

**Peer-reviewed article**

**Coloniality Prints in Internationalization of Higher Education: The Case of Brazilian and Chilean International Scholarships**

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**Abstract**

In this article, we argue that efforts to internationalize higher education that do not make visible the colonial legacy in the higher education space become catalysts that intensify and reproduce the power asymmetries among countries, universities, and ways of knowing. To support and illustrate our argument, we carried out an analysis of two of the largest international scholarship programs implemented by Latin American countries, namely, the Brazilian 'Science without Borders' and the Chilean 'Becas Chile' programs. Our analysis shows that Brazil and Chile, aiming to enhance their position in the so-called 'knowledge economy', implemented strategies of internationalization that assumed, naturalized, and possibly biased the intrinsic benefits of internationalization at the expense of local needs and realities. We also found that Brazil and Chile embrace a concept of internationalization equated with academic mobility to (almost exclusively) Western/European industrialized countries of the global North.

## Introduction

With the advance of globalization, internationalization of higher education (hereafter, IHE) has become a strategic priority and a desirable outcome for countries and higher education institutions in the last 30 years (Knight, 2005; De Wit, 2020). IHE is typically portrayed as an intrinsically beneficial asset to enhance academic quality, advance scientific and technological discoveries, augment students' and academics' intercultural awareness, and foster agendas of global justice (see van der Wende, 2007; Knight, 2012). Nonetheless, the overemphasis on the positive aspects of IHE is somewhat problematic since it contributes to hiding the mechanisms that maintain the power asymmetries and hierarchies between nations, universities, bodies of knowledge, and different societal groups (Vavrus & Pekol, 2015; Stein, Bruce & Suza, 2016).

The flows of international student mobility before the emergence of COVID-19 mirrored the south/north divide installed since colonial times (Marginson, 2006). More than half of the total number of international students are concentrated in the USA, UK, Australia, and Germany (considered the global North); and most of these students come from China, South Korea, and India, countries that belong to the region known as global South (OECD, 2018).

Yet, most of IHE studies analyze patterns of international student mobility without paying attention to the legacy of colonization. For instance, several scholars have used the 'push-pull' model to understand student's decision of studying abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; De Wit, 2008; Gbollie & Gong, 2020; Perez, Rodriguez-Pomeda & de Wit, 2020). This theoretical approach portrays students as rationale actors seeking to optimize their opportunities considering the push and pull factors in their home and host countries respectively. As such, the push-pull model recognizes the existence of geopolitical asymmetries across the regions of the world due to colonial hierarchies (see Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), but it does not problematize nor questions how this international mobility reinforces the global North/global South divide.

Briefly defined here, the term global South refers to the geopolitical rather than geographic regions of the world and their people who have been paying the costs of colonization and economic globalization. It includes regions and peoples which have historically been politically or culturally marginalized (Dados & Connell, 2012).

Similarly, the notion that academic quality of universities located in the global North is reflected in and reinforced by global university rankings (Pusser & Marginson, 2013), whose comparative methodology disproportionately favors an Anglo-Saxon model of research-intensive universities in the global North (Pusser & Marginson, 2013; Finardi & Guimarães, 2017).

Likewise, other bodies of research show that some universities located in the global North are actively recruiting international students as a way to cope with the cut of public funding in higher education (Robertson, 2011; Cantwell, 2015; Tannock, 2018). Scholars criticize the instrumentalization of students as 'cash cows', though very few connect this phenomenon to the legacies of colonization (Stein & Andreotti, 2016).

In this article, we seek to make explicit that IHE strategies are not neutral nor disconnected from the hierarchical power asymmetries installed during colonial times. In this sense, we echo the call of other scholars (Vavrus & Pekol, 2015; Pashby & Andreotti, 2016; Stein & Andreotti, 2016; Leal & Oregoni, 2019) who argue that the potential benefits of IHE need to be problematized in the light of power dynamics that get produced and reproduced in this process. To develop this argument, we adopt a decolonial stance (see Quijano, 2000; Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2011) to analyze how two international scholarship programs funded by Brazil and Chile — Science without Borders (SwB) and Becas Chile (BC), respectively — have reproduced colonial footprints. Hereafter, we will also refer to these programs as SwB and BC.

Decoloniality acknowledges that the existing injustices of our social world are deeply entangled with the hierarchies and power dynamics installed during the colonial period (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

We selected Brazil and Chile as case studies for three reasons. First, we respond to the invitation of Diniz De Figueiredo and Martinez (2019), who encourage researchers to reveal their locus of enunciation as a way to fight epistemic myopia. Both of us are academics from Brazil and Chile. Second, these two countries report the largest scientific capacity in the Latin American region, as measured by the number of scientific articles (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Gómez, 2019). Thirdly, both countries implemented their respective international fellowship programs in similar periods with the intention of enhancing their geopolitical position in the so-called knowledge economy.

Our analysis is organized into three sections. First, we explain our conceptualization of colonial prints; then, we conduct a close analysis of the two international scholarship programs; and finally, we discuss the possibility that countries located in the global South could offer alternatives to the predominant competition logic of internationalization higher education strategies.

## **Defining colonial prints**

To analyze the colonial prints in the international fellowship programs of Brazil and Chile, we rely on two concepts: (1) economic globalization as a new facet of coloniality and (2) the hidden colonial prints in the promises of modernity. We pose that colonial prints represent indications that the hierarchical power relationships installed during colonial times still exist, though with different expressions.

### **Economic globalization as a new facet of coloniality**

Decolonial scholars, particularly the ones associated with the Latin American modernity/coloniality group argue that economic globalization represents a new facet of coloniality (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007). The international division of labor, and the superiority of racial-ethnic category of white Western Europeans over Black and Indigenous populations imposed during colonial times, still prevails in the global economic structure – even when most colonized territories obtained independence from their former colonizers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (e.g. Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011; Dussel, 2014).

The production of computers is a good example of how such global order and international division of labor has evolved throughout the years, but at the same time, has maintained the hierarchical order imposed during colonial times.

In recent year, the Chinese company Lenovo has become the major producer of computers, yet, most computers producers, including Lenovo, concentrate their research centers in the USA. These companies utilize the infrastructure accumulated in the USA and generate high-paid employment that requires advanced skills to design computer hardware and software (see Wikipedia, 2021a; Wikipedia, 2021b). Countries like Chile, a former colony of Spain, provide some of the raw materials (i.e. copper and lithium) used in the production of electronic circuits that are used in computers. The production of the electronic circuits and the final assemblage of these computers occur in different countries, mainly China, India, and increasingly Brazil (see Wikipedia, 2021a; Wikipedia, 2021b). Consumers from all over the world buy computers, largely manufactured by workers living in countries located in the global South, whose environmental and labor regulatory systems allow for a lower cost of production as compared to those in Western–European countries.

This global chain of production seen in the international market of computers (and other economic sectors such as the financing sector and the production of tea, just to name but two) is “intertwined with (and not derived from)” a structure of cultural and social relationships (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007:16) that has systematically (re)produced the superiority of Western–European values and ways of knowing, as well as whiteness as race, among other relationships (Quijano, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2011). As it is shown later, these colonial relationships are also produced and reproduced in the international higher education space.

### **The hidden colonial prints in the promises of modernity**

In explaining how the economic, social and cultural orders (imposed during formal colonial administration) is maintained through the centuries, decolonial scholars from the modernity/coloniality group argue that modernity has installed a set of promises that hide colonial relationships (Quijano, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2011). For instance, the creation of the modern states in the colonized territories brought with it the promises of democracy and socioeconomic progress, but these promises at the same time denied the rights and knowledges of Indigenous peoples (Quijano, 2007).

Modernity brought with it the promises of ‘enlightenment’, i.e., humanist knowledge that overemphasizes the role of scientific knowledge in the social progress. ‘Modern’ science and ‘modern’ philosophy have predominantly been rooted in principles of universalism, which precedes the idea that despite the cultural differences across civilizations, human societies undertake the same general path toward progress (Grosfoguel, 2013; Dussel, 2014).

Universalism has disproportionately benefited the superiority of Western–European knowledge. A phenomenon that Santos (2014) describes as an abyssal thinking, a type of rationale that only recognizes the legitimacy of knowledge produced in one side of the abyssal line (the Western–European), discarding the option of “the co-presence” of other non-Western–European knowledges (Santos, 2014:189) in what could be an ecology of knowledges.

In recent decades, reforms to expand higher education access and enhance scientific and technological capacities (Schofer & Meyer, 2005) rely on a similar logic to the promise of the 'enlightenment'. That is to say that greater scientific and technological knowledge will lead into a better positioning in the global economy, and consequently, greater economic and social progress of countries. At the individual level, access to higher education promises greater economic gains and social upward mobility.

As it is explained later, these promises are called into question in the context of Brazil and Chile (and other countries), whose aspirations to positioning in the global economy are still affected by the entanglements of colonization.

### **Brazil and Chile's position in the global economy (global coloniality)**

Brazil and Chile, former colonies of Portuguese and Spanish empires respectively, occupy a semi-periphery position in the global economy. These two countries share most of the attributes of countries located in the global South (ex-colonies) that have historically had a position on the periphery, but they are increasingly embracing the standards set by leading countries in the global North.

Brazil, the largest and most populated country of the Latin American region (211 million people, 8.516 million km<sup>2</sup> of surface area) with its affiliation to the BRICS group (comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), has cultivated a position of raising power not only in terms of economic growth but also of political influence in Latin America and increasingly, in Africa (Stolte, 2015).

Chile (18 million people and 756,950 km<sup>2</sup> of area), until its recent social unrest in 2019, positioned itself as a politically and economically stable country in Latin America. It was the first country in the region to sign free trade agreements with the US, the European Union, and China, and the second one (after Mexico) to join the Organization of the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2010).

The semi-periphery position of Brazil and Chile, to different extents, is reflected in several aspects of their local realities. In the international division of labor, Brazil and Chile, like the majority of Latin American countries, focus on the extraction of raw materials with little value add before exporting to the international market, mainly China and the USA. The average annual income per capita, estimated in USD Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), has increased substantially in the last decade in Brazil (\$15,259 PPP) and Chile (\$25,155 PPP); yet, this average income is still far away from the countries that occupy a central position in the world economy (OECD average income: \$46,578 PPP) (World Bank, 2020a). Besides, both countries report a high level of income inequality (World Bank, 2020b).

Similarly, the poverty rate in Brazil and Chile has decreased in the last two decades, especially in the large cities (World Bank, 2020c). Yet, the regions with the largest number of Indigenous people in Chile and Black African descendants in Brazil, report the greatest poverty rates in each country (For Brazil, see Soares, de Souza, da Silva, da Silveira & Campos, 2016; Chile, see Observatorio Social/Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2018b). This situation reflects that the dispossession suffered by Indigenous and

Black peoples centuries ago due to colonization is still (re)produced in current times, though in different forms and labels.

Likewise, both countries have expanded higher education enrollment exponentially in the last decade, but their systems are highly stratified by race and class. In the case of Brazil, higher education enrollment expanded from 4.6 million in 2005 to 8.03 million in 2015 (INEP, 2016). By 2018, it was estimated that only 21.3% of the population between 25-34 had completed a tertiary degree (OECD, 2021). Brazil implemented an affirmative action program to increase higher education access for Afro-Brazilians (see Colo, 2013). Nonetheless, racial disparities are still high. Around 55.6% of Afro Brazilian students between 19-24 years report attending higher education institutions, as compared to 78.8% of the white population of the same age (IBGE, 2018).

In Chile, 1.17 million people enrolled in higher education in 2017 (SIES/MINEDUC, 2021), around 40% of 20-29 year-olds; yet, the percentage of population between 25-34 years old who completed tertiary education is much lower (33.7%) (OECD, 2021). Though race is not recorded as a variable in the official statistics of Chile, ethnicity is. Statistics show that the proportion of Indigenous people between 18-24 attending HE was equivalent to 32.7% in 2017, still lower than the representation of non-Indigenous students of the same age group (38.1%) (Observatorio Social/Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2018a).

Similarly, both countries have higher education systems highly stratified by class. Upper-middle class students tend to concentrate in research-intensive universities located in the big cities, whereas students from middle and low-income classes are overrepresented in universities with lower research capacity. Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous groups in Brazil and Chile, respectively, are overrepresented in the social group with the lowest income in the respective countries (IBGE, 2019, Observatorio Social/ Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, 2018b).

When Brazil and Chile launched their international scholarship programs — Science without Borders (SwB) and Becas Chile (BC), respectively — these nations targeted slightly different goals in their internationalization strategies to compete in the economic globalization and global conversations. SwB (2011–2016) sought to “internationalize science and innovation” (Science without Borders, n.d.a), whereas BC’s primary goal was to increase the national scientific capacity of the country, relying on international universities to train a good part of the next generation of Chilean researchers (OECD & World Bank, 2010).

### **International Student Mobility in Brazil and Chile**

Brazil is the second main destination for international students in the Latin American region (N=21,181), after Argentina (N=88,873 students hosted), with international students coming from different continents (UNESCO, 2021). Two thirds of the Brazilian students studying abroad (N=67,183) go to the USA (21%), Argentina (19%), Portugal (16%), Australia (11%) (UNESCO, 2021). Despite the diversified group of countries with whom the Brazilian academia have international exchanges, most of the research produced in Brazil is cited predominantly by Brazilian researchers (McManus & Nobre, 2017).

From a position with significantly less research outputs, Chile receives significantly less students than Brazil (N= 5,682). Most of the international students in Chile come from Latin American countries. Like Brazil, Chilean students' main international destination include the same group of countries with some nuances. Argentina (38%), USA (14%), Spain (13%), and Australia (6%) concentrate 70% of the Chilean mobile students (N=16,728 total) (UNESCO, 2021). In both countries, the second main destination are their former colonizers (Portugal and Spain).

### Global competition versus local realities

Science without Borders (SwB) is the largest international fellowship program ever funded by the Brazilian government. When former president Dilma Rousseff launched this initiative in August 2011, the promise was to fund 101,000 scholarships in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) areas between 2011 and 2014 (Sá, 2016). An estimated an investment equivalent to \$1.2 billion USD was supposed to be co-funded by the state (75,000 scholarships) and the private sector (26,000 scholarships), though the latter did not contribute as expected (Sá, 2016).

SwB offered four different types of international academic mobility fellowship exclusively to STEM academics (undergraduate exchange, master and PhD degrees, visiting scholars). Nonetheless, 79% of the fellowships were allocated to fund the mobility of undergraduate students to universities in the global North for a period of 4-12 months (Science without Borders, n.d.b).

The magnitude and emphasis of the Science without Borders program raised a number of criticisms. First, the design of the program was led as a presidential initiative and no other actors were consulted to discuss its design (Sá, 2016). Second, the focus on undergraduate students called into question the administrative capacity of the Brazilian scientific agencies<sup>1</sup> CNPQ and CAPES (Grieco, 2015). These agencies have historically been in charge of designing and administering postgraduate fellowships to study in national and foreign universities (Sá, 2016). Third, SwB primarily fostered an international mobility toward English-speaking countries of the global North, but an important number of undergraduate students required additional preparation in the English language to utilize the fellowship. This increased the pressure on CNPQ and CAPES to create language training courses for undergraduate students in a short period of time (Sá, 2016), ultimately leading to the creation of the national program 'English without Borders' in 2012 (Finardi & Archanjo, 2018). Fourth, undergraduate students receiving a SwB scholarship did not receive adequate guidance to navigate the new cultural and academic environment in the foreign university, which made their process of academic adaptation more difficult (Grieco, 2015).

Science without Borders was discontinued in 2016 having funded 92,880 fellowships (Science without Borders, 2016) and being responsible for inducting an internationalization agenda in most Brazilian universities (Finardi & Guimarães, 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> CNPQ, by its acronym in Portuguese, is the Brazil's National Council for Scientific and Technological Development. CAPES, also by its name in Portuguese, is the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel.

In the case of Chile, the implementation of its international fellowship program, Becas Chile (BC), shows similar characteristics to the one implemented by Brazil, with the big difference that BC primarily funded master's and doctorate scholarships.

In May 2008, then-President Michelle Bachelet announced the creation of BC in the annual national public accounts, upsetting the presidents of traditional Chilean universities because they were not consulted in the design of the initiative (CUECH, n.d.).

Although it was not the only strategy of internationalization of higher education funded by the Chilean government, BC represented the largest government effort to fund studies abroad. It was expected to attract 3,300 fellows by 2010 and maintain this rate for the next decade, allocating more than 30,000 fellows by the end of the decade (Bachelet 2008 in OECD & World Bank, 2010). To fund the program, the Chilean government relied on the interests of an international deposit of \$6 billion USD fed by resources procured from copper exports (OECD & World Bank, 2010:10).

The decision to finance postgraduate scholarships in foreign universities arose from studies comparing Chile's scientific and technological capabilities with industrialized countries such as Finland and New Zealand, and which concluded that Chile had too few doctorates in science and engineering (CNIC, 2007). However, the largest number of BC scholarships financed masters and doctorates in social sciences and humanities (CONICYT, 2020).

During the first two years of the program, Chile's main scientific agency—CONICYT currently renamed ANID<sup>2</sup> — faced a number of challenges in administrating a volume of international fellowships that was ten times greater than the number of fellows awarded annually in 2007, resulting in delays in payment. The number of scholarships decreased substantially in 2011 (CONICYT, 2015) as concerns voiced that the Chilean labor market did not have the capacity to absorb the new generations of masters and doctorate holders (Astudillo, Blondel & Norambuena, 2012). The low investment in research and development, 0.35 as a percentage of GDP (RICYT, n.d.a), has been a permanent issue for Chilean scientists. By June 2020, BC had funded 5,441 masters and 4,197 doctorate fellowships plus another 1,178 international scholarships allocated to fund primarily postdoctoral research and other specializations (CONICYT, 2020). At the time of writing this article, the Chilean government announced the suspension of new calls in 2020 due to the scarcity of economic funds and the limited international mobility as a result of the COVID-19 (ANID, 2020).

Overall, the design and implementation of SwB and BC show two countries seeking to catch up with their scientific and technological capacity, while investing in international visibility by increasing the number of academics studying abroad. This decision-making process was poorly planned and did not consider the opinion of other higher education actors (Chiappa & Muñoz García, 2015; Sá, 2016). From a decolonial standpoint, both countries, at least discursively, reproduce the notion that science and technology will precede the socioeconomic progress of the country, without questioning the validity

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<sup>2</sup> CONICYT (by its acronym in Spanish) is the Chile's Commission for Scientific and Technological Development. After Chile created its Ministry of Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation in 2019; CONICYT was renamed as the National Agency for Scientific Development (ANID).



of such promise in light of their role in the international division of labor and in regards to their local realities.

### The superiority of universities (and knowledges) of the global North

Brazil and Chile adopted different strategies to select the universities that would receive their fellows. SwB signed off institutional agreements with a group of top-ranked international universities, primarily located in the global North. Candidates had to select a university from a list of three offered by the program; these foreign universities were applied to on behalf of the applicants by SwB. BC left the selection of the international universities to the individual applicants, but it set as an admissibility criterion that fellows were admitted to one of the 150 top-ranked universities as determined by global university rankings— (Perez Mejias, Chiappa & Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2018). In the last three years, BC developed its own international university ranking system (CONICYT, 2019).

Despite the different strategies, most scholarships went to the same group of countries, but in different proportions. In Brazilian case, fellows went to the USA (30%), UK (12%), Canada (8%), France (8%), Australia (8%), Germany (7%) and Spain (5%) comprising 77% of the total fellowships (Science without Borders, 2016). No SwB fellow went to Argentina, the main country destination of the overall group of mobile Brazilian students. For Chile, 80% of the fellows went to the UK (28%), USA (21%), Spain (19%), Australia (11%), France (4%) and Germany (4%) (CONICYT, 2020).

The number of fellowships allocated to study in the global South was marginal. Out of the 92,880 fellows funded by Brazil, 16 scholarships were allocated to South Africa, 18 to Mexico and 43 to Chile (Science without Borders, 2016). Likewise, less than 2% of the 10,810 Becas Chile scholarships funded postgraduate studies in countries located in the global South (CONICYT, 2020).

The SwB and BC targeted universities known for their ‘academic excellence’ (CONICYT, 2019; Science without Borders, n.d.a), that is, those associated with a status and reputation displayed in university rankings. In the scheme of international competition, there is no space to question how such definitions of academic excellence are shaped by colonial relationships that allowed the accumulation of scientific and technological capacities primarily in European empires and a few other English colonies. Aligned with decolonial arguments about the interdependent relationship between modernity and coloniality (Quijano, 2000; Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007), the promise of partnering with a specific group of universities marked as ‘excellent’ hides the exclusion of the non- or lower-ranked universities, without questioning the criteria and/or limitations of these rankings, nor the flaws of the meaning in the current hierarchical order.

### English as the preferred language

Strategies of IHE that rely on international university rankings reinforce the superiority of English as the *lingua franca* in the academia. The methodology of global university rankings heavily rewards research outcomes, particularly peer-reviewed articles in mainstream journals published in English (Pusser & Marginson, 2013). Several scholars have identified a language bias that shows a strong

correlation among language, country of origin of the publication, and impact (Hamel, 2013; Guzmán-Valenzuela & Gómez, 2019).

For Brazil, responsible for the 2% of the total scientific publications in the world in 2018 (RICYT, n.d.b), this language bias toward English has negatively affected the visibility of its research outputs, most of which is written in Portuguese (Finardi & França, 2016). This seems to explain why the Brazilian SwB program disproportionately signed agreements with universities that not only had international visibility, but also offered classes using English as the medium of instruction (Martínez, 2016).

Likewise, the program 'English without Borders' (EwB) was created in 2012 to guarantee that potential candidates to the Science without Borders had the necessary level of proficiency in English to apply for the fellowships (Finardi & Archanjo, 2018). Because of heavy criticism raised at the EwB initiative for being exclusive to English and SwB candidates, the EwB program was expanded to include the offer of other foreign languages to all university students (not just STEM) in 2014, being renamed 'Language without Borders' since then.

In the case of Chile, more than 60% of Becas Chile applicants had to demonstrate their proficiency in English. During the first two years of implementation of the scholarship program, applicants had the option of being pre-selected as BC fellows while they acquired their foreign language requirements. That is, one applicant could be preselected to receive the fellowship without having the admission letter from the top-ranked international university. BC pre-selected fellows would have up to two years to be admitted in a top-ranked university, and thus, access the benefits of BC (Chiappa & Muñoz García, 2015). This criterion recognized that the acquisition of a foreign language, specifically English, negatively affected the applicants who did not learn a second language at early stages of their academic life, typically individuals who come from low and middle-incomes families who attended publicly funded high schools (Perez Mejias *et al*, 2018). Becas Chile removed this criterion by 2010, and since then all applicants have to present an admission letter that confirms that they were admitted in a postgraduate program conferred by a top-ranked university (Chiappa & Muñoz García, 2015).

### **The superiority of STEM fields over other disciplinary knowledges**

In most of the disciplinary fields, it is clear that the acceptance of Western–European philosophies and views are superior when compared with the knowledge that emerged from non-Western civilizations (Grosfoguel, 2013; Dussel, 2014). In addition, across disciplinary fields, the economic globalization has disproportionately highlighted the role of STEM fields as responsible for leading economic and social progress. This notion reflects an abyssal type of thinking (Santos, 2014), whereby only certain disciplines (STEM) and knowledges (mainly Western–European notions of science) are relevant for the economic and social progress of society, while other fields (social science and humanities) and knowledges (local and Indigenous) are invisibilized or devalued.

The program Science without Borders, by narrowing its recipients to exclusively those in STEM disciplines (100% of fellowships were assigned in this field) and to those that offered courses in English (Sciences without Borders, 2018), reinforced an abyssal type of thinking that only recognizes certain universal formula of how to achieve social and economic development.

Though the Becas Chile did not restrict grants to specific areas in the first years, it rewarded with higher scores projects in the STEM fields. This criterion was removed in 2010, but it recently introduced a list of strategic areas relevant for the country that includes topics such as hydric resources, natural disaster management, and digital transformation. Despite the original aims of the Becas Chile program of focusing in STEM fields, it is estimated that 61% of the fellowships were awarded in social science and humanities, only 29% in STEM fields and 10% in health science (CONICYT, 2019).

### **Most fellowship recipients were already privileged students**

The available public data about the fellowship recipients of SwB and BC does not allow us to estimate whether these two programs benefitted in greater proportion students coming from lower income and historically marginalized racial/ethnic backgrounds. Yet, the existing figures suggest that both programs benefitted in greater proportion students who were already in a position of advantage.

In Brazil, McManus and Nobre (2017) showed that only 23% of the Brazilian undergraduate students with short-term fellowships came from low-income families (less than three minimum Brazilian salaries, equivalent to less than 1,241 USD PPP monthly) (OECD, 2019). The remaining 77% came from middle- and upper-class families, most of whom were white. Only 25.5% of the same group of fellows identify themselves as having Afro-Brazilian descentance, which is equivalent to the proportion of Black Brazilian students in universities (23%) but significantly less than Black Brazilian descendants in the entire higher education system (McManus and Nobre, 2017).

In Chile, fellowship applicants who reported a disability status or belonged to an Indigenous group received an additional score in their evaluation, though this score was marginal as compared with valuation to the quality of the foreign university, as indicated by the positioning of the ranking (Chiappa & Muñoz García, 2015). In figures, less than 0.5% of BC fellows during 2008-2014 reported coming from an Indigenous background (CONICYT, 2015). Concerning the social class and origins of the applicants, Perez Mejias and colleagues (2018) show that the use of global university rankings to evaluate fellowship applications mainly favored the applicants who studied in private high schools. This school type serves primarily students who come from upper-middle classes that can afford private education.

### **Implications of international fellowship reproduction of colonial prints**

Our analysis shows that the design and implementation of SwB and BC reinforced colonial hierarchies in the higher education system of Brazil and Chile, particularly with regards to the epistemic domain, by predominantly fostering international relationships with research-intensive universities that appear in global rankings, located in the English-speaking countries of the global North.

From a pragmatic point of view, one might ask why this decision — fostering international relations with mainly top-ranked universities/countries — is problematic when these universities/countries, as

judged by their research outputs, have a greater level of resources and equipment that would benefit the scientific and technological capacity of Brazil and Chile.

Our argument here does not go against establishing relationships with a selected group of top-ranked universities/countries, but about the disproportional favoritism and resources that support engagements with top-ranked universities/countries, denying the possibility of co-existence of relationships with actors/knowledges that do not occupy the same status nor have the same visibility (Leal & Oregioni, 2019).

In that sense, we echo the words of Santos (2014) who invited scholars to move beyond this type of abyssal thinking that only recognizes the values of knowledges/languages/people on the global North side of the abyssal line. We argue that fostering international engagement with a reduced set of research universities/countries negatively affects the encounter of pluriversal, divergent theoretical perspectives and views, which inevitably has negative implications in the production of knowledge in universities.

Indeed, we contend that the SwB and BC have left colonial prints in the epistemic domain that not only influence how the current generation of fellows might be conducting pedagogical and research processes, but also influence the next generation of students/researchers who will be taught by academic staff who have barely been exposed to or involved in non-Western–European knowledge construction.

In the current scenario of environmental crisis highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Santos, 2020), along with nationalist governments and hate speech against historically marginalized communities, we argue for the need of situating strategies of IHE that recognize the different views, cultural perspectives, and ways of knowing to foster what Santos (2014) has labeled an ecology of knowledges which recognize the validity of pluriversal ways of thinking, and thereby creating distance from a monopolistic view of competition in economic globalization.

### **Drafting other possibilities of IHE, from and for the South**

One might think that the option of intentionally favoring partnerships and alliances with actors located in the global South that have experienced the periphery and marginal position could naturally bring alternatives to the predominant competitive schemes of IHE. Nonetheless, we notice that this option requires deeper de-investment of aspirations of superiority and accumulation of economic wealth and resources (Stein & Da Silva, 2020) than a simple change of geographical orientation would entail.

First, we cannot deny the systematic exclusion of Indigenous Peoples and their knowledges from universities located in the global South (see more in Grosfoguel, 2013). Second, if the main motivation of international partnerships is competition, South-South internationalization strategies could simply reinforce and recreate other colonial relationships.

For instance, the Brazilian fellowship program known as (Post)Graduate Agreement Student Program (PEC-G for undergraduate students, PEC-PG for postgraduate students) created in the 60's (Laus &

Morosini, 2005), is an example of South-South collaborations. This program targeted students coming from a selected group of Latin American and African countries to study in Brazilian universities with the final goal of strengthening educational and cultural exchange and cooperation ties between universities in these regions (Laus & Morosini, 2005). Yet, this international cooperation logic, also seen in other programs of internationalization elsewhere (e.g. Fulbright, Chile's program for Latin American students, German Academic Exchange Service program), is not exempt of abyssal thinking – where it is often possible to observe that the host country is considered superior to those sending the students (Stein & Andreotti, 2016).

More recently, during the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva (2006–2014), Brazil actively engaged in international partnerships with other Latin American and African countries in what could be seen as an expansion of cooperation in the South. Yet, in some of these initiatives, Brazil appeared as the leader country following a competitive logic, whereby other countries (for example Benin), looked up at Brazil, much like how Brazil looks up at countries in the global North, thus reproducing colonial prints (in the South) rather than offering an alternative based in collaboration (Piccin & Finardi, 2019) and more horizontal relations (Morosini, 2011). In other words, partnerships between actors located in different geographical and or geopolitical locations do not necessarily escape the colonial logic of superiority and competition.

### **Alternative strategies/gestures towards the disruption of colonial relationships**

There is no single initiative of IHE that could completely escape or operate outside the colonial matrix (see Stein & Da Silva, 2020). Yet, there are several projects, run by scholars, researchers and artists associated with higher education institutions that are intentionally seeking to de-invest in harmful relationships that have allowed and naturalized the injustices and violence in the epistemic, racial, class, economic and ecological domains.

It is the case of the research/artist collective [decolonialfutures.net](http://decolonialfutures.net), which gathers diverse initiatives of artists, researchers, and Indigenous communities in Canada, Brazil and other American countries, work is done to re-imagine spaces and relationships beyond the rationale of expropriation of the Earth and other beings. These initiatives explicitly state that their “decolonial perspective is informed and inspired by Indigenous analyses and practices that affirm that [their] current global problems are not related to a lack of knowledge, but to an inherently violent modern-colonial habit of being” ([decolonialfutures.net](http://decolonialfutures.net), n.d.).

Another interesting case is the student exchange program between the Sandberg Institute and Rietveld Academy (both in the Netherlands) and Funda Soweto Community College in South Africa, whose goal is based on mutual recognition of knowledge among students working in the discipline of art and design. This program explicitly declares its intention to work toward decolonial futures, exposing students to question their position and tension within the local and global realities (Sandberg Institute, n.d.).

At the institutional level, the University of Latin American Integration (UNILA) centers its mission on the academic cooperation and solidarity with other Latin American countries, especially those in the

Mercosur alliance. As such, UNILA, at least discursively (see for example Guimarães, Finardi, El Kadri & Taquini, 2020), does not seek the integration for enhancing its positioning in the global economy (or global rankings) (UNILA, 2017), but to contribute to a sustainable development of the region.

The aforementioned initiatives share three common points that are relevant for any higher education policy-maker interested in exploring how IHE projects can move away from the predominant competing scheme in the economic globalization, whether in Chile, Brazil, or elsewhere. First, the three examples indicate a gesture that treats with skepticism the simplistic discourses that pose that accumulation of scientific and technological knowledge and institutional prestige are good on their own sake and are a proxy of development. Second, the examples mentioned move away from the hierarchical type of thinking that exclusively recognizes the value and legitimacy of actors and knowledges on one side (only) of the abyssal line (Santos, 2014). Third, we noticed that none of these initiatives talk about their international engagements in terms of IHE, but rather refer to larger goals that have an international component, such as re-imagining and enabling decolonial futures (decolonial futures collective), mutual share and recognition of knowledge (exchange program) and integration with recognition of cultural diversity (UNILA).

Without trying to idealize these initiatives nor set them as infallible options gesturing toward decolonial realities, these projects demonstrate that the underlying purposes of international initiatives have an additional responsibility of making explicit the colonial legacy, if the goal is to disrupt power asymmetries (and violence) among countries, peoples, and knowledges. Similarly, this article sought to make visible some of the coloniality prints in the international scholarship schemes of Brazil and Chile, hoping that this exercise will trigger spaces for reimagining alternative options for IHE in these two Latin American countries and elsewhere.

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