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Dismantling the Master's House: A Decolonial Blueprint for the Internationalization of Higher Education

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Abstract

While critical scholars have attempted to decenter internationalization, limited research has aimed to understand internationalization efforts in the context of the socio-historical particularities of the postcolonial condition. This paper takes a decolonial perspective in the study of internationalization, in light of the Eurocentric tendencies of modernity, whose major manifestation in higher education is neoliberal globalization. We unpack internationalization in the U.S. and examine how it is embedded in and reproduces neoliberalism, racism, and colonialism. Since decolonization is not merely deconstructive but also regenerative, we reconceive what it means to be international and recommend how internationalization can be deployed as a tool of decolonization, considering various possibilities for hopeful and ethical praxis. We identify promising practices to spark ongoing reflection and action about ways to contest coloniality/modernity and rethink mobility. This paper can benefit educators seeking to reclaim internationalization and [re]align it with an ethos of mutuality and practices geared at strengthening cooperation, rather than competition.

Keywords: critical internationalization, decolonial, decolonization, higher education, international education, postcolonial

Resumen

La internacionalización de la educación superior funciona como un proyecto de occidentalización que centra las innovaciones eurocéntricas en investigación, pedagogía e instrucción. Las implicaciones negativas de la internacionalización incluyen su énfasis neoliberal en la comercialización, el imperialismo y capitalismo académico/cognitivo. Algunos académicos críticos han intentado de-centrar la internacionalización y trazar las desiguales esferas de conocimiento y poder que los estudiantes in/migrantes internacionales atraviesan y habitan. A pesar de estos esfuerzos, existen solo unos pocos estudios que aspiran comprender y conceptualizar los esfuerzos de internacionalización en el contexto de las particularidades socio-históricas de la condición poscolonial. Este documento adoptará una perspectiva decolonial en el estudio de la internacionalización, a la luz de las tendencias eurocéntricas de la modernidad, cuya manifestación más influyente en la educación superior es la globalización neoliberal. Así, analizamos en detalle la internacionalización y examinamos cómo ésta reproduce y está intrínsecamente relacionada con el neoliberalismo, el

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racismo y el colonialismo. Dado que la descolonización no es meramente deconstructiva sino también fundamentalmente reconstructiva y regenerativa, redefiniremos lo que significa ser internacional para una universidad, un programa y un estudiante o académico. En este artículo, recomendamos cómo la internacionalización puede ser utilizada como una herramienta de descolonización, considerando varias posibilidades para una praxis esperanzadora y ética en tiempos de crisis globales post-pandémicas. Identificaremos prácticas prometedoras para impulsar la reflexión y acción continuas sobre formas de impugnar la colonialidad/modernidad y de repensar la movilidad. Este documento beneficiará a los educadores que buscan recuperar la internacionalización y [re]alinearla con un ethos de mutua colaboración y prácticas orientadas a fortalecer la cooperación, en lugar de la competencia.

Palabras claves: *internacionalización crítica, descolonización de la educación superior, descolonización de la educación internacional, estudios decoloniales, internacionalización, educación internacional, estudios poscoloniales.*

Resumo

A internacionalização do ensino superior funciona como um projeto de ocidentalização que centraliza as inovações eurocêntricas em pesquisa, pedagogia e instrução. As implicações negativas da internacionalização incluem sua ênfase neoliberal na comercialização e no capitalismo acadêmico/cognitivo e no imperialismo. Estudiosos críticos à internacionalização neoliberal têm tentado descentralizar a internacionalização e mapear as esferas desiguais de conhecimento e poder que os estudantes internacionais migrantes/imigrantes percorrem e habitam. Apesar desses esforços, poucas pesquisas visaram entender e conceituar os esforços de internacionalização no contexto das particularidades sócio-históricas da condição pós-colonial. Neste contexto, este artigo adotará uma perspectiva decolonial para o estudo da internacionalização à luz das tendências eurocêntricas da modernidade, cuja manifestação mais influente no ensino superior é a globalização neoliberal. É nosso objetivo olhar a internacionalização em sua complexidade e examinar como ela está inserida e reproduz o neoliberalismo, o racismo e o colonialismo. Uma vez que a decolonialidade não é apenas desconstrutiva, mas fundamentalmente reconstrutiva e regenerativa, pretendemos reconceituar o que significa ser internacional para uma universidade, um programa e um estudante ou pesquisador. Apontaremos para como a internacionalização pode ser utilizada como ferramenta de decolonização, considerando várias possibilidades de práxis esperançosa e ética em tempos de crise global pós-pandêmica. Identificaremos práticas promissoras para estimular uma reflexão e ação contínuas sobre formas de contestar a colonialidade/modernidade e repensar a mobilidade acadêmica. Este artigo, assim, tenta responder a educadores que buscam recuperar a internacionalização e [re]alinhá-la com um ethos de mutualidade e práticas voltadas para o fortalecimento da cooperação em vez da competição.

Palavras-chave: *decolonização do ensino superior, decolonização da educação internacional, estudos decoloniais, educação internacional, internacionalização, internacionalização crítica.*

Introduction

Higher education internationalization projects are tainted by and, to a large extent, replicate the tendencies of the colonizer's model of the world. From a postcolonial perspective, U.S. higher education is entangled with the colonial past and the neoliberal, neocolonial present as an economic actor that dominates global educational markets through internationalization (Suspitsyna, 2021). The internationalization of higher education (IoHE) is a westernization project that privileges Eurocentric innovations, pedagogies, and instruction (Sperduti, 2017), and is pursued through a neoliberal emphasis on marketability, academic and cognitive capitalism, and intellectual imperialism (Gyamera, 2015; Muñoz, 2022; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). These forces uphold global power relations, reinscribe colonial forms of knowledge, and diminish the potential contributions of diverse voices, including Subaltern/ized and Indigenous (Chatterjee & Barber, 2021; George Mwangi & Yao, 2021). While the Global South is not exempt from the epistemic chokehold of the North, the scope of this essay is limited to an analysis of the colonizing tendencies of IoHE in the U.S. context.

Most scholarship surrounding IoHE tends to be status quo-ist and uncritically accepting of dominant neoliberal discourses about the role of higher education as a driver of economic competitiveness (Vavrus & Pekol, 2015). Mainstream approaches to IoHE, further, fail to account for broader historical and sociopolitical forces that recast transnational inequalities and shape opportunities for students and scholars to participate in international programs and policies. Such normative approaches preserve the invisibility of the modern/colonial imaginary (Stein & McCartney, 2021) — the complex system of ideas, beliefs, and narratives that shape the way societies perceive and understand the world — perpetuating what Byrd (2013) referred to as ‘colonial agnosia,’ a discomfort with unknowing and unlearning. There is dire need for research that actively investigates and makes visible colonial patterns in IoHE that normalize divisions between higher- and lower-status institutions, settler and native, and Global North and South/First and Third World.

As diasporic Asian women scholars from the Global South, in the U.S., we firmly hold that unanchoring from IoHE’s Western paradigm is a necessary step toward a future that envisions a more inclusive and equitable citizenship. For us, the Global South refers to “an entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained” (Dados & Connell, 2012, p. 13). We believe IoHE in its current form is — borrowing from Lorde (1984) — a master’s tool wielded by Western/ized architects that buttresses neoliberal agendas and thereby reinforces White supremacy. We begin by providing a literature review of IoHE and its connection to globalization, neoliberalism, and neo/colonialism, with a focus on the U.S., because it is where we currently teach, create, and labor. In the subsequent section, we lay out the value of decolonization to deconstruct IoHE in its present state. We lean into our lived experiences and conclude by discussing future directions and speculating what IoHE might look like beyond its neoliberal and neo/colonial model.

If the mission of IoHE is educating citizens for active and constructive democratic participation, this paper emphasizes IoHE’s responsibility to society before individuals. More broadly, this paper signals an urgent need to resist a global market-determined economy that commands that the world has to be gendered, racialized, segregated, and organized for exploitation. Decolonization can enable us to better account for global entanglements that are produced through the continuing legacy of unequal interdependencies, and better consider how these contexts serve as foundational for current IoHE research and strategies. Through a revisitation of IoHE and a rethinking of the world as we know it, new pathways can be constructed and radical frameworks of knowledge imagined. Our collective futures depend on the growth of “credible alternative philosophies whose complementary characteristics would make humanity richer and the philosophic enterprise itself more fascinating” (Okere, 1983, p. 129).

Literature Review

Definition of and Approaches to Internationalization

Knight (2003) defined the phenomenon of IoHE as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (p. 2). A common approach to IoHE is for higher education institutions to incorporate a global dimension to their existing teaching, scholarship, and service components (Vavrus & Pekol, 2015), through initiatives such as seminars by guest lecturers of international partner universities, conferences on global topics, and virtual exchange partnerships. However, our understanding of IoHE has evolved to include other (often conflicting) perspectives. Emerging studies on IoHE and the postcolonial condition highlight the dynamic nature of definitions, with varying emphases ranging from normative to inclusive and critical perspectives. IoHE has developed into a broad, unwieldy, and nebulous category encompassing multifarious activities, strategies, concepts, approaches, and meanings.

IoHE reflects the interconnectedness of multiple processes, peoples, practices, communities, and organizations, which led George Mwangi and Yao (2021) to compare IoHE to a thread of fiber composed of multiple interlocking strands. IoHE engages various stakeholders, including governments, institutions, faculty, staff, and students (De Wit, 2002). As a result of its complex and multifaceted nature, there exists conceptual ambiguity surrounding what IoHE actually means. IoHE can be broadly defined as:

specific policies and initiatives of countries and individual institutions or systems to deal with global trends [including] policies related to recruitment of international students, collaborations with academic institutions or systems of other countries, and the establishment of branch campuses abroad. (Altbach, 2015, p. 6)

IoHE has been associated with the manifestation of neoliberal discourses of globalization (Smith, 1999a), which has led higher education to be viewed as a global marketplace for international students, scholars, and research funds. IoHE efforts are heavily driven by global structures and systems that privilege the needs of the global norm (George Mwangi & Yao, 2021), and are aimed to help students to become more competitive in the global economy, faculty to develop broader perspectives on their disciplines, and universities to have an international presence, which is increasingly deemed necessary to remain financially solvent, prominent, and prestigious (Stromquist, 2007). With transnational corporations moving rapidly up the global value chain, competencies such as career-readiness and proficiency in global collaboration are deemed necessary to self-optimize and achieve corporate competitiveness (Yeravdekar & Tiwari, 2014).

However, common conceptions of IoHE have excluded discussions of global power imbalances and sufficient attention to student heterogeneity beyond visa status (Buckner & Stein, 2019). IoHE has come to encompass a messy entanglement of neoliberal categories and assumptions with other, primarily progressive humanitarian ideals, and this coupling has had the unfortunate effect of normalizing inequalities (Bamberger et al., 2019). The prominence of a marketisation discourse has claimed IoHE's agenda, redefining it narrowly in commercially expedient terms (De Vita & Case, 2010). The social roles of public higher education have been displaced by the economic role of serving corporations' global competitiveness (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2000). IoHE scholars and practitioners seem more preoccupied with myopically reporting student learning outcomes than considering what forces are at work.

Unfortunately, most scholarship surrounding IoHE, as Vavrus and Pekol (2015) noted, tends to accept dominant neoliberal discourses about the role of higher education as a means to ensure economic competitiveness. Despite growing interest in counter-normative approaches to IoHE, there still exists a continued prioritization of financial over ethical and political concerns (Stein & McCartney, 2021). As a result, most IoHE scholarship often uncritically supports the status quo regarding the division between higher-and lower-status institutions in the Global North and South respectively, failing to account for broader historical and sociopolitical forces that shape opportunities for students and faculty to participate in IoHE programs and develop IoHE policies (Vavrus & Pekol, 2015). Even many supposedly critical approaches to IoHE have failed to address modernity/coloniality (Stein & McCartney, 2021).

The Colonial Roots of Western Education

Processes of knowledge production are not exempted from (re)producing colonial legacies, and are not value-free, and knowledge about Global North-South relations is no exception. Cupples (2018) argued that the Western university is “a site where learning and the production, acquisition, and dissemination of knowledge are embedded in Eurocentric epistemologies that are posited as objective, disembodied, and universal” (p. 2). U.S. higher education institutions generally function as exclusionary and elitist spaces that maintain the status quo of hegemony, neoliberalism, and Whiteness as ideologies instead of centering learning and instruction to prepare students to challenge societal inequities and oppressions (De Saxe & Trotter-Simons, 2021). In the Western university, knowledge has been defined, interpreted, and manufactured through Western categorizations, philosophies, and frameworks. The assertion of White dominance reinforces normative behaviors and subjugates Others, often marking the latter as outsiders (Muñoz, 2022; Tachine, 2022).

The history of colonial higher education reveals a complex pattern of hegemonic processes that have characterized its global expansion. Western universities were not set up to benefit the colonized, women, nor working classes (Dear, 2018) but mostly built “by rich White men to benefit rich White men” and “protect a class of social and cultural elites when elite was synonymous with White” (Iorio, 2017, para 7). Western universities “sought to craft a world civilization as an expression of sameness” rather than “acknowledge the plurality of experience and perspective” (Mamdani, 2016, p. 78), functioning as theaters of ‘re-education’ and brainwashing (Dussel, 2003). In the colonial imagination, people of color seldom produced valuable knowledge, although colonizers often stole knowledge from people of color and claimed it as theirs (Xaba, 2018).

A wealth of scholarship exists shedding light on the colonial roots and machinations of Western higher education (Peters, 2017; wa Thiong'o, 1985; Wilder, 2013), a discussion that remains outside this paper's scope. There is also ample research tracing the epistemic heritage of Western higher education as Eurocentric, discriminatory, and intangible traditions of thought, reasoning, and knowledge production that originate in modern Europe and continue to influence, if not dominate, higher education curricula, policies, pedagogies, and practices across the world (Lohaus-Reyes, 2019; Quijano, 2007; Shahjahan, 2005, 2011). For the sake of space, we will not delve into the many consequences of the epistemic violence that was deployed to build empires, but in the context of this paper, it is crucial to keep in mind that all projects of educational institutions, including those associated with IoHE, are tainted with coloniality.

Globalization as a Facet of Coloniality

Although IoHE is associated with many different types of projects, scholars (Finardi & Rojo, 2015; Knight, 2003; Sharipov, 2020) generally perceive it as a product of and response to globalization pressures. Globalization refers to the social processes that constitute the rapid movement of ideas, information, goods, and manpower across the globe, radically transforming relations among people and communities across national borders (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007). Globalization is a multidimensional concept whereby political, sociocultural, technological, and ideological aspects become presumably more homogeneous and driven by free market principles (Maringe, 2010). It has given rise to new forms of transnational interconnectivity, increasingly integrating the local into larger, globe-spanning networks (Rizvi, 2011), driving a global arms race for academic, intellectual, and technoscientific talent (Wildavsky, 2012).

Globalization, however, is a new facet of global coloniality, a neoliberal project of homogenizing the world under the desires of Western civilization (Mignolo, 2019, 2021). The trends of colonial empires, where the colonizer benefited from the exploited labors of the colonized — under the garb of the White man's burden — did not disappear when imperialist governments left their colonies, because their global imperial designs remained deep-set. Political, economic, and educational power shifted to the Occident, and Oriental regions and peoples ended up aligning with global linear thinking (Schmitt, 2006), as Western capitalist civilization carried over to — or rather was *thrust upon* — non-Western and Indigenous peoples. Modern European education models were supplanted in semi-peripheral/peripheral countries through globalization, and also served as transmitters of globalization (Zinkina et al., 2019), often through the neo-colonialist, predatory regimes of the comprador bourgeoisie.

Coloniality refers to the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonization, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist patriarchal world system (Grosfoguel, 2002). Global coloniality expresses how the modern world's technologies of subjection underwent a subtle shift from labor and resource extraction facilitated by physical empires, to exploitation and subjugation/subjectivation facilitated by more complex and invisible entanglements of global power (Grosfoguel, 2007). This modern/colonial system “defines the organization and dissemination of epistemic, material, and aesthetic resources in ways that reproduce modernity's imperial project” (Andreotti et al., 2015, p. 23). These hierarchies of global power, which derive from empire, are totalizing, all-encompassing, and seemingly inescapable, and they continue to subject all aspects of human (and non-human) life to a Euro- and androcentric world system.

In the era of globalization and unfettered capitalism, higher education has become discursively configured to meet the needs of modernization from the context of Euro-modernity (Dei, 2012). The flow of information, capital, and people continues to circulate toward the Global North, or the West (Rizvi et al., 2006). Globalization — together with neoliberalism and the knowledge economy, forces functional to each other and part of the same colonial matrix of power — is swaying practices of IoHE in the direction of commodification and pushing higher education toward consumer- and market-orientation, concretizing ideas of capitalist modernity (Edwards & Usher, 2000). Establishing this link between colonization and globalization can aid us to examine how power stratifications established through colonization continue to be fueled through new economic and cultural relations, and how IoHE can both perpetuate and challenge these stratifications depending on how it is approached and implemented.

Role of Neoliberal Ideology

Neoliberalism is a differently-interpreted and contested concept, and can be understood as a political-economic ideology, a set of economic policies, and a mode of governance, and it manifests and re/constructs subjectivities differently across contexts. We borrow Touwen's (2015) definition of neoliberalism as "a policy direction that combines supply-side policy with monetarist views, aimed at stimulating private solutions [...] explicitly avoiding an agenda that actively reduces inequality or pursues income redistribution" (p. 13). Neoliberalism has been described as a veiled colonialism (Kotzé, 2019), a creeping kudzu (Staller, 2022), a 'new imperialism' (Harvey, 2003) and White settler model of development that exploits historic inequity along the same geopolitical, gendered, raced, classed, and caste lines as colonialism (Pailey, 2020; Wilson et al., 2018).

Globalization, as a process of increasing interconnectedness and integration of economies and societies worldwide, has been facilitated through neoliberal economic policies, particularly neoliberalism's promotion of 'free' markets, deregulation, and minimal government intervention in the economy. Neoliberalism is "inextricably linked to the current workings of capital on a global basis [and] extends the earlier logics of empire, trade, and political dominion in many parts of the world" (Appadurai, 1999, p. 229). The dominance of English as a global lingua franca has played a significant role in facilitating globalization and neoliberalism, entailing hegemonizing processes that enabled the march of U.S. capital across the world (Phillipson, 2008; Sharma, 2020). A Eurocentric, Anglophonic, capitalistic knowledge economy appears incapable of accounting for the intersecting gendered, raced, and classed power relations of knowledge and labor extraction between and within the Global North and South.

Coinciding with the hegemonic ascendance of neoliberalism, IoHE shifted from aid to trade during and after World War II (Stein, 2021) and started to be considered a market: "a continuation of former imperial and political connections that have evolved into financially beneficial markets and sources of income for Western universities" (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008, p. 80). Neoliberalism advanced globalization, academic entrepreneurialism, and IoHE by promoting trade and student mobility (Shields, 2013), and neoliberalism's emphasis on the economic value of education contributed to an increased focus on recruiting international students and producing graduates with marketable skills to meet the demands of the global market (Marginson, 2012). Conversely, globalization enabled neoliberalism and IoHE by creating a globalized economic and education system where markets transcend nation-states, commodifying collaborative efforts for market-oriented goals (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Neoliberalism equates a state's success with its ability to nurture and sustain the economy, but unlike liberalism, it is unconcerned with the contradiction between the right to pursue profits in a capitalist economic system and the ideal of equal opportunity in a democratic sense (Mintz, 2021), making neoliberalism at odds with equity. Together, globalization and neoliberalism exert a powerful influence on education systems, to the point where it is often assumed that their effects constitute educational or economic good, while in reality they may not (Patrick, 2013). Institutions are coming under pressure to enter the global space and embrace neoliberal logics that require them to compete in this 'free' market (Matus & Talburt, 2009). University administrators and policy makers are devising policies in response to the proliferation of the Eurocentric knowledge economy in higher education (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008).

Neoliberalism has reconceptualized the purpose and benefits of higher education (Saunders, 2007), redefining higher education in market terms (Gupta, 2015; Shrivastava & Shrivastava, 2014) and reshaping the knowledge that scholars create and disseminate (Dixon, 2006). There is growing concern that if the market logic continues dominating discussions on higher education, then its leaders will feel increasingly driven to prioritize fields linked to growth in revenues (such as STEM), in the process marginalizing fields that resist neoliberal symbolic logics but are central to addressing socio-cultural issues, such as the humanities (Breu, 2018; Kim, 2009). Knowledge with a high exchange value in the market is what counts, while those fields that cannot be quantified are either underfunded or devalued in the masculinized hierarchy of academic knowledge (Carrigan & Bardini, 2021; Giroux, 2002).

Neoliberalism also manifests as the use of corporate practices in higher education governance (Urban, 2016), replacing traditional cultures of learning and intellectual enquiry with a massified knowledge economy emphasizing student

recruitment, strategic planning, performativity, and competition (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Competition and marketization have come to matter more to IoHE than its traditional values, such as cooperation, intellectual exchange, and service to society, which were driving the IoHE agenda in the early 20th century. Scholars, such as Brandenburg and De Wit (2011), who were earlier strong proponents of IoHE, have expressed alarm over the dominance of commercial, utilitarian interests and ideologies in IoHE. Knight (2007), too, denounced the global trend towards the market model of IoHE. As universities transition from a service to market profile, academics fear the depoliticizing, subjectivizing practices of evaluation and loss of control over the means by which they produce and evaluate themselves and their labor (Cannizzo, 2018).

In the creation of a knowledge identified, transnational capitalist class, university rankings receive top priority, students are configured as clients, and academic programs are structured to promote students' economic potential rather than their intellectual growth (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2011; Hertig, 2021; Larsen, 2016). This academic colonization process centers on productivity and skill exchange rather than on meaningful cultural exchange founded on decolonial equal-partnership terms. Neoliberalism, dovetailing with the White capitalist myth of meritocracy, has generated a 'caste system' of 'winners and losers,' 'makers and takers,' and 'the best and the brightest' (Deresiewicz, 2015). Neoliberal forces, furthermore, limit the effectiveness of universities as sites of contestation of the national and global order (Boron, 2008), causing a decline of dissent. Academic capitalism is eroding the underlying principles of IoHE, namely intelligibility, solidarity, and subversion (Khoo et al., 2016).

Internationalization as a Vehicle for Colonial Hierarchies

Normative IoHE functions as a tool of the existing power structure, in that it serves to perpetuate the dominance of Western capitalist and hegemonic knowledge systems within the global education landscape. The colonial roots of modern Western rationality are embedded deep within the foundations of IoHE, which continues Eurocentric knowledge production, exploitation of international students, and inequitable access to resources and opportunities (Hou, 2021; Stein, 2021). While IoHE is increasingly a strategic priority at U.S. higher education institutions, practices such as international student recruitment, education abroad, cross-border partnerships, and uncritical virtual exchanges can engender/maintain Western superiority, elitism, and hegemony. A model of IoHE which prioritizes economic growth tends to be extractive and benefits former colonial powers.

For instance, scholars (Alatas, 2000; Ashcroft, 2001; McMurtry, 1998; Prasad, 2003; Smith, 2006; Young, 2001) have highlighted that trends such as global rankings, research output, and institutional efforts to expand mobility perpetuate the dominance of particular ways of knowing that are foundational to the Western model of higher education. The center imposes itself on the periphery and is seen by all, including the periphery, as the source of knowledge, morals, and culture (Dussel, 2003). In IoHE, Western productions of knowledge are touted as authentic, rational, and correct, whereas Other knowledges are demoted, delegitimized, pathologized, or discarded (Collyer, 2016). Further, the notions and criteria for rankings are defined by Western paradigms, causing the divide between the Global North and South and between universities classified as top world-class and 'Others' to persist (De Wit, 2022). This supposedly meritocratic global race exalts the possibility of a few 'star scholars' to succeed, overlooking the system's embedded inequalities that handicap and hurt the many.

IoHE, moreover, is increasingly dominated by economic imperatives that focus on exporting education and generating income from overseas students (Jiang, 2008). International student recruitment has been a source of income generation for Western universities, emulating elitist colonial power/knowledge structures (Ploner & Nada, 2020). International students are positioned as 'cash cows' (Sanchez-Serra & Marconi, 2018), motivating many governments to charge foreign students higher fees than national students. A student from India, for instance, pays three to four times more to study at an institution in the UK, a country that colonized India for two centuries. Student mobility is situated within larger systems of global domination and geopolitics, and Western countries largely dominate international student mobility. Historically, English-speaking, geopolitically-privileged nations, aligned with Whiteness, have provided most services related to IoHE initiatives and come to control most programs, whereas Asian, African, Latin American, and poorer nations

of the developing world are the buying countries as they are unable to meet growing demand (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Such recruitment trends reproduce colonial hierarchies.

De Wit (2022) pointed out that such elitist approaches to IoHE have contributed to increase inequality and exclusiveness, both nationally and internationally. Only 1-2% of students worldwide have a chance to be mobile for a semester, year, or full degree, and this percentage is lower in the Global South than North (De Wit, 2022). Further, factors such as high tuition fees make U.S. higher education out of reach for aspiring students from lower socioeconomic marginalized Global South communities (Choudaha, 2020). Waters (2012) echoed this sentiment, claiming that IoHE in its current state entrenches (and in some cases, within emerging economies, actively creates) social disparities. Thus, IoHE is paradoxical because, despite its purported aim of providing global access to education to students from various geographical origins, its different practices un/consciously reproduce structural inequality (Gómez, 2019).

The influence of neo/colonialism on IoHE is further reflected in the prevailing discrimination of lower-income social groups which generally, but not exclusively, hail from minority communities with migration and/or colonial background (Ploner & Nada, 2020). For example, Dalits (a group historically exploited and oppressed under the Brahmanical caste system) need affordable access to IoHE more than their upper/caste counterparts. However, members of 'lower' castes from India constitute an almost negligible portion of international students in the U.S.—in 2003, a mere 1.5 percent of Indian immigrants in the U.S. were Dalits or members of lower-ranked castes (Kapur, 2010). This reveals that IoHE perpetuates Savarna hegemony and caste stratification. Foreign language proficiency is also an unequally distributed form of linguistic capital in a transnational economic order (Rössel & Schroedter, 2021), and IoHE largely remains inaccessible to students without foreign language currency.

Another trend exemplifying how IoHE risks reproducing colonial hierarchies is the establishment of satellite campuses in developing countries. The setting up of overseas branch campuses and transnational degree programs by Western universities in the Global South has been critiqued as a form of neo- or re-colonization, since branches send profit back to their main campuses (Clarke, 2021; Ling et al., 2014; Xu, 2021). Branches are characterized by asymmetrical power relations, particularly between the main campus and local administration, which are embedded in different social and societal contexts (Siltaoja et al., 2018). Siltaoja et al. (2018) argued that the neocolonial implication of these branches is enforced through the 'world-class' discourse, which seeks to signal institutions' value in the educational network while simultaneously imposing ideas of who and what count as preferred sources of knowledge. This allows Western universities to flex their academic clout in developing nations through academic colonization (Sulaiman, 2012).

IoHE's neocolonialist tendencies can also be observed in the increasing popularity of U.S. accreditation overseas. Altbach (2003) has cautioned against accreditation and other practices as 'academic hubris,' 'academic muscle,' and 'academic invasion' (p. 5). In general, a power relationship exists between universities in the North and South and between those deemed world-class and 'Other,' in terms of knowledge, capital, access to funding, and access to publications (De Wit, 2022). And while these accreditations are often welcome by developing countries, Chatterjee and Barber (2021) opined that the postcolonial states' desire for Western knowledge and modernity re-casts broader transnational inequities established by colonial practices. In all of these ways, IoHE is widening the gap between socioeconomic classes and thus creating discrimination among developing societies' students (Jaschik, 2012).

Study abroad programs and short-term exchanges are also not immune to neocolonialist tendencies and can perpetuate the neocolonial exploitation and othering of poorer countries. U.S. study abroad programs often exploit orientalist stereotypes in their marketing (Onyenekwu et al., 2017). It is not uncommon for U.S. recipients of 'privilege migration' (Breen, 2012) to display White saviorism and White superiority during study abroad sojourns in developing countries (Hughes & Popoola, 2022), resulting in a reification of consumerist ideologies and an ongoing employment of an objectifying tourist gaze (Sharpe, 2015). Elite immigrants of Global South origin, based in the U.S., can also potentially re-route neo/colonialist discourses and re-orientalize the Orient. Moreover, when programs take place between well-resourced institutions in the Global North and poorer host communities in the South, the provision of global education services creates new forms of work in the neoliberal economy (Collins, 2021), which can allow for neocolonialist exploitation of Third World proletarian labor.

The current model of study abroad, moreover, widens the gap between haves and have-nots in the sending country too, by giving distinction to already privileged students rather than an opportunity for all (Galen et al., 2021). The high costs associated with physical travel deter the participation of economically disadvantaged domestic students (Di Pietro, 2020). For example, less than 1% of students who study abroad are Indigenous in the U.S. (Obst et al, 2007), which suggests that a White capitalist model of study abroad disprivileges the disprivileged, at home and abroad. In the case of online virtual partnerships, too, power asymmetries are often obscured by discourses of partnership. Students from developing, Global South countries often lack the semiotic, cultural, digital, and linguistic competencies, the financial resources, and the tools and infrastructures to partner equally with students from developed Western countries, which leads to financial and social selectivity (Lanham & Voskuil, 2022; López-Duarte et al., 2021). This has led DeWinter and Klammer (2021) to advocate for co-equal, decolonized, and Africanized virtual exchange programs.

Decolonization: A Proposed Framework

Since the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house (Lorde, 1984), any genuine transformation of IoHE will require drawing up a new blueprint. Only with new tools and new pedagogies, new paper and new ink, can IoHE practitioners work towards inventing counter-hegemonic praxes to the individualistic and capitalist principles that reign in IoHE. We believe it possible to generate IoHE projects that can embrace IoHE beyond the modern/colonial university model that was birthed in the West and exported elsewhere. However, such reform will require everyone involved in policy, leadership, and practice to reexamine the foundations of their cognitive dependencies on Eurocentric ideologies, deconstruct many of their norms and values, open themselves to knowledges drawn from diverse experiences (Battiste, 2008), and place these knowledges on a horizontal, non-hierarchical relation (Radcliffe, 2017).

Fortunately, the critical engagement with the colonial heritage of higher education has seen a strong utilization of decolonial theories in recent years and has been closely associated with current discourses surrounding dominant neoliberal and neocolonial agendas that characterize IoHE in contemporary times. According to Rizvi (2007), de/postcolonial studies make valuable contributions in exploring how social, political, economic, and cultural practices continue to be located within processes of cultural domination in IoHE. A decolonial framework can un-obfuscate our locations in the colonial present and illuminate tensions between IoHE as conceived in the West and racial/social justice demands in 'post' colonial contexts. It can make visible underlying assumptions of neoliberal IoHE for the research community and those implicated in the resulting inequities. Such an approach involves posing critical questions designed to destabilize and critique IoHE in its current form, unraveling embedded power structures and, heretofore, unquestioned assumptions.

The exact meaning of decolonization is highly contested, because it directly links with specific territories and peoples and manifests differently. We understand decolonization as "the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world" (Maldonado-Torres, 2006, p. 117). Decolonization is a radical departure from the dominant social, economic, and political structures built upon the historical foundations of colonialism (Chovanec et al., 2015), and begins with unpacking and understanding the colonial legacies of modern Western imperialism and globalization. It is a move away from "reading from the center" (Connell, 2007, p. 44), an un-anchoring from the Western paradigm, which is the unquestioned, point-zero perspective in relation to which 'Other' particularities are addressed and assessed.

Decolonization begins with the recognition of the constraints placed by global power hierarchies and involves unlearning Whiteness within us (Xaba, 2018), productive undoing (Spivak, 2012), and dismantling systems (and selves) that allow for any reproduction or maintenance of White privilege. Decolonization reflects a changing geopolitics of knowledge where the modern epistemological framework for knowing and understanding the world is no longer interpreted as universal and unbound by geohistorical and biographical contexts (Mignolo, 2011). It implies changes of attitude and mentality in both of those communities once simply defined as 'home' and 'abroad' (Betts, 1998), and by extension, 'domestic' and 'international.' It requires an iterative and ongoing examination – paired with reflective practice – of the

structures, policies and curricula of any setting to impede the inclination of schooling towards the social reproduction of racial and class inequalities (Patel, 2016).

Decolonization, also, is not a metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and should not be conflated with neoliberal methods of promoting social justice in education, which can serve to reify rather than resist settler-colonial futurity. There exists a worrying trend of ‘decolonization’ being used as a buzzword in neoliberal universities and IoHE courses to virtue-signal that universities and faculty are against racism, sexism, and other modes of oppression. In truth, universities are largely increasingly investing in neoliberal practices, with the Global North maintaining control of and lead on decolonial initiatives, frameworks, and approaches, and it is likely that universities’ aims for decolonization will remain superficial, toothless, self-defeating, and fakely performative unless they are willing to de-invest in neoliberalism, engender radical social change, and un-close alternative futures. Faux, market decolonization efforts end up reproducing colonial circularities through efforts framed as ‘decolonial.’

True decolonization is epistemic (in that it disrupts the White gaze/ear and its larger White episteme) but also reparative and restitutive. Decolonization requires redressing racial and spatial regimes of property that resulted from dividing people, their spaces, and their knowledges into ‘civilized’ and ‘savage,’ regimes that construct and exploit vulnerabilities (Harris, 2020) through machineries of dispossession and accumulation. For Tuck and Yang (2012), decolonization means the repatriation of land from settlers to Indigenous peoples alongside the affirmation of Indigenous ties to their lands. For Smith (1999b), decolonization entails a process of “bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power” that is best pursued by centering Indigenous peoples’ concerns and perspectives (p. 98). As Fanon (1968) powerfully wrote, “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that of the underdeveloped peoples” (p. 102).

We pause here to stress that decolonization is not merely disruptive and deconstructive but also fundamentally reconstructive, creative, and regenerative. Decolonization is the act of “creating new and pleasurable ways of living” (King, 2015, p. 65), undoing and redoing (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and imagining otherwise in order to act otherwise (Giroux, 2018). Mignolo (2018), who defined decolonial thought and action as delinking from Euro-American thought, described a second stage following decolonization, which he termed as re-existence: “a sustained effort to reorient our human communal praxis of living” (p. 106). If we unmoor from contemporary IoHE, what might re-existence look like? How might we salvage IoHE and remold it anew? What does the future of IoHE hold beyond the empire? For us to imagine a new world, to conceive of new possibilities, we must believe the world can change.

Implications

IoHE, in its current form, cannot be divorced from the intersecting socio-historical forces of coloniality, globalization, institutionalized racism, and capitalism. We recommend that everyone involved in IoHE (from students, faculty, institutional leaders, and governing boards, to donors, policymakers, transnational accrediting bodies, and education consultancies) actively engage in honest discussions of global power imbalances between those aligned with White, capitalist interests (including comprador bourgeois elites in the Global South) and the proletariat/precariat (the invisible foot soldiers of globalization). We must ensure that we do not un/intentionally ignore or naturalize the deep and specific historicity of IoHE. We recommend a nuanced approach to engaging in such conversations, discerning that the Global North and South are not separate, monolithic interest groups, and that the South’s elites (including bourgeois international students and intellectuals in the U.S.) run the risk of reinforcing Global North-South asymmetries, particularly in the way knowledge is selected, constructed, validated, recognized, credited, and disseminated.

To address the inequities reproduced by IoHE’s neoliberal model, we can start by listening to (not speaking for) the voices of those hitherto erased from dominant discursive spaces and affirming the evolving perspectives of Global South communities, recognizing that the Third World is not a monolithic, static voice and is replete with contradictions and conflicts. Dutta (2014) contended that exploitation is rooted in the denial of the communicative capacity of the margins and in the co-optation of the margins as the subjects of top-down communication directed at the margins by experts. Listening offers an opening for interrogating the inequities in the global landscape of power distribution, by attending to the unvoiced

assumptions and principles underlying the logics of concentration of power in the hands of the transnational elite (Dutta, 2014). Such listening involves partnering and co-authoring with Global South, Indigenous, and Black scholars on equal terms, especially those from lower-caste, poor, subalternized, and/or migrant communities and those who write and speak in non-English languages. Building agency in the research community outside the hegemonic community will create a more symmetrical discussion in IoHE.

We also encourage pedagogies rooted in critical and transformative perspectives, what Zembylas (2021) termed as ‘pedagogies of refusal,’ that function affectively to challenge colonial futurity and “disrupt the seductive workings of colonial power in its most intimate dimensions” (p. 1). Decolonial pedagogies are “methodologies and processes of struggle, practice, and praxis that are embodied and situated, that push historical, political, ethical and strategic learnings, and that oblige epistemic, political, ethical, strategic ruptures, and displacements” (Walsh, 2018, p. 48). Such pedagogies regard education as a tool for kindling critical consciousness, confronting injustice, and subverting unjust power dynamics. An example of decolonial pedagogies is decentering, which Zeggio and Chiappa (2022) described as a systematic exercise of shifting what, in our surroundings, has appeared to us as the referent or canon. Decentering better positions us to combat neo/colonialism in IoHE, reconceptualize international academic mobility, and chart the uneven terrains of power and knowledge that international students and scholars traverse and inhabit.

As we contemplate and work toward the ongoing imperative of toppling the master’s house, we can transition the university toward what Boidin et al. (2012) called the ‘pluriversity.’ Pluriversities are counter-hegemonic/subversive and community-oriented institutions that foster a pluriverse of onto-epistemes (Blaser & de la Cadena, 2018), reject academic imperialism, resist commodification, promote democratic deliberation, and challenge the hijacking of assessment and evaluation processes to serve neoliberal interests (Hursh & Wall, 2011; Martinez-Vargas, 2020). Pluriversities also destabilize the asymmetric exchanges of labor that underpin academic productivity, thereby centering creativity, care, and collective praxis. According to Gyamera (2015), universities should adopt proactive strategies that promote alternative notions of IoHE in ways that challenge the status quo. IoHE will benefit from conceptualizing approaches to liberatory, emancipatory education in which transformation, liberation, epistemic equity, democracy, and social justice are objectives.

With regards to the internationalization of curricula, we recommend that the desires of faculty and students be centered in determining whose knowledge is worth knowing, as opposed to the desires of bureaucrats invested in capitalism toward personal benefit. Curricular internationalization should foster the creation of transnational, diasporic spaces in which “scholars from different localities collaborate in reframing and decentering their own knowledge traditions and negotiate trust in each other’s contributions to their collective work” (Gough, 2003, p. 68). IoHE has the power to move curriculum from the competitive global race to a collective conversation (Berry, 2014), and to elevate scholarly labor from simplistic measures to more meaningful creation. The curriculum can be instrumentalized to superimpose and prioritize White capitalist thinking, but it can also be instrumental in decolonizing and reconstructing subjectivities.

Additionally, it is important to put equity and care at the core of IoHE research, practice, and policy, by reprioritizing IoHE’s qualitative, human dimensions, which include building trust, improving research quality, fostering global citizenship development, cultivating intercultural competence, and promoting service to society. Gyamera (2015) argued for a de-emphasis on profit and a move toward community-university design structures. Jones et al. (2021) suggested that universities better connect their service missions (i.e., contributing to the social, economic, and cultural development of communities) with their IoHE agendas, thereby amplifying their contributions to the global common good by strategically enacting global social responsibility through IoHE. These ideas present a paradigm shift, as they reorient IoHE’s objectives away from market-driven goals toward the welfare of the communities served.

It is also crucial to recognize that a decolonized education is not the same as a diverse education. The discourse of diversity, or neoliberal multiculturalism, objectifies relations of power and stabilizes them through neoliberal inclusion of figures of difference in ways that make no difference, while simultaneously perpetuating and stabilizing social injustices within the realms of higher education (Thompson & Zablotsky, 2016). Dutta (2020) warned that “the ability of Whiteness to accommodate, colonize, and co-opt is vital to its survival, ironically often carried out in the name of the Global South after having exhumed the Global South of its radical possibilities” (p. 228). Adding Indigenous, Black, and Othered epistemologies to a weak foundation will not address the inequities currently plaguing IoHE. Policymakers and educators

must recognize that “we cannot simply add new floors/structures to the currently crumbling building that is education until we address the cracks in the foundation” (Dei, 2012, p. 108). Decolonization-as-inclusion is a master’s tool that seeks to insert diverse peoples into a master’s house instead of demolishing the master’s house.

Educators should consider conjuring alternative visions of liberation that do not operate within a modernist framework, as the paradigms of the future that we envision should carefully steer away from modern concepts. Socialist anticolonial politics requires naming and dismantling Whiteness as a capitalist project (Dutta, 2020) and taking on the difficult but fulfilling task of creating new educational systems and alternatives that hold the promise of excellence and equity *for all*. Critical scholars should also remain vigilant of neoliberal recuperation, depoliticization, dehistoricization, and misappropriation of decolonization, and make conscious efforts to deflate the myths used to justify neoliberal IoHE policies. Neoliberal educators promote the idea that equal rights for racialized and subalternized Others can occur solely through representation in existing modes of corporate power, thereby co-opting our critique to serve their utilitarian ends. We must repoliticize that which has been depoliticized.

And finally, because decolonization is reparative and restitutive, U.S. universities should critically reexamine their current business models that require the oppression of the Other to be fiscally operable, with this Other taking various forms: the subcontracted food service worker; the student of color crippled by debt; the graduate assistant exchanging high-skilled labor for low to no wages in an increasingly raced, classed, and feminized academy; the adjunct laboring in the lowest rungs of the academic sweatshop; and the international student barred from admission because of their non-access to financial aid or non/citizenship. Stokas (2023) has reminded that, for U.S. universities that are built on stolen land and through enslaved/exploited labor, decolonization will require eliminating student debt, returning land, redistributing institutional ownership to the workers who sustain them, and reformulating boards of trustees to be composed of students, staff, faculty, and community members, instead of capitalists who remain invested in perpetuating racial and class exploitation.

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