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## WHY IS HIGHER EDUCATION CALLED HIGHER EDUCATION? - KNOWING A LITTLE ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THIS EDUCATION MODE IN BRAZIL

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**Abstract:** The objective of this article is to provide a brief historical contextualization of Higher Education in Brazil. ES was directly affected by Portuguese colonization, since it was with the arrival of the, until then, Royal Family (1808) that this type of education was officially established in the country. Colonized lands and education, rights and access historically restricted to a privileged portion of the population. Initially, the undergraduate diploma was a tool for social advancement, which in a certain way encouraged segregation and inequality between people. Who attended higher education in the past?

The sons of the planters, the nobles. And today, in 2023? Me, you, we... What does this have to do with the composition of the name's "education" and "higher"? The construction of this text follows the theoretical-methodological approach of the Actor-Network Theory, proposed by Bruno Latour and collaborators, and is written based on the four authors' affect on the theme and the bibliographic material researched along the way. Currently, the challenge of access to Higher Education relies on affirmative action programs in the search for the democratization of this place of education for the entire population that wishes to be there. However, the practical effectiveness of such programs needs to continue to be studied and applied in order to make Higher Education a real possibility for everyone.

**Keywords:** University education; Actor-Network Theory; Democratization.

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever stopped to think about why Higher Education (HE) has the adjective "superior" accompanying the noun "teaching"? Superior to what or who? This term - superior - brings the idea of hierarchy, superiority, which makes us question who or what would be "below" the universities. Who are these

people in the supposedly upper and lower parts? Who accesses and who stays in these teaching places? The objective of this article is to provide a brief historical contextualization of universities in Brazil and follow the trails that this research calls for, in the theoretical-methodological approach of the Actor-Network Theory (ANT), as proposed by Bruno Latour (2001, 2012) and collaborators. This is an ethnographic methodology developed in the afeTAR laboratory (TSALLIS et al., 2022) that invites us to follow actants - human and non-human - across the network, seeking to describe their bonds and affects; From this we will discover possible relationships between the words "teaching" and "higher".

This text is derived from studies in ES and constitutes one of the chapters of the doctoral thesis of one of the authors of the article. The afeTAR laboratory is a Technological Development Unit (UDT) linked to the Psychology Institute of 'Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro' (UERJ), to which the doctoral study is linked. It is in laboratory ethnography, as Bruno Latour (2001) teaches us, that meanings are produced by experience, therefore, the work is procedural. We consider that our laboratory is the text.

It is not exclusive to a knowing subject who captures a given and passive reality, but a fact manufactured by narratives, which bring concepts summoned by the material practices that support them. For the author of the thesis, for example, it is a field of interest to focus on the meanings of education.

For TAR, the materiality of what is experienced directly participates in the production of knowledge. For the thesis studies, for example, the author Danielly Pierre Procópio da Rocha, in her work, carried out a virtual ethnography in dialogue with Christine Hine (HINE, 2004). Bruno Latour (2001, 2012), with his proposal for a symmetrical anthropology, invites us to

follow how human and non-human actors, or actants, as he calls them, engender and perform the field of research. For ANT, all actants in the field have the same importance, with no distinction between humans and non-humans, since they have agency - they produce effects in the field. It's about following the actors in action, mapping their links in the world and thus understanding that a network is movement.

What do we mean by this? In this text, we will describe the links, which are the points that connect actants to the possibility of circulating, of acting, in a better understanding of the meanings linked to ES. For this reflection we built, with many hands, and also, joining hands with other authors, who came to us through texts, we chose reference articles to studies on the topic, a choice that is the result of the authors' process of focusing on writing, analyzing the field of the word "superior". In this mode, the text is the functional analogue of a laboratory, it is the place where we carry out experiments, which we call torsion tests, which, as postulated by Alexandra Cleopatre Tsallis and Gabriela Rizo, are the layers of descriptions that border the writing in the sense of making them overflow the field in written lines (TSALLIS, RIZO, 2010, p. 231). At the end of the text we discuss the effects of the word "superior".

When we talk about ES, what and who are we talking about? Affects that connect to the idea of buildings with classrooms for students, a teacher's room, a writing board, a table and chair facing many desks. Corridor with people passing by, encounters and disagreements, sharing and singularities. Classes and more classes sharing and building knowledge, assessments, passing or failing, so that after a few years, you will have the much-desired diploma. What's superior about that?

Following the etymology of the term "superior", we invite the actant dictionary

and find its origin from the Latin superior. oris, meaning above, highest of all; In the dictionary it can be found under two relevant definitions:

Adjective - In a higher place; highest: top step. Which reaches the maximum degree; high: temperature higher than normal. That surpasses others in something specific: superior talent. Which has its origin in an authority: superior orders. Who is better than another in relation to the same thing: a painter superior to his contemporaries. Who has more authority than another: superior judge. Of distinct, different content; unusual. (SUPERIOR.DICIO, 2023).

How can an adjective change the meaning of the word so much? It seems cliché, especially because the meaning of adjectives is the same, but when referring to "Superior" we have the feeling that it is something that goes beyond, that creates hierarchies, demarcating boundaries regarding people's supposed place. Another definition we found is grammatically classified as:

Masculine noun - Person who exercises authority over another. Person who heads a religious community, a convent. On a time, scale, the one that is closest to the present time. University education. University education or related to such education. Be superior to. Don't let yourself be dominated, get hit by. (SUPERIOR.DICIO. 2023).

We consider this search in the online dictionary as a new actant: the internet. Even though in this work we will primarily follow the meanings of "superior" referring to education, the questions and provocations that emerge, when we look at the wide range of meanings of the term, give us clues as to how it can affect and be affected by the bonds established. with him.

The theme of this work was chosen at a bench meeting at the afeTAR Laboratory. We are part of the International Platform for Science, Technology and Innovation in Health

as a supporting organization and we count on the partnership of researchers, undergraduate and postgraduate students, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other universities inside and outside from Brazil. We develop projects and have many ideals and desires to build a world where we can fit in and exist in different ways. For example, here I illustrate one of the dialogues that we created for this work, from so many hands, where from the excerpt “Who prepares us for higher education? Why superior?” the comments were born:



MONIQUE BRTO  
17:23 12 of

I'm always confused by the term 'higher education' and when I read it here, I thought: hmmm, maybe this is the most interesting place I've ever seen to discuss this. if you want, obviously, if that's or become a question for you.



Dandara Chiara  
19:06 Apr 12

Wow, I loved the thought Mo!



Alexandra Tsallis  
08:11 13 Apr.

Very good indeed!



Jackeline Aires  
15:06 Apr 13th.

I just fell in love with it, I had never thought about that!

**Image 1.** Comments woven into one of the versions of the thesis under construction by one of the authors of this article, where the idea of writing about the term higher education originated - in April 2023. In the image, with a white background, we see four icons with the names “MONIQUE BRITO”, who comments: I’m always confused by the term “higher education” and when I read it here, I thought: hmmm, maybe this is the most interesting place I’ve ever seen to discuss this... if you want, obviously, if this is or become a question for you... Then “DANDARA CHIARA” responds: Wow, I loved the idea Moni! Next, “ALEXANDRA TSALLIS” says: Very good indeed! And later “JACKELINE AIRES” comments: I just stuck it together, I had never thought about that! “Vc”, on the internet, is a widely used abbreviation that refers to “you”.

And our experience of affectation makes us write this article. The term “make-do”, by Bruno Latour (2001, p. 321), tells us about this place that inspires production. Most interesting place we’ve ever seen to problematize this “superior” thing? Yes! We are in ES, we are committed to the joy of being able to encourage social engagement and invest in the innovation of ethically situated scientific processes, therefore we think it is pertinent to better unveil the meanings linked to this. We also believe that this text is a great place to take this discussion public. Our affectAR methodology is freely inspired by Actor-Network Theory and seeks to experience affectations as a creative possibility for dialogue with the world. As we can see, and we believe that you could feel it too. Affects drive our research.

What do we mean by this? Bench meetings are spaces where we discuss the texts produced. We read, comment and, as a group, everyone asks their questions about the writings, which makes up the depth and rigor of the productions, which also include our affectations. These meetings took place from 10am to 12pm on Fridays and are currently taking place from 2pm to 4pm. On the day we talk about the text (this is what we do at bench meetings: we read, comment and participate in the construction of research by affectAR participants), we are guided by Professor Alexandra Cleopatre Tsallis and there, we discuss and choose the effects that the field calls us in the research carried out. In the case of this work, we find it pertinent to discuss the issue of the term “superior”, as a necessary direction for problematizing this type of teaching.

We will explore more about the university’s environment. Consulting the Ministry of Education (MEC) Portal, we found that in ES there are the categories of undergraduate (technologist, bachelor’s and licentiate) and

postgraduate, which is divided into *stricto sensu* (academic or professional master's degree, doctorate and post-doctorate) and *lato sensu* (specialization programs, MBA - minimum duration of 360 hours). According to the 13th edition of the Map of Higher Education in Brazil, carried out by the SEMESP 2023 Institute, of the 2,574 Higher Education Institutions existing in Brazil, 313 are public and 2,261 private ones (SEMESP, 2023).

So that we can better reflect on the graphics and meanings attributed to the term "superior", relating to teaching, let us, hand in hand with this data, brought by the non-human actant internet, revisit the past to find out how the first universities arrived in Brazil and its changes according to the current political, cultural and socioeconomic period.

## METHODOLOGY

The elaboration of this article follows the theoretical-methodological approach of the Actor-Network Theory (ANT), proposed by Bruno Latour (1994, 2012), an ethnographic research methodology that leads us through a way of doing science that follows the movement of actors in network - its agencies, its links - and which breaks the logic of anthropocentrism that we take for granted in the world.

By considering the agency of humans and non-humans as actants - those who do - doing - equally important for the network, ANT calls for us to think beyond people and human affections, since each element moves the network and is moved by she. For example, this graph in image 2 invites us to reflect. Can we say that universities is done by teachers and students?

Yes! The following graph tells us this. But we also show that it is done in classrooms and other spaces, by the Ministry of Education (MEC) and other institutions, by paper, pen,

internet, other tools, other professionals... And so on.

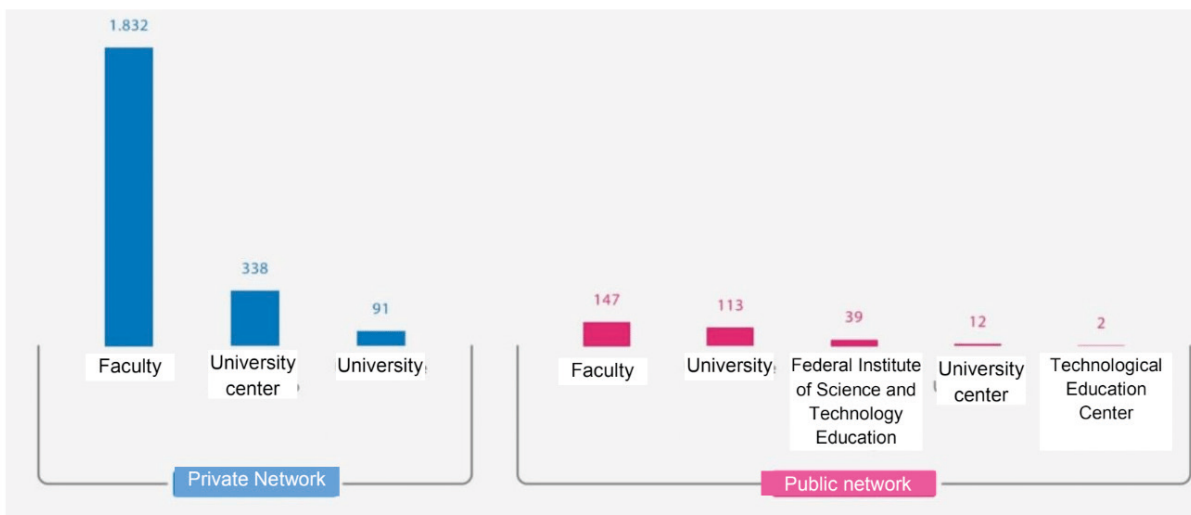
In this theoretical-methodological commitment, here we tell you that we are working together with our affectation experiences, with texts, with which we create dialogues and we will follow and explain in writing the network relationships that were found, following the actants, present in this network that make up ES in Brazil.

Did you notice that we refer to female students? Well, this has to do with our choice to write in the feminine, since we are four women, psychologists, researchers. The majority of psychologists in Brazil are women, with 79.2% according to the 2022 CensoPsi (FEDERAL COUNCIL OF PSYCHOLOGY, 2022), as well as the majority of university students, who represent 58.4% of academics in 2021 (SEMESP, 2023), as shown in the graphs:

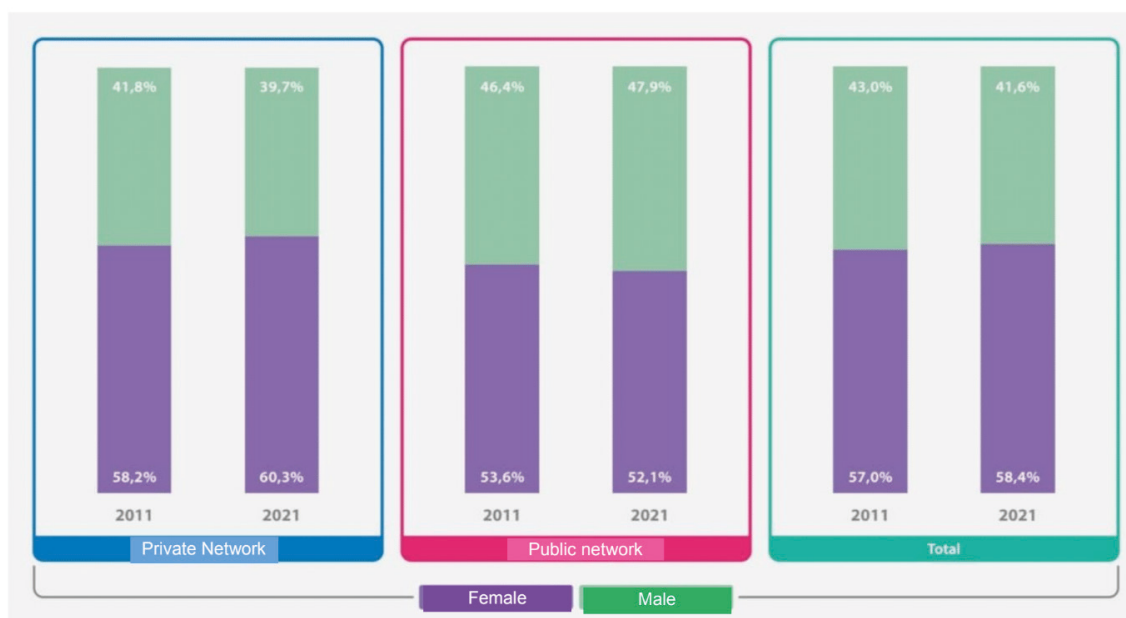
We were inspired by movements that have been happening in science and we found words that explain this well in Monique Araújo de Medeiros Brito (2021):

Here we want to lend the feminine to all people, without wanting to crush their individuality, their subjectivity. It's not revenge, either. It is, first and foremost, the way I feel comfortable in this space to express myself. [...] We are seeking to do science in the feminine, which is not the same as science done only by women. [...] Does reading a text entirely in feminine cause strangeness? Yes! We want the aesthetic and political consequences of this estrangement. (BRITO, 2021, p. 16).

We chose a naming policy proposed by Alexandra Cleopatre Tsallis, Beatriz Prata Almeida, Rafaelle Cristine Diogo Melo and Tereza de Magalhães Bredariol "that both shows us and ethically commits us to what we learned in the field" (TSALLIS *et al.*, 2020, p. 186). In other words, the people cited in this research will be duly named with their full name, so that we can better visualize the



**Image 2.** Graph of the Number of Higher Education Institutions, by Administrative Category in 2023; source SEMESP Institute, INEP base.



**Image 3.** Graph with percentage of university students divided between women and men, in public and private universities; source Instituto SEMESP 2023, INEP base.

authors with whom we are working/talking/affecting/constructing in the text.

To better explain the methodological steps of the study presented, we describe the following actions of the method used, divided into the following steps:

- 1) According to reflections raised in the process of writing the thesis, the question arises: why does Higher Education have the adjective “superior” accompanying the noun “teaching”?
- 2) Carrying out bibliographical research on the history of Higher Education in Brazil, and on the etymology and meaning of the word superior. We chose the texts that best addressed our questions.
- 3) Reading the collected material with simultaneous writing, as a way of dialoging with the texts and authors.
- 4) Debate and reflections in person at bench meetings and meetings between authors via *Google Meet*, a virtual platform that allows real-time and synchronous meetings, with image and sound, to clarify ideas and guide writing.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

To talk about HE in Brazil, let's start by talking briefly about the colonization of the country and how/when the HE modality arrived. For this construction, we spoke with Uyguciara Velôso Castelo Branco, like us, a psychologist, graduated (Training and Degree) from “Universidade Federal da Paraíba” (UFPB) and deepened her studies in the Master's degree in Education (UFPB). She pursued her doctorate studies in History at “Universidade Federal de Pernambuco” (UFPE) and post-doctorate in Sociology at “*Universidad de València*” - Spain; and Aline Carneiro de Oliveira, graduated in Law from the Centro de Ensino Superior de Catalão (CESUC), with a specialization in Teaching in

Higher Education from the Instituto Federal Goiano (IF GOIANO). Because both authors present a trajectory that problematizes universities, we chose their texts, which nourished our writing process. The works chosen were: *The Construction of the Myth of “My Son Doctor” - historical foundations of access to higher education in Brazil-Paraíba*, which was Uyguciara's doctoral thesis; and *Higher Education in Brazil: a historical analysis*, Aline's course completion work (TCC) in her teaching specialization.

In her TCC, Aline Cordeiro de Oliveira (2020) counts from the “discovery”/colonization of Brazil by the Portuguese in the year 1500 and covers all political changes until 2018, focusing on universities. The author says that the Portuguese brought a formal teaching model that aimed to catechize and domesticate native people for work, or rather, to exploit them. Universities officially arrived in Brazilian lands in 1808, with the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family; The metropolis was, for many years, against the creation of universities in the colony, as it wanted, according to Aline Cordeiro de Oliveira, “to prevent the population from accessing knowledge and thus maintain order and avoid any type of revolt” (OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 07-08). Uyguciara Velôso Castelo Branco added that during this period there was “little interest in the development of educational institutions, especially at higher education [...] avoiding the formation of an intellectuality that could acquire, in colonial lands, forums of autonomy”, the objective was to expand the traditions and culture of the metropolis in its new territory, guaranteeing the formation of a social elite with which it could interact (BRANCO, 2004, p. 65).

In colonized territory, education (even before it was officially education) was also colonized, with white European men determining what needed to be learned and

who could receive each learning: In that period, women, mestizos and enslaved people did not have access/right to literacy, as the focus was not to educate, but to control, dominate, colonize. There was still no idea or basis for the establishment of universities, but, if we analyze it, it is possible to correlate this beginning of access to “education” with inequality.

The authors also say that with the presence of Europeans, planters and the wealthier classes wanted to find a way for their family to be “up to par” with the elite. Even before 1808, some gentlemen sent their children to study universities in Europe, not for the knowledge itself, but for the diploma that guaranteed prestige and power (BRANCO, 2004, p. 64-65; OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 09). However, the priority was not to further elevate the status and power of Brazilians, but rather to support the needs of that period: The navy and army, for example, needed doctors, so the School of Surgery was founded in Salvador (later turned into an Academy Medical-surgical, and later “Universidade Federal da Bahia”) and the Medical-surgical School and Academy, in Rio de Janeiro (nowadays, “Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro”). In 1810, the Royal Military Academy was inaugurated (by Charter of December 4, 1810), with the aim of offering:

Complete course in mathematical sciences, observational sciences, such as physics, chemistry, mineralogy, metallurgy and natural history, which will include the plant and animal kingdom, and military sciences in their entirety, both tactics and fortification, and artillery. (BRAZIL, 1810).

They believed that “education was given to manual workers, since there was no interest in qualifying the workforce. Only teachers, public officeholders, and members of the clergy were required to know read and write” (OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 10). With this belief, the bachelor’s degrees that were offered had a practical

function and were related to the dominant classes. In 1827, after the Independence of Brazil, with the creation of the Decree of August 11, 1827 (BRAZIL, 1827) “two Legal and Social Sciences Courses will be created, one in the city of S. Paulo, and the other in of Olinda, and in them within five years”.

As people acquired their bachelor’s degrees, public positions were created. We already had politicians, doctors, lawyers and engineers. Uyguciara Velôso Castelo Branco says that at that time there was “a bureaucracy centered on the bachelor’s degree in force in the Imperial period, prioritizing landowners. The Republic demanded another model of bureaucracy” (BRANCO, 2004, p. 125).

Aline Cordeiro de Oliveira talks about important points during the period of the Proclamation of the Republic, namely: the permission for private universities to be created, but this did not guarantee increased access, quite the contrary, the author says that “it was just a strategy adopted by the political groups of the time, which aimed to remain in power, supported by the ruling class” (OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 12).

What we have observed in history so far allows us to realize that education passed from hand to hand, but always remained in the hands of those who had the most power. Little by little, as new private universities emerged, more people began accessing universities, even though they were those who had the purchasing power/money to pay. Private institutions were not sufficient to provide social equality of access to universities, on the contrary, they reinforced inequality. Entering universities continued to be for a restricted and privileged portion of the population (OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 18).

The end of the dictatorship came after much resistance and persistence from the opposition and the movements that rose up. The main milestone was the achievement of the right to



vote by the people, who began to directly elect the president of the republic. Subsequently, we had the drafting of a new constitution, in 1988, which valued democracy. In 1996, a new Law of Guidelines and Bases, which in 2023 we call Laws of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN).

The Education Guidelines and Bases Law 9,394/1996, which was based on the principle of the universal right to education, where it says in article 21 that the composition of school levels is “school education consists of: I - basic education, formed by early childhood education, elementary education and secondary education; II – higher education”. But when we return to Title III - The Right to Education and the Duty to Educate - in article 4 we observe that:

The State's duty with public school education will be carried out by guaranteeing: I - compulsory and free fundamental education, including for those who did not have access to it at their appropriate age; II - progressive extension of compulsory and free secondary education; III - free specialized educational assistance for students with special needs, preferably in the regular education network; IV - free care in daycare centers and preschools for children from zero to six years of age; V - access to the highest levels of teaching, research and artistic creation, according to each person's ability. (BRAZIL, 1996 - emphasis added).

We need to highlight that after the fall of the military dictatorship, more precisely from 1990 onwards, Brazil opened up to international capitalism, which generated changes in society's relationship with consumption, work and education. According to the MEC website, in 1998 the MEC created the National Secondary Education Examination (Enem), whose initial objective was to evaluate the quality of basic education through students who were completing secondary education. In the first year, only two universities agreed to replace the entrance exam with Enem, namely

PUC-RJ and ``Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto``.

Until then, the way to enter universities was only through the entrance exam, but in the second year of Enem there was a jump to more than 90 universities accepting the test as a way of admitting students.

## **CONCLUSION / FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

After revisiting the history of universities in the country, we realized that in the colonial period, education brought from Portugal to Brazil was limited to the catechization and domestication of the colonists, and over time to literacy, with the minimum being provided so that they could serve the colonizers; At the end of this phase, some planters sent their children to universities in Europe with the aim of moving up socially. Aline Carneiro de Oliveira also adds that:

In a way, this social prestige persists to this day. After almost 200 years, both laws are still in force and in addition, it is the custom of society to refer to doctors, lawyers, judges and prosecutors as doctors, even if such professionals do not have the academic title of doctorate, which is why doctor in this case, serves only as a treatment pronoun. (OLIVEIRA, 2020, p. 12).

With the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family to Brazil, universities came with it. Before it was not allowed, there was a fear that the Colony might rebel in search of autonomy. Afterwards, higher education became permitted, but the focus was not on higher education offered to all people, as a way of developing society in general, but rather so that the, until then, nobility could have access to qualified labor to what was of interest to him, such as training doctors, lawyers and engineers, mainly to support the armed forces.

With the Proclamation of the Republic, in 1889, the first private universities emerged. With the 1934 Constitution, basic education

became the right of everyone and the duty of the family and the Public Power, but in practice basic education and higher education were far from being offered in an equal or even equitable manner.

The challenge of access to higher education is still a current issue. There is a question as to how Enem grades can, in fact, provide the functioning of the University for All Program (Prouni), Student Financing (Fies) and the Unified Selection System (Sisu) in favor of access to higher education, for example. This indicates the need for new research on the subject, given the importance of providing access to education to work on social inclusion. For the authors, being part of ES gives our careers, choices of action and work with the population essential tools for the quality of the service offered.

We concluded this work with the need to continue to experience other opportunities to enrich the way we operate in the world, without this being only available to a portion of the population. It is necessary that universities are not just restricted to elites or populations in privileged situations. The work of democratizing access must continue through affirmative action and social inclusion programs in universities, such as affirmative

actions and the Quota Law, to enable all people who want to be able to occupy vacancies in universities. So, how could universities have, for so long, been at the mercy of individual capacity in such an unequal country? What does this have to do with the word superior? We defend the idea that everyone who wants to can access improvements for their respective careers.

According to the 2021 Higher Education Census, of the almost 4 million undergraduate students, 87.5% were from private institutions, while 12.5% were from public institutions; in the same year mentioned, more than 1.3 million students completed undergraduate courses, 83.5% from private schools and 16.5% from public schools (BRAZIL, 2022). In the last twelve years there has been a significant growth in private universities and their adherence by students (BRAZIL, 2022) and we have completed this work, which starts from the first university in Brazil to implement the Quota System for access to universities (UERJ, 2022). And, from within this place - universities - the afeTAR Laboratory continues to work actively towards social inclusion, anti-capacity, anti-racist struggle and care for people in vulnerable situations.

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