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# *Um Pouco Mais de Calma*: Identifying the *Trampas* of Decolonizing Internationalization of Higher Education and Academy in the Global South

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**Abstract**

*In this article, we analyze contradictions, complexities, limits, and potentialities of internationalization of higher education (IHE) from Latin American decolonial perspectives. We argue that even when scholars may be holding decolonial critiques and aspirations towards IHE, the structures of universities are heavily influenced by colonial legacies, undermining the potentialities of decolonization. We pay special attention to those initiatives that apparently promise a decolonial exit, because they may be acting as traps, or what we called trampas (in Spanish). In this article, we particularly analyze the initiatives that are frequently seen as projects that deviated from the hegemonic discourses of internationalization: i) South-South international higher education cooperation projects, ii) policies and projects that seek to address colonial legacies, and iii) teaching and researching committed with decolonial intentions. In the end, we invite readers, practitioners and scholars alike, to welcome the contradictions we face in such work and not to lose sight of the ongoing, relational, and hyperreflective character of any project that aims to be an alternative to coloniality.*

**Keywords:** complexities, decolonial projects, global south, modernity/coloniality, *trampas.*

**Resumen**

*En este artículo, analizamos las contradicciones, complejidades, límites y potencialidades de la internacionalización de la educación superior (IES) desde perspectivas decoloniales latinoamericanas. Sostenemos que incluso cuando los académicos pueden sostener críticas decoloniales y aspiraciones hacia la IES, las estructuras de las universidades están fuertemente influenciadas por legados coloniales, socavando las potencialidades de la decolonización. Prestamos especial atención a aquellas iniciativas que aparentemente prometen una salida decolonial, porque podrían estar actuando como trampas, o lo que llamamos "trampas". En este artículo, analizamos en particular las iniciativas que a menudo se perciben como proyectos que se apartaron de los discursos hegemónicos de la internacionalización: i) proyectos de cooperación internacional en la educación superior Sur-Sur, ii) políticas y proyectos que buscan abordar legados coloniales, y iii) la enseñanza y la investigación comprometidas con intenciones decoloniales. Al final, invitamos a los lectores, practicantes y académicos por igual, a acoger las contradicciones que enfrentamos en dicho trabajo y a no perder de vista el carácter continuo, relacional e hiperreflexivo de cualquier proyecto que aspire a ser una alternativa a la colonialidad.*

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**Palabras clave**: complejidades, modernidad/colonialidad, proyectos decoloniales, Sur global, trampas.

**Resumo**

*Neste artigo, analisamos contradições, complexidades, limites e potencialidades da internacionalização da educação superior (IES) a partir de perspectivas decoloniais latino-americanas. Argumentamos que mesmo diante das críticas e aspirações decoloniais adotadas por estudiosos com relação à IES, as estruturas das universidades são fortemente influenciadas por legados coloniais, minando as potencialidades da decolonização. Damos especial atenção àquelas iniciativas que aparentemente prometem uma saída decolonial, porque podem estar funcionando como armadilhas (trampas, em espanhol). Neste artigo, analisamos particularmente as iniciativas que são frequentemente vistas como projetos que se desviam dos discursos hegemônicos de internacionalização: i) projetos de cooperação internacional Sul-Sul em educação superior, ii) políticas e projetos que buscam abordar legados coloniais, e iii) ensino e pesquisa comprometidos com intenções decoloniais. Ao final do artigo, convidamos os leitores, profissionais e estudiosos a acolherem as contradições enfrentadas neste trabalho e a não perder de vista o caráter contínuo, relacional e hiperreflexivo de qualquer projeto que pretenda ser uma alternativa à colonialidade.*

**Palavras-chave**: complexidades, modernidade/colonialidade, projetos decoloniais, sul global, trampas.

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## Introduction

***Mesmo quando tudo pede***
***Um pouco mais de calma***
***Até quando o corpo pede***
***Um pouco mais de alma***
***A vida não para***

***Enquanto o tempo***
***Acelera e pede pressa***
***Eu me recuso, faço hora***
***Vou na valsa***
***A vida é tão rara***

***Enquanto todo mundo***
***Espera a cura do mal***
***E a loucura finge***
***Que isso tudo é normal***
***Eu finjo ter paciência***
***[...]***
***(Paciência, 1999, a song by Lenine, a Brazilian musician)***

The epigraph that introduces our text is a song by Brazilian musician Lenine. It points to the ephemerality and rarity of life amidst a world that does not stop and is always quickly moving. Despite this, the lyrical subject resists following the alienating dominant path and chooses to feel and act differently toward this temporality and way of life. Similarly, the present text attempts to hold some space to deal with the difficulties and accountabilities when advancing decolonial work to resist top-down neoliberal projects in international education. It is an invitation to reflect upon the different contexts and demands we experience and to attentively respond to them, especially when we work under *another* understanding of space, time, and educational work.

That said, while projects for internationalization of higher education (IHE) continue gaining traction across higher education institutions, the hegemonic model for internationalizing higher education has been more and more challenged due to the market-driven logic that sustains it and the revenue-generating purposes it serves (Amsler, 2011; Jones & de Wit, 2014; Rizvi & Lingard, 2020; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). Among the criticism emerging from diverse loci of enunciation, we highlight three explicitly and at different levels engaged with constructing more socially just futures.

Leading scholars in the field of IHE, such as Philip Altbach (2004), Uwe Brandenburg & Hans de Wit (2011), and Jane Knight (2011), among others, largely based in institutions in the global North, have argued that the current state of internationalization has deviated from its original purpose of enhancing academic and research quality (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011), thus "losing its meaning and direction" (Knight, 2011, p. 10). Such an argument seems to refer to an arguable golden past of international education (Stein & Andreotti, 2016) when the predominant discourses of government agencies and higher education institutions almost exclusively highlighted the intrinsic goodness of IHE for processes of knowledge exchange, academic quality enhancement, intercultural understanding, and the expansion of the global economy.

Drawing on decolonial and critical frameworks, scholars who identify with critical IHE studies, including Vanessa Andreotti et al. (2015), Sharon Stein et al. (2019), and Sharon Stein (2021), work to reimagine "dominant patterns of relationship, representation, and resource distribution in the internationalization of education" (CISN, 2023), which also involves troubling the naturalized mainstream positive view of IHE and acknowledging its constitutive relationship with coloniality. They have explicitly argued for the need to recognize how IHE strategies and international projects are not exempted from participating in harmful behaviors that reinforce colonial hierarchies, such as the superiority of the North (Chiappa & Finardi, 2021; Martinez, 2017; Stein & Silva, 2020), whiteness (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2021; Mwangi et al., 2018; Yao et al., 2019), and English as the language for academic exchange (Jordão & Martinez, 2021; Martinez, 2017).

Assuming a similar critical argument but based geographically and epistemically in the global South, Fernanda Leal, Kyria Finardi, & Julieta Abba (2022) question the very meanings of IHE projects and argue that "to a large extent, the critique of IHE is a Eurocentric critique of modernity" (p. 247). Therefore, the authors advance a project for decolonizing and creating an IHE otherwise, a project that should emerge "from and for the Global South", capable of recognizing our constitutive epistemic blindness (Sousa Santos, 2007) and gesturing towards the creation of pluriversal worlds (Leal et al., 2022).

Despite posing questions to the mainstream model of IHE, the criticisms and praxis purported by the distinct groups of authors mentioned above come from equally different contexts and attend to diverse purposes, engaging in altering the modern/colonial structure that sustains IHE in a lesser (even nonexistent) or higher degree. In other words, even theories and projects with critical and decolonial intentions (Chiappa & Martinez, 2021) are impure and cannot be seen outside their entanglements of modernity/coloniality. With this in mind, we would like to offer an analysis of how IHE projects engaged in decoloniality, whether more or less explicitly, can become a trap (henceforth *trampa*, in Spanish) if they do not acknowledge the complexities, contradictions, and complicities we, as individual academics, and our institutions experience in the geographic and epistemic global South. As scholars living and working in countries geographically localized in the South hemisphere (Brazil and Chile) and frequently identified as global South scholars, we often find ourselves trying to conduct IHE projects that embrace the resisting and decolonizing nature of the South. Yet, while we do this, we notice the limits of building an IHE otherwise from and with the South and the importance of recognizing its multiple meanings.

In doing this analysis, we draw from decolonial critiques as they allow us to offer a situated analysis on IHE as well as demand from us a compromise towards creating *another praxis* of living capable of building different worlds (Chiappa & Finardi, 2021; Grosfoguel, 2016; Leal et al, 2022; Martinez, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019, Stein et al, 2020; Stein & Silva, 2020). Not to fall into the trap of seeing decoloniality as another salvationist and universal critique, and drawing from the words of Argentinian scholar Walter Mignolo and Ecuadorian scholar Catherine Walsh, we understand it as a local "form of struggle and survival, an epistemic and existence-based response and practice - most especially by colonized and racialized subjects - *against* the colonial matrix of power in all of its dimensions, and *for* the possibilities of an otherwise" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 17, emphasis on the original). As all theories and practices offer possibilities and limitations when dealing with a specific body of knowledge, we engage with decolonial critiques to widen our ontoepistemic horizons and navigate through the complexities and layers involved in transforming the university education and the world as we see it.

In methodological terms, this paper is an argumentative essay written collectively through several dialogues among the authors. The empirical data drew from what some colleagues have called autoethnography (Ellis et al., 2011; Poulos, 2021). Autoethnography is considered a qualitative type of research in which the researcher uses individual experience to make relationships and understand meanings about themselves and larger social, cultural, and political issues. In this case, each of us—the authors—engaged in a self-reflective exercise of how our individual experience as an academic was confronted and permeated by colonial legacies (e.g. the pressure of publishing in high-impact journals points us out to write mainly in English as opposed to doing work with communities outside of the University and/or learning other languages). We wrote notes about it and met periodically to discuss the projects that we perceived as a "promise" toward a decolonial exit. We have not adopted a fixed structure to have these conversations, but, typically, one of us would start sharing her

reflections, and the other two would listen carefully, adding comments or raising questions. We held around 15 conversations between May 2022 and February 2023 of 90 minutes each approximately.

On that note, it is important to acknowledge that one of the main tenets of autoethnography and decolonial critiques recognizes how the positionality of the researchers, or "loci of enunciation", influences their research (Castro-Gómez, 2005; Diniz de Figueiredo & Martinez, 2019; Grosfoguel, 2007; Menezes de Souza et al., 2019; Quijano, 2007). Therefore, we identify ourselves as scholars whose bodies are at the same time *marked* differently according to the color of our skin, gender, ethnicity, beliefs, geography, and social class. Silva is a non-white early-career scholar and the co-chair of the Critical Internationalization Studies Network. She works as a professor in language teacher education in a public-funded federal university in a small city in Southeast Brazil. Martinez is a white woman, who has been researching the internationalization of Higher Education in the global South in the past few years and works as a professor in language teacher education in a federal university in the South of Brazil, a conservative and prestigious institution challenged by a diverse student body. Chiappa is a mestiza woman formerly trained as a journalist and higher education researcher. She has taught in the USA and South African universities and currently works as an assistant professor at a regional university in the North of Chile. Despite these nuances, we see ourselves inhabiting a border space in our respective countries while maintaining strong connections to universities and colleagues working in the global North.

In the following pages, our text is organized into three sections. Firstly, we share some reflections upon the global South, as we see it as a relational geo-onto-epistemic concept and a space for multiple and potential implications and contradictions. Secondly, we emphasize how coloniality crosses our existence in academia and why it is crucial for our critical discussion on IHE. Our main goal is to scrutinize how global trends condition IHE decolonial projects, therefore, the importance of recognizing our entanglement and complicity within modernity/coloniality. Lastly, we dedicate our reflection to the *trampas* we recognize both in terms of relying on global South as a natural space for transformation and regarding the limits and constraints we see on the inseparability between global South and North. We pay special attention to southern IHE projects, practices, and perspectives that may become a *trampa* due to liberal discourses, desires, and intentions as they end up trapped by their own blindness. For this reason, it is about the contradictions, or *trampas,* and the complexities, problems, possibilities, limits, and potentialities they may hold that this text is about.

## Global South as a Relational Geo-onto-epistemic Concept

In this epistemic terrain, the global South has been reclaimed as a potential geo-onto-epistemic space where different bodies and pieces of knowledge can fight for their existence, against their invisibility, and demand the end of colonial acts of violence. For instance, Portuguese scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018) claims the *Epistemologies of the South*, pointing out how they involve other modes of being, knowing, surviving, and existing that were erased by the North but have always existed. Similarly, Argentinian scholar Enrique Dussel (2012) theorizes the necessity of considering *transmodernity* as a possibility for an epistemic turn by situating history through another locus of enunciation that has not entirely ended after five centuries of colonialism and coloniality. Those searches for alternatives require a profound understanding of what the global South means.

From our perspective, global South, understood as a concept that includes, but also transcends the geographic dimension, is a geo-onto-epistemic location that allows the bodies, knowledges, and existences thrown to what Sousa Santos (2007) called the abyssal line to exist in their own right. Such an abyssal line was created by colonization processes and metaphorically divides the world into two sides. This side, the North, refers to metropolitan societies and modes of existing/knowing/being (Sousa Santos, 2018) that project their "single story" as universal; there, hegemonic/Eurocentric ways of existence and knowing are legitimized and accepted. The other side, the South, is a space marked by colonial difference, whose ways of existence/being/knowing are not fully seen nor recognized. In the epistemic South, at the same time capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism are continually fought and resisted, they are also desired and pursued (Sousa Santos, 2007, 2018; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Such relational character of the meaning of South shows that within the South, the mechanism of operation, logics, and desires of the North also exist. For instance, let us imagine a female Latina professor working in a South African research-intensive university. The institutional structure of a research university allows the female academic to have access to good infrastructure, reputation, and likely better salaries than her colleagues working in less-intensive research universities. At the same time, the position of this female full professor has been conditioned by the patriarchal and sexist structure of Chilean academia, limiting her possibilities of realization. This example shows that the position of the South is not fixed, but relational, leading us to inhabit a much more complex institutional space without a determined and

circumscribed identity in the global South or in the North. As such, the assumption that the South has a greater capacity to address and enact decolonial IHE projects can turn into a simplified discourse or simply a *trampa*.

As put forward by Brazilian scholars Leal et al. (2022) in their argument on how coloniality gets reproduced in IHE projects, any effort to decolonize IHE with, to and from the global South requires recognizing the limits embedded in the notion of "university as an institution historically managed by actors susceptible to Western beliefs and the effects of the totality of knowledge" (p. 246). In order to do so, we build on their argument to consider how coloniality crosses our existence inside our institutions even when we attempt to advance decolonial projects. This means we intend to look at some *trampas* in their individual, disciplinary, and institutional dimensions, thus correlating the concepts of coloniality of being, coloniality of knowledge, and coloniality of power as theorized by decolonial critiques.

## Coloniality Crosses our Existence in Academia

One of the first actions to unpack the traps in IHE projects with decolonial aspirations involves recognizing the grammar of modernity. Using Mignolo's (2000) metaphor, modernity and coloniality are the two sides of the same coin. While modernity sheds light on the bright side of the coin, translated into positive attributes of "modern" life, such as development, progress, technology, material wealth, rights, humanism, democracy, and nation-state, coloniality points to the dark side of modernity, alluding to the legacies of the colonization processes in all social realms, starting from the superiority of whiteness that justified the genocide, slavery, and marginalization of Indigenous groups and an extractive relationship with nature. Seen as the asymmetrical relations of power that control—based on race, gender, access to resources, and knowledge—our modes of existing in the world, oriented towards development (Mignolo, 2000), coloniality cannot be said to be an effect of modernity; instead it constitutes it.

In the words of Puerto Rican scholar Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), "coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. [...] It is maintained in books, *in the [competitive, hierarchical] criteria for academic performance*, in cultural patterns, in common sense, *in the self-image of peoples*, *in aspirations of self*, and so many other aspects of our modern experience" (p. 243, our emphasis). Coloniality begins with the European invasion of the Americas, Africa, and Oceania. It continues to take place until our days through its Western (USA-European) rationality (Eurocentrism, universal reason, Christianity, Humanism) and temporalities (modernity, progress, linear time, West as developed versus the rest as backwards).

In this way, coloniality, as a set of intertwined processes happening in different realms, imposes Western views on what can be validated as true knowledge and who can be considered a full human (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). In other words, the ways we, colonizer/colonized beings, learn, socialize, teach, research, and construct knowledge are crossed by coloniality; our very existence is founded in a modern/colonial world which dictates what is good, normal, and ideal. Therefore, the concepts that govern us and our projects cannot be seen outside of coloniality.

This is also likely true when one considers the development and history of the educational endeavor, both in terms of schools, higher education, and scientific institutions. For instance, according to Colombian scholar Santiago Castro-Gómez (2007), the underlying logic and mechanisms that justify science´s monolithic/universal character hide the basic fact that every knowledge is local to some place and people. Thus, as thoroughly discussed by Puerto Rican scholar Ramón Grosfoguel (2013) and American scholar Rosalind Raby (2009), the notion of universal knowledge or history is in itself an imposition that has been instrumental to maintaining hierarchies of knowledge and ways of being that disproportionately favor the European/Western/Anglo-Saxon knowledges, mostly represented by white middle-upper class men in academia. In this sense, it is crucial to acknowledge that the mainstream authors in a given discipline and the languages spoken, the imaginary about ideal students, and the expected roles higher education institutions are supposed to serve in a globalized world are not neutral, but crossed by the entanglement of coloniality/modernity.

In fact, the idea of university itself was built on a colonial structure, which encompasses power hierarchies (*coloniality of power*), the modes of knowledge production (*coloniality of knowledge*), and the creation of subjectivities (*coloniality of being*) (Castro-Gómez, 2007). In other terms, the Western university emerges from and for a privileged political and economic elite of thinkers (Grosfoguel, 2013) who determines a scientific method to dictate universal truths and measure the world against its own ruler, thus forming appropriate subjectivities, also positioned in this power structure according to their geographical, social-historical, and onto-epistemological location (Maldonado-Torres, 2018).

The universities created in the territories identified as global South do not make an exception to the rule. They have followed the European modern values and education model, operating within the same modern/colonial matrix of power. The difference is that the institutions in the global North have long been granted many privileges and accumulated material

and symbolic capital through centuries of colonial relations. Up to now, the North has been the recipient of the modern promises, without paying the costs necessary to make it function (Stein & Silva, 2020; Stein, 2022). As a consequence of these long-standing patterns of harmful ways of sensing, being, relating, and existing, it is not surprising that institutions and individuals in the South can still aspire for the North, its logics and promises.

To give this thought further consideration, we argue that globalization, neoliberalism, capitalism, and IHE are not only closely entangled: they constitute the very grammar of modernity. Similarly to the critiques we have pointed out towards internationalization, globalization is also informed by celebratory discourses, its benefits, and positive consequences. The way we see it, globalization presents itself in a hegemonic narrative based on the vantage point of those who benefit from it. According to this narrative, globalization reinforces the idea that the world is interconnected, people have become closer, equality is more present, distances have shortened due to communication technologies. It seems that anyone can participate and benefit from the global scenario. According to Brazilian scholar Juliana Martinez (2017) and Sousa Santos (2002), this is certainly a narrative that hides any form of inequality in terms of opportunities, wealth, and knowledge, told by voices that occupy privileged positions.

Globalization, therefore, is defined in a naturalized way, as inevitable, a neutral description of our realities. As Martinez (2017) argues:

> Nunca é demais enfatizar que os processos dinâmicos e plurais da globalização, em suas formas de livre mercado, fluxos, mobilidades, contatos, não alteraram as hierarquias sedimentadas ao longo da história entre países, povos, nações, línguas, culturas. Pelo contrário, a lacuna em termos de redistribuição de recursos e de oportunidades está exponencialmente ampliada. (p. 88)
>
> [We can never emphasize too much that the dynamic and plural processes of globalization—through free market, fluxes, mobilities, and contacts—have never altered the hierarchies between nations, peoples, languages and cultures sedimented throughout history. In fact, the lack in terms of resource and opportunity distribution is exponentially amplified].

One of the most prominent examples to illustrate such entanglement and the complexities it involves is the mainstream discourse on IHE. According to Indian scholar Fazal Rizvi and Australian scholar Bob Lingard (2020), IHE in its current market-logic phase (1980s-) has been centered around a neoliberal rationality that focuses on trade and revenue generation. As such, it can be considered both as an expression of globalization and as a response to it, especially when it is widely believed that an international approach to education is fundamental to instrumentalizing students with proper (Western) knowledge to adapt to the ever-changing global market. However, corroborating Brazilian scholars Clarissa Jordão & Juliana Martinez (2021), and Stein et al. (2020), one barely asks what counts as internationalization, if and why it is necessary, who benefits from and who loses with this process, and whose knowledge and bodies value, to put some. These questions are important for their possibility of pluralizing and complexifying the hegemonic naturalized discourses around IHE, as they problematize the unavoidability and always-beneficial character of IHE and bring to the fore what was thrown to the other side of the abyssal line along with its costs.

To dig deeper into these tensions and complexities, we describe two important IHE dimensions (academic mobility and qualified publication) and analyze how they tend to perpetuate, instead of dismantling, coloniality.

**Academic Mobility**

According to OECD (2020), the flows of international students and scholars predominantly go in one direction[1], from epistemic global South to epistemic global North. The USA, the UK and Australia, for instance, maintain their leadership worldwide in attracting more than half of the international students, who mostly come from what they call "developing" countries, especially from China and India, or "underdeveloped" countries (OECD, 2020) to pursue degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics programs (which accounts for 31% of enrollments) (OECD, 2023). A not so different flow is noticed in Latin American and African countries as well. Students from smaller and less industrialized countries tend to flee to places that are projected to be hierarchically superior, with better job and academic opportunities, such as the case of Brazil receiving international students from Venezuela, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guatemala, and so on.

Although the predominant discourse on IHE has highlighted the benefits of international academic mobility to prepare people to work in an international environment and enhance their intercultural awareness, more and more scholars have been challenging this notion.

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[1] To learn about the unintended consequences of IHE projects and policies, including the creation of regional hubs as a result of these unidirectional flows, see Kamyab & Raby (2023).

In the case of Australia, higher education has become the third largest export industry, making up almost 35% of its student population (Rizvi & Lingard, 2020). Rather than pointing to international cooperation and intercultural awareness, these students in Australia and elsewhere have been seen in their capacity to bring and generate revenue (Amsler, 2011; Rizvi & Lingard, 2020). In fact, diverse studies show that international students in Australia may be facing high levels of discrimination (Dovichin, 2020; Jamieson, 2018; Robertson, 2011). Broadly covered by the media, the suicide of the Chinese student Zhikai Lui, from the University of Melboune, in 2019, brought attention to the undiagnosed mental health issues that international students were experiencing due to the pressures and discrimination actions toward them. In 2021, the Victorian coroner's report showed that 47 international students had committed suicide from 2010 to 2019. Dochivin (2020), drawing from ethnographic interviews with international students in Australia, argues that one of the main forms of discrimination against international students happens in terms of linguistic racism. Students are discriminated against by the way they speak and how they are valued and seen, which would increase their levels of low self-confidence and sense of non-belonging.

Similarly, in the USA, a country that receives the largest flow of international students worldwide, several scholars demonstrate that international students of color are not exempted from experiencing racism on campuses (Lee & Rice, 2007; Yao, 2018; Yao, Briscoe & Rutt, 2021). Chinese international students, for example, are frequently exposed to racism behaviors inside and outside campus, something that grew worse during the COVID-19 pandemic (Yao & Mwangi, 2022). Such examples are not hard to be found in Brazil. In a case study, a researcher has shown how a black Haitian student has faced similar experiences in the academic space that ends up reproducing racism, colonial difference, exclusion, and silencing (Rodrigues, 2021).

This evidence demonstrates that both academic mobility and international research partnerships in general point to the already mentioned uneven distribution of resources between global North and global South institutions and nations (Martinez, 2017; Menezes de Souza, 2021), reflecting the colonial North/South division. In addition, while international academic mobility may have potential for generating greater intercultural awareness among students and academics who represent different racial, linguistic and cultural identities, such intercultural awareness may still happen in a hierarchical logic, producing or reproducing the position of domination and subalternity between the domestic and international students. Unfortunately, this type of intercultural experience reflects what Walsh (2010) defined as *functional interculturality,* without any space to scrutinize racial relations and colonial differences.

Furthermore, academic mobility, as we argue, cannot be seen apart from the modern/colonial structures that allow it to exist. As American scholar Stein and Brazilian scholar Silva (2020) suggest, the modern promises of scientific and technological progress, development and social mobility through wealth accumulation that inform the discourse of mobility have been built over the colonial processes of racialized expropriation of human and other-than-human beings, epistemicides, and production of inequalities, especially through the overrepresentation of Western knowledge systems, active erasure of heterogeneous forms of knowing, being and existing, and extractivist modes of producing knowledge.

**Qualified Publications**

In regard to the pressing demand for publishing in IHE circles, or the "publish or perish" discourse, we understand it to go beyond a natural course of events inside an international policy within higher education. For us, it is a symptom of knowledge production according to a capitalist/neoliberal logic, which exacerbates the idea that people are merely productive agents/consumers and their worth is dependent upon their capacity for productivity (Stein & Silva, 2020). Once the responsibility of fundraising, revenue generation, and institutional/professional growth has been put onto the students, researcher and scholars, the process of knowledge construction loses its communal sense, confirming the market-oriented logic that has informed universities for the last decades. In addition, it helps camouflage the modern/colonial harmful habits of being nowadays increasingly connected to the growing surge of mental health crises and anxieties.

Similar concerns have been raised by Colombian anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo and Argentine-Brazilian scholar Rita Segato. Restrepo (2018) argues against this business model that has oriented discourses of productivity, quality of education, internationalization, as well as the establishment of academic practices and research based on the hyper value of publishing—mainly in index journals and in English. According to him, the consequences of this logic is that it sustains academic rentability, transforms students into clients, and does not solve the insecurity and precarious positions of many independent scholars. Furthermore, this system imposes new forms of control and the academic research practices strongly become much more framed. In this terrain, internationalization turns into an aggressive educational policy that normalizes a neoliberal and Western pattern of academic and educational practices (open access journals being an exception to the rule

in terms of democratizing knowledge and access, however still strongly attached to Western modes of producing and validating knowledge).

Segato (2021) criticizes the current international academic evaluation and indexation logic that she names as a 'suicidal' practice. According to her, this quantitative and productivist evaluation system is suicidal because there is no room for genuine learning, questioning, writing through a creative impulse, and research curiosity. All of those principles have lost the possibility of existence due to the index system and the never-ending search for qualified and prestigious publishing. The critiques she raises against this productivist agenda are not only based on its business model traversing the educational and research realm, it foremost focuses on the authoritarian regime that has been formed towards critical thinking and the world of ideas, as well as how it has turned the academics into docile bodies. In her perspective, this logic represents a *trampa* as it sustains the global North as the main academic knowledge market and does not propel any fundamental structural or institutional change; on the contrary, it reproduces the coloniality tripod of being, knowing, and doing as the North.

In addition, Segato (2021) highlights, we, academics from/in the global South, live by the 'fiction of reciprocity', believing that the citation system allows visibility in/by the North while, in fact, it is based on the illusion of interchange as it has never been an inclusive system nor created for knowledge exchange. One of the serious consequences in aspiring such false reciprocity is the fact that it breaks up our real interlocutors, from our communities, in our local languages, in our own ways of producing knowledge. Even if we consider that the access to information technology and the internet have increased, knowledge continues to be legitimized by the categories of the North. We seem trapped because we still consume theories, concepts, and forms of knowledge production resulting from modernity/coloniality. In this scenario, global North continues to be the provider, and the global South, the consumer or the object to be researched. Thus, the academic market nurtures and reproduces the inequalities of unequal knowledge production and permanent borders between South and North.

Given the complexities highlighted in the examples, we now turn to the *trampas* (traps) we see when, acknowledging the colonial habit of being that informs our existence in academia, we engage with projects advanced by individuals, institutions, and groups in the global South. As mentioned in the second part of this text, the exercise of sitting with the contradictions and complexities of our alternatives is a powerful way to keep (re)imagining and acting toward the construction of other possible worlds.

## Shedding Light to the *Trampas* Found in Decolonial Educational Projects

The inspiration to reflect upon the idea of *trampas* in IHE projects that explicitly aim to interrupt colonial legacies comes from the work of Rita Segato. In her scholarship, Segato (2021) draws on different dominant academic practices, policies, and discourses as to observe how coloniality of power, knowledge, and being are intertwined and reproduced in daily academic practices. For us, the idea of *trampa* is pertinent to our analysis because it holds a contradictory meaning. We explain: at the same time it points to something negative, it also reminds us to keep pursuing wiser and more creative alternatives, despite our constitutive coloniality of being/knowing/relating.

When engaging with actions that aim to decolonize IHE, we identify a knot of contradictions, where at the same time that institutional and/or individual actors launch agendas that seek to decolonize IHE, these initiatives are constrained by the entanglements of coloniality of power, being and knowledge, configuring discursive decolonial *trampas*. In this section, we will refer specifically to three common initiatives: i) South-South IHE cooperation projects; ii) Policies and projects that intentionally seek to address and question colonial legacies; iii) Teaching and researching committed with decolonial intentions. With some nuances, these initiatives tend to be characterized by discourses that seek to undo colonial legacies in processes of internationalizing higher education and in educational processes at large. Yet, such initiatives operate as decolonial *trampas* as they do not always recognize or deal with the entanglements of modernity/coloniality. After presenting the three *trampas*, we reflect upon how they are entangled in the individual, disciplinary, and institutional dimensions regarding the coloniality of being, knowledge, and power.

### The Trampas in South-South IHE Projects

The agenda of South-South cooperation dates back to the Cold War period, when it emerged as a political movement of solidarity among developing countries in times where the biggest geopolitical players of the world-order were disputing their role of leadership (see Gray & Gills, 2016 for the Bandung conference and PABA, 1978 for the Buenos Aires Plan of Action). For some authors, the South-South cooperation configured an identity of "global South", characterized by a discourse to subvert the modern/colonial matrix of power. As far as international higher education is

concerned, a growing number of multinational institutions, including multilateral ones such as UNESCO, OECD, WB, and EBRD, highlight the importance of establishing agreements and programs among partners located in the global South.

Yet, the potentialities of South-South cooperation as an alternative way of IHE often face the contradictions between the aspirations of actors, mainly institutions, that want to enhance their visibility and leadership in the international higher education space and intentions to repair the consequences of the modern/colonial matrix of power. These initiatives often fall into two common *trampas*. First, South-South cooperation projects tend to consider the notion of global South as if it were a fixed attribute that meant a geographic location, despite the theorizations otherwise. Nonetheless, among the so-called "developing" countries located in the Southern hemisphere, one can find actors (universities, academics, and government agencies) differently positioned in the modern/colonial matrix of power. Holding more or less power, these actors nurture aspirations of leadership and prestige in the South-South cooperation projects.

The Chilean agency for international cooperation, for instance, offers postgraduate fellowships to individuals who come from African, Latin American, and Caribbean countries. The discourse around this initiative highlights the cooperative nature of the fellowship to contribute to the professional development of public servants from less developed countries. Yet, this program is also informed by Chile's aspiration of becoming an international hub for international students from Latin American countries and enhancing its international reputation and ranking, an unintended consequence of IHE in the words of Kamyab & Raby (2023).

In turn, the Brazilian Ministry of Education and of the Foreign Affairs offer higher education opportunities to citizens of developing countries (mainly African, Latin American, and Caribbean countries) with which Brazil maintains educational and cultural agreements. Despite the fact that this initiative may promote academic, social, cultural, and political ties, it is rooted in colonial difference and legacy with the aim of promoting *aid* and *charity* to those countries. Consequently, the foreign students who apply for the program tend to be projected on the other side of the abyssal line, labeled as not having enough background knowledge to attend a public university in Brazil (Jordão & Martinez, 2021). Stein and Andreotti (2016) found a similar pattern when analyzing the main purposes of internationalization initiatives in the USA and Canada. According to them, the intensification of international student recruitment is directly related to these students' personal experiences with racism, a phenomenon explained by the dominant imaginary of Western supremacy.

Related to the prior *trampa*, a second understanding is that South-South cooperation initiatives *naturally* assume a position of subalternity and resistance toward the existing hierarchical logic that neglects the pluridiversity of knowledge. Nonetheless, several projects of this nature have emerged as a way of creating scientific and academic capacity to compete in an international scenario, in which the questioning of the status quo is not a priority. This is the case of the recently created Association for Fostering Internationalization of Higher Education in Latin America (INILAT), composed by six associations of national universities. In October 2022, INILAT launched a report that recommended Latin American countries articulate initiatives that call into question the hegemonic IHE model based on competition and revenue generation (Castiello-Gutiérrez et al., 2022). The report specifically asks Latin American universities to pay attention to the demands for decolonizing higher education and push an IHE agenda that contributes to that purpose. Yet, INILAT's main intention is to stimulate internationalization among Latin American actors to strengthen their competitiveness in the international space. Besides focusing on market-driven logics, it is a kind of initiative that exempts the global North from any responsibility towards the modern/colonial legacy and implicates the global South as the only agent to promote decolonial practices and policies in higher education.

These two *trampas* create the illusion that the sole inclusion of partners from the global South in IHE projects is able to interrupt the hegemonic model of IHE, when what they actually do is to keep the same modern/colonial structures and violences on which this model is based. Without changing the terms of the conversation (colonial structure of IHE initiatives), the content (international cooperation) will remain the same.

**Policies and Projects that Intentionally Seek to Address and Question Colonial Legacies**

To address projects/policies that are created with an explicit intention to question and interrupt modernity/coloniality, we now shed light on one of the affirmative action policies Brazilian higher education institutions have promoted since 2012, which is the system of quotas. Segato (2021), one of the educators responsible for advancing the project and making it an institutional right, claims that there are four reasons to fight for social inclusion in academic spaces. First, she explains, it represents the desire for a more equitable world. Second, it seems to be a social reparative function with the intention of giving back the access, resources, and opportunities of communities that have suffered historical violences and are in need of repair. Third, there is a demand to pluralize the market and consumerism, so an expansion of diversity in higher education represents inclusion for economic reasons as well. Lastly, there is the pluralist reason, which

Segato highlights as the most important one in her opinion. She explains that pluralism is usually understood when colored people have the chance to enter in the higher education system, resignifying the previous elite space as well as creating an imaginary that their own presence is able to transform the university into a plural space.

According to Segato (2021), this never-ending search for social justice finds itself in a *trampa* as its existence takes place in the contradiction between what the university means in the western realm and the pluralist reason in decolonial studies. This way, both affirmative actions—for example, programs aimed at receiving students from distinctive social and economic backgrounds, refugee students, and students from developing countries—and discourses of inclusion may reproduce the hegemonic forms of knowledge production. For the author, a pluri-university (or a pluriversity) should be the place where various and diverse knowledges are not only produced but requested. Therefore, a social transformation must guarantee ways of a black body, for instance, truly exist and be able to inhabit social spaces such as the university, which par excellence has been the place where the elites reproduce themselves.

Another *trampa* in this type of project is the lack of understanding and discussion in regard to the reasons affirmative actions and social justice are being reclaimed in academic spaces. Unfortunately, Segato (2021) explains, affirmative actions turned into another *trampa* as they push transformation up to an individual level and not to the community and structural domain. As a result, both students who have and those who do not have accessed the university through quotas usually do not express a deep understanding towards the significance of affirmative actions and the historical repair they intend to. Up to a certain point, social justice becomes an apolitical and a-historical fight in the academic realm.

**Teaching and Researching Committed to Decolonial Intentions**

Many academics, including us, utilize research, teaching, and learning spaces to unpack the legacies of colonial hierarchies in higher education. This happens because as individual and social subjects, we live in a given space and time and are constituted by our diverse encounters with the world (dimension of *being*). Besides, we are also constituted by the positions we, as political and cultural beings, occupy inside a larger economic and social structure (dimension of *power*). Thus informed, we are able to position ourselves in terms of what we consider valid knowledge, who can produce it and what can and cannot be considered true (dimension of *knowledge*) (Maldonado-Torres, 2018). This means that coloniality manifests in different dimensions of our lives; therefore, as scholars who inhabit prestigious spaces inside the structure of the university, we welcome the contradictions and the potentialities we find in this educational institution and inhabit the possibilities of confronting modernity/coloniality from inside this structure. To exemplify how the entanglement of these kinds of coloniality operate, we will briefly draw from our own experiences of teaching and conducting research in our local institutional contexts.

Let us consider our position as professors in public universities in Brazil. These institutions are based on three deeply interrelated and fundamental pillars: teaching, research, and outreach activities, which means that our roles demand a full commitment to our institutions, students, and society in general. As language teachers, we can choose the authors that compose our syllabi, the concepts we find important to discuss with our students, the critical approaches we assume toward language teaching, and even the criteria we are going to use when assessing our students. In our research, we find space to engage in discussions that converge or critique the hegemonic paradigms under which we act and produce knowledge. As educators, we are given the responsibility of both sharing scientific knowledge inside and outside the university, and learning from and with our students and the communities of which we participate as citizens. This happens through all kinds of activity, including projects, conferences, programs, workshops, artistic events, and talks.

These functions, however, coexist with all the pressing demands we are called to serve in academia: demands for productivity, so that our courses are qualified and granted funds to keep functioning; demands for recognition, so that our research and practices are validated both in the global South and in the global North, and we are granted adequate payment; demands for internationalization and for rankings, which for us also means a high volume of publication (in English) in qualified journals and ongoing involvement with projects that help our institutions booster their recognition abroad, especially in the global North, among others.

The *trampas* and contradictions are constitutive of our positions. We are inside the rigid walls of the university and use our privileged spaces to advance a critique against this institution and the violent modes of knowing and relating it purports. We use our positions as scholars to question modernity/coloniality in IHE, but are paid and recognized for the critical work we develop. We identify as decolonial scholars, and sometimes see this perspective as a new critical theory to be consumed or a praxis that is going to make us more just, more intelligent, more pure, better people. We aspire to other ways of knowing and being, but are not always willing to give up the privileges acquired at the cost of our complicities in colonial harm.

Deep in our guts, we have named our academic performance and daily-lives at the university such as a 'schizophrenic' experience by realizing how we and our colleagues are sickening due to aspirations, desires, acknowledgement, pressure, outcomes, deadlines, bureaucracies that push us to a kind of deep hole. This is the contradiction we see ourselves delved into internally and institutionally that takes place between the cognitive critique we are able to produce against the modern/colonial academic system (capitalist, male logic, globalized, business-driven) and our own hidden aspirations, at the same time, to decolonize higher education and to join an academia that presents itself as shiny, promising, rewarding, reliable, just. As academics, we could then ask ourselves why we keep playing a game that converts itself in apolitical social justice, false reciprocity, control of critical thinking, suicidal practices, illness, docile bodies, the lack of intercultural dialogue, and the impediment of existing in our own terms.

This answer has proven to be more difficult than it appears in a first moment. That is why we understand that decolonizing ourselves, higher education, and its internationalization is not that simple and deserves care. From our view, the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being are profoundly rooted in the kinds of trampas we live in our individual, disciplinary, and institutional academic domains. And this is exactly our invitation here: to shed light on those three domains that intrinsically manifest our own coloniality. It is an exercise to scrutinize the contradictory elements that inhabit us and in which we find emerging decolonial intentions and expectations that the global South could provide alternatives to the matrix of colonial power operating for centuries in the realm of higher education and our whole existence.

**On the Complexities of Decolonizing IHE in the Global South**

As already mentioned, the global South is understood here in geo-onto-epistemic terms and that is why we recognize ourselves in complicity and contradictory positions and identities. Despite working in different cities and universities in Brazil and Chile, in our individual domain, we see ourselves simultaneously operating as South and North depending on the relationships we face and partnerships we establish. On the one hand, for instance, in our academic associations and research projects with partners who geographically are located in the North, we constantly struggle to join spaces, conversations, and opportunities as we are the ones who need to adapt, to use the dominant language (mostly English), to reference the mainstream theories and concepts (mostly Western), to move towards the North (high ranked institutions), and so on.

In such circumstances, we realize with ease what Gabriel Menares (2014, p. 201) highlights: "la sociedad dominante parece hacer todo lo posible por imponer, pero poco por aprender" [the dominant society seems to do everything possible to impose, but almost nothing to learn]. In his effort to discuss how to decolonize knowledge from a Mapuche perspective, Menares explains that it has always been the Indigenous people who need to integrate the western and global society. All the strategies used by the State, educational policies, and the schooling system are forms of neocolonialism and the relationship between Western and Indigenous communities is based on a process of assimilation to the dominant community.

On the other hand, in our own local institutions, we are oftentimes projected and see ourselves as the North due to the status our background education grants, the positions we hold in our careers, the demands our institutions require us to meet, as well as the professional aspirations we also carry to reach proper academic recognition, legitimacy, and achievement. The way we understand it, there is never purity in our identities in the epistemic or geographical global South: it is always relational and informed by the colonial difference.

Drawing on the relational aspect of our identity allows us to consider the complexity that lies in both directions—being projected to the same degree as South and North, we may face a *trampa* of coloniality. In both cases, colonial modes of existence, feelings, and aspirations still play an important role in our academic practices, decisions, and choices. Even when we put forward an action that we claim to be decolonial, it will not be possible to remove the colonial identity that also constitutes us. Our scholarly agency exists at the same in complicity, contradiction, limit, and potentiality. Not being able to exist outside modernity/coloniality, the only way to provoke change and transformation is by assuming our own constraints.

All in all, after looking at the *trampas* we brought throughout the discussion, we recognize the assumption that the global South will generate decolonial projects and solutions may be an understanding that disregards the complexity of relational identities and the multiplicity of possibilities to define the global South. In addition, such an assumption reinforces the separability between North and South, translated as the disconnection between modernity and coloniality, and points to the possibility of the North withdrawing from its responsibility and compromises in this modern/colonial order.

## Final Remarks

After considering the geo-onto-epistemic terrain of global South, how coloniality crosses our existence in academia, and the *trampas* we highlighted, one may be thinking what could be the alternatives to interrupt the modern/colonial matrix of power that governs and dominates international higher education. In fact, this is our ultimate concern and some of the burning questions that guided us through our discussions were: Are there alternatives? Should we provide answers? Should we find solutions? Should we desire for replacements or closure? Should we resist? What does it mean to identify, interrogate, and interrupt coloniality? How to move on after identifying ourselves as scholars who adhere to decolonial aspirations, constrained by our own colonial socialization and frequently faced with decolonial *trampas*? How to imagine *otherwise* when minds and bodies are marked by traumas and historical violences? How to *delink* from the modern/colonial matrix of power and our own Cartesian existence?

These are some of the questions that we often raise in order to exercise our imagination of whether or not it is possible to live academia otherwise, from and with the South, when everyone around us may be talking about decolonial intentions and when policies, discourses, and practices frequently engage and hit with colonial institutions, hierarchies, and violences. As we previously stated, we see ourselves in conflicting positions, as we often find ourselves in situations in which our institutions and/or our desires aspire to reach the logics of the North, particularly in respect to the geopolitical domains of our countries, institutions, social status, languages, as well as when we consider the student population that our institutions serve.

Throughout this text, we emphasized the concept of coloniality and how its different dimensions are entangled with our lives as decolonial scholars who work in Westernized universities informed by modernity/coloniality. Our main goal was to offer an analysis of how IHE projects with decolonial intentions can turn into *trampas* if not followed by the acknowledgement of our complicities and a strong compromise towards change. Therefore, our argument was rooted in the invitation to welcome the contradictions our positions present us, so as not to lose sight of the ongoing, relational, and hyperreflective character of any project that aims to be an alternative to modernity/coloniality.

In doing this exercise, we relearned that this process requires us to slow down or, what Brazilian musician Lenine sings in his song, go with "*um pouco mais de calma*". If we consider that decolonial intentions, initiatives, and alternatives could interrupt modernity/coloniality, our task will also involve slowing down. This means fighting against our own Cartesian way of being/relating/exiting, unlearning the linear experience of time and space, embodying ourselves in different dimensions.

We understand, however, that identifying the entanglements, complexities, and contradictions involved in the projects we advance is already a long and important part of decolonial projects, especially in the area of IHE. Such projects are plural, diverse, difficult, and collective; they are experienced in concrete bodies with equally concrete desires, needs, and limitations. Embracing the *trampas* we find in our decolonial endeavors, both those known and unknown, seems to be a way of holding space for other modes of inhabiting academia in the global South.

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