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The Quest for Requirement Fulfilment: the case of the Fabrication of the Technologized Academic Subject in a Mexican Public State University

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Abstract

How is Academic Practice shaped in today's Universities? How is the Academic governed in order to produce or "fabricate" a controlled and technologized productive subject? Using Foucauldian categories the paper explores the literature produced within and outside a specific institutional "dispositive": a Mexican Public University. This Foucauldian perspective will be the framework to discuss how 'subjectification procedures' evidenced in literature are being related to technologies for control. The ultimate purpose is to describe how such processes have impacted academic practice "fabrication" in this particular university and the intrinsic dangers for the university as system and for academic freedom.

Keywords:

Academic Practice, Subjectivity, Academic Government, Technologized Subjects, Foucauldian Studies, Mexican Public Universities.

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to describe what we have called the “academic technologized subjectivity” and its relation with the institutional structures derived by the state regulations for Mexican Higher Education from early 90s onwards. Foucault deemed his work as ontology of the present, an historical ontology of ourselves that can be placed in three domains: 1. Regarding power relations, with the capacity to constitute subjects capable of acting upon others; 2. In relation to the truth that form subjects of knowledge, and 3. In relation to morality that constitutes ethical subjects. Each domain corresponds to one of the Foucauldian approaches: genealogical, archaeological and ethical (Foucault et al., 1994). The subject matter of this paper is to describe forms of objectification/subjectification a Mexican State University: Universidad Autonoma de Ciudad Juarez (UACJ), focusing in the constitution of the ‘academic technologized subjectivity’. Research will be based on Higher Education literature in the Mexican context analysed with a Foucauldian approach and categories such as discursive practices, power relations, disciplinary practices and moral practices.

1. Discourse

In order to analyse how universities have fabricated the technologized academic subject, we must first lay out a few considerations regarding the role of discourse in the process. In Western societies, discourses create meaning systems and the corresponding truths. This approach is radically opposite to the traditional ways of defining truth as adequatio between subject and object. On the contrary, truth is a constitutive part of discourses that cross societies. Some discourses have a broader impact depending on where they come from, so they exert hegemonic practices, languages and power, creating modes of subjectivity. Universities, as well as the family or the law, are some of those institutions that create modes of subjectivity. In this paper we will analyse how the University discourses linked with those of the State, and the corresponding practices, focusing in the way technology and State technocracy are constituting what we will call the technologized academic subjectivity.

1.1 Higher Education as a Global Industry

Knowledge is produced in growing levels of complexity and sophistication and higher education becomes a key factor in knowledge production. The close bonds between university and industry affect the

nature of the academic profession both with negative and positive consequences. Knowledge that industry requires is often concentrated on the short-term solution of problems, the advance of technology, and the training of well-prepared worker (Stromquist & Fredin, 2009). Changes experienced in HEIs affect not only the way in which higher education is provided and how it is created and transmits knowledge, but it also affects the faculty.

Globalization has introduced a de-regularization, privatization, and competition framework. De-regularization enables the uncontrolled expansion of the private sector in higher education, often done with minimal standards of opening and performance as an educational institution. As the IES change, the same happens with the nature of the faculty.

The considerable growth of higher education enrolment all over the world - throughout the last four decades – is partially due to the increase in the rates of undergraduates at the secondary level and the subsequent pressure of more education. Furthermore, it is a product of the social demand, which considers advanced education necessary to get the best jobs in the market. Finally, it is also a result of a greater supply of educational programmes, which are often characterized by easy access as well as by its flexibility in paying conditions.

The growth of universities, together with the parallel demands for resources, promotes a business spirit. This type of institution is increasingly placing administrators in key positions, and it rewards professors with financed research above those whose research attracts less funds and whose duties are focused on teaching.

Some observers have noted that not only has the market played a part in the expansion of IES as businesses, but also there have been internal forces directed by the academics available and capable of adopting business-like management. From this perspective, new administration of the IES has not only emerged as an imposition on the part of the administrators to academics but also as a result of the division of work that academics, with business spirit, prefer.

The dynamics of internationalization, urged by the forces of globalization, have a greater presence in universities of prestige, both public and private, than in profit institutions, which tend to concentrate on national students and market demands. Internationalization seems to be valued as an end in itself as well as a way of differentiating universities of prestige from others with less resource and as a way of recruiting and retaining students, especially at the graduate level.

Under the current globalization discourses, we argue that academic practice face considerable tensions:

- Between keeping solid professional identities and having fundamental part-time employment.
- Between achieving racial and gender equality and moving towards a greater efficiency to develop more competitive institutions
- Between improving teaching and increasing the teaching workload.
- Between devoting themselves to research and handling more administrative duties
- Between developing local knowledge and devoting themselves more to the strategies of internationalization.

Studies show the management's separation from its participation in the expansion of higher education as a public policy, preferring to leave such expansion in private hands. The conditions that affect the faculty – in this great movement towards part time work and the reduction of work security – are spread all over the world.

In general terms, the university seems to be going from learning to enrichment and from social participation to personal interest with very little signs of there being a collective action on the part of university professors to offset these trends.

1.2 Academic Practice defined by Educational Models

Universities have entered into an evaluation culture that in accordance with an administrative vision (multidisciplinary focus) will allow knowing in a systematic way about the correct and deviation from the work of the teachers in regards to an educational project.

The educational model of UACJ establishes that professors must follow the teaching-learning process in classrooms so students can become: active, committed, creative and self-oriented. It is the academic obligation to look for the right teaching-learning techniques that will help to accomplish the institutional goals to educate students (Rodríguez, 2008).

The constructive, significant, creative, collaborative, self-oriented, integration and communication principles established in the institutional educational model Rodríguez (2008) says, allows teachers to know what the Institutional authorities expect from the their work, these principles are the guidelines. Silva (2009b) states that the Educational Model is defined by the administration and is a document that establishes the way the teacher-student relation should be, the way the teacher should organize his class and even suggests the instruments of evaluation that can be applied, thus limiting

academic freedom and denying his/her capacity as an active subject with values, ethic, and culture.

To guarantee that the Educational Model is more than a lifeless document, UACJ incorporated the Implementation Program of the Educational Model (PIME) in 2004 to train faculty in the learning-based educational model. The academic staff should be certified in the Educational Model through the PIME, not only to evidence the incorporation of the educational model to the classrooms but also to qualify to receive part of the incentives for academic performance that complement the professors' salary.

PIME includes courses to enhance teaching, research and the use of educational technology by offering courses like: Epistemological Bases of Constructivism, Constructivism in Higher Education, Creation of Learning Environments, Learning Strategies, Design of Didactic Material, Tools to Design Didactic Material, Making of Scientific Work. As it has been mentioned, through these courses faculty will be able to obtain a certification in the pedagogical model recognized only by UACJ.

As Silva (2009b) mentions, the educational model establishes that professors must be constructivist, creative and able to renew their work object, and PIME courses should be a reflection framework to prevent model from being far from the academic practice. Silva thinks that this is an experience with no legitimated academic work, where faculty only creates or carries out programs pre-fabricated by the planning departments or educational experts. Also, he mentions that the opinions gathered through discussion forums about the educational model at UACJ, consider that Constructivism was imposed and has the risk of turning into pure technique if no reflection is made about its practice. UACJ is trying to turn its faculty into facilitators of learning, which has been difficult because of the difference between theory and practice in the classroom.

In this regard, Acosta (2009) says that this is only the beginning on the move toward an ambitious academic model. This academic model, says Rodríguez (2008) establishes that the professor is responsible of creating a learning environment that will educate students to become adults, who are translated in their capacity to be autonomous and assume the consequences of their acts.

1.3 The Academic as a Professional Worker

The average university lecturer in Mexico does not perform research; he/she faces a teaching workload that is intense and non-rewarding, and he/she practically plays no role in academic management, something that used to be a distinguishing attribute of the lecturer.

From the point of view of the academic personnel, a paradox exists: Investing in graduate studies is the best way of optimizing the possibilities of access to improve labour contracts. However, it is a risky investment since improving the academic profile also makes the person more expensive and, therefore, less desirable from the employer's perspective.

As Gil-Anton (2009) states, the poor work conditions for the individual professor also have serious implications for the university and the nation:

1. A national sense of mission requires committed people to feel that the University, as an institution, plays a special role.

2. If most of the academics do not work full time at the institution where they teach, management and decision-making standards weaken.

3. Consultancy for the students can be provided by only a few persons who have stable positions and who perform research on a regular basis. On the contrary, part time professors do not know their students well, a deplorable situation, especially nowadays when it is observed that students are less prepared for graduate studies.

Another important element in modern employability of academics is Academic market segmentation. The study of Mexico reveals that non-elite profit organizations – which attend to thousands of students – are an important source of work for instructors. Similar conditions are reported in the studies of South Africa and Russia. Given these standards, the faculty has been redefined de facto as a knowledge worker and even as a “just in time” instructor.

The Mexican study demonstrated that those who aspire to the academic profession as a life project tend to be more inclined to basic education both in the hard sciences and in the social sciences, while those committed to teaching are the ones who teach the application of the hard sciences and social sciences.

Both the study of Mexico and of Brazil show an interesting development: In the past, the recruitment of professors was done in differentiated job markets. Both the universities of prestige and the profit IES hired academics from their own former students; nowadays both tend to hire people from prestigious public universities. The positive aspect of this development is that having a high educational level can improve the quality of such institutions. The negative aspect is that, in spite of having better education levels, the faculty faces unsteady work.

The reflection on academic management must also include the presence of another set of professionals: Those who occupy the ever

increasing number of centres, institutes, and external offices of the academic units of the university and who are engaged in academic work in the design and implementation of courses dedicated to the obtainment of diplomas and certificates. Nowadays, with the pressure of a growing registration and the expansion of the educational offer, some administrative units enter into academic fields that were previously out of their sphere.

Regarding research activities, private elite universities and public prestige institutions feel the pressure of engaging in research, and they have access, although in a limited way, to support for research. In profit schools that must educate most of the population, research is not carried out since these institutions act like “knowledge factories” (Ibarra-Colado, 2005).

Support for research in general has become very competitive since it is customary to expect professors to depend on external funds and not those that come from institutional budgets. External support from state organizations exists in most countries, but –obviously- it is not enough to cover the potential demand.

2. Power Relations

As it is well known, Foucault’s approach to power, not as a thing, but as power relations, has been a useful tool in the philosophical discourse. In former conceptions, power was understood in a linear way, according to which someone (the State, a person or a group) had the power and acted against another group who was completely powerless. In Foucault’s conception, that power is like a net distributed in all society, and individuals move through it. Since power is not a thing, it cannot be a possession, but an action; thus, power is exerted in moving relations. The problem is, that in non-democratic societies or in those with a very imperfect democracy, like Mexico and most Latin American countries, power relations are not distributed equally, resulting in corruption, abuse, poverty and ignorance. But, the positive approach is that, since there is no one completely out of power relations, vulnerable groups are not completely impeded of exerting some sort of power. In what follows we will discuss power relations between Universities, the State and academics.

2.1 Power relations and university government

Since the end of the eighties, National governments and elites in Mexico and Latin America started to formulate policies to evaluate the quality of universities and higher education institutions’ performance. Since then many public and private actions were taken to modify the relationship

between universities and State. Under such circumstances, Mexican public universities started to experience pressuring factors, restrictions and demands to reform their orientation, structures and institutional practice. But the political transition process towards democracy became a crucial influence in the transformation of the traditional context of universities in Mexico. The strengthening of structures of the directive conduction of public universities constituted one of the transformation axis oriented by the model of “innovative university” or “entrepreneur”, during the eighties and beginning of the nineties of the last century. (Clark, 1987)

Changes in the profile of university Rectors also represent the change magnitude in university governments. Relationships and tensions between public policies, government and university governing during the last two decades in Mexico, are the updated versions of the traditional tension between the administration and university policies. In general, for the public Mexican university context, policies and politics determined a modification of conducting styles as well as university Authorities operation methods. The central logic of these transformations was a pragmatic one, of adapting to the demands and proposals of federal programmes that represented additional financial resources, institutional recognitions and several accreditations and certifications for academic quality programmes, teacher training and investigation procedures. This implied the creation of several supporting structures for the central conduction of universities, particularly the strengthening and expanding of bureaucratic groups surrounding the Rector of the university and the main administrative management positions: an apparatus to assess quality pursuant to the state’s vision. Such settings and conditions in institutional management have impacted deeply in how academics are conceiving their practice.

2.2 The Power of Money

Money, recognition and prestige govern the changes in institutional behaviour that translate to a fierce fight to accumulate administrative, academic and political capital, but it has also represented a reduction of the social university capital. Regarding institutional performance, it is difficult to show that there is a direct relation between administrative and organizational reforms of the university government with the improvement of quality in the institutional academic performance.

Today we have better financed public universities than in the eighties, but also universities that depend more and more on fulfilling demands and goals mainly established by the federal government or by some

local governments. We have more and better qualified university teachers than ever, the number and percentage of full-time teachers has increased, and hundreds of academic bodies of different levels of consolidation have been formed in all public universities, but we do not know exactly if that has significantly raised the quality of academic procedures in Mexican Public Universities, nor do we know if scientific investigators have joined the life of university teaching and how they contribute to form new investigators.

The extension and university diffusion have turned into relatively abandoned functions by federal policies, even though universities keep developing such function in generally bad conditions, without consistent policies or stable financial resources.

The growing and apparently irreversible “monetary” condition of public policies – the tendency to assign resources to individuals and institutions to be able to demonstrate something and the traditional “monetary” condition of high cost private higher education, have managed to figure out the new equation for university elite: it can only be shown, recognized and credited by “external” entities to the universities (either the State, the market, or their corresponding hybrids).

In contrast, the reputation and prestige created in the loneliness of cubicles and individual reading, together with the academic and research freedom –as principles of university autonomy that can never be given up, the rigour and ethics of academic work are activities and attitudes hardly recognized.

2.3 Regulation Processes and Bodies

To carry out the research regulation processes there is a centralized area called General Research Centre, which is in charge of regulating, following and informing about the different activities of the institutional research. The Scientific Research Council –the regulation research organization supported by the Technical Councils of each Institute, regulates research processes. This council is responsible of establishing the research policies, plans, promotes and communicates the research activities. It establishes the Guidelines for the Generation and Application of Knowledge (LGAC, for its Spanish acronym). A prerogative of each Institute’s Research Council is to update the LGAC applicable in such Institute. Evaluate and authorize the research projects and their development until their conclusion; authorize and administrate the internal economical supports.

UACJ conceives the academic bodies as groups of full time teachers that share one or several research or study lines on disciplinary or

multidisciplinary topics, and group objectives and academic goals. Under this scheme, it says, the academic bodies are those whose colligated work will validate the use of economic resources to finance patrimonial professorships, seminars, conference attendance, exchanges and incorporation of projects that will meet LGAC.

3. Disciplines in the Formation of Productive Academic Practices

“... You have, then, in the disciplinary power, a series constituted by the subject-function, the somatic singularity, the perpetual glance, the writing, the mechanism of the infinitesimal punishment, the projection of psyche and, finally, the normal-abnormal separation. All this is what constitutes the disciplinary individual. It is all this that attaches, finally, one to another one, the somatic singularity to the political power”

(Foucault, 2003, p. 57).

In the last third part of *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1987a, pp. 135-229) is devoted to the analysis of disciplinary power, a kind of power the main goal of which is the control of bodies in its details, internal organization and effectiveness of its movements. The discipline⁵ related to power establishes an analytic relation, aimed to produce docile bodies. The goal of discipline directs to the maximization of the economical usefulness of the body, and at the same time to the reduction of its political force. Disciplines are productive and generate a kind of individuality determined by four characteristics: cellular, organic, genetic and combinatory, and each characteristic corresponds to the techniques of the disciplinary power.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault makes a genealogy of punishment in modern European societies, in the context of changing power relation, from the seventeenth and eighteenth century to present times. Reformers fought against the cruel punishment methods, not only in prisons, but also in psychiatric hospitals, schools, general hospitals and factories. But, according to Foucault, their intentions were to achieve a more efficient use of power relations. This analysis can shed some light in the discussion of how Universities, assuming the practices imposed by the State, by the Market and other institutions, become a factory of academic subjects, subjected to certain practices which are not necessarily for the benefit of

⁵ For Foucault there are two notions of discipline, both related, but at the same time with different scopes: one related to knowledge and the other related to power relations (Foucault, 1994c, p. 516)

academic purposes, but to the construction of normalized, disciplined and technologized academics. The foregoing is based on efficiency and humanitarian discourses and practices to impose some sort of disciplinary power making use of its three elements: observation, normalization and examination, with contemporary postmodern sophisticated instruments.

3.1 Who can be an Academic?

In the case of single course hired teachers, they may have an academic Bachelor to Doctorate Degree. Most of the times, they are required to prove teaching experience and on his/her specialization area. These academics don't have a base contract with the University, but they must participate in their continuing preparation and be certified in the educational model (PIME). This category of professors represents 70% of the institution's academic staff. It was observed that these professors are required to issue a payment receipt to be paid for their services and since the hourly payment received is very low, they must have an additional job to afford their expenses. These academics are employed in the private sector.

The associate professor may be a person with an academic Bachelor to Doctorate Degree. Must prove teaching experience and have research work. According to the UACJ's Institutional Planning Office, 70% of faculty is part time (DGPI, 2008). An institution's common practice used to be the presence in classrooms of administrative staff, without being appointed as teachers, who taught a class in their expertise field, in or out from their working schedule, with no additional payment. The document signature that releases the University from an extraordinary work relationship, which involves an employee's payment or the remote possibility to obtain a full time base as an academic, has regulated these practices. Nowadays, the remaining administrative staff-into teaching is the one that wish to teach with no payment.

To obtain a full time job as a teacher it is required to have a PhD degree and participate to obtain the position based on the PROMEP⁶ regulations. Once the full time job is obtained, a permanent contract will be granted two years after the job was obtained. In the UACJ, the full-time professors, besides obtaining their positions through a competitive examination, they must prove teaching experience, have research work, participate in tutoring and provide administrative work. The process of incorporation is made through competitive examinations open and

⁶ PROMEP, National Program for Faculty Development

promoted, in such way that applications are received countrywide, and even from abroad. A recent modality assumed by The UACJ is the committees of mixed evaluation that check the applicants' files and rule the PTC admission. For the new PTC to obtain PROMEP profile in a two year term is a contractual obligation. The statute establishes that a PTC can have administrative positions and be able to keep the category and level he/she had before getting their administrative position. The Academic Personnel Regulations at The UACJ established that working hours per week should not exceed 48 hours. In this category 30% of faculty is full time.

There is not much information in regard with retired members. The Academic Statutes only mentions that they will receive a three- month salary based on rights established in the Trust Regulation. The 2007-2012 university's rector plan only establishes that there will be a transparent and fair administration of the pensions and retirement trust.

This fact allows to highlight that above any other consideration, even quality issues or performativity, the main element for rationality is the economic one: to maintain a faculty consisting in 70% of 'freelancers', does not cause even the 30% of cost of the remaining 30% formal professors.

In contrast, when the university refers to formal academic practice, discursively establishes the consideration of three aspects of research activities: research methods, academic examination of documents in empirical research- applied or pure, commissioned, individual or collaborative.

Teaching methodology reflecting the work with undergraduate and graduate students in a broader sense. This includes planning procedures, evaluation, supervision, advising and the tutor's work. This practice is partially academic since it happens in an institution with regulations required to develop higher education and contribute to knowledge. However, the academics have strong loyalties to their disciplines, in some cases, loyalties stronger than the institution that make academic practices different from discipline to other. At the same time, traditional cultural-academic, departmental and institutional disciplines exist, which are the base for the variation determining the way professors understand themselves.

3.2 The Normalised and "Desirable" Academic

In the chapter "The Means of Correct Training" in *Discipline and Punish* (1987, pp. 172-196), Foucault states that in order to obtain the disciplined individuality, disciplines must prepare or train individuals to generate them as instruments for production.

In Mexico, it was recently made evident for HE research groups that academics are still in the 'centre' of the functions that society assigns to the university (Grediaga, 1999). Within the higher education system, the academic has the task of forming new members from the professional communities and educate those that will occupy the leading and intermediate positions in different parts of society, at least this is what is supposed to be. Academics must also guarantee the preservation of accumulated knowledge and promote its diffusion and expansion.

In Mexico, to become a member of the academic community, at least one of the two main functions assigned to the university as social institution, teaching and research, must be performed. The minimum elements required to be considered an academic are:

- To evidence training in a specialized field of knowledge.
- To be hired by a higher education institution or research centre to develop one or more characteristics of this occupational role.

From the report of Grediaga –and not too much has changed since–, academics are at the same time, professionals and employees, the first selection is made over the field of knowledge in which their studies will be developed, the place where they are going to develop it, secondly, the type of higher education organization with which the working compromise is made. From that moment on, being an academic in Mexico represents, simultaneously, being a member, of a disciplinary community, participating in the organizational objective achievement and integrating into becoming part of a national and/or international scientific community.

In order to advance in the systematic study of the reasons that explain the diversity in the academic profession and its consequences, the conceptual development of new observation dimensions is required, where the socialization processes, the identity construction and the interaction meanings of the members of the academic profession emphasize.

Typical academic trajectories, as in the rest of professional trajectories, have a beginning, a process of variable temporality development, and culminate with the academic life retirement. The academic trajectory is operated as the path taken by a person at the moment he or she is hired for the first time to develop activities in a higher education or research institute.

The diversity in the professional identity construction and the trajectories of the academics, before deriving from differences attributed to the object of study, is product of diverse historic institutionalization processes both from disciplinary communities and different organizations that form the National Higher Education System. In everyday activity,

academics face simultaneous demands from different regulation references, which come from the discipline they work on, or derive from the institution they work in, and the ones that orient the different types of activities, they perform.

Nowadays, academics tend to acquire a more diverse consciousness about the multiplicity of their practices, their respective interests and the ways to perform the academic practice, even in institutions where the administration is centralized and bureaucratic. However, government and university authorities tend to set, administratively, homogenous actions, especially in terms of result evaluation, without taking into consideration neither the objective differentiation, material condition, institutionalization grades, and the cultural diversity context in which the actors are inserted, nor analysing the processes that were required in order to get to them (Grediaga, 1999).

Still, towards the end of the 80's Fuentes Molinar (1989), mentioned the fact that we knew little about the university and badly. If this is true, without a doubt, this observation could be applicable to a great extent to the academics subjectivity. According to available studies, in Mexico, many academics remain in the place where they got their first job, spending the rest of their careers in one institution (Gil-Antón, 1994). Nevertheless, there is an inter-institutional differential mobility among different kinds of organizations and regions of the country (Grediaga, 1999), but still this is not a common practice.

3.3 Documentalization of Academic Practice as Individualization

With the Transparency Law and demands from different public institutions, Silva's phrase is an ad hoc "first I document myself, then I exist". At UACJ, professors have to fill out a curriculum in a different series of software (depending on the procedure that is being tried) and send a copy of all evidence of their academic work to support their curriculum. Each entity publishes their contests on at a different time with a closing date. This way, each procedure is a set of copies to be audit by local, state and federal institutions. In practice, professors express their nonconformity with the number of forms and justifications that must filled up in each event, because they value the time invested. UACJ used to announce teachers of a new and only form to submit the academic curriculum. In this regard, several complaining emails were written and the following public complaint was rescued, an anonymous email reads:

“The big problem not considered is that since this new curriculum has to be filled out, we get behind in filling out the SNI⁷ and PROMEP curriculum vitae; without considering that we have to gather the paperwork that should be included in the Incentives to Academic Performance folder (an extra resource for those of us not receiving any compensations for being a staff member) and start to prepare our classes, begin to work on the research project we have considered for this year.”⁸

Another teacher says: “Each time we are only numbers, statistics, results, humanism is out of the picture”. It is possible that the nature of the new form called Research Products’ Only Form (RUPI), that is not completely clear, may be the answer to the faculty complaints, however, they have only being asked to fill out the new form without explaining to them the nature or benefits for them. It appears that conflict and frustration comes as inevitable ingredients in the relations between the subjects and between the subjects and the management.

I have observed also that in order to have academic information of faculty, it is important to have the documentation generated by each professor. Based on the archival procedures there should be a professor’s only file to allow him/her to get the organized information to be consulted at any moment. If the faculty information and the documentation were submitted in a sole file, he would not have to be photocopying the evidence for each contest he participates in.

I argue here, that in a very clearly way, a process of individualization of subjects –remembering Ball, is structured in terms of uniformity and individuality, and any ‘problem’ is related to the ‘person’, and not to the ‘system’. Any inadequacy or resistance is considered as a ‘deviation’ and submitted to correction. From here, I can locate one of the central elements to problematize academic practice, in relation of the dangers of managerialism and performativity.

3.4 Academic Training as Correction

The University administers a course program to implement the academic model (PIME) and SABERES programs for academic update. It is mandatory for teachers to study 200 hours of this course to be certified by PIME. The PIME certification tries to have tangible evidence that the academic model is being implemented in the classroom, and is in this way

⁷ SNI, National Researchers System

⁸ This message was found while consulting the online Unique Registry for Research Production of UACJ, which is a network application for research registration.

that UACJ has trained the academic staff. On the other hand, the SABERES courses have a broader range of topics and try to update professors in different areas. Any of the two programs preparing the academics issue a document for the number of hours taken, so those participating in the Incentive Program for Academic Performance, can later turn for economic remuneration. Therefore, an increase on the demand for these courses is expected in the Institution.

According to Silva (2009b), the teaching evaluation affects academic freedom, since the measurement of conducts, abilities and desirable teaching attitudes for the institution prevail and teaching as a complex activity is discarded, in practice. Its elements are insufficient to understand practice. All academic activity is reduced to scores.

3.5 Salaries and Incentives System as Regulation

Salary is formed by wage itself and by a complex world of fixed or variable, national or autonomous complements. Academic's salaries are considered low and compensated by limited money deposits for which they have to compete through an incentive program for academic performance, previously mentioned; and by getting extra money for equipment and research development with resources from PROMEP and SNI.

According to Silva (2007) during the teacher's salary crisis of 1984, it was encouraged the creation of the SNI to compensate and reevaluate the academic work. It is the first salary differentiation experience. Incentives to academic performance are additional incomes to the teacher's salary, provided by the Federal Government, the Department of Public Education and the Department of Treasury and Public Account as a way to compensate the low salaries of teachers. In practice, teachers make fun of the academic performance incentives by calling them "tortibonos"⁹. The origin of the incentives comes from a State Policy to make up for the loss of the teacher's income and to condition and control the University and the academic staff. A strategy resulted from the economic crisis and the budget reduction for higher education. This is the only option considered by teachers to improve their insufficient salary; however these additional resources earned by teachers through incentives for academic performance are not considered for retirement:

⁹ Corn tortilla is the most important nutrient in the diet of Mexicans. "Tortibonos" refers to the Tortilla program that provides a subsidy to the corn tortilla for human consumption. This Government support meant daily access to a kilo of tortillas free with the use of a card.

“The difference in salary based on an academic productivity criteria is a Taylorist proposal, since the point scale determines the areas for productivity and the sum of points is translated into the incentive’s currency value”. (Silva, 2007, p. 15).

The research outcomes show that for UACJ Administration, the survey is a teaching quality endorsement and a reference to exclude teachers from the economic incentive program (Silva, 2009b).

3.6 Evaluation System as Examination

Institution’s professors are evaluated through an Incentive Program for Teaching Performance (Programa de Estímulos al Desempeño Docente, PEDD, in Spanish), which strongly influences the student’s opinion, and measures the external vision of the teaching performance in the classroom.

For UACJ Management, PEDD is a tool that raised the institutional quality, the production of teaching material and the participation in the educational planning process. According to Silva, the evaluation represents a recent demand in Mexico to control the IES development and orientate work. It is originated outside the universities, quantitative prevails over qualitative. It lacks the participation of the teachers in the evaluation design (what, how, who) and the evaluation criteria are made in a vertical and centralized way. The evaluation is exclusive, since its objective is to select a group of teachers to distribute the monetary resources based on a series of requirements and on a regulation governing those that have not managed to meet them (Silva, 2003).

The teaching evaluation systems are controversial because, Silva later asserts it is considered crucial by UACJ Administration since it picks up the assessment from the service user to improve the faculty’s work in the classroom. Faculty sees the teaching evaluation system as a way to control his work and as the student’s revenge because of a low performance. Students feel forced to evaluate their professor in an insignificant act, because by doing so, the teacher’s pedagogical practice does not change. The faculty evaluation focuses on the control and not on the pedagogical improvement, considering that its profile is linked to administrative models, it privileges the quantitative, as part of a quality standard and uses efficiency criteria (Silva, 2009b).

A nationwide concern exists on the incentive system for teaching performance, professor’s dissatisfaction and low rise of productivity and academic quality. According to Silva (2007) there is a “nonconformity of professors to the areas they are evaluated and this generates processes of

simulation in the academic practice” (Silva, 2007, p. 11-13) because the objective is focused on getting the higher number of points, and academic collaboration can only be obtained if you get points. Arcudia (2009) mentions that the evaluation system affects the scientific activity by privileging productivity over human and social importance of knowledge:

“University formed by academics that work as “subdued characters” to certain educative policies, on pragmatic objectives that distracts them from their mission as professors and researchers, and predispose them toward utilitarianism interests” (Arcudia, 2009, p. 9)

According to Silva (2009b), teaching evaluation affects academic freedom, since the measurement of conducts, abilities and desirable teaching attitudes for the institution prevail and teaching as a complex activity is discarded, in practice. Its elements are insufficient to understand practice. All academic activity is reduced to scores.

4. Moral Practices

Taking from Foucault’s argument: ...in every society the production of the discourse is at the same time controlled, selected, organized and redistributed through certain numbers of steps that serve to avert its powers and dangers, dominate its random occurrence, avoid its heavy and terrible materiality (Foucault, 2005, p.8); Institutions –such as the UACJ- tend to ritualize discourse, so that the power that it generates belongs to the institution, also, this has a particular interest in determining the whole process of creation, circulation and recurrence, taking from here the importance of the statements, and the conditions that bring them about and allow them to exist within the discursive field. Disciplines, but academic practices as well, have been affected with this current university model, the same one that every time it is influenced by economic rationality and the politics of the new capitalism, specifically in relation to the theme of privatizing knowledge, where the absence of critical discussion is notorious with respect to the idea of a university functioning as a business. This type of merchandized system places academic practice in doubt in its function of educating youth as persons, or citizens or if is simply there to produce professionals useful to the economic system of the region. In this way, education as a social good passes to being seen as a commodity, one of the multiple ways in which the autonomy of public universities in Mexico has been eroding.

On a different note, academic practice centred on the new educational model, with constructivist leanings and by discovery, has been

focused in recent years on competencies reinforcing the policies of “success”, where the process of learning to learn is aimed at developing in students, within their professional formation, management and leadership; abilities that will be necessary to make decisions and solve problems when they join the work force as professionals.

As I have previously mentioned (figure 1), student performance was centred on learning, she then comes to be viewed as “client” within a process that produces professionals, and the UACJ assumes the role of “supplier” in an educational global market. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the discourse emphasizes academic practice as a central part of the new educational model, the academic has little influence in the process of formation and transformation; On one hand, it limits itself by creating learning environments where the “user-client” becomes responsible for creating their own meaningful learning, but on the other hand, the majority of the professorship maintains authoritarian practices in education, this way, the function of teaching is concentrated in encyclopaedic, repetitive, and memorized content.

From the previous point of view, since the teaching process should influence the development of intellectual abilities in students, when anti-authoritarianism is taught in an authoritarian manner, that is, despite the different names that have been assigned to the “educational models”, today this continues being limited to a traditional outline, where the professor is the central figure, the student is a receptive being, the method is a type of conference, and the information is content with different themes or topics; this position emphasizes direct teaching and rigidly predetermined by an inflexible curriculum.

In academic practice within the classroom, different elements interact in the process of teaching-learning, like the material resources that the educator uses; the themes and content, as well as the theories, factors and strategies of educational practice; the educator-student interactions; the student answers to the professor’s proposals and the appeal to favour individual or group work.

The descriptive card, a guiding document that permits the student to understand the course dynamics, its objective, its method and didactic strategies, evaluation and accreditation criteria, thematic content by date and the suggested or mandatory bibliography, constitutes the central part. The courses are full-time and mandatory. All content is predetermined, as are the hours; the student has no voice to suggest topics in the same way she has no say in selecting a professor.

The previous assignments are fundamental to continue or to present the subject matter in class. There are those where the topics were distributed to students for them to prepare a presentation for the group. In this scenario, the academic poses questions more out of habit than with clear intention, facilitating the monitoring of detecting who actually completed their assignment. The most recurring teaching strategy is the individual evaluation through examination of the lecture analyses (homework), which is held above all other activity; it is used as an instrument of control and not of feedback.

In other courses, the professor makes the presentation. In this type of subject, questions are posed to try and detect the student's cultural knowledge, nonetheless, there is little room for debate, sometimes due to the lack of preparation on behalf of the student, sometimes due to the student's point of view or individual interest; also, in many of these cases, the subject matter presented cannot be included in the student's research or thesis.

On a different note, the interior dynamics of a workshop-course, distinguished by a traditional, positivist, rationalist, deterministic, simplistic, quantitative vision; where science can only be characterized as a rational, exact and verifiable understanding, registers a higher level of stress in the majority of students, first, because they lack the basic knowledge to follow along with the course content, many of which are considered as "given"; second, the teaching process lacks an art of teaching that allows the student to grasp understanding, that is to say, there is no significant learning, since this is based on three principles: the building of knowledge, where the material that the professor presents to the student is organized, long term memory so that the student can connect new understandings with previous knowledge, if not, she will forget, and third, a favourable attitude, since learning is impossible by those who do not want it (Marin, 1986). Freire (2006) considers that since the act of studying became a subject of experimentation it entails a discipline, but in no way should it be martyred.

Evidently, the classroom is something more than the place where ideas, understanding, or behavioural guidelines are transferred; the classroom is perceived, described and lived as a regulated hierarchical space where power structures are evidenced that determine the dynamics of the social relationships of all involved (Foucault, 1979). The processes of socialization that develop within it occur as a consequence of social practices, and within that social group they develop forms of intersubjectivity and ways in which the subjects interact and express themselves within a culture.

Amidst this fragment of reality of academic practice where there is no visible access to questioning, to the ideas and frame of mind of the educator; where the commitment with respect to free and open dialogue is at best hazy and a clear concern for promoting students' independent thinking is imperceptible, how does a student learn to answer questions amidst the new complexity of her environment, especially in this extremely violent and stigmatized city where the UACJ is located? And not just that, how can she anticipate it all?

From the point of view of De Sousa (2005), the university mission requires a high level of autonomy, freedom, and flexibility to decide what careers and programs it should offer, but in the same way, to decide which ones should be allowed to be studied freely. It is autonomy that defies the processes of standardization.

Nonetheless, UACJ has suffered a crisis of dominance, of losing the exclusivity of knowledge, since currently it is not the only place where knowledge is generated and formed; some private organizations, as well as the maquiladoras develop their own knowledge through their research and development departments⁵⁷, also, specialized teaching no longer needs to be legitimized by institutions of higher education, creating a crisis of legitimization.

Ok, now, despite the trite phrases such as those in which workers (educators, researchers, higher education institutional employees) represent the highest value and the most significant asset, the educational policies have been guided to impose a unification of university practices and intentions, for example through institutional audits, work evaluation diagrams, professional teaching standards and financing tied to evaluations. These indicators, operated and controlled by the State, primarily through the SEP-CONACYT¹⁰, transform into the strategic plan for the UACJ to permanently elevate the level of academic training based on an adequate profile for higher education.

This way, the University aligns itself unlimitedly to State policies, subjected to accomplishing objectives and evaluated based on the imposed indicators where the tension between management and government has been determined by the reconfiguration of the power relations and university policy; this type of decisions are elements that politicize academic practice and play a determining role on a day to day basis.

¹⁰ CONACYT, National Council for Research and Technology in Mexico

For universities, this dependence on direct financing from the State is an important factor in the way they conduct their activities, nonetheless, that sector based on knowledge, the academy, has been urged to collectively respond to national and regional needs where the finance structure has forced the UACJ into a fierce competition (with other institutions of Higher Education) for funding and for students.

In this way, institutions of higher education are obliged to compete amongst each other to achieve higher rankings, synonyms of reputation and prestige, like a proliferation of table creation where they are ranked according to production and publication of scientific material, among other things.

And so, the response of the institution to political demands has been guided to increase economic donations, the value of money and improve management's performance; from this point of view and in political terms, the UACJ is considered more and more each day as a work place with "employees administered by management".

That way, the system of accrediting agencies – like PROMEP or SNI- has been fostered by the UACJ as the principal avenue to obtain recognition and respect within intellectual academic life. Also, the accreditation of educational programs by external agencies continues being considered as a symbol of prestige and excellence in academic practice and quality education.

4.2 Research as maquila

Being one of the substantive duties of the institution, Research was transformed in accordance with the recommendations of the Teaching Improvement Program (PROMEP, for its Spanish acronym), which establishes research activities in college environments through Academic Bodies.

Research at the University is regulated by the Academic Bodies following the guidelines that generate knowledge. However, it is also influenced by PROMEP, SNI and PEDD. In the first case, its requirements establish that the University shall have full time faculty capable of publishing articles in specialized magazines, redesign the curriculum and study programs. A substantial advance in research activities are stated by the University, explaining the fact as a consequence to the formation of Academic Bodies (CA, for its Spanish acronym) since the number of publications has increased. It must be mentioned that research has been affected by acts of simulation derived from the surveillance and control

resulted from the evaluation of teaching performance, which also considers the research performance in quantitative more than in qualitative terms, as will be seen later.

According to Silva (2007), PEDD leads to simulation –or what Stephen Ball calls ‘fabrications’, discourages long reach projects, generates high levels of stress and anxiety and breaks up academic communities. It is considered a bureaucratic instrument since it orders teachers to work, organizes their activities and works in a project that it is not their own. In that sense, low scope research is being constructed and it is being partially published with the intention of looking more productive.

Also Silva adds that PROMEP has promoted a culture of electronic information and documentation of teaching activities through the academic bodies, in contrast with SNI that promotes individualism. One of his interviewed mentions that he prefers to bet on SNI because it is better paid than trying to look for a PROMEP profile. Castro’s research outcomes show that research practice is the main and preponderant activity that supports teaching, but it is promoted by bureaucratic procedures of a mandatory and collective nature, through the CA, to financially promote the publishing of outcomes. In contrast, the objective of the administrators was focused in the high number of publications. Professors think that the best way to stimulate research is creating a culture and have identified situations of fraud, plagiarism and simulation (Silva, 2009b).

Regarding the Porter study, Arcudia (2009) recognizes that teachers enter into an unfair competition where simulation prevails. UACJ promotes the improvement of academic performance and the grant of resources for the collective productivity, searching to raise the educational quality through planning in collegiate bodies, which have been constructed as the main academic practices that determine the grant of supports for the achievement of a minimum or preferential level of graduate formation.

Conclusions

From a general scope, and according to the evidences found in literature, we can say that the shape of UACJ’s institutional context seems to be strongly related to the national and international trends and policies. It is also evident, the style of the reaction produced by the relation between those pressures and the reaction of the institutional management: an epic of survival. Academic practice, in consequence seems to be more oriented to a transformation to a ‘liquefied state’, forced to take the form of the recipient that contains it –performativity, quality, and so on, rather to encounter

spaces for reflection and autonomy. As a result, the space for subjectivity remains out of place along with all the cultural and educational structures.

The academic subject now can be more related to a notion of employment, rather than a subject with a voice in an academic community. They become “*controlled professionals*”, where it seems to be that conflict and frustration comes as inevitable ingredients in the relations between the subjects and between the subjects and the institutional management.

The dangers we have seen are not only related to the subject, but also even to the destiny of the university as a whole system. There are many elements to sustain that the intrinsic value of academic practice is losing ground to the ever-changing set of ‘values’ dictated by the basified system of customer satisfaction. Instead of reflecting on the historical arrange of experience and unique forms of dialogue of its members, the institution is more focused on the satisfaction of quantitative goals and objectives dictated by external judgement bodies, forgetting the complexity and richness of academic practice.

We have also discussed the way that institutional and academic autonomy is being cornered by the competence for financial funding. It is a race for survival, the far the institution reaches the more it loses its autonomy. The ‘game’ is perfectly designed: there is no option of holding the ground, because sooner or later the institution will lose its autonomy for the need of funding. The same set of conditions seems to apply for academic practice.

We think that without these traditional academic practices any desire of certification or evaluation has the risk of simulation and institutional imposture. In their place, we can see how managerial conduction styles of the university activities along with political practices with no academic sense and an increasing bureaucracy of teaching, research and diffusion.

We agree when Acosta (2009) suggests that if we go back to the basics, recognizing the importance of elemental forms of university life, its rituals and practices, may be one of the way in which the government of these organizations may contribute to solve the new and old dilemmas of Mexican Higher Education. From our perspective, in Mexico we have a clear example of the dangers of “performativity”, denounced by Stephen Ball (2002). With the formulation of evaluation practices and certification by external agencies, universities –and academics with them, have focused all their efforts to meet the requirements, hoping for higher funding and better recognition, but giving academic practice a meaning of professional ranking tournament.

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