

261(061.3)
28196

CICOP WORKING PAPER C-07-68

THE UNIVERSITY AND CULTURAL
CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA
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Published by:
LATIN AMERICA BUREAU, USCC
National Program Office
P. O. Box 946
Davenport, Iowa 52805

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In this exposition we shall try to present some important points pertinent to the discussion of the role of the university in the advent of a new culture in Latin America. Although many of these ideas have already been presented on other occasions, now, we shall try to summarize them systematically.

We shall assume that the University does have an effective impact on cultural change, and not only in Latin America. Imagine what would happen if your country's university system was changed for that of the Soviet Unions', for example, for ten years. At the end of this time, new patterns of living, and basically, a new system of values would have begun to appear in society, especially in its economic aspects. The indubitable impact which the university can have on established cultural patterns would obviously be even greater upon a society looking for change. This is the case in Latin America. Social change presupposes a referential orientation. The scheme of ideas and guiding values must be grasped, interpreted, elaborated and adapted, obviously or discretely, by some social agent. This could be of various complexities and inclinations, represent a part of the same system which receives its action, or belong to some foreign body. A minority of critics in Latin America have suggested that the university fill this role of referential orientation (functioning both for itself and for global society), thus supplying an answer to a social need. The importance of the orienting role of the university increases with the needs emerging from other social units entrusted with assuming explicitly this role.

Before presenting some points of discussion related to the function which falls on the university in cultural change, it is convenient to analyse some reactions of the groups with non-traditional mentalities in Latin America. First, one notices that this transformation is endorsed, even though not always consciously, by the groups which, with a pragmatic mentality, try to diminish the distance between our countries and the more developed ones which serve as a point of reference. The pragmatic mentality is not interested in establishing final goals but in adopting the means provided by the experience of those countries considered more advanced, with the purpose of obtaining the habitual goals of these social systems. It aims fulfilling these goals, not replacing them. To develop seriously is in synthesis, gradually becoming part of the multifaceted nucleus of the nations considered as models through the adoption or importation of their cultural characteristics.

A second, quite different view, reflects a revolutionary longing to build a new society, more just, more free, integrated around crystallized values and emotionally significant ideas unmistakably that are Latin American. This is the feeling of minority groups of a more critical mentality. These are trying to produce more than mere modifications of the traditional system - its substitution. This position is manifested in Christian form through the ideology of communitarianism. This communitarian spirit, advocated by Latin American Christian democratic movements, is striving to give conscious and critical social expression to evangelical fraternity.

These two mentalities, favourable to change, the "developer" and the "revolutionary" have an intimate connection with the priority conceded to technology over science, or viceversa. We feel, and this is a basic thesis, that the cultural transformation is favored by agents who promote it explicitly with the greatest consciousness, knowledge and control of

mechanisms that can produce it. More over, we think that without the aid of science or reflection reinforced by reality, it is not possible to produce efficiently the cultural transformation which Latin America longs for.

There exists, at the same time, an undeniable reciprocal relationship between science and technology, the latter providing tools for the former. Nevertheless, science, in our view, through its endless searching in the visible world of matter, life, and society, possesses the key to technological progress and therefore to the dynamic social action which this produces. Science as a vehicle running simultaneously on the rails of logic and of empirical proof, tries to approach disinterestedly - but conscious of its limitations - the station of truth, to share universally and communally its discoveries. In contrast, we see technology using the impulse and the results of science to pursue utilitarian objectives, destined to be utilized by the patronizers of these applications.

For a policy of gradual identification between underdeveloped countries and countries of reference, which subtly maintain the direction of the changes which they provoke in the former, it is enough to put emphasis on technology and on the preparation of corresponding professionals. Nonetheless, in these countries, virtually new provinces in the foreign system in which they take refuge, it is of no use to wait for great technological progress, because without the help of science the possibilities of competing head on with highly industrialized nations are remote. These export their technologies and one has to pay generously for the right to use their patented processes. They also absorb the people trained in these techniques who, being devoid of ideological commitment with their countries, abandoned them for better payed places.

Establishing an integrated Latin America with its own cultural characteristics, without merely the expressions of underdevelopment, presupposes the abandonment of indiscriminate acceptance of foreign

suggestions. It supposes at the same time a new attitude of stimulating of the original and authentic creative imagination, and naturally scientific creation.

It is necessary to banish once and for all the premise that science is a luxury which a developing country cannot permit itself. Those who believe that science signifies a cyclotron, atomic disintegration, astrophysics, all elements of a "big science", forget that on the other hand there is a scientific duty touching especially on biology, biophysics, social and cultural phenomena, whose cost is significantly inferior to that conditioned to the search for world supremacy; this, in exchange, helps to consolidate peace. There is, also, at the margin of costly expenditures a fruitful task of mathematical research for the progress of the scientific spirit, which makes use of imaginative personalities more than of exotic laboratories.

The university is the institutional home of science; nonetheless, in the professionalized Latin American university, science does not occupy a preferential place of honor. The immediate pragmatism of university and state authorities, supported by international aid, leads them to place the accent exclusively on the professional dimension of the institutions of higher education. We shall not pretend to disregard the importance of technology and technologists, but we lament the marginal position occupied by the activities and formation of scientists in our continental area. Then, even though with a planning effort one tries to bring up to date an obsolete university system, it will not accomplish the production of a free academic community capable of invigorating the social body or promising Latin American society a value reference to orient its integration; it will be a museum piece rejuvenated but not fundamentally changed. On the other hand the effort to establish Academies or Institutes of Science outside the universities - an uncritical copy of european tendencies - also

does not assure a vital atmosphere for the progress of science. The need for a new university is therefore evident.

We, in the light of the facts, assert that in Latin America, the traditional university is about to be overtaken, by its reform on the one hand, and by a true revolution on the other. In one case, the University adapts to the demands which are imposed from outside in order, for example, to supply society with human resources which are needed for its progress. On the other hand, the university seeks to play a principal role in the process of social transformation, without putting aside the preparation of professionals. In any case, the reformed university or the new university which can rise from a revolutionary process, has the possibility of fulfilling its role, even though in a different way, in the cultural transformation in Latin America.

Naturally, the Latin American university is passing through a process of transformation in which we can distinguish three phases. In the first, the professionalization of the university, adapted to a quasi-feudal society, prepares only for the traditional professions, such as law, medicine and civil engineering. The university does not fulfill the function of research and only a few scholars are engaged in literary or historical studies. In the second phase, corresponding to a society submitted to accelerated changes the university is looking for adaptation, rationalizing the focus contained in its program of studies, introducing new disciplines in the fields of economics and engineering, and beginning research in the technological area. In the third phase, scientific research enters, even though incipiently. The individualist mentality of the graduates of the first two phases is yielding up its place to those with a greater consciousness of their social responsibilities. But the last phase is opening the way to another possibility. The new type of university which shows a significant improvement over the professionalized university,

outside of adapting to the demands for human resources, is attempting to play the central role in the orientation of the changes which are occurring in Latin America.

Also it has gone on generating Latin American inter-university relationships, especially within the scope of each country. With this, the different universities found at any given moment in different phases, have reduced distances, preparing with them the advent of a new university. It is just to indicate the impact which the foundations of international aid have had in the process of inducing the institutions of higher education to cooperate around the concrete goals linked to the distribution and use of resources which it itself has contributed directly or indirectly. With the intensification of international cooperation after the triumph of Fidel Castro, the process of change in the universities which until then was brought about mainly by internal forces (in one context by vaguely formulated external demands) is accelerated and deflected by a powerful, external impact. This aid has resulted, therefore, in the acceleration of the process of advance in each university until the ultimate phase of its development within the line of professionalization; nonetheless, for the substitution of this, or for the jump towards a new type of university, this cooperation has begun to show negative aspects. And through its policy, it has become, consciously or unconsciously, an obstacle for the appearance of a new university or for the consummation of the university revolution.

We see, then, the two university ideologies, or models which are competing in Latin America: one of them pragmatic, relying on the support of international institutions; the other, that of the New University, motivated by the criticisms of the university Inteligencia. The confrontation of these ideologies acquires conflicting characteristics which we estimate will be intensified with time.

Since most aid to Latin American universities comes from U.S. philanthropic foundations, we will restrict ourselves to pointing out briefly certain relevant traits of the U.S. higher education model, as ideally perceived by the administrators and a great number of the advisors of the philanthropic agencies.

In this model we discern three distinct functional levels: those of the "administrators", of the professors, and of the students. The administrators' function is to direct and administer, to name the professors, and establish requirements for student admission. The professors, as hired employees of the university, teach and conduct research. Finally, the students' exclusive mission is to study. The university takes on the form of an economic enterprise, seeking increased output in obtaining its visible goals, in fulfilling its functions and in the performance of its employees and students. Thus the prevailing action patterns among university units incorporated in international aid programs are those derived from an economic or administrative ethos. Stress is placed on administrative efficiency, in the use of financial and human resources, along with the demand of the professional market, strict adherence to administrative rules and orders, the impersonal and specific nature of relationships, and the limitation of responsibilities to particular areas.

Nowhere is there in those programs any statement of intent to create a new type of university, or for the university, if a modified Professionalized one, to assume an orienting integrating function for society. Discussion of such a possibility is considered to be wholly in the realm of ideology and, moreover, opposed to the ideal of neutrality or "objectivity" (any critical focus of the program appears to be similarly qualified). Nevertheless, spurred on by the search for efficiency in the development of university activities, the action program takes a different route, that of rationalizing the use of the resources, to effect the gradual installation

of the U.S. system in the pertinent institutional units. The focal points of this effort are the instrumental-adaptive function of the university within society and the instrumental roles which the administration, the professional staff and student body must play in achieving these objectives. Drawing from their own experience in developed countries, the aid programmers seek to impose the same patterns in the non-developed country insofar as the number and distribution of different types of professionals are concerned, particularly in technological areas. The recipients of international assistance are usually those considered strategic for this purpose (Faculties or Schools of Economics, Business Administration, Engineering, Veterinary Medicine, Agriculture, Technology, etc.).

Moreover it is frequently proposed that the university administration incorporate those units which teach the basic sciences indispensable for those specific professions. In addition, attempts are often made to induce the administration itself to rationalize its administrative mechanisms.

Thus, the university becomes an important vehicle for introduction of U.S. cultural patterns. It is not, however, the only agent in this process. The State, the Communications System, the institutions of the Economy, the Army and the Church itself are other ways. Through all these channels, the socio-cultural content of one system flows drop by drop into the other. Industrialization, urbanization, secularization or religious pluralism, ideological neutrality, free enterprise economy, birth control or family planning, etc., are the traits or guiding patterns which not only begin to evolve in the system of the non-developed country, but also tend to assume the same mode of socio-cultural articulation as the one present in the developed country. Thus, in effect, development emerges as a process of gradual identification of such socio-cultural systems with the characteristics of the referential models, by means of concrete, pragmatic experimentation (which does not preclude the use of rational techniques).

The ideology of the New University, the other option, declares openly the need of the university, with the help of science to assume an orienting role. It shows that the new type of university appears to emerge fundamentally as the result of an internal dynamism communicated to the "Professionalist" University through the introduction of scientific research. It points out, with respect to the frame of values and concepts which orient the action, or scope of the university cultural subsystem, that the possibilities of its appearance flow parallel with the consolidation within it of a cultural ethos adequate for the development of the scientific endeavor. Where the obstacles confronting the carriers of the new values for achieving the radical transformation of the present university (beyond simple modifications of some functions and structures) are inseparable from the existence of an atmosphere of values in opposition to the characteristic notes of the scientific ethos.

The framework of values and concepts of the New University embraces all those goals and values implicit in the problematic and historical tradition of Latin America which are compatible with the scientific tasks. The outstanding goal within this constellation has to do with a function of orientation and integration assigned to the university with respect to the social changes. The university emerges as a possible referential system for society as a whole and has the potential for affording society, through mechanisms of coordination, a set of values for integration. It is this role of referential microcosm, of projector of values and goals, that takes outline in the emerging "idea" of the University as a contribution to the Latin American socio-cultural integration. In the new image, the university is the polarizing point of convergence of the processes leading to integration. (In this context, development is nothing more nor less than the process of gradual substitution of the recently existing socio-cultural structures through the action of distinct social agents oriented according to the

patterns implied in the annotated constellation of values and goals. This substitution process continues until the contours of the new totality are reached).

Deep motivations for the accomplishment of its role of cultural transformation are found in the New Universitys' ideology. Thus the University, for achieving its purposes, has to order its own activities along with those of the people and other social entities which are carriers of the latinoamerican cultural patrimony. This cultural coordination is turned to the inside and the outside of the University. Towards the inside it touches its constitution as a macrocosmos, as a universe, in harmony with a personal universe, with the human microcosmos. When cultural coordination is spoken of it refers to a new ways, connected with some existing ones, of allowing the people in a fruitful institucional soil to elevate their human condition. It assumes therefore an envolving creative activity of recollection, interpretation, elaboration, selection and combination of cultural elements in a new sunthesis. Raw material for this elaboration is popular culture. Confronted by this reality, the university has the obligation to grasp and to diagnose, it and also to derive from it doctrinal orientations and models of solution for latinamerican problems. With this purpose the university coordinates the interdisciplinary work of all its institutional units around strategic topics. With this purpose the university coordinates the interdisciplinary work of all its institutional units around strategic topics. With the elaboration of an authentical culture through the use of scientific research and the thinking effort belonging to an humanism penetrated by transcendentalism, the university conquers its maximum authonomy, because in this field its social power is indisputable.

Events have come to show that the catholic universities, paradoxically, are an effective soil of nourishment for the uprising of the critical mentality

and that in them, in an institutionalized manner, the Gospel may find its way into life. The same spirit was revealed in Buga. There it was said that that the catholic universities should play a critical role against colonialisms, defending the principles of a new latinamerican society and creating favorable conditions for the integral development of knowledge. To be yeast in the dough, fermenting the cultural revolution. That is its duty in this historical moment.

Thus not only in the catholic universities an Inteligentsia or creative minority as appeared, constituted by some professors and important student groups, all of the, professors and students, engaged in the great Latin American issues. That Inteligentsia, with critical conscience, plays a critical and creative role. Depending on the university's phase of development, it manifests itself to a lesser or greater degree in vibration with the external problems of the university and plays its function of denouncing social injustices. Its strong politicization obeys the desire to produce tangible modifications in the surrounding society. Its action is intensified when it is disregarded. After creating consciousness in larger circles, it confines itself within the university in order to satisfy other needs disregarded by conventional society. In this manner, finally, it projects itself with a revolutionary action upon the interior of the academical house.

Revolution or Reform, as we have asid in Buga, here is the knot of the problem of the role of the university in the cultural transformation of Latin America. The university may assume a developmental role or a revolutionary one. A "developmental" option has a different meaning, depending upon the persons themselves, their social relationships, and their values. A pseudo'revolutionary or developmental position would see the people on the one hand, playing the role of social mechanisms, and on the other, forming minorities which direct those mechanisms. There would then exist a rigid dualism among those who direct and those who are directed.

According to the revolutionary conception, without discharging accidental or functional differences, the person should be considered both as the end and as the agent of the social process.

In the area of social relationships, outside and inside the university, the developmental concept would fall back on promoting the guidelines of subordination or paternalism; that is of subtle subordination of the university to a foreign system, or within itself, from one group to another. On the contrary, the revolutionary concept of the university seeks to set up a system of guidelines proper to the cooperation of free entities and tries to coordinate activities according to the rational criteria of common benefit. Regarding the values, it is not easy to present a complete list of the most important, but it might be said that scientific values are not alien to the university. This would give the university a dynamic character. Nor is it alien to the proper content of the Gospel. This will give a fraternal or "communitarian" dimension to the university. Neither would be alien to it: the essential aspects of democracy, directed toward the improvement of the standard of living and to the elimination of social distances. This would give it its coordinating character. All these notions are of course imbedded in the latinamerican context.

On the contrary, the developmental university would put the accent more on technology than on science, the latter used by the former. If we would have to speak about the equivalent of the evangelical message, perhaps it could be referred to a secularized calvinism impregnating the academic endeavor. In the place of democracy we would have to speak about an accentuated tendency toward technocracy.

These are the two main positions. The first pretends to establish a new society and to integrate Latin America around authentical values, through a creative action. The other, a passive and humilating position of integration in a foreign system: the eternal herodian or imitative attitude of

large groups of latinamericans.

The cultural transformation of Latin America walks hand in hand with the university. And the university finds momentarily, in these uneasy times, its walking stick in foreign aid. Would it be possible that this may become only an instrument helping it to find its own destiny instead of trying to control its life? Only an affirmative answer harmonizes with the proper ethic for cooperation between human groups.

We have presented some points concerning to the university and cultural change in Latin America. It is our hope that this exposition may provoke a discussion between Latin Americans and people of the United States, helpful for achieving a mutual understanding of our problems.

This paper may be quoted in whole or in part in any manner that will promote the interest of the Church in Latin America. Please acknowledge the CICOP Conference of the U.S. Bishops' Committee for Latin America. Mimeographed copies may be purchased at the CICOP Headquarters, Box 946, Davenport, Iowa 52805.