

ARTICLE

THE CONQUEST OF THE UNIVERSITY: INDIGENOUS OCCUPATION AROUND A DISPUTED TERRITORY¹

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ABSTRACT: Indigenous people have claimed access and permanence to the university environment. This article aims to analyze the presence of indigenous people in the academy, as well as to understand how these students have been conquering this territory. To collect the data, we used the official figures available in INEP's Statistical Synopsis of Higher Education, as well as on-site research at the Academic Control Departments of the HEIs in the state of Amapá (Brazil). We therefore worked with national data and tried to contrast it with the reality of indigenous people attending higher education in Amapá state. In addition, bibliographical research was also used to establish the theoretical basis already built up on the subject. The article reveals that in the last 12 years, the presence of indigenous students in Brazilian universities has intensified. Official records show that Indigenous people are increasingly accessing higher education, and this has led to some creative unfolding for the university. One of these unfoldings is the necessary reflection on recreating the academic space in the light of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge. In other words, in addition to the physical presence in universities (which has been revolutionary), it is also necessary for the Academy to open up to the ancestral knowledge of the indigenous world/culture. It is understood in this study that it is this achievement of conception that Indigenous people are also demanding from the academic space.

Keywords: Indigenous people, University, Indigenous university students.

A CONQUISTA DA UNIVERSIDADE: OCUPAÇÃO INDÍGENA EM TORNO DE UM TERRITÓRIO EM DISPUTA

RESUMO: Os povos indígenas têm reivindicado acesso e permanência no ambiente universitário. O presente artigo se propõe fazer uma análise sobre a presença de pessoas indígenas na academia,

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bem como compreender a forma que esses estudantes vêm conquistando esse território. Para a coleta de dados, utilizamos os números oficiais disponibilizados na Sinopse Estatística da Educação Superior do INEP, além de pesquisa *in loco* nos Departamentos de Controle Acadêmico das IES do estado do Amapá. Portanto, trabalhamos com os dados nacionais e procuramos contrastá-los com a realidade de indígenas que frequentam o ensino superior no Amapá-Brasil. Além disso, também recorreremos à pesquisa bibliográfica para demarcar o embasamento teórico já construído a respeito do tema. No decorrer do artigo é revelado que nos últimos 12 anos, a presença de estudantes indígenas nas universidades brasileiras tem se intensificado. Os números oficiais mostram que os indígenas cada vez mais estão acessando o ensino superior, e isso tem trazido alguns desdobramentos criativos para a universidade. Um desses desdobramentos é a reflexão necessária de recriar o espaço acadêmico à luz das perspectivas e saberes indígenas. Ou seja, além da presença física na universidade (que tem sido revolucionário), também é necessário que a academia se abra para os saberes ancestrais do mundo indígena. Compreendemos nesse estudo que é essa conquista de concepção que os indígenas também reivindicam do espaço acadêmico.

Palavras-chave: Povos Indígenas, Universidade, Indígenas universitários.

LA CONQUISTA DE LA UNIVERSIDAD: OCUPACIÓN INDÍGENA EN TORNO A UN TERRITORIO EN DISPUTA

RESUMEN: Los pueblos indígenas han exigido acceso y permanencia en el ámbito universitario. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la presencia de los pueblos indígenas en la academia, así de comprender la forma en como estos estudiantes han ido conquistando este territorio. Para la recolección de datos, utilizamos las cifras oficiales disponibles en la Sinopsis Estadística de Educación Superior del INEP, además de investigaciones *in-situ* en los Departamentos de Control Académico de las IES del estado de Amapá. Por eso, trabajamos con datos nacionales y buscamos contrastarlos con la realidad de los indígenas que cursan la educación superior en Amapá, Brasil. Asimismo, utilizamos la investigación bibliográfica para demarcar las bases teóricas construidas sobre el tema. A lo largo del artículo se revela que en los últimos 12 años la presencia de estudiantes indígenas en las universidades brasileñas se ha intensificado. Las cifras oficiales muestran que los pueblos indígenas acceden cada vez más a la educación superior, y esto ha traído algunos avances creativos a la universidad. Uno de estos avances fue la reflexión sobre la recreación del espacio académico a la luz de las perspectivas y conocimientos indígenas. Es decir, además de la presencia física en la universidad (que ha sido revolucionario), también fue necesario que la academia se abra a los saberes ancestrales del mundo indígena. Entendemos en este estudio que este logro conceptual es lo que los indígenas también demandan desde el espacio académico.

Palabras clave: Pueblos Indígenas, Universidad, Estudiantes Universitarios Indígenas.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to problematize the aspects surrounding the conception of access and permanence of Indigenous people in universities and understand this fact as an achievement. The title of this work leads us to a purposeful ambiguity. On the one hand, it encourages us to understand the university as a space and locus of conquest of the other from their perspectives

constructed under the surroundings of knowledge and practices based on a logical adverse impact on indigenous peoples. On the other hand, we seek to highlight throughout the text the character of a claimed university, a disputed place, and, therefore, that seeks to be conquered by indigenous peoples, as a space for the plurality of knowledge, which goes beyond the walls of an environment monopolized by political, social, economic, cultural, linguistic and historical structures foreign to the environment in which it is built.

We borrowed the idea from the title of this work by Bartomeu Melià (1989), who proposed to reflect such ambiguity based on the “conquest of writing”. In this work, the author problematizes the challenges of indigenous literacy in the mother tongue, since writing, according to his understanding, as well as language, were strategies to facilitate that exogenous aspects could be learned more easily by the original peoples and could be domesticated. However, according to Melià (1989), writing was conquered by the indigenous people, and they transformed it into a political tool to reinforce their ethnic tendencies and fight for emancipation.

We also borrow the term from Marcio Ferreira da Silva (1994), who proposes an analysis of the “conquest of school” based on the movement of Indigenous teachers in Brazil, who, through confrontation, expressed the desire to break with a school structure that underestimated and inferiorized the knowledge and desires of Indigenous peoples. As for the university, we understand that in Brazil there is a growing tendency to demand the conquest of this space by indigenous peoples, and it is important that this aspect is highlighted as a movement to dispute the conquest of conceptions on this topic. From this understanding, we intend to weave the arguments presented in this work.

The methodological path used to construct this study was initially based on a careful bibliographic analysis, where we sought theoretical support to understand the meanings that represent the Indigenous presence at the university. Among the authors we had access to read, the following stand out in this article: Assis (1981), Tassinari (2001), Paladino e Almeida (2012), Luciano (2013), Paladino (2016), Souza Lima (2016), Dal Bó (2018), Bergamaschi and Leite (2022).

To obtain official data on indigenous enrollment in higher education in Brazil and the state of Amapá, we used open data from the Statistical Synopsis of Higher Education - Undergraduate, from the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP-*Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira*). We use the following filters on the downloaded files: Enrollments/Number of enrollments in Undergraduate courses and Specific Training Sequences – In-person and Distance learning, by Academic Organization, Administrative Dependency, Color, Race, and gender, according to the Geographic Region, State,

and the Municipality/Higher Education Institutions/Public/Private/Indigenous/Total Brasil/Total Amapá.

The data analyzed begins in 2011, the year in which the data sequence begins with the “color/race” category at INEP. In other words, it was only from that year onwards that the “indigenous” category officially appeared in higher education statistics in Brazil. Data on Indigenous people enrolled in higher education extends until 2022 on the INEP portal. This is the reason for delimiting the period from 2011 to 2022 in Tables 01 and 02 and in the reflections that make up this article.

We also searched the institutional websites of public HEIs in Amapá, as well as directly in the Academic Control Departments of these institutions and in the coordination of undergraduate courses at the Binacional campus of the Federal University of Amapá, based in the municipality of Oiapoque-AP, to cross-reference data with information collected on the INEP platform. However, as we will see, we have had little success in this task.

From access to statistical reports that demonstrate a visible growth in the number of Indigenous enrollments in higher education, and looking at our personal experiences of working with Indigenous students in the state of Amapá, we began to question: What are the motivations for Indigenous people to demand entry and permanence in universities, a historically exclusionary and challenging environment? What has higher education training contributed to the life plans of these indigenous peoples?

Around these questions, we built this reflection, to understand how indigenous peoples have conquered the university.

The conquest of the university by the indigenous people guarantees the possibility of breaking into an institutional structure that has solidified in our academic environments. This structure understands that indigenous people, as well as other populations that have historically been segregated from the university space, are only sources of our research, they are the objects of our investigations, and therefore, “scientific knowledge” must reach these populations, understanding them, think about them, subordinate them to academic knowledge and conquer them. This is the movement that guided the colonial positioning and is still very present in our environment.

In this way, there is an indigenous mobilization to build a reverse movement, so that, instead of being conquered by the university, they begin to be conquerors of conception, territory, and affirmative policies and, thus, consummate in the academy as intellectuals, considering the knowledge built within the university, but bringing their ancestral knowledge, their ways of understanding, their conceptions of the world. We understand that this is how we will rebuild the

academic environment based on not only ethnic diversity but mainly theoretical and analytical diversity, which also considers the knowledge and practices of original peoples.

As already mentioned, part of this study will be guided by the reality of the indigenous peoples of Oiapoque, a municipality in the extreme north of the state of Amapá. These are the people who we have been building our investigative reflections over the last six years about the emergence of the educational theme offered by schools in villages, as well as by universities.

At another point, we have already mentioned the demand of the Indigenous people of that municipality for a proposed university that meets their demands for access and permanence (MACHADO, 2019), and we want to deepen this reflection here based on concrete official data that we have obtained over the last 12 years about the number of enrollments of Indigenous students in academic space. We also want to begin an analysis of what this data represents in practice for their communities of origin and the university.

We understand that this reflection requires care and extensive observation, as there are nuances that are not evident from a hasty look. Therefore, understanding the limits of this article, we aim to contribute to the debate and realize that there is much to be uncovered and understood based on indigenous motivations to claim the university as an authentic space.

We tried to subdivide the text into three parts. First, we will seek to deepen the understanding, meanings, and horizons that the presence of Indigenous students in universities has been providing, both for their people and for the reinvention of the university. By addressing the importance of implementing Indigenous Degree Courses in HEIs as one of the main gateways for Indigenous students to access higher education, we demonstrate that academia can be a place of ethnic plurality, concluding the need to reaffirm it as a space also claimed by Indigenous peoples. We also emphasize that progress in the most diverse aspects (cultural, symbolic, structural, social) is undeniable, and what the entry and stay of indigenous people in these environments represents.

The second part of the text will show us the panorama of the entry of Indigenous students into higher education at national and local levels (in the state of Amapá). We will base our analysis on official data from the Statistical Synopsis of Higher Education, made publicly available by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP-*Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira*), from 2011 to 2022. We will notice that, in the period mentioned, there is a significant increase in the entry of Indigenous students into universities, and this already demonstrates a change in the academy's perspective depending on what the Indigenous presence in this space represents. On the other hand, taking this official data into account, we also identified some challenges to be overcome.

Finally, in our final considerations, we highlight some important points raised throughout the article, in addition to reaffirming the need to think about the academic environment also with the collaboration of Indigenous perspectives. The occupation of these spaces will not come by chance or for free, which is why we highlight the importance of mobilization, personal and collective confrontations for Indigenous people to remain on the benches in classrooms, in laboratories, in living spaces, and in other environments of the academy where they wish to occupy.

THE CONQUEST OF THE UNIVERSITY AS AN ETHNIC COMMITMENT

Since the Federal Constitution of 1988, which changed the Brazilian State's relationship with Indigenous peoples, no longer protecting them and guaranteeing in the law that there is respect and recognition for their knowledge and ways of life, Indigenous people began to compete in the academic space, understanding it as also rightfully theirs.

Although there is a feeling that indigenous inclusion policies in the academic environment still only include individuals and not their “traditions and knowledge of the people of which they are part” (PALADINO, 2016, p. 120), the occupation of a significant space in academia has represented a major advance towards the reconstruction of the conception of a more open, dialogic and plural university.

However, since the redemocratization of Brazil was demarcated in the new Constitution, the country has taken around 15 years to implement a higher education policy that begins to consider the specificities of Indigenous peoples. According to Mariana Paladino and Nina Paiva Almeida (2012, p. 108), concerning higher education, the Indigenous Movement has been demanding two priority agendas:

The first of these is the training of teachers at a higher level, which reflects the concern with improving their teaching practices, acquiring instruments to run Indigenous schools autonomously, and adapting to the legal regulations that require them to hold a degree at a higher level. The other, arising from the relations between Indigenous peoples and the State today, is linked to the need to train cadres within the Indigenous movement who can take on, in a qualified manner, the processes of dialogue and intervention in public policies in favor of rights and interests of the Indigenous people (PALADINO and ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 108).

These authors understand that significant progress was only made in the first demand after 2012, with the opening of legal possibilities for Indigenous people to occupy spaces in undergraduate courses. But we also consider that the opening of Indigenous Intercultural Degree courses, starting in 2006, in some public universities in the country, was fundamental for this situation to be transformed.

The Indigenous Intercultural Degrees that began to be structured in Brazil from the first notice launched by the Program for Higher Education and Indigenous Degrees (PROLIND/SESU/SECAD/MEC), in 2005, had as a parameter for recognizing the importance of these courses two autonomous experiences and embryonic ones, one at the State University of Mato Grosso (UNEMAT) and the other at the Federal University of Roraima (UFRR). The first one started a course to train indigenous teachers in 2001, while the second university started in 2003 (PALADINO; ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 110-111).

After the launch of PROLIND, other universities began to create projects to begin training indigenous teachers in specific and differentiated courses. However, it is important to mention the need to make a critical assessment of the reality of these courses for training Indigenous teachers, mainly because this initiative was guided as a program and not as a permanent policy of the Federal Government (PALADINO; ALMEIDA, 2012, p. 201). In this way, as soon as the resources from the notices were running out and the programs became the exclusive responsibility of the universities in which they were located, the problems became more evident.

Based on the study by Bergamaschi and Leite (2022), we also understand that Indigenous Degrees were responsible for causing an increase in the entry and permanence of Indigenous students in Brazilian public universities, demarcating the character of a dispute over territory in academia. The role that these training courses for Indigenous teachers had, (and still has), and was/is fundamental in building the Indigenous academic space, and even today these courses represent the main gateway for Indigenous people to public HEIs in our country.

However, in the second decade of its implementation, it is also important to mention its weaknesses that persist, and which demonstrate the indispensability of carrying out recurring assessments regarding the methods adopted to maintain them.

Paladino and Almeida (2012, p. 16-17) highlight some problematic issues of these courses in the initial years of their implementation, such as: 1. Even with the increase in the number of indigenous intercultural courses, the difficulty in achieving the goal of training teachers at higher education, as provided for in the National Education Plan (PNE 2001-2011). It is important to highlight that this goal has not yet been achieved, and the reality of Indigenous schools shows that the vast majority of Indigenous teachers who work in schools in their villages do not yet have a higher education diploma; 2. In some cases, the courses operated intermittently, or based on a modular teaching scheme, which caused wear and tear and precarious learning for students and faculty. This is a reality still felt by many Indigenous Intercultural Degree courses, which concentrate on face-to-face classes in just three months of the year, not having enough time for reading, dynamic classes, field classes, experiences, participation in academic events, and rest; 3. In

many places, these courses operated during the vacation period for other courses at universities, not allowing Indigenous students to have contact with other non-indigenous students, as well as with the university's various services; 4. Due to a lack of resources, during the period in which students returned to the village, there was no continuous and effective monitoring by teachers.

We must also consider an imminent risk: by concentrating students in classes exclusively for Indigenous people, in periods between other university courses, there is a risk that stereotypes and prejudices against Indigenous students will be reinforced within the academic space. We understand that the university, which theoretically claims a multiverse, polyphonic, and plural character in the most diverse aspects, cannot conform in its structure to the idea of an education that may run the risk of becoming segregating.

By this, we do not in any way mean that the nature of differentiated education for Indigenous students at universities is a mistake. But the risks that threaten their effectiveness must be considered since the character of “interculturality”, which these courses claim for themselves, must be taken seriously, understood as a two-way, equal cultural path, which requires the understanding that

even considering conflicts and contradictions between the traditional knowledge of original peoples and the knowledge of modern science that predominates in academia, it is necessary to recognize an ambivalence, that is, in which the parties are not irreducible, but possible for negotiation (BERGAMSCHI; LEITE, 2022, p. 61).

In this sense, indigenous peoples demand all spaces of academic life (from undergraduate to postgraduate), beyond their specific and differentiated courses, beyond the spaces designated “exclusively” for them.

However, even considering all these difficulties listed, we reinforce the understanding that the introduction of specific intercultural courses at universities was an important first step towards other actions. We realized that the training courses for Indigenous teachers brought Indigenous peoples the first experiences of minimum effective conditions for specific teacher training to work in schools in their villages, seeking to implement a differentiated and bilingual education.

In a way, the courses offered at universities specifically for Indigenous peoples effectively represented the gateway for Indigenous students to expand their space in academia. We realized this fact when checking the case of Indigenous students with active enrollments in the state of Amapá. The number of students linked to the UNIFAP Indigenous Intercultural Degree Course (the only course in the state aimed specifically at Indigenous people) represents 64% of all

Indigenous students enrolled in public HEIs in the state of Amapá in 2022, according to the numbers represented in Table 01.

Table 01: Number of Indigenous students enrolled in public HEIs in the state of Amapá and in the Indigenous Intercultural Degree Course, year 2022	
Indigenous students enrolled at CLII	257
Indigenous students enrolled in other undergraduate courses	225
Total in the state of Amapá	399

Source: CLII/UNIFAP Coordination and INEP Synopsis, adapted by the author.

With Law 12,711/2012, which creates specific vacancies for black, brown, Indigenous people, and people with disabilities in regular university courses, in addition to occupying vacancies in specific and differentiated courses, Indigenous people also began to enter other courses, which previously had very difficult to access. However, entry into these courses through quotas has limitations and, as a result, there are currently institutions that use quota places allocated to Indigenous people to promote differentiated entry², to escape the standard/traditional model of entrance exams, as well as the National High School Examination (*ENEM-Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio*), which do not consider the specificities of Indigenous peoples, since the exams do not dialogue with the cultural reality and educational background of this portion of the population.

We still have a long way to go to build a more concrete and edifying dialogue between universities and Indigenous peoples, to reach the creation of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2019) calls a “polyphonic university”, as a pluralist one, guaranteeing space for conventional and unconventional voices, a “pluriversity”, which would be the construction of a university as a response to what the author calls “university capitalism” and “university colonialism”.

Taking due care not to establish a univocal university, considering the parameters for the implementation of the intercultural character, the idea of an institution with a polyphonic and “pluriverse” character would perhaps be contemplated through the creation of a higher education institution intercultural indigenous culture, which, according to Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima (2016, p. 23), began its formatting in Brazil in 2014, by Ordinance 52/2014, which established the Working Group to carry out studies on the possibilities for its creation. However, the Federal

² An example is what happens at the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), which offers four places in all the institution's undergraduate courses, through a specific entrance exam for indigenous people and quilombolas. At UNIFAP, although there was a demand and conquest by indigenous and quilombola movements in 2018 to expand the possibilities of access and permanence, as described previously (MACHADO, 2019), the specific and differentiated entrance exam remains only for the Campus from Oiapoque.

Government did not respond to the studies carried out by the aforementioned GT, and, once again, the plan remained only on paper.

In this way, we can see that the presence of Indigenous people in higher education institutions, occupying the academic and scientific space that has been denied to them since the creation of universities in our country, is a possibility of advancing the transformation of these spaces. We understand that the growth and solidification of the occupation of Indigenous students in universities is a result of the struggle of the Amerindian peoples of Brazil who use the cultural, political, and cosmological capital they have and demand that they establish and expand democratically, increasingly, these strategic spaces.

We understand that the formation of indigenous intellectuals in academia means a major revolution in recent times in Brazilian academic thought. But it is also important to highlight that the knowledge accumulated over millennia by indigenous peoples must be recognized as knowledge capable of strengthening the identity and culture of these peoples.

In these terms, it is necessary to demarcate the criteria that produce the concept of intellectuality that we are using here, because, as Jack Goody (2012) emphasizes, intellectuality has an unquestionable presence in societies that he calls “pre-literate”. But it is important to understand that the intellectuality that exists, for example, among indigenous peoples, is founded from other perspectives, which cannot be defined only as individuals who act as members of a profession in any strict sense, but rather “individuals who are involved in the creative exploration of culture” (GOODY, 2012, p. 32).

For this reason, we understand that the presence of the university in the lives of Indigenous people plays the role of an auxiliary agent in the intellectual formation of these individuals, who act to bring knowledge closer together and not exercise and/or obey a single epistemic command.

Therefore, the “intellectuality” that we highlight here comprises a macro view, not reducing the term to the meaning that was historically constructed from Western models, which is based only on scientific, academic, and epistemic knowledge classically accepted in the university space. We understand that the intellectuality of indigenous university students is a construction of knowledge postulated in the academy meeting with their knowledge accumulated by tradition, which contemplates their way of being, feeling, and living in the world that surrounds them.

In this sense, the presence of Indigenous people in academia represents an unprecedented advance, as, based on their positions established in their cultural knowledge, they work to deconstruct biased knowledge about their people and produce new directions for

understanding and strengthening their culture, according to their convictions and their forms of knowledge (VASCO, 2012).

The recognition that Indigenous people have about the importance of academic work is a movement that contests the subordinate and marginalized position that these people have occupied in the official history of Brazil and the trajectory of our country's universities. We can feel this positioning based on some criteria that the Indigenous movement has been adopting in the university.

As an example of this, we noticed that the construction of a political movement by indigenous people to embargo some academic research in various fields of study has become common. In our view, as white researchers, this attitude of Indigenous peoples towards academic research can bring discomfort or disappointment. However, it is an attitude that deserves attention, given how research has been conducted by non-indigenous people, over the years, based on Eurocentric and colonial ways of considering the production of knowledge.

This movement of denying some scientific research in their territories can manifest many of their private issues. Among these manifestations, I realize that Indigenous people understand that the consequence of academic research has strong repercussions and that they impact many sectors of society. In addition, according to the perspective of those who are writing, the perspective of those who are at the forefront of the research is reinforced, since they are clear that the researcher can't get rid of their subjectivity to write about others (MACHADO, 2023).

Therefore, many descriptions that appear around Indigenous people do not consider what the indigenous people think and/or understand. Hence a need for them to conquer their spaces as researchers, and scholars of their cultures, so that studies can emerge that pay more attention to what indigenous peoples designate as important to themselves.

Mariana Paladino (2016, p. 97), when approaching academic productions by Indigenous authors in Brazil, points out that it is important to “break with the corporate barriers of groups of Indigenous researchers, who continue to dominate the scene”, and defends that Indigenous researchers cannot remain solely in the shadow of renowned researchers on Indigenous issues.

The author also points out that she does not advocate the replacement of groups of non-indigenous researchers by indigenous groups, but it is essential to guarantee space for everyone, with public policies and investments that also reach academic research promoted by indigenous intellectuals. This is an “indispensable condition for the construction of a critical and decolonizing intellectual activity” (PALADINO, 2016, p. 97).

It is important to emphasize once again that the higher education agenda for Indigenous peoples is very important, so much so that, for example, this agenda is always on the discussion table at the annual general and evaluation assemblies of the Oiapoque Indigenous Movement. In their speeches, they always point out that it is essential to train indigenous researchers so that they have autonomy and guarantee their intellectual self-education.

In this sense, there is an investment and political incentive from the Indigenous Movement to guarantee every year a considerable number of people compete for places allocated to the indigenous people of Oiapoque in UNIFAP undergraduate courses.

We understand even more the importance of higher education courses in the lives of these Indigenous peoples when we realize that the new Indigenous leaders of Oiapoque are people who have already received a certain degree of school and/or university education. The intellectual capital they possess, the result of their cultural knowledge, added to the knowledge acquired in academic spaces, is fundamental for them to be seen as desirable representatives for their people because they can forward the demands and meet the expectations of their communities.

But it does not stop there. In addition to demanding access to undergraduate courses, the Indigenous Movement of the state of Amapá also highlights the importance of continuing an academic career in postgraduate courses.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of indigenous people in Amapá seeking qualifications at master's and doctoral levels. Indigenous people are entering some postgraduate programs that offer specific vacancies with a differentiated selection process, such as the Postgraduate Program in Literature (PPGLET) and the Postgraduate Program in Education (PPGED), both from UNIFAP, as well as in other programs at universities outside the state of Amapá.

It is important to mention that, according to my observations, most of this group of Indigenous researchers from Amapá who are accessing *stricto sensu* postgraduate studies come from the Indigenous Intercultural Degree, which demonstrates the importance of specific training and the need for differentiated access to students from the various Indigenous peoples of the region and also reinforces, once again, the importance of this course for the Indigenous peoples of Amapá.

We also consider it necessary to emphasize that the search for qualifications by Indigenous people also has another very important connotation. It is, as Gersem Baniwa (2013) argues, considering that the example of these Indigenous students is very important for the self-esteem and ethnic pride of these people:

Successful Indigenous academics are an example and help to awaken ethnic pride, self-esteem, and self-recognition, understanding themselves as successful here in a broad

sense: as educated Indigenous people who get good jobs and salaries in the city, and thus can help materially, family members who remain in the villages, Indigenous people who left to study and returned to their communities, holding important positions and functions in their lives. The good example of successful Indigenous people, therefore, goes beyond material interests, also serving to increase self-esteem and overcome the constant situations of prejudice of which they are victims (LUCIANO, 2013, p. 94).

We were able to perceive this feeling translated in Baniwa's words among some young indigenous people from the state of Amapá. Some point out with pride the trajectory that some relatives are managing to access, and that they realize that there is the possibility of conquering university, which, even knowing the challenges and difficulties they face in everyday student life (which are doubled due to their ethnic origins), these students are examples of ethnic and cultural self-esteem for many young people.

I concretely perceived this feeling in a public speech by a young man from the Kumenê village, of the Palikur people, who, inspired by the academic trajectory of a relative of his people who is already in the concluding phase of his doctorate in anthropology, revealed:

Adonias is becoming a doctor. I feel very proud of him, for being Palikur and knowing that even though he is going through a lot of difficulties studying, he is achieving his goal. And if he can, so can I. I will be able to finish my master's degree and then study to become a doctor too (Aldiere Orlando, January 2020, speech in a conversation in Macapá-AP).

It should be noted that the search for qualifications by Indigenous students indicates the path they demand in the field of education. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the importance of the university for the training of its intellectual staff, for the construction of a future that points to a closer, deeper, and collaborative dialogue between traditional knowledge and academic productions. Thus, they claim to occupy academic territory so that the analysis of their social, economic structures, linguistic, and cultural variations is also defined based on their perceptions and understanding.

Therefore, we realize that the conquest of the university by Indigenous peoples is directly linked to an ethnic commitment to their people, who in contemporary times understand the need to make efforts to occupy the academic space and transform it into an ally of their cause, as this aspect represents a political position that Indigenous peoples are building for themselves, and which directly assists in the decision-making required of them and in the various relationships they establish with non-indigenous people.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AT UNIVERSITY: THE PANORAMA IN BRAZIL AND THE STATE OF AMAPÁ

The indigenous peoples of Brazil recognize the importance of entering university as a necessity for training professional and intellectual staff to work in their villages in the most diverse areas of services and the indigenous cause. They understand that it is a political strategy to be able to assume the responsibility of being the bridge that favors dialogue between their people and the white world.

This more general understanding of Indigenous peoples about the importance and meanings of school and academic training today does not nullify the ideological conceptions that marked (and still mark) the function of formal instruction in the Indigenous environment. These marks are widely recorded in the historiography of indigenous school education in our country, characterizing schools as ideological institutions, acting as an arm of the State to nationalize indigenous peoples (ASSIS, 1981), perceived by others as a space for learning religious concepts, social and economic aspects of the colonizer (LUCIANO, 2013), and by others as a space for dispute, dialogue, border (TASSINARI, 2001).

However, we noticed that there is a movement of indigenous peoples who demand schools and universities. But this demand is based on the understanding that these spaces must be refounded, based on the understandings and demands of the original peoples. From this conception, they understand how important it means to have indigenous teachers, indigenous lawyers, indigenous doctors, and nurses, because, by specializing in people who are part of their ethnic groups of origin, they understand that they will not be completely hostage to the whites, since that some actions by non-indigenous public agents in their villages have provoked a series of complaints of mistreatment, ill will, prejudice, and unwillingness to remain continuously in their villages.

Furthermore, academic training also represents the possibility of autonomy and self-determination, demarcating in their daily life what makes sense for their life project. Therefore, higher education education demonstrates the willingness of indigenous peoples to extend and affirm their knowledge to protect and ensure the perpetuation of their ancestral procedures, according to their understanding of the present and future.

In this sense, the importance that higher education courses offered in the academic space have for Indigenous people is evident, given their socially referenced nature. However, the Brazilian public university is marked in its history to respond to the call of the ruling class, initially established to train the children of this ruling class. In this sense, the university is marked by an

exclusionary and meritocratic profile, as it was essentially established in Brazil “not to meet the fundamental needs of which it was and is part but thought of and accepted as a cultural good offered to minorities” (FÁVERO, 2006, p. 19)³.

Under the influence of this historical legacy, the university has repeatedly refused to expand the possibilities for people belonging to the most vulnerable social strata to gain access and remain with quality at higher levels of formal education.

In the current context, we concretely see that the public university is still an elitist space, which is unable to guarantee a wide opening of all its undergraduate and postgraduate courses to the children of the working class, as well as to Indigenous peoples, for the quilombola population, for the riverside people, for the LGBTQIA+ community, in short, for the oppressed people of our country. This reflects on how public universities were created in Brazil, to perpetuate the hegemonic political and economic power of the local elite (BRITO and CUNHA, 2009).

Although this scenario has presented a visible change in the last 12 years, mainly after the implementation of affirmative action policies, adopted from Law 12,711/2012, the perspective of access and permanence in the various courses offered at public universities by the most vulnerable population is still a challenge to be faced, since meritocracy continues to be the main leveling method for access to higher education. But not just that. There is still a barrier imposed on the university's structures that prevents it from reorganizing itself to welcome students belonging to these social groups. To give a very basic example of this “institutional laziness”, we will look at the official enrollment numbers of Indigenous people in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Table 02 indicates the official numbers of these registrations in the national territory. From this, we can have a more assertive perception of the reality of recent years, as well as be able to analyze the effects of these numbers on the daily lives of the university and Indigenous peoples.

Table 02: Total number of Indigenous students enrolled in Public and Private Higher Education Institutions in Brazil, 2011-2022			
Year	Enrollment in Public HEIs	Enrollment in Private HEIs	Total enrolled
2011	3,540	6,216	9,756
2012	4,126	6,156	10,282
2013	5,079	8,608	13,687

³ The term “minorities” indicated by Fávero (2006) refers to wealthy, economically powerful and rich minorities in Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century, when universities began to be institutionalized in our country.

2014	8,226	13,783	22,009
2015	9,810	22,337	32,147
2016	12,348	36,678	49,026
2017	13,898	42,852	56,750
2018	15,450	42,256	57,706
2019	15,837	40,420	56,257
2020	13,246	34,021	47,267
2021	16,783	29,468	46,251
2022	15,922	28,272	44,194

Source: INEP Higher Education Statistical Synopsis⁴. Adapted by the author.

Table 02 shows the panorama of enrollment of Indigenous students in Higher Education Institutions from 2011 onwards, the year in which INEP began providing enrollment data in HEIs divided by color/race categories. This first data already demonstrates that the collection of data on Indigenous people entering HEIs is a category applied very recently and, therefore, still in the adjustment and consolidation phase. However, there have been 12 years of data collection from these categories and we still see a lack of adequate treatment, when compared to the data obtained from HEIs in the state of Amapá.

When we investigate directly in the academic control departments about the way these students' access, as well as the specifications of their cultural and ethnic categories, such as the people to which they belong, Indigenous land of origin, the village of reference, mother tongue, there is no institutional data consolidated on these items in any of the higher education institutions in Amapá. However, through the coordination of undergraduate courses at the Binacional Campus of Oiapoque, at the Federal University of Amapá (UNIFAP), we obtained in a succinct and limited way the number of indigenous students enrolled on that campus until 2022. It was the only concrete data that we managed to get.

Regarding this point of the difficulty in processing data from Indigenous students in HEIs, Dal Bó (2018) helps us understand that the difficulties in measuring it within the scope of the MEC are also consequences of a scenario of constant movement:

Adoption of affirmative actions in new HEIs (in undergraduate and postgraduate courses) and new Indigenous entrants, withdrawal, and transfers, of graduates. Added to this is the lack of a body for monitoring affirmative actions and producing and systematizing this data by the government body responsible for national education policy,

⁴ Available at <https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/aceso-a-informacao/dados-abertos/sinopses-estatisticas/educacao-superior-graduacao>. Access on 01/02/2024.

the Ministry of Education – MEC, so that information can only be tracked through consultation with each institution (DAL BÓ, 2018, p. 43).

However, we once again emphasize that internally in some institutions, such as the HEIs in Amapá, this treatment is still practically null and non-existent today. The only information that exists is in the reports on the lists of those approved for admission to the institutions' courses, which does not correspond to an exact idea of reality, since there is the constant “movement” that Dal Bó mentioned above, with transfers, locking of enrollment, or even dropping out of the course before even enrolling, among other interruptions throughout the process. Therefore, this reality pushes us towards the need to organize and systematize data of this nature, considering its importance for educational policies, as well as for the analysis, evaluation, and strengthening of the Indigenous presence in universities.

Regarding the data shown in Table 02, in 2012, there has been an exponential growth in the number of indigenous students enrolled in higher education in Brazil. This indicates that, in 2019, the growth in the number of this type of enrollment increased by 476% in 2011. However, from 2020 onwards we noticed a sharp drop in the number of enrollments, a fact that deserves particular investigation. However, there has been an increase in the number of Indigenous students at universities, and this mainly corresponds to their demands for expanded access to higher education.

Another point that deserves to be highlighted in these data is that, as we mentioned, the increase in this number is also in line with the implementation of Law 12,711/2012, which provides in Article 3 for the reservation of vacancies for “blacks, browns and Indigenous people and people with disabilities (...) in proportion to the total vacancies at least equal to the proportion of black, mixed race, Indigenous people and people with disabilities in the population of the State where the institution is located”.

Associated with Law 12,711/2012, Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima (2016) also considers that the

Decree 7,824, of October 11, 2013, which regulates it, and Normative Ordinance 18, of October 11, 2013, which “provides for the reservation of places in federal educational institutions”, together with the Permanence Grant Program, created by Ordinance nº 389, of May 9, 2013, were some of the measures taken, among the wide range of proposals for affirmative actions in higher education, which tend to positively modify the discouraging situation of 2011 and part of 2012 (SOUZA LIMA, 2016, p. 21).

In the state of Amapá, following the national trend, the number of indigenous enrollments in HEIs also grew during this period. Let's look at the numbers in Table 03:

Table 03: Enrollment of Indigenous students in Public and Private Higher Education Institutions, in the state of Amapá, 2011-2022			
Year	Enrollment in Public HEIs	Enrollment in Private HEIs	Total enrolled
2011	12	42	54
2012	18	44	62
2013	40	1,187	1,227
2014	172	710	882
2015	225	518	743
2016	252	324	576
2017	274	239	513
2018	356	215	571
2019	335	160	495
2020	357	124	481
2021	355	93	448
2022	399	83	482

Source: INEP Higher Education Statistical Synopsis⁵. Adapted by the author.

The data presented in Table 03 also shows the increase in Indigenous people enrolled in Higher Education Institutions in the state of Amapá between 2011 and 2022. However, according to these official data, we noticed an oscillation in the growth of this type of enrollment in this state.

Following Table 03, as of 2014, there has been a visible increase in the number of enrollments of indigenous people in Public Institutions in Amapá. An element that probably contributes to this increase is the creation of the Binational Campus of the Federal University of Amapá in the municipality of Oiapoque, which, in 2014, installed seven (07) new undergraduate courses in that municipality in the extreme north of the state.

According to data obtained directly from the coordination of the eight (08) undergraduate courses on the Oiapoque campus, by 2022 there were 395 Indigenous people regularly enrolled in that academic unit. Compared with the data in Table 03, this represents almost all Indigenous students from Amapá who attend public HEIs. We, therefore, consider that the

⁵ Available at <https://www.gov.br/inep/pt-br/aceso-a-informacao/dados-abertos/sinopses-estatisticas/educacao-superior-graduacao>. Access on 01/02/2024.

presence of the university in Oiapoque has caused an increase in the number of enrollments of Indigenous students, since Oiapoque is the Amapá region where the largest number of Indigenous people are found in the state of Amapá, according to IBGE data of 2010⁶.

Even though in 2014, when the 8 courses in Oiapoque began operating, there was no possibility of differentiated entry for Indigenous people and quilombolas on that campus, we also noticed an increase in the enrollment of Indigenous people. However, the most significant increase occurred in 2018, when the Oiapoque campus adopted a different selection process model for Indigenous people and quilombolas. From then on, we noticed a considerable increase in enrollment of Indigenous students in public HEIs in the state of Amapá.

In any case, considering only enrollments in public HEIs in the state, there is an increase of 3,225% in 2022 when compared to 2011. At a national level, according to Table 02, the increase in enrollments in public HEIs increased by 349% in the same period. In other words, in Amapá, the data points to a growth in Indigenous enrollment in public HEIs well above the national growth.

It is important to highlight that official numbers are just one of the possible sources for analyzing this data. However, due to the administrative difficulties imposed on HEIs in the processing of this data, it was not possible to thoroughly investigate the other sources. However, with the elements we have from on-site visits and documents collected on official websites and pages of HEIs, we can point out here, at least, one inconsistency in the processing of data made available by INEP.

As of 2014, according to Table 03, 172 indigenous students were enrolled in public HEIs in the state of Amapá. Considering that in this State there are only 03 public Higher Education Institutions (Federal University of Amapá – UNIFAP, State University of Amapá – UEAP, and Federal Institute of Amapá – IFAP); considering that only the UNIFAP Indigenous Intercultural Degree course there were 164⁷ Indigenous students enrolled in 2014 and, at least, around 19 students enrolled in the same year in other courses at the same institution⁸. Considering also other students who enrolled in other HEIs, which, based on the data from their notices, we

⁶ According to the 2010 IBGE Census, the municipality of Oiapoque had an indigenous population of 5,569 people, while the total indigenous population of the state of Amapá was around 7,385 individuals. This means that the municipality of Oiapoque concentrated, in that year, 75.4% of the indigenous population of the state of Amapá. Available at: <https://indigenas.ibge.gov.br/graficos-e-tabelas-2.html>. Accessed on 04/15/2022.

⁷ According to data obtained directly from the physical archives of the secretariat of the Indigenous Intercultural Degree Course at UNIFAP.

⁸ Data obtained from consultations on UNIFAP enrollment notices, available on the page <http://www.unifap.br/editais-academico/>. Access on 02/20/2021.

can see at least 09 students⁹, it is possible to identify that there is an inconsistency in the numbers officially presented.

Inconsistencies in the data are also present in the other years shown in the table mentioned above. This is a fact that seems minor, but it is not. Thus, why is there no specific refinement and care in the processing of this data? We are talking here about numbers relating to people who have historically been excluded from the university context, who still seek to overcome the walls of the academy, and who, even if some manage to enter the academic space, their origins are erased in the reports, in the notices, in the official data of the university. This is very serious, as it demonstrates that the university is not willing to highlight the rich diversity that supports it.

One last issue that I believe is important to mention is that Tables 02 and 03 indicate a very high number of enrollments in private institutions. Although we notice that this trend shows a decline from 2014 onwards¹⁰ in the HEIs of Amapá, while on the national scene, its numbers are exorbitant, which corresponds to a significant increase of 353% in enrollment of Indigenous students in these HEIs in 2022 when compared to 2011. This means that, even if the numbers change due to the inconsistencies we exposed above, according to official data from INEP, 64% of Indigenous higher education students were enrolled in private HEIs in 2022, while 36% were enrolled in HEIs public in the same year.

However, according to data worked by Mariana Paladino and Nina Paiva Almeida (2012, p. 107), the percentage of indigenous students enrolled in private higher institutions already reached 70% in 2003. According to the authors, until then, FUNAI was the only government body that partially met the Indigenous demand for higher education, “through the granting of financial aid”. But the authors also point out that, until the end of the 1990s, these demands were mainly individual and family within indigenous groups. Thus, Paladino and Almeida (2012, p. 107) further state: “The demand from Indigenous movements for higher education, therefore, is recent”.

This entire scenario allows us to realize that Indigenous peoples in Brazil have hardly conquered their space in the academic environment and with a lot of struggle and mobilization they demand expansion in the occupation of these territories, although these academic spaces are often located in private higher education environments, which requires monthly payments, or often depends on student financing from the Federal Government, through programs such as the

⁹ Research carried out on the websites of the State University of Amapá and the Federal Institute of Amapá, referring to the year 2014. <http://processoseletivo.ueap.edu.br/>; <https://processoseletivo.ifap.edu.br/ps/>. Access on 05/10/2021.

¹⁰ I consider it necessary to emphasize again the importance of reading this data based on the situation that occurred at the Oiapoque Campus in 2014, when seven new undergraduate courses were introduced and from 2018, when there was a differentiated entry offer for indigenous people in these same courses. We saw from the table that, from 2014 onwards, the number of indigenous people in public HEIs increased, while in private HEIs decreased. From 2018 onwards, this trend has become even greater.

University for All Program (*Programa Universidade para Todos - PROUNI*) or the Higher Education Student Financing Fund (*Fundo de Financiamento ao Estudante do Ensino Superior - FIES*)¹¹, which, in my understanding, and based on the readings of Miranda (2017), Silva and Soares (2019), Miranda and Azevedo (2020), among others, it works as a transfer of funds and responsibility for offering higher education from the Federal Government to the private sphere, which represents a problem.

PROVISIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

We reaffirm the importance that Indigenous people have dedicated to the knowledge produced in academic spaces. We reiterate that the data we work with in this article indicate that in recent decades in Brazil there has been a greater movement of Indigenous people in search of academic training, which has increased the number of indigenous students in Brazilian universities. We also point out that there is a need to look at the data collected by INEP, understand their contradictions, and the challenges of organizing them according to local realities.

We realize that Brazilian public universities still create barriers to building an adequate entry and permanence model for Indigenous peoples, but little by little, even with all the difficulties, the number of Indigenous university students has gradually increased.

Another point that deserves to be highlighted is that Indigenous researchers are seeking improvement in academic spaces so that, in addition to a safer dialogue with the white world, they can recover their history and memory that have been historically manipulated by Western knowledge, meaning that Indigenous people cannot feel completely represented by what has been produced about them. In this movement, we understand that there is a possible construction of knowledge within the academy arising from the possibility of a science built from an “ecumenical epistemology”, or construction of knowledge based on the collaboration of collectivities (RAMOS, 2007; 2016).

When dealing with a university that is dedicated to opening the construction of plural and joint knowledge, we understand that the university begins to constitute not as an institution for conquering others and monopolizing knowledge based on Western understanding. This openness is fundamental so that people who have historically been excluded from “spaces of knowledge” can conquer them based on their cultural, political, and social experiences.

¹¹ O PROUNI ficou estabelecido a partir da Lei nº 11.096/2005. Este programa prevê a destinação de bolsas integrais e parciais para estudantes matriculados em IES privadas, considerados em vulnerabilidade econômica. Por outro lado, as IES que aderiram ao PROUNI ficam isentas de vários impostos e contribuições, conforme prevê o Artigo 8º da citada Lei. Já o FIES foi instituído pela Lei nº 12.202/2010, que alterou a Lei 10.260/2001. Trata-se de um “financiamento a estudantes matriculados em cursos superiores não gratuitos”, e que, ao concluir seu curso de graduação e iniciar sua carreira profissional, inicia a pagar o financiamento, incluindo as correções e taxas de juros firmadas no contrato.

The indigenous people have a demand for collaboration in the construction and fabric of the academic space based on their speeches, based on their presence, their knowledge, and their knowledge practices. They demand the construction of a way of thinking and knowing that takes into account their sciences and their ancient practices of being in the world. They therefore demand a university that is attentive to this call, and that can understand the importance of this space being conquered by them, in a process of reversing the historical process of conquest and manipulation of knowledge.

Colombian anthropologist Luis Guillermo Vasco (2012) understands academia as an important space for debate, dialogue, and transformation of science and society. According to this author, if the academy is the place where a science is created that still serves as a tool for the domination of indigenous peoples, this tool cannot be left alone. They must confront these ideas, and the place for this confrontation is in the academy, where the scientists are, where the researchers train. Therefore, this space must also be occupied and conquered by indigenous people.

A point for a final reflection: to occupy and achieve, it is necessary to remain at university. We are aware that maintaining an academic environment is not an easy task for anyone, and indigenous people, the challenges are redoubled, since they are far from their lands, their family environment, living on the outskirts of urban centers, learning to speak another language, having contact with other types and norms of food, trying to overcome the racism that is directed at them every day.

Staying at university has been a great resistance challenge for these people. However, even with all the adversities imposed, the indigenous people have managed to expand the doors of the university. Thus, with a lot of struggle, mobilization, and confrontation, they begin to ensure that the conquest of this environment is on their horizon. Therefore, the need to occupy these spaces that have historically been denied to them is much greater than the adversities, and with their resistance, they will be able to reach the university in its entirety and not in parts.

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