

Research, ethics and rights

Discussions on the ethics of scientific actions are not recent. On the contrary, we can affirm that they cross the history of sciences since their beginning, and, according to scientific paradigms, they have changed and multiplied, gained different intensities, emphasis and frames. They have been formulated in terms of the truth of the knowledge produced, of the research implications to the ones involved with it, of its development on the methodological decisions, of the constriction and influence from the financing and evaluative agencies, of the political crossings that are part of the researchers' course and of the effects of the produced knowledge about the world where we live in and the transformations that are made possible through such knowledge.

This last vertex of the discussion, which privileges the argumentation on the way that science contributes to the transformation and to the construction of the social world, has been constituted specially due to the qualitative research, for that, frequently, concentrate its efforts in fields commonly permeated by discussions on human rights. The focus of qualitative researches is, in general, the social world and the way that it is understood. The social processes are always permeated by rights, negotiation of rights and violation of rights. Therefore, the scientific knowledge produced by many qualitative researches is part of the social process that regulates the formulation and the distribution of rights.

The universities, understood as reference centers of scientific production, must work for the proposition and for the support of those ethical discussions, once they are a fundamental part of the construction of the social arrangements in which we live. But what is the current social scenario that frames this construction?

On one hand, we watch an intense movement of withdrawal of social hard-earned rights. The universal right to health and education starts being threatened by means of the so-called "fiscal adjustment" measures, whose aim is to make the constitutional warrantees of budget allocation to those areas more flexible. The urgency for social security austere changes and for a labor reform that adjusts rights is mentioned; however, the agrarian, tax and political reforms are hardly ever discussed. In the field of the social assistance, the current government acts towards the dismantling of public policies, by employing conservative and archaic notions of non-specialized charity work developed by the First Lady. The actions of constructing racial, gender and sexuality equality have been ruined with the closing of ministries, extinguishing of committees, revocation of measures and relevant attacks to our field marks, such as Resolution 01/99 of the Brazilian Federal Psychology Council.

On the other hand, we can notice that the Brazilian universities have been suffering with the budget restrictions imposed in the last years and with the establishment of an evaluation model of research practices excessively focused on productivity. Among some current politicians, an already explicit discourse denying the universality of upper education is becoming more and more common. The neoliberal governmental agenda, subsidized by IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development), is aligned with the pressure from private education groups and does not embrace the warrantee to upper education without costs to the general population. The agencies that promote research had their budgets cut and reduced the already limited official notices.

Scientific journals, such as *Psicologia em Estudo*, resist, despite the insufficient financing, increasing evaluation requirements and precarious working resources. Besides the restrictions on the universities' administrative autonomy, the interference on their celebrated knowledge production liberty has been announced; this liberty is a characteristic that makes universities, along the history, a place to shelter ideas considered conservative, as well as ideas that we consider to be revolutionary.

Facing such issues, the political-discursive maneuver called *Escola Sem Partido* (Brazilian Portuguese term for "Non-Party School"), is being discussed. This maneuver was formulated from allegations that educational institutions have been serving as agents of political and ideological indoctrination and harming the exclusive right of the families to decide on the moral and religious

education of their children. The proposal is based upon a conservative “familism”, and tries to restrict the school’s role to construct the critical thinking in relation to the social values socially accepted and established. It is not an exaggeration to think that, soon, similar proposals will be formulated with the specific focus on the universities’ role.

In short, the scenario is one that retracts rights, increases inequality and weakens universities. It is within this scenario that we consider that it is fundamental that the reflection on research ethics prioritizes the discussion on how science contributes to the social world’s transformation and construction, such as we have expressed at the beginning of this text. That reflection must get over the demands of research ethics committees and allow the formulation of a set of themes that broadens the questioning about the political research implication for keeping or transforming our social practices.

Questioning what certain practice of knowledge production does to the world means to open the reflection on, for example, what impact a certain research has on the ones that collaborate with it, on who is (or may be) benefited and what type of benefit that is, on who is (or may be) harmed and what harm that is, on how the research is explicitly and implicitly placed in relation to the dispute of values instituted in its thematic field, on its commitment to legitimate different life forms, modalities and choices, specially on its positioning in relation to the lasting and unfortunately increasing inequality forms.

Based upon those ideals – and always thinking about the knowledge, research, university and society development – we present this new issue of the journal *Psicologia em Estudo*, inviting the readers to explore it and ponder the questions presented here when enjoying its articles.

Enjoy your reading!

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