



## Article

# Pandemic and Higher Education in Brazil

Deise Mancebo<sup>1</sup>

State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

## Abstract

The text discusses the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Brazilian higher education. To this end, an exploratory investigation is undertaken that involves a literature review, systematic research of the alternative press, and documental analysis of converging issues required to gain an understanding of the topic, as well as reference to existing aggregate data, constituting an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative aspects simultaneously. It is broadly organized as follows: first, an analysis of the country's political and economic situation when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, considering that the economic and public health impacts of the spread of the virus depended on pre-existing weaknesses and cracks. The analysis focuses on details of the way the pandemic has been tackled in Brazil, notably the denial of basic precepts of public health and science, which is the hallmark of Bolsonarism. It goes on to investigate the realm of higher education, organizing the arguments around an analysis of two key factors for this discussion: the impacts of ultra-neoliberalism and of neoconservatism on Brazil's higher education establishments. The analysis concludes with some considerations about what has changed at these institutions since the arrival of the pandemic and their prospects for the future.

**Keywords:** Pandemic, Higher education, Ultra-neoliberalism, Neoconservatism.

## Introduction

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."  
James Baldwin<sup>2</sup>

The writing of this article stems from a challenge posed by some colleagues from the Federal University of Pará when they invited me to take part in a cycle of debates entitled "Pandemic and University in International Dialogue," where I presented the first version of this text<sup>3</sup>. Broadly speaking, it

---

<sup>1</sup> Full professor, State University of Rio de Janeiro. ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8312-4495>. Email: [deise.mancebo@gmail.com](mailto:deise.mancebo@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup> A Black American writer and activist who died in 1987.

<sup>3</sup> The complete debate can be viewed at:

consists of the following: first, an analysis of the political and economic state of Brazil when the pandemic reached its shores, considering that the economic and public health impacts of the spread of the virus depended on pre-existing weaknesses and cracks. Second, I narrow down the focus to the world of higher education, centering the analysis on two issues of particular importance to this discussion: the impacts of ultra-neoliberalism and of neoconservatism on higher education establishments in Brazil. Only after these considerations was I able to detect what actually changed at these establishments with the arrival of the pandemic and how their future could pan out henceforth.

For the discussion of these topics, the text is anchored on an investigation of an exploratory nature that includes literature review, systematic research of the alternative press, and a documental analysis of converging issues required to gain an understanding of the topic, as well as a consultation of existing aggregate data, thereby adopting an analysis perspective that at once combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. This is enriched by the contributions made when the preliminary version of this work was presented and discussed.

## 1. The complexities of the situation in Brazil before the pandemic

The generalized state of crisis heralded by the new coronavirus pandemic encountered a situation that was already extremely complex when it reached Brazil. Before addressing the health crisis *per se*, we must stress that the country had already entered a new capitalist crisis. The story nurtured by some of our leaders that "we were growing and then along came the pandemic and everything went downhill" is fallacious. As Fontes (2020) puts it, "the crisis was already underway [at least since 2015] and had been foretold by the bourgeois economists themselves."

Some data confirm this analysis. Prior to the arrival of the virus, the country's economic growth was low, as witnessed by the meager 1.1% gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2019. In the first three months of 2020, before the effects of the pandemic were felt, the GDP retracted by 1.5%, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2020).

Unemployment was also on the rise, reaching 12.6% in the three months ending April 2020 (IBGE, 2020). This figure does not even taken into account the great number of people surviving off informal labor or in precarious employment conditions.

Social inequality was already extreme, with Brazil ranking the sixth most unequal country in the world, reinforcing its endemic poverty, which leaves huge (especially black) contingents to subsist in degrading living and housing conditions with a deficit of social services<sup>4</sup>.

As Harvey (2020) aptly sums up, decades of neoliberalism around the world (and in Brazil) left countries "totally exposed and poorly prepared to face a public health crisis of this caliber, despite the abundant warnings and convincing lessons offered by previous scares like SARS and Ebola" about

---

< <https://www.facebook.com/faed.ufpa.14/videos/297734231610333>>.

<sup>4</sup> According to Guimarães (2020), "Brazil is the country with the second highest concentration of wealth, where 1% of the population accounts for 28% of the national income, which is only beaten by Qatar, where 1% of the population account for 29% of the income."

what should have been done. It is worth noting that the expropriation of social rights was intensified in the field of health care, in which significant portions of the comprehensive policies were privatized and much of public health care was transferred to profit-hungry businesses in the area. Nonetheless, the austerity policies took no account of the warnings sounded by previous outbreaks, much less the attacks on public health services, such that COVID-19 came much like "nature's revenge" for years of mistreatment and abuse "at the hands of violent and unregulated neoliberal extractivism" (Harvey, 2020).

Almost everywhere around the world, the scientists' public health calls for mass self-isolation as the best means of fighting the pandemic were duly heeded by governments of the most varied of hues. Excepting a few cases, even conservative administrations set aside some of their neoliberal precepts to allow for measures such as income support for workers, assistance for the unemployed, and an expansion of social benefits to include informal workers. Essentially, many states took pro-active measures to protect lives, whether of those who caught the disease or of those who were forced into lockdown to avoid contagion and the spread of the epidemic. To a greater or lesser extent, addressing the serious public health situation largely took precedence over economic precepts, "reinstating some sense of community, lost with the severing of ties of solidarity as capitalism matured" (Colombi et al., 2020).

## **2 – The arrival of the pandemic in Brazil: denialism and other particularities**

Just like the rest of the world, in March 2020 the pandemic also challenged Brazil's leaders, legislature, and population to rally in coordinated and regulated action in a bid to tackle the crisis. However, that was not what happened. Instead, from the outset, the political and institutional instability compounded by the social and economic crisis and the public health crisis was tagged by a false dichotomy between and social isolation measures and the continuation of economic activity, which ended up becoming the hegemonic situation, irrespective of the recommendations of physicians and scientists. In this superficial and simplistic opposition between the health of the economy and the health of people, the economy won, putting people – especially the poorest – at risk of contamination and death by the virus.

The Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe (2017) developed the concept of necropolitics, which is very fitting for describing Brazil, since it has to do with the violent, arbitrary nature of state decisions about who should live and who should die. Thanatoeconomics – the economic arm of necropolitics – has been maintained in Brazil throughout the pandemic through the three pillars of permanent fiscal austerity, the withdrawal of social rights, and the maintenance of property privileges.

A fascist approach has ruled supreme since the pandemic arrived: whoever must die must die, but capitalist accumulation must not falter. Unlike most other governments around the world, where more measures have been taken to protect workers and the general public if they get ill, in Brazil necrophilic policies have denied the gravity of the pandemic and treated thousands of death as mere side-effects that in no way justify interrupting the hallowed needs of finance-dominated capitalism.

This translated, in concrete terms, into a 1.2 trillion real injection into the country's financial system at the beginning of the pandemic, assuring the banks solvency at the same time that people were falling ill and dying and other sectors of the economy were starting to buckle in the face of the crisis. Colombi et al. (2020) argue that for workers, the government's solutions conceived in alignment with the interests of financism and major economic groups only "aggravated the situation and the uncertainty of income and employment," putting responsibility for the economic crisis [and the pandemic] squarely on workers' shoulders.

The provision of financial support for some of the people most in need involved the emergency payment of just six hundred reais for three consecutive months. Obviously, the measure was a significant win for the opposition in congress, but it was not enough. Furthermore, the state failed to take the firm, direct action needed to assure proper self-isolation, mitigate economic collapse (especially) during lockdown, and to "take measures to inject public monies into economic planning, looking forward to the post-pandemic period" (Colombi et al., 2020).

In reality, despite a few dissonant voices in the ruling class choir, what prevailed among different sectors of the bourgeoisie was an action plan that took advantage of the

"window of opportunity" to make still further inroads in the removal of rights from the working class, establishing new legal frameworks for an unbelievable rise in the level of overexploitation; to guarantee the maximum of transfers from public coffers, especially to the financial sector, in the name of assuring credit and assistance for businesses; to assure that the extraordinary state spending during the pandemic should afterwards be reverted by a return to the austericized logic of "fiscal tightening"; and to limit the scope of social distancing measures, keeping businesses open as much as possible, [even at the] cost of human lives (Badaró, 2020).

In its essence, the political economics of death associated with the denialist ideology have increased the contingent of under citizens who are left to fend for themselves (entrepreneurship!) and cobble together a strategy for survival through informal labor, unemployment, sub employment, gig work, and death!

### **3. Higher education in Brazil in times of ultra-neoliberalism and neoconservatism**

What was the state of higher education in Brazil when the epidemic arrived?

Since 2015, I have been calling for the Brazilian higher education system to be analyzed along two basic lines. These relate to the impacts that ultra-neoliberalism and neoconservatism have had on this system (Mancebo, 2020).

For ultra-neoliberalism, there is too much public spending and fiscal austerity must be managed. Generally speaking, this was (and is) the prevailing

thinking in the country, and it is this that has affected higher education, at least since the beginning of President Dilma Rousseff's second term in office, in 2015. With the coup in 2016, those at the helm of the country's economic policy took austerity to a whole new level, pushing for the dismantling of state structures and the end of public policies to serve the majority of the population (Mancebo, 2020).

The main concrete outcome of these guiding principles was the passing of Constitutional Amendment #95<sup>5</sup>, which in 2019, for example, was responsible for cutting the public health budget by over 20 billion reais, according to a study by the NGO Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos (INESC, 2020). Much has been written about this legislation, but it is worth noting that all its restrictions relate solely to "primary expenses," leaving financial expenses free to grow as much as the country's leaders wish. As Kliass (2019) puts it:

[...] this same tourniquet that sets about choking social security, health, education, labor, social services, sanitation, agriculture, and many other policies does not touch the VIP expenditure of financism. [...] In plain Portuguese: financial expenses are not subject to any type of control!

But the tide of austerity did not stop there. Along with EC 95 came the outrageous reduction in the cost of human labor in the form of the Outsourcing Act<sup>6</sup> and the Labor Reform<sup>7</sup>, both in 2017, and the Social Security Reform<sup>8</sup>, in 2019, which consummated the withdrawal of workers' and pensioners' rights with the same false and demagogic discourse that the state was on the brink of bankruptcy.

All this new legislation was passed with the promise of new jobs and a bolstered economy, neither of which has come about, leaving the state less well equipped to support its population and, in our case, their education. In the context of an international crisis, when state intervention in the form of inclusive and compensatory social policies is a pressing need, what Brazil's governments have done since 2015 is simply to cynically repeat the same old recipe of austerity.

Apart from this, there have also been attacks aimed specifically at higher education, such as the freezing (in a contingency fund) of 30% of the federal university budget in 2019, its discretionary resources set aside to cover utility bills, cleaning costs, bursaries for students, and others.

Research and graduate education have also been sacrificed, as Sguissardi (2020) explains:

The cuts in the budget for the Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovation, and Communication (MCTIC), to which CNPq is linked, reduced its funding to around ¼ of the amount it was allotted in 2016. [...] The proposed budget for 2020 forecasts a

<sup>5</sup> Constitutional Amendment #95, of December 15, 2016, added eight items to the transitional constitutional provisions. Through this legislation, the rules and operating conditions for a "new" fiscal regime are established, freezing for 20 years the budgetary expenditure of the Union. Every year, the values will only be adjusted by the official rate of inflation for the previous year.

<sup>6</sup> Act #13,429, of March 31, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Act #13,467, of March 13, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Constitutional Amendment #103, of November 12, 2019.

cut in funding for operating costs and the payment of grants and bursaries through Capes of around 40% vis-a-vis 2019 (from around R\$ 4.0 bi to around R\$ 2.3 bi). In 2020, the Capes budget will correspond to around 25% of the 2015 budget, when there were 2,057 graduate programs compared with 4,300 now, and when there were 163,671 master's and doctoral students as opposed to around 400,000 today (p. 155).

Neoconservatism is the second key consideration in this analysis of higher education in Brazil. The neoconservative ideology comes in many shapes and sizes propounded by a profusion of authors based on different conceptions, and stems from an equally varied and complex range of causes, which cannot be explored here. Nonetheless, what we should note is that since the 2015 street protests we have seen growth in conservative thinking in a way rarely ever seen in the history of Brazilian society.

Since the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in 2018, it is fair to say that along with neoconservatism, the country has come close to a semi-fascist regime, even if some of the features of classic twentieth century fascism are missing<sup>9</sup>. Even so, some of its most marked features are present, at least in terms of lies, manipulation, violence, cultivation of hatred against enemies from within, oppression, and racism.

Ultra-neoliberalism and neoconservatism go hand-in-hand in a phenomenon Laval (2018) makes clear in his analysis, indicating we are going through a hyper-authoritarian stage of neoliberalism,

a dangerous phase of neoliberalism that channels and exploits resentments, frustrations, hatred, fear of different portions of the population, the poor and the rich, to pit them against scapegoats. These may be immigrants, people regarded as lazy, layabouts, parasites, sexual or ethnic minorities, left-wing political leaders or parties, it hardly matters what (Laval, 2018).

Sadly, education, universities, schools, science, and culture, with their professors, teachers, students, artists, scientists, and intellectuals, have been prime targets of this aggression. It could even be said that universities and the academic scientific world "occupy an important place in the plans for power of Bolsonarism. As a target to be toppled" (Motta, 2020). The basic assumption that the left has gained hegemony in the world of culture and academia and is a hotbed of left-wingers and the propagation of "cultural Marxism," and that if this "red phantom" is to be defeated once and for all, the institutions that harbor culture, science, and education must be crippled and politically muzzled.

Federally run higher education establishments are particularly targeted in the attacks. Indeed, it is fair to say that the whole issue involving the elections of deans for the federal universities is designed to assure the government a strong foothold in these institutions in an attempt to change them ideologically.

---

<sup>9</sup> Classic fascism counted on a solid, organized mass of the population, a nationalist project, a clear political identity, and other features that are not seen in the present Brazilian government.

Along with the ideological motivations, the Bolsonarist project also aims to weaken the fields of science and academia so they do not put up any resistance to its economic plans and may even contribute to them. As Miguel (2019) aptly sums it up, "this is a government that is against education. It is a government that sees education as a threat." Historical educational demands are seen as dangerous because this is an obscurantist government – in the strict sense of the word – that wants mystification to be spread throughout society, because this is what assures its grassroots support (Miguel, 2019).

Additionally, the cultural war waged by the government is designed to push for entrepreneurial education that is aligned with the market, acritical, and under its yoke. As opponents cannot actually be physically eliminated in a regime that claims to be democratic, what Bolsonarism does through its digital militia is to attempt to eliminate them symbolically. This has been done since before this government came to power.

A prime case in point is the Future-se program (literally "future yourself"), whose full title is the Program for Entrepreneurial and Innovative Universities and Institutes. The Ministry of Education has already presented four versions of Future-se (in July and October 2019 and January and May 2020). Whatever version ends up being used, the program, based on the false, reductive dichotomy that the problem is the state and the solution is the market, will leave universities at the mercy of financial market oscillations and interests alien to the university setting. For what it aims for is

the deconstruction of university autonomy and, through this, the possibility of producing knowledge [and education] without any imposed agenda, training professionals who are free to serve the majority of society and not just a small portion of it (Carlotto, 2019).

As discussed elsewhere, Brazilian public universities have been under a series of attacks by state entities and sectors of public opinion, an offensive that was intensified when Bolsonaro came to power.

The reasons behind this offensive include deeper ideological positions: obscurantism, anti-intellectualism, Marxist theory of culture, and a narrow, short-sighted, utilitarian view of the functions of science in society. With Future-se, research will be slotted into the business environment. Innovationism, already rooted in the country since the 1990s, will be deepened, interventions will have to be profitable, meaning they will have to contribute to increasing business profits. Basic research, historical and social research, research in the field of art and culture will suffer discontinuities (Mancebo, 2020).

#### **4. Pandemic and university: new attacks and risks besides the virus**

This was the climate of higher education in Brazil when the pandemic came along. So what else has happened since then?

At the higher education establishments that have hospital facilities, much of their health efforts have been channeled into providing care for the population. We can also see a strong effort to gear research towards finding

answers for the pandemic: research into treatments, drugs, and vaccines; the production of low-cost medical equipment, like respirators, personal protective equipment, and hospital supplies; the development of programs and applications to tackle new situations, monitoring of the evolution of the pandemic in its epidemiological and social dimensions; the production and promotion of science communication activities and debates on key topics, and much, much more.

In the other university departments, classroom teaching was suspended and immediately many professionals hired under temporary contracts, as substitute lecturers or as outsourced professionals found their jobs on the line and their income under threat. For everyone else, one way or another, working from home – one means of remote working – was the almost automatic option put on the table for the institutions to do their work as the pandemic spread around the country.

As Antunes (2020) explains, the option of working from home means the worker is not paid transport expenses, meal expenses, or any of their equipment costs, and also isolates them at home, breaking down class solidarity and blurring the distinction between work time and private time once and for all.

It is important to stress that the technologies that enable home office working are not in themselves exploitative or emancipating. However, it should be noted that many harmful effects have been associated with professionals working at home by scholars investigating the topic. In fact, what it does is make the home a place that is organized around work and make work hours get extended beyond what was agreed. According to Ruy Braga (2020), "this trend will deepen the inequalities between those who have the means to keep up with technological changes and those who will not be capable of adapting to the new social context."

Specifically, the work of university professors, which encompasses teaching, research, and outreach, as well as a growing number of administrative duties, has been moved wholesale into their homes since the pandemic arrived.

In this complex web of activities, distance learning deserves special attention. It has become more widespread since the pandemic in both private and public education. At private institutions, where, in 2018, distance learning already accounted for 24.3% of enrolments, according to the 2019 census by the government bureau Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP, 2019), except in very rare cases, the use of remote learning is designed to reduce costs and strengthen private conglomerates. As the press has reported<sup>10</sup>, Laureate, which has several private universities under its umbrella, not only uses robots to correct work without students' knowledge, but also laid off over one hundred professors in May 2020. Uninove fired 300 teachers in late June<sup>11</sup>, while the Ânima education group laid off 150 professors in early July in Belo Horizonte<sup>12</sup>. One-size-fits-all distance learning models are being offered to governments and schools

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/educacao/2020/05/depois-de-colocar-robos-para-ensino-laureate-demite-120-professores.shtml>>.

<sup>11</sup> Reported in: <<https://educacao.uol.com.br/noticias/agencia-estado/2020/06/24/uninove-demite-professores-por-meio-de-plataforma-online.htm>>.

<sup>12</sup> Available at: <<https://www.brasildefatoma.com.br/2020/07/07/mais-de-150-professores-sao-demitidos-da-una-faculdade-do-grupo-anima-em-bh>>.



(Krawczyk, 2020). There is already a Brazilian platform for anyone who wants to earn money preparing lessons online<sup>13</sup> and, as one of the world's richest men, Jorge Paulo Lemann, says<sup>14</sup>, distance learning should spread like wildfire after the pandemic.

There is no correspondence in the public education network for these kinds of events that are reported as happening in the private network. But as Krawczyk (2020) points out, "it would be quite naive to imagine that our public university is exempt from the pressures of [such strong] business interests."

This begs a question: Can public universities offer quality distance learning without discrimination or exclusion? Of course it can, but it is very unlikely under the present circumstances. Distance learning requires careful, deliberate, targeted planning, together with systematic classroom activities and pedagogical activities developed for that particular teaching strategy. It is impossible to make a hasty transition from the planning of classroom lessons to remote learning. Furthermore, in Brazil connectivity and IT equipment are available only to some, and people's living spaces are often not conducive to concentrating on studies and work. It is therefore quite likely that improvised distance learning could leave many out and could further deepen the country's educational apartheid. Finally, it should be noted that the results of distance learning are not very positive, even when the teaching is well planned, even in the Brazilian public school system (Mancebo, 2016), and even in other countries<sup>15</sup>.

This set of impediments does not mean we cannot continue to maintain contact with students to keep up with what is happening to them and give them support whenever possible at this difficult time. I therefore regard it as fundamental for there to be serious, substantiated discussions about distance learning. Unless we do this, we will have no way to fight off the new attacks that call for the commercialization of education. As Santos (2020) rightly points out,

if it [the public university] does not do so, it will be devoured by the neoliberal vertigo that now feels empowered by the technological orgy of zoom, streamyard, webex, webinars, etc. [...] And for them, the public university of the future is online: vast savings in faculty and technical staff and in premises and facilities; an expeditious way of putting an end to "ideological" subjects and university protests [...]; the elimination of dysfunctional face-to-face deliberative processes.

Finally, we should note that graduate education, research, and science have also been hampered by this public health crisis. With lockdown and the interruption of public activities, thousands of projects have been partially or

---

<sup>13</sup> News story available at:

<[https://professores.diariooficial.com.br/?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=display&utm\\_campaign=professor&utm\\_content=mulher&fbclid=IwAR0P4mD-bhD\\_UuVO-pZDbeHoTdYP23\\_H\\_ZLR0mAkuOvYiV9ccQEbYPqGxP4#disciplinas](https://professores.diariooficial.com.br/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=display&utm_campaign=professor&utm_content=mulher&fbclid=IwAR0P4mD-bhD_UuVO-pZDbeHoTdYP23_H_ZLR0mAkuOvYiV9ccQEbYPqGxP4#disciplinas)>.

<sup>14</sup> News story available at: <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2020/05/lemann-dara-maior-enfase-a-ensino-virtual-em-suas-fundacoes.shtml>>. See also:

<<https://outraspalavras.net/outrasmidias/a-caixa-preta-das-startups-da-educacao/>>.

<sup>15</sup> It is worth watching the video interview with Professor Paulo Blikstein, from Columbia University, who researches new education technologies. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfzW8e329qA>>.

totally paralyzed. The actions planned for research projects will have to be adjusted, schedules will have to be reviewed, but no measures to assure the stability of science and the production of knowledge have been announced to date. Rather, federal entities have taken advantage of the moment to attack science, as seen in CAPES directive #34<sup>16</sup> and MCTIC directive #1122<sup>17</sup>.

In a recent statement, the president of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science, Ildeu de Castro Moreira, highlighted how important a role science has played in tackling the pandemic, while stressing the shortage of funding for the sector and the drastic cuts seen in recent years. To cite just one example, the government-run science and technology development fund Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (FNDCT), the main source of funding for research and development in Brazil, currently has over 88% of its funds frozen in the contingency reserve (SBPC, 2020b).

To sum up, the general thrust of the recent reforms is towards applying ultra-neoliberal and neoconservative formulas based on an agenda of privatizations, result-oriented management, "accelerated learning," content-oriented learning, and the adoption of a "hybrid" model that incorporates distance learning into the education policy.

## 5. Concluding remarks: speculation on what is to be done

Many issues have been raised throughout this text and there are enormous barriers to be overcome to address each one. In an attempt to sum up the issues, which will surely fail to include many byways, I believe there are at least four giant challenges ahead!

The first decisive challenge right now is to fight for the life threatened by the virus. It is paramount that we stop the virus from killing thousands more Brazilians, because the pandemic is still spreading and the extent of contagion and thus of deaths remains very high, probably ten times higher than official numbers suggest.

What we need immediately is a state capable of completely reconstituting the health system, channeling funds into free, comprehensive public health, so necessary for assuring social equity and equality. The public health system, Sistema Único de Saúde, "must finally be implemented, something that has never truly happened" (Fontes, 2020). To do so, funding decisions must cease to consider only market-oriented concerns and criteria. Essentially, it is about valuing life over profit.

The second great challenge is politics. The heart of the political struggle should be holding the Bolsonaro administration directly accountable for the tragedy the country is going through, because throughout this process, this government has underplayed the severity of the public health crisis despite the overwhelming evidence of the danger it poses; publicly challenged social distancing measures; been party to and divulged pro-coup events; boycotted

---

<sup>16</sup> Directive #34, of March 9, 2020, which sets forth new conditions for the funding of master's and doctoral programs, is responsible for an approximately 10% reduction in the total number of permanent graduate education bursaries funded by the agency since its implementation. In particular, programs rated 3 and 4 have lost up to 40% of their bursaries (SBPC, 2020a).

<sup>17</sup> MCTIC directive #1122, of March 19, 2020, sets the priorities for the funding of research, technology, and innovation development for 2020-2023. It makes no mention of funding for basic science, the humanities or the social sciences.

the efforts of other leaders in the country; and failed to acknowledge the death of thousands of citizens for the sake of its ambitions for power.

Thenceforth, this dramatic health, economic, and social crisis urges us to question the very way in which society is organized, and to take action to transform it. As Colombi et al. (2020) point out,

we can no longer carry on naturalizing a society guided by the quest for profit, which is based on increasing inequality, which relegates much of the population to miserable living conditions, which degrades the environment, which is particularly violent against black and indigenous people, which puts us in permanent competition and tends to sever any bond of solidarity between people, which places the "health of the economy" above the health of the people, and sees the mere maintenance of a quality comprehensive health system as an intolerable "cost".

This dramatic scenario is a fair description of the "normal" we are living through, whose brutality must be quelled. This means admitting that criticism of ultra-neoliberalism and neoconservatism must go hand-in-hand with a radical criticism of capitalism to enable society to be based on principles that promote equality and social justice.

Finally, universities could play a decisive role in this whole process, whether it be developing equipment or creating new protocols for the control and cure of diseases, which they already do to a large extent, as well as taking a decisive role in fostering debate and the fight against denialism and obscurantism in general. This is why they must be defended from destructive attacks, whether they be funding cuts or threats of censorship or the attempt to control them from within through new programs or even by appointing leaders aligned with the neoconservative agenda. I refer to resistance against projects that could ultimately lead to the destruction of universities as centers for the production of knowledge and education of relevance to society as a whole!

## References

ANTUNES, Ricardo. Meta é sairmos vivos dessa crise, metas do teletrabalho na pandemia. **Sintrajud**, São Paulo, abr. 2020. Available at:

<<https://www.sintrajud.org.br/meta-e-sairmos-vivos-dessa-crise-afirma-sociologo-contra-metas-do-teletrabalho-na-pandemia/>>. Accessed on: 10 Jul. 2020.

BADARÓ, Marcelo. Por que Bolsonaro ainda governa? **Esquerda on line**, Rio de Janeiro, maio 2020. Available at: <<https://esquerdaonline.com.br/2020/05/09/por-que-bolsonaro-ainda-governa/>>. Accessed on: 1 Jun. 2020.

BRAGA, Ruy. Covid-19 e avanço tecnológico. Nasce um outro mundo do trabalho. Entrevistas especiais com Ruy Braga Neto e Rafael Grohmann. **Combate Racismo Ambiental**, maio 2020. Available at: <<https://racismoambiental.net.br/2020/05/04/covid-19-e-avanco-tecnologico-nasce-um-outro-mundo-do-trabalho-entrevistas-especiais-com-ruy-braga-neto-e-rafael-grohmann/>>. Accessed on: 10 Jul. 2020.

BRASIL. **Emenda Constitucional nº 95**, de 15 de dezembro de 2016. Altera o Ato das Disposições Constitucionais Transitórias, para instituir o Novo Regime Fiscal, e dá

outras providências. Available at:

<[http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/constituicao/emendas/emc/emc95.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/emendas/emc/emc95.htm)>.

Accessed on: 10 Feb. 2020.

BRASIL. **Lei nº 13.429**, de 31 de março de 2017. Altera dispositivos da Lei nº 6.019, de 3 de janeiro de 1974, que dispõe sobre o trabalho temporário nas empresas urbanas e dá outras providências; e dispõe sobre as relações de trabalho na empresa de prestação de serviços a terceiros. Available at: <[http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2015-2018/2017/lei/L13429.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2017/lei/L13429.htm)>. Accessed on: 15 Feb. 2018.

BRASIL. **Lei nº 13.467**, de 13 de julho de 2017. Altera a Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho (CLT), aprovada pelo Decreto-Lei nº 5.452, de 1º de maio de 1943, e as Leis nºs 6.019, de 3 de janeiro de 1974, 8.036, de 11 de maio de 1990, e 8.212, de 24 de julho de 1991, a fim de adequar a legislação às novas relações de trabalho. Available at: <[http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2015-2018/2017/lei/l13467.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2017/lei/l13467.htm)>. Accessed on: 15 Feb. 2018.

BRASIL. **Emenda Constitucional nº 103**, de 12 de novembro de 2019. Altera o sistema de previdência social e estabelece regras de transição e disposições transitórias. Available at:

<[http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/constituicao/emendas/emc/emc103.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/emendas/emc/emc103.htm)>.

Accessed on: 10 Feb. 2020.

BRASIL. MEC. **Future-se**, de 3 de janeiro de 2020. Institui o Programa Universidades e Institutos Empreendedores e Inovadores - Future-se. Available at: <<http://www.in.gov.br/en/web/dou/-/despacho-236403674>>. Accessed on: 10 Feb. 2020.

BRASIL. MEC. Portaria nº 34, de 9 de março de 2020. Dispõe sobre as condições para fomento a cursos de pós-graduação stricto sensu pela Diretoria de Programas e Bolsas no País da CAPES. **Diário Oficial da União**. Available at: <<http://www.in.gov.br/web/dou/-/portaria-n-34-de-9-de-marco-de-2020-248560278>>. Accessed on: 15 May 2020.

BRASIL. MCTIC. **Portaria nº 1.122**, de 19 de março de 2020. Define as prioridades, no âmbito do Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia, Inovações e Comunicações (MCTIC), no que se refere a projetos de pesquisa, de desenvolvimento de tecnologias e inovações, para o período 2020 a 2023. Available at: <<http://www.in.gov.br/en/web/dou/-/portaria-n-1.122-de-19-de-marco-de-2020-249437397>>. Accessed on: 15 May 2020.

CARLOTTO, Maria Caraméz. Weintraub propõe a universidade amordaçada. **Outras Palavras**, 23 jul. 2019. Available at: <[https://outraspalavras.net/crise-brasileira/o-plano-weintraub-para-a-universidade-amordacada/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=23\\_7\\_o\\_plano\\_weintraub\\_para\\_universidade\\_amordacada\\_boaventura\\_e\\_agora\\_brasil\\_um\\_novo\\_o\\_trump\\_como\\_chefe\\_do\\_governo\\_britanico\\_nossa\\_intimidade\\_a\\_servico\\_da\\_inteligencia\\_artificial&utm\\_term=2019-07-23](https://outraspalavras.net/crise-brasileira/o-plano-weintraub-para-a-universidade-amordacada/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=23_7_o_plano_weintraub_para_universidade_amordacada_boaventura_e_agora_brasil_um_novo_o_trump_como_chefe_do_governo_britanico_nossa_intimidade_a_servico_da_inteligencia_artificial&utm_term=2019-07-23)>. Accessed on: 10 Feb. 2020.

COLOMBI, Ana Paula Fregnani et al. Nota sobre os impactos econômicos e sociais da Covid-19. **Grupo de Conjuntura da UFES**, Vitória, Apr. 2020. Available at: <<https://blog.ufes.br/grupodeconjunturaufes/2020/04/02/nota-sobre-os-impactos-economicos-e-sociais-da-covid-19/>>. Accessed on: 15 May 2020.

FONTES, Virgínia. Entrevista: coronavírus e a crise do capital. **ANDES-SN**, Brasília, abr. 2020. Available at: <<https://www.andes.org.br/conteudos/noticia/cORONAVIRUS-e-a-cRISE-dO-cAPITAL1>>. Accessed on: 15 May 2020.

GUIMARÃES, Samuel Pinheiro. Guedes, Bolsonaro e o Vídeo. **Revista Fórum**, jun. 2020. Available at: <<https://revistaforum.com.br/noticias/guedes-bolsonaro-e-o-video-por-samuel-pinheiro-guimaraes/>>. Accessed on: 1 Jul. 2020.

HARVEY, David. Política anticapitalista em tempos de coronavírus. **Carta Maior**, São Paulo, jul. 2020. Available at: <<https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Politica/Politica-anticapitalista-em-tempos-de-coronavirus/4/47997>>. Accessed on: 14 Jul. 2020.

IBGE. **Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios Contínua Mensal (PNAD Contínua)**, maio 2020. Available at: <<https://sidra.ibge.gov.br/home/pnadcm>>. Accessed on: 14 Jul. 2020.

INEP. **Sinopses Estatísticas do Censo da Educação Superior: 2018**, Brasília, set. 2019. Available at: <<http://www.inep.gov.br/superior/censosuperior/sinopse/default.a>>. Accessed on: 10 Jan. 2020.

INESC. **O Brasil com baixa imunidade – Balanço do Orçamento Geral da União 2019**. abr. 2020. Available at: <<https://www.inesc.org.br/obrasilcombaixaimunidade/>>. Accessed on: 20 May 2020.

KLIASS, Paulo. Gastos com juros e cortes no orçamento. **Carta Maior**, jun. 2019. Available at: <<https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Economia-Politica/Gastos-com-juros-e-cortes-no-orcamento/7/44240>>. Accessed on: 10 Feb. 2020.

KRAWCZYK, Nora. As falácias da educação à distância se alastram com (e como) o Covid19. **Carta Maior**, May 2020. Available at: <<https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Educacao/As-falacias-da-Educacao-a-Distancia-se-alastram-com-e-como-o-Covid19/54/47657>>. Accessed on: 10 Jun. 2020.

LAVAL, Christian. Bolsonaro e o momento hiperautoritário do neoliberalismo. **Blog da Boitempo**, out. 2018. Available at: <[https://blogdaboitempo.com.br/2018/10/29/o-momento-hiperautoritario-do-neoliberalismo/?utm\\_source=Contatos+Boitempo&utm\\_campaign=f42be1894e-Campanha\\_P%C3%B3s-elei%C3%A7%C3%B5es&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_68c0e326c0-f42be1894e-59940767](https://blogdaboitempo.com.br/2018/10/29/o-momento-hiperautoritario-do-neoliberalismo/?utm_source=Contatos+Boitempo&utm_campaign=f42be1894e-Campanha_P%C3%B3s-elei%C3%A7%C3%B5es&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_68c0e326c0-f42be1894e-59940767)>. Accessed on: 10 Feb. 2020.

MANCEBO, Deise. Breve análise do acesso e permanência na educação a distância: o caso do CEDERJ. In: CUNHA, Célio da; SOUSA, José Vieira de; SILVA, Maria Abádia da. (Orgs.). **Expansão e avaliação da educação superior: diferentes cenários e vozes**. 1ed. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2016. p. 239-258.

MANCEBO, Deise (submetido). Educação superior no Brasil em tempos de ultraneoliberalismo e neoconservadorismo. **Educação & Sociedade**. 2020.

MBEMBE, Achille. Necropolítica. **Arte e Ensaios**, v.32, n.2, 2017. Available at: <<https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/ae/article/view/8993>>. Accessed on: 10 Feb. 2020.

MIGUEL, Luis Felipe. A gente tem que ser capaz de passar do protesto à resistência de fato. **Carta Maior**, set. 2019. Available at: <<https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Politica/-A-gente-tem-que-ser-capaz-de-passar-do-protesto-a-resistencia-de-fato-/4/45291>>. Accessed on: 20 Feb. 2020.

MOTTA, Rodrigo Patto Sá. A guerra cultural bolsonarista, as universidades e as redes. **Carta Maior**, jun. 2020. Available at: <<https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Educacao/A-guerra-cultural-bolsonarista-as-universidades-e-as-redes/54/47895>>. Accessed on: 10 Jul. 2020.

SANTOS, Boaventura de Sousa. A universidade pós-pandêmica. **Outras Palavras**, jul.2020. Available at: <<https://outraspalavras.net/alemdamercadoria/boaventura-a-universidade-pos-pandemica/>>. Accessed on: 10 Jul. 2020.

MANCEBO, D. *Pandemic and Higher Education in Brazil*.

Dossier: "Consequences of the Bolsonaroism on human rights, higher education and scientific production in Brazil".

SBPC. A nova política de distribuição de bolsas da CAPES: onde estamos e o que esperamos do novo plano. **Jornal da Ciência**, jun. 2020a. Available at: <<http://www.jornaldaciencia.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GT-SBPC-bolsas-CAPES-2.pdf>>. Accessed on: 10 Jul. 2020.

SBPC. Corrida contra o coronavírus. **Portal SBPCNET**, jun. 2020b. Available at: <<http://portal.sbpcnet.org.br/noticias/corrida-contra-o-coronavirus/>>. Accessed on: 10 Jul. 2020.

SGUISSARDI, Valdemar. Um projeto neoliberal de heteronomia das federais e um passo a mais rumo a sua privado-mercantilização. In: GIOLO, Jaime; LEHER, Roberto; SGUISSARDI, Valdemar. (Orgs). **Future-se**: ataque à autonomia das instituições federais de educação superior e sua sujeição ao mercado. São Paulo: Diagrama Editorial, 2020. p. 153-195.

Sent on: 15/July/2020 | Approved on: 21/August/2020