

BRAZILIAN DESIGN IN THE DECOLONIAL GYRE **DESIGN BRASILEIRO NO GIRO DECOLONIAL** FLÁVIO FERREIRA, JULIANA FRANCO

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Abstract

This study uses a decolonial perspective to examine the influence of colonialism on the design field in Brazil. Decolonial thinking can be a useful tool, providing a critical perspective that can challenge dominant narratives and encourage more inclusive forms of knowledge production. Through an analysis of design curricula and syllabi in Brazilian universities, the study reveals the dominance of European and American authors, who are mostly white cisgender men. Furthermore, the research has shown that many designers see themselves as neutral agents, detached from the social and political contexts in which they operate. However, design is a field of knowledge and practice that is not exempt from responsibility for the events of today's society. As such, designers must be more aware of the power structures surrounding them and strive to liberate and adapt their practice to the needs of marginalized communities. The research presented in this article has provided valuable insights into the influence of coloniality on design education in Brazil. It has highlighted the need for more diverse and inclusive curricula that reflect the country's cultural heritage and the perspectives of marginalized groups. Overall, the research highlights the need for further investigation into the influence of coloniality on design education and the importance of adopting a decolonial perspective in the field. This will not only help to transform design education in Brazil, but also contribute to the broader effort to challenge oppressive hegemonies and create more inclusive and equitable forms of knowledge production. By bringing attention to the role of colonialism in design, this research can contribute to a more critical and counter-hegemonic understanding of the field.

Keywords: Design, Epistemology, Decoloniality, Curriculum, Coloniality

1 Introduction

This research seeks to understand the epistemology and organization of the Brazilian design field from a decolonial perspective. We want to investigate design knowledge in undergraduate design education and see how hegemonic dominance shapes and influences its construction from a non-existence production logic. According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2002), the production of non-existence in knowledge involves the transformation of modern science and high culture into unique criteria of truth and aesthetic quality, resulting in the exclusion of anything outside of this canon. Dijon de Moraes (2006) argues that the relationship between local references and imported design models, particularly from German, Italian, and Swiss schools, have played a significant role in the development of the Brazilian design field.

Utilizing decolonial theories, this research aims to examine the relationship between design, production, and the colonial power matrix in the Brazilian design field. By adopting a decolonial perspective, we aim to investigate the gaps and limitations created by the Eurocentric influence in design. Our research will focus on the impact of external influences on the formation of the Brazilian design field, and how these have shaped its epistemology and organization. We will also consider how prioritizing external parameters and universalizing them in the fields of knowledge production has led to the exclusion of non-dominant perspectives and contexts.

To gather data for this study, we will use a multi-step approach that includes analyzing the Bachelor of Design curricula and syllabi in Brazilian federal universities, and conducting interviews with course coordinators. The first step involves analyzing the curricula and syllabi to identify key themes, such as the main center of knowledge production in design and the gender identity of the most recurrent authors in the field. The second step involves conducting interviews with course coordinators to gain insights into their perspectives on these topics. The data collected on these two steps will be examined through a decolonial lens to determine the impact of the colonial power matrix on design education in Brazil. This analysis will allow us to understand the trajectory of design in Brazil and its construction as an area of knowledge and expertise.

2 Colonial, Post-colonial, and Decolonial

The transformation of understanding specific locations in universal terms can be traced back to the European maritime expansion and colonization of the Americas starting in 1492. This period led to the genocide of the local population and the replacement of their native knowledge with European knowledge. As European and Euro-American colonies spread around

the world, a hierarchy of knowledge development, with the suppression of native languages in favor of colonizer languages, as noted by Walter D. Mignolo (2007). Anibal Quijano (2000) argues that the elimination of customs incompatible with Christianity transformed Christianity into the only true religion and established a hierarchy of people. With each new step toward global dominance, Europe reinforced the superiority of its knowledge and used its economic and technological power to maintain its dominance.

The Modernity/Coloniality group, with its decolonial thinking, encourages radical changes in the ways of producing knowledge and emphasizes the need for a new epistemology emerging from the global south. This counter-hegemonic perspective serves as the fundamental theoretical reference for this study. According to Walter D. Mignolo (2003), this approach represents the manifestation of political, theoretical, and epistemological self-determination of places that have not yet been inscribed among knowledge producers.

Decolonial thought is unique in that it does not simply list issues or propose solutions, but rather provides the right questions from a counter-hegemonic perspective. Through this research, we can observe the influence of the colonial power matrix on several structural dimensions of contemporary society, particularly in how it prevents many fields of knowledge, including design, from being open to diverse collectivities. This is the significance of this work, as the awareness of coloniality as a component of the design is already a counter-hegemonic thought process in motion.

3 Design Trajectories in Brazil

To understand the development of design in Brazil, it is important to consider the country's political and social dynamics. According to Quijano (2000), decolonization is necessary for any significant social change. Brazil has developed a design culture based on its own political and sociocultural context. As Maurice Dobb (1987) notes, the origins of design can be traced back to industrialization, which separated the creation of an object from its production. This led to poor working conditions and low wages for factory workers, as well as rapid technological development and increased consumerism. Those conditions had, as their main characteristic, the alienation of man from the means of production and the transformation of human labor into a commodity like any other.

Until the 1930s, Brazil's economy relied heavily on coffee exports and had a small, insignificant industrial sector. However, when the world market became oversaturated and the New York Stock Exchange crashed in 1929, coffee exports declined, and the government's economic strategy was no longer able to support coffee prices on the global market (Otaiza de Oliveira Romanelli, 1996). According to Boris Fausto (2007), the developmentalist policies of President Juscelino Kubitschek's government (1956-1961) aligned with the needs of international capitalism, led by the United States, and welcomed the construction of multinational industries, positioning Brazil within the global monopoly of capitalism.

The Brazilian government saw design as a useful tool for the country, but not as a critical and reflective practice. Instead, it viewed design as a technical discipline that served industrial interests. To achieve this goal, the government based its approach on European models of design and incorporated them into Brazilian culture through rhetoric that aligned with modernity and the country's economic goals of growth and export of commodities to foreign interests.

In the debate over the consolidation of industrial projects in Brazil, the German matrix, represented by the Ulm School, was the main reference. This model was brought to Brazil through the creation of the Superior School of Industrial Design (ESDI) at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. According to Izabel Maria de Oliveira (2009), the ESDI project anticipated the ideological transformation associated with modernity. The influence of European rationalism on Brazil and other peripheral countries that experienced Western industrialization led to a focus on technical and functional quality in product design.

Functionalist design and internationalism were well-suited to Brazil because they aligned with the country's developmental project, which was driven by the "economic miracle" of the time. This period of economic growth led to the emergence of regional inequalities, with consumer goods concentrated in the south and southeast regions of the country, while other areas outside of production systems experienced severe industrial crises (Zoy Anastassakis, 2011).

In the 1970s, the military government's economic development policies discouraged bachelor's degree programs in social and artistic fields, while providing financial incentives for technological areas. According to Rita Maria de Souza Couto (2008),

this was intended to help Brazil become a forward-thinking country. To adapt to the developmentalist ideal and secure resources, bachelor of arts programs were abruptly transformed into undergraduate industrial design courses. This led to a standardized and centralized curriculum structure imposed by the Ministry of Education (MEC), based on the ESDI model (Lima; Lima, 2003).

According to Guacira Lopes Louro (1997, p. 143), no research, or rather, no science, is disinterested or neutral, and the adoption of a European curriculum to lead the experience of teaching design in Brazil cannot be isolated from the interests encoded in that act. To maintain colonizing power, knowledge, and being, the curriculum includes itineraries, routines, procedures, didactic-pedagogical conceptions, theoretical references, and physical structures, thus that students and even teachers regard Eurocentric knowledge as natural, valuable, and beneficial. We currently detect criticisms of design studies and practices in both the global south and the north. Such viewpoints try to break with the designer's unilateral creation logic. Design anthropology, defined as a hybrid approach by Anastassakis and Kuschner (2013), is one example of these initiatives to destabilize the hegemonic knowledge of countries in the global north. This strategy combines methods and tools from anthropology and design, as well as interventionist research and field design. It also repeatedly alternates between reflection and action. It tries to actively involve the subject in the creative process as a co-creator.

The countries of the global south bring ideas, such as those proposed by Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero (2014), which argue that even if all human groups design, only industrial projects designed in a specific and hermetic graphic language are understood as technical, neutral, and universal. He emphasizes the importance of prioritizing South designs — those created in the South through the construction of South ideas, which are more inclusive and emancipatory (Borrero, 2014). However, Geraldina Porto Witter (1985, p. 54) advises against changing the curriculum model before recognizing, investigating, assessing, and critiquing the issues that the current educational system is founded on. To gain a better understanding of the current teaching environment, we will now focus on research on the curriculum for design programs in Brazil. As Tomaz Tadeu da Silva (1995, p. 196) explains, the curriculum allows or rejects, legitimizes, or delegitimizes, includes, or excludes it, making it the subject of decolonial research.

4 Analysis of the Bachelor of Design Curriculum

It is important to consider the curriculum not only as a tool for facilitating learning, but also from a broader perspective that takes into account its social, political, and epistemological implications. According to Tomaz Tadeu da Silva and Antônio Flávio Barbosa Moreira (1995), the curriculum plays a significant role in shaping personal and social identities, as well as in communicating societal perspectives. To better understand the framework that shapes design education in Brazil, we analyzed bibliographies included in syllabi from various institutions that offer graduate programs in design, recognized by the "Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES)", as shown in Table 1. We were particularly interested in identifying the sources used to develop ideas that shape professionals in this field, and how these ideas have influenced their development.

TOTAL DE PROGRAMAS DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO

INSTITUIÇÃO DE ENSINO	UF	TOTAL
CENTRO DE ESTUDOS E SISTEMAS AVANÇADOS DO RECIFE (CESAR - PE)	PE	1
CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO TERESA D'ÁVILA (UNIFATEA)	SP	1
CESAR CENTRO DE ESTUDOS E SISTEMAS AVANÇADOS DO RECIFE (CESAR-AM)	AM	1
PONTIFÍCIA UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA DO RIO DE JANEIRO (PUC-RIO)	RJ	1
UNIVERSIDADE ANHEMBI MORUMBI (UAM)	SP	1
UNIVERSIDADE DA REGIÃO DE JOINVILLE (UNIVILLE)	SC	1
UNIVERSIDADE DE BRASÍLIA (UNB)	DF	1
UNIVERSIDADE DE SÃO PAULO (USP)	SP	1
UNIVERSIDADE DO ESTADO DE MINAS GERAIS (UEMG)	MG	1
UNIVERSIDADE DO ESTADO DE SANTA CATARINA (UDESC)	SC	2
UNIVERSIDADE DO ESTADO DO RIO DE JANEIRO (UERJ)	RJ	1
UNIVERSIDADE DO VALE DO RIO DOS SINOS (UNISINOS)	RS	1
UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL PAULISTA JÚLIO DE MESQUITA FILHO, BAURU (UNESP-BAURU)	SP	1
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE CAMPINA GRANDE (UFCG)	PB	1
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE PERNAMBUCO (UFPE)	PE	2
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA (UFSC)	SC	1
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO AMAZONAS (UFAM)	AM	1
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO MARANHÃO (UFMA)	MA	1
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO PARANÁ (UFPR)	PR	1
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO DE JANEIRO (UFRJ)	RJ	1
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO NORTE (UFRN)	RN	1
UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL (UFRGS)	RS	1
TOTAL		24

Table 1: Courses evaluated and recognized by CAPES, prepared by the authors based on data from the Sucupira Platform. Source: Authors, 2022. Available at: <https://sucupira.capes.gov.br/sucupira/public/consultas/coleta/programa/quantitativos/quantitativos.xhtml?areaAvaliacao=29&areaConhecimento=61200000>. [Accessed: 02 March 2021].

This study examines multiple design teaching curricula to better understand the context of design teaching in different parts of Brazil. The goal is to provide a more comprehensive and accurate description of design education in the country, rather than rely on a single case study. Our analysis showed that external factors, such as European culture, have had a significant impact on the national design curriculum. By comparing the authors of the publications included in the bibliographies, we were able to demonstrate and discuss the influence of European culture on Brazil's design education.

Design education in Brazil has been heavily influenced by European culture, as evidenced by our analysis of 1,065 publications designated as fundamental bibliographies in 365 disciplines. The significant disparity in the number of institutions by region of the country was already apparent at the start of the analysis: 66% of all the universities analyzed are concentrated in the south and southeast regions, with the states of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo accounting for 33% of the total. These two states have more CAPES-recognized graduate design programs than the North and Northeast regions combined (28.6%). This illustrates the presence of European hegemony, but also of internal colonialities, with the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo axes as the central focus of courses and discourses regarding the rest of the country.

The principal location of the publications cited in the studied syllabi is a crucial aspect of this research, as it indicates where design knowledge is generated. According to our findings, works produced in the United States (22.7%) and Europe (38.1%) predominated, with only the cities of New York and London accounting for 26.1% of the total output. This indicates that, although all courses are held in Brazil and relevant to national realities, only 35.4% of the works were made in the country. We also found that there is a greater diversity of cities in the United States where design projects are launched (30 cities) compared to Brazil (16 cities). This can be explained by the concentration of Brazilian publishers in the Rio de Janeiro and

Sao Paulo axes. While in the United States, many publishers with ties to universities operate autonomously, and practically under the licensing of these institutions (Rocha, 2014, p. 19). Figure 1 shows the distribution of publications by location.

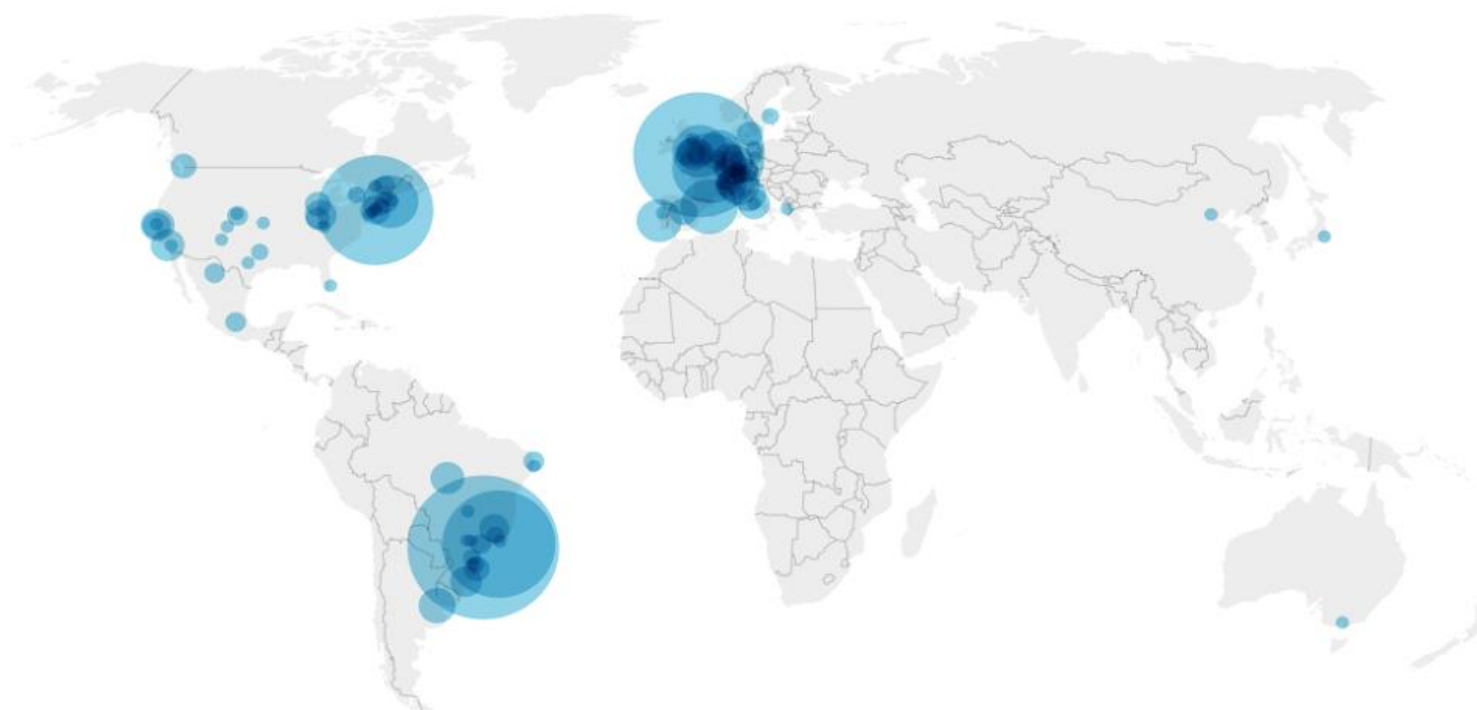


Fig. 1: Proportion of publication of works analyzed in cities around the world, a graph created using the *datwrapper* with data collected from a curriculum analysis. Source: Authors, 2022.

This data supports our research findings, which indicate the presence of Eurocentric hegemony in the production of design knowledge in Brazil. It reflects the country's adoption of the German matrix in design education, which represented imported ideas still considered paradigmatic.

In terms of the gender of the authors of design works, the significant difference between publications by cisgender male authors (84.3%) and cisgender female authors (15.7%) is notable. Taking into account the low representation of women in design research, we highlight the gender issue in the field, as noted by Beatriz Batisteli (2021). The percentage of women in undergraduate and graduate design courses varies depending on the institution, but is generally greater than 50%. However, when analyzing the representation of women in leadership positions within companies or in awards, this representation decreases drastically. According to Gabriela Angel Ramalho de Sá (2018), there is a sexist effect on female scientific production in academia, in which male researchers receive superior and prominent recognition, underestimating and minimizing the qualifications of women, which suggests the distortion of the construction of women's representativeness and authorship in scientific production. Figure 2 shows these findings.

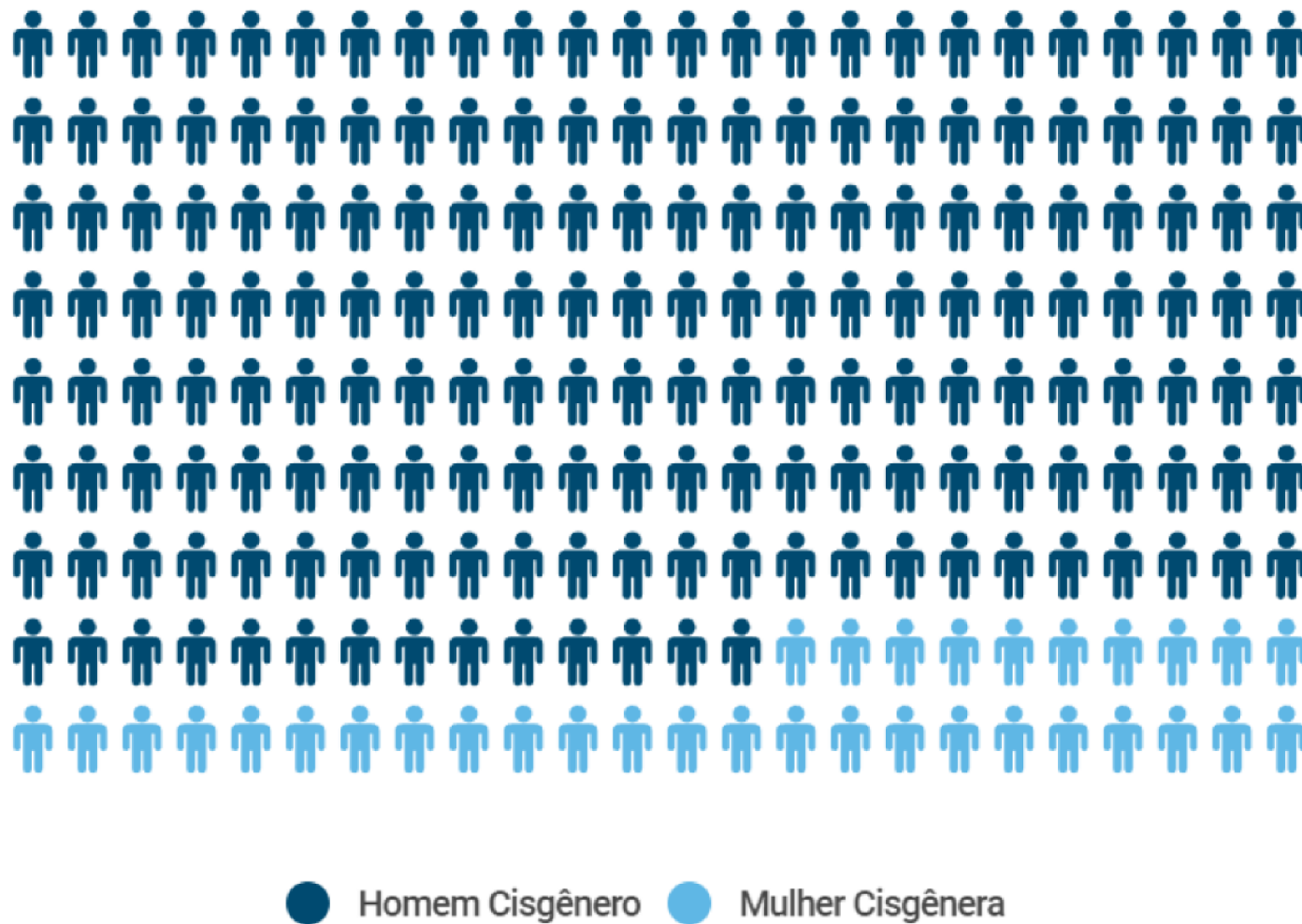


Fig. 2: Relationship between the genres of the authors of the analyzed works, a graph created from *Infogram* with data collected from curriculum analysis. Source: Authors, 2022.

5 Interviews

This article aims to analyze the construction of the field of design in Brazil and the consequences of its colonial past on teaching in the area. To do this, interviews were conducted with the coordinators of institutions whose curricula were previously studied. The interviews were based on online questionnaires and focused on the presence or absence of national authors in the curriculum, as well as the diversity of authors in terms of gender and race.

The answers to the questions raised some interesting points, such as the lack of national authors in the curriculum and the lack of effort to ensure diversity. However, many coordinators believed that prioritizing national authors and increasing diversity would be beneficial. The text also discusses the need to incorporate more diverse voices into the design, and the challenges of decolonizing the curriculum.

For the selection of the interviewees, only one criterion was adopted: that all were in the position of coordinating the selected courses when the interview was carried out, and nine (9) were available to participate. As for the questions asked, we highlighted those that helped introduce the theme of decolonization, starting from the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge within universities. Therefore, the first question was: "Do you believe prioritizing national authors is a concern?" This question sought to understand the interviewees' view of the presence or absence of national authors in their curriculum matrices.

Some interesting issues were raised from the analysis of the answers to the questions. For example, interviewee nine stated that "one knows these titles can be more specialized and specific (...), thus they may not be as apparent in the matrix

curriculum, which does not mean they are not present in the course and classroom." However, it is necessary to reflect on why national authors' materials are "specialized" and "specific" within the curricula matrices of their own country, while the classics or basic contents continue to be mostly Eurocentric.

The lack of national base works, whether because of the low production of scientific knowledge in the area or the difficulty in accessing existing works in libraries, leads to a cycle that does not feed the national scientific production in the sector. This means our main references are almost always foreign. However, it is important to emphasize that most believe that giving priority to national authors would be beneficial.

For the question, "Do you think there is any concern with the gender and race diversity of the authors when choosing the bibliographies for the elaboration of the curriculum matrices?" The answers were almost entirely negative. The interviewees do not see an effort to guarantee gender and race diversity in the curricula. One interviewee even declares "it would be absurd, in my opinion" (interviewee eight). The interviewed three share a similar perspective, stating that "the implications for influencing choices are based on the quality of production, regardless of gender, race, etc." It is worth mentioning that the same respondent, who stated in the previous question that the effort to ensure gender and race diversity would be absurd, replied that with a greater presence of diverse authors in the curriculum, it would be more inclusive and representative of society.

We noticed that including more voices than the white man's voice in intellectual production, validated by the academy, is not a priority for many of the coordinators in question, perhaps because many of them do not see the direct relationship between issues such as race and gender with design. What is visible in the responses is that "academic writing is not only linked to color or gender," as interviewee two states. Nevertheless, as advocated by Francielly Baliana, the construction of a field of knowledge production - centered on Eurocentrism/Westernism and a specific idea of modern rationality - also led to the consolidation of coloniality beyond the borders of colonialism itself. Because of these historical perspectives on power, a system of social exploitation has been built that makes all forms of work increasingly subject to the exclusive and permanent logic of capital, as well as cultural dominance that controls, covers up, and hierarchies the forms of subjectivities based on a Eurocentric perspective of rationality even today, even after the independence processes (Baliana, 2020).

For the analysis of the item related to the European centrality of the most read authors in design teaching in Brazil, we started this axis with the question: "According to our previous research, most of the authors used in the disciplines are men and Europeans. Why do you believe this phenomenon occurs?" Many interviewees were aware of the presence of a strong Eurocentric influence in society, stating that it was "a matter of power." "As a country with a colonial history, Europe heavily influenced us." Yes, "they result from a patriarchal society and the influence of the first European design schools" (interviewee two), which we can complement with another answer: "mainly linked to schools like Bauhaus and Ulm" (interviewee 1).

The interviewees also perceive the centrality of the production of knowledge that such influence creates, and show that many researchers in the area need to go abroad to specialize: "many of our professors were prepared from this European content in Italy, influenced by male authors" (interviewee five). This statement highlights the fact already mentioned in this article: the association of the area with foreign, classical, and canonical content, as shown by interviewee nine: "an undergraduate course needs to commit to traditional training values." "It is impossible to recommend, as a basic bibliography, an author who has not yet recognized relevance for the area."

Respondents' opinions and ideologies form an unbreakable chain, because academic works with European or American credibility are used to validate the course. As mentioned in previous questions, the national scientific publication market does not offer opportunities for publishing unpublished national works. This leads to the stagnation of the field with the reading of the same authors and concepts, feeding back the cycle of dependence on the works of foreign authors. Most interviewees perceive the colonial problem and its effects on scientific production in the field. However, they would like something done. Especially when faced with more complex discussions, such as race and gender, they withdraw and do not see in these discussions the key to improvements in the area. This reaction indicates the importance of raising topics such as those proposed here to build deeper debates in the area. Decolonial thinking can be an important tool for the future of design, and for the designer who seeks to be more aware of the complexities surrounding it.

The need to investigate the main influences of coloniality on design and national education in contemporary times motivated this work. We sought to understand the formation of the countryside in the country, and, from there, we verified that there has been strong coloniality, as well as subservience to international economic interests. The teaching base was exported from European schools to the Brazilian context, with completely different realities.

It was found that the methodological procedures used proved efficient as tools to achieve the proposed objectives, considering they allowed both a theoretical deepening of the research themes and a broader and more contextualized understanding of the same.

It is important to point out that the method used in the research, despite achieving the proposed result, is subject to improvement and should be applied in the service of a counter-hegemonic discussion of design. Using this method in other research requires analyzing in more depth the internal colonialism between regions and locations in the national context through the replication of the same questions asked here (for the field of design) in specific areas of the field, like graphic design, product design, and fashion, among others. So, through additions to the theoretical framework and other interlocutors, the focus is on encouraging the national production of scientific knowledge and literature in design.

In this sense, the present research revealed both the discourses that have remained in force since the last century, and the mechanisms that understand technical-scientific and rational knowledge as the only valid epistemology. It also indicated the behavior of the designer, as reported in some interviewees' answers, of seeing himself as a neutral agent whose function is only to design. However, design, as a field of knowledge and practice, is not exempt from responsibility for the events of today's society. It is a fundamental element of this context. For this reason, the designer must understand his context and history, making his practice liberating and sensitive to the effects of the power structures surrounding him.

It is, therefore, necessary to situate the problems arising from modernity to understand how to naturalize and standardize certain narratives, and thus to conceive alternatives that challenge the dominant discourse, conventions, knowledge, and language, since it is impossible to find solutions to the problems of modernity by seeking them in modernity itself. Therefore, to become a counter-hegemonic tool, the design must cease serving the old premises and propagate certain narratives, such as modernity or infinite development, that only endorse colonialism and extractivism. Every design serves as a narrative. It is never neutral, as all professional activity will, to some extent, relate to and interfere with the daily lives of people who Accessed: it. This impact will not always be positive. Because society considers the historical legacy of injustices committed since the colonial period, the chances of reproducing an excluding and oppressive vision are high.

Finally, this research was only a first step toward discussions that could be broadly explored in design, as well as a method to demonstrate new ways for designers to act. Using the decolonial perspective in the field does not imply developing a new style of design or technique of designing, which would just add to the many other issues that the field is now dealing with. Decoloniality acts as a guide for investigational orientation, a radical mode of thinking and questioning, and a means of combating oppressive hegemonies and creating forms of reflection. The work to decolonize the curriculum contributes to the development of new perspectives, ideas, and readings that should serve as the foundation for altering design education. The work to decolonize the curriculum contributes to the development of new perspectives, ideas, and readings that should serve as the foundation for altering design education. Another perspective on modernity and the purported universality of Eurocentric logic sold as neutral: a perspective that is pluralistic, intercultural, and decolonial.

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