

Policies of international academic mobility, processes of elite and state formation, and “returning” to Brazil

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Abstract:

Adopting a historical anthropological perspective, this article sets out to understand the role of policies promoting international academic mobility as a strategy for state-building and the formation of national elites in Brazil. I focus on analysing the sociogenetic processes underpinning these policies – particularly starting in the 1950s with the establishment of national agencies responsible for scientific research and advanced training abroad – and their reconfigurations over subsequent decades. Finally, the article explores the contemporary context of one such policy by examining the experiences of Brazilian PhD students who received public funding for their doctoral training at foreign institutions. Based on these trajectories, the discussion addresses how these state policies conceptualize the role of Brazilian researchers and students trained abroad, as well as the moral considerations arising from the convergences and divergences between state expectations and the life projects of these individuals.

Keywords: Academic elites; state formation processes; CAPES; Moralities; Academic mobilities.

Políticas de mobilidade acadêmica internacional, processos de formação de elites e de Estado e o “retorno” ao Brasil

Resumo:

O artigo tem como objetivo principal compreender, desde uma antropologia histórica, o papel das políticas brasileiras de incentivo à mobilidade acadêmica internacional como estratégia nacional de formação de Estado e de elites nacionais. Para tal, partirá de uma análise dos processos sociogenéticos de construção dessas políticas - sobretudo a partir dos anos de 1950, com a criação das agências brasileiras responsáveis pela pesquisa científica e formação qualificada no exterior - e seus rearranjos nas décadas seguintes. Por fim, será abordado o cenário contemporâneo de uma destas políticas, a partir da experiência de doutores brasileiros que obtiveram financiamento público para sua formação doutoral em uma instituição estrangeira. A partir dessas trajetórias, será discutido como estas políticas de Estado compreendem o papel destes pesquisadores e estudantes brasileiros, com formação no exterior, bem como os desencontros e moralidades presentes entre as expectativas estatais e os projetos individuais desses sujeitos.

Palavras-chave: Elites acadêmicas; processos de formação de Estado; CAPES; Moralidades; Mobilidades acadêmicas.

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OPENING CONSIDERATIONS

Although distinct processes, the formation of states and national elites are deeply interrelated. As Souza Lima (2015) points out, studying the ‘state’ anthropologically as a set of practices, processes and their effects (Trouillot 2001) entails thinking in terms of flows and performances. It also means exploring the various dimensions of policy-making and the governance of state apparatuses in which the actions of politico-administrative elites and the rhetorical construction of the ‘state’ as a category by such groups become key factors. Analysing the state and its dynamics thus also requires us to conduct research with elites as interlocutors in contexts that effectively involve ‘studying up’ (Nader 1972).

The very definition of the term ‘elite,’ however, contains semantic ambiguities, reflecting its fluid nature and its association with privileged groups, which presupposes exclusionary values (Marcus 1983; Gomes, Motta & Souza Lima 2021). To discuss elites is, above all, to think about “the mechanisms by which dominant social groups are formed in different scenarios of social stratification, as well as the ways in which they (re)produce prestige and power” (Gomes, Motta & Souza Lima 2021: 24). As the authors also emphasize, this requires an understanding of the processes through which hegemonies are produced and social inequalities are reproduced.

This article seeks to build on this perspective, focusing on the creation of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (*Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento do Pessoal de Nível Superior*: CAPES) and the implementation of the policy for awarding postgraduate scholarships to Brazilians abroad, understanding these initiatives as processes

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of state formation based on the formation of national techno-scientific elites. While there was never anything unusual about Brazil's national elites studying abroad (Carvalho 1981), this practice was until the mid-twentieth century almost entirely financed by families themselves, who sent their young members to foreign institutions – particularly given the limited availability of higher education in Brazil at the time. Following the creation of CAPES and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico*: CNPq) in 1951, a structured long-term policy for granting postgraduate scholarships for studying abroad began to take shape in Brazil.

My objective is precisely to understand this distribution of scholarships as a strategy employed by the Brazilian state – an investment with medium- and long-term returns, considering the time required for training individuals and for the country and its institutions to receive the expected 'return' on such investments. These policies are assumed to have a dual impact: institutionally they respond to the need for personnel to fill bureaucratic positions in government agencies and institutions, while academically and technologically they train university professors and high school teachers, researchers and producers of technology and innovation (Azevedo 2022). Although migration studies have debated the mobility of highly skilled individuals and its consequences in some depth – whether as brain drain or brain gain (Gomes 2015; Padilla & França 2015) – my interest here lies in broadening this debate to connect it with discussions on state formation and elite formation processes.

This aim in mind, the article is divided into four parts. The first revisits the context of Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s, when a strong developmentalist agenda shaped the country's governance. This was the period when the aforementioned agencies were created, accompanied by an intensification of international cooperation initiatives for academic mobility. Also in this section I briefly examine how these policies remained active under the Brazilian military dictatorship and continued into the period of redemocratization and the New Republic in the 1980s. The second part focuses in more detail on the policy of awarding doctoral scholarships for study abroad, reflecting on its continuities and transformations from its earliest initiatives to the contemporary setting. In the third part, I analyse the experiences of three Brazilian researchers who completed their doctorates abroad with CAPES funding and later returned to Brazil. I explore these state policies through the trajectories of these three researchers: one who today lives in Brazil and has no intention of moving abroad; another who lives in Brazil but is dissatisfied and considering moving abroad again; and a third who returned to Brazil but now lives in another country. Finally, in the fourth and final section I reflect on the disjunctions and tensions between state expectations and individual career trajectories involved in these policies, as well as the moralities that emerge from these processes, seeking to understand them through the optics of the present.

MODERNIZATION OF THE COUNTRY, TRAINING OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED INDIVIDUALS ABROAD AND STATE POLICIES

Throughout the twentieth century, Brazil experienced an intense process of state institutionalization and bureaucratization – or, as Souza Lima and Dias (2020) put it, a successful attempt by the country’s political and economic elites to consolidate an image of the nation while securing control over land and labour, maintaining – despite variations in the profiles of its subgroups – the characteristics of exclusion and arbitrariness essential to preservation of any elite. In the 1950s and 1960s, modernization theories – then at their peak – were premised on the idea that overcoming the ‘underdevelopment’ of Third World countries meant emulating the First World nations. This approach was endorsed by international organizations and their agencies and policies, which promoted ‘development plans’ formulated in the aftermath of the Second World War (Teixeira & Castilho 2020).

In this context, the training of ‘qualified’ workers for the national labour market became a clearly defined objective. However, there were too few higher education and postgraduate institutions in the country to train the amount of professionals and researchers needed to transform the profile of the Brazilian workforce. Encouraging postgraduates to study abroad thus emerged as one of the Brazilian state’s strategies for ensuring the formation of this qualified labour force. Given the low level of educational attainment of the Brazil population at the time – estimates suggest that in the early 1950s, just 0.67% of the economically active population had a university degree, with 85% of these graduates concentrated in the south-central region – there was already a concern during the Vargas government with creating a ‘new intellectual elite’ capable of ‘re-equipping’ the state and fostering substantive changes to the national productive system (Córdova 1996; Rosa 2008).

This situation was not unique to Brazil. Latin America as a whole faced a similar challenge. In the geopolitical context of the Cold War, the United States played a significant role in the region, spearheading various cooperation agreements with Latin American countries from the 1950s onward (Faria & Costa 2006). In 1952, under the national-developmental policies of Vargas’s second government, agreements were signed between Brazilian and US universities, resulting in many Brazilian students travelling to the United States to undertake master’s and doctoral courses. In the opposite direction, numerous professors from the United States came to Brazil to assist in the development of local postgraduate programs (Cury 2004). Also during this period, international foundations and agencies assumed an active role in funding scholarships for study abroad, including prominent US institutions such as the Ford, Rockefeller and Fulbright Foundations (Miceli 1993; Velho 1997; Silva 2016; Ridge & Terway 2019).

It was also during the 1950s that Brazil’s two main national agencies for science funding and human resource development were founded: CNPq and CAPES. CNPq was created with the mission of promoting and fomenting the advancement of scientific and technological research by providing funding for research, training researchers and technicians, fostering

cooperation with Brazilian universities, and facilitating exchanges with foreign institutions (CNPq 2018). Another reason for its creation was Brazil's need to develop nuclear energy research, already under way in other countries and deemed essential for national security in the post-war context. This priority was reflected in the CNPq's early funding allocations, with 65.6% of its resources in 1951 directed to the physical sciences (the remaining 34.4% went to the biological sciences (Morel 1979). CAPES was initially founded as a campaign with the primary goal of "ensuring the existence of specialized personnel in sufficient quantity and quality to meet the needs of public and private enterprises dedicated to the country's development" (Brazil, 1951). One of its principal responsibilities at the time was to lay the groundwork for a national project for postgraduate policies (Fernández 2012).

While the 1950s saw the creation of the institutional structures needed to organize a policy to form a national academic elite – viewed as crucial to the Brazilian state's 'modernization' – the 1960s provided the biggest impetus for the institutionalization of postgraduate education in Brazil. This, in turn, stimulated policies for international mobility with the creation of new courses and the national regulation of postgraduate studies in 1965 through Ruling No. 977/65 of the Higher Education Council (*Conselho de Educação Superior*: CESu) (Parecer CFE No. 977/65; Contel & Lima 2011).² This process, however, occurred during the military dictatorship in Brazil, a period in which modernization and authoritarianism both worked to shape the national state (Motta 2014).

The inception of postgraduate education in Brazil was closely associated with an idea of the state as a facilitator of both scientific progress and the search for leading international centres of knowledge. At the time, the state positioned itself as the guarantor of scientific development, conceived to be essential to achieving national autonomy. This perspective envisaged postgraduate studies as a strategic sector for public investment, endorsing the nationalism and developmentalism guiding much of the military regime's policy agenda. For policymakers at this time, Brazil's nascent scientific field was the cause of the country's 'backwardness,' not its historical dependency, which affected all levels of education (Cury 2004). Surpassing this barrier was deemed essential for transforming Brazil into a 'great power' with the capacity to expand economically by strengthening its national productive system (Morel 1979). During this period, international agreements were intensified, especially between Brazil and the United States through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which awarded a substantial number of undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships to Brazilian students at US educational institutions (Germano 1993; Gaio 2008).

2 The 1960s also saw the creation of the *Programa de Estudante-Convênio de Graduação* (PEC-G), offering "foreign students the opportunity to undertake their undergraduate studies at Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (IES). In so doing it contributes to the internationalization of participating institutions and the dissemination of Brazilian viewpoints worldwide." Source: <https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/assuntos/cultura-e-educacao/temas-educacionais/programas-de-estudo-para-estrangeiros/pec-g/sobre#sobre> Accessed 30 September 2023.

These policies were also accompanied by measures designed to ensure the return and retention of Brazilian researchers in the country, such as ‘Operation Return,’ an initiative introduced by the military government in 1967 that actively sought to bring back Brazilian researchers in the fields of Engineering, Medicine and Physics working in the United States (Morel, 1979). Similarly, Decree No. 63,343 of 1 October 1968 created incentives for retaining Brazilian scientists and encouraging the return of those abroad by establishing Regional Postgraduate Centres (*Centros Regionais de Pós-Graduação*) (Brazil 1968).

Cury (2004) identifies these measures as the first concerted attempts to ensure the permanent return of Brazilian researchers, combined with other actions such as the creation of a law to regulate the validation of foreign diplomas in Brazil during the same period and a concern to improve the training of academic staff in the country’s recently founded universities. The first National Postgraduate Plan (1975–1979) strongly emphasized the need to train academic staff in Brazilian institutions. In fields where training within Brazil was unavailable, agreements and exchanges with foreign institutions were to be established. To this end, the Institutional Academic Training Programme (*Programa Institucional de Capacitação Docente*: PICD) was created with the aim of training 16,800 master’s graduates and 1,400 doctoral graduates between 1975 and 1979. The plan also included the awarding of 7,650 scholarships abroad per year. It was also during this same period that CAPES and CNPq introduced their scholarship policies for postgraduate students within Brazil too. Postgraduate education thus “assumed a strategic position not only within the educational system but also in terms of the country’s development model under the military regime” (Cury 2004: 128).

Contel and Lima (2011) identify the 1960s and 1970s as a period of reform for policies aimed at the internationalization of higher education – though it is important to note here that the term *internationalization* was not yet part of the lexicon of scientific policy. This period was dominated by cooperation programmes that emphasized the presence of foreign consultants and the awarding of scholarships for master’s and doctoral studies abroad, funded by both national and international agencies, as well as the Brazilian and United States governments. Beyond academic motivations, there was also a contemporaneous political interest in restructuring the country’s higher education system to align with the US model. It was also during this period – the late 1960s – that Brazil saw the creation of FINEP (Studies and Projects Financing Agency: *Financiadora de Estudos e Projetos*) and FNDCT (National Fund for Scientific and Technological Development: *Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico*). These institutions would have a huge impact on research funding policies and models in the country, further boosting the availability of postgraduate scholarships (Pereira 2016).

In the 1980s, however, as Brazil entered a process of political and economic liberalization, the national policy for training personnel abroad began to change. Priority shifted to awarding doctoral sandwich course scholarships, in which only part of the doctoral training would take place abroad while maintaining the scholar’s primary institutional affiliation in Brazil. This shift stemmed from the recognition that the country now had a large range of postgraduate

programs, including master's and doctoral courses, at its leading universities (Lombas 2017). Also included in this assessment were financial considerations – such policies were less costly – and a reduced concern with ‘brain drain’ (Velho 2001; Cury 2004). This scenario would continue throughout the 1990s, despite increasing budgetary constraints and institutional crises – including the brief dissolution of CAPES in 1990 under the Collor government, a decision that was quickly reversed. Even with subsequent changes, such as reforms to CAPES's postgraduate program evaluation system in the 1990s and a substantial rise in public investment in Brazilian scientific policy from the 2000s onwards, the preference for sandwich course scholarships over full doctoral scholarships abroad persisted as the main strategy pursued by national funding agencies (Salomon & Magalhães 2021), a process explained in more detail below.

CAPES POLICIES FOR POSTGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS ABROAD: CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES IN A LONG-TERM POLICY

In its founding statute (Decree 29,741/1951), CAPES announced that one of its missions was to ensure the availability of sufficient highly qualified professionals to meet the country's demands, as well as to provide the ‘most capable individuals’ with opportunities for further development. In this regard, just one year after its creation, in 1952, three scholarships had already been awarded, two of them abroad, in the fields of agronomy and anthropology. By 1953, 79 scholarships had been granted, 54 abroad, and by 1954 the number had increased to 155, with 72 awarded for studies abroad (Rosa 2008).

The scholarship program became CAPES's principal line of action with the agency showing a steadily expanding capacity to administrate this policy, gradually turning into a reference institution for the still-emerging academic community in Brazil as well as for international agencies (Neddermeyer 2002; Rosa 2008). In 1958, CAPES launched its first international collaboration program with the American Rockefeller Foundation, awarding around 200 scholarships in the fields of medicine and biology. From the 1960s onwards, more international partnerships were agreed, leading to a substantial leap in the number of scholarships granted by CAPES. In 1964, new partnerships were established, including one with the Ford Foundation, offering scholarships in basic sciences – particularly in the humanities – and another with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) conceived to improve the infrastructure of Brazilian higher education institutions, seeking to provide “support and means to ensure work continuity for researchers returning from abroad after completing their studies and to strengthen the nascent national postgraduate system” (Rosa 2008: 40). During this period, CAPES also began adjusting its scholarship allocation criteria, prioritizing “fields not yet established in the country” (Córdova 1996).

In the literature on the subject, authors commonly highlight the crucial role played by CAPES scholarship programs in consolidating the National Postgraduate System. The return of Brazilian scientific and academic professionals trained abroad created a research and postgraduate system in the country with a strong international influence, replicating the United

States model in particular. In some ways, the idea that ‘return’ is central to the success of scholarship policies still persists today among Brazilian funding agencies.

From the 1970s onwards, there was a shift in policy for awarding scholarship for studies abroad with funding now linked to bilateral programs supported by both national and foreign funding resources. A landmark initiative in this area was the agreement signed with France through CAPES/COFECUB (French Committee for the Evaluation of University Cooperation with Brazil). This would serve as a model for subsequent agreements such as the partnership with the British Council in 1988. In the 1990s, CAPES established a series of further cooperation agreements, including with Germany (DAAD) in 1994, Argentina (SECyT) in 1998, and Cuba (MES) in 1999. In the early 2000s, agreements were also made with Spain (MECD-DGU) in 2001 and the University of Texas in 2001 (Rosa 2008).

Some of the literature on the subject typically seeks to evaluate these different ‘phases’ of scholarship programs for foreign study, moving from an initial phase considered highly asymmetrical – when only Brazilian students were sent abroad – to a phase of international cooperation considered to be more ‘symmetrical.’ My aim here is neither to reify these classifications and interpretations, nor to question them from the outset. Recognizing that these interpretations are also ways of constructing a discourse around these policies, here I intend for now simply to outline the changes and continuities in funding initiatives of this kind. This will allow me to develop an analysis that approaches the phenomenon from a less institutional, cohesive and coherent perspective by also taking into account their discontinuities, tensions and contestations.

One aspect worth highlighting is the adjustments and changes in CAPES’s governance of ‘international cooperation’ policy with its management transferred in 1995 from a small sector (the International Cooperation Division) under the agency’s Directorate of Programs to a specific Coordination Office linked to the presidency. In 1999, it became a General Coordination Office, and later, in 2007, the ‘Directorate of International Relations,’ responsible for coordinating both international cooperation programs and the awarding of scholarships for study abroad.

Rosa (2008) emphasized the diverse range of the Directorate of International Relations’ activities in the first decade of the 2000s, spanning from the award of individual doctoral scholarships for study abroad – a model in place since the 1950s – to promoting the joint creation of postgraduate programs in Brazil and other countries, the establishment of South-South agreements and partnerships, and the awarding of undergraduate sandwich scholarships in specific fields such as technology and agrarian sciences. However, this scenario underwent a considerable shift from 2011 onwards with the creation of the Science Without Borders program, which expanded the number of scholarships available for study abroad on an unprecedented scale.³ This program placed special emphasis on undergraduate students

3 The Science Without Borders (*Ciência Sem Fronteiras*) program aimed to send 101,000 students abroad, primarily undergraduates in fields deemed ‘strategic’ by the government, to “institutions of excellence abroad” (Brazil, 2011). These institutions were mostly concentrated in the central countries of global capitalism, reinforcing a historically constructed North-South relationship (Dutra & Azevedo, 2016; Manços & Coelho, 2017).

and reoriented the logics of international cooperation towards the traditionally established North-South model. Other initiatives can be highlighted within this contemporary landscape of transformations in international academic mobility policies, exposing the tensions contained in the logic of international cooperation. One such initiative is *CAPES-Print*, launched in 2017, whose objectives included the development of strategic internationalization plans for participant institutions and the promotion of research projects in international cooperation,⁴ while maintaining the emphasis on the North-South model. More recently, the *Move La América* program, launched in 2024, offers master's and doctoral sandwich scholarships at Brazilian institutions for researchers and students from Latin America and the Caribbean,⁵ marking a renewed preference for South-South cooperation.

But while we may recall that in the 1960s the Brazilian government was concerned with establishing postgraduate programs in the country (Decree No. 63.343/1968), at the time still too few in number to train the personnel needed for Brazilian universities, including new researchers and professors, by the 2000s the scenario had changed radically. Brazil had significantly expanded its national scientific base, shifting the focus of international training away from the completion of full doctoral programs – common in the early phases of the policy – towards the doctoral sandwich course model, in which only part of the training occurs abroad. Indeed, funding for this kind of academic mobility became the predominant modality, though full doctoral scholarships abroad continued to exist, albeit in smaller numbers. Moreover, during the 1980s and 1990s, with globalization and international trade liberalization, Brazil underwent an intense process of deindustrialization, the consequences of which continue to challenge the ‘original’ design of these policies to this day (Azevedo 2022; Brito 2004; Marchelli 2005; Schwartzman 2009; Salomon & Magalhães 2021).

Despite the structural changes experienced by Brazil over recent decades, however, the requirement for scholarship recipients to return to the country after studying abroad remains in place. The so-called ‘interstice period’ obliges former scholarship holders to remain in Brazil for at least the same duration as their funded stay abroad. According to CAPES’s current regulations for international scholarships, “the interstice period is a commitment assumed by the scholarship holder upon accepting the terms of the grant and aims to ensure the *dissemination of the knowledge acquired abroad in their home country through their professional and academic activities*” (CAPES 2018, Chapter V, Section II, my emphasis). The design of these policies is premised on the idea that the scholar’s return to Brazil entails much more than their mere physical presence – the country is expected to recover the full investment made by the agency in training these researchers, who are expected to ‘contribute’ to the nation by disseminating

4 For more details, see <https://www.gov.br/capes/pt-br/aceso-a-informacao/acoes-e-programas/bolsas/bolsas-e-auxilios-internacionais/informacoes-internacionais/programa-institucional-de-internacionalizacao-capes-print>. Accessed 7 March 2025.

5 Information available at <https://www.gov.br/capes/pt-br/aceso-a-informacao/acoes-e-programas/bolsas/bolsas-e-auxilios-internacionais/encontre-aqui/paises/multinacional/programa-move-la-america>. Accessed 7 March 2025.

what they learnt abroad. This objective would be unfeasible without their return. In cases of non-compliance, former scholarship holders are obligated to reimburse the public treasury for the full amount received while studying at the foreign institution.

In this sense, the award holder's return functions as a fundamental strategy for closing the cycle of the international scholarship policy. From this viewpoint, these students and researchers are not merely individuals undergoing training, entitled to public funding for their education – as is the case, for example, of undergraduate and postgraduate students in Brazilian public institutions. Rather, they are viewed as agents responsible for the country's development through the knowledge and skills acquired abroad. Consequently, there exists a debt not just to the funding agencies but also to the Brazilian nation itself. The notion of 'return' could be examined from various angles, such as the dynamics relating to legal and regulatory frameworks or customary norms. Here, though, I intend to approach the topic via the idea of the gift, considering the student's return as a counter-gift to the scholarship award (Azevedo 2022). This process will become clearer by examining the experiences of three Brazilian researchers, former recipients of CAPES scholarships, who returned to Brazil in the mid-2000s after extended periods abroad.

THE 'RETURN' IN CONTEMPORARY BRAZIL: NEW EXPERIENCES FOR OLD DILEMMAS

The socio-historical processes outlined above continue to echo in the contemporary landscape. As I discussed in the previous section, the number of full doctoral scholarships abroad has fallen significantly over recent decades, while sandwich doctoral scholarships have expanded considerably along with domestic doctoral funding. Nonetheless, the full-length modality is still available and I shall now examine this policy through the experiences of former scholarship recipients who started and concluded their doctorates in foreign institutions between 1999 and 2014, focusing on the requirement for them to return to Brazil. Here, I develop an interpretation of the moral dimensions embedded in this process (Azevedo 2022), exploring the idea that a 'debt' seems to be implicitly contracted between former scholarship recipients and the 'nation' that transcends formal obligations. It is worth recalling that the ultimate goal of the policy analysed here is to ensure that these scholarship holders return to Brazil and establish themselves in the country. My interest, therefore, lies in understanding how these researchers managed their projects, expectations and frustrations throughout this process.

While agencies, government bodies and international foundations design projects that provide scholarships for individuals to pursue education abroad, these individuals have their own life projects and career plans. In other words, students who apply for and secure funding for doctoral studies abroad do so as a strategic means of obtaining the desired academic title. However, the funding agencies, in granting these scholarships, impose a responsibility on recipients that extends beyond their initial ambitions. By studying abroad with the obliga-

tion to return, they automatically become entangled in a strong pledge to the nation. What emerges, then, is a constant process of negotiations, tensions and intersections between the logic of the state and individual aspirations.

To develop my reflection, I examine the different trajectories of three interlocutors⁶ who returned to Brazil and established professional careers: one is satisfied with her current position and has no intention of returning abroad; another is dissatisfied with his current working conditions and is considering returning overseas; and the third, despite holding a permanent university position in Brazil, chose to resign and move back abroad. These three different experiences will help us comprehend the various dimensions involved in the policy under analysis – focusing particularly on how state-designed constructs impact the everyday lived experiences of those affected by them.

Alice,⁷ our first interlocutor, completed her doctorate in the human sciences area in the United Kingdom between 2005 and 2009 and was working as a university professor at a private community institution in Brazil at the time of the interview. In her mind, there was never any doubt about the necessity and obligation to return:

The idea was always to return, and CAPES always made that very clear to us, always placed a great social importance on the award: [...] ‘you are receiving a great scholarship, with full support, and we expect you to pay Brazil back.’ So the rules of the game were always very clear: *‘you go, and the time you spend there, you must dedicate back to Brazil.’* So it was always very clear. In the final year of my doctorate, an opportunity even arose for me to do a postdoc in Japan thanks to my supervisor, but [...] the rule was clear. We never even considered [...] evading these norms. [...] We felt the social importance attached to the scholarship, you know? A social responsibility towards the country. The idea is a bit corny, but it’s also very honest. We understood how much of an elite we represented at that moment and it was an honour to give that back.

Alice’s account clearly illustrates the main point of the argument presented here: the researcher, funded by the state to build her career, also bears a “social responsibility towards the country,” as well as recognizing herself as part of an ‘elite,’ albeit temporarily (Azevedo & Dutra 2021). Hence, there is a dispute over the meanings of this return and an investment in what can be generated through the practice of ‘mobility.’ Academic mobility, in the terms formulated by the state, is thus seen as an experience that, by itself, is sufficient to be converted into gains for the entire country, even if these benefits are understood in a somewhat diffuse way.

Alice always depicted the question of her return as a project, even though she had doubts about her ability to reintegrate professionally in Brazil after spending so much time abroad.

6 Here I present data from my doctoral research, based on 39 interviews I conducted in 2020 and 2021 with former CAPES scholarship holders who started and completed their doctorates abroad between 1999 and 2014 (Azevedo, 2022).

7 The names of all the interlocutors cited here have been changed.

She returned, therefore, uncertain that she would stay, but due to a combination of personal and contextual factors, she ultimately did settle in the country.⁸

We were very clear in our minds that returning was necessary, even if it was just to wait for a year or two and then leave again without necessarily staying for the full four years. That was the idea. Let's go back, see how things turn out, and then decide. And when we did return, a lot happened [...] many academic job openings were appearing and there were plenty of work opportunities at the time. The field was thriving. There was a load of money available, research grants, all of it [...]. At the time, I felt that Brazil was the best place to stay for the time being.

Even though the funding conditions for science in the country were better during this period, the researcher encountered bureaucratic difficulties on her return.

Reintegration is a whole other discussion. [...] There's this issue of validating diplomas, right? And it was really tough because with CAPES everything was great, wonderful, until you set foot back in Brazil. Once you're back, CAPES just says, 'Well, mission accomplished, congratulations!' Obviously, they're not my mother. 'We did our part, you finished. Congratulations! Bye, take care.' And then we had to begin that whole process of where to live, how to make a living, and validating the diploma, which proved really expensive. [...] I paid R\$3,000 to validate my diploma while I had no place to live, no job. Just me. The whole validation process, sworn translations... I waited eight months. [...] Around the time, a series of job openings came up [...] I applied but my applications were rejected because I hadn't submitted a validated diploma. I missed out on various public competitions the year I returned because of that fact and it was brutal – having no income, being unable to work because my diploma hadn't been validated.

Despite these difficulties – Alice remained unemployed for about a year, stuck in a 'limbo,' as she put it – she eventually managed, through her personal and professional connections, to obtain a recommendation for a position at an educational institution, where she was still working at the time of our interview. However, the researcher met all the accountability requirements set by CAPES.

Every step I took, I made sure to meet these requirements. I didn't take one step without getting their authorization. So, before any approval, I would already say, 'Look, you're going to be approved, but you need to present X, Y, et cetera.' In terms of reporting back, it was very smooth.

This is indeed an aspect worth highlighting in the relationship that CAPES establishes with former scholarship holders. There is a notable shift from encouraging international mobility to enforcing immobility: only movement within Brazil is permitted without requiring CAPES's 'authorization.' In this way, CAPES seems to enforce a kind of 'tutelary power'

8 I use the terms in the plural here, following the same pattern used by the interlocutor during the interview, as she was referring to herself and her then-husband, who had also gone to the same country to undertake a doctorate.

(Souza Lima 1992) over these former scholarship recipients, making their stay in Brazil a matter of national interest and control, obliging these individuals to request permission for any international trips.

Over time, however, Alice perceived that it was not necessarily the doctorate itself that had been the main factor enabling her to establish a professional career in Brazil, but rather the “status of gaining the doctorate abroad.”

The status of the diploma or even fluency in English [...]. I think these matter more than the doctorate itself, you know? That’s how I see it today. So, being fluent, circulating internationally, participating in international research groups, publishing internationally [...]. I think it’s an illusion to believe that the title alone is what puts you ahead.

Alice, however, points out that while greater international integration is a positive outcome of the experience abroad, Brazil has structural funding issues that hinder the expansion and strengthening of such networks.

How am I supposed to engage [in international cooperation] if I don’t have funding for travel, research, for this and that? How am I supposed to circulate internationally? I think we run into these issues. Now, I think there are topics of mutual interest. We have good professionals here in Brazil and I believe we have professionals who are integrated or who have this thing of fluency, embedded in the international scene. They are relevant, yes, but I reiterate that we run into and suffer from a significant lack of investment. [...] And foreigners, in general, they give and want Brazil to return in kind. So, like, ‘Oh, let’s hold a congress. We’ll contribute X, Y, Z, but you have to contribute A, B and C.’ But we never match what they contribute.

Despite the difficulties of maintaining her international networks and cooperation practices from Brazil, Alice points out that the experience of international mobility, beyond the doctorate itself, brings intangible gains that are important for her career and professional activities. She also stresses that this experience abroad was her dream, receiving a scholarship just to study at a good university, which for her represented a privilege. Alice also underlines the role that CAPES played in this process, ensuring that her time abroad went as smoothly as possible. She has a completely positive evaluation of her own experience.

My assessment is entirely positive. I tell everyone that I really lived. I fulfilled my life’s big dream, which was to be paid to study, to become integrated, to dedicate myself fully to my studies. I started my doctorate knowing how privileged I was. I had this feeling I mentioned, a sense of social responsibility, and it pervaded my entire trajectory. I had an awareness. I always had a very clear perception of the privilege I held. So, the final balance is positive. CAPES was faultless in providing support and solving problems. The representative from CAPES was extremely competent, quick to respond, at a time when communication was not as easy as it is today.

Despite her positive evaluation of the experience, Alice notes that spending so much time abroad led to a relative weakening of her personal and professional networks in Brazil, which made reintegration more difficult on her return. But while this was a complicating factor, she

also believes that this long-term experience at a foreign institution allowed her to approach academic life in Brazil from a different perspective.

I stepped out of the circuit. So all the networks of relationships I had in my area – the people who attended the working group and the ones who put together dossiers on a particular topic, the familiar faces in the department, in the program, at the conferences – when you drop out of the circuit, you're not seen, you're not remembered. At the time we're talking about, virtual interactions were much less important than they are today, you know? So leaving the circuit really meant leaving. When I returned, I had genuinely lost many contacts. Attending conferences again, I no longer knew anyone. I think that was the real cost of spending so much time abroad. When I came back, I felt like I had taken a few steps backwards, you know? Leaving the scene and reintegrating back into it... I think it took about two years before I could say, 'I'm back on the scene.' I think this training, this technical skill, knowing how to deal with bureaucracy, funding applications. Compared to my colleagues, I feel I've developed a different way of thinking, because if you can handle a CAPES funding application, you can handle anything. [...] It's a complicated, complex process. That's one of the benefits. You obtain other perspectives. I think you get a broader view. I feel less attached to certain aspects of academic life here because I've seen that it's a much bigger world. I'm much less involved in these activities, in these political disputes, and I attribute that to my international experience.

For Alice, then, the experience of completing a doctorate abroad was conceived as a privilege, one that entailed a moral obligation to return to Brazil. Despite the problems she encountered, she eventually managed to reintegrate professionally and meet CAPES expectations for its former scholarship holders: to disseminate the “knowledge acquired abroad” through their academic and professional work. At the same time, though, she still finds it difficult to strengthen international collaboration networks due to the limited funding available in Brazil. Alice has undertaken postdoctoral research and summer courses abroad but has not considered pursuing her career in another country. However, this does not apply to all the former scholarship recipients.

The second interlocutor whose experience I shall present is Fernando. He currently lives in Brazil and works as a university professor at a state public institution. He completed his doctorate in Engineering at a prestigious university in the United States between 2010 and 2014. For him, undertaking a doctorate in Brazil was never an option.

I never considered doing my PhD in Brazil. After finishing my undergraduate degree, I had several job offers [...]. I chose to continue in academia and do a master's degree. And by the end of my master's [...], some opportunities became available to me. I even received an offer to work at a company here, but in the end, I decided not to stay in Brazil to pursue my PhD. If I hadn't gone abroad for my doctorate, I don't think I would have done one at all. Why did I choose to go abroad? I immersed myself in my master's degree – studying and working hard – and you end up reading and studying so much, you begin to know exactly who the leading researchers in your field are. And in my field, all of them were either in the United States or in Europe. So, I really wanted to work with those internationally recognized researchers, or I think I would have probably looked to do something else with my life.

So Fernando's desire was to pursue an academic career, studying with the leading scholars in his field, who were based at prestigious US universities. The CAPES scholarship provided him with a way to work with these researchers. However, his experience was not without setbacks and the fact of being Brazilian meant coping with prejudice during his academic training. Yet, for him, there was a greater purpose in being there.

My supervisor knew him by name because he was very famous, but he didn't know him personally. [...] I started working with this English researcher, but I faced a lot of prejudice at first. He himself accepted me, but I felt that I wasn't treated at all well in his lab. It was literally because I was Brazilian, because another colleague of mine – an Israeli friend with whom I worked – joined at the same time, with the same supervisor, and the difference in treatment was obvious. I started becoming very stressed, I wasn't getting anywhere, and so I decided to switch supervisors [...]. This Israeli friend and I were taking the same courses and had the same academic training [...]. We both already had a master's degree and during our tutorials with the English supervisor, he asked us the same questions: 'What courses are you going to take?' My Israeli friend would answer first: 'Oh, I'm going to take this course.' And I would say, 'Oh, I'm going to take the same courses.' And he would always reply, 'Why are you taking this course? In Brazil, you don't have anything like this, you've never learnt this before?' So with the Israeli student everything was fine, but with me, there was always some issue. [...] And since I came from a country with a strong company in the area in which we were working, this English supervisor of mine repeatedly threatened me, saying, 'I can't share anything with you because you'll hand it over to [the Brazilian company].' Even though I had no ties to this company whatsoever. So, it was really complicated working with him.

The situation experienced by Fernando exemplifies several of the difficulties confronted by these researchers in their relationship with foreign supervisors. The lack of knowledge about Brazil's academic reality among some international groups and researchers produces a recurring discourse of academic 'underdevelopment,' which can be mobilized in specific situations as a way to disguise prejudices and ignorance about Brazil. There is also the production of a certain ethical distrust and wary stance in relation to the researcher. Fernando's testimony points to an everyday dimension of scientific practice that is not necessarily considered when thinking about international academic mobility policies. These researchers have to mediate and translate traditions, contexts and representations in their routines, whether with their supervisors and professors or with their colleagues. Fernando also claimed to have suffered forms of prejudice from some of his classmates, particularly due to the "lack of information about Brazil," unlike what happened with his Korean, Israeli, Iranian and Indian colleagues, who, in his words, came from countries "famous for exporting brains to the exact sciences."

For Fernando, the difficulties encountered during his doctorate were intensified by the pressure from CAPES regarding his return to Brazil – his worries about being unable to complete his doctorate and, as a result, have to repay all the money received from the agency.

As I said, it's very stressful [especially at the beginning] because it's competitive, you need results, and CAPES applies a certain amount of pressure all the time, saying: you have to return, you have to return, you have to return. And you always think: 'well, I'm abroad, if things don't work out, I'll have to pay the money back to CAPES,' so you feel kind of pressured.

But Fernando, like Alice, always had the goal of returning to Brazil once he had completed his doctorate. However, he also faced difficulties returning:

I always wanted to return to Brazil, I had in mind that I would like to go back there and work as a professor, and so I returned. And when you return, you return like with one foot forward and one foot back. I didn't have any immediate opportunities. Which is understandable. So I went back to work with my former master's degree supervisor and did a postdoctorate with him, hoping that opportunities would come up for me to re-enter the academic field [...]. But the return was somewhat complicated. Because you are at the peak of your production there in the United States. I was producing a lot, working a lot, and suddenly you have to stop everything and return to Brazil. And at first, I was unemployed for a while [...] One thing I noticed is that, after doing the entire PhD abroad, when you return to Brazil, nobody knows you. So that was quite bad. I think some of my colleagues who stayed in Brazil to do their PhDs had already gained substantial recognition here in the country. At conferences, in research organizations, right? But over time, I got to know people, I became more familiar with everyone, and today people know me here.

Although Fernando is now a tenured professor at a renowned university in Brazil, when he looks back on his experience, he regrets having returned. He believes his career could have taken a different path had he stayed abroad. Moreover, his frustration with the research career in Brazil – especially in the political context in which our interview took place (2020, during the Bolsonaro government) – contributed to a somewhat negative assessment of his professional experience in the country.

Today, I regret it. Why? After completing my doctorate, I also had job opportunities there. I received three job offers and also had the chance to do a postdoc. At the time, I said no – since I had a J visa, I was required to return to Brazil – I thought, no, I'll go back to Brazil, that's what I wanted to do. So I had those opportunities, but I thought: no, I want to go to Brazil. And at that time, Brazil's economic situation was... let's say, reasonably good, and I had just experienced a crisis in the United States. So I had high expectations that I would find my niche in Brazil and contribute significantly. But the last few years have left much to be desired. So, those opportunities I turned down at the time – I regret the decision today. Just like many colleagues I know who either went back there, have their own regrets, or are leaving academia altogether.

Fernando's regret resonates with the possibility of returning abroad. He had not yet made any firm decision regarding the idea, but in his view, the political and working conditions encountered today in Brazil were discouraging.

Sadly, I must be honest. The way I see research in Brazil today, and high-quality education, with the current government, we are going to be severely impacted. Even under previous governments, it was never fantastic. But I think now, with the current Minister of Education, things are not moving in a positive direction. [...] So, I see things deteriorating. [...] Education, science, and technology, precisely what any country needs to develop and escape a crisis like this, we are feeling away from that, heading in the opposite direction. And why? You need a government policy that plans for the next 20 years. Investing in science, technology and education is not something you do for a return in just one or two years. So, I see things

only worsening. I seriously thought about giving up. I haven't given up yet because I have excellent students here and I think it would be very unfair to them were I to abandon my career here. But recently, I've received some invitations to go to England, the Netherlands and the United States, and every time I get one of these invitations, I waver a little more [...]. At some point, I may end up either leaving academia – because today, I feel that the career wasn't quite what I expected – or, if not abandoning the career, then leaving the country. That's definitely a possibility.

While for Fernando this was still a remote possibility with no decision yet made, the same could not be said for Geraldo. He completed his doctorate in the United States, also in the field of Engineering, between 2005 and 2009, and currently lives in the same country where he gained his PhD. After returning to Brazil, he obtained employment in his area as a professor at a federal public university, but after completing the required period of return, he moved back abroad. Like Fernando, Geraldo wanted to work with the leading expert in his field. For him, a sandwich doctoral course alone would have been insufficient to acquire the experience he was after.

I went to do my doctorate with the author of the book I had used during my master's degree. So, the author of that book became my PhD supervisor. It's truly a much higher level and that was the reason I decided to do a full PhD abroad. There was the possibility of doing a sandwich course but [...] it doesn't offer the same level of [demands]. That's something I noticed while studying in the United States: the level of demands on you and, consequently, the level of learning is significantly lower for those who do a sandwich doctoral course compared to those who complete a full PhD. So, I chose to do the full PhD.

For Geraldo, the experience of completing his doctorate at this institution in the United States placed him in a privileged position compared to those who had earned their PhD in Brazil. Having direct access to the leading figures in his field afforded him access to cutting-edge knowledge much more quickly and effectively.

The research I did was essentially computer-based, I just needed a computer. So in that sense, I could have [done my doctoral research in Brazil]. What was lacking in Brazil, however, was the knowledge. [...] I was working with the leading expert in my field, the author of the book that my master's supervisor had used. What's the basic problem? [...] Abroad, I start writing an article, I have an idea – 'right, let's develop this new method here.' A lot of mathematics, a lot of computation, a lot of physics. 'Let's build this method here, write a program, develop an algorithm,' and so on. We test the idea and if it works, it's worth an article. So you write the article. The whole process takes about six months. [...] Then you submit the paper to the top-tier journals. Six months to a year later, the reviewers send the paper back with comments. You revise, rework and resubmit the article. By then, a year and a half has passed since the original idea. Finally, the paper gets accepted and is scheduled for publication. That takes another year. So it's two and a half years from the moment you first had the idea to when the article is eventually published. During those two and a half years, I'm already working on a whole new set of things. By the time researchers in Brazil read the article, it's already outdated. If I'm still working along the same lines, I'm already doing millions of other things in the same direction; or I may have already shifted to a completely new idea and started developing that. And there's the problem: in Engineering [researchers in Brazil]

read these journals and think they're up to date. And, yes, by Brazilian standards, they are. But by US standards, they're already two or three years behind. So, what happens in Brazil is that you read an article in a journal, then you write a project to get a doctoral student to work on it. By the time the student is accepted [...] and starts working, they're already four or five years behind. So much of this gap derives from the fact that when you start working on something, you're already delayed by four or five years... and you never catch up. [The advantage of being at the centre where knowledge is being produced is that] you're already there, you already have access to all the ideas as they're being exchanged. For example, you go to a conference, and all these big names are there. Just having coffee and chatting with one of these top names is worth six months of study, because they might suddenly mention something, or maybe you're presenting at an expo and one of these big names asks a question. Suddenly, you start thinking in a new direction and that leads to another article. The flow of ideas is much more intense when you're at the centre. So, to answer your question, could all this be done in Brazil? In practical terms, a computer and books are all I need. But in real terms, no, it's not possible, because you don't have the same flow of ideas.

Geraldo's comments are symptomatic of how global inequality in the process of producing scientific knowledge generates asymmetric relationships in the production and dissemination of scientific discoveries. Countries outside the geopolitical centre of scientific knowledge have delayed access to whatever is 'new' in their areas of research. This reveals a global structure of scientific production that impacts the entire research chain, inevitably leading those who wish to be at the 'forefront' of their fields to migrate to these major centres. It is important to observe that this dynamic obviously varies depending on the area of knowledge. Nonetheless, this perception fed Geraldo's wish not to remain in Brazil, even though he had a good professional position at a university considered to be 'cutting-edge' in the country. The rules and dynamics of the national academic world, including evaluation policies and publication practices in national journals, led him to opt for a return to the United States.

I finished [my PhD] and returned to Brazil. I stayed for about four years, which is what CAPES demands. I kept going back and forth to the Netherlands for a while because I was a professor at [a Brazilian federal university] and had a postdoc in the Netherlands, so I kept going back and forth from the Netherlands, but I couldn't do it... What I learned in the United States was very difficult to apply in Brazil. The gap was huge in my field, Engineering. [...] Then I managed to do some work in the Netherlands, cutting-edge research still, in a hospital in the Netherlands, and after that period, I applied to become a professor at [another Brazilian federal university] and that was very difficult because, in my field, it is considered one of the leading centres in Brazil [...]. And what I saw was really bad, the quality was very low. I went through a process of not only feeling deeply disappointed but thinking, 'Well, if it's already this bad now, the future looks even bleaker.' I'll give an example: when I was in the United States, I published in journals from [an internationally renowned institute specializing in a specific field of Engineering], which are considered the top journals in my field. Getting an article published there takes six months to a year of work – it's extremely difficult. Here's the thing: during my doctorate, I published in the institute's journals but also in journals that were considered lower-tier. At the beginning of a research project, you typically publish in less prestigious periodicals. When I arrived in Brazil, you've got the CAPES Qualis system and I noticed that within Qualis A – supposedly the top-tier journals – there were both the

journals from the international institute – which are really top level – and other journals that I knew well enough to recognize as lower quality. I know how difficult it is to publish in one of these journals from the institute I mentioned, and I know how difficult it is to publish in those other ones. I know they're not the same level. And I just couldn't understand how both could be ranked as Qualis A by CAPES. Then, a colleague explained to me: 'So the thing is, who decides what qualifies as Qualis A at CAPES are university professors. But since the vast majority of them don't manage to publish in the top-tier journals, instead of pushing themselves to reach that level, they simply lower the bar. The journals they publish in are then categorized as Qualis A.' This is extremely damaging because now the standard for Brazilian researchers has been lowered and they don't even realize the difference between them. [...] So instead of improving, things are worsening. [...] I saw a talk given by the president of FAPESP two years ago, where he said they had already identified the problem: now there is a massive volume of publications that are completely irrelevant. No one reads them, no one cites them, yet this is the only criterion CAPES uses. It was already clear twenty years ago that this was going to happen. And this creates a distortion because there are a few people who know the difference, but the vast majority don't. Most people just look at the label: 'Qualis A.' But if everything is Qualis A, then nothing is really Qualis A. If everything is the same level, then, I don't know where this distortion ends. [...] I didn't want to be part of this game of pretending to produce knowledge. I thought, 'No, I won't play along,' so I decided to leave. I just wasn't enthused enough to stay.

Geraldo's testimony reveals a certain mismatch between national Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policies and the intended internationalization of this model. Given that Brazil does not occupy a central position in setting global standards and parameters for scientific production, the challenges faced by national journals are distinct from those encountered by internationally recognized periodicals. This resonates with the data presented by Machado (2018) on the dynamics of international citations, where North American and European publications are predominantly the most cited – both by their own researchers and by those from other continents. It may be necessary, therefore, to consider how mediations and translations are effected between these different academic spheres. Geraldo's remarks also recall the discussion in the previous section regarding the Brazilian state's objectives and ambitions in awarding doctoral research scholarships abroad. What are the limits and possibilities of disseminating the knowledge acquired in international institutions within Brazil? For Geraldo, becoming familiarized with international scientific systems and policies allowed him to critically assess the Brazilian university system from a distance. But rather than seeking to promote changes within the national system, he chose to return abroad. Surviving professionally in Brazil under the prevailing academic rules was not seen as desirable by him – in other words, having a job alone was not enough. In this sense, for Geraldo, the policy from which he benefited had clear limitations: it was unrealistic to expect an individual, acting alone, to meet the state's expectations regarding their career trajectory.

For the individual, I think it's excellent, I would recommend it to anyone. But looking back, I think it's a lot of money for the country. I cost a lot of money. I don't think there's any real return for Brazil [...]. And it's not just that: there's no plan. What are they going to do

with me when I come back? Will I become a university professor? There wasn't anywhere to teach or apply [...]. I went, won a CAPES postdoc scholarship because someone there managed to obtain one for me, and that was it. [...] Maybe there would be more of a return if it were better organized and more coordinated. [...] Brazil does things in reverse: they invest a huge amount of money at the beginning and then ask, 'What about industry?' But there is no industry for what I do. So what was the point of investing in me? If it were the other way around, if they first asked, 'Where are people needed?' 'Oh, sure, maybe in farming innovation?' 'OK, so let's bring in the people we need and pay them.' That way, the money would immediately benefit society.

The idea of the return as both a legal threat and a moral duty was present in the accounts of several interlocutors – here represented primarily in Alice's account. However, Geraldo also highlights an element that appears important for this discussion: how far can individual agency influence this process? Fernando's pessimism and Geraldo's critiques can be apprehended from this perspective: however much these former scholarship recipients may be willing to act in accordance with the State's expectations, they are unable to do so without a coordinated policy that ensures a well-defined plan of reintegration. Perhaps the assumption that these researchers can serve as catalysts for the creation of new fields of research and professional opportunities in Brazil overestimates their actual capacity to achieve this aim.

This is an aspect that warrants a closer analysis in discussions on policies for training highly qualified individuals abroad as a national development strategy. While in the 1950s and 1960s there was a huge professional field in Brazil, precisely because a consolidated system had yet to be established, in today's landscape, with a relatively solid research and postgraduate system now established in the country, earning a doctorate abroad does not necessarily translate into prestige or new opportunities in Brazil. Given the competition for positions, professional connections and funding within the national scientific field (Bourdieu 2004), a doctorate from a foreign institution does not automatically confer advantages. Even so, the state still expects these individuals to 'give back' to Brazil what they received to train abroad (Azevedo 2022).

Moreover, while the trajectories presented here cannot be deemed representative of the general experiences of former scholarship recipients, they do highlight certain elements that can serve as points of inquiry for future analyses and research on the subject. One of these is the difference between areas of knowledge. For a researcher in the human sciences, living in their home country and producing work in their native language is likely to hold far greater significance than for researchers in other fields, such as engineering, where research is conducted in what is taken to be a more 'universal' and 'technical' language, like English, less dependent on "the analysis of the context, culture or society in which it is carried out" (Machado 2018: 297). Thus, while there may be a homogenizing and universalizing dimension to scholarship policies for study abroad, their outcomes and implications are shaped by factors inherent to the constitution of different fields of knowledge.

STUDYING ABROAD, DEVELOPING THE COUNTRY? DISJUNCTIONS, MORALITIES, TENSIONS AND CONVERGENCES IN THE TIME-WORN AGENCY/STRUCTURE OPPOSITION

One of the objectives of the policy described here was to promote social change on a national scale by fostering the training of ‘global academics’ – pioneers who would return to Brazil equipped with this capacity. While this ambition made perfect sense when these programs were initially conceived – at a time when a national research and postgraduate system did not yet exist – it is increasingly difficult to sustain this expectation in these same terms today. Moreover, it is worth asking to what extent individuals alone can promote such changes, given that these kinds of transformations require more systematic frameworks involving multiple institutions and actors, as reflected in Geraldo’s account of his inability to effect any change by himself.

It is also worth highlighting that by working with different dimensions, scales and meanings, the various premises and expectations implicit in this policy produce numerous tensions and divergences. For researchers and students, accessing this funding represents an opportunity to gain experience and build an international career with the leading figures in their fields, satisfying a certain cosmopolitan aspiration (Azevedo & Dutra 2021; 2022). On the other hand, policymakers and funding administrators hope that the careers of these individuals become instruments for promoting national development.

Faced with this scenario, an unavoidable question emerges: given the advent and popularization of the internet and information technologies at the pervasive level now existing today, just how influential and important are physical circulation and presence in ensuring the expected outcomes of public investments? How can virtual and real-life dimensions be reconciled when it comes to international academic mobility? What is gained and lost? Furthermore, considering the multidimensionality of these forms of communication, as well as global forms of knowledge production and networking, how should we think about the training of new generations in foreign institutions? How can the debate and analysis of these policies be updated in a setting that is evolving so rapidly that even the foundations of scientific knowledge are being questioned? What does it mean to ‘develop’ under these new conditions? And how can Brazilian students and researchers, regardless of where they are located, engage with national dynamics and demands? These questions point to an open research agenda in urgent need of deeper reflection.

Another aspect to consider within this broader analytical framework, whose anthropological perspective can help reveal dynamics and nuances that might otherwise go unnoticed, relates to the moral dimensions involved in such policies and projects. As emphasized throughout the article, the debt these researchers owe is not merely to CAPES but to the development of the country itself. In other words, their trajectories and careers are embedded within broader social processes and dynamics. Fazito (2010), in a study of young Brazilians from Governador Valadares who migrate to the United States, demonstrates how the idea of returning to Brazil, even when

not a concrete possibility, becomes manifest in their everyday lives through norms, behaviours and values at both individual and group levels. Return is understood as the culmination of the migratory project, a moment of consecration by the community, which perceives migration to the United States as a necessary and almost obligatory stage. If, in choosing to migrate, these individuals experience a kind of ‘rite of passage’ through a “cultural matrix that legitimizes them and grants them autonomy to the point that each migratory project does not necessarily depend on conventional ‘economic success’” (Fazito 2010: 93), then return marks the closure of this ritual in which the act of displacement itself is sacralized and socially recognized for its symbolic power. These rites of passage thus help construct a particular “moral order of the community” (Fazito 2010: 94), qualified and reinforced through these ritualizations.

For my interlocutors, despite the various reservations that can be made, it is possible to conceive of some kind of “moral order of the community” that fosters this type of international mobility and, consequently, their return by framing the latter as an obligation that extends beyond contractual terms. Having received a significant investment from the Brazilian government, these scholars feel compelled to repay the country for the substantial resources invested in their careers. In this debate, they position themselves as privileged individuals and, as such, accept responsibility for repaying the benefits they have received personally – an idea strongly represented in Alice’s statements but also echoed by other interlocutors in this study. For these individuals, then, the scholarship emerges as a gift – that is, there is an underlying exchange system (Mauss 2003; Coelho 2006; Azevedo 2022) in which the return to the country constitutes the counter-gift for the substantial funding received from the Brazilian government. Understanding their return through this logic helps shed light on how these individuals make sense of their experiences and career trajectories, highlighting the production of a certain ethical-moral commitment to a broader state and nation-building project informing these policies.

FINAL REMARKS

The practice of international academic mobility, despite being relatively common among academics and researchers, has so far received little attention as an object of investigation in its own right. Understanding its different dynamics and dimensions enables us to see how this phenomenon encapsulates and translates historical moments and development projects, functioning as both a product and producer of relations between individuals, institutions and countries. As I described above, promoting this mobility has been one of the main strategies employed by the Brazilian state – and here I deliberately use the term ‘state,’ since this encouragement has taken place under different governments with distinct ideological objectives and perspectives – as part of the modernization project that acquired significant momentum from the 1950s onward. As discussed throughout this article, the central argument here is that funding for international academic mobility was understood as a state investment and strategy in which it was believed that these individuals, on returning to Brazil from abroad

after their period of training, would disseminate a certain ethos and scientific knowledge acquired in the United States and Western Europe.

As I showed in the first section, the activities of the main national research funding and human resource development agencies, CNPq and CAPES, were initially guided by the aim of fostering this type of practice, particularly concerned with the development of nuclear research in the country, as well as with the formation of sufficient personnel for the establishment of postgraduate programs, seeking to improve the qualifications of Brazilian university professors without necessarily depending on international institutions. In addition to the national agencies, foreign governments and international foundations also played a significant role in this process.

CAPES has gone through a series of political-institutional changes since its creation and today has a larger institutional structure that manages academic mobility and international cooperation practices and policies in different terms and directions, prioritizing new financing modalities such as the sandwich doctoral course.⁹ By bringing the analysis of this policy into the present day through the experience of Brazilian researchers who received funding for full doctoral courses abroad in the 2000s, we can note that some of the premises originally guiding these policies still continue, such as the obligation to return as the main tool for repaying the country for the investment made in their careers. The state's objective in funding these scholarships both converges with and diverges from the career and life projects guiding the actions of these individuals. The strategy found by them to secure funding for a doctorate abroad is redefined not only by the contractual importance but also the moral importance of the idea of return. Reading this moral dimension of return through the logic of the gift helps us comprehend how, for some of these researchers, returning to the country implies this necessary 'retribution' for the significant amount received during their doctoral studies abroad – an opportunity to which only a privileged group in the country has access.

Yet the ability of these individuals to become protagonists in this process is limited. Just submitting reports to CAPES is certainly not enough to achieve the goal originally established. As Geraldo, one of the interlocutors in the study, asked: "*What are they going to do with me when I come back?*" The initial expectation that these individuals would, through a 'naturally' defined path, form a national academic elite and serve as motors for the country's development does not necessarily align with the objective socio-historical realities of the country or the individual projects of those benefitting from these policies.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the historical significance and relevance of these policies and programs for the country. Certainly, without them, the national research and postgraduate system as we know it today would not exist, nor would Brazil's substantial international presence in various fields of scientific knowledge. Overall, therefore, we can

9 Indeed, in a recent informal conversation with a current director of the agency, it was confided to me that CAPES intends to cease funding full doctoral scholarships abroad, except in very specific cases where it is shown that there no equivalent programs exist in Brazil for the requested field of study. Priority would be given solely to sandwich doctoral courses and postdoctoral research.

say that the objectives set in the 1950s were largely achieved. Since we are dealing with a long-standing public policy, though, as well as recognizing its importance and relevance for national dynamics, we also need to progress in terms of the processes and methods used for evaluation and improvement. Considering the perspectives of those involved in such programs can provide a valuable contribution to such a process. Here it is important to highlight that the agencies themselves have also promoted changes regarding the obligation to return to Brazil, as seen in recent alterations to CAPES (2023) and CNPq (2023) regulations. These new provisions open the possibility for former scholarship holders abroad to ‘pay’ their debt to the country through actions and measures other than physical return, such as establishing partnerships, cooperation initiatives and projects with Brazilian researchers and universities.

In a previous study (Azevedo & Dutra 2021), attention was already drawn to the question of whether these researchers can be considered an elite, given the uncertain prospects that shape their professional trajectory, even though they represent less than 2% of the population with a doctorate in Brazil. However, it is also important to consider to what extent the difficulties faced by these researchers on their return differ from the challenges encountered by young doctors trained in Brazil. To what extent can we differentiate between the situations of those who trained in Brazil and those who trained abroad? While fluency in a foreign language, publication in international journals and experience at internationally renowned universities may be considered to create distinction and prestige, the limitations of professional networks in Brazil and the difficulties of readapting to a system distinct from the one in which they completed their doctorate also become significant hindering factors in this process. Moving beyond analyses that sharply differentiate inside/outside, or national/international, the challenge in terms of both policies and analyses is perhaps to understand these trajectories and experiences as a continuum. In other words, the goal is to advance towards an understanding of the Brazilian university system beyond its developmentalist and nationalist mission, as framed in the second half of the twentieth century. How we can update these terms of reflection without necessarily subscribing to the neoliberal logic and premises of other university systems around the world is a challenge faced by the multiple actors involved in this process: policy decision makers, governments, scholarship holders, former scholarship holders and scholars of the topic.

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