

## **EQUALITY, DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND SOLIDARITY: IS THERE A ROLE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE FRAMING OF AN ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM?**

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### **1. Introduction**

I will begin this paper by citing a statement by Eugene Rosa, a sociologist specialized in the field of environmental studies, when he says:

“While it seems fully appropriate to adopt the definition of a policymaking agency to guide risk management, it is curious that it would pass academic scrutiny as an analytic definition” (Rosa, 2008: 103, footnote 3).

Academic scrutiny is characterized by what Amartya Sen (2011) called, in his conference in Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra, last 14 March, “criticality”, that is, and I quote:

“the importance of critically confronting our own values, in addition to scrutinizing the values that others propagate. This criticality is needed not merely for examining the reasoning behind what disgusts us, but also for questioning what we come to live with and accept (often implicitly, because they seem like a part of the “normal” world which we are used to). An inclination to be uncritically contented with the world as it is can be, I would argue, seriously unhelpful for a theory of justice as well as the pursuit of justice in practice.”

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In this paper, reflecting on conceptual developments in the field of education I ask the following questions:

- Why equity and not equality?
- Why social cohesion and not solidarity?
- And what is the role of higher education in fostering democratic citizenship?

Trying to answer these questions I felt the need to do a brief genealogy of these concepts and their role in the academic and policymaking documents pertaining to higher education. Because concepts are important in perceiving and changing the world, the role of academic work and education is to engage in a dialogue in the public sphere that enables people and citizens to change the way they see the societies they live in.

## **2. The Emergence of the Concepts of Equity and Social Cohesion in Higher Education Policies**

OECD promoted its first major review and conference on the issue of equity in 1961, at Kungälv in Sweden (Halsey, 1993), although the main preoccupation was with selection and entry at secondary schools. With the growth of higher education enrolment and the debate on inequality to access, the OECD Education Committee launched the *Thematic Review of Tertiary Education* in October 2003, in response to the OECD Education Chief Executives' proposal of tertiary education as one of the five mid-term priorities for OECD work on education", at their February 2003 meeting in Dublin. A meeting of National Representatives in April 2004 defined the guidelines for participation in the Review and the analytical work started in January 2005, with country thematic reviews. The thematic reviews were primarily concerned with equality of opportunity, while recognizing that relative equality of outcomes was often used as an indicator of equality of opportunity.

Tertiary education was also the focus of the meeting of OECD Education Ministers held in Athens in June 2006 with the theme *Higher Education - Quality, Equity and Efficiency*. Ministers noted that "Higher Education plays a vital role in driving economic growth and social cohesion" (Santiago et al., 2008).

In the study conducted by Simon Field et al. for the OECD in 2007, with the suggestive title, *No More Failures. Ten Steps to Equity in Education*, ten policy recommendations were drafted to promote equity in education. For the purposes of their study, equity in education included two dimensions, fairness and inclusion (Field et. al, 2007):

*Fairness* implies that personal and social circumstances such as gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin should not be an obstacle to educational success.

*Inclusion* implies a minimum standard of education for all.

As for the European Union, the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and the Lisbon Declaration in 2000 set forward European worries about the global market in higher education. In Paris, the Declaration was primarily economically motivated, although symbolic references to European culture were not missing. The economic motive and agenda was even more open at the European Union - gathering in Lisbon in March 2000. Given the perceived successes of the United States and of Australia in producing substantial 'export value' in the domain of higher education, the European Union decided that European inferiority on the global educational market could no longer be tolerated (Lorenz, 2006).

The Lisbon European Summit in March 2000 set a new strategic goal for the Union for the new decade: "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (Room et al., 2005:11).

As Chris Lorenz states: "Given the idea that the global economy is a 'knowledge economy', the European Union inevitably came to the conclusion that European higher education had to become the most dynamic and most competitive in the world too. Therefore, the European Union Ministers of Education translated this intention in 2001 into an ambitious agenda for the educational domain. Predictably the 'Lisbon Process' has as yet only resulted in serious disappointments, because in 2005 it was already crystal clear to even the greatest EU-policy optimists that its objectives would not be met—even approximately. The remedy for this 'delay' is of course sought in speeding up the 'Lisbon Process' in all EU member states and in shifting the responsibility for the 'process' to the EU member states" (2006:80).

And, concurring with the conclusions of Chris Lorenz on his analysis of the higher education policies in the European Union and the knowledge society, "all the European declarations and plans considered so far basically contain an economic view of education, by considering higher education primarily in its function for the European economy and in terms of a marketable commodity" (2006:80).

The World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in 1998 gave a new thrust to UNESCO's higher education programme at a time when a need for change and adjustment to a new paradigm in higher education was strongly felt by decision makers. Its *World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century* provided an international framework for action both at systems and institutional level. A particular focus was placed on broadening access and strengthening higher education as a key factor of development; enhancing quality, relevance and efficiency through closer links to society and the world of work; securing adequate funding resources, both public and private, and fostering international cooperation and partnerships. One spin-off of the World Conference was the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge, an open platform forum encouraging research and intellectual debate. Within these general orientations and delivery mechanisms, research on trends in higher education remains at the heart of UNESCO's preoccupations, along with the question of higher education and social cohesion (Burnett, 2007: 287-288).

More recently, the mainstreaming of the social cohesion thematic and higher education is well illustrated in the special issue of *Prospects*, UNESCO's journal of comparative education in 2007, entirely dedicated to the thematic of higher education and social cohesion.

In 2000, The World Bank in its report "*Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*" recognized that rate-of-return analysis was out, and there was the need for the

promotion of the public interest of higher education. In the absence of more and better higher education opportunities, developing countries could expect few benefits from a knowledge-based global economy. The report *Peril and Promise* argued that developing countries needed to prioritize higher education more than would be indicated by rate-of-return analyses alone (Post et al., 2004).

In the World Bank Group report published in 2002, *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New challenges for Tertiary Education. Directions in Development*, it was stated that:

“The norms, values, attitudes and ethics that tertiary institutions impart to students are the foundation of the social capital necessary for constructing healthy civil societies and cohesive cultures—the very bedrock of good governance and democratic political systems...Through the transmission of democratic values and cultural norms, tertiary education contributes to the promotion of civic behaviours, nation building and social cohesion”. (2002: 23, 31).

### **3. Equity or Equality?**

Luciano Benadusi reviewed the many conceptions of equity in the sociology of education, underlying the normative conceptions of equity and their implications for choosing indicators for analysis (2001:25). He identified five approaches:

- Functionalism: where the concept of equity is based on Rawlsian liberal equality of opportunity.
- Cultural reproduction theory: the concept of equity implies the existence of no natural social, cultural and educational inequalities among groups.
- Cultural relativism: equity means the equality and reciprocal independence among the different cultures.
- Cultural pluralism: the concept of equity implies the respect for cultural differences.
- Methodological individualism: the concept of equity is based also on Rawlsian liberal equality of opportunity or free choice (a formal equality of opportunity).
- International comparative research on equality of opportunity: equity means that no educational inequalities exist among groups.

One of the most sophisticated discussions of the dilemma between equity and equality in education can be found in the excellent article published in 2010 by Oscar Espinoza. In this article Espinoza proposes a complex equality-equity model (Espinoza, 2010: 134-139).

As Espinoza argues (2010: 129-130), the “equity” concept is associated with fairness or justice in the provision of education or other benefits and it takes individual circumstances into consideration, while “equality” usually connotes sameness in treatment by asserting the

fundamental or natural equality of all persons. While “equality” involves only a quantitative assessment, “equity” involves both a quantitative assessment and a subjective moral or ethical judgment that might bypass the letter of the law in the interest of the spirit of the law. Equity assessments are more problematic because people differ in the meaning that they attach to the concepts of fairness and justice and because knowledge of equity-related cause-and effect relationships is often limited. The conception of “equity” which is commonly associated with human capital theory is based on utilitarian considerations; it demands fair competition but tolerates and, indeed, can require unequal results.

As Jean-Pierre Dupuy argues, equity presupposes no envy, that is, a simple relation between the desiring subject and the desired object with no third party involved, where there is the assumption of the incommensurability of preferences and where everyone feels better in her place than on others’ places (2009: 201). On the other hand, the concept of “equality” associated with the democratic ideal of social justice demands equality of results.

It is ironic that the current neo-conservative sweep in education fosters the resurgence of “sameness” to form the ethos of equity programs and policies. The concept of substantive equality and systemic discrimination is being replaced here by the more limited “one-size-fits-all” focus of equal opportunity.

According to Espinosa, equality pertains to five features of the educational process:

- a) Financial, social, and cultural resources
- b) Equality of access—the probability of children from different social groupings getting into the school system, or some particular level or portion of it.
- c) Equality of survival—the probability of children from various social groups staying in the school system to some defined level, usually the end of a complete cycle (primary, secondary, higher).
- d) Equality of output—the probability that children from various social groupings will learn the same things to the same levels at a defined point in the schooling system.
- e) Equality of outcome—the probability that children from various social groupings will live relatively similar lives subsequent to and as a result of schooling (have equal incomes, jobs of roughly the same status, equal access to sites of political power, etc.).

These features can be translated in three different perspectives:

- equality of opportunity;
- equality for all;
- or, equality on average across social groups.

As for equity, it also can be analysed on the five features of the educational process (resources; access; survival; output; outcome) and structured as three different perspectives:

- Equity for equal needs
- Equity for equal potential (abilities)
- Equity for equal achievement

This sophisticated proposal for conciliating equity and equality fails to grasp the political assumptions underlying the concepts of equity and equality, that constitute different notions of citizenship, entitlements and social and political rights. Even Amartya Sen's theory of capabilities, that propose a broad notion of equality and is critical of liberalism, seems to focus most on procedural aspects rather than substantive equality of capability in the political space (Sen, 1992).

In this paper I argue and invoke that substantial and active equality is more relevant for democratic citizenship. Democratic politics concerns the presupposition of equality, not the distribution of equality. Therefore, equality must be put at the beginning of every political process.

And, following here the proposals of Jacques Rancière, while passive equality is the creation, preservation, or protection of equality by governmental institutions, active equality is based on empowerment and composed of three basic components: dissensus, the act of declassification and equality of intelligence (May, 2008: 3;39-44).

As Margaret Somers rightly states (Somers, 2008: 131), citing Hannah Arendt, the alternative to naturalism of both nationalism and liberalism requires more than merely the institutions of laws and states, and even more than the fact of citizenship itself. It requires collective political action toward the goal of human justice.

"Equality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given to us, but is the result of human organization insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal as member of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights. Our political life rests on the assumption that we can produce equality through organization, because man act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals and only with his equals" (Arendt, 1979:301).

#### **4. Social Cohesion and Social Capital or Solidarity Among Strangers?**

In studying the impact of education on society there exist two basic analytic models (OECD, 2006). For the first model, an absolute model, education reinforces the technical skills and positive attitudes in individuals. In this model we are confronted with a positive sum game, where everybody wins, and more education means an increase in expected global benefits. In the second model, education by changing the place of the individual in the social hierarchy generates

benefits for some at the expense of others. This is a zero-sum game, related to the most confirmed invoked devaluation of educational degrees.

In the studies of education and social cohesion, there is a research agenda that, based on nomological methods, tries to assert the role and relationship between education, social cohesion and equity or equality.

Two representative studies will be briefly analysed in this paper: Andy Green et al. *Education, Equality and Social Cohesion* (2006) and François Dubet et al., *Les écoles et leur société* (2010).

Andy Green et al., using aggregate statistics (correlations and regression analyses) to compare countries, identified how education impacts on different aspects of social cohesion (2006). The model proposed assumed that education may impact in two different ways: the first, indirectly, through the way it distributes skills, and hence incomes, opportunity and status among adult populations; and the second, through how it socializes students through the formation of values and identities.

Andy Green et al.'s findings in relation to the first pathway –the distributional model – appear to be quite clear-cut. While there are no apparent relationships between aggregate levels of education and social cohesion indicators across countries, there are quite strong and significant correlations between measures of educational equality, income equality and a wide range of social cohesion outcomes, including general and institutional trust, crime, civil liberties and political liberties. More education-equal countries tend to be more income equal and rate higher on a range of social cohesion measures. Furthermore, educational equality appears to have a positive relationship with social cohesion outcomes independently of income distribution.

According to their initial hypothesis, the other main route by which education could impact on social cohesion is through the socialization process which includes both values and identity formation. It is our values and identities which ultimately condition how we regard and interact with other individuals and groups, determining with whom we associate, how we cooperate and whom we decide to trust. Identity is, in a sense, the most crucial since our received and adopted identities determine the affective and ideological boundaries of our worlds and thus the locus and ambit of our trust and co-operation. Tolerance appears as a multifaceted and highly situational variable at the country level and subject to rapid changes over time. The authors found little evidence that educational inequality impacts on levels of tolerance, although plausible theoretical arguments suggest that it might, but there is evidence for a number of countries, particularly from the studies of education and racism, that levels of education can affect attitudes and behaviours to do with tolerance. However, the effects, as observed in the individual-level data, are highly context-bound, varying in strength and mechanisms from country to country and between social groups. Relations between aggregate levels of education and tolerance across countries are far from clear, probably because tolerance is strongly affected by other country contexts, including levels and types of immigration, and the dominant political discourses surrounding these.

In an attempt to create a typology of social cohesion regimes, Andy Green et al. (2009) defined four contemporary regimes of social cohesion:

a) Liberal Regime of Social Cohesion: the core values underpinning social cohesion in liberal regimes include opportunity and rewards based on merit; individual freedom and choice;

active and “tolerant” civil society (some of the countries included are the USA, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand).

b) Social Market Regime of Social Cohesion: in this regime, social cohesion is underpinned by strong institutional mechanisms concerted by the state. There is a stakeholder model of the firm (with industrial democracy), highly regulated labour markets with solidaristic wage bargaining based on industrial unionism, social partnership between encompassing intermediate organisations, and sectoral agreements on pay and conditions. Also, there are lower wage differentials with generous welfare provision for unemployed and a corporatist welfare system, based on employment contributions, less universalistic and more divisive than social democratic model. Some of the countries characterized by this social cohesion regime include Germany, France, Belgium, Austria, Netherlands, Italy and Spain.

c) Social Democratic Regime of Social Cohesion: as in social market regime, social cohesion is underpinned by the state and powerful intermediate organisations. There is a centralised wage bargaining that leads to low pay differentials and promotes labour market solidarity; active labour market policies that support losers from industrial re-structuring and universalist and generous welfare state promoting solidarity. Furthermore, egalitarian education systems promote beliefs in equality and adult education promote ideal of community. Some of the countries included are Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway.

Finally, they propose a fourth regime.

d) Confucian Regime of Social Cohesion: included are Japan and South Korea. This regime is characterised by low crime rates and low inequality levels, high hierarchy, low Welfare protection and weak civil societies.

Andy Green et al. also reflect on the possibility of defining other social cohesion regimes as, for example, Southern Europe or Post-Communist regimes.

François Dubet et al. define social cohesion as “the values, the culture and the ensemble of attitudes that move individuals to cooperate in a solidaritarian way” (Dubet, Duru-Bellat and Véréout, 2010: 50). These authors operationalized social cohesion in three macrovariables: Social Capital (density of social life and civil society); Confidence (group of attitudes and beliefs about confidence in others and institutions: army; police; justice; Parliament; trade unions; public administration); Tolerance (2010:51-53).

Dubet, Duru-Bellat and Véréout distinguish social cohesion from social integration. Social integration is the systemic configuration of a society, its social structure, measured by inequality and the dynamism of the labour market. And the results obtained by the authors clearly show that social cohesion and social integration may not coincide. Crossing the statistical results for social cohesion and social integration they propose the following types of societies:



Figure 1. Typology of societies by crossing social integration and social cohesion

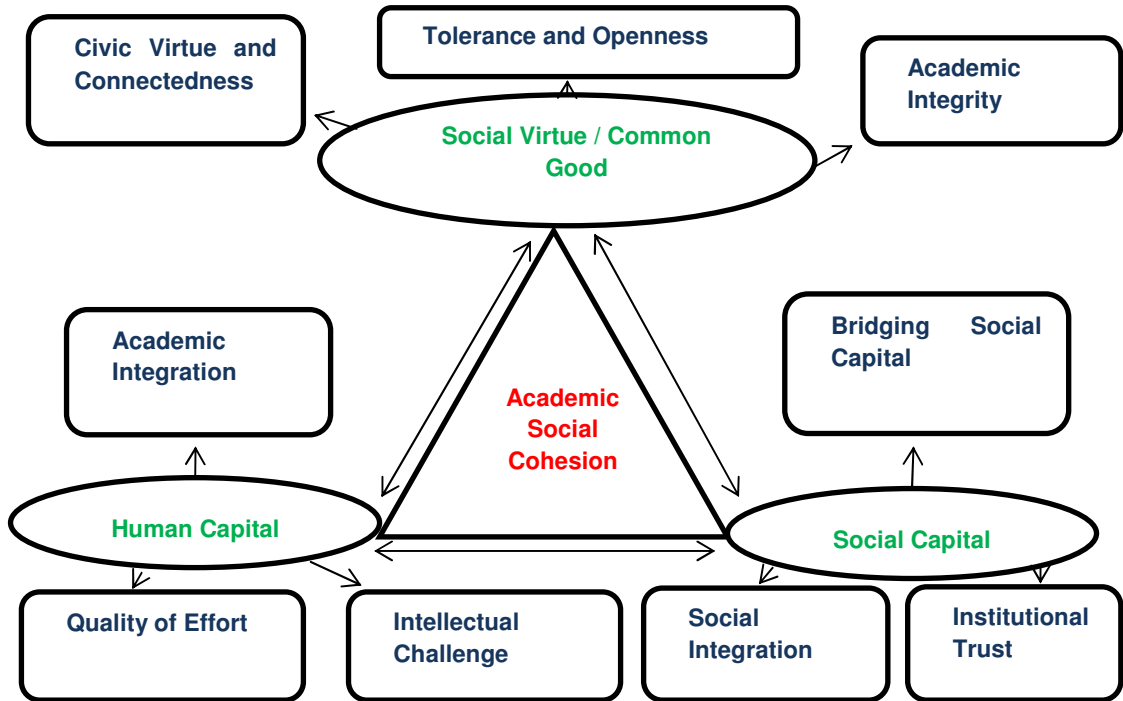
Integration / Cohesion	<b>Liberal</b> High Dynamism / Strong Inequalities	<b>Late capitalism</b> Low Dynamism / Strong Inequalities	<b>Social-democrat</b> High Dynamism / Weak Inequalities	<b>Corporatist</b> Low Dynamism / Weak Inequalities
<b>Liberal Democratic Confidence</b> Strong confidence/ Strong social capital	Australia, Canada, United States			
<b>Social-Democrat Democratic Confidence</b> Strong confidence/ Strong social capital			Sweden, Denmark, Norway	Netherlands, Finland, Switzerland
<b>European</b> Strong confidence/ Strong social capital	United Kingdom, Ireland	Spain		Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Luxembourg
<b>Newcomers</b> Strong confidence/ Strong social capital	Japan, South Corea	Italy, Greece, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia		Czech Republic

Source: Dubet, Duru-Bellat and V  r  tout (2010:64).

Dubet, Duru-Bellat and V  r  tout (2010:175), analysing the factors that impact on social cohesion, concluded that 67% of the variance in social cohesion was explained by the dynamics of the labour market, Gross Domestic Product level and income inequalities. Only 47% of social cohesion was explained by the characteristics of educational systems.

Alongside the discussion of social cohesion, some authors argue for the analysis of social cohesion within higher education or, specifically, academic social cohesion (Heuser, 2007). Heuser proposes a synthesis model that highlights the main dimensions in academic social cohesion within higher education (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Academic social cohesion within higher education



Source: Heuser (2007:295)

This model presupposes a virtuous cycle between human capital, social capital and social virtue and the common good, and the author doesn't discuss the institutional, political and interactional dimensions concurring for the result of academic social cohesion

As these methods rely heavily on individual methodologism and aggregative statistics, we can ask what is the value of these findings and typologies for the analysis of collective dynamics and if they can evaluate adequately the role of higher education in promoting social cohesion.

According to Thomas Theo (2005:25), it was Habermas (1994) who proposed, in the context of the relationship between knowledge and interest and on the background of an epistemological foundation for a theory of society, three kinds of sciences: empirical-analytic sciences, historical-hermeneutic sciences, and critically oriented sciences whereby each type of science can be characterized by a specific underlying cognitive *interest* that guides its pursuit of knowledge. Empirical-analytical sciences are motivated by the production of nomological knowledge in order to achieve technical control over processes or objects. Historical-hermeneutic sciences are motivated by the practical interest of interpretation and understanding of meanings. Critical theory has an emancipatory interest and applies self-reflection as a basic principle of investigation.

The best critique of the concept of social capital as a public good and its underlying assumptions was put forward by Margaret Somers (2005, 2008). Somers argues that the equation “social + capital” equals the evacuation of the social. Social capital refers to the economic value produced by social relationships. According to Somers, Robert Putnam, one of the most prominent scholars on the field of social capital, never comes to grips with the fact that the theory of social capital extends market principles to those non-contractual arenas of social life where utilitarian ethics will do nothing less than corrode the very social ties and practices he so celebrates. To achieve the practices and institutions of trust, communication, and reciprocity convened in the concept of social capital, requires abandoning its constitutive postulates of localism, acquisition, individualism, the market model of efficiency, the marketization of the social, and the radical autonomy from power and politics (Somers, 2008: 235).

The contributions of social capital to the political project of marketization of the social has four dimensions (Somers, 2008: 242):

- social capital provides a nonstate solution to those externalities the market is either unable or unwilling to solve. This is the function of saving capitalism from its own excesses.
- social capital shifts expectations of citizenship from rights claims to obligations and duties.
- social capital provides a nonstate alternative to the entitlement-driven welfare state and the excesses of democratic rights claims. This is the reconstitution of citizenship through the cultural sphere of moral regulation, self-help, and personal responsibility.
- finally, social capital provides a spatial substitute to civil society in the concept of “community” – the nonstate site in which relationships of social capital are confined.

Following Margaret Somers, as an alternative to the concept of social cohesion and social capital, I propose the notions of civil society and the recovery of the concept of solidarity, and using Bin Shu (2010) propositions, to operationalize the concept of solidarity among strangers (with no need for a specious concept of community, even if only imagined communities, as analysed by Benedict Anderson (1991)).

Solidarity, since Émile Durkheim, has been one of the central concepts of social theory (Hechter, 2001). Solidarity answers the fundamental question “What holds society together?” Due to its significance, scholars have discussed it in a whole range of terms (integration, cohesion, solidarity, bonds, etc.) at various analytical levels (group, organization, community, social movements, nation-state, etc.) even in different disciplines (Shu, 2010).

Methodologically, as proposed by Bin Shu, defining solidarity only by its observable representations can avoid the debate over its normative features. Beyond the approaches that focus on values; or, on moral-linguistic codes that integrate conflicts into the bases of civil society (Jeffrey Alexander); or, on ritual conducts; or on political elites and the state’s manipulation of rituals and identities, Bin Shu proposes a theoretical framework that addresses the critical issues raised by the previous approaches, that is, what can account for the solidarity among strangers in a modern society with tremendous heterogeneity and power hierarchy. This

framework must be empirical and explanatory, and Bin Shu advances a based on the interaction ritual theory and the theory of publics.

Randall Collin's theory of "interaction rituals" is an upgraded version of the ritual-conduct approach. At the core of interaction ritual is emotion. In explaining solidarity, the Interaction Ritual theory argues that variation in several critical ingredients will lead to collective effervescence, from which solidarity among the participants is born. These ingredients include 1) group assembly or bodily co-presence; 2) boundaries to outsiders or identification of who is taking a part; 3) participants' focus on a common object and communicates this focus with other participants; 4) shared mood among participants. (Collins, 2004: 48).

If extended to the Solidarity Among Strangers, solidarity at macro-level, the theory might encounter the difficulties in linking different levels of analysis. How is the solidarity on the ground transformed into a large scale one among a large loosely connected and differentiated population? How do the macro structures and processes influence the micro-level interaction rituals? Collins answers these questions by indicating the "chains" between situations and interaction rituals, i.e. that social actors move among different situations and spread the symbols and emotions. This point is no doubt true but unspecific.

To liberate the interaction ritual theory explanatory power, Shu argues that the theory of publics based on networks and encounters, can supplement it at some critical points. Inspired by Habermas' "public sphere" and social network theory, Shu argues that people from different networks encounter in publics, experiencing a process of "decoupling" themselves from the previous networks. Consequently, previous identities are suspended, and people tend to be engaged in ritualistic behaviors. Therefore, the encounter is open to new cognitive patterns, communication styles, and new identities.

From its inception, the empirical studies of publics are devoted to the informal and emergent networks and spheres in civil society. Following this trend, Shu pays close attention to how the state-society relationship shapes the boundary of the emergent public and how this macro-level political structure and its situational variation influences the interaction rituals within the public. Therefore, the theory of publics is a useful supplement for Interaction Ritual Theory. The combination of the two theories can generate a more convincing theoretical framework that specifies the mechanisms linking the micro to the macro, relations to culture. Shu lays out three major theoretical mechanisms:

*a) State-society relationship and publics (macro-to-micro)*

State-society relationship shapes the boundary of the emergent public by enabling and constraining movement of information to and participants between the existing publics and the emergent public in the wake of the disaster or other incidents. This enabling and constraining could be the result of either the state's intentional action or the power structure between the state and civil society. The result of open boundary is more converging networks and information, which lead to a space for interaction rituals to proliferate and compete with each other. The closed boundary will lead to reduction of interaction rituals.

*b) Interaction rituals and public's influence (micro-to-micro)*

In addition, there is a less obvious aspect of the emergent public influencing interaction rituals by directly influencing their ingredients; thus, it is a *micro-to-micro* mechanism. An open emergent public will lead to more converging networks on the site and therefore more *bodily co-presence*. The more and quicker participants cognitively switch from their previous network positions, the more likely an *identification* is established among them. Also, this decoupling will lead to fewer identities, and thus the participants' *focus of attention* will be less distracted from institutions and structures outside the public. All these lead to a higher level of collective effervescence and then solidarity on the local level. Negative on the two aspects, i.e. closed or restricted boundary and less decoupling and switching will lead to lower level solidarity.

*c) Emotional feedback loop and formal rituals (micro-to-macro)*

The emotional energy accumulated in the interaction rituals in the emergent publics and existing publics converge. Open boundaries enable this flow, while restricted boundaries impede it. The emotional energy flow eventually is solidified in large-scale formal rituals.

## **5. An Alternative Paradigm: Education as Freedom<sup>46</sup>**

The roots of an alternative paradigm in higher education and the contribution of higher education for creating a democratic citizenship lie in the notion of education as freedom as proposed in the book edited by Noel Anderson and Haroon Kharem (2009). And also in the book by the African American writer bell hooks: *Teaching to transgress. Education as the practice of freedom*.

And for higher education to be a practice of freedom, universities must be thought as public goods. And the notion here of public implies four questions, as rightly put by Craig Calhoun (2006): (1) where does the money come from? (2) who governs? (3) who benefits? and (4) how is knowledge produced and circulated?

No scholar better than Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010) proposed an alternative analysis to the role of the University in the XXI century. Boaventura identified three crises facing the university at the end of the twentieth century. First, the crisis of hegemony was the result of

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<sup>46</sup> Anderson and Kharem (2009).

contradictions between the traditional functions of the university and those that had come to be attributed to it throughout the twentieth century. The second crisis was a crisis of legitimacy, provoked by the fact that the university ceased to be a consensual institution in view of the contradiction between the hierarchization of specialized knowledge through restrictions of access and credentialing of competencies, on the one hand, and the social and political demands for a democratized university and equal opportunity for the children of the working class, on the other. Finally, the institutional crisis was the result of the contradiction between the demand for autonomy in the definition of the university's values and objectives and the growing pressure to hold it to the same criteria of efficiency, productivity, and social responsibility that private enterprises face.

According to him, the mercantilization of the public university resulted in the monopolization the reformist agendas and proposals by the institutional crisis. The public university's loss of priority in the State's public policies as a result of the general loss of priority of social policies (education, health, social security) induced by the model of economic development known as neoliberalism or neoliberal globalization.

The response, Boaventura proposes, must be a counter-hegemonic globalization of the university. Counter-hegemonic globalization of the university-as-public-good means that the national reforms of the public university must reflect a country project centred on policy choices that consider the country's insertion in increasingly transnational contexts of knowledge production and distribution. This country project has to be the result of a broad political and social pact consisting of different sectoral pacts, among them an educational pact in the terms of which the public university is conceived of as a collective good. The reform must be focused on responding positively to the social demands for the radical democratizing of the university, putting an end to the history of exclusion of social groups and their knowledges for which the university has been responsible for a long time, starting long before the current phase of capitalist globalization. From now on, the national and transnational scales of the reform interpenetrate. Without global articulation, a national solution is impossible.

Also, Boaventura proposes that University must reclaim legitimacy through 4 processes:

- Access

In the area of access, the greatest frustration of the past two decades was that the goal of democratic access was not attained. The University must account for the access of marginalized groups and minorities.

- - Extension

The area of extension is going to have a very special meaning in the near future, according to Boaventura de Sousa Santos. At a moment when global capitalism intends to functionalize the university and, in fact, transform it into a vast extension agency at its service an emancipatory reform of the public university must confer a new centrality to the activities of extension and conceive of them as an alternative to global capitalism, attributing to the universities an active participation in the construction of social cohesion, in the deepening of the democracy, in the struggle against social exclusion and environmental degradation, in the defence of cultural diversity.

- - Action-research

Action-research and the ecology of knowledges are areas of university legitimacy that transcend extension since they act both at the level of extension and at the level of research and training.

- - Ecology of knowledges

The ecology of knowledges is, for Boaventura de Sousa Santos, a more advanced form of action-research. It implies an epistemological revolution in the ways research and training has been conventionally carried out at the university. The ecology of knowledges is a kind of counter-extension or extension in reverse, that is from outside to inside the university. It consists of the promotion of dialogues between scientific and humanistic knowledge produced by the university, on the one side, and the lay or popular knowledges that circulate in society produced by common people, both in urban and rural settings, originating in Western and non-Western cultures (indigenous, African, Eastern, etc.), on the other.

Boaventura also proposes a new institutionalism for the University based on: network, where the idea is that of a national network of public universities upon which a global network can be developed; internal and external democratizing, in which the new institutionalism must work toward the deepening of the university's internal and external democracy; participative evaluation; and, finally, the new institutionalism entails a new system of evaluation that includes each of the universities and the university network as a whole.

An alternative paradigm must be based on a dialogic approach to education (Flecha, 2011), constructing critical fora for exchanging experiences, proposing new concepts, challenging established ideas and, through access policies, pedagogical activities, curricula content and policy oriented recommendations contribute to the construction of a common world, based on critical inquiry, freedom, solidarity and democratic citizenship.

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