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The University and the Dictatorship in Brazil[1]

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Abstract

This essay analyzes Florestan Fernandes's interpretation of the university question in Brazil from the 1964 coup onward. It starts from reflections that discuss, in particular, how internal democracy within universities was affected and how the debate on university reform unfolded under the dictatorship. It seeks to show the internal and external contradictions that universities faced during their formation, even before the coup, and how these issues relate to the debate on university reform. To this end, in addition to Florestan Fernandes's work, it draws on a body of literature that discusses the dictatorship in general and the university in particular, especially after 1964.

Keywords: University; 1964 coup; Dictatorship; University reform.

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1. Introduction

Originally published in 1975, while the dictatorship was still in force, the book *Universidade brasileira: reforma ou revolução* [Brazilian university: Reform or revolution], written by Florestan Fernandes, brings together a set of reflections on the situation of the university in the first years after the 1964 coup. The book, in the sociologist's own words,

> [...] is the product of lectures given by the author in the context of the discussion on the basic reforms or "structural reforms" in 1967 and 1968. These two years witnessed an attempt by the forces fighting the dictatorial regime to regain political space. The various groups engaged in the debate ranged from the far left to democratic radicalism (Fernandes, 2020, p. 33).

The texts presented in the book offer a detailed study of the university in Brazil, seeking, among other questions, to debate the nature of higher education. The axis that structures the work, which we will discuss in this text, is the critique of a university model geared to private and foreign interests and the role that higher education can play in a national development project. In the set of essays published in the book, the sociologist shows the relationship between economic dynamics and how they manifest themselves in state policies, so as to guarantee the reproduction of capitalist relations of production, with effects on other spheres, such as politics and culture. It is worth recalling that

> [...] the process of capital expansion tends to reorganize the social space of education according to its own rationality, yet it does not do so solely from an economic point of view: in the very act of economic reorganization, the symbolic-cultural sphere changes, coming to consist of values and signs proper to economic production, in a context of the technicization of politics and culture. Thus, at one and the same time, actions of a public and private nature are redefined across the most varied human activities within the State and civil society (Sguissardi & Silva Júnior, 2001, p. 80).

Florestan Fernandes was one of the most important Brazilian intellectuals. Beyond his academic production, which includes fundamental contributions to the development of sociology in Brazil, he made indispensable contributions on topics such as the racial question, education, and the historical, economic, and political dynamics of Brazil. In the period before the coup, he actively defended the so-called "basic reforms", among which university reform was one of the demands. After 1964, because of his political activities, he was persecuted by the dictatorship and was even dismissed from the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) under Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5) in 1969.

This essay analyzes elements of Florestan Fernandes's *Universidade brasileira: reforma ou revolução*. Building on his contributions, it examines the university in Brazil during the dictatorship, in particular how its internal functioning was affected after the 1964 coup and the debate on university reform.

2. The university in Brazil

The development of universities and public policies for higher education are geared toward serving the interests of the dominant classes. According to Fernandes (2020, p. 91), "the dominant classes behave as if they were sensitive and loyal to the educational requirements of the republican legal order, because they derive from it the legitimation of their own political power". However, according to Fernandes (2020, p. 91), these classes "consciously and tenaciously oppose the establishment and observance of an educational policy suited to such an objective". In this way, the dominant classes can

> [...] grant themselves educational privileges, monopolizing most of the community's educational resources for their own ends, and socially exempt themselves from the civic sacrifices that could result from a proper understanding of the functions of schooling in the equilibrium of a regional republican society (Fernandes, 2020, p. 91).

Under capitalism, the actions of the State are geared toward serving the interests of the dominant classes, guaranteeing both the production of commodities and power over society. In this sense, "the university is conditioned by the context in which it is embedded, and its objectives are necessarily related to the

predominant interests of organized groups" (Almeida, 2012, p. 95). With regard to Florestan Fernandes's analysis, given his understanding of Brazil's economic development, the internal and external contradictions to which the university is subject must be taken into account. Referring to the broader context, in his work *A revolução burguesa no Brasil* [The bourgeois revolution in Brazil], published in 1975,

> [...] the sociologist points out that the pattern of capitalist development in Brazil is characterized by a double polarization, constituted internally through the articulation between the archaic sector and the modern (or urban-commercial and industrial) sector, and externally through the articulation between the domestic agrarian-export complex and the central capitalist economies (Silva, 2013, p. 57).

In the process of economic development, capitalist transformation and bourgeois domination are combined, expressed both in internal class contradictions and in the relationship between different countries. According to Fernandes (2005, pp. 339–340),

> [...] this combination takes place under specific economic and socio-historical conditions, which rule out any likelihood of a "repetition of history" or of an "automatic unleashing" of the prerequisites of that democratic-bourgeois model.

Starting from this understanding and analyzing higher education in the period immediately after the 1964 coup, Fernandes (2020, p. 63) stated that the university was experiencing "the worst crisis it has ever faced during its short formation in Brazil", pointing to "three main threats" hanging "over it and over the nature of its educational contribution". One of them was what the sociologist called "external tutelage", which referred to the very limits of the development of universities, which, unlike the "higher schools" that previously existed in Brazil, "were born, grew, and expanded in a climate of great intellectual freedom" (Fernandes, 2020, p. 65).

The emergence of higher education in Brazil is directly related to the education of elite sectors, resulting in teaching aimed at a small segment of the population and intended to train a workforce for local demands. This produced a homogeneous education, aimed at a specific and well-defined public, in fields such as law, medicine, and engineering. With the creation of universities, the objective of higher education changed. According to Fernandes (2020, p. 65),

> [...] the recent differentiation of society, with its repercussions on the organization of the economic, social, and political spheres, condemned this homogeneity, which is gradually disappearing. Not only did large sections of the teaching staff and student body come to be recruited from various social strata: the very idea of the university imposed an ideal of autonomy, which implied a new stance toward the tendencies toward democratization prevailing in society itself.

In this sense, the university ceased to be a school of higher education for representatives of the local dominant classes and began to incorporate segments from different sectors of society. This also implied a new organization of academic space, marked by free debate, institutional autonomy, and, above all, a relationship with the political interests of a national project. In the words of Fernandes (2020, p. 66), "the ideal of building the university became definitively and increasingly associated with the correlated ideal of involving university members in the economic and political dilemmas of their community".

Florestan Fernandes's reflections refer to the growth visible in the 1950s, in urbanization as well as in industrial expansion and population increase. In this context, universities "received young people influenced by new trends, but they were backward institutions, designed for another era, when the demand was for small cohorts of graduates" (Motta, 2014, p. 66). Expressing the transformation society was undergoing, one perceives "the awareness, by various sectors of national life, of the stagnation in which Brazilian universities found themselves" (Fávero, 2000, p. 99). This process marked both society and the university in the 1960s.

3. The coup and the universities

The university project analyzed by Florestan Fernandes, still quite embryonic and marked by limitations caused by the material problems of Brazilian society, was put at risk by the 1964 coup. The supporters of the coup had defined their objectives for the universities:

> [...] what they want is to restore the old homogeneity that existed in the interaction of the "higher schools" with the interests and values of certain segments of society. Deep down, they are trying to introduce among us a new and pernicious form of control, *ideological control*, through which they hope to secure drastic and limited tutelage over the composition, structure, and functioning of the Brazilian university. This is a reactionary design, because it presupposes a return to the past and, what is worse, to distorted practices that found no echo there, nor could they (Fernandes, 2020, p. 67).

Therefore, the dictatorship's project did not so much involve a structural change in the universities, which could be used to consolidate the national project conceived by the dictatorship, as the consolidation of ideological control and the weakening of these institutions' autonomy. Moreover, the coup's project for the universities is linked to the second threat identified by Fernandes (2020, p. 63), in which "intellectual radicalism is treated as an evil in itself and as a danger to society". What the sociologist calls "radicalism" was nothing more than the need for freedom of science, without the constraints of external criteria or policies that could prevent university professionals from using the available methods and tools to carry out their research. However, with the rise of the dictatorship, ideological control and political persecution came to mark daily life in the universities, even with the connivance of part of the intelligentsia of the period.[2] In this process, the regime "made an effort to carry out a 'cleansing' of university institutions to eliminate its enemies, which led to imprisonment, violence, exile, dismissal of faculty, and exclusion of students" (Motta, 2014, p. 64).

This intervention in the institutions took the form of mechanisms to control work in the universities and the production of knowledge. Ideological control was also expressed in mechanisms for monitoring the activities of faculty and researchers. According to Fernandes (2020, pp. 69–70),

> [...] the tendency to evaluate the intellectual production of university members (or the requirements for such production) in the light of external and irremediably ideological criteria leads to a dead end. If those who set themselves up as judges of the situation do not also intend to be the executioners of science and scientific technology, they must undergo a Copernican turn that adjusts their ideologies, at least, to the interests and social values of a capitalist society.

Thus, the production of knowledge was not supposed to respond to the concrete needs of society, but directly to the external interests of political and economic groups. One expression of this was the elaboration of ideologies that could help maintain the regime, especially by emphasizing aspects such as the modernization of institutions or economic development.[3] According to Ianni (2019, p. 28),

> [...] in a society in which political debate was forbidden and the expropriation of the proletariat and peasantry reached exceptional levels, it was important to "legitimize" the dictatorship through the ideologization of the systematic character, coherence, operability, pragmatism, rationality, modernization, etc., of economic policy.

This perspective also materialized in the policy for universities. If the process then under way were to be continued, it would be necessary to point to the need to develop science and technology, that is, the need also to train scientists and technicians. However, this training was to be geared toward strengthening the project being built by the dictatorship and therefore did not require a broad system of free public education guaranteeing access to all who wished to pursue higher education; it would suffice to guarantee the technical training of the number of professionals needed. For Fernandes (2020, p. 68),

> [...] without a doubt, we can build "higher schools" (as in the past) or universities (as was recently intended). Yet one thing is inescapable. If the latter objective prevails, a new climate must be created so that the *technician* and the *man of science* are possible. The criterion of efficacy and the criterion of truth that both pursue do not

[2] A number of studies show the role of intellectuals during the dictatorship; a systematization of this discussion can be found in Silva (2024).
[3] The debate on modernization and its relation to the production of ideologies during the dictatorship was discussed in Silva (2012).

> adapt to any kind of ideological control. If ideological control is stronger than modern technology and science, then we do not want the civilization based on both, and we can do without both types of personality.

Therefore, the threats at stake are the restriction of freedom in the production of knowledge and its subordination to the project of capitalist development defended by the dictatorship. This context relates to the third threat, which is "the aspiration to isolate young people from the flow of the reconstruction of society" (Fernandes, 2020, p. 63). This is a context in which the sociologist observes a changing reality, where

> [...] the establishment of the competitive social order and the expansion of capitalism in Brazil fostered a new reality: the pattern of success tends to shift to another sphere, in which accumulated experience counts less than the so-called capacity for new experience. This was reflected in education (particularly higher education), arousing new aspirations in young people: on the one hand, for self-affirmation; on the other, for mastery of the social techniques that ensured efficacy in the capacity to deal with "new experience" (Fernandes, 2020, p. 70).

The sociologist criticizes the conservative perspective that associates young people with a subversive stance and which, in the case of the dictatorship, justified its curtailment of free expression in the universities. He understands that there is no rebellious nature innate to young people; their formation, like that of any other segment of society, is determined by material conditions. According to Fernandes (2020, pp. 70–71),

> [...] subversion, if it exists, is not only within the young person; it comes from outside, from a society that is renewing itself and demands a new type of youth. To understand Brazilian youth narrowly in this respect is tantamount to destroying our future participation in the developments of modern civilization in our midst. Young people are the only guarantee left to us that overcoming cultural backwardness and dependence is a matter of time.

In other words, it is society in transformation, unable to guarantee the fulfillment of the promises of the future it presents, that to some extent makes young people "subversive". In this sense, the dictators of the time were mistaken when they saw young people as an "instrument" of the "forces of the left". This perspective was criticized by Florestan Fernandes, who states that young people are "neither a social danger nor a danger in themselves. However, they may become very dangerous if they receive a frustrated and socially alienated education, ignorant of the dilemmas weighing on the country and on youth itself" (Fernandes, 2020, p. 71).

However, denouncing these threats and pointing to the importance of universities did not mean that Florestan Fernandes saw the situation of higher education before the coup as perfect. On the contrary, among various data on the state of education, the sociologist pointed out that there were 155,781 enrollments in higher education in 1965, representing 1.27% of total enrollment. This percentage contrasts with secondary education, which accounted for 17.52%, and primary education, with 81.11%. These data lead Fernandes (2020, p. 79) to conclude: "Brazilian higher education is basically an education of the *elite* and for the *elite*". These problems materialize, among other things, in the fact that "the proportion of people with higher education, in the schooled population and in the population as a whole, is almost negligible" (Fernandes, 2020, p. 87). In addition, he points out that, owing to the "predominance of the economic, social, and political interests of thin and selfish cultural *elites*, higher education was practically confined to the function of preparing liberal professionals" (Fernandes, 2020, p. 87). He concludes, in this sense, that

> [...] Brazilian society has not managed to impart a minimum of homogeneity and intensity to the development of education. Regional fluctuations and, above all, class interests have introduced serious distortions into the mobilization of educational resources at the level of higher education (Fernandes, 2020, p. 87).

Florestan Fernandes highlights that the expansion of universities broke the monopoly over education held by the traditional sectors of society. He notes that from 1800 to 1889, 14 higher education establishments were created in Brazil, while from 1890 to 1929, another 64 institutions were created. This growth was even greater between 1930 and 1960, when another 338 higher education establishments were created. In the 1950s alone, there were 178 new higher education establishments. Overall enrollment increased almost sixfold over 30 years, from 27,501 in 1935 to 155,781 in 1965. However, these elements cannot be seen merely as numbers; the data must be taken as a whole, considering the contradictions of society:

> what is happening is more a leveling of the educational privileges of those *elites* than an authentic process of universal democratization of the best educational opportunities. The middle classes in formation or in growth broadly share old or new privileges (Fernandes, 2020, p. 87).

Therefore, despite the advances and the possibility of incorporating different sectors of society into higher education, universities still remained a space occupied by a small portion of the population, revealing "an ideal of education, of domination of the State, and of social monopoly of power that is, by nature, anti-republican and extra-democratic" (Fernandes, 2020, p. 91). These problems were expressed even in the very organization of the universities. In the 1960s, universities were organized

> [...] around the chair professors, prestigious and well-paid faculty members with total power over their respective areas of knowledge. Chair professors had the prerogative of personally selecting their assistants, teachers, and researchers, as well as defining teaching programs. The positions were held for life, and this power sometimes gave rise to nepotistic practices, such as hiring relatives to work as chair assistants (Motta, 2014, pp. 66–67).

However, the chairs were not the only problem affecting the universities. Their administrative structure did not guarantee their full functioning. In these institutions there was

> [...] a fragile assemblage of virtually autonomous faculties. The deans had budget allocations received directly from the federal government; they hired and spent without answering to the rector. Even the selection of new students was decentralized, with each faculty holding its own entrance examination (Motta, 2014, p. 67).

These themes, as well as other problems faced by the universities, were discussed in the book by Florestan Fernandes. The sociologist devotes himself both to discussing the competing conceptions of the university and to analyzing the proposals and actions promoted by the dictatorship.

4. University reform

Before the 1964 coup, the demand for university reform was incorporated into the basic reforms announced by the João Goulart government. However, referring to the 1964 coup, which sought to disarm the social movements organized around the basic reforms, Fernandes (2020, p. 105) points out that the dictatorship

> [...] rose to power with two ambitions. First, to destroy the ongoing process that was turning the "crisis of the higher school" into a "crisis of conservative control" over the university. Second, to work out the "conservative solution" to *university reform*, channeling the inevitable qualitative changes in an apparently purely technical direction, but one that was in fact dominated by the eagerness to create new mechanisms of conservative tutelage over higher education and the emerging type of university.

Although the proposal was born as part of the struggle of social movements before the 1964 coup, the university reform carried out a few years later was the one imposed by the dictatorship. Motta (2014, p. 66) points out that, as happened with other policies during the dictatorship, "in higher education the regime appropriated projects under debate in the years before 1964 and implemented them in its own way". Fernandes (2020, p. 34), taking stock of the implementation of the reform, points out that the "conservative and counterrevolutionary forces in power" not only "emptied the reform of its democratic and innovative content" but "castrated it completely, further fragmenting the conglomerate university and removing from it any cultural or political vitality". In this process,

> [...] the university was politically sterilized and, incidentally, with the frank and open collaboration of professors and students who supported the counterrevolution and the dictatorial regime. This contributed to its becoming, over the last ten years, the "university of silence" (Fernandes, 2020, p. 35).

Therefore, from the 1964 coup onward, there was a process involving the articulation of repression, the co-optation of education professionals, and the elaboration of policies that, distorting the debates held by the movements in favor of the basic reforms, pointed toward a modernization of the university according to capitalist economic criteria and emptied of its transformative political content. This process materialized in the University Reform, transforming higher education institutions and deepening their elitist and exclusionary

character. It should be noted that this reform was not instituted solely by Law 5,540/68 and the decrees regulating it, but encompassed

> [...] everything from openly coercive elements, such as AI-5/1968 and Decree 477/1969, to changes made within the Federal Council of Education (CFE), facilitating exponential private expansion, measures accompanied by changes in tax legislation aimed at increasing the transfer of public resources to private institutions, as well as policies of subsidized credit for students to purchase places in the private network (Educational Credit Program, Creduc, 1976). Also part of the reform were the new rules for student selection, through the unification of entrance examinations by state, the preparation of examinations no longer by the universities but by organizations aligned with the dictatorship's educational project (Fundação Cesgranrio and others), and, with the aim of putting an end to the figure of the "surplus" candidates, the change in admission criteria, imposing a ranking system (Leher, 2019, p. 49).

These changes express the aim of expanding government control over the universities, with an impact that was not limited to these institutions. It can be observed that, with the university reform, there were also

> [...] changes in the way science and technology were funded, moving the entire apparatus outside the universities, especially to the sector of the state apparatus that was considered the brain of the dictatorship's planning: the Secretariat of Planning (Seplan), especially during the tenure of Minister Delfim Netto (Leher, 2019, pp. 49–50).

This set of measures by the dictatorship had consequences that still persist in the universities, especially the channeling of public resources to private higher education. According to Rubião (2013, p. 125), one of the

> [...] consequences of the 1968 law was the considerable increase in private higher education institutions. These were responsible for absorbing the large number of students arising from the phenomenon of massification that was beginning to occur in Brazilian higher education. In addition, the scrapping of Brazilian public universities began.

This synthesis of the set of actions that constituted the university reform shows the dictatorship's understanding of higher education. Fernandes (2020, p. 303) described "the consented university reform as a manifestation of political tutelage and as a mere panacea". In view of this, he stated:

> We cannot accept it, because it does not flow from our will, does not respond to the aspirations that drive our struggles for the reconstruction of the university, and has no legitimate democratic foundations (Fernandes, 2020, p. 303).

This consolidation of a reactionary project for higher education affected the struggle for university reform, which ceased to be the center of the debate. In the 1970s, in view of the implementation of the educational project established by the dictatorship, Fernandes (2020, p. 35) pointed out that

> [...] there is no longer political room for the idea of a "university reform". The conservative and counterrevolutionary forces themselves adulterated the viable projects and, for that very reason, made the recovery of the university more difficult.

To a large extent, the dictatorship's conception of university reform was marked by an idea of planning and technical neutrality. According to Ianni (2019, pp. 27–28), the dictatorship "adopted planning as a technique and rhetoric of government", strengthening "the state apparatus, basically the Executive Branch, so as to favor, guide, and boost private capital accumulation" (Ianni, 2019, pp. 27–28). Therefore, rulers and their officials "did everything to expand and reinforce their own power to formulate and implement plans and programs, generally broken down into projects" (Ianni, 2019, p. 29). In this process, a body of professionals, civilian and military, was consolidated within state power, providing political and ideological support for the government's actions, and it became noticeable that

> [...] a whole immense *army* of officials came to permeate, broadly and densely, society as a whole, whether in its centers of power (economic, political, military, cultural, and others) or at its most distant and remote extremes of the execution of decisions (Ianni, 2019, p. 62).

This is a fundamental facet of the dictatorship, even though greater emphasis is usually placed on its military and repressive form.[4] However, this violence is intertwined both with the production of ideologies and with the process of exploitation of the working class. It should be understood that "it is not the naked violence of the dominant class that reigns in the State. It is the central site of a domination and, even more, of the muffled and permanent tension provoked by the dominated" (Fontes, 2006, p. 271). Under the dictatorship, "the State was led to mobilize political and organizational, scientific and technical resources so as to favor, guide, reorient, boost, or diversify productive activities in industry, agriculture, livestock, commerce, and finance" (Ianni, 2019, p. 84). In this process, "the violence of state power, as the concentrated and organized violence of bourgeois society, comes to act to guarantee and reinforce the economic and political subordination of the working class and the peasantry" (Ianni, 2019, p. 85).

The title of Fernandes's book seeks to reflect on the dichotomy between reform and revolution present in the left-wing tradition. Although he uses the term "reform", present in the perspectives of the sectors of the social movements that debated changes in the universities, for Fernandes a complete reconstruction of the university is necessary, since occasional actions could not be expected to solve the problems of Brazilian society. This transformation would be inseparably linked to the radical transformation of society itself, and therefore to revolution. According to the sociologist,

> [...] the collective disposition toward social reforms requires an extensive prior development of the institutionalization of the democratic political game. Reformism requires, in other words, a society with a democratic structure that is able to preserve or improve the existing social order through collective, binding choices grounded in majority consensus. Since there is no democracy in Brazil, reformism, as an expression of economic, sociocultural, or political movements, is not part of a cultural tradition and is not viable (Fernandes, 2020, p. 43).

In the situation analyzed by Fernandes, in which the dominant classes would not renounce their privileges, any actions that could be called "reforms" could lead to a scenario of rupture, instability, and social transformation. According to Fernandes (2020, p. 44), referring to positions that could be called "reformist",

> [...] the rigidity and monolithism of conservative restriction systematically convert them into an expression of "revolution", regardless of whether they are purely liberal and nationalist or authentically revolutionary. They go against the *status quo* as it is defined by conservative thought and behavior: they all fall into the same bag, wide enough to hold "subversives" and "revolutionaries" of every stripe, jumbled together with the "corrupt" from conservative ranks in ostracism.

Florestan Fernandes relates the question of the universities to the struggle to end the dictatorship. The sociologist states that the struggles waged at the end of the 1960s "provide the ballast that can support our advance, linking the emerging democratic revolution to the reconstruction of the university that should serve Brazil in the twenty-first century" (Fernandes, 2020, p. 39). In this process, it would be necessary to

> [...] set aside the banner of "university reform" as a main cause. For the university to be renewed and rebuilt in Brazilian society, it is essential to establish in the country a democracy of broadened participation and, in the long term, for us to be able to fight, alongside the working classes and the popular masses, for the transformation of this democracy into a majority and socialist democracy (Fernandes, 2020, p. 39).

The subsequent period of the universities proved full of contradictions, the product both of the material conditions in which they are embedded and of the political disputes that end up affecting education as a whole. In the 1980s, universities experienced a process of internal democratization, whether through the possibility of the academic community choosing rectors or through the formalization of autonomy, enshrined in the 1988 Constitution, which grants professionals relative freedom in teaching, research, and extension activities. Contradictorily, however, the expansion of private education continued, the presence of the private sector in public universities was consolidated through support foundations, and education continues to suffer from budget cuts.

[4] A discussion of propaganda and the dissemination of reactionary ideologies during the dictatorship was carried out in Silva (2023). For a broader understanding of anticommunism in the period, see Silva (2021).

From this body of Florestan Fernandes's work, it is possible to identify a series of elements that make it possible to understand the university today. One of them involves the need for institutions to place research at their core, contributing to the development of knowledge. Fernandes (2020, p. 364) emphasized:

> The university cannot look outside itself for ready-made, finished scientific knowledge. Science, as an institutionalized system of knowledge, is incessantly rebuilt and refined as humankind progresses in the mastery and use of its forms of knowledge.

This need to contribute to the development of scientific knowledge clashes with the very idea of the university. The view still persists that universities have a teaching function, with a practical and quite tangible purpose, even though the training of any professional also involves extension and research. Fernandes (2020, p. 369) pointed out that

> [...] Brazilian society, in the past, only asked the higher schools to manufacture "good" liberal professionals. This resulted in a structural deformation of the nascent university, which urgently needs to be corrected. The higher schools did not intervene in the selection and preparation of talent. That function was performed by society itself, through economic, social, and political criteria. After graduation, the same criteria continued to operate, and properly professional and technical training took place through career opportunities and "practical apprenticeship".

The rich debate on the nature of the university, involving the most diverse segments of society, was interrupted by the 1964 coup. Although the dictatorship invested in research and placed the university in charge of carrying it out as a priority, its main interest was restricted to the exact and technological sciences and was geared toward the immediate interests of the bourgeoisie and the governments. The perspective of the university as exclusively devoted to teaching predominated, to the point that the creation of private colleges or other regional institutions was encouraged to guarantee the basic training of certain professionals, such as administrators and accountants. This perspective continues to permeate the policies of many governments, in which research is relegated to a secondary role and the university is expected to focus primarily on teaching and workforce training.

In the logic of current public policy, the university need not be geared toward the production of knowledge, but merely contribute to the private sector's interests. This contrasts with the formulations of Fernandes (2020, p. 364):

> [...] in order to keep up with the incessant progress of the various branches of scientific knowledge, the university needs to produce, by its own means, at least some portions of that progress; in order to communicate the techniques of scientific knowledge to the surrounding environment, the university needs internal channels for the discovery, application, and evaluation of such techniques.

Therefore, the criteria for the production of knowledge cannot be those that serve particular private interests; on the one hand, they must engage with the broader production of knowledge and, on the other, contribute to the demands necessary for solving society's problems. This is not a matter of turning research toward the immediate interests of particular groups or of the State, but of pointing to possible solutions to the economic, political, and cultural problems faced by society.

5. Final considerations

The themes addressed by Florestan Fernandes in his book make it possible to identify some general reflections on the universities. First, the 1964 coup and the dictatorship put an end to a university project that had not yet been consolidated, in which the existing institutions, despite expressing the economic development of the previous decades, still carried contradictions from earlier higher education projects.

A second conclusion left by Florestan Fernandes's contributions is that the dictatorship's university reform sought to direct public higher education toward strengthening its national project, anchored in particular economic interests. As a consequence, most of the population seeking higher education would have to turn to private education.

Third, there is the need to discuss a university project not from the perspective of improving or reforming what might be wrong. On the contrary, it would be necessary to change its foundations and institutional structures completely, as part of the struggle to transform society. In this sense, the challenges and dilemmas presented by Florestan Fernandes remain relevant and require immediate responses from those who build the university in their daily lives.

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