

ARTICLE

TOTAL CRITICISM OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: DEPENDENCY AND ACADEMIC DUALITY¹

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ABSTRACT: This article proposes an unprecedented theoretical articulation between Marxist Dependency Theory (MDT) and the Critique of Dualistic Reason to analyze the structural crisis of public universities in peripheral countries. It argues that the university is not just a victim of dependent capitalism, but one of its most sophisticated devices for reproducing inequality. Based on the category of the super-exploitation of labour (TMD) and the critique of deformed modernization (dualist reason), it is shown that the institutional duality of the university - excellence for the few, precariousness for the many - is a functional strategy of capital, and not a deviation. The text analyzes the financialization of academic life, teacher burnout, and the symbolic capture of knowledge, suggesting that resisting is more than preserving: it is reinventing the university from the ordinary. In the end, a total critique is advocated - not moralistic, but committed to the insubordination of forms of life and thought on the periphery.

Keywords: Critique of Dualistic Reason; Fictitious Capital; Institutional Duality; Marxist Dependency Theory; Superexploitation.

CRÍTICA TOTAL DA UNIVERSIDADE PÚBLICA: DEPENDÊNCIA E DUALIDADE ACADÊMICA

RESUMO: Este artigo propõe uma articulação teórica inédita entre a Teoria Marxista da Dependência (TMD) e a Crítica da Razão Dualista para analisar a crise estrutural da universidade pública nos países periféricos. Argumenta-se que a universidade não é apenas vítima do capitalismo dependente, mas um de

¹ Article published with funding from the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* - CNPq/Brazil for editing, layout and XML conversion services.

seus dispositivos mais sofisticados de reprodução da desigualdade. A partir da categoria de superexploração do trabalho (TMD) e da crítica à modernização disforme (razão dualista), evidencia-se que a dualidade institucional da universidade — excelência para poucos, precariedade para muitos — é estratégia funcional do capital, e não desvio. O texto analisa a financeirização da vida acadêmica, o esgotamento docente e a captura simbólica do conhecimento, sugerindo que resistir é mais do que preservar: é reinventar a universidade desde o comum. Ao final, defende-se uma crítica total — não moralista, mas comprometida com a insubordinação das formas de vida e pensamento na periferia.

Palavras-chave: Capital Fictício; Crítica da Razão Dualista; Dualidade Institucional; Superexploração; Teoria Marxista da Dependência.

CRÍTICA TOTAL DE LA UNIVERSIDAD PÚBLICA: DEPENDENCIA Y DUALIDAD ACADÉMICA

RESUMEN: Este artículo propone una articulación teórica sin precedentes entre la Teoría Marxista de la Dependencia (TMD) y la Crítica de la Razón Dualista para analizar la crisis estructural de las universidades públicas en los países periféricos. Sostiene que la universidad no es sólo una víctima del capitalismo dependiente, sino uno de sus dispositivos más sofisticados para reproducir la desigualdad. A partir de la categoría de la superexplotación del trabajo (TMD) y de la crítica de la modernización deformada (razón dualista), se demuestra que la dualidad institucional de la universidad -excelencia para unos pocos, precariedad para muchos- es una estrategia funcional del capital, no una desviación. El texto analiza la financiarización de la vida académica, el agotamiento del profesorado y la captura simbólica del conocimiento, sugiriendo que resistir es más que preservar: es reinventar la universidad desde lo ordinario. Al final, aboga por una crítica total, no moralista, sino comprometida con la insubordinación de las formas de vida y pensamiento en la periferia.

Palabras clave: Capital Ficticio; Crítica de la Razón Dualista; Dualidad Institucional; Superexplotación; Teoría Marxista de la Dependencia

INTRODUCTION

At a time when the public university seems torn between its history and present, between the utopia of emancipation and a precarious reality, a question persists: How to understand this institution that simultaneously forms and deforms, includes and excludes, promises and frustrates? This text is a reflection of an attempt to address this question from the perspective of two theoretical traditions that, although born in difficult times in Latin America, with distinct vocabularies, converge in their diagnosis of the regressive modernization of the capitalist periphery: Marxist Dependency Theory (MDT) and the Critique of Dualistic Reason. More than a confrontation between concepts, this is a gesture imbued with both affection and rigor, driven by the urgency of understanding the university as a historical subject within an order that produces and sustains dependency. It is not about conceiving it as a victim, but as an active agent in a system that reproduces inequalities and empties the meaning of thought, reducing intellectual work to a mere shadow of accumulation.

The articulation between Marxist Dependency Theory and the Critique of Dualistic Reason reveals that the crisis of public universities in peripheral countries is neither a contingent episode nor a distortion that can be remedied by good management or administrative reforms. It is an organic

component of dependent capitalism, in which the institutional forms of the university conform to the logic of super-exploitation and the calculated reproduction of inequality, making knowledge an instrument for legitimizing the hierarchies that sustain the very system that imprisons it.

By identifying overexploitation as the driving force of accumulation at the margins of the system, MDT shows how intellectual work is also inscribed in this logic, especially when education, research, and teaching become commodities under the control of financial capital. *The Critique of Dualistic Reason*, by revealing that the coexistence between excellence and precariousness is not a flaw but a strategy, demonstrates how the university naturalizes its own institutional division, legitimizing it under the guise of technocratic modernization.

Both traditions converge on a diagnosis that is simultaneously structural and symbolic. The university not only operates within the logic of dependence, but also helps to organize, rationalize, and reproduce it. The professor who multiplies their functions, who writes projects in series, who accounts for their work through indicators that say little about the value of what they produce, is embedded in a system of labor exploitation that operates according to the laws of capitalist dependence. It is precisely this dualistic institutional framework that allows this overexploitation to be experienced as a vocation, as a noble sacrifice, as an individual choice. At this point, dualistic reasoning transforms the structural violence of the university into a morality of performance, an ethics of renunciation, and a celebration of excellence.

Connecting these two viewpoints does more than create a parallel; it establishes a new analytical framework that allows us to view the university as a contradictory whole, where the accumulation of capital and symbolic domination are intertwined. This critical approach not only reveals the hidden mechanisms that perpetuate inequality within the university but also highlights the limitations of reforms that do not address the institution's dependence on these structures. The crisis facing universities, when viewed through this perspective, cannot be solved simply through efficiency, entrepreneurship, or pedagogical innovation. Instead, it calls for a radical epistemological shift—a complete critique of the existing system.

The convergence between Marxist Dependency Theory and a critical reading of dual rationality reveals that the collapse of public universities in the periphery of capitalism is neither an accident nor the result of administrative errors, but rather unveils a historical mechanism of subordinating knowledge to the imperatives of capital. It is an expression of a perverse rationality that combines technical modernization with social regression, excellence with precariousness, and science with commodification. This is a specific form of capitalist rationality that demands inequality as a condition for efficiency, and that transforms knowledge into a reputational asset, the professor into a self-managing entrepreneur, and the student into an indebted consumer of promises of the future.

Since the 1970s, when Francisco de Oliveira published his inaugural essay “Critique of Dualistic Reason” and Ruy Mauro Marini consolidated the Theory of Dependent Development (TDD) in works such as “Dialectics of Dependence,” the two traditions have run parallel, sharing diagnoses but without intersecting in a systematic theoretical articulation. Latin American literature, sometimes rich in incisive diagnoses of the development crisis, has rarely dared to bring together these two conceptual bodies as parts of the same critical anatomy of dependence. Surveys in databases such as SciELO, RedALyC, CAPES, and JSTOR confirm the gap: to date, no work has operated with both categories—superexploitation and institutional duality—in an integrated manner, committed to the construction of a critical ontology of the peripheral university.

What we examine is Oliveira's (2023) engagement with reality, which is limited to partial observations. Fundamental authors such as Jaime Osorio (2014), Jorge Veraza (2008), Leda Paulani (2008), and Eleutério Prado (2023) update the categories of their respective traditions, but without explicit conceptual cross-references. Although the studies by Frigotto (2010) and Sguissardi and Silva Júnior (2009) have advanced the critique of the commodification of education and the precariousness of teaching, they also fail to build bridges between the critique of institutional reason and the anatomy of dependency. The absence of such a theoretical articulation reveals a void that this text humbly and firmly aims to help fill.

The articulation between Marxist Dependency Theory and the Critique of Dualistic Reason reveals that the crisis of public universities in peripheral countries is neither a contingent episode nor a distortion that can be remedied by good management or administrative reforms. It is an organic component of dependent capitalism, in which the institutional forms of the university adapt to the logic of the super-exploitation of labor and the calculated reproduction of inequality, converting knowledge into an instrument for legitimizing the hierarchies that maintain the existing order.

By recognizing super-exploitation as the force that sustains accumulation at the margins of the system, the Marxist Theory of Dependency reveals how intellectual work is subsumed by this logic of domination, where teaching, research, and training come to conform to the value dictated by financial capital. The Critique of Dual Reason, by revealing that the coexistence between academic excellence and misery is not an error but a method, shows that the university has learned to manage its own fracture, converting inequality into an appearance of modernity and subjecting knowledge to the fetish of efficiency and meritocracy.

Both traditions converge on a diagnosis that is simultaneously structural and symbolic. The university not only operates within the logic of dependence, but it also helps to organize, rationalize, and reproduce it. The professor who multiplies their functions, who writes projects in series, who accounts for their work through indicators that say little about the value of what they produce, is embedded in a

system of labor exploitation that operates according to the laws of capitalist dependence. It is precisely this dualistic institutional framework that allows this overexploitation to be experienced as a vocation, as a noble sacrifice, as an individual choice. At this point, dualistic reasoning transforms the structural violence of the university into a morality of performance, an ethics of renunciation, and a celebration of excellence.

Articulating these two perspectives is more than establishing a parallel: it is producing a new analytical field, capable of treating the university as a contradictory totality, where the accumulation of capital and symbolic domination is intertwined. This critical operation not only illuminates the hidden mechanisms of inequality reproduction within the university, but also points to the limits of reforms that refuse to confront the institutional form of dependence. The university crisis, seen through this lens, cannot be resolved with efficiency, entrepreneurship, or pedagogical innovation. It demands a radical epistemological shift—a total critique.

In times when the public university seems torn between its history and its present, between the desire for emancipation and the reality of precariousness, a question persists and repeats itself in corridors, pedagogical meetings, and unbearable silences: how to understand this institution that simultaneously forms and deforms, includes and excludes, promises and frustrates, welcomes and abandons? This is not merely an institutional impasse, but a historical anguish, rooted in the concrete experience of professors, students, and staff who experience the university as a space of both potential and wound. This reflection arises from an attempt to confront this question from within, with the body and with theory, drawing on two critical traditions that, although originating in different contexts, converge in the analysis of the perverse structures of peripheral modernization: Marxist Dependency Theory (MDT) and the Critique of Dualistic Reason.

This approach is not fortuitous. It is the result of years of accumulation, reading, and listening to a malaise that finds no translation in the liberal categories of crisis, reform, or excellence. The crisis of the university is neither new nor episodic: it is constitutive of its place in the international division of labor and knowledge. The MDT, with its emphasis on super-exploitation, and the Critique of Dualistic Reason, with its denunciation of deformed modernization and the rational management of inequality, together offer a fruitful path to dismantle the mechanisms that naturalize academic precarity as technique, as merit, and as destiny.

More than a conceptual approach, this is a critical and sensitive investigation, guided by the urgency of understanding the university not as a passive subject, but as an active component of the architecture that sustains dependency. It is a reading that recognizes it, at the same time, as a territory of contradictions and as a space of struggle for the construction of the common good, where knowledge still resists its own capture. The university is traversed by opposing forces that manifest themselves in the

rhetoric of calls for proposals, in productivity metrics, in pedagogical relationships, and in the incomplete promises of the diploma. To think in light of Marxist Dependency Theory and the Critique of Dual Reason is to affirm that this institutional suffering is neither natural nor inexorable, and that it demands to be named with theoretical rigor and ethical responsibility.

THE THEORETICAL CORE OF MARXIST DEPENDENCY THEORY: CATEGORIES, BREAKS, AND UPDATES

The Marxist Theory of Dependency constitutes a historical and epistemological turning point within Latin American Marxism. It arises from a radical dissatisfaction with the stage-based and structuralist explanations of underdevelopment and proposes, with theoretical courage, that dependency is not external to capitalism, but rather its specific form of reproduction at the margins of the world system. This formulation breaks with readings that viewed backwardness as a residue of the past and affirms that dependency is a present and operative logic that organizes the economy, the State, and social life in peripheral formations.

The super-exploitation of labor is the central category of this tradition. In his classic formulation, Ruy Mauro Marini (1973) argues that, unlike the usual forms of surplus value extraction, in dependent countries, capital needs to go beyond the necessary working time and impose levels of intensity, extension, and wage reduction that systematically devalue human labor. This super-exploitation is not a deviation, but a mode of functioning of capitalism in subordinate regions: a condition of its subordinate insertion in the international division of labor.

Vânia Bambirra (1978) explores the concept of structural heterogeneity by demonstrating that the coexistence of modern and backward sectors is not an anomaly, but rather a functional arrangement that maintains the continuity of dependence. Theotônio dos Santos (1978) also develops a theory of the dependent state, describing it as a mediator of international capital's demands. This state assumes roles of legitimation, repression, and organization of subordination. Therefore, dependence is all-encompassing; it shapes the economic, political, and ideological spheres. Rather than being a mere absence, it manifests as a distorted presence.

The most radical point of the Dependency Theory, however, lies in Marini's work. In "Dialectics of Dependence," the author proposes an original theory of capital reproduction in the periphery, capable of articulating dependence as a historical and structural category. He shows that the mechanisms of exploitation are distinct from, but not external to, the capitalist mode of production: it is a totality articulated by internal inequalities, whose functionality is based on the transfer of value from the super-exploited labor of dependent countries to the centers.

In the last two decades, intellectuals such as Jaime Osorio (2014), Jorge Veraza (2008), Renildo Souza, Maurício Sabadini, Pedro Rossi, and Thiago Santos have updated Dependency Theory for the context of financialization, without abandoning its structural framework. The logic of fictitious capital, the dominance of investment funds, and the financialization of life make superexploitation even more intense and invisible. In this new scenario, dependency not only persists but becomes more sophisticated. It now operates through metrics, control technologies, student debt, and the conversion of knowledge into an abstract commodity. It is through this critical renewal that MDT remains a living and necessary tradition.

At this point, its connection with the Critique of Dualistic Reason becomes possible and fruitful. Both reject the developmentalist illusion and denounce that structural inequality is not a flaw, but a strategy. The MDT describes the anatomy of exploitation. The Critique of Dualistic Reason reveals its institutional physiology. Together, they offer not only categories for understanding, but reasons for transformation—and love for resistance.

THE CRITIQUE OF DUALISTIC REASON: INSTITUTIONAL FORM OF INEQUALITY AND PERVERSE REASON IN THE PERIPHERY

The Critique of Dualistic Reason, formulated by Francisco de Oliveira in 1972 and profoundly reformulated in the essay “The Platypus” (2003), constitutes one of the most incisive interventions in Brazilian social thought. Unlike approaches that explained underdevelopment as an absence or historical residue, Oliveira proposes a radical interpretive framework: the duality between the modern and the archaic is not a flaw or a transitory contradiction, but a functional constitution of peripheral capitalism. The archaic is maintained to guarantee the viability of the modern. Inequality is not a deficit, but a technology of accumulation. The reason that organizes this architecture is, therefore, a perverse reason—a rationality that plans and legitimizes the reproduction of inequality as if it were a neutral technique.

This reasoning is reflected in institutions, mechanisms, forms of government, and administrative arrangements. It is evident in public policies that create a duality of rights, in educational models that separate excellence from mass education, and in legal frameworks that ensure privilege under the pretense of universality. Francisco de Oliveira rejects any hopeful interpretation of the national-developmental state, instead highlighting its role as a manager of inequality. The critique of dualistic reasoning is not merely a formal exercise in epistemology; it serves as a concrete denunciation of the rationality of capital in peripheral regions, which transforms Brazil—and, by extension, Latin America—into an institutional “platypus”: a creature that survives precisely because it is misshapen.

In the 2000s, this critique was expanded by Leda Paulani, who identifies in the financialization of the economy the recoding of this dualistic logic. In “Brasil Delivery” (2008), she shows how the Brazilian

state transforms itself into an operator of global financial valorization, managing budgets under the control of the debt system and rating agencies. Paulani (2016) explains that fictitious capital does not eliminate structural duality, but deepens it: it converts inequality into a performance index, transforms precariousness into flexibility, and reconfigures the public university into a platform for the production of reputational assets. Peripheral modernity is, therefore, the modernity of indebtedness and simulation.

Eleutério Prado (2023) explores the troubling trend of knowledge being transformed into an exchangeable commodity. In his works, “The Financialization of Wealth and Fictitious Capital” and “The Metamorphoses of Labor in Capitalism”, Prado highlights how universities adopt the principles of capital's symbolic value. Scientific output is now evaluated based on impact metrics and turned into intangible assets. The concept of planned scarcity, previously criticized by Oliveira, re-emerges as a form of academic competition: only a few are recognized and rewarded, while many others are overlooked. Professors, who are ostensibly granted autonomy, end up managing their own burnout. While dualistic thinking persists, it adapts its language but retains its fundamental nature.

This set of contributions strengthens the hypothesis that dualistic reason is, in the 21st century, the rationality of fictitious capital applied to peripheral institutions. The modern and the archaic not only coexist: they co-produce and mutually legitimize each other. The public university, when analyzed from this perspective, is an exemplary device of this duality: a place of excellence and misery, of knowledge production and subjective annihilation, of symbolic resistance and systemic reproduction. This is why articulating the Critique of Dualistic Reason with the MDT becomes not only possible, but necessary. The anatomy of exploitation and the physiology of inequality are intertwined: there is no value extracted without a form that legitimizes it, nor is there an institutional form without a logic of exploitation behind it.

THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY AS A PLACE OF CONVERGENCE BETWEEN SUPER-EXPLOITATION AND INSTITUTIONAL DUALITY

Articulating Marxist Dependency Theory with the Critique of Dualistic Reason allows us to understand the public university not as a bastion of autonomy threatened by external forces, but as a central mediation of the dependent logic and dualistic rationality that organizes social reproduction in the periphery. While MDT reveals that knowledge is part of the value transfer chain—training personnel for central capital and adapting curricula to the demands of global markets—Oliveira's critique clarifies that this submission occurs through a distorted institutional framework that legitimizes inequality as a technical criterion.

The Reuni program, rankings, productivity metrics, evaluation agencies, and academic productivism operate as mechanisms that convert teaching work into symbolic surplus value and the

university into a reputational asset. The quantitative expansion of higher education, far from democratizing access, consolidates a dual system: centers of excellence with a high concentration of resources coexist with massified, underfunded, and precarious courses. This unequal coexistence is not a failure of implementation, but a structural logic of peripheral modernization. Excellence is sustained by precariousness, and both reproduce themselves in the name of institutional efficiency.

In this context, the professor is an exemplary figure of this capture: innovation, productivity, and internationalization are demanded of them, while they are denied time, material resources, and subjective recognition. Students are treated as clients or as raw material to be shaped by the demands of the market. The university ceases to be a space for the creation of knowledge and begins to be an instrument of global competitiveness, covered by metrics and discourses of excellence that disguise its subordination. Everything is carried out under the guise of technical neutrality, meritocracy, and efficient administration, where instrumental rationality replaces the formative and ethical meaning of intellectual life.

The logic described in the Critique of Dualistic Reason is termed “rational perversity,” which refers to a type of social organization that turns inequality into a measure of effectiveness. Similarly, the MDT exposes the issue of intellectual and symbolic overexploitation, where immaterial labor begins to face the same levels of exhaustion and invisibility that have historically characterized manual labor in marginalized areas.

In this scenario, the public university becomes the quintessential institutional platypus: it combines excellence and misery, science and subservience, resistance and docility, without ever allowing one dimension to overcome or eliminate the other. It functions this way because it needs to function this way—and that is why its critique must be total, loving, and uncompromising.

BETWEEN THE CIVILIZING PROJECT AND THE MANAGEMENT OF PRECARIETY: THE HISTORICAL FORMATION OF THE BRAZILIAN UNIVERSITY

The Brazilian public university, contrary to the founding myth that presents it as an Enlightenment project for the formation of ruling elites, emerges and consolidates as a hesitant, belated institution structured by contradictions that, from its origins, are hallmarks of dependent capitalism. Unlike the European model—where the university, at different times, played an organizing role in national culture and the formation of the state bureaucracy—or the American model—focused on the articulation between science, capital, and technological innovation—the Brazilian model arises under the sign of importation, incompleteness, and duality. It is a form of university education marked by foundational tensions: between the patrimonialist state and diffuse social demands; between the modernizing civilizing project and the structural authoritarianism of the elites; between institutional expansion and restricted access; between proclaimed autonomy and chronic budgetary dependence.

This structural ambiguity is closely linked to Brazil's position in the international division of labor and knowledge. The Brazilian university is not simply the product of progressive political intentions or corporate conflicts. Instead, it serves as an institutional mediation of a historical process of conservative modernization (Oliveira, 2003). In this process, the adoption of modern institutional forms—such as the university, the judiciary, and the electoral system—does not aim at fundamentally transforming society; rather, it seeks to preserve it under new appearances. The concept of the university, which was introduced late from the European model, became nationalized as a functional necessity for the oligarchic state and later for the developmentalist state. This was necessary to train technical personnel without making substantial changes to the existing structure of power and property.

From this perspective, the Brazilian university can be understood as an institution of a dual nature. On the one hand, it is a civilizing promise, dedicated to the creation of knowledge, the preservation of critical reason, and the formation of consciences capable of questioning the world. On the other hand, it acts as a mechanism of social reproduction, disciplining bodies, regulating trajectories, and converting historical inequalities into legitimized educational inequalities. In this intersection, knowledge becomes a site of struggle between emancipation and submission, revealing that the university is, at the same time, a haven of possibilities and an instrument of containment. The coexistence of these two dimensions—emancipatory and functional—is not accidental. It constitutes the Brazilian form of the public university: an institutional platypus that carries traces of the Enlightenment project and the logic of exclusion.

This logic is historically expressed in the dual formation of the higher education system: federal universities with a vocation for excellence coexist with isolated, poorly funded institutions, with precarious evening courses and limited access to scientific production. This duality is not limited to institutions: it permeates labor relations, curricula, forms of evaluation, and the very meanings of knowledge. Highly selective courses, such as medicine, law, and engineering, function as showcases of merit; evening teacher training courses, with working students, function as compensatory policies without structural compensation. This division reflects, in university language, the super-exploitation of labor in dependent capitalism.

Throughout the 20th century, the reforms that expanded the system—such as the Capanema Reform in the 1930s, the University Reform of 1968, and REUNI starting in 2007—did not break with this dualistic model, but rather rationalized it. The 1968 Reform, influenced by the North American model, instituted academic productivism, departmentalization, and the figure of the professor-researcher as a meritocratic ideal, while simultaneously maintaining the exclusion of broad social sectors. REUNI, while expanding access and decentralizing higher education, operated through the intensification of teaching work, the flexibilization of employment relationships, and the verticalization of academic

management. In both cases, the promise of democratization was accompanied by an intensification of precariousness.

The Brazilian public university has historically been tasked with fulfilling contradictory roles: educating the elite while integrating the poor, producing cutting-edge science alongside teaching fundamental skills, and serving as a center of excellence while also being a refuge for marginalized youth. These demands do not cancel each other out; rather, they shape a model of the university that organizes its inherent inequalities as a basis for its functioning. This contradiction, deeply rooted in the institution's historical formation, helps us understand why the public university today is both a space for transformation and a means of perpetuating dependence.

The connection between Marxist Dependency Theory and the Critique of Dualistic Reason is not simply a dialogue between different theoretical traditions; it represents a radical call for a comprehensive critique of the university system in countries with dependent capitalism. This thorough critique is neither a rushed synthesis nor a superficial layering of ideas. Instead, it is a rigorous effort to develop a holistic understanding that does not separate the economic from the institutional, the symbolic from the material, or form from substance. It is considered total because it exposes the fact that superexploitation occurs not only on the factory floor but also in libraries and classrooms. It is total because it reveals that technocratic rationality is not neutral; rather, it serves as a tool for organizing and perpetuating inequality.

The financialization of higher education in Brazil is not just a trend within the private sector; it has also fundamentally affected public universities. This shift has transformed these institutions into platforms for symbolically reinforcing and legitimizing inequality. Since the 2000s, particularly with the growing emphasis on evaluation, ranking, and internationalization, public universities have started to adopt practices characteristic of fictitious capital. This includes treating knowledge as an intangible asset, converting academic prestige into a form of exchange value, and reorganizing teaching efforts around measurable impacts. As a result, the essence of the public good is being eroded from within. What was once defined by social value—such as the production of independent knowledge, critical thinking, and dedication to national culture—is now being reshaped by criteria of symbolic profitability. This shift positions universities within a global market focused on reputation and performance indicators.

This functional mutation does not occur abruptly, but as a progressive reconfiguration of university management practices, parameters of excellence, and funding logics. Public calls for proposals, funding agencies, and evaluation systems have come to prioritize quantifiable productivity criteria, instrumental internationalization, and links with the private sector. CAPES, CNPq, and even the State Research Foundations have adopted evaluation models that disregard local specificities, working conditions, and the epistemological diversity of the different fields of knowledge. The result is a process

of forced homogenization, which prioritizes profitable topics, exportable formats, and career paths adjusted to the logic of excellence measured by scores. Knowledge ceases to be considered a public good and begins to function as a reputational asset.

Financialization is more than just a financing model; it represents a rationality that transforms the entire structure of the university. Public universities are increasingly organizing their institutional development plans, postgraduate policies, and criteria for career advancement around targets, rankings, impact indices, and the promise of symbolic returns. This rationality operates through a focus on anticipation: it prioritizes potential future reputational gains and penalizes anything that does not yield immediate prestige. Critical areas of study, such as the humanities, knowledge grounded in local contexts, and long-term projects, are often viewed as inefficient. This epistemic reorganization coincides with the precarization of intellectual work and the depoliticization of discussions concerning the public function of the university.

This process can only be understood within the framework of fictitious capital, as discussed by Leda Paulani (2008, 2016) and Eleutério Prado (2011). Valorization now occurs not through direct production but through the promise of future value. For instance, a highly regarded article can substitute for the social impact of research; an international partnership can guarantee prestige even if it is disconnected from local realities; and a patent can hold more value than a critical thesis. Consequently, the university acts as a symbolic mediator of capital: it transforms knowledge into prestige, prestige into funding, and funding back into more prestige. This cycle is reinforced by an evaluation system that rewards conformity and punishes dissent. In this context, financialization not only manages scarcity but also disciplines individual perspectives and redefines what qualifies as knowledge.

The decline of the university as a public good is not only evident in its financial instability or the deterioration of its infrastructure. More importantly, it shows through the shift in its symbolic purpose. The promise of universality, commitment to critical thinking and social development, is being replaced by narratives focused on excellence, competitiveness, and efficiency. Business language, private management strategies, and the demands of productivity have become commonplace in academic settings. Rectors are turning into managers, professors are becoming entrepreneurs, and students are viewed as clients or investors of their time and money in pursuit of "professional futures." The university loses its public character not because it is no longer free, but because it stops being a space for the collective development of a societal vision.

This process has devastating effects on teaching work. The intensification of workloads, the multiplication of tasks, the pressure for results, constant surveillance, and the logic of ranking not only overload bodies but also erode the meaning of intellectual work. The university becomes a place of illness, self-exploitation, and self-blame. Professors are led to internalize the logic of failure as an

individual fault, when in reality they are experiencing the contradictions of a system that demands excellence under conditions of scarcity. Productivity becomes a moral obligation; fatigue, a sign of commitment; exhaustion, a synonym for merit.

At this point, the articulation between MDT and the Critique of Dualist Reason reveals its analytical strength. The financialization of higher education should be read not as a neoliberal deviation, but as a new form of dependence. The peripheral state, as already diagnosed by Marini, continues to operate as a mediator of the demands of international capital, now reconfigured as reputational capital. Dualist reason is reorganized in the form of governance: it combines administrative archaisms with digital control instruments, material precariousness with discourses of innovation, scarcity with the demand for results. The public university, in this logic, no longer belongs to itself: it has become a device for symbolic valorization subordinated to the center.

Therefore, total critique is comprehensive and complete. It understands that the precariousness of academic work does not stem from chance, but constitutes a structural part of the system; that academic productivism does not express excellence, but rather a way of deepening exploitation, converting knowledge into a commodity and thought into measurable performance; that university internationalization is not only openness, but a subordinate adherence to prestige markets. It is a critique that looks at the exhausted professor and sees a dispossessed worker; that listens to the indebted student and recognizes the intellectual overexploitation under the regime of fictitious capital. It is a critique that accurately names what institutional rhetoric tries to conceal.

By uniting the MDT and the Critique of Dualistic Reason, an analytical field is forged that can show that the university not only reflects the logic of dependence: it embodies it, disseminates it, and rationalizes it. Therefore, it is not enough to reform the university. It is necessary to rebel against it, because repeating it feeds capital. It is urgent to reinvent it in the places where the common still breathes, where knowledge does not bow to calculation nor the desire to understand surrenders to the accounting of metrics. Total critique is not born of despair, but of a gesture of radical tenderness, aware that what is at stake is not the fate of an institution, but the very idea of humanity. The platypus university may yet learn to move against the current, to refuse the intellectual training that domesticates it. For this, theoretical courage is required, capable of questioning time, attentive listening to the ruins, and a firm commitment to those who, even relegated to the margins, continue to believe in the transformative power of dreams.

APPROACHES TO A TOTAL CRITIQUE

The articulation between Marxist Dependency Theory and the Critique of Dualistic Reason does not propose a mere dialogue between distinct theoretical traditions, but a radical call for a total critique of the university in countries with dependent capitalism. This total critique is neither a hasty synthesis nor an artificial superposition of categories. On the contrary, it is the rigorous construction of a comprehensive understanding that refuses to separate the economic from the institutional, the symbolic from the material, the form from the substance. It is total because it denounces that superexploitation occurs not only on the factory floor, but also in libraries and classrooms; total because it shows that technocratic rationality is not neutral, but an instrument for organizing inequality.

The financialization of the Brazilian public university is not limited to institutional transformations or budgetary reconfigurations: it directly impacts the work of professors and the modes of subjectivation that organize university life. The professor-researcher, a figure previously associated with the long duration of reflection, intellectual autonomy, and full dedication to the formation of individuals, is now transformed into a self-manager, an agent of results, an entrepreneur of reputation. This mutation is neither neutral nor spontaneous: it is a direct product of the dualistic rationality and the logic of overexploitation that structure dependent capitalism, now under the hegemony of fictitious capital. Teaching work becomes, at the same time, invisible in its complexity and measurable in its productivity, permeated by symbolic control mechanisms that naturalize precariousness as commitment, and illness as individual responsibility.

The intensification of university work occurs through three simultaneous avenues: the increase in formal demands (publications, supervision, reports, international collaborations), the fragmentation of work time and space (remote teaching, endless meetings, constant availability), and the dissolution of the boundaries between professional and personal life. Faculty members now work continuously, in a regime of diffuse presence and constant control, managing deadlines, calls for proposals, and performance indicators as if their subjectivity were a spreadsheet. This management is not merely an adaptation to new tools: it is a form of capturing existence, transforming thought into a task and the pedagogical relationship into productivity.

This reconfiguration of work brings with it a harsh and often unspoken emotional burden. Feelings of inadequacy, anxiety about performance, guilt for not meeting goals, and a sense of isolation become integral to the university experience. Professors not only work harder; they also feel a personal responsibility for their inability to cope. As the university evolves into a space focused on performative excellence, it fosters a culture of constant comparison. In this environment, each curriculum vitae serves as a tool for subjective surveillance. Peer review, impact metrics, institutional rankings, and annual reports

become sophisticated forms of symbolic control that internalize a competitive mindset and erode solidarity among colleagues.

Precarization extends beyond just contractual relationships; these patterns reveal the harshness of the model. Temporary contracts, a lack of competitive examinations, exhausting workloads, inadequate infrastructure, and multiple administrative tasks assigned to a few faculty members create the daily reality for thousands of professors at public universities. However, there is a more subtle—and harder to define—aspect at play. Precariousness becomes internalized. A precarious professor is not solely one who works without job security or under poor conditions; it also includes those who, even when tenured, find themselves influenced by a mindset of scarcity, urgency, and fragmentation. They may begin to question the meaning of their work, yet they continue to engage in it out of fear, loyalty, inertia, or love.

At this point, the “Critique of Dualistic Reason” provides a powerful insight. The rationality that underpins our university system is not just bureaucratic but also ideological. It reinterprets inequality as a technical standard, turns exhaustion into commitment, and legitimizes the destruction of individuals as the cost of achieving excellence. Professors are not only under pressure; they are also encouraged to desire greater productivity, to take pride in their overwhelming workloads, and to view self-care as a deviation from duty. Dualistic reason operates deep within individuals, promoting an ethic of constant self-improvement and a morality of silent sacrifice. This makes it incredibly difficult to resist, as the underlying violence is masked by recognition, functional advancement, and academic prestige.

The Marxist Theory of Dependency helps to explain the phenomenon of super-exploitation in academic work, particularly in the context of dependent capitalism. In this scenario, academic labor is a prime avenue for extracting symbolic value amid conditions of structural scarcity. Knowledge, as a productive force, is subjected to the process of valorization, yet the individuals who generate this knowledge do not have their rights recognized. This leads to a transfer of reputational value from the periphery to the centers of power, resulting in the appropriation of intellectual capabilities through funding networks, international proposals, unequal partnerships, and academic journals that function as colonial filters. Scholars from peripheral regions, despite being productive, are not seen as autonomous producers of knowledge. Instead, they are relegated to a subordinate role within the global academic circuit, serving primarily as executors, collaborators, or as part of the intellectual labor force.

This situation fundamentally creates a divided subject. On one hand, there is the professor who resists, defends the public good, builds relationships, and promotes critical thinking. On the other hand, there is the professor who submits, internalizes the logic of indicators, and accepts productivism as inevitable. Often, these two figures coexist within the same individual, shaping the same trajectory and daily life. In this context, teaching becomes an experience of dissociation: one loves what one does but

resents the manner in which one is compelled to do it. Therefore, criticism must address not only the structures themselves but also the forms of subjectivation. A vibrant public university requires dignified teaching work, and dignified teaching work can only exist if we break free from the self-destructive productivity logic that currently defines what it means— and what it doesn't mean— to be a professor.

The university, which is the heir to the platypus, may eventually learn that swimming against the current is not just an act of resistance; it is a way to remember who we were and what we still have the potential to become. This journey requires intellectual courage, sensitivity to the times, and a dedication to those who, even in the midst of ruins, continue to envision the future as if they were kindling small embers in the dark. To think thoroughly, without compromise and without fear, is the only way to uphold the dream that sustains us and gives meaning to the very idea of a university.

The Brazilian public university, despite being subjected to intense processes of financialization, precarization, and symbolic capture, continues to be a space of resistance, conflict, and innovation. This paradox should not be viewed as an accidental ambiguity but rather as an inherent characteristic of an institution historically shaped by the tensions of dependent capitalism. The university is neither a neutral ground nor simply a colonized entity. It serves simultaneously as an apparatus of the State and a venue for the production of dissent; it mediates the logic of accumulation while also being a refuge for everyday acts of resistance; it administers inequality yet also generates radical critiques of that very inequality. Its historical function is contradictory, and it is from this contradiction that an internal critique can be developed, without falling into nihilism or the illusions of mere reform.

University resistance has manifested in various forms over the past few decades. This includes faculty and student strikes, occupations, public denunciations, open letters, parliamentary efforts to defend education, critical extension movements, emancipatory pedagogical practices, insurgent research groups, autonomous scientific journals, and spaces for care and listening. Together, these elements create a fragile but persistent fabric of real struggle. However, it's important to recognize that this resistance has become increasingly confined, fragmented, and redefined by new forms of institutional governance. The university, by adopting a performance-oriented approach, tends to absorb critical actions, neutralizing them through symbolic validation, appropriation for specific grant proposals, or overlapping agendas. In this context, institutional resistance risks becoming aestheticized, bureaucratized, or depoliticized.

At this point, it is crucial to make a fundamental distinction: criticism from within an institution can only be effective if it challenges the limitations imposed by that very institution. This does not mean denying the importance of advocating for budgets, labor rights, and student retention, issues that are urgent and necessary. Rather, it means understanding that these concerns must be linked to a deeper critique, one that actively questions and deconstructs the prevailing structure of the university. The

danger of focusing solely on institutional resistance is that it can become merely about maintaining existing frameworks. This often results in fighting to preserve what is already unsustainable, defending structures that perpetuate inequalities, and holding onto spaces that have lost their potential for emancipation. Criticism from within requires more than this; it demands the courage to acknowledge that, in many instances, what currently exists needs to be transcended, not just funded.

The Brazilian university serves as an institutional mediator of dependence, reinforcing its subordinate role in the pursuit of value while presenting itself as neutral. Resisting within this system means challenging the prevailing standards of excellence, productivity, and depoliticized innovation. It involves breaking away from the fetishism of evaluations, rejecting the moralization of teaching practices, and not passively accepting indicators as the sole measure of truth. Consequently, it requires ongoing efforts of epistemological disobedience, the collective building of knowledge grounded in local contexts, the recognition of historically marginalized voices, and the steadfast defense of the time needed for thoughtful consideration against the pressure for immediate results.

In this sense, the articulation between MDT and the Critique of Dualistic Reason offers powerful tools for formulating a critique from within. MDT reminds us that there is no neutrality in the knowledge produced in contexts of structural subalternity: all knowledge bears the marks of the position from which it is generated, and peripheral universities, even the most prestigious ones, operate under the logic of global subordination. The Critique of Dualistic Reason, in turn, shows that this subordination is not only structural but also symbolic: it infiltrates the ways of thinking, teaching, evaluating, and relating. Dualistic reason is alive in the regulations, in the university councils, in the institutional development plans, and, above all, in the silences that organize what can and cannot be said.

Overcoming institutional resistance requires redefining the university as a space for creating the common good. This does not mean idealizing a new, perfect institution; rather, it involves building, within the gaps of the old one, forms of coexistence, research, and teaching that reject the logic of planned scarcity. Examples of such initiatives include study groups without funding, critical outreach programs lacking visibility, mentorship that listens without judgment, self-managed seminars, and pedagogical practices that do not conform to the official system. Although these spaces may be small, they represent breaches in the binary logic of the institution. It is through these breaches that new possibilities can emerge. Criticism from within the institution is, therefore, a continuous practice for those who understand that mere resistance is not enough; it is essential to reimagine the structure and purpose of the university.

Now more than ever, it is essential to reaffirm that the public university should not be limited to its current role. We must challenge its very meaning. Defending the university is not just about preserving its institutional existence; it is also about ensuring that it can be something different from what capitalism

wants it to be. The university must once again become a space for fostering freedom rather than conformity. This transformation can only occur if we have the courage to critically examine, from within, everything that hinders our collective ability to think. Ultimately, what is at stake is the possibility of a thought that promotes life rather than domination.

CONCLUSION

The crisis facing Brazilian public universities, when viewed through the lens of Marxist Dependency Theory and the Critique of Dualistic Reason, is not merely a temporary setback or a passing trend. Instead, it represents a structural manifestation of the contradictions inherent in capitalist modernization within peripheral countries. Historically, the university has not been a uniform space for either liberation or total control; rather, it has always existed as an ambiguous social institution, shaped by various temporalities and rationalities. To move beyond the critical divide that splits our understanding of universities, between a longing for the past and the technocratic focus of the present, it is essential to view the institution as a dialectical synthesis of dependency. It serves as a site where both the reproduction of inequality and the creation of critique are held in tension.

The Brazilian public university, as it has developed since the 20th century, is not an anomaly; rather, it responds organically to forms of dependent accumulation. It fits into a peripheral structure that serves as a space for producing subordinate knowledge, functional training, and the institutional rationalization of inequality. In other words, the university is not merely influenced by dependent capitalism; it is shaped by it. What is distinctive about university rationality is its operation within an imaginary of autonomy, excellence, and neutrality, even while it is being instrumentalized by mechanisms of capital valorization, the hierarchization of knowledge, and the expropriation of academic labor.

The Marxist Theory of Dependency introduces the concept of superexploitation of labor power as the foundation for accumulation in peripheral contexts. This perspective helps us understand how intellectual work, despite appearing prestigious, is often subjected to structural devaluation. In this context, the public university serves as a venue where this logic is applied. Professors, researchers, and students endure a form of subjective, intellectual, and institutional superexploitation: they are expected to produce more with fewer resources, compete with one another for limited funding, and internalize failures as personal shortcomings. Additionally, superexploitation also has moral and emotional dimensions. This creates a sense of exhaustion that is presented under the guise of striving for excellence.

The Critique of Dualistic Reason helps us recognize that this unequal structure does not function transparently. In fact, the university perpetuates inequality through a harmful rationality that disguises institutional duality as meritocracy, treats academic apartheid as a mark of excellence, and turns the gap between institutions into a management strategy. Dualistic thinking has shaped Brazilian universities since

their inception—creating a divide between elite faculties and night courses for the less privileged, between prestigious research centers and makeshift campuses, and between well-funded programs and departments in disarray. The university reflects the dual nature of the country; however, the critique urges us to reject this duality as an inevitable fate.

To overcome this critical divide, we must abandon two complementary illusions. The first is the idealization of the university as a pure institution, viewed as a bastion of knowledge free from the influence of capital. The second is the nihilistic perspective that regards the university as irreparably lost, merely an empty stronghold of neoliberal technocracy. Both positions neglect the work of contradiction: the first one ignores the university's co-optation, while the second denies its potential for resistance. Consequently, both attitudes lead to demobilization. This essay proposes a different critical approach: to acknowledge that the university, even when shaped by dependence and duality, contains living tensions that can be mobilized towards an alternative vision.

This approach is not based on voluntarism; it is grounded in a concrete analysis of structural mediations. Although the university functions within the framework of capitalism, it still retains areas of relative autonomy, sites of symbolic struggle, and networks of solidarity that can lead to significant change. The goal is not to ignore institutional capture, but to identify its weaknesses. Teaching work, even when precarious, still has the potential to be transformative. Similarly, research, even when driven by market logic, can produce subversive knowledge. Teaching, despite being influenced by platforms and reporting requirements, can still create opportunities for critical thinking. These potentials are not guaranteed; they must be actively pursued. Therefore, they require a comprehensive critique—one that goes beyond mere denunciation and also focuses on constructive solutions.

The dialectical synthesis of dependence is not a completed process; rather, it is an ongoing critical task. This task involves rearticulating categories, dismantling hierarchies, and reconstituting the meaning of the common within an institution that has been hollowed out. The university should be viewed as a field of struggle—neither as a monument to be defended nor as a relic to be forgotten. The effort to redefine its meaning requires rejecting productivism, denouncing financialization, questioning the validity of metrics, and reconstructing the connections between research, teaching, and society. Most importantly, it calls for the reinvention of teaching practices and the insubordination of knowledge. At this juncture, critique evolves into a horizon for future possibilities.

The task of overcoming the critical divide between an idealized past and a fragmented present, demands a theoretical and political reconstruction that dares to name the impasses of the Brazilian university. It is not enough to defend it in the abstract: we must ask what kind of university we want, who it serves, who finances it, who governs it, and who silences it. And this will only be possible if, alongside the struggle for budget, infrastructure, and professional recognition, there is also a struggle for meaning.

The university needs to return to being a space for thought, for disagreement, for collective invention, and not for the management of results.

The MDT and the Critique of Dualistic Reason, articulated as analytical frameworks, offer the foundations for this reconstruction. Together, they unveil the forms of domination and indicate the paths to overcoming them. Dependence and duality are not partial diagnoses: they are the very grammar of the peripheral university. Only by recognizing this, it is possible to build another language.

If a total critique reveals how the public university has been historically shaped by the logic of dependence and dualistic rationality, the next task is not resignation, but reinvention. Reconstructing the university as a space of the common good requires shifting the focus from abstract denunciation to concrete practices of resistance, solidarity, and intellectual creation that persist even under capture. Amidst financialization, precarization, and symbolic emptying, the daily gesture of those who teach, research, organize, listen, and care still pulsates. It is in this often-invisible gesture that the openings for another horizon emerge.

The common university is not a nostalgic return to a lost idea, but the slow and insurgent construction of an institution rooted in popular knowledge, in excluded territories, and in the struggles for dignity. To this end, it is necessary to reject the dichotomy between institutional autonomy and productive integration, paving the way for a new logic of valuation: one that recognizes the time of thought, the value of silence, the importance of dissent, and the centrality of connection. Reinventing the university means disobeying the metrics of capital, subverting productivism, and affirming that thinking, with others, for others, among others, still matters.

This reinvention will not happen from above, nor will it come from official decrees or rankings. It emerges from below, in the interstices, in the collectives, in the bonds forged between teachers and students who reject the logic of exhaustion and insist on the dignity of thought. The common university will be, if it is to be, the work of those who have not given up.

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Submitted: 09/04/2025

Preprint: 09/01/2025

Approved: 11/13/2025

Section Editor: Suzana dos Santos Gomes

DATA AVAILABILITY DECLARATION

The content of the research text is within the manuscript.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1 – Project coordinator, active participation in data analysis, and review of the final writing.

Author 2 – Data collection, data analysis, and writing of the text.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.