarchical differences between social groups. Accordingly, as suggested in Larson (1977), the professions would be the modern form of social inequality, to the extent that the criterion for distinguishing between groups has a meritocratic nature and not patrimonial one. At the same time, professional groups exert their power precisely from the social control they have over scientific knowledge specific to their area.

From this point of view, the first parameter to consider in the understanding and analysis of economic and social value of different diplomas is the set of social disputes over the definition of what is effectively considered meritorious, around what is the merit. In modern societies, in which patrimonial or traditional factors such as family origins are less valued, three important social resources are highlighted because they allow their "holders" to compete for positions in the labor

market: the experience, practical qualifications and schooling, i.e., the different forms of human capital. In the particular field that interests us in this study, this last item, schooling, deserves special attention.

As in the credentialist model portrayals of ideal types of meritocratic society are varied, ranging from human capital theorists, who assume an unproblematic relationship between education and work, to researchers such as John Goldthorpe (1997) who seek to unravel the complex mechanisms and the enormous variability of factors that, in every society, constitute distinct patterns of legitimating inequalities, especially those visible in the association between education and the labor market.

Using these two models discussed by Bills (2004), the meritocratic and credentialist ones, as opposing perspectives to understand the relationship between education and work, this paper tries to analyze the perceptions of the different degrees produced in the current Brazilian higher education, namely, the academic and the professional. It seeks to analyze the extent to which higher degrees of academic or professional type are perceived as credential or as merit, comprising thus the sense of valuing school titles and their contribution to the organization of social inequality.

Technologists: a critical issue

In the Brazil of the turn of the XXI century, the modernization of the education system has led to an intense process of diversification of school courses offered at the same time that we are witnessing a staggering increase in enrollment in higher education. Only between 1996 and 2001, the number of students enrolled at this level increased from 1.8 to 3.1 million (Martins, 2000; MEC, 1996; MEC-INEP 2011). We currently have 6,38 million people in higher education, which corresponds approximately to 14% of the population in the 18-24 years age bracket (MEC-INEP, 2011). Substantively, there is the emergence of a series of new objects, themes or areas of training such as Fashion, Gastronomy and Hotel Management.

On the other hand, this also appears in modernizing organizational changes such as shorter courses, longer courses, full titles, bachelors, license degrees, plus a plethora of MBA specializations.

The courses in technology clearly express both aspects of this modernization: they indicate as much diversification in the training content as in the institutional arrangements. And maybe the technologists they trained pay the price of participating in an innovative process in a society with serious conservative tendencies.

Table 1
Total income by type and level title

Group	Total Income in R\$ - 2000	Standard Deviation
Higher education professionals	2.691,24	10.337,81
Technicians and similar professionals	899,03	3.144,17
Technologists and similar professionals with college degree	1.989,04	1.962,70

Source: IBGE - Demographic Census, 2000.

In these figures, for the 2000 census, it appears that higher education really translates into an effective increase in income: these professionals receive nearly three times more on average than those who have secondary levels of education. The huge standard deviation, particularly among individuals with higher degrees is an important indication of income diversification among them. Note that upper level technicians or technologists received an average slightly below that received by all graduates in higher education. However, the standard deviation below the mean, unlike what happens with all the professionals with higher degrees, indicates a consistency in the size of income: there is little difference between the technologists in their level of monthly wages.

One can always perceive these differences as a result of distinct duration of some courses and in both models, credentialist or meritocratic, they would be seen as reasonably warranted. Courses longer and wider would qualify better the individuals and provide them with higher incomes. However, there are some problems with this reasoning, as discussed below.

Other forms of differentiation between technologists and academics appear in job opportunities, as indicated in Barbosa (2009). Large Brazilian companies, even state owned ones, refuse to hire technologists. Some of them, though not formally, block the access these professionals and do not have the job of 'techie' in their chart. Yet this same study shows how companies tend to value practical knowledge, essential trait in the training of technologists. Moreover, this kind of knowledge is less recognized by other professionals, even some technologists. Like other practical knowledge, it is considered inferior to abstract knowledge. From the point of view of technologists, the domain of practical knowledge would be the key resource for driving production processes. School education is viewed positively but as a basis for practice. This study recommends that managers of public policies and technological courses to try to adjust and balance abstract knowledge and practical knowledge in order to improve the position of technologists in the labor market.

For technologists, we are no longer faced with differences in pay, but with the creation of different levels of social and professional authority. The responsibilities of professionals in the production process are different according to their position in the hierarchy of professional institutions or associations: technical and administrative responsibilities are higher for engineers than for technologists as well as opportunities for advancement to leadership positions.

If the point of view of the credentialist model we would only have a distinct appreciation for credentials that are also distinct, the meritocratic model would question the extent to which these precautions or requirements reflect real differences in the extent of necessary training or even the type of knowledge mobilized in implementing these tasks. From this point of view, something that often appears as a privilege of some groups would be a form of recognition of the importance of scientific knowledge controlled, developed and used by the professionals who are part of it.

In fact, social disputes about the meaning and social value of higher education are essential to explain these differences and inequalities. What explanations can be found for these important differences regarding the social position of people who have the same level of education? To what extent this appreciation of separate school certificates indicates greater proximity of Brazilian society with a meritocratic or credentialist model? Or, another way of asking, a little broader: how legitimate are our patterns of inequality?

The sociological research: some questions

A journalistic assessment of the questions mentioned above would already provide us with a good reason - related to the merits - for differentiation between the remuneration of people with both types of diploma, professional or academic or technological and traditional. If universities are well established and evaluated, very strict and very competitive on the occasion of the selection processes, the same is not true for technological courses. The possibility of creating higher technical courses is already mentioned in the LDB¹ (1968) but the effective expansion of the courses took place starting from the 90's: only between 1994 and 2004, the number of higher education technological courses grew 591% to 1804 courses, of which 1445 were in the private sector.

While many courses then created were of a high standard, such as those offered by SENAI (National Service of Industrial Apprenticeship, created and maintained by the National Federation of Industrial Entrepreneurs) or by FATEC-SP (Faculty of Technology of São Paulo, state funded) and FAETEC-RJ (State Foundation of Technical Schools in Rio de Janeiro), or in CEFET (federal government institutions), a plethora of courses without major technical or pedagogic requirements were created as an alternative to the new high school graduates. In terms of a credentialist or meritocratic perspective, it can be said that signals that the school system could send employers were somewhat confusing. If companies rely on the quality of the training courses offered in SENAI, they constitute only a tiny minority of all graduates as technologists in different fields and institutions. In general, we know very little about what would be the actual qualifications offered by these

other courses. Add to this the fact that the nomenclature of these courses is quite complex, even after attempts to systematize were made. So the heterogeneity of quality and the uncertainty about courses titles could possibly explain the lower wages of technologists in relation to academics. However, it is possible to hypothesize that the variation in wages among technologists is not a mere reflex of those characteristics mentioned, being also an effect of academic bias.

Another reason mobilized to justify differences in income between jobs concerns the type of knowledge required to perform that specific task. Without going into the intense quarrels around the functionalist theories of society, it can be argued that, in modern societies, and more complex jobs with greater demands of abstract knowledge are better paid. The sociology of professions, from Durkheim's classic studies, shows that this division of labor is not a purely technical question: technically different tasks correspond to different patterns of social relations and different forms of collective identities. Given these assumptions, modern societies intensely value scientific knowledge through various instances which organize our everyday lives – from the school to the factory, through the markets and different forms of entertainment. The main agents of this organization are the various professional groups which control essential elements to the existence of us all, mainly because of their relation to science. Thus, professionals medicate people, separating healthy from ill, magistrates decide on arrests and rights, oenologists classify wines.

It is important to consider, as do Grusky and his colleagues (Grusky & Weeden, 2001; Grusky & Sorensen, 1998), that the technical differences between the tasks or works are also social differences. And, from this perspective, we can understand that the technology courses, having a focus on more specific processes of each vocational area are seen as more specialized and less comprehensive than the traditional academic courses. Specialization or specification, that are stronger in the technological courses associated with these professionals, seem to remove an important base of social authority (or cultural authority, as defined by Starr (1982), reducing their margins of power, even within her own work.

This dimension seems to be confirmed in the case of technologists studied by Barbosa (2009) when comparing the activities assigned by supervisors (many of them engineers) for technologists with those per-

ceived by the technologists as their main tasks. For the latter, their task would have a very general character, involving even the design work for the development and improvement of technical tools, besides, of course, the specialized activities of technical and site supervision. However, for the company, the these professionals' tasks match legal description: they just perform technical work and technical supervision. This difference of perspective seems to indicate the presence of some kind of social dispute over the control of the work process within which technologists have still a long way to go before attaining the intended position.

According to the meritocratic model, the situation of these technologists indicate a reasonable fit between what they have learned – specialized techniques for solving specific problems – and what they do. But the difference in perspective between technologists and supervisors seems to indicate some level of attrition in this setting. It could be both a case of excessive qualification (as pointed by some credentialists, discussing the question of overeducation) for tasks performed, as a problem of sub-qualification, because technological courses do not offer the completeness and comprehensiveness of training required for higher tasks.

Draw up here another possible reason for the differences between the graduates of the academic system and those in the professional system: the first would have access to a type of training not only larger but also much more abstract. And in this case, the sociology of professions teaches us, through the study of Andrew Abbott (1998), the degree of abstraction of knowledge controlled by a professional group would be the most important basis for strengthening the collective identity and social position of the group.

But the legitimacy of professional work should not belittle the other functions of abstract knowledge: The most important one is the best known, the generation of new diagnostics, treatments and methods of inference. The academic knowledge reaches levels of excellence in the field of inventions precisely because it is organized along abstract lines. It is able to make connections that could seem unwise from the standpoint of practical professional knowledge, and they can even redesign all this knowledge. Examples from Medicine are innumerable, but the importance of papers which analyze the laws in the reconfiguration of legal doctrine is equally evident in the quotations of appeals courts (Abbott, 1988).

This defense of the differential value of abstract knowledge brings water to the mill of the meritocratic model in that training more abstract opens a wider range for professional services. More than that, abstract knowledge is translated for each professional group, as a set of highly standardized, codified and depersonalized knowledge. And while this formalization favors the individual professionals who dominate this knowledge, increasing their freedom of choice and autonomy in performing the tasks, it discourages the practical knowledge, the knowledge of experience. The latter is dependent on the individual that has experienced it, being somewhat less susceptible to transmission by schooling. Larson (1977) mentions a "dialectic of indeterminacy" would favor the legitimacy of professional groups as the modern idea of genius capable of manipulating forces are replaced, with advantages, by the technical competence of the group, regardless of individual prowess. But beyond the value of abstraction and standardization, there is an equivalent reduction in the prestige and value of practical knowledge; they would have little chance to be organized as a formalized system. In an even broader perspective, Dubet and Martuccelli (1996) show in their analysis of the school culture that

[...] The hierarchies not only do not value any social or practical utility for the knowledge acquired there as they also elevate to a culminating point more abstract and less 'useful', or the less practical knowledge.

This is a crucial point in understanding the differences between the two groups. Clearly, the technologists' formation has a more practical character, which is also considered one of the greatest qualities of this formation. Both the list of activities for which the technologists feel competent ("define ways of optimizing activities," "provide support to the processes of planning," "perform technical activities" and "prepare layout and arrangement of technical manufacturing environment") as the company's vision on these professionals demonstrate strong practical nature of their training and expectations for their work (Barbosa, 2009). Just what is shown as the best and highest quality of their training is perhaps the most compelling factor in legitimizing the social fragility of technologists.

If the very nature of knowledge held by different groups of professionals directs the discussion to the sociology of professions, there are two approaches that provide invaluable contributions to the analysis of the social dimensions of higher education in Brazil.

The first, an approach based primarily on the sociology of organizations, developed by Augusto Antonio Prates (2011, 2007 & 2005), addresses the differential access to labor market positions of greater occupational prestige. This study suggests that this access would vary according to the type of organizational management of higher education institutions. It also indicates that institutional differentiation between research universities and vocational institutions of higher education has impaired the potential effect of democratization that could have been produced by the massive expansion of higher education system in the world.

On the other hand, the approach of Schwartzman (2012) highlights the predominance of 'academic bias', which in the case of Brazil would not be restricted only to the higher level of education, also reaching high school. The author wonders about the reasons for the trend towards uniformity, marked by academic bias, if the benefits of differentiation of the higher education system would be many, already proven in research in other countries. In part, this happens because education in Brazil is not only a recognized and valued human capital: it is also a positional value. Education in Brazil, mainly in its higher level, the one that, as seen above, ensures the highest economic returns, would work more strongly as the basis of social distinction than as a source of learning and qualification.

Higher education & social inequality

As can be seen from the discussion above, the sociological analysis of the development and strengthening of higher education in Brazil includes necessarily the understanding of education as one of the structural axes of social inequality (Peixoto & Mendes Braga, 2011; Pereira Sousa & Portes, 2011; De Paula & Heringer, 2010). This perspective is already very explicit in the intense debate over social and racial quotas for university entrance, where the contribution of the sociology of education has been key, especially to clarify the social

conditions of academic performance as a counterpoint to the discourse on the (supposed) Universalist selection by traditional ‘vestibular’ (entrance examination). Trying to understand the different forms of learning and social recognition that are associated to distinct diplomas, school certificates, qualifications and work experience this article will not enter the debate on the access to higher education. Even considering that access to higher education can easily be associated with the values that organize the hierarchies of prestige among disciplines and courses, which are also connected to the recognition or market valuation for different occupational markers of merit (experience, education, practical learning).

The lengthening and diversification of formal schooling can be seen as part of the elites’ strategies for conservation of their power (Goldthorpe, 1997). This perspective is associated with that of Archer (1996) or Brunello (2007), which deal, respectively, the historical process of constructing education as the most important criterion for distributing social positions, and the social disputes over the definition of merit. The last text emphasizes particularly the significance of practical qualification, experience and education as definers of occupational position in Europe. This text advances into some issues already addressed by the sociology of professions, showing the links between generality and abstraction in the various branches of knowledge and the varied opportunities of domination that they open to holders of this specific knowledge.

If these studies allow us to show how education has become the dominant criterion for the organization of social hierarchies, they also emphasize the fact that, despite being a more democratic principle than those organizing patrimonial societies, the definition of merit through education is yet a form of domination. It could be added that the dominance through schooling is also translated into parameters of perception and action on the social world that would have conquered the other spheres of society, including that of labor, or the workshop (Bills, 2004). In the Brazilian case, a study on the determinants of economic inequality shows how social origin has greater weight than schooling, following the same line of sociological research mentioned above (Ferreira, 2000). The explanation for this incapacity of the school to function as a basis for policies of equal opportunities could be found in the power of the middle class over the school system. The strength of the middle class and their ability to control the education system, either

through political pressure or through its direct action on the system, both as parents or teachers, would prevent a true democratization of school.

Beyond establishing the context and the meaning of schooling in general, the analysis of higher education poses some specific problems. To begin with there is the dialectic between contents of knowledge and the strength of the diplomas that also requires enough investment in research and can be translated into more detailed questions.

The first one can be formulated as a point about the lack of specific effects of the courses. On one side, we have selection processes or public procurement requiring only that the candidate has a diploma of higher education in any field. On the other hand, we have students majoring in different areas of knowledge and can never be employed to carry out work in this area of training. In this sense, this question meets both the complaints of entrepreneurs who employ the graduates of an education system that do not meet the demands of technical knowledge of the task that must be performed, as the negative reviews made about the work of these professionals when they are embedded in the school as teachers. Would it be a lack of professionalism in Brazilian society? Or would it be a lack of modernity in society and in higher education system?

Another issue would be that the strong domain of the diploma as just a credential seems to create a new perception or vision of the role of professionals and their work in society. This new collective representation (in the sense of Emile Durkheim) seems to separate on one side the prestige and honor of a social group (e.g. a profession) and, on the other side, the technical content and some doses of the “Enlightened view” of the world that used to be associated with the scientific professionalism and even with the so-called 'modern knowledge'. It seems no longer to have a correlation between a certain area of knowledge, a piece in the social division of labor, and the constructed collective identity of the professional group that would have the ‘jurisdiction’ over this area. From this perspective, the scientific knowledge or any other form of knowledge is no more the basis for the construction of the professional identity.

And one of the questions posed here is that probably the higher education system, working under a credentialist model, would be no more able to produce the professionals it is supposed to.

Unfortunately the very critique to the power of credentials – sometimes a critique made by the professionals themselves – has

produced an equivocal association between what is called 'critical role' of professionals in social movements and an alleged reversal of legitimization power of diplomas or credentials. This perspective can be contrasted to the notion that, if social movements can effectively represent relevant criticisms to dominant lifestyles, professional credentials remain untouched when their holders are involved themselves in this kind of activity. Engineers, lawyers or doctors who work along with social movements can do this only as properly credentialed professionals. The academic diploma retains its dominant position in the field of work for higher education graduates, resulting in a protective effect of careers and institutions.

The strength of academic degrees, or "the academic bias", seems to have also an effect of disqualification of experience and other titles, valuing the bachelor degrees against those of teaching licenses or technological courses, highlighting the academic degrees as the main criterion of social hierarchy. One may wonder to what extent the academicism would setback the modern forms of domination, reaffirming the old patrimonialism against a more technical or more professional model of organizing society. In this sense, the academic bias could be seen as being able to reduce or even nullify the strength or the space of knowledge in society in order to give all the power to the specific dimension of social life, i. e. to the title as a credential deprived of knowledge content.

By way of conclusion

The domain, perhaps exaggerated, of academic bias in Brazilian education system, particularly at the top level, seems to build a set of twisted social forces that organize types of appropriation, production and distribution of scientific and technical knowledge that would tend to generate some of its inefficiencies recognized thereof. These inefficiencies can appear in the difficulties of the system monitor the technical division of work, becoming unable to adequately qualify to job market. We would also have inefficiencies in the production of innovations and patent registration. But perhaps the most outstanding social inefficiency, given the enlargement of inclusive policies in the university system, would be that the new groups who manage to get a

college degree would be excluded (from the inside, cf. Bourdieu) both by the devaluation of some titles or by the process of subordinating certain careers and types of training to the academic model.

For Weber, the 'pedagogy of culture' – so dear to modern thinkers of Brazilian education – is a key feature of Traditional or Patrimonial Domination. Bourdieu also equals the academic titles to those of Nobility. The information presented and theoretical perspectives mobilized allowed to say that maybe the Brazilian society, and its system of higher education, is moving towards the reproduction of the traditional ruling classes through the modern path of the diplomas that are transformed into nobility titles.

Notes

* This article incorporates some previous papers and lectures and draws itself as a kind of research agenda, which presents some of the issues discussed in the Research Laboratory "Higher Education: Expansion, diversification, democratization", CNPq (<http://dgp.cnpq.br/diretorioc/fontes/detalhegrupo.jsp?grupo=0202702JQZBLS2>)

¹ Law of the directives and bases of Brazilian education.

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