

Introduction to the JCIHE Special Issue

Inhabiting the Otherwise in International Academia: Critiques, Complexities, Struggles, and Re-Existences

Juliana Zeggio Martinez^a, Roxana Chiappa^b, Jhuliane Evelyn da Silva^c

Guest Editors

^a*Universidade Federal do Paraná, Brazil*

^b*Universidade de Tarapacá, Chile*

^c*Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto, Brazil*

*Corresponding author (Juliana Zeggio Martinez): Email: jumartinez@ufpr.br

Dear readers,

This special issue emerged from our intention to encourage critical collaboration among scholars interested in reflecting, discussing, and problematizing the complexities of the Internationalization of Higher Education (hereafter IHE). As scholars geographically and epistemically located in the global South, we invited academics and practitioners to contribute to this issue with a view to scrutinizing IHE from decolonial critiques.

In the last decades, an important group of higher education institutions, governments, and supra-national organizations have highlighted the “need” for internationalizing higher education so as to respond to globalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Among the actors that promote the strategic relevance of IHE, there is a predominant discourse that portrays its initiatives as if they were intrinsically positive, ahistorical, and apolitical (Martinez, 2017) and presents globalization as an inevitable phenomenon of world economic integration and rapid technological advances (Sparke, 2013).

Within this perspective, the “positive” impacts of internationalization are commonly taken for granted, and its institutional achievements and alternatives are emphasized in order to meet its global demands. Similarly, these discourses allude to globalization as if it had emerged de-linked from colonial histories, expropriation, genocide, and slavery of Black and Indigenous populations in the African, American, Asian, and Oceania continents. Yet, the over-emphasis on the “benefits” of IHE and the ahistorical perspective of globalization is problematic since these narratives contribute to naturalizing and/or hiding power asymmetries and colonial hierarchies among countries, institutions, peoples, languages, and knowledge systems in processes of IHE (Sousa Santos, 2010).

In fact, westernized universities, as modern institutions par excellence, are immersed in racist, sexist, and epistemic structures (Grosfoguel, 2013), in which other modes of producing knowledge and making sense of the world, enacted by othered bodies, have been actively excluded. To the extent these structures are expanded to a global scale, the pervasive modern/colonial structure of being and knowing is projected as desirable, perpetuating coloniality in international and local academic spaces.

In a different direction, IHE can be problematized and scrutinized from decolonial critiques as a historical, political, cultural, educational, and social process that questions its entanglement with modernity/coloniality and hegemonic globalization. In this sense, there is neither genuine globalization nor a single process called globalization: “The dominant discourse on globalization is the history of the winners, told by the winners” (Sousa Santos, 2006, p. 395).

Drawing from decolonial critiques, we understand that higher education institutions have to face their own complicity with colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. There is planetary urgency in the production of knowledges otherwise, based on diverse onto-epistemologies that are able not only to challenge the status quo, the whiteness, the Eurocentrism, as well as the universalisms that inhabit and constraint higher education, but also to identify, interrogate, and interrupt coloniality (Menezes de Souza, 2019), and respond to relevant and imperative planetary issues in the cultural, social, educational, relational, and ecological domains.

From where we stand, critical analysis of internationalization must seek to break with the generalized consensus of its benefits and begin to address the most difficult and disturbing paradoxes and challenges that arise with the promotion and expansion of internationalization (Stein et al., 2016) mainly due to the historical inequalities among different peoples, languages, cultures, and knowledges (Sousa Santos, 2010). Moreover, as Latin American female scholars, we understand the importance of recognizing and facing our complicity and contradictory locus of enunciation (Diniz de Figueiredo & Martinez, 2021).

On the one hand, within the macro academic geopolitics of knowledge, we see ourselves located in the global South, in institutions projected as having inferior quality when compared with the well-known world universities of the global North. We also see ourselves struggling to endure the ‘publish or perish game’ as non-native speakers of English and coping with our own colonialities that reinforce the modern/colonial matrix of power in the way we act, research, teach, learn, and relate to our colleagues, students, and local knowledges. On the other hand, within the global South settings, we see ourselves working in prestigious universities in Chile and Brazil that are awkwardly and simultaneously located in the geographic global South and the epistemic global North, i.e., these institutions are, at the same time, informed by Eurocentric epistemologies and modern desires, acting towards promoting affirmative actions to repair historical inequalities resultant from colonialism.

Therefore, the exercise and effort to understand ourselves inhabiting the imaginary yet experienced borders between global South and global North, fighting against the modern/colonial identity that globalized and westernized institutions have imposed on us became our daily basis of academic practices and re-existences. That is why, in this Special Issue, we have welcomed contributions that were willing to act from a difficult position that challenged us all to scrutinize, reflect, and problematize international education. We were particularly interested in engaging with discussions that emerged from othered epistemologies, such as the Epistemologies of the South, Latin American Studies, Indigenous Studies, Decolonization, non-Eurocentric analysis, Racial Studies, Global South praxis, and so on. We intended to focus on projects, policies, and practices that have been enacted in university spaces as a form of resistance and re-existence to modernity/coloniality and that have sought to answer back to the modern/colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2000).

During the experience of reading, reviewing, engaging with, and guest editing this special issue, we felt tempted to read the others through our own eyes, thus reducing the multiple meanings that the decolonial project may have in a search to police the ahistorical, unproblematic, or even romantic readings of what decoloniality *really* meant—to us. In the very same attempt, however, we noticed how the mere desire to control the meanings

and praxes of coloniality and decoloniality in IHE had emerged from our own colonized socialization in academia and the aspiration of what the Maori philosopher Carl Mika and other scholars epistemically located in the global South call the modern aim of “wording the world” (de Oliveira, 2021; Mika et al., 2020).

In the field of decolonial studies, the discussion of how to undo the effects of coloniality is heterogeneous by nature, because any decolonial attempt is always localized and intrinsically associated with the locus of enunciation of those who engage in these projects. Accordingly, you, dear reader, will see that the articles included in this Special Issue draw from different theoretical approaches and are informed by different types of critiques in the discussion of how to advance toward decolonial projects in IHE.

Likewise, while witnessing and participating in the process of editing a Special Issue, we learned that multiple potentialities can be generated in the rise and spread of the dialogues among Southern epistemologies that contest, disrupt, and fight back against the effects of coloniality in distinct, situated ways and dimensions. Besides the theoretical and experiential differences found among the contributors of this issue, this publication is a powerful way to amplify the voices of scholars who are concerned with the effects of coloniality and how international higher education is linked to it.

Some of the questions that guided, and still guide, our concerns and reflections are:

- *How do decolonial approaches to internationalization challenge mainstream approaches and its founding assumptions?*
- *How can different modes of relating, sensing, existing, and producing knowledge in academia flourish through an internationalization otherwise?*
- *Is it possible to engage in otherwise approaches to internationalization without reproducing the same violences that constitute and allow the university to exist?*
- *To which extent are our efforts to inhabit and act from the cracks contributing to maintaining the modern/colonial structures of the university?*
- *Whose projects do an economy-led IHE narrative serve?*
- *What are some challenges and possibilities to face internationalization from counter-hegemonic perspectives?*
- *What are some of the foreclosures and critical possibilities opened up by decolonial perspectives in IHE?*
- *How have people and HE institutions sought to resist the urges of neoliberal globalization?*
- *How do marginalized knowledges and racialized bodies relate to ongoing legacies of local and global colonialism?*
- *How are scholars of IHE complicit in the coloniality purported by our modern/colonial institutions?*
- *How do the epistemic modern/colonial foundation of higher institutions prevent critical and intercultural relations from emerging?*
- *What principles, values, and worldviews inform internationalization of higher education and how can they be reconceptualized from a decolonial turn?*

The Special Issue brings together nine articles written by scholars who are geographically located in Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, and the United States, but whose stories and research may differ in terms of geo-onto-epistemologies. These scholars also represent different career stages at institutions with diverse institutional missions. This enriching collection of papers reinforces the importance of dialogues among Southern epistemologies that fight the effects of coloniality, produce critique, and reconceptualize international education otherwise. Again, different intentions were brought together in these articles and the readers will notice that some engage more in critical analysis, while others focus on critical questioning or even offer new possibilities to rethink IHE.

A last but not least important point we want to make is that the complexities of having English as a language of publication of an issue aimed at the global South and otherwise epistemologies were considered. Acknowledging the diversity of loci of enunciation and theoretical affiliations includes acknowledging the plural language/ing practices that constitute each one of us. As such, even if in a small and limited way, we have tried to open space to the heterogeneous and embodied Englishes and writing styles that weaved the texts, and provided them with abstracts in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

The first article, titled “Decolonial Practices in Higher Education from the Global South: a systematic literature review”, was written by Maryluz Hoyos Ensuncho, from the University of Missouri, in the United States, and aimed to find and share a systematic literature review of works from the global South that attempt to disentangle universities from colonial practices in higher education. The author explains that, on the one hand, higher education institutions are complicit with the colonial project as education is rooted in colonialism; on the other hand, she has encountered a variety of practices, curriculum changes, and institutional connections that have contributed to decolonial praxis and should be considered.

The second article, also a literature review, comes from Bhavika Sicka (Old Dominion University) and Minghui Hou (Southern Illinois University Carbondale), in the United States, who collaborated with the paper “Dismantling the Master’s House: A Decolonial Blueprint for Internationalization of Higher Education”. The authors argue that IHE still functions as a western project that centers on Eurocentric views in research, pedagogy, and instruction. Drawing on an array of critical scholars, they conclude that despite the efforts and critiques, the internationalization of higher education finds its most influential manifestation in neoliberal globalization and reproduces racism and colonialism. Besides, they also offer possibilities for what they call “hopeful and ethical praxis in times of post-pandemic global crises”, and reinforce the importance of cooperation in academic settings.

The third article focuses on a specific case of a Brazilian policy of internationalization, called Science without Borders. Simone Costa, Lauro Sérgio Pereira, and Kléber Silva, who research and teach in different federal institutions in Brazil, wrote the article “Intersectionalities in Internationalization Studies: An Overview of Brazilian Research”. Their literature review delves into doctoral dissertations and Master’s theses as well as academic articles within their country, published from 2015 to 2022, that dealt with the intersectionality of gender, race, and class in international higher education. In their critical analysis, the authors problematize the entanglement of such different social markers of inequalities and advance the importance of addressing colonialism in social dynamics and recognizing the coloniality of power in language policies in IHE.

From a different perspective but looking at the evolution of a similar policy of internationalization, Clarissa Jordão and Nayara Mandarino Silva, from the Federal University of Paraná, in Brazil, wrote the article “Languages without Borders: Reinforcing and Delinking English from Coloniality in a Brazilian Internationalization Program”. Drawing from decolonial critiques, the authors analyze a nationwide language program and offer a discussion by exposing its complexities and contradictions when fixing English as the language of science in internationalization. Their findings highlight a process permeated both by the reinforcement and delinking from modernity/coloniality. Thus, the paper is an invitation to promote specific ‘delinking’ and to allow cultural differences to rise in order to enlarge repertoires and stimulate collaboration instead of insisting on the colonial difference that classifies and fragments.

Using a reflecting and argumentative perspective, Myrtle Sodhi and Sonia Martin, from York University, in Canada, invite readers to consider how an embodied ethic of care epistemology, based on Black feminist and Indigenous African thought, may inspire different existences to repair the colonial and institutional racism that inhabits internationalized contexts. In their article “Considering an Embodied Ethic of Care Framework to Counter Colonial Violence in International Education”, the authors problematize the commodification of international students and the language-based discrimination still present in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Linguaging and dialoguing serve as key concepts to the reflections and contributions offered by the authors.

Gian-Louis Hernandez, from the University of Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, discusses the concept of whiteness as a structuring feature in the way knowledges are both constructed and legitimized. In a critical analysis paper, entitled “Racial Dis/Embodiment: A Discourse Theoretical Analysis of University International Offices’ Websites”, the author scrutinizes visuals collected from the websites of twelve Swiss universities' international student offices. In the study, Hernandez indicates that even alleged countries that have not experienced colonialism directly are not exempt from coloniality within their current contexts. This way, his analysis demonstrates that: (1) the university, as a site of knowledge production, still perpetuates inequalities; (2) the concept of race is still untheorized within the studies of international higher education; and (3) the understanding of diversity in education is still misrepresented.

Another important critique of efforts of internationalization of higher education, now focusing on the experience of English teachers, is the work of Fabiola Ehlers-Zavala, from Colorado State University, in the United States. Her paper “The Role of English Language Teaching (ELT) Professionals in the Internationalization of Higher Education: Current Challenges and Strategies to Resist Complicities with Colonialism” develops a self-critical analysis of diverse experiences and efforts lived in academic settings that were problematized by decolonial concepts and perspectives. The author invites English language professionals to scrutinize how complicit they became with colonialism and imperialism in the realm of internationalization and globalization processes universities undertake. The author also presents strategies to resist such complicities that come from her personal experiences as an English language teacher.

From a different stance, Anne Carr, Gabriela B. Bonilla, Athena Alchazidu, William A. Booth, Kateřina Chudová, Patricia E. Tineo, and Pilar Constanzo, from the University of Azuay, in Ecuador, share the experience of a project that has tried to make visible and question the social stereotypes and epistemic injustices faced by immigrants and refugees in different countries. Their article “Epistemic (In)justice: Whose Voices Count? Listening to Migrants and Students” describes an intercultural participatory project that included higher education students and academics at universities located in Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom. Their invitation is striking as they offer a new framework by intertwining epistemology and ontology as well as raising awareness of who, when, where, and why constructs knowledge.

Finally, the last article included in this special issue was written by us, Jhuliane Silva, Juliana Martinez, and Roxana Chiappa. Entitled “Um Pouco Mais de Calma: Identifying the Trampas of Decolonizing Internationalization of Higher Education and Academy in the Global South”, this text reflects our intention to pause (*um pouco mais de calma*) and make visible the contradictions, complexities, limits, and potentialities that we see in IHE from Latin American decolonial perspectives. As an existential practice and an effort of humility, we argue that even when scholars draw from decolonial critiques and aspirations, the structure of HE is strongly influenced by colonial legacies that make it difficult to be undermined. This way, our paper scrutinizes initiatives that promise a decolonial exit but may end up being a colonial trap.

We genuinely expect that the articles included in this Special Issue contribute to open generative dialogues between those involved in IHE projects and feed the needed stamina to sustain projects that systematically seek to interrupt the violence caused by the reproduction of modernity/coloniality in IHE and higher education in general.

Guest Editors

Juliana Zeggio Martinez, Roxana Chiappa, and Jhuliane Silva

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Juliana Zeggio Martinez, PhD, is a tenured Professor at the Universidade Federal do Paraná, Brazil. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the Universidade de São Paulo with a doctoral internship taken at the University of British Columbia, Canada. She also collaborates at a Centre for Continuing Language Teacher Education (NAP-UFPR), which was created to enhance the relationship among teacher educators, pre-service and in-service teachers. Her research interests lie in critical applied linguistics, language teacher education, internationalization of Higher Education, and decolonial studies. Email: jumartinez@ufpr.br

Roxana Chiappa, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the Universidad de Tarapacá, Chile, associated researcher at Rhodes University and adjunct researcher at the Center for the Study of Conflict and Social Cohesion (linked to several Chilean universities). Her research agenda addresses the question of how historical and structural inequalities get reproduced in the scientific and higher education systems of countries, higher education institutions, and societal groups. Currently, she is involved in several projects that analyze the role of epistemic authority in the reproduction of social inequalities in Chile. Additionally, Roxana runs a weekly-mindfulness meditation workshop for postgraduate students in South Africa. Email: chiappa.roxana@gmail.com

Jhuliane Evelyn Da Silva, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto, Brazil. She currently participates in the research groups “Identidade e Leitura” and “Formação de Professores de Línguas Estrangeiras” from UFPR, in the “Projeto Nacional de Letramentos” from USP, and is co-chair of the Critical Internationalization Studies Network. Informed by critical and decolonial scholarships, her research focuses on critical literacies, in-service and pre-service teacher education, collaborative praxis, critical language education, decoloniality and internationalization of higher education. Email: jhuliane.silva@ufop.edu.br