



“In reality, the universities’ priorities are not linked to society, but to their own reproductive mechanism.”

Although the research is a very important tool, today it does not have a social utility, because the institutions that have the power to use it do not invest on it.

By Vladimir Ugarte

I was born in Angola, raised in Africa and Portugal during the time of the dictatorship. I was a Portuguese army officer but as I refused the colonial war - because I agreed to the independence of Angola - I had to desert. Traveled throughout Europe, where I received political asylum in Geneva (Switzerland) and then I joined the Angolan liberation movement where I spent nearly 4 years in the guerrilla movement, in charge of the of children’s education. Just before independence, I did not agree with the main party of the liberation movement (which is still in power), so I stated my dissidence and went to Switzerland. In Geneva I left the economy, which my previous occupation in Lisbon (Portugal) to start with sociology and met my wife who is Vietnamese.

Switzerland gave us the opportunity to rebuild our lives, but my wife had to go to Canada because she had no Swiss papers, so I followed her. I continued my studies in sociology at the University of Montreal and worked as an associate professor. After, I went to the University of Ottawa to teach criminology. Criminology did not interest me much because it was too close to the state, so I concentrated on development issues and education in Africa. I always say I am a sociologist who has had a very different basis: I am a mixed race (white and black) and I have got a mixed cultural background. I am not like some French, Quebeckers or Africans, who believe to be purebreds. In my case, my whole family was Portuguese; therefore I am a combination of the originally colonial Portuguese culture together with the African. I also lived a long time in Switzerland. However, Quebec’s culture is also part of who I am. I lived longer in America than in Africa and Europe. The world today is culturally mixed. If you look at the world for the past 25 years, although states attempted to keep from people circulating, we continue to live in the places we want.

In your experience, the current university, is open to this blending and interculturalism?

Not at all. Today, although we live in a globalized world, our institutions evolve slower than technology and social relations. The university and the Catholic Church today are completely out of step with these new social relations.

Currently although there is diversity in the university model, they are elitists. Here in this seminar I had difficulty disposing the concept of elite, "we must form the elite of tomorrow," I say no! In addition I can assure you that not everyone who works at a university will be elite. There are students who have done masters or bachelor degrees in criminology and are now managers of a shoe store. Nothing is predetermined, not because you go to university you will be part of the elite.

Another thing is what Canadians call multiculturalism, interculturalism as others say, or miscegenation, as I say, that is intended to be built. The universities have self-centered in its local dimensions. With globalization, however, it is of a great interest - including the mental structure that implies in the way we think and act - to have more people trained in European or American universities. This is important because in theory, it expands the capacities of communication between the people involved in this process. We

had the opportunity to obtain grants from other countries or the United Nations, to our studies, but most of the children coming from the third world that we knew were children of military and big bourgeoisie and they did not come to build a multicultural university.

The university is now opening up to the international education market. In Ontario for example, we look at the world's French-speaking students, but the college is not French. They found a way to drain funds from the State through bilingualism, which is the main criterion of the Canadian government. The local universities started competing for foreign students, but not towards an intercultural university only with an economical interest.

In Canada before the French colonization, there were people who came from several sides, from Spain or Portugal to fish for cod. Many of these people remained in Canada during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The twentieth century has had many waves of immigrants and most of these people came to Canada, the USA or Latin America. Unfortunately there is no cultural mixing or integration. There is fusion of two or more cultures for a new cultural synthesis. Here is separated by one side to the French culture and the other to the English. Then they had to recognize that there were so many people from Latin American or other European background, that they had to raise the idea that the country was not bilingual but multicultural. This means that if you speak Spanish, you can but in a corner of your house. Behind all this there is the problem that sociologists only speak of social actors and not of actual people, which transform the person in something abstract, without sensitivity.

You said in plenary, that anyway the University gives a 'damn' about society

My experience is that in countries where I have been, universities are a public institution, run by the state and teachers are civil servants that are evaluated in very a specific way. These are systems where you have to take a series of competitive examinations to ensure your position as a professor and you can only hold it if there is a vacancy. Even if you are a single candidate you have to apply for a group to evaluate your work. There you will show your thesis, your paper, everything you have published, is doubtless a very bureaucratic process.

In the U.S., with the Anglo-Saxon system is different, since one has to be evaluated by their peers. You have barely finished your thesis and you can order your integration becoming then, a professor assistant. After a few years you can ask your promotion and while preparing your file, you have 3 individual domains, teaching, research and communication and services to the university community. In Europe, the professor does not do administrative work while in Canada 50% of our work is administrative (dealing with students, program, etc). I am currently a member of the university faculty and all the tutors and professors demands, such as holidays or payment issues, go through this committee and we propose to senior management what should be done.

If you look at the universities' Great Charters, there is written that their mission is excellence in teaching, research and services given to the community. In reality, however, the universities' priorities are not linked to society (district, city, country or world), but to their own reproductive mechanism. This happens in every university sector: state, private and public. Teachers themselves have to find the money to carry out their investigations. For example, to request US\$ 50,000 to investigate for 2 or 3 years and to hire 2 students to help me and buy a computer, I have to produce 40 pages. During this process, I have to answer bureaucratic forms and explain how it is going to be done, what it should look for and what it will be found, as if the investigation was already done! This is purely a stupid logic. There are ethical monitoring committees to try to avoid problems; there are complaints when someone did not want to be mentioned in an investigation. In short, everything becomes completely normative and the objective of relating to society disappears.

Even my younger colleagues, who were students of mine, have worked as monster because they want to achieve permanence, promotion and salary increase as fast as possible. I wonder if there is any common sense, which is about the vocation, the motivation to do our work as a teacher and show students how society works and how we can change it.

Research: for whom and what for?

Today we cannot ignore the importance of the research. However, we must wonder for whom and what for. I personally do not like doing military research, or researching for the pharmaceutical companies. However, all the universities in the world are seeking funding from the pharmaceutical industries. Even though these companies do give money to the universities, ulti-

mately the state funds these researches much more than the drugs companies. The problem is that when you find the formula, the pharmaceutical industry gets its patent and the power to market the product. The real tragedy is that neither disease, nor the cure, nor intensive care what are important here. These guys are doing is to race to find something else new and to sell it. Moreover let us not talk about the huge amounts of money spend in advertising, creating fictitious needs backed up by the universities.

My research is about insecurity in the slums (unemployment, violence), in order to find an alternative solution to the one from the States, which solves the problems by sending the police, causing more deaths and violence. My research aims to be useful. In Brazil, violence in the favelas is a thousand times more important than the parade of samba, but the state intervenes to ensure the firm is profitable and so people have the spirit in another part. I wonder where the studies on poverty are. Why there are no universities that specialized in poverty? Actual studies on poverty there are millions but not presenting solutions, because the state does not pay for such research and also does not implement whatever has been found. Although the research is a very important tool, today it does not have a social utility, because the institutions that have the power to use it do not invest on it. I advocate the democratization of democracy, namely, the need to build public policy and when I say public I mean for all of us and to all of us, not just the state. Today we have to push for democratic governance, guided by a state of rights, which means that we all can place ourselves at the same level around the big table. In the case of a university policy, it is essential to have the participation of different social actors, such as teachers, administrators, students as well as young people from neighbourhoods, finally use the university. If these schools are financed by the government then it has to be transparent, because that is our money. I wonder why Obama funded banks to get them out of the catastrophe in which they got themselves. Why did he not finance, with that money, research on poverty or public health (the poor daughter of medicine)? Why has so much public money been invested in the pharmaceutical companies to develop a job that has not even yet proved its real need?

What can we learn from this crisis?

I am not pessimistic; I am critical, lucid and realistic. The universities have entered a commercialization path, the same that characterizes our world. It, however, does not mean that there are no activities in our society that can be opening other perspectives.

I think that TriViet can build the university they want. It is irrelevant whether it is going to be funded by the state or private enterprise. It must, however, be able to define what space is going to try to fill in, what their mission is and what type of university they want to become. To achieve that they must make a critical analysis of what exists, in order to identify what they want their differential to be. And they need to unite rather than divide the forces that want work together on this project. They then need to position themselves, especially because everyone knows that universities are in competition and tend to crush each other in their struggle to obtain funding and to do their researches. It does not make sense trying to copy the major universities and their important international rankings; believing to have a small power or looking at China, India or Brazil tomorrow.

The research must be done, a university without research is not much. This research, however, should not be focused on creating disciples, but to train researchers who are able to understand the problems of our societies.

Daniel Dos Santos
PROFESSOR, Social Sciences.Criminology,University of Ottawa.
25, rue Université C.P. 450, Succ. A Ottawa (Ontario). K1N 6N5 Canada
ddsantos@rogers.com