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Challenges for an internationalization of higher education from and for the global south

One of the recent developments in the field of internationalization of higher education (IHE) is a greater recognition that, alongside the opportunities offered by this process, there are several political and ethical issues that are complex, contradictory, and contestable (Stein, 2017; Leal, 2020). In this regard, Chiappa and Finardi (2021) claim that even though the process of IHE is usually portrayed as an intrinsically beneficial process, its "darker side" (e.g. Archanjo & Barbosa, 2019) – a reference to Walter Mignolo's thought on coloniality – hides mechanisms that maintain and reinforce power asymmetries and hierarchies between knowledges and people (Vavrus & Pekol, 2015), accordingly with their positioning within the historical world-system (Wallerstein, 2006).

Some of the criticism raised against current views and practices of IHE refer to the understanding that internationalization is "losing its way" (Knight, 2014: 76); that competition advances to the detriment of cooperation (De Wit, 2020; Finardi, Mendes & Silva, in press); that internationalization should be more inclusive and less elitist (Finardi & Guimarães, 2020); that the link between internationalization and neoliberalism has narrowed (Bamberger, Morris & Yemini, 2019) and that international collaboration has become complex: "Did anyone really anticipate just how complicated internationalization of higher education was going to be?" (Reisberg, 2019: 1).

Given this recognition, several researchers – both in the Global North and South – have advocated for internationalization to be guided by values that transcend the market logic and offer more direct contributions to the society.

For example, Jones and De Wit (2014: 28), referring to how globalization affects IHE, argue that internationalization should no longer be immersed in a westernized, largely Anglo-Saxon, and predominantly English-speaking paradigm. De Wit, Gacel-Ávila and Jones (2017) reaffirm that the traditionally adopted concept of internationalization

is the result of a dominant paradigm originating in Western Europe and English-speaking countries. Streitwieser *et al.* (2019), in turn, propose the inclusion of the humanistic rationale as a category of motivation/interest to internationalize, given the barriers of access that refugees face in North America and Europe's higher education.

In the Global North, an evident conceptualization aligned with the mentioned concerns is the one of "Internationalization of Higher Education for Society (IHES)", which, by claiming that this process should bring a meaningful contribution to society (De Wit, 2019), assumes that work on internationalization must be linked to work on social engagement, with a focus on "global issues" such as xenophobia, populism, climate change, and preservation of democracy (Brandenburg, 2020; De Wit, Leal & Unangst, 2020).

In the Global South, decolonial perspectives claim that, instead of suppressing, IHE should promote an "ecology of knowledges" – as proposed by De Sousa Santos (2010) – resulting in what De Sousa Santos, Guilherme and Dietz (2015) call a movement from university to pluriversity. Referring to the case of Brazil, De Wit *et al.* (2020) denounce current IHE practices, contesting the idea of internationalization as an unconditional good and calling for more cooperative forms to engage internationally and interculturally. In their view, internationalization should be explicitly aligned with broader social justice efforts and aimed at shaping more inclusive, sustainable, or alternative futures.

Still in Brazil, Leal (2020) observes the predominance of a reductionist and hegemonic approach in IHE national and institutional policies, which consents with the perspectives and interests of the core of the world system. Reaffirming this perception, Finardi *et al.* (in press) conclude that IHE in Brazil is still veering more towards competition than to cooperation. Finardi *et al.* (2020), analysing a cooperation agreement between a HEI in Brazil and in the United States, argue that this process is still very imbalanced and dictated by instrumental, neoliberal, reductionist approaches.

Recognizing the relevance of these and other arguments that make the dilemmas and contradictions of IHE visible, we understand that any critical efforts to address the contemporary university institution and the international relations established in this domain are enriched when explicitly situated within colonial history and contrasted with the colonial heritage that impact on it. In other words, and as put forward by Chiappa and Finardi (2021), it is necessary to make explicit the non-neutrality of the IHE process as well as its connection with the reproduction of hierarchical power asymmetries.

Especially for those located on the side of the "abyssal line" – a metaphorical and invisible division that separates metropolitan societies from colonial territories (De Sousa Santos, 2010) – who are relegated to a status of invisibility (e.g. Piccin & Finardi, 2021), looking towards the future of IHE, requires a look towards its past (Leal, 2021). It demands a recognition that what we understand of internationalization today results from relations that were unevenly constituted throughout history (Leal, 2021; Abba & Streck, 2021).

Given these considerations, the following reflections dialogue with the idea of promoting a perspective of IHE "from and for the Global South": one that, instead of suppressing, recognizes the epistemic plurality of the world (Leal, 2020).

1. Recognizing the university as a historical producer and reproducer of colonial hierarchies

In the absence of questions about the role that the university institution has played and continues to play in capitalism as a historical world system and the solutions the university has given to the ecological, economic and health crises developed in the 21st century, it would be difficult to conceive perspectives of IHE otherwise, that is: perspectives that propose other ways to understand internationalization and that truly transcend the dominant modern/colonial rationality.

The university is a privileged space not only for the production, but also for the consecration of a unique and hegemonic knowledge, as it enjoys an epistemological authority that gives it the power to decide which stories and intellectual contributions are valid and worthy of attention and dissemination (Leal, 2020). Historically, it was closely associated with the formation of capitalist elites and, during the colonial period, it was a key place for the institutionalization and naturalization of relations of appropriation and exploitation, in addition to having benefited directly from such relations. Bhambra, Gebrial and Nisancioglu (2018: 5, own translation) summarize this understanding:

> *It was at the university that colonial intellectuals developed theories of racism, popularized discourses that bolstered support for colonial endeavours and provided ethical and intellectual grounds for the dispossession, oppression, and domination of colonized subjects. In the colonial metropolis, universities provided would-be colonial administrators with knowledge of the peoples they would rule over, as well as lessons in techniques of domination and exploitation.*

The dominant academic model remains largely immersed in a modern/colonial power pattern. The criteria that define aspects such as the curriculum and the faculty and students tend to be based on the ideology that reinforces the superiority of a specific culture, so that disciplinary divisions, theoretical models and Eurocentric histories continue to provide intellectual materials that reproduce and justify hierarchies (De Sousa Santos, 2018).

Furthermore, the producers of theories accepted as universal are almost always European or Euro-American white men, which induces the traditional academic narrative to remain highly selective and exclusive (De Sousa Santos, 2018). By suppressing or subjugating local epistemologies in favour of Eurocentrism, the content of university knowledge remains governed 'by the West' and 'for the West', while non-Westernized forms of knowledge are celebrated as 'local cultures'; commodified and appropriated for the benefit of the West; or simply, based on the colonial hierarchical relationship, recognized as something of little or no value.

2. Conceiving the Global South as a field of epistemic challenges

The concept of the Global South or South should be detached from its geographical character. In most interpretations. It concerns the "grouping that brings together the so-called 'developing countries' (middle-income countries and low-income countries)" (Leite, 2012: 4, own translation): a large number of countries in the Africa, Asia and Central and Latin America – around 160 out of a total of 195 recognized independent states – face significant economic and developmental challenges (Robertson & Komljenovic, 2016). As Chisholm (2009) observes, Notions of North and South have become a metaphor for rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, First and Third Worlds, donors and recipients of international

aid. In essence, it is a relational concept, which invariably refers to a relationship of inequality, since the level of development is contrasted with the parts of the world that constitute the Global North.

Also in relational terms, the recognition of inequality and diversity within nations suggests that every state in the South can have its own North and South; that the East can exist within the West; and that the South can exist within the North (Chisholm, 2009). It is possible, then, to point to the existence of a Global South within the Global North; that is, the communities of the central countries whose economic, cultural, political and technological circumstances are precarious compared to the rest of the population. This group includes those living at or below the poverty line, asylum seekers with limited access to social welfare, and marginalized ethnic groups. It is also possible to see a Global North within the Global South: in this case, the political and economic elites evidenced in dominant coalitions of countries such as South Africa and Brazil (Robertson & Komljenovic, 2016).

For De Sousa Santos and Meneses (2010: 19, own translation), the South is "metaphorically conceived as a field of epistemic challenges, which seek to repair the damage and impacts historically caused by capitalism in its colonial relationship with the world". De Sousa Santos (2018), in a more recent interpretation, refers to the South from an epistemological conception, since the term assumes a metaphorical character, and expresses the knowledge built in the struggles of oppressed and excluded subjects against the injustices caused by capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy.

With regard to the production, circulation and reverberation of knowledge in the Global South, Finardi, França and Guimarães (2022), explain the epistemic invisibility and lack of an ecology of knowledges and languages in Latin America. Based on that, Finardi (2022) calls for a more critical internationalization in, from, and for the South, which requires the creation and acknowledgement of epistemologies of the South (De Sousa Santos & Meneses, 2010: 19, own translation): "a set of epistemological interventions that denounce this suppression, value the knowledge that successfully resisted and investigate the conditions of a horizontal dialogue between knowledge".

3. Having a non-myopic view of South-South Cooperation

The idea of South-South Cooperation (SSC) gains relevance from a scenario of discontent with the existing asymmetries in the international arena; questioning the effectiveness of the western model of development and criticizing the welfare bias commonly observed in the links between the North and the South. Much of the political argument that supports SSC is based on the assumption that the South can and must cooperate with the North to solve the its political, economic and social problems.

Discourses on SSC in the specific domain of the IHE gain notoriety with a general recognition that links partners (national systems, university institutions, researchers, etc.) unequally positioned in the world economic system tend to be exacerbated asymmetrically through processes that strengthen the already strong and weaken the already weak. In this sense, such discourses tend to associate CSS with the presence of principles such as equity, autonomy, horizontality, solidarity, and mutual participation.

However, by placing national interests and power at the centre of the analysis of international relations, it is possible to shed light on the political nature of SSC, associating it with a diversity

of meanings for the dynamics between peripheral and semi-peripheral countries. This means that SSC agreements are not necessarily free from colonial legacies and vices, as reported, for example, by Piccin and Finardi (2019) in the case of a partnership between a HEI in Brazil and a HEI in Benin, in which the second one expected the first to dictate "the term of the conversation", placing it in a passive, recipient role. Thus, despite the feeling that SSC may represent a path for international relations to develop in more egalitarian conditions, it is unrealistic to conceive that it is depoliticized or that it does not include material or immaterial rewards, direct or indirect, nor colonial legacies and vices.

SSCs seem to have the potential to promote more horizontal relations in higher education; however, classifying any exchange relationship as colonial or cooperative is an empirical question that requires going beyond the promises and discourses emphasized about it (Leal, 2020). Therefore, South-South relations (with all the associated complexity) are an important topic of interest for empirical research on internationalization of higher education.

4. Spreading the epistemological horizon of internationalization

Given the perception that the oppressive logic of coloniality itself produces an energy of discontent and detachment that translates into questioning, fissures and contradictions in the dominant paradigm, in order to internationalize differently in the Global South, there is a need to broaden the epistemological horizon in which this phenomenon is immersed.

It is therefore important to question the partial stories of "progress, happiness and salvation" that are traditionally associated with the phenomenon, shedding light on its complexity and opening the way for stories of internationalization to be told not only from within the 'modern' world, but also from within its borders.

Denaturalizing the dominant idea of IHE – in the sense of enabling the conception of other ways of doing, thinking, experiencing and being in the international and intercultural relations in the Global South – implies distancing from contemporary political and academic discourses that are emphasized on the phenomenon and widely adopted by institutions and actors involved with higher education. It also means seeing oneself as the centre of references and "inhabiting the frontier": not resisting, but subjectifying oneself, resurrecting, re-emerge and re-exist.

Aware that the proposition of specific models carries the risk of reproducing a universalist, dichotomous conceptual genealogy, linked to global projects, and that there is no single way to re-imagine IHE, we point to some theoretical and practical initiatives that might serve as an inspiration and provide epistemological ground for detachment from the modern/colonial logic when designing policies and practising internationalization from and for the Global South.

5. The postcolonial concepts of epistemologies of the South and sociological reduction

The epistemologies of the South (De Santos & Meneses, 2010) assume that the dominant epistemology of the last two centuries excluded from its scope the cultural and political context of the production and reproduction of knowledge. From this perspective, differences are suppressed and provide ground to the dominant culture, reducing the epistemological, cultural and political diversity of the world. In the specific context of higher education, the recognition of the epistemological plurality constitutes a source of significant enrichment for

policies and practices of internationalization. This requires a deep exercise of critical review of the concepts hegemonically defined by modern/colonial rationality in historical, ontological and epistemic terms.

The sociological reduction (Ramos, 1996) emerges from a concern with the production of committed and engaged knowledge, with pragmatic value, as opposed to an alienated and ideological knowledge, which treats social facts as stable and isolated in time and space. It refers to a critical-assimilative procedure of the foreign experience, opposed to the uncritical transposition of external determinations. Within the context of internationalization, the concept can be associated with the demand for a more realistic view of international university/academic relations, which apprehends the "dynamic and situated character of reality" (Lynch, 2015: 30, own translation), without disregarding the centrality of the power and national interest (Morganthau, 1962) and the complex articulations and interests involved. In summary, the concept of sociological reduction might shed slight on the limitations of the "ethnocentric illusion" (Ramos, 1996: 159) that has defined the expectations related to the phenomenon.

According to Abba and Streck (2021), the Córdoba movement of 1918 is presented as a relevant historical antecedent of the IHE process in Latin America. More than a hundred years ago, the students of Córdoba rejected the exclusionary and elitist character of higher education, as well as denounced the growing distance between the university institution and society. The pressure of the students resulted in the outbreak of the Córdoba Reform of 1918, which was characterized by a series of measures that contemplated democracy, autonomy and university extension. The reformist airs of Córdoba spread throughout Latin America and the students became true internationalists of this movement, which is remembered as one of the most important in the region in terms of education. The legacy of the Córdoba movement is part of a historical process of internationalization of education and regional integration that is being built in Latin America with its own characteristics.

Some experiences of university institutions that collaborate to reflect on SSC and internationalization practices from a critical perspective are, for example: the Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana (UNILA), Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira (UNILAB), and Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina (ELAM). The first two are located in Brazil and the last in Cuba. Since their creation, these institutions have been conceived with an international sense, prioritizing union and solidarity among the countries of the Global South (Abba, 2018). Currently, they resist the attacks of the modern/colonial logic in higher education and show that the perspective of IHE otherwise are possible.

6. Final considerations: Questioning the imperative with other questionings

To a large extent, the growing recognition of contradictions and dilemmas associated with IHE does not seem to challenge widespread beliefs around this process. Nor does it seem to question assumptions related to structural issues of power, inequality and coloniality that accompany the institutionalization of internationalization or the centrality of the university institution in the very consolidation of such structure.

Expectations, objectives, practices, and solutions attached to internationalization remain largely immersed in a Eurocentric agenda that projects itself universally. Such agenda not only defines what is valid, desirable and possible when it comes to internationalize, but it also obscures the colonial past (and present) of the university institution. As a result, there is

still little space for debates on ethical responsibilities; on what internationalization is and can actually be; and on how internationalization can actively work as a tool of transformation of a highly hierarchical world. To a large extent, the critique of the IHE is a Eurocentric critique of modernity.

To internationalize to and from the Global South, there is a need to understand the university as an institution historically managed by actors susceptible to Western beliefs and the effects of the totality of knowledge. It is equally important to understand the South as a field of epistemic challenges, where knowledge is built in the struggles of oppressed and excluded subjects against the injustices caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy.

From these recognitions, several other questions can integrate the reflection to IHE in the Global South. Some of them are outlined:

- There is, in fact, a tense relationship between the values of university internationalization and globalization, or despite the discourses that distance them, internationalization refers to an agent of globalization and to a phenomenon of interest to capital.
- How to guarantee a democratic IHE in an institution like the university, which privileges one type of knowledge and culture, as if they were the only ones that circulate in a single and homogeneous society?
- What does inclusion and diversity mean in this context? Who has the power to 'include' and 'diversify'? What type of university fits the idea of internationalization as an imperative?
- What do concepts such as 'comprehensive internationalization', 'intelligent internationalization', 'internationalization at home', and 'inclusive internationalization', among others, means when thinking of internationalization from and for the Global South?

In the Global South, we understand that internationalization is not 'losing its way', as most academic discourses on the subject claim. After all, for those located "on the side of the abyssal line" that disappears as a reality (De Sousa Santos, 2010), international relations in higher education, either objective or subjective, have never been equal (Leal, 2020). Without questioning the broader structure within which the university operates, it is likely that inclusion and diversity in the context of the internationalization remains conditioned by the same global imaginary that produces and reproduces colonial hierarchies.

Crises like the one resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic pointed out the inability of institutions exclusively linked to academic mobility (Finardi & Guimarães, 2020) and/or subjected to the instrumental/productivist logic of the capital to respond to societal needs. This moment is, therefore, an opportunity for reflexivity not only on current concepts and practices of internationalization, but also on the roles played by the university institution itself (Leal, 2021).

The agenda for the future of internationalization in the Global South should include a collective effort of detachment from the dominant rationality, which requires intentionality. There is need to truly move away from the idea of internationalization as an unconditional good or as a phenomenon that should take place at any cost (Leal, 2021). Only then it will be possible to envision new horizons for international relations in higher education, contributing to the existence of a world in which different worlds can exist.

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