

## **University: Vision and Mission**

### **An interview with Bernard Charlot**

#### ***1. Discussing 'change'***

Stamelos: Has there been a real change in the university or are we perhaps just expressing a kind of nostalgia for the past? Shouldn't the University, first and foremost a social institution, follow social developments?

Charlot: I think that we can start with Bourdieu. We cannot understate the social character of the university. What does Bourdieu say? He says two things and this helps us to construct a problematic. He says, firstly, that the university, like the school, is a social institution. But he also says that the university possesses a relative autonomy which determines its particular character. The university is social but the police force is also social, the army is social, justice is social. So, at the same time we need to understand the way in which the university is social and what we mean by its 'relative autonomy'. This leads, I believe, to two questions. Firstly, being a social institution, the university is an institution of which society? And in the direction of what kind of society are these changes moving it? What kind of social evolution are these changes responding to? This is the first order of questions. There is yet a second question. The university is social but it has relative autonomy and the issue is for us to understand, what

is going on with this relative autonomy. What is characteristic of the university and cannot and must not change otherwise it ceases to be a university, it ceases to reflect its particular character? Hence it is a double problematic.

Stamelos: So, I've retained two concepts that you have used, on the one hand, there is society and its changes and on the other, the particular character of the institution. But at the same time an issue of power arises for society.

Charlot: Yes, yes.

### **1.1.Society and changes in the university: massification, commercialization, globalization, differentiation**

Stamelos: Let's start then with society and power. From the history of the university we can see that the university was always associated with the power of the time. Of course, at times this was the church, at other times the emperor...

Charlot:...or the state.

Stamelos: Later, indeed yes, it was the state. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century it was chiefly a mechanism for the production and reproduction of state employees.

Charlot: Yes. In essence, we have to understand what happens in universities in different parts of the world. I have two ways of answering, one general way, and one using the case of Brazil which is interesting and which I am familiar with because I've been living it since 2003 since I teach in a federal university. I believe that there have been three fundamental changes in the university in contemporary society, three changes which are interconnected. Firstly, commercialization. What is the central power? All the more, it is the market, it is no longer the

state. Secondly, there is another process which is linked to the first: globalization. And a third process which seems to me to be fundamental, the differentiation of forms of higher education. Let's start with commercialization. More and more, the university is being seen as a service, not a public service, a public good, but a profit making service. Hence it is becoming more and more removed from the sphere of the state, not in order for it to enter a sphere of cultural university autonomy, but in order for it to enter a market sphere. In Brazil this is very clear: 85% of students are in private universities.

Stamelos: Impressive!

Charlot: The case of Brazil is particularly interesting, since the children from rich families or from the upper middle class go to public universities!

Stamelos: Really?

Charlot: The children of the poor don't go anywhere, the children of the lower middle classes go to private universities where they pay. In general, we are witnessing a commercialization where, all the more, the university is considered a lucrative service, which ought to produce economic goods, which should earn money. And certainly, this logic leads to the privatization of the university. The second current process: globalization. It is closely linked to commercialization. The Bologna Process in 1998 was followed by the Lisbon Strategy which sets the creation of an economy of knowledge, which will be the most competitive and the most dynamic in the world in 2010, as a European objective. The reorganization of the European university takes place through a logic of economy.

Stamelos: All the same, the Lisbon strategy failed.

Charlot: It failed, yes, but we had a globalization that accompanies commercialization. All the more we see – and in Brazil it is very evident – the arrival of university products from abroad. I recently received some propaganda (an advertisement), I don't know from which country, for

a degree in theology. I have also already received, and for sure you have too, proposals for the acquisition of a doctoral title, and so on.

Stamelos: Yes, indeed.

Charlot: The propaganda says: You don't have entrance exams, nor work to do. You just need to send money! And all the more we are seeing proposals that are not from private universities, but from the Mass Media systems, from the big mass media or from international businesses. In Brazil, the profit making private universities which represent three quarters of private universities, since there is a blanket private sector, are often governed by large multinationals which are only interested in making money. So we have commercialization and globalization. But we also have differentiation. And I believe that differentiation is a fundamental answer to the question you posed at the beginning regarding the social aspect. Many more students can enter the university now than ever before and this is very good, it is apparent in large countries like China, India, Brazil. For these countries, this development is important because this new type of university can reach the interior of a country. This didn't happen before. That's the positive side, but at the same time this is accompanied by excessive differentiation in the forms of the university. There are institutes of higher education that aren't universities, but schools. Here for example you have only one school for law and another that is just for administration. And the number of schools (private, certainly) has sky rocketed in recent years. There are also local private universities, very local. I recognize that they certainly play a role, often a positive one, since they absorb individuals from within a radius of 100 kilometres where there is nothing else – because this is not Greece or France where at a distance of 100 kilometres you'll find a public university. There, there is nothing. But what do they do? They do lessons. And obviously there is no research. They are, in effect, an extension of secondary education. Besides this, there are traditional public universities that are trying to deal with the waves of students that are arriving at their doors, and their students

are more and more different. There is also distance learning which is growing more and more, accompanied by an 'epic' Discourse on cyber culture which does not correspond at all to what is actually happening, since distance learning is today a space of huge university failure. There are, finally, public university policies based on the German model, which are trying to construct some centres of excellence, or based on the French model, which are trying to place the universities within an excellence network, or on the Netherlands' model (Holland) (and Australia's I think), which are trying to specialize each university into a sector of excellence. All of these are called 'universities', 'higher education'. But they are all completely different. So we have growth, a massification which, from one point of view, is a form of democratization, and hence a positive change. At the same time, it is accompanied by differentiation which permits the ruling classes to maintain their elitism. We are opening universities everywhere, but the young from the privileged classes do not go to just any university or just any branch of study. In France there are the contests for the 'grandes écoles' or they enter the elitist universities. In Brazil they aim for medicine or law at the public universities or the large private universities. The children of the African elite no longer go to a local university, they go to the USA or England or France, if possible to a prestigious university. So, in contemporary society we are simultaneously witnessing university growth but also the maintenance of the elitist sectors.

Stamelos: Can we talk about the consequences of this?

Charlot: Consequences which have to do with the life of the professors and the students. What is growing, alongside differentiation, is a system of special evaluation, which is public, or sometimes private. There are now huge businesses for university evaluation because with so much differentiation we have no idea what a degree is worth. The degree will be of different value depending on where it was awarded and prepared for. When it is a small law school which opens exclusively to make money, and which accepts anyone, the degree it awards

needs to be evaluated. In Brazil, only 18% pass the Bar exams. A large portion of students paid a lot, at a low level private school to obtain a degree, which does not even permit them to acquire the law card (licence). Hence, massification, together with differentiation lead more and more to the growth of the process of evaluation, since the market wants to know the quality of the product. A non-university evaluation of the value of the university degree or of the university itself.

Stamelos: You talked about different forms of university, in other words, about a kind of 'creolization' of the university whose features are being eroded. Perhaps we no longer have need of the university?

Charlot: What was the university, in essence, in the past? At the time of Avelardo and some others? It was a place for the production and transmission of knowledge. The production and transmission of a cultural heritage from generation to generation. And that is more or less how it functioned for a long time. That doesn't mean that it didn't have a professional function. It was always linked to professional situations in medicine, law, or even in arts schools, which opened numerous social positions. But today it is the market which takes more and more of the decisions, and more and more directly. It is less and less the state and all the more the pressure of the market. The market is putting more and more pressure on the university to adapt to its demands. It has to adapt to the diversity of its 'clients', recommending privileged sectors for the children of the elite. It must produce research, but in physics, in chemistry, and in biology, instead of research in sociology or psychology, although these haven't been eliminated completely, despite the recent trend in Japan...

Stamelos: Yes, yes.

Charlot: So what is being demanded? Research which can produce results in a short period of time. Because capitalism isn't foolish, it also maintains a little basic research as it knows that basic research can ultimately bring in money too. But it wants research of a relatively

immediate time period. In a somewhat contradictory way, it even wants to shape a mass of students. It needs to train students because it needs to raise the basic level of the population, for reasons that have to do with the more complex operation of contemporary society: hygiene problems, problems of accountability, sequential logic with things being more and more online... The market demands research which leads to the rapid production of new goods and services and to the training of a multitude of students. At this point there is a contradiction between the demand for peak productive research and the training of a mass of students. Differentiation is a way of dealing with this contradiction, which is a contradiction of the social system itself. This differentiation of the institutions of higher education has a tendency to be accompanied by a differentiation of the teachers themselves, with teachers working in the third cycle of studies with research and so on and others dedicated to mass higher education with little research. When we deny this choice between research and education, we come under, in France, in Brazil, and very possibly in Greece, huge pressure. We must conduct research, conduct research, conduct research, to the point where there is more and more deceit! There are colleagues who publish the same article five, six, seven times, sometimes changing only the title, other times changing just a few sentences. We see this happening more and more frequently in various countries. Why do they do this? To survive! But at the same time we have to face pressure to publish, publish, publish and a pressure to train multitudinous masses of students and this is one of the contradictions we have to live with. In the same way that the system has to face this contradiction between the production of significant research and the mass training of students. Perhaps we should investigate the possibilities of distance learning, but we will talk about this, I hope, later on, as distance learning is an issue we also need to talk about today when we think about the university.

Stamelos: Now, I wonder after everything you've said, what remains of the particular character of the university, in other words the relative autonomy of the university that you referred to at the beginning of the discussion, university autonomy: Is anything left?

Charlot: Yes, us!

Stamelos: (laughter).

### **1.2. University professors of knowledge as pillar of the autonomy of the university**

Charlot: I will explain what I mean, beyond the humorous response. 'We' remain, at least for a while, since in the future one could see a gradual replacement of the university by distance learning, which would not essentially be guided by the academics. Already today, university professors, for better or worse, are on the brink of losing control of the university machine, including control of their own evaluation, control of the pace of their publications. They are continually subject to evaluations which are quantitative with ranking systems, I don't know if you have this in Greece, we have it in Brazil and in France: A1, A2, B1, B2 etc<sup>1</sup>. When I was young, I published articles in union journals or pedagogical journals which were translated in many countries and which today shouldn't be included in the formal evaluation of my academic file.

Stamelos: You were lucky (laughter).

Charlot:...but I found them in circulation in Argentina 30 years later! So then we have less and less control of the university machine. But we are still there, with our students, endeavouring to teach, to direct, to guide research, and this is the limit of what the market can do, at least for the time being. The university cannot function without academics and the university

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to rankings of scientific journals.



remains, despite all this, a space of critical thinking. That is how I would describe it now, a space where we can discuss contradictions or where we can talk about contradictions. That's what I try to teach my students. The job of the researcher is not to say who is right and who is wrong. The job of the researcher is to determine, to conceptualize, to show, to reveal the contradictions, since this takes place only at the university, through research we can do it. Not even an activist can do it. The activist cannot say that we have to take certain opinions of our opponents into consideration, and so on. Only the people in the university are capable of facing the contradictions, to show and talk about contradictions, as we are ready in any case, in part, to do right now. Neither the body which is dominated by the market, nor the political activist can do this job. What is left of the university then is us, it is what we do with our students, it is the students we educate, it is the research and teaching we do. We are under pressure, but we still exist.

Stamelos: You sound pessimistic....

Charlot: ...I'm not pessimistic, but I believe that we are at a historical watershed and that the way in which the teachers react is of fundamental significance – and not only in higher education. This is the difference between the issue of information and that of knowledge, on which I insist in my lectures in Brazil and occasionally in other Latin American countries. The professor of information is historically deceased. The professor who explains that this kind of fish swims like this, and the other kind of fish swims like that or that in Patra the economic zone is such and such, are historically deceased, since nobody can compete with Google. If I put some well-chosen words into Google, I will receive information, graphics, pictures, videos and so on. The professor of information is historically dead, but never more so than today was it necessary for a professor of knowledge. Because we have to know how to put the right words into Google, because the information we find on the internet is not always trustworthy

and is rarely sufficient if we don't search. We need to search for knowledge, to evaluate it and we need to link different pieces of information to solve problems, to understand things, to understand the meaning of the world, the meaning of life, the meaning of others, the meaning of ourselves. So then we can be replaced, we can, all the more be replaced by products that inform, but I believe that a professor, who will be a professor of knowledge will always be necessary unless we abandon culture entirely. From this point of view I think that whatever is internet can be positive, freeing us from the duties of informing, which historically was the most boring part of our work, leaving us to occupy ourselves with more interesting things. So, my discourse is not pessimistic, it is not exclusively critical, it is not exclusively negative, I believe that there is a future for the professors, but that this future demands a cultural change which involves the professors and the forms of social, political and union resistance, which are part and parcel of the university.

Stamelos: However, the reality seems different to me. To give you an example, last year at Paris 8, my colleagues told me that at this moment in the Education Sciences there are about 200 students following courses in person and about 10 times more involved in distance learning. And this is not an obligation, it happens because more and more, the teachers prefer to be involved with distance learning. And they gave me quite a critical explanation: that the professors are becoming all the more afraid of the students and hence they prefer them to be at a distance so as to feel greater security.

### **1.3. Society – University – Democracy**

Stamelos: To return once more to the relationship between society and university, do you believe that the university has a mission regarding democracy? Taking the case of Greece and the current economic crisis, we believe that if the university exists only for economic reasons

then there is no reason for it to exist, at least not as a mass institution. We could even consider that for a country that does not have sufficient economic resources, the fact that it has a mass university system is nothing more than economic waste. Especially as far as our graduates are concerned. On leaving university they are obliged to either remain unemployed for an indefinite length of time or to go abroad.

Charlot: The problem is relatively new in Europe but it isn't new in itself. I remember, 20 or 25 years ago now, that I had some Moroccan students at Paris 8 who raised the same question. I think that I had a student from Venezuela who also posed the same question. There are countries where there are organizations for unemployed graduates. It is a problem that is not new, it is appearing now in Greece but in itself it is not new. From the moment that there was a time shift between a middle class – under construction -, which had sufficient money for its children to study, and the reality of the economic growth of the country, the problem was created. In essence I believe that we should return to the question of the contradictions. The university is linked to the market, but what does that mean? It means that the market advertises the university it needs. In Greece, which university does economic capitalism need from the point of view of job positions? The market isn't just anything, it is today the economic capital, and chiefly in Greece you know it, the German economic capital and the German creditors! What does it want as a university in Greece? I believe that it is not interested in this, in a sense. Greece must align itself in an economic position which corresponds to a European hierarchy with Germany at the top and with some other countries linked to Germany. Capitalism, without doubt does not wish to educate a mass of mechanics in Greece. But at the same time as the university is always linked to the economic condition of a country, it always exceeds and goes beyond this condition. It is, despite all this, a space of thinking, a space for analysis of the contradictions, a space of ideological production. This is fundamental and includes Greece at the moment.

Stamelos: Agreed. Two comments only to feed the discussion. To start with, in Europe it is a little more complex because we say that we are creating a European space and a European community. However, what we are seeing is that the Greek taxpayer is paying for the education of the mechanics and the doctors who then, since we have freedom of movement in the European space, will go and work chiefly in Germany or England. We have 240,000 graduates who have moved away in the 5-6 years of the crisis.

Charlot: Yes, but at the same time the taxpayers in Pakistan are also paying for the education of the doctors who will work in England.

Stamelos: Correct!

Charlot: What I want to say is that you are about to discover in Europe a series of problems that the countries of the south (and I now belong to a country of the south) are already familiar with. Moroccan graduates, Pakistani graduates from medical school, Indian graduates in information technology will work in rich countries while they have been educated in poor countries, in addition they speak English these Pakistanis and Indians! There is the Brazilian solution with Cuba: Brazil brings Cuban doctors, paying a portion of their salary to the Cuban government. But all this has shocked the Brazilian Right while some of those Cuban doctors escape to the USA...

Stamelos: Not bad at all! Nevertheless, in Europe we have a Discourse according to which we are building a common space. So, our analysis should deal with this contradiction. Do we use Europe as our unit of analysis or the modern Nation-State? Ultimately, if we have a common space of graduates, why don't we have a common space of debt?

Charlot: I agree with you, but that's a question we have to ask the Germans! It seems obvious to me that now this dialogue on the common space constitutes an argument for the dominant

party to operate in one or the other direction, depending on what is in its interests. To repeat myself, I believe that the university isn't dead. The spirit of the university isn't dead. That is where critical analysis, distancing, the possibility of intellectual and cultural resistance, survive. In the end, the university is alive!

Stamelos: Could we say that one of the university's missions is also the education of the citizens, the promotion of active citizenship?

Charlot: Yes. But for me the university's foremost role is the production of knowledge. It remains the space, all around the world, where we produce the most knowledge, the most research. This production and transmission of knowledge includes an economic dimension but it also includes the cultural, political, ideological and critical dimension that you call an active citizenship.

## **2. *Distance higher education***

Charlot: We will talk about distance learning and the new student population. Last week, here in Aracaju, where I live and work, there was a large poster advertising distance learning. Since there is a lot of private education, the institutions are in competition and they advertise. So there was a banner from a private university in favour of distance learning, showing a thirty year old guy who was laughing and saying 'distance learning is your vision'. The vision of a young and happy individual. Why was he happy? The poster didn't say so but I believe he was happy because he didn't have to go to lessons! My present interpretation (I'm working on it with a doctoral candidate) is that distance learning is perceived as learning in which you are not obliged to turn up to lessons. It is not perceived as what it really is, in other words, an education in which we have to study on our own. Students don't choose distance learning to

study alone, but so that they don't have to go to lessons. My doctoral candidate's research is on the relationship knowledge has to distance learning. Elissandra, my doctoral candidate, with an education in history, is in addition, a teacher in distance learning at my university, a federal, public university. When she started her research she was of course entirely in favour of distance learning. And she had the Discourse on cyber-culture which is the Discourse of Pierre Levy, translated here into Portuguese. This is what I call 'epic' Discourse on distance learning or romantic Discourse as Elissandra now says. Let's imagine that we are twenty years after the invention of printing by Gutenberg. There would be people who could develop a Discourse of the kind: now we don't have to copy out the books one by one, there are books for all the people and so in ten years from now all the world will have read Plato and Aristotle. This is what they are trying to do to us with the 'epic' Discourse on cyber-culture, saying real things, possibilities, truths, which however do not reflect the reality out there. What is actually happening with distance learning at our university at the moment? In this research that we are conducting we see that there are students that never access the distance learning platform, we see that there are few relationships between the centre of distance learning and the local cities, we even see that while the students send their projects to the distance learning platform, they are often copies of each other.

Stamelos: Real chaos!

Charlot: Those who belong to the same group often copy from each other. And then there are writers who are trying to develop a Discourse on creativity thanks to cyber-culture! In addition, what do I see in primary and secondary education? The young use the internet to do what? To learn? Almost never! They use the internet to download music, to exchange messages rapidly, sometimes to access porn sites. There is more *WhatsApp* than scientific articles! What do they do when they have a project to send to their professor? They go on the

internet, yes, but they find a text, copy it, paste it and they give it to their professor as if it were their own text. I suppose we see the same thing happening in Greece.

Stamelos: Yes, exactly!

Charlot: There is this reality of distance learning which explains the huge statistical failure rate (he is referring to the success rate in exams for the acquisition of a licence to practise law) and at the same time there is the Discourse on cyber-culture that proposes some potential possibilities. There is a huge gap between the two. As far as the professors are concerned, I don't know – I have little contact with Paris 8 at the moment. On the part of the professors it is perhaps a means for them to no longer have students.

Stamelos: Yes, but this poses a “small” problem, nevertheless.

Charlot: Yes, but that is an old dream of the professors. I love maths, I want to become a maths professor but the problem is that I have to support the students with their maths.

Stamelos: Exactly that!

Charlot: Hasn't it been working something like that for a long, long time? Professors who wanted to be professors because they love their subject, but they had to support students too. Now, thanks to distance learning, in the final analysis, the professor no longer needs to support the students! However this has nothing to do with distance learning. It has to do with the production of lessons that are provided within a system that may be public, private or anything at all and which will put me on the internet, that is all. Distance learning is something else entirely, with support, with a new pedagogical form of interaction. Otherwise, it is not distance learning, it is the sale of educational products in a market dominated by the preoccupation with profit.

Stamelos: Yes but nevertheless we have to accept that with distance learning we have a significant change on three levels: relationship with the institution, relationship between students as a community of learning and the relationship *to* knowledge.

Charlot: True distance learning creates a true community of learning. As far as the relationship *to* learning is concerned, the question is: why, what is the objective, the motivation of the student in turning to distance learning? The current answer, in my doctoral candidate's developing research is that the students are not choosing a new way of learning, they are not entering a new relationship *to* knowledge. They choose not to be obliged to attend lessons, something which is understandable since the lessons are very far away, as they have to travel 250 kilometres by car to come and another 250 kilometres by car to return. It is then an answer from the point of view of space and time before anything else. Greece is a very great historical country but from the point of view of space it is not very big. It isn't China, India or Brazil and so this question of space and time is posed differently. There are countries which are huge and distance learning is a geographic, spatial and space-time answer. But we have to construct this learning. What is the difficulty? There was already distance learning before, attempts using television for example. This did not make progress because it is a different kind of education which presupposes a different kind of learning. This equals an active constructivist pedagogy where the student has responsibility for himself, is capable of self assessment with the tools we put at his disposal, he can interact with his personal professor, with the group, send a message saying: I don't understand this part of the text, could someone explain it to me? This is another student. But what we are seeing in our research is that there are students that don't access the platform for a month, there are others that access it only occasionally. Practically speaking, there aren't any students who access the platform on a daily basis. In reality, it is not distance learning that is functioning, it is an attempt to construct a pedagogical time-space substitute almost devoid of traditional education. I am not criticising



at all the possibility and interest in distance learning. This could be one of the answers for the future. But, I say that often what we are doing now is not distance learning. It is the on line, internet 'availability' of educational products. I don't call that distance learning.

Stamelos: Yes, you're right. Now I'd like to return again to the relationship with the institution since we no longer need to have a common place, a common space. We understand that this reduces operational costs, but for the institution that is another thing. That changes.

Charlot: In a way, yes. Because, in reality we also know that the effective forms of distance learning require only a minimal in person education.

Stamelos: Yes, minimal. Is it really a university or is it a *university form* as you were saying before?

Charlot: It is more a university form that allows its students to acquire a degree. Because there is still something that we haven't talked about and it is important. What do the students want, essentially? It's not education, there are those who want an education, however the majority want a degree more than anything. If it is possible to obtain a degree at minimal cost, in terms of time and energy, there is a good portion of students who will go for this solution, even if a minority still want an education. And if it is possible for someone to sell a degree to those students, making a good profit, there will be people that will sell it.

### **3. Higher education in Brazil**

Stamelos: I'd like to talk more about one contradiction. There are 'fake' private universities that attract students, students that are interested solely in getting a degree. But this degree must, despite this, be of some value, a minimal value in the job market...

Charlot: This is related to what I said at the beginning regarding differentiation. Besides, they are not, generally, universities, they are schools, without there being a group of schools that constitute a university. In Brazil this occurs in law, sometimes in teacher training or administration. It is much more difficult in medicine or for engineers, where materials and technically trustworthy abilities are required.

Stamelos: Is it possible with this type of degree for the holder to participate in national competitions to enter a profession, to become teachers in a school, for example?

Charlot: Yes, if the degree is recognised by the Ministry.

Stamelos: So, if I follow university education at a private university and acquire a degree I can present myself and obtain a position in the school system.

Charlot....Yes, if the degree is recognised by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education regularly assesses the degrees and sets the education regulations, the rules for the professors, the materials, etc. Each year various study programmes are recognised, whose degrees are no longer recognized. But from the moment a degree is recognized by the Ministry, it has the same legal value as a degree from a public university. Besides, it is a problem of globalization. For example, the postgraduate courses in education done by Brazilians outside Brazil are not recognized. There is a protectionism of the professors, to protect them from competition from abroad. Often they refuse to validate degrees acquired abroad. Not always, but very often. At this point we come across another dimension, corporatism and national protectionism which can work against degrees from abroad. Sometimes it is a protectionism because the degrees were awarded by good universities. Other times they are degrees that come from regions or institutions that are isolated or not well known. And the other case is the one of some institutes that have no objective beyond

making money from the students. The cases are different and that is why the process of evaluation acquires greater and greater interest.

Stamelos: Could you explain the Brazilian system to me a little bit? What makes an impression on me is the fact that the children of rich families go on to public higher education and the middle class children to private.

Charlot: I'll explain it to you and it is also very interesting because in Brazil there has been a left-wing government since 2002. What happened? Was it worth it? Etc. First of all, in Brazil there is a competition for university entrance. It's not like in France, I don't know how it is in Greece, but there is a competition for entry to Brazilian public universities. And even at the fee-paying private universities there is an entrance competition.

Stamelos: On a national level? Is the competition at a national level or at the level of the institution?

Charlot: No, at the level of each university. Until recently each university organized its own competition called 'vestibular' [waiting room, hall]. Today we are in the process of partial change since for a few years now they have been developing an exam at the end of secondary education studies. It is an exam, not a competition, but all the more now the universities are using the grades from this exam as a selection mechanism, in other words, like a competition. Students who have completed public secondary education participate in it as do others who have completed private secondary education. We must remember that there are two networks: private education and public education. However, the private schools are generally better than the public since working conditions and social employment in private education are better than in public education. Besides there are teachers who work in both.

Stamelos: Really, is that possible?

Charlot: Yes, education is still part time, although there is a tendency for it to become full time. So you can be a professor in the morning in public education and a professor in the afternoon in private education, where you earn more money and prepare more lessons, so as not to lose your job. There really are two networks. Consequently who wins the places in the entrance competition at the public universities? In mass, those who come from private school. They will have free higher studies. Who has to pay for places at the private universities? Those who come from the public school and who very often work during the day and go to a fee paying private university in the evening. It is a paradox, an upside down world.

Stamelos:....And where are you?

Charlot: I work in a public university, something which permits me to carry out research and so on. But my students are not the poor. The poorer students are at the private university, which is certainly more significant in student numbers than my public university which is federal. So, 85% of Brazilian students are in private universities. Of course this is a first, simplified picture of the situation in Brazil. In reality, it is a little more complex. The very poor don't go to university at all since often they don't advance to the second tier of secondary education, like lyceum, senior high school. And then my students in the pedagogical schools of the public university come from the working class or from the lower middle class, while the students in medicine and law at the big private universities belong to the privileged classes. Added to the distinction between public and private is the kind of competition depending on the subject, and the greater or smaller geographical proximity of the one or other university.

Stamelos: But is there the buying power to pay the fees?

Charlot: Obviously, the students face great difficulties in paying. So, what happened when the left came to power? They tried to partially amend this situation. What they did is interesting

because it shows the effectiveness and the limits of effectiveness of the left's university policies. In power the left created new public universities and increased the number of places at public universities by more than 50%. The ministry also did a lot of work on 'interiorizing' the public universities, in other words the creation of annexes of the universities in the interior of the country and not only in the capital of the federal state or in the big cities. This issue of 'interiorization' of the university, this geographic issue, is very important on a global level but we don't see it in Greece or France because in France we always have a public university within less than 100 kilometres. On the contrary here in Brazil this wasn't the case. When the nearest university is a 250-500 kilometre round trip, this means that you have to move to the university city. And have money to live on. What the state did, and for which it was criticized by the public university unions, was to create a system called 'PROUNI' in which the private universities accept students who don't pay fees and in exchange the state deducts taxes from these universities. It is a system that allows the state, in a way, to use positions at private universities and to buy them by reducing taxes. There is a double advantage to this. The advantage for the public sector is that it gets to use existing infrastructure. The advantage for the private sector is that, since private higher education is highly developed, there comes a point when the private institutions can no longer find students as there aren't sufficient numbers graduating from secondary education that are able to pay. In a way, the state buys the places in private education. At the same time the state organized an American credit system for the students. Credit which the students later return, after ten years, at very low interest rates. However, last year, this move almost collapsed because the small universities or small schools began to accept very weak students who would pay with state credit. It is another way, at the same time, to strengthen the private sector through the help the state offers to poor students and allows these students to continue to higher studies which they often wouldn't be able to do without this help. Finally, the state promoted and enforced a

quota system in the public universities. But beware, Brazil is a federal country, it's not like Greece or France where the ministry decides and everyone applies the decisions. In a federal state like Brazil or the USA the ministry provides the bases and each state adapts and interprets the federal directives. My university makes 50% of its places available, at the moment, to candidates who completed all their studies in public schools and within that 50% there is a quota for blacks and indigenous groups. All these policies are worth the effort. It is one of the positive results of the workers' party (PT) which has been in power since 2002. It allowed all young people to go to university and to follow higher studies. The problem, as in other countries, is the extreme differentiation, which leads us to wonder whether we can still call this 'university education'.

Stamelos: Is there a university policy regarding global rankings and is Brazilian society interested in these rankings?

Charlot: The answer is more 'no'. That is a question for a Greek, a French man, a German, it's not the question of a Brazilian. The University of Sao Paulo which is the most important in South America, is in the 100<sup>th</sup> or 120<sup>th</sup> position in the Shanghai ranking. It is a public university which depends on the state of Sao Paulo, it is not a federal university. There is no strong central power to determine policy for all the universities and to care about their position in international rankings. And when the first Brazilian university is in 100<sup>th</sup> or 120<sup>th</sup> place, you're not very passionate about the Shanghai ranking, even though you know it exists.

Stamelos: Do you have a questionnaire for the evaluation of education?

Charlot: Of the teacher or of the teaching?

Stamelos: In Greece we say 'teacher', but in France we say 'teaching'!

Charlot: Once again I need to remind you that many universities are private and that among the public universities a significant number are 'estaduales' [state] and depend financially on the federal state and not on the state itself. The operation of each university has great pedagogical autonomy. This can be understood when there are federal universities – like the one I work in – which can decide alone on their evaluation. At my university we are graded by our students at the level of degree (not doctoral...). Personally I'm not complaining, they give me a good grade, but experience and observation helped me keep my distance from this grading system. For a start, because the students give you the grade you give them! If you are a very strict professor, they give you a bad grade out of a desire for revenge... Then, there is nothing qualitative about this evaluation, it is just an overall grade. I am in favour of a qualitative evaluation of teaching which would be interesting and would help in the improvement of teaching. However, the overall grade reflects that which we criticize in our lessons! We explain to the students that there is the cumulative evaluation which consists of giving just one grade for everything, a grade that would represent the value of the individual. That is what we have to finish with, so we can move towards evaluation that is formative, diagnostic, regulatory etc. And then when the institute organizes evaluation on the professors it is exactly the same type of cumulative evaluation that we criticize in our lessons! It is yet another contradiction...

*(Translation: Panagiota Evangelakou, textual editing: Panagiota Evangelakou – Georgios Stamelos)*

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