

**DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO? AND PRIVATE HIGHER
EDUCATION IN BRAZIL: PARADOXES AND DILEMMAS FOR A CRITICAL
INTERPRETATION**

***O “SABE COM QUEM ESTÁ FALANDO?” E A EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR PRIVADA NO
BRASIL: PARADOXOS E DILEMAS PARA UMA INTERPRETAÇÃO CRÍTICA***

***¿SABE USTED CON QUIÉN ESTÁ HABLANDO? Y LA ENSEÑANZA SUPERIOR
PRIVADA EN BRASIL: PARADOJAS Y DILEMAS PARA UNA INTERPRETACIÓN
CRÍTICA***



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ABSTRACT: This work aims to establish a dialogue on private higher education in Brazil, based on the anthropology of Roberto DaMatta. Through analyzing the author's ideas regarding everyday situations and events in higher education, the goal is to highlight dilemmas and paradoxes that need to be addressed. A proposed reflection introduces possible contributions from Brazilian anthropology to educational phenomena in private higher education, prompting the need to create alternatives and pose critical questions about existing practices in this context. The analysis of the 'jeitinho' (finding a way), hierarchy, 'do you know who you're talking to?', conservatism, and social rites aims to expand the notions commonly applied in understanding educational phenomena.

KEYWORDS: Private higher education. Anthropology. Brazilian culture. Social rites.

RESUMO: *Este trabalho tem como objetivo estabelecer um diálogo sobre a educação superior privada no Brasil, fundamentado na antropologia de Roberto DaMatta. Através da análise das ideias do autor acerca de situações cotidianas e eventos do ensino superior, busca-se destacar dilemas e paradoxos que necessitam ser enfrentados. Propõe-se uma reflexão que introduz possíveis contribuições da antropologia brasileira para os fenômenos educacionais no ensino superior privado, instigando a necessidade de criar alternativas e realizar questionamentos críticos sobre as práticas existentes nesse contexto. A análise do jeitinho, da hierarquização, do "sabe com quem está falando?", do conservadorismo e dos ritos sociais visa ampliar as noções comumente aplicadas na compreensão dos fenômenos educacionais.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Educação superior privada. Antropologia. Cultura brasileira. Ritos sociais.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo pretende promover un diálogo sobre la enseñanza superior privada en Brasil a partir de la antropología de Roberto DaMatta. Cotejando las ideas del autor sobre situaciones y hechos cotidianos en la educación superior, buscamos señalar dilemas y paradojas a ser enfrentados. Proponemos una reflexión que trae a colación posibilidades de contribución de la antropología brasileña a los fenómenos educativos en la enseñanza superior privada, provocando la necesidad de crear alternativas y cuestionar críticamente lo que se ha hecho en esta área. Creemos que el análisis del "jeitinho", de la jerarquización, del "¿sabes con quién estás hablando?", del conservadurismo y de los ritos sociales permite ampliar las nociones usualmente aplicadas para la comprensión de los fenómenos educativos.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Enseñanza superior privada. Antropología. Cultura brasileña. Ritos sociales.*

Introduction

This article aims to provoke and broaden the debate of ideas in the field of private higher education from the perspective of Roberto DaMatta's anthropology. If the ritual of authority manifested in the expression "Do you know who you're talking to?"² can be indicative of Brazilian social life, could it also be a generative element for understanding the social practices within the realm of private higher education? This is the starting question of this article and the theme upon which the work will be developed and reflections constructed.

Roberto Augusto DaMatta (1984, 1993, 1997a, 1997b) has dedicated, and still dedicates, his life to interpreting social rites and everyday practices in Brazil. From carnival and Independence Day celebrations to the "*jeitinho*" (a way of getting things done) and street smarts, religious processions, spaces within homes, streets, and workplaces, death, and more recently, traffic, he has revealed important aspects of the so-called Brazilian social way of being, providing insights for the analysis of other phenomena.

The experiences lived within the classroom context or even within its physical environments in the realm of private higher education constitute the starting point for the following considerations. Several passages from DaMatta's books (1984, 1993, 1997a, 1997b) specifically refer to contexts of hierarchy, power struggles, and ways of resolving situations (using the "*jeitinho*," asking "Do you know who you're talking to"), positions and attitudes towards criticism—cultural characteristics that shape the Brazilian way of being and every day realities brought from outside into the university.

It is not expected to use the detailed and descriptive perception of Brazilian daily life provided by DaMatta's anthropological theory (1984, 1993, 1997a, 1997b) to understand or develop reflections related to education. On the other hand, a significant portion of this perception, contained in his works, can be frequently observed and experienced in classrooms, closely aligning with what is presented in his books. The following will present crucial points from this author's work, facilitating the analysis of everyday phenomena and enabling their understanding through reflection focused on the field of education.

The intention is not to construct a thesis, as that would require depth befitting a more extensive dissertation and empirical research. The purpose is to investigate the possibility of a

² Roberto DaMatta's study addresses this theme in the chapter "Do you know who you're talking to? An Essay on the Distinction between Individual and Person in Brazil" in the book "*Carnavais, Malandros e Heróis: para uma sociologia do dilema brasileiro* (Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: Toward a Sociology of the Brazilian Dilemma)" (1997b).

dialogue between what DaMatta writes and the everyday context of private higher education. By taking an uncommon path, as, until the present moment, no studies in this direction have been identified, the aim is to provoke and encourage students and researchers in the field of education to incorporate or deepen this Brazilian anthropological discussion in their research.

Subsequently, a bibliographic study will be developed with the aim of establishing a connection between excerpts from DaMatta's work (1997b) and everyday situations in the context of private higher education. Education authors such as Saviani (2008), Freire (2000), Fernandes (1960), Veiga (2009), Bourdieu and Passeron (1975) are also presented with the objective of grounding and supporting the theoretical construction. In the final considerations, some questions are raised that relate to the insights gained from this kind of anthropology of everyday school life, seeking to establish connections with the expected responsibilities assigned to private higher education institutions.

Reflecting on the daily lives of students, teachers, and administrators immersed in the anthropological phenomena described by DaMatta (1997b) and considering that these phenomena make sense for analyzing reality, as believed, a series of questions arise that could and should be viewed in the development of action plans, curricula, and even public policies in the realm of private higher education.

Brazilian cultural dilemmas pointed out by DaMatta

In a society where inequality predominates and social relations are established in multiple entanglements of cultural characteristics, disregarding anthropological observations seems equivalent to neglecting a rich source of possibilities for analyzing and understanding society and, consequently, the development of instruments for transforming reality.

In Brazil, several authors and scholars have dedicated their lives to interpreting the country, and they often appear to have spoken and written in vain. It is assumed that as Florestan Fernandes perceived when criticizing the education guidelines bill:

We confine ourselves to defending ideas and principles that have ceased to be the subject of political discussion in more advanced countries. It is as if Brazil were regressing almost two centuries in relation to the contemporary history of those countries and as if we were compelled to defend the values of the French Revolution vehemently! It is a situation that would be comical if its consequences were not serious, which may arise from it. Our personal position weighs on us as uncomfortable (FLORESTAN FERNANDES, 1960, p. 220, our translation).

This creates a sense of inauthenticity in the country's culture, leading to the importation of portions of foreign culture assumed to be superior and imitated recklessly. It is necessary to examine to what extent this actually occurs in the context of higher education and whether there is a relationship between this "cultural transplantation" and the absence of an educational system, especially in the specific case of this study, which addresses private higher education in Brazil.

In Brazil, it is believed that higher education makes all the difference in terms of intellectual and critical maturity. One can agree with this to some extent, as it is undeniable that the practice of education brings about transformations in individuals, given the demands and processes related to teaching and learning. However, this does not necessarily imply direct assistance in the process of social mobility construction and practical contributions to reducing inequality and strengthening democracy.

Manifestations that occur within classrooms, for example, related to punishment, racial and economic quotas, homoaffective, economics, and politics, highlight the more perverse and backward side of those who theoretically should propagate democratic and critical ideas. Either the effect of the classroom and higher education is insufficient, or what is discussed there does not bother us to the point of generating an agenda for social transformation.

In this context, DaMatta's anthropological reading (1997b) reveals that expressions like "Do you know who you're talking to?" and other relevant characteristics contradict the Brazilian way of being by demonstrating proximity to formality and exposing prejudices classified as veiled. These rituals elucidate a series of concepts and perceptions of DaMatta (1997a) about Brazil, which can shed light on educational practices within institutions, such as "*jeitinho*" (finding a way), trickery, patrimonialism, meritocracy, fatalism, hierarchy, and personalism.

Hierarchical scales in Brazil, also evident in education, coexist and are visible but often concealed by a layer of hypocrisy as if it were an unquestionable rule that establishes "each one must know their place." The ritual of authority in question arises as a reminder, a reaffirmation that represents the denial of the "*jeitinho*" (DAMATTA, 1997a) and cordiality (HOLANDA, 1995).

On the other hand, the "*jeitinho*" and trickery have stood out, going beyond mere survival tools in a society that is still disorganized and in development. Alarming, these practices emerge in political corruption scandals and misappropriation of state funds, resulting in delays and disastrous consequences, especially for the most vulnerable population.

While, for various reasons, we are averse to formalism, at least in daily practices, challenging the social law imposed by the dominant classes, some rituals manifest fascinating paradoxes about how social relations unfold in a country where there is considerable concern about social position and a notable awareness of the rules and resources related to the maintenance, loss, or threat of these positions. DaMatta invokes Alexis de Tocqueville to remind us that,

[...] In aristocratic communities, where a small number of people direct everything, social interaction among men follows established conventional rules. Everyone knows or thinks they know exactly the marks of respect or attention they must show, and it is assumed that no one is ignorant of the science of etiquette. The customs and practices established by the first class of society serve as a model for all the others, each of which, in turn, establishes its code, to which all its members are obliged to adhere. Thus, the rules of politeness form a complex system of legislation, difficult to master perfectly, but from which it is dangerous for anyone to deviate; hence, men are constantly exposed to inflict or receive, involuntarily, bitter affronts (DAMATTA, 1997b, p. 188, our translation).

From these observations, two problems emerge that contradict democratic logic, specifically evident in the everyday environment of classrooms. The question "Do you know who you're talking to?" limits the progressive³ initiatives of private school teachers since, apprehensive about the reach of their speeches, they tend to avoid commitments, concerned about the institutional outcomes of potential critical and transformative approaches.

Various reactions can be observed, ranging from pressures from institutional leadership strategically defending political positions necessary for their economic survival to course coordinators facing considerable pressure in the quest to create new classes every semester. These pressures also extend to the students themselves, who rely on the "weapon" of institutional faculty evaluation, which carries significant weight in the teaching careers and subsequent salary increases of the professorial class.

It is also relevant to emphasize the pressure from the state, which sometimes demonstrates concern about "improving" higher education indicators at any cost, resulting in an unbridled and sometimes irresponsible pursuit of increasing the number of students in higher

³ Regarding progressive teachers, Paulo Freire states: "In my understanding, serious work, meticulous research, and critical reflection around the dominant power that is gaining increasing dimensions have never been as necessary as they are today. The activity of progressive intellectuals can never be that of someone who, recognizing the strength of obstacles, either transforms them or takes them as irresponsible. That would be a fatalistic position of accommodation, which has nothing to do with the task of progressives. For these individuals, taking obstacles as challenges, the task is to seek appropriate responses to them" (FREIRE, 2012, p. 69, our translation).

education courses. It is important to note that this is not about challenging policies for access to higher education, which is admirable and necessary, including reducing social inequalities so detrimental to our society. The criticism is directed towards the simplified pursuit of numbers, disregarding the fundamental aspect of the entire process, which is the critical and transformative development of society in its various aspects.

Roberto DaMatta himself articulated in his book “*O que faz o brasil, Brasil?* (What Makes brazil, Brazil?)” (1984) the need to distinguish Brazil with a lowercase "b" from Brazil with an uppercase "B." The former refers to criteria related to numbers and objective, quantitative, and clear definitions aligned with classificatory models established by the West after the French and Industrial Revolutions, as seen in the cases of the United States, France, England, and Germany. On the other hand, Brazil, with an uppercase "B," is something complex, rooted in culture, geographical location, the "piece of land paved with the warmth of our bodies, home, memory, and awareness of a place to which one has a unique, wholly sacred connection" (1984, p. 11-12, our translation). He further states:

It is an important discovery, I believe, to say that we have paid much more attention to only one of these classificatory axes, wanting to discuss Brazil only as a matter of modernity and its economy and politics; or, conversely, reducing its reality to a problem of family, personal relationships, and cordiality. For me, it is neither one nor the other, but both given simultaneously and in a complex way. From this perspective, which is that of this small book, the key to understanding Brazilian society is a dual key. On the one hand, it is modern and electronic, but on the other, it is an old key crafted over the years. It is typical of our system to have the ability to mix and mate things that I have discussed in my work as a relational activity, to connect and discover a central point (DAMATTA, 1984, p. 19, our translation).

Many teachers from various research and training centers had already internalized such a mindset in their formation. This means that the conservative school has already caused them enormous damage and marks that will be passed on throughout their careers to those around them. Transformative initiatives tend to collide with the construction of their life history as academics. A meeting of teachers often demonstrates such conservative positions in their usual expressions regarding certain subjects. The experienced ritual of authority, shared below, harks back to the propagation of panoptic control models by Foucault (2012) and the reproductive mechanisms of Bourdieu and Passeron (1975)⁴.

⁴ The work of Bourdieu and Passeron, “*A Reprodução: elementos para uma teoria do sistema de ensino, 1975* (Reproduction: Elements for a Theory of the Educational System, 1975)”, points out that in a given social formation, legitimate culture, that is, the culture endowed with dominant legitimacy, is nothing other than the

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If democracy presupposes equal rights, in this context, there is no isolated desire for transformation or differentiated initiative that can survive for long. There is an overwhelming tendency in conservative teaching that leads new initiatives to fall into disuse rapidly without the need for confrontations, which become more and more isolated as the recurring pattern establishes itself as predominant. In this space, the recurrence of arbitrariness among the involved agents is inevitable. Paraphrasing a popular Brazilian saying: "cry less, do more!" The power struggle for power and to retain power occurs unrestrained, each for themselves, once again contradicting the democratic and constitutional logic that "all are equal before the law" (BRASIL, 2016, p. 15, our translation), as established in Article 5 of the Brazilian Constitution.

The second problem arises from survival initiatives within these relationships and their complexity. The "*jeitinho*" (finding a way) emerges as an unavoidable solution in social relations. It is what blinds those who should not see in certain situations; it is with it that one can sometimes achieve the unattainable, and without it, social life loses its charm and its reason. In the Brazilian context, society values the practice of "*jeitinho*," which sets us apart, for example, from the United States, where this approach is often disapproved.

In the situation at hand, the resolution of situations has chosen to follow the path of informality and personal connections. "There is a remedy for all things but death," as another Brazilian popular saying goes. Delays are justified for unquestionable reasons, salary increases may occur for personal reasons, and the number of absences is relative, depending on factors that must be considered. Grades can be reviewed based on plausible justifications that take precedence over bureaucratic decisions, the teacher's evaluation may rely on their personal relationship with the students, and bureaucracies and formalities are often set aside in favor of harmony and maintaining each person in their place.

The problem-solving approach grounded in this logic is defended as a moral aspect of Brazilian society. What Almeida (2007) calls society's "moral gray zone" is the supposedly more logical way to resolve conflicts. Between the cold law and the rule that makes us equal, there are friendships and situations where personal connections replace the law. Who resists a friend's request? Or how not to help someone who once helped me? One hand washes the other, and if I owe everything to my friends and enemies, the rigor of the law is applied. This complex logic of social relations is permeated by inexplicable details in other countries, where rules either function or do not exist, as DaMatta (1984) would say.

dominant cultural arbitrary, insofar as it is unknown in its objective truth as cultural arbitrary and dominant cultural arbitrary.

Social rituals manifest in societies' daily lives, in various contexts, and for different reasons. It is particularly interesting to understand how these rituals specifically occur in the context of private higher education. The analysis of education from classical perspectives has become commonplace, and the results of these studies often align with expectations, as if they were commissioned work with guaranteed delivery, although unwrapping this package does not always represent satisfaction. Therefore, it becomes necessary to add a touch of reality and proximity to everyday experience, respond to Brazilian theorists' calls, and study them more thoroughly.

More than just revealing specific details, it is crucial to make efforts to understand and interpret reality. In this sense, Brazilian theorists offer abundant material from field research and in-depth studies of our culture. In particular, part of DaMatta's work (1997b), despite being written in the 70s and 80s, can be considered timeless. This is evident when realizing that practices analyzed by him still prevail in Brazilian daily life. Proof of this is Alberto Carlos Almeida's book, titled "*A Cabeça do Brasileiro*" (2007), which, through meticulous research, demonstrated that the questions proposed and analyzed by DaMatta throughout his career continue to be evident and latent in our society. The author comments on DaMatta's work, stating that:

[...] exploring some of its central concepts in our Brazilian Social Research. We address different aspects of national life. From sexuality to corruption, from the use of "*jeitinho*" to illegal punishments, from the idea of a paternalistic State to the practice of racial prejudice. [...] Our research has shown that Roberto DaMatta is essentially correct. Brazil is hierarchical, familistic, and patrimonialistic and approves of the "*jeitinho*" and a wide range of similar behaviors (ALMEIDA, 2007, p. 275, our translation).

Initially, it seems that "Do you know who you're talking to?" can be easily grasped, especially in the context of private higher education in Brazil, as one thinks about the commercial and economic relationships arising from this field. This analysis is evidenced in this ritual of authority through expressions like "I am paying" from the students or "I don't teach, I sell classes" from the professors, as well as institutional practices like "give him another chance" (a common practice among course coordinators pressured by the institution to protect their student-clients).

The intense economic appeal allows for analyses based on notions that consider the division of social classes and their consequences and struggles. However, without neglecting this crucial analysis derived from the historical dialectical materialist perspective, the present

study is grounded in authors who use diverse sources and share an appreciation for different interpretations and social analysis forms. The aim is to avoid exclusive theoretical affiliation to a single line of thought, as this approach has been widely adopted in the Brazilian educational scenario.

The "Do you know who you're talking to?" is a ritual that transcends this economic relationship to expose realities and dilemmas, paradoxes, and surprising and intriguing arrangements that do not directly depend on class. These rituals do not exclusively illustrate a pyramidal hierarchy between economically privileged and disadvantaged social classes. In the perplexity found in social relations in Brazil, theories about social structure, even offering various possibilities for analysis, become insufficient when they disregard efforts to interpret and deepen the study of culture.

In this context, hierarchy is more based on social intimacy and relationships that acquire a personal tone, defining themselves in the realm of strong and enduring morality. DaMatta highlights this perspective:

In other words, instances of the application of "Do you know who you're talking to?" reveal a social structure in which social classes also communicate through a system of intersecting relationships (cf. Gluckman, 1965) that likely partially inhibits conflicts and the system of social and political differentiation founded on the economic dimension of the system. In a society so constituted, where work relationships are added to a set of personal bonds governed by values such as intimacy (cf. Barret, 1972), consideration, favor (cf. Schwartz, 1977), respect (cf. Viveiros de Castro, 1974), and generalizing ethical and aesthetic judgments (such as the categories of clean, well-dressed, correct, shrewd, pleasing, refined, etc.), there are possibilities for a continuous and multiple hierarchization of all positions in the system, even when they are radically differentiated or formally identical (DAMATTA, 1997b, p. 192, our translation).

Faced with conflict, as stated by DaMatta, one experiences apprehension, loses balance, and is unsure how to act. An authoritarian ritual always puts people in conflicting situations. The relationships between teachers and students, and vice versa, in today's context offer new possibilities for analysis from this perspective.

In one society, a crisis may reveal that something is in disorder and needs to be modified or corrected; in another, it represents the end of an era, a catastrophe. In Brazil, conflicts are conceived as harbingers of the apocalypse and as weaknesses, which, in part, theoretically hinders us from studying or debating the subject. In the name of supposed peace, one avoids contradicting someone, arguing, or creating problems. DaMatta advocates this position:

The "Do you know who you're talking to?"—and we can say this without fear of committing a sociological short circuit—is an instrument of the society where personal relationships form the core of what we call "morality" (or "moral sphere"), and it carries immense weight in the lively play of the system, always occupying the spaces that the laws of the State and the economy do not penetrate. The formula "Do you know who you're talking to?" is thus a function of the hierarchized dimension and the patronage that permeates our differential relations and allows, consequently, the establishment of personalized links in impersonal activities (DAMATTA, 1997b, p. 195, our translation).

The discussion can be revealing of individualistic egalitarianism and, therefore, must be combated as it clashes with our hierarchizing skeleton. In a system dominated by totality leading to a pact between the strong and the weak (DAMATTA, 1997b), one can find the idea of consideration as a fundamental value within the relationship between superior and inferior.

The perception of conflict ceases to be a symptom of a crisis in the system and is interpreted as a rebellion that must be repressed and considered out of place. The crisis, which could generate changes in the landscape, is minimized, and the conflict, although turbulent, is deemed preferable. Additionally, a concerning aspect arises in education related to the logic of Latin Catholicism, which sees the need for intermediation in the face of problems. In this educational context, the teacher is labeled as the "know-it-all," resulting in constant outsourcing of the effort to learn.

The "Do you know who you're talking to?" cannot and should not be taken as an update of values and structural principles of society but rather as a manifestation of personal and undesirable traits. Everything echoes within what can be predicted, maintaining things as they are and, ironically, hierarchies as they should be. This ritual resembles racism and authoritarianism. The system reveals visible cultural entanglements, although its members often do not recognize them. In the educational context, everyone learns early on what is appropriate, but in practice, each situation suggests a different approach.

The complexity of analyzing "Do you know who you're talking to?" as a social ritual in private higher education becomes evident as it is an apparently recurrent expression but constantly denied. Just like prejudice, which is considered undesirable but manifests in specific situations. Much of the fatalism present in the Brazilian mindset and the relentless pursuit of a better position, even without prospects, fuel the famous phrase "*eu sou brasileiro e não desisto nunca*" (I am Brazilian and never give up). This phrase, often chanted, reflects the maintenance of a system where personal relationships and hierarchies prevail. In the university, the object of

the Brazilian elites, this culture combines with the culture of the street, home, and work, multiplied by teachers and institutions committed to expanding their resources and scholarships through good relationships, friendships, and partnerships, supported by laws grounded in the defense of private property and the maintenance of the status quo.

Paradoxes of Educational Culture in Brazil

The culture expresses elements affirming its authenticity and creativity, as well as deleterious and restrictive elements for society's autonomous development, including in forming its members as balanced personalities (RIBEIRO, 1975). It reflects the society's previous experience and its structural characteristics.

In Brazil, driven by the needs of the Order and the exercise of the mission of conversion, institutions specialized in the task of education and diligently established the structure that, for two and a half centuries, ensured the systematic transmission of culture. This structure developed on two levels: that of schools for reading, writing, and arithmetic, targeting children, and colleges targeting adolescents. The former was presented as being directed towards the "columns," but the truth is, and it could not be otherwise, they accommodated the masters' children. It was the latter who received Jesuit education in these colleges. Now, this education was characterized by alienation, and this alienation, in the case of Brazil, adds to the transplantation – historically necessary in this initial phase, as mentioned – a new dimension. "Education aimed at forming a basic, free, and disinterested culture, without professional concerns, and equal, uniform throughout the territory," defined Fernando de Azevedo. [...] Being a culture neutral from a national perspective (even Portuguese), strictly linked to European culture in the Middle Ages and oblivious to political borders – as the culture spread by an 'essentially international association, with the characteristic of true papal malice' had to be – it is certain that this neutrality (if we take a qualitative perspective) prevents us from seeing in this culture, in its origins and products, a specifically Brazilian culture, a national culture still in formation (SODRÉ, 1970, p. 12-13, our translation).

Understanding the configuration of social relations (*habitus*) within institutions, considering a specific way of being grounded in relevant issues for cultural and educational purposes, can represent a fruitful path to transform immutable habits into critical reflection (instrumentalization, according to BOURDIEU; PASSERON, 1975).

Considering the perspective described by Sodr  (1970), in which formal education reaches society, it is necessary to reflect on its incorporation into the overall educational context, with characteristics that influence historical events. From this commitment, one does

not expect to reach absolute truths or immutability, still so present in current models, but primarily the discovery of characteristics present in practice, where theories often deviate.

In this analysis, it is relevant to place the subject of study in a historical context and consider that Brazilian society has been, until recently, under colonial rule, whether formal or disguised. Colonization is directly derived from the Latin verb "*colo*" (meaning: to cultivate, dwell). Latin meant "I dwell, I occupy the land," and, by extension, I work, I cultivate the field. An ancient heir of "*colo*" is "*incola*," the inhabitant; another is "*inquilinus*," one who resides on another's land (BOSI, 1992, p. 11). However, the verb "*colo*" also means taking care of, managing, wanting good for, and protecting. From the supine "*cultum*" derives the future participle "*culturus*" (one who will work, cultivate), applying to both land cultivation and the work of human formation, a sense in which this Latin term translated the Greek word "*Paideia*" (SAVIANI, 2008). What we have seen here, in fact, was the [...]

[...] process that articulated, not homogeneously or harmoniously, but dialectically, these three moments represented by colonization itself, i.e., the possession or exploitation of the land subjugating its inhabitants (the "*incolas*"); education as acculturation, i.e., the inculcation in the colonized of the practices, techniques, symbols, and values of the colonizers; and catechesis understood as the diffusion and conversion of the occupied to the religion of the colonizers (SAVIANI, 2008, p. 29, our translation).

These moments are still visible today as a reproduction effect, manifesting in classrooms through institutional practices based on the teacher training model, the structure of private institutions, and the social realities of students. Playing a determining role in historical construction, these students perpetuate and drive practices inherited from a not-so-distant past.

It is true that the smaller, historically privileged portion with access to education based on European standards still believes in incorporating part of Europe into their way of life, attire, vocabulary, and postures. This phenomenon reflects a country where, in practice, patrimonialism persists, now in a modernized form. The difference is that, nowadays, student docility is achieved without the use of physical force, but, in a no less impactful manner, symbols and habitus determine continuities and absurdities.

Paulo Freire (2000) states that "the human being who, making history, is made by it, tells not only his own but also the history of those who only have it (p. 120, our translation)". And further:

One of the fundamental differences between the being who intervenes in the world and the one who merely moves the support is that, while the latter adapts or accommodates to the support, the former sees adaptation as just a moment in the process of their ongoing quest for integration into the world. By adjusting to objective reality, the human being prepares to transform it. Essentially, this "vocation" for change, for intervention in the world, characterizes the human being as a project, just as their intervention in the world involves a curiosity in constant readiness to, by refining itself, reach the *raison d'être* of things. This vocation for intervention demands a certain knowledge of the context with which the being relates to other human beings and to which it does not merely contact as other animals do with their support. It also demands objectives, such as a particular way of intervening or acting that implies another practice: evaluating the intervention (FREIRE, 2000, p. 120, our translation).

The identity of those seeking education is constructed from the moment of choosing a course in institutional spaces, conferring dimensions of time, space, and culture to the individual. Grounded in professional knowledge and ethical and deontological responsibilities, professional identity is in constant transformation, although innovative processes often rely on standardization, uniformity, bureaucratic control, and centralized planning (VEIGA, 2009). Thus, when changes follow the logic of rearticulating the prevailing system, representing only the uncritical adoption of the new as old, the perpetuation of the status quo occurs, a concept that Bourdieu and Passeron (1975) would call the maintenance of habitus, classifying it as social reproduction.

According to Veiga (2009), lesson plans reveal didactic conceptions from the technical innovation perspective, reinforcing decontextualized teacher education that aims only at technical skills. He emphasizes that the plans show that:

The importance of didactics for teacher education is not highlighted; practice is not seen as the starting point for didactic studies but is viewed as a neutral field upon which rules are applied to obtain predicted and controlled results. Conceptions of education and teacher education are developed in a logic centered on technique, that is, "how to do it." Teaching, the object of didactic study, is not understood as a concrete social practice and comes to assume problem-solving as a measurable action (VEIGA, 2009, p. 33-34, our translation).

To educate (from the Latin *formare*) means to give shape, to enter into formation, and to develop a person. It is necessary to reflect upon and question biases that repress initiatives of renewing sensitivity, creativity, novelty, and inventiveness. The university demands from both educators and university students the inseparability of teaching, research, and extension; the production and socialization of knowledge are part of this integrative demand (VEIGA,

2009). Socializing knowledge also means allowing criticism and debates to be generative rather than reproductive.

In our society, criticism, debate, and opposition to inquiry are associated with the inquisition, as highlighted by DaMatta (1997b), a form of legal proceedings triggered when there is suspicion of crime or sin so that questioning should be avoided. This situation is evident in the classroom when calling for participation, debates sometimes devolve into personal issues and almost uncontrollable animosities. It would sometimes be almost like provoking a "war," with due proportions maintained, to incite debate among students and professors. DaMatta (1997b, p. 196-197, our translation) continues:

Without question, social life flows in its normal course so that a probable connection between the fear of interrogative forms and societies concerned with hierarchy, where everything must generally be in its place, can be postulated. In such systems, asking questions may constitute an attempt to revolutionize everything, stopping (or suspending) the sanctified routine of the system. By the same logic, we are socialized (in the family and school), learning not to ask too many questions. Either because it is impolite or because it is considered an aggressive trait that should only be used when we want to "bring someone down".

When observing students seeking degrees to complete the education process quickly and completing the undergraduate, master's, or doctoral period is perceived as a victory and relief, it becomes necessary to understand why this occurs, considering the demands of lifelong education. In the case of private institutions, there is the aggravating factor of clientelism, which requires completion upon timely payment of fees.

Reaching the pinnacle of the ascent toward intellectual and symbolic capital should not be seen as an end but as a starting point for continuous development. Believing to be at the peak of intellectual capital seems sufficient to legitimize positions that simplify and reproduce. As expressed by Roberto DaMatta (1997b), "To the detriment of dealing with our problems, we privilege our more universalist and cosmopolitan aspects, implying that we leave aside a genuine view of the problems (p. 184, our translation)". Eurocentrism, found in sociological and educational analyses, has consistently suppressed interpretations that consider Brazilian social reality to be an essential factor in academic theoretical analyses. To generate instruments for change for social agents, it is necessary to understand the habitus and the fields upon which Brazilian society is grounded. The quest may be for self-understanding to build effective change from this understanding.

The relationship between teacher and student, as well as vice versa, does not unfold by chance, resembling what Brazilian sociology theorists proposed to study or, as Paulo Freire carefully captured in his insightful analyses of the educational context of the excluded in Brazil. The significant contribution of these authors, among many others, lacks a more careful theoretical elaboration. As a result of this connection, intriguing biases fundamental to educational processes, practices, and understanding of current education may manifest. The limited investment in Brazilian sociological theories stems from the shocks of reality and controversies found within our social and cultural formation and, perhaps, from the disinterest of the dominant classes.

Fundamental issues of our formation have been and continue to be little discussed and understood, and the condition of being a second-class people to which we have been subjected does not significantly transpire in everyday life. Perhaps out of shame to assume this condition (whenever possible masked and astutely exposed) or because we incorporate and reproduce the educational and cultural model as "good students".

The "Brazilian way," the remarkable difficulty in separating the public from the private, our tendency towards personalism, the omission in dealing with prejudices (which is often discouraged), and the challenging task of dealing with hierarchies, combined with our young democracy, provide a complexification in understanding relationships in all aspects of our society, and possibly, in the sociology of education. As observed by Holanda (1995, p. 61, our translation):

In a society with such clearly personalistic origins as ours, it is understandable that simple person-to-person connections, independent and exclusive of any tendency toward authentic cooperation between individuals, have almost always been the most decisive. Aggregations and personal relationships, although sometimes precarious, and, on the other hand, struggles between factions, between families, and between regionalisms, made it a coherent and amorphous whole. The peculiarity of Brazilian life at that time seems to have been a singularly energetic accentuation of the affective, the irrational, the passionate, and a stagnation or a corresponding atrophy of ordering, disciplining, and rationalizing qualities. That is, exactly the opposite of what seems suitable for a population on the verge of politically organizing itself.

Personalism in social and, in practice, teaching formation leaves deep marks that trigger critical situations in psychosocial theoretical analysis. Reaffirmations of habitus, disposition in fields, and social reproduction are fundamental concepts that unveil such complexities. From authority, now required through discourse, manifested by attire and intonation of voice, to

friendliness, personalism is a functional gear of the institutional teaching model. Achieving the status of a chair patron can mean continuity and assurance, revealing an irrevocable side from a personalistic point of view.

Analogically, more often than not, we reproduce the custom of calling state mandates by the name of the ruler, reminiscent of economic plans and significant events named after the protagonist. On the other hand, associating one's figure with failure arising from multiple possible conditions is to assume individual consequences of a disastrous nature. Bourdieu astutely analyzes the reflections of being an outsider, a member of excluded groups, amidst academic reproducing ills.

Addressing the Brazilian dilemma, Roberto DaMatta (1997b) asserts that, at times, we are punished for attempting to enforce the law or for our idea that we live in a genuinely egalitarian universe (p. 216, our translation). When analyzing the expression, "Do you know who you're talking to", commonly used in Brazilian social life, he points to a highly significant aspect of dramatic opposition between two ethics:

One is a "bureaucratic ethics"; the other is a "personal ethics." Indeed, when a bureaucratic rule, universalizing and impersonal, loses its rationality in the face of someone claiming a bond of kinship, marriage, friendship, or cronyism with another person considered powerful within the system, we are effectively dealing with a very complex situation. On one side, we have a rigid and universal morality of impersonal laws or rules that emerge as a modernizing and individualistic feature and are put into practice to subject all members of society. On the other hand, we have the much more complicated morality of total relationships imposed by family ties and webs of imperative social relations, in which personal relationships and substantive connections allow bypassing the rule or, which comes to the same thing, applying it rigidly. As the old and dear Brazilian saying goes, 'to enemies, the law; to friends, everything' (DAMATTA, 1997b, p. 217, our translation).

The skill of avoiding equality before the law and the consequent individualized treatment is highlighted here (DAMATTA, 1997b). Hierarchical parameters in education (teacher habitus) play an essential aspect of analysis that many authors delve into. Considering specific cultural characteristics enhances the understanding of culture and brings theory closer to the omitted reality. The educational curriculum, for example, presents an opportunity for questioning and considering the structuring of the Brazilian educational system and the curriculum itself in the dispute over contents, models, languages, histories, theories, values, and behaviors to be selected and represented. To this framework, there is a tendency to analyze "[...] forms of knowledge such as literature, arts, philosophy, and sciences specific to European

societies as superior to the human beings, cultures, and civilizations of other regions of the world" (PRAXEDES, 2008, p. 2, our translation).

As for the political competence of the colonizers in hindering the development of intellectual culture in Brazil, it is emphasized that the

[...] transmission of culture occurs through systematic and non-systematic means; the most used and developed systematic means is the form of education called teaching; in all times and places, with development paralleling the development of societies, there has always existed, to a greater or lesser extent, a system for the systematic transmission of knowledge, a structure of teaching; complex societies, such as capitalist ones, demand complex teaching apparatuses, complex teaching structures; such apparatuses and structures are, in whole or in part, components of the State apparatus; thus, they transmit the official culture, the one that adheres to the social characteristic that the dominant culture is the culture of the dominant classes. In considering the issue of the University in Brazil, the first aspect to highlight is the privilege inherent in higher education, reaching a tiny portion of young people (SODRÉ, 1970, p. 112-113, our translation).

It is clear that government after government, the educational project of higher education can evolve and bring changes in the number of available spots and the percentage of people accessing Brazilian colleges and universities (especially private ones), for better or worse. However, in practice, there is no evident and effective concern that they are doing work that will bring about fundamental changes. Proof of this is the growth of private institutions and what, for the most part, they deliver to communities and society in general. It is very little compared to the concessions and authorizations they receive.

Final considerations

Higher education still proves to be decisive in the pursuit of increased symbolic, economic, and social capital⁵. The wage percentage of people with more than 15 years of education reveals a huge difference between those who study more and those who do not review or have fewer years dedicated to studies. Even though research indicates that the wage gap after the pandemic has decreased in relation to those with fewer years of education, there is still a

⁵ According to Bonnewitz's interpretation, "At first glance, the notion of capital is linked to the economic approach. The recognized properties of capital explain the analogy: it accumulates through investment operations, is transmitted through inheritance, and allows profits to be extracted according to the opportunities the holder has to operate the most profitable applications. These characteristics make it a heuristic concept if, as Bourdieu does, its use is not limited only to the economic sphere. Indeed, it is possible to distinguish four types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic" (BONNEWITZ, 2003, p. 53, our translation).

significant difference between them, as shown by the work of economists Veloso, Filho, and Peruchetti (2022) from FGV-IBRE⁶.

However, it is necessary to consider that the growing contingent of demand for the highest degree of appreciation by society (status) is greater than the actual number of places available for all of them. These are scarce resources. From the Brazilian population of 203,062,512 people, according to the Demographic Census (IBGE, 2023), only 9,443,597 million are pursuing Higher Education (INEP's Higher Education Census, 2021). Of these students, 7,367,080 million are in private higher education.

Private educational institutions (but not only them) are concerned, on the one hand, with forming students capable of performing technical and specific tasks proficiently. Over time, they also realize the need to educate citizens and individuals who know how to live in society in a democratic and civilized manner, following the guidelines proposed by the dominant classes and strictly adhering to their assumptions. One of the paradoxes of *liquid modernity*⁷ is the need to deepen knowledge about humanity as if we were not human. Our society teaches individuals about self-sufficiency while simultaneously delineating the paths through which their desires and wishes will unfold.

The mental structure that society provides, an antithesis between innate individuality and an "external" society, is then used to explain phenomena that are actually the product of discrepancies within society, the mismatch between the social orientation of individual effort and the social possibilities of consummating it (ELIAS, 1994, p. 121, our translation).

The difficulty of achieving regulatory parameters (if this is possible and desirable when habitus disables us for it) occurs not only because coexistence in complex societies is also challenging but fundamentally because the harmony of these relationships is only achieved (and for a select group of people) when socially elaborated goals can be realized. This makes the teaching process more complex today and significantly increases the responsibility of educational institutions regarding their social responsibility and fundamental role in education. Additionally, Pereira (2020, p. 78, our translation) emphasizes:

⁶ “*Impactos da educação no mercado de trabalho* (Impacts of Education on the Labor Market)” at the Regis Bonelli Productivity Observatory – FGV (2022).

⁷ Bauman refers here to a society where the "individualized and privatized version of modernity, and the weight of the web of standards and responsibility for failure, falls mainly on the shoulders of individuals. It is the time of liquefaction of patterns of dependence and interaction. They are now malleable to a point that past generations did not experience and could not imagine; but like all fluids, they do not hold their shape for long. Giving them shape is easier than keeping them in it" (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 14, our translation).

To stimulate this logic in education, market rules, according to Barroso (2004), align educational objectives with effectiveness criteria defined by competition based on assumptions that attribute a relevant role to education to subsidize the needs of the productive system and wealth. This has weakened the conception of education as a value for social well-being. This weakening, observed within universities, has generated new forms of pedagogical organization and thus creates a compatibility based on the guidelines of new modes of regulation of educational policies, adopting the business management model and promoting measures, with privatizing tendencies in Teaching Centers, Course Coordinations, Departments, and Research Sectors. In practice, the presence of values of competition, rivalry, economic excellence, and flexibility is increasingly evident, confirming the existence of a pronounced one-sided relationship between education and the market.

The need to effect changes in the educational landscape implies an expansion of debates. Addressing sensitive issues related to the approval and authorization processes of courses, genuine social responsibility towards the communities where institutions are located, intellectual honesty, the training of teachers and coordinators, and the salaries of teachers and working conditions offered in all aspects. Such paradoxes characterize Brazil's private higher education, presenting challenges awaiting courageous and fearless solutions.

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