



**CONTRADICTIONS OF THE NEOLIBERAL IDEARY IN THE STUDENT ASSISTANCE POLICY:
FROM BIRTHDAY TO CURRENT DAYS**

**CONTRADIÇÕES DO IDEÁRIO NEOLIBERAL NA POLÍTICA DE ASSISTÊNCIA ESTUDANTIL: DO
NASCEDOURO AOS DIAS ATUAIS**

**CONTRADICCIONES DEL IDEARIO NEOLIBERAL EN LA POLÍTICA DE ASISTENCIA
ESTUDIANTIL: DEL CUMPLEAÑOS A LOS DÍAS ACTUALES**

Marília do Amparo Alves Gomes¹
Ennia Débora Passos Braga Pires²
Soane Santos Silva³

Abstract: The article seeks to discuss the historical trajectory of the Student Assistance (SA) policy that aims to promote access and permanence of young people from the lower classes to the university. As a public policy inserted in the context of capitalism, Student Assistance is forged amid contradictions, on the one hand it partially meets the demands of the working class, on the other, it presents minimalist aspects characteristic of focal policies. He concludes by pointing out that AE, at the national level, with the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES), strictly complies with the neoliberal prescription and the guidelines of multilateral organizations for education in Brazil.

Keywords: Student Assistance. Higher Education. Educational Politics.

Resumo: O artigo busca resgatar e discutir a trajetória histórica da política de Assistência Estudantil (AE) que tem como finalidade fomentar o acesso e a permanência de jovens das classes populares à universidade. Como uma política pública inserida no contexto do capitalismo, a Assistência Estudantil é forjada em meio a contradições, por um lado atende parcialmente as reivindicações da classe trabalhadora, por outro, apresenta aspectos minimalistas característicos das políticas focais. Conclui apontando que a AE, em nível nacional, com o Programa Nacional de Assistência Estudantil (PNAES), atende rigorosamente

¹ State University of Southwestern Bahia. Vitória da Conquista, Bahia, Brazil.

² State University of Southwestern Bahia. Vitória da Conquista, Bahia, Brazil.

³ State University of Southwestern Bahia. Vitória da Conquista, Bahia, Brazil.

ao receituário neoliberal e as orientações dos organismos multilaterais para a educação no Brasil.

Palavras-Chave: Assistência Estudantil. Ensino Superior. Política Educacional.

Resumen: El artículo busca rescatar y discutir la trayectoria histórica de la política de Asistencia Estudiantil (AE) que tiene como objetivo promover el acceso y la permanencia de los jóvenes de las clases bajas a la universidad. Como una política pública insertada en el contexto del capitalismo, la Asistencia Estudiantil se forja en medio de contradicciones, por un lado, cumple parcialmente con las demandas de la clase trabajadora, por otro, presenta aspectos minimalistas característicos de las políticas centrales. Concluye señalando que AE, a nivel nacional, con el Programa Nacional de Asistencia al Estudiante (PNAES), cumple estrictamente con la prescripción neoliberal y las directrices de las organizaciones multilaterales para la educación en Brasil.

Palabras clave: Asistencia al Estudiante. Enseñanza Superior. Política Educativa.

1 INTRODUCTION

An analysis of public educational policies must consider that poverty and social inequalities do not occur naturally. Thus, starting from a perspective that understands the inequalities present in public education policy as part of the contradictions inherent in a capitalist society based on exploitation and oppression, it is possible to identify some of the expressions of the social⁴ issue articulated to the current reality.

It is important to highlight the emergence of the Higher Education policy in Brazil and, subsequently, the student assistance policy as an expression of a broad combination of interests, conflicts and demands. We start from the assumption that the existence of growing popular groups that remain deprived of the right to access Higher Education and access to work makes up a structural dimension of capitalism. We realize, therefore, that this is not a phenomenon specific to specific spatial contexts, but rather, to the implications of the historical inequality inherent in the production system in capitalist societies.

In all phases, capitalism aimed at imposing ideologies that would naturalize the domination of a privileged elite over the impoverished population, so it is not possible to think

⁴ This expression started to be used in the 19th century and “[...] appears to account for the most evident phenomenon in the history of Western Europe that was experiencing the impacts of the first industrializing wave, which started in England in the last quarter of the 18th century: this is the phenomenon of pauperism. In effect, the massive impoverishment of the working population was the most immediate aspect of the establishment of capitalism in its industrial-competitive stage”(NETTO, 2011, p. 152-153).



about this system without considering class antagonism. As Netto (2012) emphasizes, capitalism only worked for the owners of the means of production, given that this mode of production expresses a direct relationship with the social issue.

Marx and Engels already denounced class inequality in capitalism in the first sentence of the Communist Manifesto Party written in 1848, when they remembered that if there were many classes in feudal society, in bourgeois society, in capitalism, new forms of oppression and struggles were identified, society being increasingly divided into two vast opposing fields: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (MARX; ENGELS, 2011).

From the 1970s, with the structural crisis of capital, the world elite concerned with maintaining privileges and guaranteeing the preservation of the system adopts the neoliberal ideology, a new model of policy and control that has its mark in 1989 when the Washington Consensus occurs, characterized by a set of economic rules agreed by economists from large financial institutions that would guide the elaboration of economic and social policies recommended by major international organizations, such as: International Monetary Fund, World Bank, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Inter-American Development Bank. These institutions formulate guidelines that are strictly followed by countries that require “loans” and, in return, there are in the requirements the dictates of neoliberalism, economic adjustments and, mainly, policies that are less and less impacting on social reality.

In Brazil, as of the 1990s, it is possible to clearly perceive traces of this ideal, such as the minimization of the State and the guarantee of the free market. The Brazilian reality is marked by governments that historically have made political choices that overlap the payment of the Brazilian public debt at the expense of investment in social policies that could have a major impact on the country's social problems. In this sense, Peroni (2003) emphasizes that the State has presented itself as a minimum for social policies and, in compensation, a maximum for capital.

With this, the deepening of inequalities occurs from the materialization of neoliberal ideas that are based on the withdrawal of the State from the economy, here appears the idea of the Minimum State, the return of market laws without restrictions, the increase in interest rates for expanding consumption, reducing taxes on capital and decreasing public spending,



and, consequently, investments in social policies. With neoliberalism, the possibility of achieving the Social Welfare State is eliminated, encouraging severe cuts in social⁵ spending.

These cuts occur mainly in social policies, among them, in education policy including student assistance policies. In this problematization, we question how the trajectory of the student assistance policy was built, which is essential for students in situations of social vulnerability and which are the actors involved in the construction of this policy.

We understand that from the analysis of public policies, social actors can demand changes. However, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that, when inserted in the capitalist mode of production, these policies have no impact on the structures of inequalities. In the current moment of capitalist development, barbarism is deepening, which explains the fact that public policies in the neoliberal context only mitigate the effects of poverty and do not act with the objective of eliminating it (NETTO, 2012).

In this sense, an analysis of social public policies today allows us to argue that social programs, for example, should be coupled with structural transformations in society, as they would thus have a profound impact, but, on the contrary, they are emergency and basically welfare programs.

[...] the social policy now directed at those qualified as excluded is outlined by always claiming to be included in the field of law, as specific to capitalism, it does not even have the formal intention of eradicating poverty, but of facing only the extreme poverty, indigence, as its own discourse intends to confront absolute poverty, that is to say, misery. (Netto, 2012, p. 28)

Following the same bias, education policy in Brazil has always been restricted to the interests of the Brazilian elite. According to Motta (2008, p. 04), the relationship between poverty and education was established “since the formation of capitalist societies as a mechanism of political stability, with a proposal to contain possibilities of breaking social cohesion and establishing the order necessary for the reproduction of capital”, but it can also be a factor in overcoming the conditions of poverty of the working class. It is worth remembering that the working class and the popular strata see in education a possibility of social ascension and liberation from models of slavery proper to the capitalist mode of production.

5 The Welfare State emerged after the Second World War. Its development is related to the industrialization process and the social problems generated from it. There was also a vertiginous expansion of public assistance services in the areas of income, housing and social security, among others.



2 STUDENT ASSISTANCE POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Researchers present different experiences to explain the institution of higher education in Brazil. In this analysis, we will take Saviani's thought (2010, p. 06) as a reference, which states that “higher education courses themselves began to be installed in Brazil from 1808, with the arrival of D. João VI. Then (...) isolated higher education courses, that is, not articulated within universities”, therefore, this is the genesis of Brazilian higher education.

With regard to student assistance in Brazil, Kowalski (2012) points out that its origin is linked to the birth of the university and is transformed together with the entire history of Brazilian Higher Education, marked by a social context in constant movement process, with deviations until the legitimation of the student assistance programs. Next, taking Kowalski's (2012) research as a reference, we present the historical trajectory of student assistance in the Brazilian context, showing the contradictions along the way taking the historical framework of student assistance in Brazil as reference.

2.1 FIRST PHASE OF STUDENT ASSISTANCE IN BRAZIL

In the first phase, student assistance actions are dated from 1928, with the creation of a university residence for young people who went to France to study and had difficulties in finding housing in the country, leaving the Brazilian government with the transfer of resources both for the construction of structures as well as for the maintenance of the home and students. However, we must emphasize that student assistance, in this historical period, was restricted to meeting the needs of the children of the Brazilian elite, since only those had access to Higher Education, confirming that inequality in access is directly related to social inequality.

It is important to note that the bases of student struggles in Latin America were influenced by the Cordoba Reform. Dozens of students occupied the headquarters of the National University of Córdoba, in Argentina. The Cordoba student movement launched on June 21, 1918 the Manifesto called “From the Argentine youth of Córdoba to the free men of America”, in which they strongly describe the university reality. According to Freitas Neto (2011), after issuing a pastoral letter from the Bishop of Córdoba in which he condemned student mobilization, in July 1918, students held the 1st National Congress of Argentine



Students and reinforced the demands of the Manifesto, summarizing as main guidelines: student co-participation in the administrative structure; free participation in classes; defined periodicity and free professorship of the chairs; public character of the sessions and administrative instances; extension of the University beyond its limits and dissemination of university culture; social assistance to students; university autonomy; university open to the people.

On September 9 of the same year, the students took over the direction and control of the University and reopened the institution, the government appointed José Salinas as intervener with the support of the students, a Decree was published that responded to the demands, ensuring the triumph of the Movement. There were repercussions of the Movement's ideals throughout Latin America, albeit late in Brazil, especially due to the specificities of the history of higher education in the country.

Regarding the practice of student assistance on Brazilian soil, even though they have records of previous isolated actions, it has as a landmark the construction of the first Student House in 1930 in Rio de Janeiro, during the government of Getúlio Vargas; in the interest of the government, donations were granted. Subsequently, the House became an aid organization for students without political connotations, where it housed various services for underprivileged students, such as: popular restaurant, student residence, library, among others. After 1937, the Student House became the administrative headquarters of the National Student Union, which started to have control over the student assistance services offered on the spot (VASCONCELOS, 2010).

Throughout the course of Higher Education, we perceive the focus of resistance to the University model presented by the elite. The student movement through National Student Union is one of the important actors in the struggle for student assistance and guided, among the demands, a look at access and permanence in Higher Education. Kowalski (2012) points out that the Ministry of Education supported the creation of National Student Union as a government strategy to build a depoliticized institution, with administrative headquarters at Student House of Brazil responsible for promoting legal assistance, scholarships, jobs, library, health and residence.

National Student Union's demands are intensified especially in the area of university reform and rights for students in higher education. In 1961, National Student Union held, in Salvador, the National Seminar on University Reform that resulted in the Declaration of Bahia



that claimed pluralism in universities, with accessible courses (KOWALSKI, 2012). In addition, it brought discussions on national political issues and the problems of society reform. In the same year, the 1961 Law of Directives and Basis for National Education was promulgated, establishing student assistance as a right that should be guaranteed equally to all students with provision for social, medical, dental and nursing assistance to students, in addition to offering free scholarships to students to pay for all or part of their studies, with financing for reimbursement within fifteen years.

Despite specific demands, university reform was the flag of the National Student Union with the main objective of making the university a pluralized space with guaranteed access for all. This entity has a fundamental role in the construction of the student assistance, especially from the period of the Military Dictatorship, because, at this time, National Student Union suffered strong reprisals due to the demonstrations.

Among the seventeen decrees issued by the military dictatorship in the years following the 1964 coup d'état in Brazil, Institutional Act Number Five (AI-5) was the toughest of them all, issued by President Artur da Costa e Silva in December 13, 1968. This Decree resulted in the loss of mandates from parliamentarians opposed to the military, in addition to interventions ordered by the president in municipalities and states and also in the suspension of constitutional guarantees that resulted in the institutionalization of torture, used as an instrument by the State.

However, as a contradiction, the military period from 1964, on the one hand, strongly rebukes the student movement, on the other hand, creates the false idea of equal opportunities. Thus, during the military governments, an illusory process of inclusion of the most popular strata becomes evident. The students were organized in several representative entities, such as the Central Student Directorate the Students' Union, in addition to the National Students Union and their demands, protests and demonstrations were guided by the political issues of the country.

One of the motivations of the demands in the streets was the questioning about the "surpluses", students who obtained average in the entrance exams, but did not enter the University because the number of places was lower than the number of approved (ANTUNES; RIDENTE, 2007). Disgusted with this reality, on March 28, 1968, students, mostly poor high school students, mobilized at the student restaurant in Rio de Janeiro, called Calabouço; the



police invaded the restaurant, generating the first major street conflict that year. Many students were injured and high school student Edson Luís de Lima Souto was killed.

The repercussions of this conflict generated another great mobilization against the military regime with a general strike decreed by National Student Union, with the support of trade unionists, artists, religious and intellectuals to the movement that culminated, in June of the same year, in the march of the Hundred Thousand in Rio de Janeiro, asking for democracy, freedom and justice; such an act marked the history of Brazil's resistance.

Still in June 1968, there were demonstrations, strikes and occupations of colleges, with a main focus on Rio de Janeiro; in response to this, acts of repression were increasingly harsh. Antunes and Ridente (2007) point out that on June 21, in the protest that later became known as “bloody Friday”, four people were killed, in addition to dozens injured and hundreds arrested. With the scenario marked by repression, the militants of the student movement were persecuted, made illegal and/or killed.

In this sense, a common strategy of the leaders of the power was the invisibilization of the class struggle, for that the working class was disarticulated. The propagation of conflicts among students of opposing ideological positions, for example, is an attempt to weaken the student movement, beyond to successfully pursuing the objective of capturing the leaders of the movement, without negative repercussions of the military regime on society. On the contrary, episodes of explicit violence by the military against students made the population take to the streets in defense of the students, but with the increase in repression, they remained articulate in order to organize the Congress.

As another extreme act of violence by the military, on October 15, at the National Student Union Congress, in Ibiúna, in the State of São Paulo, all participants were arrested, about a thousand students, according to information on the UNE website (2018), marking thus the end of the protests of 1968, because, at the end of the same year, Institutional Act number five (AI-5) was proclaimed, indicating, still, greater repression against opponents of the military regime. From then on, several student movement members would go on to clandestine political activism. Only at the end of 1970, the student movement began to restructure itself after the National Student Union Congress.

Despite the history of violence against student movement, it is perceived as an advance in the 1970s, as pointed out by Vasconcelos (2010), the institution of the Student Support Department linked to the Ministry of Education. The Department was responsible for



maintaining a university student assistance policy at the national level, with priority for food, housing, medical and dental assistance programs. However, later governments paid little attention to student assistance by extinguishing the Student Support Department.

This shows that the implementation of short-term policies depends on the political strategy of governments and the environment to remain. In this case, the institution of the Student Support Department, with actions aimed at student permanence, in a period of great repression against students, should not be understood as a government benefit, but rather as an attempt to contain the student movement, based on two strategies: the concrete repression with student deaths and arrests and the appearance of meeting student demands.

The world context of the 1970s was marked by the rise of neoliberal ideas settling in Brazil in the 1990s. Frigotto (2010) states that the neoliberal and neoconservative ideas became the watchword for the adjustment and submission to the rules of the new lords the world and its institutions both in Latin American and Eastern European countries.

The struggles of the student movement took place in the opposite direction to the logic of capital, especially the struggle for a policy of permanence that in the 1970s was also led by the Movement of Student Houses, because the student movement has always had a very strong connection with student housing, which gained emphasis in the 1970s, and from 1975 onwards it started to promote the National Meeting of Student Houses. Such a meeting is the highest decision-making body of the National Secretariat of Student Houses. In the event, resident students organize themselves through mobilizations in search of improvements in their homes, also through student assistance and social justice. The National Secretariat of Student Houses website highlights as its main characteristics the Movement of Student Houses its resistance and dispersion throughout the country, since it brings a history of struggles and is present in the various regions of Brazil with discussions about student assistance and specific way about the student housing situation.

2.2 SECOND PHASE OF STUDENT ASSISTANCE IN BRAZIL

Kowalski (2012, p. 101) points out that the second phase of the implementation of the EA is based on the political democratization of Brazil, with which “[...] there is a favorable space for a series of debates and bills that resulted in a new configuration of student



assistance in Brazilian universities”, therefore, other important actors stand out who, together with the student movement, contributed greatly to the construction of an student assistance. Like the creation of the National Forum of Pro-rectors of Community and Student Affairs (FONAPRACE) and the National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education (ANDIFES), in 1987.

After the Federal Constitution of 1988, important achievements were made from the struggles. The Federal Constitution incorporated civil society claims expressed as social rights provided for in article six “education, health, food, work, housing, transportation, leisure, security, social security, maternity protection and childhood, assistance to the destitute ”(BRASIL, 1991).

Regarding Higher Education, the 1988 Constitution enshrined the fallacious university autonomy, in reality it is a relative autonomy, because with the precariousness of higher education and the reduction of public education funds, there is nothing to talk about autonomy. It also established the indissociability between teaching research and extension, free of charge in official establishments and ensured admission by public competition and the single legal regime.

Peroni (2003) points out that from the 1990s onwards, education policies began to suffer a strong influence from the redefinition of the role of the State and are also constitutive parts of the changes. Barroso (2005), in line with Peroni (2003), emphasize out that the historical context of the rise of the neoliberal ideology, of the State's lack of responsibility for social policies has directly impacted the education that has been transformed into a commodity and proposes as a way to reflect on the real role of the public school, which should aim to fight for social justice and reduce inequalities, breaking with capitalist logic.

Legislation with forecasts about student assistance have historically been constituted for partially meeting the student agenda as a way to contain the demands and mobilizations of the student movement, however never with full attention to the needs of students, as shown by the study by Felipe e Silva (2018).

Mancebo, Silva Junior and Schugurensky (2016), when analyzing the impact of the globalization of capital in Brazilian Higher Education, point out that initially the impact has the highest point in 1995, when the Ministry of Federal Administration and State Reform draws up the Master Plan for State Reform under the responsibility of Minister Luís Carlos Bresser Pereira.



However, the reform of the State was not only in the scope of the economy with the privatization of state-owned companies. In the educational field, the focus was on management. With the enactment, in 1996, of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN), there was greater flexibility in the offer of Higher Education for the private sector. In its Art. 7º, LDBEN (BRASIL, 1996) determines that “education is free to the private initiative”, opening space for a restructuring of Higher Education in Brazil since it clearly authorizes the operation of for-profit institutions.

In his reform plan, Bresser Pereira identified four sectors in the interior of the State: the strategic core, exclusive activities, non-exclusive or competitive services and, finally, the production of goods and services for the market and, following this reasoning, he asserts that the most important non-exclusive services of the Union are universities, technical schools, research centers, hospitals and museums, services that with the reform, intended to transform into social organizations through the Publicization Program, a kind of non-state entity or public foundation under private law controlled by a management contract signed with the executive and that would have the congress permission to participate in the state budget (SILVA JÚNIOR; SGUISSARDI, 2001).

Considering universities and technical schools as part of the non-exclusive services of the State, the reform of Brazilian Higher Education begins with the state reform in 1995. The main project for the education system is the decentralization of social services, because, disclaims managerial and financial responsibility for the State of a considerable portion of the public education system, with negative effects on the educational system, since it transfers educational services to the other federated entities, but does not guarantee an infrastructure to States and municipalities, leaving it in charge of these, all responsibility for the precariousness of Education.

For Mancebo, Silva Júnior and Schugurensky (2016), the more noticeable impact of the globalization of capital on Brazilian Higher Education is more evident in the mandates of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC) and the beginning of the first term of the Lula da Silva government (2003/2007). Phase marked by the enactment of laws resulting from the Master Plan for State Reform with an impact on Higher Education Institutions.

The traits that come to be pursued, in a very general way, in Brazilian higher education are: applied research; faster courses, including those supported by new information and communication technologies; evaluative or regulatory



processes based on results, among others. (MANCEBO; SILVA JUNIOR; SCHUGURENSK, 2016, p. 210)

In addition, there is a loss of university autonomy influenced by the “heteronomy of management”, besides the new relationship between the university and the private sector. The impacts of these actions are the scrapping and devaluation of public universities, consequences of the contingency of costing and capital resources, suspension of public tenders for hiring professors and administrative employees and, finally, the freezing of salaries, a reality until today Brazilian universities.

In spite of this, as a result of the history of claims, the student assistance started to be listed by the National Education Plan of 2001, in articles nº 33 and 34, in which it is predicted that the public education policy should foresee as a goal for the Education, encouraging the adoption of student assistance programs such as work grants or others designed to support underprivileged students who demonstrate good academic performance in public universities.

In the face of this macro scenario, the highlight of the Lula government (2003-2007) is the attempt to configure itself as a class conciliation government, with social programs aimed at the vulnerable population, such as the *Bolsa-Família* Program, which has gained international visibility; programs for the construction of low-cost housing, regulation of student assistance at universities, concurrently with this, there was a large allocation of resources for the large business community, especially in Higher Education expansion policies. This government does not break with the current economic model.

Santiago (2014) asserts that the issue of access to Higher Education from the perspective of democratization and non-massification was a demand of society, in addition to the struggle for the right to stay, since the degree of evasion in Higher Education was already evident. With the continuation of the privatization of Higher Education, President Lula acts through Provisional Measure nº 213, of September 10, 2004, which institutes the University for All Program (PROUNI) in which we highlight two strategic points: 1st) serves the sector private; and 2) it appears that the demands of student bodies for expansion and democratization of Higher Education seem to be met.

Mancebo, Silva Júnior and Schugurensky (2016) highlight that the first term of President Lula da Silva and in part of the government of Dilma Rousseff is a period that has as its main characteristic the emergence of programs with strong potential for institutional



change and the expansion of Higher Education. In addition to PROUNI, the Support Program for the Restructuring and Expansion Plan of Federal Universities (REUNI), the increase in distance education and the Student Financing Fund (FIES).

2.3 THIRD PHASE OF STUDENT ASSISTANCE IN BRAZIL

As of 2007, the third phase of student assistance begins. It is the period of President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva's second term (2007-2010). In the context of Higher Education, the year 2007 is marked by Normative Ordinance N^o 39, of December 12, 2007, which institutes the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES), a milestone of student assistance.

Throughout the course of Higher Education and, consequently, of student assistance, it is possible to perceive strong repercussions of the neoliberal ideology, such as privatizations, the focus of the governments of Collor de Melo and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, while the PT and Lula governments dilute the continuity of service faithfulness of the neoliberal prescription with the so-called “democratization of Higher Education”, with new ways of meeting the demands of the financial market.

Silva Júnior (2006) points out that the new design of Higher Education in Brazil presents a university that quickly became an organization and started offering educational products in response to the demands of capital, therefore, in addition to its initial objective of knowledge production, extension and service provision adds the need to present education as a commodity.

Despite the “class conciliation” bias, with low visibility of social movements, in the Lula government, in 2009, the fifty-first Congress of the National Students Union, held in Brasília, discussed as proposals the improvement of public education, student permanence, inseparability between teaching, research and extension. Among the resolutions approved at the event was the creation of a National Student Assistance Plan that would guarantee students in situations of social vulnerability, access to food, transportation and educational material. It also defended the creation of Pro-Rectories for Student Assistance in all public higher education institutions and specific funds for that purpose (UNE, 2018).

In this context, the social policies for the expansion of ES, a hallmark of the Lula government, are divided into two groups: those in the private sphere and those in the public



sphere. Both clearly demonstrate the process of transforming a right into a commodity, since the State's social policies are not independent, they are influenced by the market.

We highlight as Higher Education expansion policies in the private sphere the Higher Education Student Financing Fund (FIES) and the University for All Program (PROUNI). It is a new conception of education oriented not as a social right, but as a service, therefore, regulated by the laws of the market.

FIES was instituted by Law nº 10.260, of July 12, 2001; it is intended to finance “students of higher education courses not free”. We emphasize that this is a focal policy, with no guarantee of conditions of permanence or even of subsequent success in the labor market.

The University for All Program (PROUNI) was created in 2004, by Law nº. 11.096/2005, and aims to “grant” full and partial scholarships to undergraduate students and sequential courses of specific training, in private institutions of higher education”, and the institutions that adhere to the program are exempt from taxes.

Sguissardi (2015, p. 869) points out that the Higher Education expansion policy in Brazil, especially through programs like PROUNI and FIES, is a public policy of a focal and compensatory nature of the social inequalities produced by the capitalist development model, “a elite, high-quality education” for the few and mass and “ low-quality education for the many”. We can infer that at this juncture, the accelerated expansion of private initiative was the most evident result of the set of reforms implemented in Higher Education.

When questioning whether there is democratization or market massification in Higher Education, the author warns of three important points: to examine how access to higher education has been given, the permanence until the end of studies and the success or failure of those with qualifications in the labor market. It can be seen that such policies strictly meet the neoliberal prescription and benefit large companies, in addition to disseminating the false idea of the democratization of higher education, when it comes to an expansion process of higher education marked by market massification.

The expansion policies of higher education in the public sphere are emphasized with the Support Program for the Restructuring and Expansion Plans of Federal Universities (REUNI) and Unified Selection System (SISU) once in Brazil the state public policies for the inclusion of young people from popular classes in Higher Education were directed to the financing of this type of teaching in private institutions, whether by purchasing places through PROUNI or via educational credit programs.



The Program to Support Federal University Restructuring and Expansion Plans (REUNI) was instituted by Decree nº 6,096, of April 24, 2007. According to data from Andifes (2011), in the period of REUNI, the expansion of supply stands out of vacancies in evening courses which was 79% and in undergraduate courses which represented approximately 34%. The Program aims to “[...] create conditions for the expansion of access and permanence in higher education, at the undergraduate level, by making better use of the physical structure and human resources existing in federal universities” (BRASIL, 2007). The fact that it was a government program established by a decree and not a law has already made it vulnerable, since, in a possible change of government in 2010, there was no guarantee of continuity. In addition, the Program was not designed taking into account the equipment of existing universities or the hiring of new professors and technical servants.

Law nº 9.394, of 1996 and the National Education Plan (PNE) 2001-2010, justified Reuni, established the provision of Higher Education provision for at least 30% of young people aged 18 to 24 years, up to the end of the decade (BRASIL, 2010). However, REUNI did not resolve the issue of precarious public universities; on the contrary, it emphasized. The increase in vacancies in Higher Education Institutions disregarded the need for proper planning and discussion with the academic community and other stakeholders, such as the student movement, teachers, managers and civil society, etc.

From the quantitative point of view, there was an expansion of courses and expansion of the physical structure, which resulted in an increase in the number of universities and campuses, as evidenced by the results presented in 2012, based on the quantitative data of Reuni, the result of work carried out by a commission instituted by Ordinances nº 126, 2012 and Nº 148, 2012, composed of representatives from Andifes, Secretariat of Higher Education (SISU/MEC), National Students Union and the National Association of Graduate Students (ANPG).

In compliance with the dictates of capital, especially of international organizations, of reducing expenses per student, the Brazilian government started to develop mechanisms for assessing the quality of education, with the creation of new modalities of access and competition for admission to public University education. One of the measures was the creation of the Unified Selection System (SISU). It is a computerized system of MEC in which public institutions of Higher Education offer vacancies for participants in the National High School Exam (Enem). In this type of selection, the candidate must choose, in order of



preference, up to two options among the vacancies offered by the participating SISU institutions. The candidate also opts for vacancies for the affirmative policies of the institutions. Adherence to SISU has been taking place gradually in both federal and state universities. Its use occurs in conjunction with other forms of entry to, in the future, become the means of universal access.

The idea of SISU has several positive implications, but also aspects that demonstrate the prevalence of the meritocratic criterion, in addition, there was no investment in public universities, neither in personnel nor in infrastructure. SISU promotes participation in the selection processes for public higher education, as it makes it possible for candidates to compete for all courses registered in the system, without financial costs, which allows greater participation of groups from popular classes.

As a way of resisting massification policies, there was mobilization of opposition to the reforms of the FHC government and the Lula government on the part of institutions such as the National Indicator of Teachers of Higher Education Institutions (ANDES), a National Association of Directors of Federal Higher Education Institutions (ANDIFES) and the Federation of Technical-Administrative Workers Indicators in Public Higher Education Institutions in Brazil (FASUBRA), among others, with the objective of guaranteeing the valorization of federal universities, demonstrating that the official expansion data did not take into account more complex issues.

The positive impact of public policies to expand enrollment and social inclusion is undeniable, which constitute an important step towards overcoming inequalities. In the case of young people from the poor classes, but also for the country in general, “[...] the expansion of enrollments is of high value” (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2010, p. 1,238). For these young people who, beyond to economic vulnerability, generally reach higher education with low educational and cultural repertoires, each year of schooling can mean salary gains, an increase in consumption patterns, an increase in self-esteem and the possibilities of achieving better social positions.

This can also mean a large number of students who migrate from their cities to study at university centers, many times, without having guaranteed the conditions of permanence of graduation. Therefore, such an expansion is contradictory; on the one hand, it allows access to Higher Education, on the other hand, it disregards the fact that access alone does not guarantee the conclusion of graduation. Bearing in mind that the question of universalizing



the selection processes for admission to public universities was not considered together with other important issues, such as the policies for the permanence of students and the academic performance of those from the lower classes.

This situation was aggravated by the 2016 political coup, when the Temer government continues the same tonic as previous governments; increasing inequalities and dismantling hard-won social rights. In the field of education, the State is reduced even further, with a government project called “Bridge to the Future”. The proposals for this field deepen the scrapping of public education with low investment in research and defense of education without criticism, such as the High School reform project (Law nº 13.415, of 2017) that opened space for the controversial *Escola Sem Partido* Project (Bill nº 867, 2015), in addition to the freeze on spending in the Education area for two decades with Constitutional Amendment 95/2016, known as PEC da *Maldade*. The reduction of funds directly impacts the permanence policy, with a direct impact on the daily lives of universities.

The brief exhibition held so far serves as a parameter to show the influence that the productive restructuring and the neoliberal ideology had in the Brazilian educational field both in the FHC governments and in the Lula, Dilma and Temer governments. What stands out over the past decades is the effort with the objective of quantitative expansion, regardless of whether this expansion takes place as a usufruct of a public right or if only as a purchase of a service, commercial product or merchandise (SGUISSARDI, 2015).

For a better understanding of student assistance, it is necessary to know the legislation that influenced the development of permanence policies in Brazilian Higher Education. In this sense, the National Student Assistance Program instituted on December 12, 2007, by Normative Ordinance nº. 39 of MEC and Decree nº. 7.234 of 2010, constitutes the legislative framework.

Student Assistance, made official through the National Student Assistance Program, is the result of a historic struggle by National Student Union, the National Secretariat of the Student House and National Forum of Pro-rectors of Community and Student Affairs. With a recent past of fragmented actions in universities, as in the 1990s, it is now guided by specific legislation. However, student assistance persists with visible influences from the macro context, such as meeting the neoliberal prescription. Catani and Oliveira (2002, p. 75) emphasize that the World Bank has some guidelines for the process of restructuring public universities, including diversification of sources of funding for state institutions, as well as the



adoption of incentives for the your performance. The mobilization of private funds for Higher Education, "[...] especially through the participation of students in spending, graduates, external help from financing agencies, and the expansion of services". Also according to Catani and Oliveira (2002, p. 75), it is also part of these guidelines of the World Bank, "[...] the assistance and support to poor, but qualified students, through assistance plans / programs; improve the allocation and use of resources between and within institutions", above all, by linking funding to institutional performance criteria.

To meet these guidelines and, at the same time, meet the demands of the IFES and student movements, specifically National Student Union, National Forum of Pro-rectors of Community and Student Affairs and Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education, the Federal Government started to allocate specific resources to student assistance. As a result of the struggles of the aforementioned entities, student assistance gains public policy status, being governed by Decree 7.234 of July 19, 2010; it is the recognition of its importance to expand the conditions of permanence of young people in a situation of social vulnerability in public higher education.

The aforementioned Decree also establishes that student assistance actions are developed in the areas of student housing, food, transportation, health care, digital inclusion, culture, sports, daycare, educational support and access, participation and learning for students with disabilities, global disorders development and high skills and giftedness (BRASIL, 2010).

The student assistance is inserted in the public education policy and is configured as a focused policy, listed in the Federal Constitution - 1988 as a social right. One of its contradictions occurs with a dichotomy of focused politics and universal politics. Focal policies such as those aimed at portions of the working or excluded population and have limited reach, since they do not act on the causes of the social inequality that causes exclusion. In turn, social policies are called universal when they act on structural aspects of the economic-political system, such as real and constant increase in the minimum wage or to eliminate the causes of unemployment and social exclusion.

The articulation of student assistance in the teaching-research-extension triad, guaranteed as academic praxis and social law, escapes the logic of focal policy, thus overcoming the minimalist and assistentialist character of social policies. This was evident with the discussions proposed by UNE in 2013:



It assumes that Student Assistance Policies should be seen as a social right and as a political guarantee of citizenship and human dignity. Therefore, it must be inserted in academic praxis with actions articulated with teaching, research and extension. (UNE website, 2018)

In practice, the materialization of student assistance does not occur with this dimension of universalization. Immersed in the reality of resource reduction, in the logic of the minimum state, if effective, in fact aimed at meeting the minimum survival needs. Behring (2009) highlights that social policy meets the needs of capital and labor, configuring itself, since for many it is a question of survival, as an important scenario of the class struggle in defense of dignified conditions of existence.

3 FINAL REMARKS

Student Assistance is based on contradiction, and can assume the character of realizing rights, as well as meeting the dictates of neoliberalism and the logic of maintaining social inequalities as it currently occurs. The shaping of student assistance is strongly linked to the country's socio-political transformations and its impacts on the history of Brazilian Higher Education, from its trajectory until it gained greater legitimacy in the government's agenda and reached the status of public policy in the 2000s.

The comprehension of the totality in this analysis took place with the deepening about the neoliberal prescription for Higher Education in Brazil and its consequences as the State reform in the Fernando Henrique Cardoso Government and with the Lula and Dilma class conciliation governments, which continued the commercialization of Higher Education and printed the massification of Higher Education erroneously publicized as democratization.

Student assistance presents itself throughout all its phases, as a focal policy, immersed in the logic of reducing the role of the State in public policies and partially meeting the demands of the student movement, an important actor in the struggle for a policy of universal student permanence.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS:**Marília do Amparo Alves Gomes**

Master in Education from the State University of Southwest Bahia (UESB); Graduate Program in Education PPGED / UESB; Member of the Research Group on Playfulness, Didactics, Politics and Educational Praxis (LUDIPPE) and Study and Research Group on Policies for Higher Education (GEPPS).

Email: mariliaamparo@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2321-3813>

Ennia Débora Passos Braga Pires

PhD in Education from the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), Professor of the Graduate Program in Education PPGED at the State University of Southwest Bahia (UESB); Leader of the Research Group on Playfulness, Didactics, Politics and Educational Praxis (LUDIPPE).

Email: enniadebora@uesb.edu.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3924-4996>

Soane Santos Silva

Master in Education from the State University of Southwest Bahia (UESB); Graduate Program in Education PPGED / UESB; Professor at the Municipal Education Network of the Municipality of Itapetinga, Bahia / Brazil; Member of the Research Group on Playfulness, Didactics, Politics and Educational Praxis (LUDIPPE).

Email: soanesilva@hotmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3807-1798>

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