

## Intersectionalities in Internationalization Studies: An Overview of Brazilian Research

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### Abstract

*This systematic review explores the intersection of race, gender, and social class in the context of internationalization of higher education (IHE) research in Brazil. Historically, the development of the Brazilian educational system has responded to the elite's demands and reproduced Western-European values and knowledge. The exponential growth of IHE has led to increased scholarly interest in various interdisciplinary research areas, with a possible move in studies and practices from a neoliberal to a more critical, decolonial, and diverse perspective. This article aims to investigate to what extent Brazilian researchers have investigated the intersectionality of gender, race, and class in IHE. Using two scientific databases, the study provides an overview of recent Brazilian academic Doctoral Dissertations, Master's Theses, and academic articles published between 2015 and 2022. The theoretical framework of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2002; Collins & Bilge, 2021; Akotirene, 2019) is presented to help recognize the interaction of different social markers of inequalities in IHE. The results pointed to a small number of publications related to this theme and continuous interest in the Science without Borders (SwB) mobility program. A particularly privileged profile of participants in academic mobility programs across various higher education institutions (HEI) in Brazil demonstrated the need for planning and actions to understand the social, historical, and political aspects that perpetuate exclusions. Moreover, this review indicates the importance of addressing colonialism in social dynamics and recognizing the coloniality of power in language policies in IHE. It calls for further investigations that explore the intersections of social markers in IHE processes from a more politically engaged perspective.*

**Keywords:** gender, race and socioeconomic class, internationalization of higher education, intersectionality.

### Resumen

*Esta revisión sistemática explora la intersección de raza, género y clase social en el contexto de la internacionalización de la investigación en educación superior (IES) en Brasil. Históricamente, el desarrollo del sistema educativo brasileño*

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*ha respondido a las demandas de la élite y ha reproducido los valores y conocimientos de Europa occidental. El crecimiento exponencial de la IES ha llevado a un mayor interés académico en diversas áreas de investigación interdisciplinarias, con un posible desplazamiento en estudios y prácticas de una perspectiva neoliberal a una más crítica, decolonial y diversa. Este artículo tiene como objetivo investigar hasta qué punto los investigadores brasileños han analizado la interseccionalidad de género, raza y clase en la IES. Utilizando dos bases de datos científicas, el estudio proporciona una visión general de las recientes disertaciones doctorales brasileñas, tesis de maestría y artículos académicos publicados entre 2015 y 2022. El marco teórico de interseccionalidad (Crenshaw, 2002; Collins & Bilge, 2021; Akotirene, 2019) se presenta para ayudar a reconocer la interacción de diferentes marcadores sociales de desigualdades en la IES. Los resultados señalaron un pequeño número de publicaciones relacionadas con este tema y un interés continuo en el programa de movilidad Ciencia sin Fronteras (SwB). Un perfil particularmente privilegiado de participantes en programas de movilidad académica en diversas instituciones de educación superior (IES) en Brasil mostró la necesidad de planificación y acciones para comprender los aspectos sociales, históricos y políticos que perpetúan las exclusiones. Además, esta revisión señala la importancia de abordar el colonialismo en las dinámicas sociales y reconocer la colonialidad del poder en las políticas lingüísticas en la IES. Hace un llamado a futuras investigaciones que exploren las intersecciones de marcadores sociales en procesos de IES desde una perspectiva más políticamente comprometida.*

**Palabras claves:** género, raza, clase socioeconómica, internacionalización de la educación superior, interseccionalidad

### Resumo

*Esta revisão sistemática explora a interseção de raça, gênero e classe social no contexto da pesquisa sobre internacionalização da educação superior (IES) no Brasil. Historicamente, o desenvolvimento do sistema educacional brasileiro tem respondido às demandas da elite e reproduzido valores e conhecimentos europeus/ocidentais. O crescimento exponencial da IES tem levado a um aumento do interesse acadêmico em várias áreas de pesquisa interdisciplinares, com uma possível mudança nos estudos e práticas de uma perspectiva neoliberal para uma perspectiva mais crítica, diversa e decolonial. Este artigo analisa em que medida pesquisadores brasileiros têm investigado a interseccionalidade entre gênero, raça e classe nos processos de IES. Utilizando elementos recuperados de duas bases de dados científicas, o estudo fornece uma visão geral das teses, dissertações e artigos acadêmicos brasileiros recentes publicados entre 2015 e 2022. O arcabouço teórico da interseccionalidade (Crenshaw, 2002; Collins & Bilge, 2021; Akotirene, 2019) é apresentado para auxiliar no reconhecimento da interação de diferentes marcadores sociais de desigualdades na IES. Os resultados apontaram para um pequeno número de publicações relacionadas ao tema, bem como um contínuo interesse pelo programa de mobilidade Ciência sem Fronteiras. Um perfil particularmente privilegiado de participantes em programas de mobilidade acadêmica em diversas instituições de ensino superior no Brasil demonstrou a necessidade de planejamento e ações para compreender os aspectos sociais, históricos e políticos que perpetuam exclusões. Além disso, esta revisão sistemática argumenta a importância de abordar o colonialismo nas dinâmicas sociais e reconhecer a colonialidade do poder nas políticas linguísticas dessas instituições brasileiras. Ao final, o estudo convida novas investigações que explorem as interseções de marcadores sociais nos processos de internacionalização a partir de uma perspectiva mais politicamente engajada.*

**Palavras-chave:** gênero, raça e classe, internacionalização da educação superior, interseccionalidade.

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### Introduction

In Latin America, Spain established the first universities in the 16th century in Peru, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Unlike the Spanish colonization of this territory, Portugal, which colonized Brazil, did not allow the creation of universities in Brazilian domain until the royal family's arrival in 1808. Until then, nobles and the high bourgeoisie were educated in Europe, making Brazil the last country in the Americas to formally establish higher education (Mazzetti et al.,

2020). This fact about our colonization is relevant to understand that, since the beginning, the development of a Brazilian educational system was not a priority and, historically, it has been designed to respond to the demands of the elite, systematically reproducing the superiority of Western-European values and knowledge.

Scholars from the Global South have tried to reflect on how the economic, social, and cultural orders imposed during the colonial administration have been maintained throughout the centuries in our modern society, often hidden behind promises of democracy and progress (Quijano, 2005; Sousa Santos, 2010). Globalization has introduced a new perceptual framework for time and space, wherein distances appear diminished and temporal velocity amplified. This phenomenon held the potential to expand the spectrum of knowledge-seeking; however, it ultimately reinforced the interdependent relationships between coloniality and modernity (Quijano, 2005), leaving little room to question the definitions of academic excellence shaped by the European empires and the expansion of the English language in the scientific world.

Considering that Brazilian higher education cannot be disconnected from hierarchical power asymmetries, women, LGBTQIA+ people, Black people, Indigenous people, and students from underprivileged backgrounds have continuously struggled and resisted to inhabit university spaces. However, as contended by Mazzetti et al. (2020), such presence has slowly been ensured through public affirmative action policies such as the Brazilian Quota Law nº 12.711 from 2012.

In recent decades, the exponential growth of projects seeking Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) has attracted scholarly interest in various interdisciplinary research areas. Our objective in writing this paper comes from the observation that, in Brazil, there has been an increasing number of voices that are challenging the neoliberal approach to IHE to search for a more complex, diverse, and critical view of this process and its rationales, as proposed by Leal and Moraes (2018), Stein (2019), and Stein and Silva (2020), among others. Based on this assumption, we aim to investigate the central question: To what extent have Brazilian researchers explored the intersections of IHE and race, gender, and social class issues?

We believe that outlining ongoing discussions on this topic could encourage a shift to more ethical, critical, and equitable practices and help identify gaps and silences that still need to be voiced. Therefore, this article provides an overview of recent Brazilian academic doctoral dissertations, Master's theses, and scientific articles published from 2015 to 2022 in two databases, in order to explore how the IHE research has included perspectives that recognize the intersectionalities of race, gender, and social class (Akotirene, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2021; Crenshaw, 2002).

Here, the term 'intersectionality', initially connected to feminist studies in the 1960s and 70s, is broadly investigated as the social-historical-political-cultural impacts of asymmetries in our educational context that can only be analyzed by considering the entangled constitution of a multitude of factors in contemporary society. The Black Women's Manifesto was presented at the 1975 Women's Congress during the United Nations Decade for Women in Brazil. This manifesto brought to light the intersectional impact of gender, race, and sexuality on the experiences of Black women in work, family, and the economy. Despite indifference or inaction from most white feminists, Black activists, such as Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro, advocated for Black women's rights, even during Brazil's military regime (1964-1985). They were ahead of their time and anticipated the seeds for the current understanding of intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2021).

After this brief introduction, this study will relate the constructs of 'intersectionality' and 'IHE' and present the research methodology, findings, and proposed discussion. Ultimately, some final remarks will be drawn.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Intersectionality is a framework that examines how different social markers of inequalities, such as sexism, racism, and capitalism, intersect and interact (Crenshaw, 2002). This study aimed to explore this concept in the context of the internationalization of Brazilian higher education and its impacts on these markers.

As Brazilian professor Carla Akotirene (2019) articulated, intersectionality serves as an epistemological and political strategy introduced by African-American intellectual Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, first related to discussions on the intersection of gender and racism in Law. To Collins and Bilge (2021), it is an expression increasingly used by scholars, policymakers, activists, and leaders from various interdisciplinary fields. All of these current social actors, in turn, apply a variety of uses to their understanding of intersectionality. However, the feminist movement had worked long before with similar perspectives. According to Vigoya (2016), personalities such as Olympia de Gouges in France compared colonial

with patriarchal domination and established analogies between women and enslaved people in the Declaration of the Rights of Woman in September 1971.

Intersectionality highlights the interrelated nature of power structures and the simultaneous interaction of identities. It helps to shed light on the fundamental inequalities within modern societies due to oppressive systems, such as the status of languages, racism, patriarchy, and class oppression. Besides that, "identifying categorical differences can enhance the potential to build coalitions between movements by acknowledging differences while promoting commonalities. This can lead to mutual acknowledgment of how structures of oppression are related and, therefore, how struggles are linked" (Carbado, et al., 2013, p. 4).

Nonetheless, there are other points of view regarding intersectionality. For Argentine philosopher María Lugones, this notion stabilizes social relations and fragments them into homogeneous separable categories of oppression that, when they interbreed and affect each other, create fixed positions and divide social movements instead of fostering coalitions between them. Lugones (2005) states that the intersection shows a void, an absence, where, for example, the Black woman should be because neither the category "woman" nor the category "Black" include her. She proposes creating circles of resistance to exploitation from within and forming coalitions of identities through complex dialogues.

Collins and Bilge (2021) express concerns about weakening the critical character of certain concepts after they become more widely used. For them, there is a need to differentiate between approaches that use gender, race, and other related categories as markers of difference (only based on identities) and those that mobilize them as markers of social inequalities, in which intersectionality seeks to draw attention and overcome social injustices.

Mara Viveiros Vigoya (2016), Colombian philosopher, summarizes the effort to situate intersectionality using Purtschert and Meyer's (2009) words,

it is not enough to ask if it is a theory, a method, a perspective, an analytical category, or simply a legal one; it is required to formulate questions based on the objects of study. The challenge is not to find the most appropriate metaphor to express the relationships between different categories of domination and guide the resulting political alliances; the challenge is to preserve 'the principle of openness to differences as a condition and not as a limit of intersectionality'. (p. 15)

Thus, intersectionality recognizes that these social markers are not mutually exclusive but interact and shape one another in complex ways. It is important to note that this framework does not posit a hierarchy of oppression; instead, it encourages the examination of the structural conditions that intersect bodies and contribute to shaping the meanings and positionalities of these bodies. Intersectionality also acknowledges the possibility of individuals for being both oppressed and complicit in oppressive structures, as highlighted by Collins and Bilge (2021).

The victory of far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro in the 2018 Brazilian presidential elections is a poignant example of the complexities of social analysis when power structures are in dispute. Despite research institutes, such as *Inteligência em Pesquisa e Consultoria* (IPEC), indicated that much of left-wing voters would consist of Black people, underprivileged working-class individuals, women, and LGBTQIA+ supporters (Mortani, 2022), as well as Bolsonaro's constant hatred speeches towards these groups, many of them ultimately chose to support him. In a way, several overlapping social dimensions might have aligned with far-right propaganda in a multifaceted movement that led him to win with 53% of the total votes.

In order to address the complexities involved when discussing intersectionality, we chose to dedicate a distinct segment of this theoretical framework to demonstrate its correlation with higher education and the internalization process, as delineated below.

## **Intersectionality as a Theoretical Framework for Higher Education and Internationalization Studies**

Nichols and Stahl (2019) indicate that from the earliest adoption of the intersectional lens within higher education research, it has been driven by an ethical view of higher education's purpose "as serving the formation of equitable societies and thus requiring that inequities be actively challenged." (p. 2). The authors also point out that mainstream investigations often adopt an instrumentalist position that focuses on strategies to improve outcomes, in which the university experience is reduced to metrics such as retention and grade point average, thus many times concealing ongoing discriminatory practices

(Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Contrastively, it is crucial to further look at any data analysis to recognize that knowledge is also generated, produced, and distributed based on social, sexual, and racial divisions in scientific and academic contexts.

In that sense, Collins and Bilge (2021) emphasize that “the divisions resulting from power relations of class, race, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, sexual orientation, and ability are more evident in higher education” (p. 18). Colleges and universities are nowadays home to a more significant number of students who, in the past, were unable to pay, historically had to deal with barriers to enrollment, or faced different forms of discrimination on campuses. As a result, these learners bring diverse experiences and needs that confront higher education’s old ways. Intersectionality as an analytical tool may help develop planning and actions to identify the modern/colonial global system demands on Brazilian higher education institutions (HEI), such as internationalization, by unpacking how social structures act, constrain, and oppress, that is, how power is organized and operates in the Global South.

In Brazil, Beltrão and Teixeira (2004) studied university careers based on sex and race variables using data from the 1960 to 2000 Brazilian Censuses. The investigation found that Black and mixed-race people enroll later in school and are less likely to succeed in completing their studies due to the structural issues they face. Consequently, the K-12 education gap between white and Black students challenges these populations in higher education. The study concluded that women are the majority of undergraduate students, however, both women and Black men and women tend to migrate to areas of lesser prestige and easier entry (such as Education and Nursing), reducing the possibilities of better salaries later on in their career paths. As a result, certain groups are kept in the margins of the society within an inescapable cycle of deleterious consequences.

That is why intersectionality studies related to post-secondary education also require a geopolitical orientation as the South experiences the Eurocentric imposition of scientific standards, theories, and values claiming to be neutral and universal. Neoliberal globalization has induced Latin American educational policies and institutions into accepting North-South asymmetric models of internationalization that ultimately move away from local agendas (Oregioni, 2021), such as transforming the reality demonstrated by 40-year records of Beltrão and Teixeira’s work (2004).

Despite the increasing popularity of internationalization at both practical and theoretical levels, there is no real consensus on its definition, nor is there clarity on a framework from a Global South standpoint. Instead, Oregioni (2021) invites us to think about IHE from a historical and contextual perspective, where the functions of the university have specific characteristics, considering the power relations that exist in the international arena, the position that Latin America has historically assumed, and the particularity and diversity of the university scene in the region.

Although internationalization is not limited to matters of student mobility, this has often been the primary focus of institutions and researchers. Nonetheless, it is essential to consider other dimensions of internationalization, e.g., internationalization of the curriculum for teaching, collaborative projects, and joint publications for research. IHE should be perceived as a means to an end, not the end itself, for the goal is to eventually improve the quality, relevance, and pertinence of teaching, research, and outreach projects (Leal & Moraes, 2018).

While many researchers emphasize the virtues of internationalization, an emerging field of critical studies in IHE problematizes overwhelmingly positive and often depoliticized nature of conventional approaches. As Stein (2019) discusses, exploitative practices rooted in a profit-maximization model; systemic exclusion from participation; uneven circulation of resources; personal and social disruption; (neo)colonization between HEI and academics in wealthier and poorer nations; an over-representation of Western knowledge systems in both teaching and research; and unidirectional flows of international students are some of the challenges that demonstrate the dynamics of the modern/colonial global system that significantly shape IHE today.

Within this perspective, Stein and Silva (2020) outline two approaches to IHE that pull away from mainstream models: system transformation and system hospicing. The first provokes toward removing economic barriers to access, centering other voices and knowledge, and challenging the dominant modern/colonial systems. The second questions the meaning and purposes of internationalization in HEI, inviting ongoing reflectivity and considering alternative possibilities for the future. Both approaches, in our view, propose identifying and interrupting colonial entanglements in the IHE processes, accepting responsibility for harm, understanding the relationship between different struggles, and disinvesting from existing false promises. The praxeology of these approaches is not simple but reflecting on them is a necessary decolonial effort.

For Collins et al. (2021), cultivating a dialogue between intersectionality and decoloniality as broad critical projects has the potential to deepen understanding of oppressions as well as their interconnections. A decolonial epistemic perspective also allows the intersection between the axis of inequality to identify and describe European colonialism's living legacy and practices in contemporary societies that impose political and social hierarchical orders. The concept of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2005) takes form in systems of hierarchies, knowledge, and culture, all of which understand race—a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to others—as a center point to justify unfair labor division, hegemony in knowledge production and validity, and a sense of familiarity and modernity towards European cultures and languages brought by the neoliberal system of capitalism and globalization.

Collins et al. (2021) recognize that decoloniality as an economic, political, and cultural process can be accommodated within intersectionality perspectives. Intersectionality focuses more on the connections among particular power systems, whereas decoloniality focuses on the mechanisms by which contemporary neocolonial relationships might be resisted and replaced. Therefore, we understand that decoloniality serves as a means of confrontation to the Eurocentric project of modernity, and intersectionality helps provide a method of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2007) for studies aimed at understanding IHE, its dichotomies, and hierarchies. Where intersectionality and IHE studies meet, inclusion, diversity, and equity can be promoted in research, projects, policies, and educational values.

## Research Method

A ‘systematic literature review’ consists of an exploratory investigation that focuses on a well-defined question, which aims to identify, select, evaluate, and synthesize the relevant evidence that has already been published (Ramos, et al., 2014).

This article intended to reconstruct the general landscape of Master’s theses, doctoral dissertations, and scientific articles that centered on the intersectional analysis of IHE processes, gender, race, and social classes available from 2015 to 2022 in two Brazilian online databases:

- a) CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) Catalog of Master’s Theses and Doctoral Dissertations (<https://catalogodeteses.capes.gov.br/catalogo-teses/#!/>), which gathers and provides access to final works from all stricto sensu postgraduate programs in Brazilian HEI; and
- b) SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online) (<https://www.scielo.org/>), a well-respected open-access Brazilian database, developed as a program of the Sao Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), which indexes more than 350 journals from 15 countries. More than 50% of the articles published by SciELO Brazil are written in Portuguese. Nevertheless, today, SciELO operates through networks in 15 countries (12 from Latin America, Portugal, Spain, and South Africa), reaching up to 1,000 journals, according to their site. Search engines like Google Scholar pull all of SciELO's content, and about 45% of all journals are indexed in Scopus or Web of Science.

Both portals are relevant and popular sources of information to help identify the most recent Brazilian academic scenario in many fields of knowledge. All data collection was conducted in December 2022. For the search, we used the following compound terms in Portuguese and English: ‘internationalization of higher education’ and ‘intersectionality’; ‘internationalization of higher education’ and ‘race’; ‘internationalization of higher education’ and ‘gender’; and ‘internationalization of higher education’ and ‘social class’. The search did not exclude any area of knowledge.

The data collection pointed to 12 results: 3 master’s theses (in the CAPES database) and 9 scientific articles (in the SciELO database). At first, titles, abstracts, and keywords were screened. In case of doubt, the introductions were also read. We discarded texts that had concentrated their examination on one of the issues of race, gender, or class in ‘isolation’, i.e., they did not interrelate these markers with each other in the existing power structure of our society. Some other studies that came up in the search concentrated on teaching Portuguese to immigrants or another theme out of the scope of this investigation.

As a result, seven publications (two master’s theses and five scientific articles) were considered eligible. From our point of view, they could highlight one or more of the social markers (gender, race, and class) without disregarding the others in their analysis, even when not mentioning the construct ‘intersectionality’ *per se*. We read and analyzed the seven

selected texts bearing in mind the research question, "To what extent have Brazilian researchers been exploring the intersections of IHE and race, gender, and social class issues?" and presented the results as follows.

## Results

In the CAPES Catalog of Master’s Theses and Doctoral Dissertations, we have identified two theses related to the intended research topic. Both productions analyzed students' experiences in the Brazilian Science without Borders (SwB) mobility program, as shown in Table 1.

The SwB program was a federal government initiative that promoted the growth, expansion, and internationalization of science, technology, innovation, and competitiveness through the mobility of approximately 101,000 students and researchers, mainly undergraduates, between 2012 and 2016. The program emphasized Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM), as well as natural sciences. It sent participants to over 35 countries, leading to several international cooperation agreements between Brazilian and foreign HEI, investments in international relations offices and personnel, language programs, and courses to support students' language needs throughout Brazil (Almeida, 2016).

Chaves and Rocha Neto (2022) also used the CAPES database in a survey that reported that the SwB program was examined in 77 master’s theses and 22 dissertations from various areas of study, including education, language studies, public policy, engineering, economics, psychology, tourism, and sociology, between 2012 and 2021. Most of this SwB research occurred in HEI in the Midwest and Southeast of Brazil, where most of the program's participation occurred.

Chaves and Rocha Neto (2022)’s list of academic work indicated the same two studies relating to SwB and intersectionality that we found in our search. Table 1 below displays these results and their respective titles, authors, HEI, years of publication, and macro areas of investigation.

**Table 1: Master’s theses from CAPES Database**

Title	Author	Year / Research Institution	Area of Research
The intersectionality of gender, race, and class in the Program Science without Borders: A study of Brazilian students traveling to the USA	<u>Rovênia Amorim</u> Borges	2015/ University of Brasilia (UnB)	Education
Beyond what is possible: Participation of low-income UFV students in the Program Science without Borders.	Ana Paula Pessoa Veloso Santana	2021/ Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP)	Education

Note: We have translated the titles. They were originally written in Portuguese.

Five scientific articles were recovered from SciELO platform. As indicated in the previously mentioned master’s theses, the SwB program is thematized in four of them. Other topics linked to internationalization were also brought to light, specifically academic mobility to Portugal and the United States, two of the leading destinations for Brazilian higher education scholars. Table 2 shows the titles of these articles, their authors, and the affiliated HEI during the year of publication.

More recently, we noticed that there was a slight increase in publications related to the theme, particularly between 2021 and 2022. Eight authors presented in Tables 1 and 2 are affiliated with universities in Brazil's Midwest and Southeast regions, and one is from *Universidade do Minho* in Portugal. Rovenia Borges has been publishing on international experiences through intersectionality lenses the longest (2015, 2021, and 2022), with three texts, while Rebeca Feltrin and Lea Velho wrote two papers (2016 and 2021) with collaborators. Therefore, the number of authors discussing internalization and intersectionality seems even more reduced because some publications came from the same researchers and their previous work.

**Table 2: Scientific Articles from SciELO Database**

Title	Authors	Year / Research Institution
Women without borders? An analysis of women's participation in the Program Science without Borders at Unicamp: Motivations, challenges, and impacts on the professional trajectory	Rebeca Buzzo Feltrin, Janaina Oliveira da Costa and Léa Velho	2016 / State University of Campinas (UNICAMP)
The role of the Program Science without Borders for social inclusion: An intersectional analysis of the profile of program participants at Unicamp	Rebeca Buzzo Feltrin, Diego Ferreira dos Santos, and Lea Velho	2021 / State University of Campinas (UNICAMP) and Federal Institute of São Paulo (IFSP)
Towards a postcolonial/decolonial critique of social relations in an academic context: Voices of Brazilian female students	Rovênia Amorim Borges and Almerindo Janela Afonso	2021 / University of Brasília (UnB) and University of Minho - Portugal
The mobility of university students that come from public high schools: Experiences with the Program Science without Borders	Wivian Weller and Jéssica Reis	2022 / University of Brasília (UnB)
Linguistic (de)coloniality and interculturality in two main routes of Brazilian student mobility	Rovênia Amorim Borges	2022 / University of Brasília (UnB)

Note: We have translated the titles. They were originally written in Portuguese.

Despite their differences, all studies seemed to share a concern with the examination of the intersections of race, gender, and class regarding Brazilian participants in academic mobility programs across various HEI. They also tried to demonstrate a consistent privileged profile of participants. To do so, the studies presented quantitative information indicated by official documents and questionnaires applied to the research participants. They also used interviews and focus groups to collect and qualitatively analyze data.

Moreover, the selected texts used a diverse array of theoretical backgrounds and frameworks, including dialectical historical Marxism (Borges, 2015); the intersectionality approach put forth by Crenshaw, in 2002 and McCall, in 2005 (Feltrin et al., 2016; 2021); Latin American perspectives on decoloniality (Borges & Afonso, 2021; Borges, 2022); Bourdieu's sociological interpretation analysis (Santana, 2021); and the Documentary Method established by sociologists Mannheim (1971) and Bonsack (1981) (Weller & Reis, 2022).

The following section summarizes the key findings and debates arising from these studies.

### **Intersectional Discussions**

We identified that few publications and authors used intersectionality perspectives to investigate international mobility projects, especially the SwB program, through sociological and educational lenses. On that note, four essential issues have been compiled here. All of them are interconnected and interchangeably organized.

#### **a) Quantitative research approaches were mostly used to identify a particularly privileged profile of participants in academic mobility programs across various HEI in Brazil**

Borges (2015), Feltrin, et al. (2016, 2021), Santana (2021), and Weller and Reis (2022) used online questionnaires to collect and analyze data from university students participating in the SwB mobility program as well as official reports



and records from the Brazilian government and multilateral organizations. The researchers observed a similar profile regarding the majority of scholarship holders: male, white, previous attendees of private high schools who did not receive any entrance benefits at university (guaranteed by Quota Law no. 12.711/2012 or others) and had no disabilities.

Government reports showed a small number of female undergraduates enrolled in 'hard' sciences (STEM-related programs) in Brazilian HEI (INEP, 2020). Since these are the priority areas for the SwB scholarships, Feltrin, et al. (2016) expected the participation of women to be reduced. Surprisingly, female mobility students still represented 43.5% of the total until 2016, which reflected a slightly smaller number than men. In a later investigation, Feltrin, et al. (2021) proposed to connect different dimensions for understanding the international students' Intersectional Profile through AIP (Intersectional Profile Analysis, or *Análise Interseccional de Perfil*), a software run in Portuguese. They were meant to find out not only the number of women participating in the program but also which women were included or excluded from the program. The authors concluded that female participants were also white, previous attendees of private high schools; they did not receive any entrance benefits, and had no disabilities. Thus, privileged white students (male and female) compose more than 60% of the mobility participants. Moreover, Feltrin et al. (2021) suggested that this has historically been the most frequent student profile in all the other traditional institutional international mobility programs maintained by the State University of Campinas for years.

The intersection of students' social markers demonstrated that the continuous increment of international activities in Brazilian HEI lacks diversity, equity, and inclusion. The indicated profile of mobility participants should represent numbers closer to the variety of the population in the country, a group that contains differences rather than a group characterized by similarity or conformity. The commitment to reduce discrepancies is crucial in how tertiary education, resources, and opportunities are developed and offered to a broader academic body. For this, intersectionality becomes analytically fundamental in accounting for the diverse racial, class, and gendered experiences in international mobility. Otherwise, IHE programs may perpetuate the status quo, dominated by a white, male, economically privileged majority from the country's wealthiest metropolis.

## **b) Social and economic markers seemed connected to motivation to engage in international mobility projects**

Feltrin, et al. (2016), Santana (2021), and Weller and Reis (2022) demonstrated that social and economic background and school capital could hinder or prevent students from less privileged economic classes from accessing international mobility programs, affecting life experiences and career expectations. Weller and Reis's (2022) study indicated that the primary incentives for participating in the SwB program came from friends and professors, not family. Mainly, male students reported that their parents, particularly fathers who did not attend higher education, expected them to finish university quickly. They saw SwB as a luxury, meaninglessly delaying graduation and job hunting. Only 34.5% of the survey participants reported that both parents supported their participation in the program (Weller & Reis, 2022). Feltrin et al. (2016) pointed out that low-income students did not intend to participate in international mobility programs before learning about SwB, suggesting that the program was a determining factor. In addition, individual efforts to further engage in academic life through extracurricular activities, internship programs, and scientific projects improved interest in international experiences (Santana, 2021).

Sometimes the implications of the colonial relations of power leave profound marks not only in the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge, and the economy but also on the general understanding of oneself. According to Sousa Santos (2010), modernity can be characterized by an abyssal line that divides those who live above it and those who live below it. This metaphorical line demarks the zones where codes of law are recognized among European empires and the lawless zones where conflicts of class, gender, and sexuality are articulated simultaneously with racial oppression through violent methods and constant appropriation/dispossession. This abyssal line may be felt by students as impervious if exclusion experiences in educational journeys have been naturalized as merit and personal conquest of a few. Thus, international mobility costs, administrative bureaucracy, language barriers, and cultural misconceptions may seem like impediments to participating in internalization projects.

### **c) Access to university does not guarantee democratization of IHE**

The expansion of Brazilian HEI and implementation of affirmative action policies, primarily after the year 2000, contributed to the representation of a slightly more diverse social segment in SwB, according to Borges (2015) and Feltrin et al. (2021). The program provided funding for significant expenses of the experience abroad (e.g., transportation fees, scholarship, monthly stipends) and facilitated underprivileged students' participation. Still, policies allowing access to public universities by the "new" student profiles alone (Black, Indigenous, economically deprived, with disabilities, among others) neither guarantee students to overcome social inequalities nor build equal opportunities for all. Researchers observed that differences in race and socioeconomic classes persist in multiple dimensions of the internalization process, such as motivation to participate in such programs and additional language barriers.

In that regard, the social structure organized by the colonial process promises opportunities to improve social status and position as a reward for hard work and productivity. It naturalizes the unequal distribution of resources and transfers responsibilities to individual levels. Society and institutions tell students to get a college degree and be global citizens as promises of certainty and security in the future, ignoring a multitude of conditions that have to be in place to make that happen. However, as Stein and Silva (2020) advance, decolonial critiques understand "colonial violence as the 'condition of possibility' for the modern global system. This means that colonization cannot be interrupted by including previously excluded populations into mainstream institutions" (p. 549). It is necessary to unsettle the concept of exclusion and understand that their struggles and demands may differ from the supposedly universal promises, acknowledging other ways of knowing and being and the fact that these modern institutions were built at the expense of violence against those excluded populations.

### **d) Language is not something we have but rather what we are in the world**

Borges and Afonso (2021) and Borges (2022) applied a decolonial approach to the intersectional analysis of race, gender, language, and nationality in questionnaires, interviews, and statistical data to study social and academic interactions, seeking to identify the lasting effects of colonialism on the experiences of students who traveled to Portugal and the United States.

Borges and Afonso (2021) found that over half of the participants reported having experienced discrimination, with a higher frequency among Black women (56.1%) in comparison to white women, and Black men (43.5%) related to white men, confirming the intersection of ethnicity-race and gender. White female students from higher social and economic classes also reported experiences that increased their awareness of their Brazilian identity and the daily subaltern legacy imposed upon them in Portuguese HEI, particularly regarding the perceived superiority of the European Portuguese language. This outcome again corroborates the relevance of intersectionality studies because it shows that women enjoying class and color privileges had not perceived or experienced discrimination as others did before, challenging the idea of 'women' as universal. This way, the researched participants reported that "the coloniality that discriminates and subordinates the language variations of those who live in countries with a colonial legacy is very vivid here" (Borges, 2022, p. 192, our translation).

Quijano (2005) stated that the division of race, a key element of capitalism in modern society, justified domination and exploitation. The domination is not always evident and thus requires a critical perspective and dedication to emancipatory practices. According to Borges (2022), Brazilians' experiences in Portugal demonstrated the importance of the decolonial awakening to the latent and intertwined manifestations of coloniality of power in social dynamics as a crucial part of a critical internationalization journey. In her words,

In that regard, student mobility in its intercultural dimension carries a force of denunciation, transformation, and liberation that contributes to the decoloniality of both, a) minds and b) practices and policies in the field of education that are promoters and reproducers of inequalities and discrimination. (p.104, our translation)

In the context of Portuguese being the national language of Brazil, it is relevant to consider the historical violence inflicted upon multilingual Indigenous peoples and Black communities to reflect on policies that could embrace the plural intersections of language and race more fully. Lélia Gonzalez coined the term *pretuguês* (*preto* + *português*, as in Black +

Portuguese) to talk about the original form of the Brazilian Portuguese, with all its roots, history, and linguistic structures. It is the language of those with less formal education, influenced by Bantu and other African languages (Gonzalez et al., 2020). *Pretuguês*, as a social and political movement, could be an alternative to empower Brazilian Portuguese, fight discriminatory practices against former colonies, and empower Black learners inside Brazilian schools.

Unfortunately, Borges (2022) states that language policies in Brazil have always marginalized Black people. The author points out that English language instruction (or any additional language) in K-12 public schools has been reduced to one or two hours a week with an instrumental focus on reading skills while the competitive market led private institutions to offer a more comprehensive bilingual education. As a result, Borges (2015) overlapped undergraduate English proficiency test results with social markers of race and class, revealing that Black students from public high schools presented lower English proficiency levels. These findings reflect that language proficiency tests, participation on publications or projects, and international mobility destination choice might be limited to students whose English learning was neglected by language policies throughout the years.

An analogy can be made at this point with Collins and Bilge's (2021) intersectional and analytical examination of the cultural dominance of power in the World Cup. They argue that the fair play narrative posits that everyone has equal access to opportunities in social institutions is merely a myth. Sports events, beauty contests, reality shows, and other competitions perpetuate the notion that competition between individuals or teams is fair, regardless of their background, and that the results are just. However, whether in these events or the seven publications investigated, the application of intersectionality as an analytical tool reveals a complex array of entrenched inequalities that position individuals differently, highlighting the vulnerability and exclusion of certain groups within international mobility programs in Brazil.

In the bigger picture, what emerges from the papers in this cohort is the necessity to foster more diversity, equity, student's agency and inclusion in the IHE landscape by broadening scholarship and financial aid opportunities to support students from varied backgrounds, challenging colonial legacies, and promoting decolonial practices that empower marginalized groups and break away from historical language learning barriers.

## **Implications and Conclusion**

Considering the current demands of internationalization on HEI, this systematic review aimed to analyze the extent to which Brazilian researchers have explored the intersections of IHE with issues of race, gender, and social class. The review used two scientific online database platforms (CAPES and SciELO), which yielded seven relevant publications. This paper resulted from an effort to understand intersectionality as critical research and praxis (Collins & Bilge, 2021), identifying its possible entanglements with decolonial and critical internationalization studies.

The investigated studies suggested that intersectionality as an analytical perspective could contribute to debates about inequalities in IHE. This broader and more sensitive perception allows researchers to notice some of the complexities of IHE and can influence future public policies and institutional decision-making. However, it is relevant to point out that the analyzed current scenario of the Brazilian publications shows the need for research that is engaged in deeper qualitative reflections and strictly considers the theoretical background and political construct of the term 'intersectionality'.

Intersectionality critiques call attention to the risk of overusing or overgeneralizing the term in a depoliticized manner that could lose connection with social movements. It is also relevant to acknowledge that intersectionality is being theorized in different contexts (Latin America, North America, and Africa, for example) and should be understood considering local perceptions.

Finally, this literature review can be considered a limited analysis due to the small number of publications written in Portuguese. The results could have been different if other foreign databases or languages were considered. Nevertheless, it represents a valid initial effort for future studies exploring the intersections of relevant social markers and their impact on the IHE policies and participants' profiles. As stated by Carbado et al. (2014, p. 11), "conceptualizing intersectionality in terms of what agents mobilize it to do, invites us to look for places in which intersectionality is doing work as a starting point for understanding the work that the theory potentially can-but has not yet been mobilized to-do." We continue to believe that a decolonial, contra-hegemonic, more democratic shift will happen in IHE inquiry and praxis in the future. We hope this change will soon be more evident in publications.

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