

Let's talk about Decolonial Internationalization

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Abstract

There is increasing pressure on higher education institutions (HEIs) to adopt internationalization strategies. The phenomenon of internationalization of higher education is understood as the means of bringing a global dimension into the approach to post-secondary education, for the benefit of all students and staff, and the broader generality of society (De Wit et al., 2015, p. 281). In the internationalization of higher education, a concerning issue arises; while universities promote internationalization strategies, they spread Eurocentric ways of knowing, standards, and norms as global. International mobility is predominantly a student and faculty movement from the East to the West. This mobility disseminates the colonial global educational engagement where the West seems to be the ultimate knowledge producer. The challenge of HEIs is to interrupt the colonial patterns in international education. This position paper examines the hierarchy of knowledge production in higher education through a decolonizing framework and subsequently proposes a decolonial internationalization approach for Canadian universities.

Keywords: *higher education; internationalization; decolonial; decolonization; Canadian universities*

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Introduction

Internationalization has increasingly been adopted by higher education institutions (HEIs) in the last several decades. The phenomenon of internationalization of higher education is described as the following:

The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (De Wit et al., 2015, p. 281)

HEIs, including most Canadian universities, have embraced various forms of internationalization, whether through recruiting international students and faculty or the internationalization of curricula. According to the Internationalization at Canadian Universities Quick Facts, “[n]inety-six percent of Canadian universities include internationalization as part of their strategic planning” (Univcan, 2014, n.p.). As internationalization has an increasing role in Canadian HEIs, a concerning problem arises. While universities promote internationalization strategies, they spread Eurocentric ways of knowing, standards, and norms as global. Indigenous scholar Battiste (2013) states that: “education systems perpetuate a biased construction of the strength of colonialism posing as globalism” (p. 32). Similarly, Stein (2017a) argues that significant components of international education, such as student and faculty mobility and global partnership, disseminate Eurocentric knowledge production in academia through colonialism. As a result, HEIs have been an instrument to perpetuate colonial patterns in the global arena by adopting internationalization strategies.

In this paper, an argument for an approach to decolonizing internationalization is presented to counteract the modern/colonial Eurocentric system that forms the current internationalization of higher education. Internationalization is often linked to the supremacy of

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Westernization (Maringe et al., 2013, p.18). Western institutions are propelled as the ultimate knowledge producers and distributors. International mobility is predominantly a student and faculty movement from the Global South to Global North or, namely, from the East to the West. In recent years, “Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the U.K. and the U.S.A. [which] have more than 50% of all foreign students worldwide” (OECD, 2014, p.343). This mobility promotes and reinforces the colonial global educational engagement where the West becomes the ultimate knowledge producer. Westernization impacts knowledge production and creates dominance over other ways of knowing (de Sousa Santos, 2007), which is reflected in the internationalization of student mobility and international research partnerships (Stein & Silva, 2020). Due to the association of internationalism with colonialism, international education centers and research partnerships are located in the West. This unequal movement and the division of the globe (the East vs. the West, or similarly, the Global South vs. the Global North) led scholars (Altbach 2004; Beck 2012; Knight 2014; Pashby 2011; Stein 2017a) to explore critical approaches to the internationalization of higher education and to question whether the current system even constitutes as internationalization (Buckner & Stein, 2020).

This paper is situated in the discourse on critical internationalization studies, and the positionality statement in these aforementioned critical studies is encouraged. I begin this discussion by expressing my positionality and providing background on decolonizing discourse and framework. I follow with a broader examination of the hierarchy of knowledge production and emphasize the need to reimagine internationalization in the context of decolonizing Canadian universities.

Positionality Statement

I am an international doctoral student and part-time instructor in Canada. My lived experience has led me to consider the processes of the hierarchy of knowledge production and colonial educational engagement in global higher education. I undertook the majority of my education in Turkey before moving to Canada. When I reflect on my early higher education experience in Turkey, I note that my university curriculum used English as the main language of instruction, its textbooks came from mainly Western publishers, and the faculty included professors and instructors who received their graduate education from Western institutions. While Turkish universities desire to become international education promoters, they follow specific program accreditation rules mainly set by Western institutions. Grosfoguel (2013) draws attention to the influence of Western values, norms, and practices in higher education, specifically emphasizing the “epistemology of Westernized universities” (p. 74). The internationalization of higher education processes and structures conveys messages that individuals should strive to align themselves with the West, pursue degrees from Western institutions, or transform their institutions to be Westernized. Ultimately, the universities promote Westernized education as international education and spread admiration towards Western to contribute to knowledge production.

The story of modern/colonial and Western-centric international education does not stop here. Once moving from the East to the West, one can face additional barriers to contributing to knowledge production in higher education. As an international student, I often feel the need to prove my skills, knowledge, and capacity to contribute to knowledge production. Because the dominant discourse of international students is based on international students’ adjustment (Gumus et al., 2020), which explores international students' adaption to their new learning

environment. Institutions, faculty, and peers consistently assess international students' cultural adaptability, language proficiency, and overall competence (Marginson, 2014). After reflecting on my experience as an international student and as an instructor in Canadian higher education and engaging in various literature and discourses (such as; critical internationalization studies and decolonial thinking), I am impelled to voice these issues – the issues of internationalization related to unbalanced mobility and unequal knowledge production in higher education to reimagine its future.

Overall, my inspiration for this paper has risen from the dream of another type of education: an education that promotes social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Chair, the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, stated, "Education is what got us into this mess... but education is the key to reconciliation" (CBC, 2015, 9:33). Therefore, I envision a decolonial internationalization in Canadian higher education.

Decolonizing Discourse in Canadian Higher Education

Upon pursuing graduate studies in Canada, I embarked on an enlightening journey, delving into learning about the land, encompassing its historical context and present circumstances. Remarkably, Canada exhibits a notable disparity between its internal narrative and the facade it presents to the international education industry, particularly with regard to the genuine challenges that pervade its educational institutions. In the global education sphere, Canada is represented as a country of freedom, liberation, and multiculturalism (Perry, 2015) that provides one of the best education in the world and is welcoming to all (Government of Canada, 2019). This narrative somewhat contradicts the current debates in Canadian higher education, which is challenged by its colonial structures in academia (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

There is an ongoing discourse in Canada about decolonizing higher education.

‘Decolonizing’ is a term to be used for dismantling colonial structures and patterns. For example,

Stein & Andreotti (2016) define this term as

An umbrella term for diverse efforts to resist the distinct but intertwined processes of colonization and racialization, to enact transformation and redress in reference to the historical and ongoing effects of these processes, and to create and keep alive modes of knowing, being, and relating that these processes seek to eradicate. (p. 1)

Subsequently, decolonizing higher education involves unpacking the messy and unsettling impact of colonization on the systems and structures of post-secondary education. Although decolonizing efforts have existed since the start of colonialism, literature on decolonizing progressed in the 1960s (Betts, 2012). Decolonization has advanced rapidly in Canada, especially after the TRC of Canada raised ninety-four calls to action in 2015. Action items have implications on the various levels of education, including the HEIs. September 30th, 2021 marked the first annual day for National Truth and Reconciliation. Over the years, Canadian colleges and universities have deepened their commitments to address the legacies of colonialism by releasing their decolonizing strategic plans or Indigenous directions (Pidgeon, 2016). In addition, HEIs have started to transform their curriculum and pedagogy by deconstructing their syllabi and indigenizing education (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). These efforts involved unpacking biases in the various fields through critical analysis and developing decolonial ways forward in the classroom and beyond (Dei-Sharpe & Ozyonum, forthcoming). The aim was to interrupt common colonial patterns, challenge the hierarchy of knowledge production, and contribute to decolonizing education efforts in higher education. Nonetheless, many scholars still ask critical questions about the extent post-secondary institutions have sufficiently responded to the TRC Calls to Action and other calls for reduced inequalities (Ahenakew, 2016; Andreotti et al., 2015; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

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I have personally been involved in efforts to decolonize higher education by participating in conferences and organizing workshops and panels (see Concordia University, n.d.). At these events, various faculty, staff, and students shared their concerns about the global hierarchy of knowledge production in HEIs, discussed the need for decolonizing internationalization and presented some decolonization approaches. The concerns shared are related to internationalization as Westernization, international students' experiences in HEIs and reimagining equitable, diverse, inclusive, and decolonizing futures of international institutions. The prevalence of these concerns indicates a need to adopt a decolonizing framework to internationalization.

Applying Decolonizing Framework to Internationalization

From a decolonial lens, I view internationalization as a strategy that can be used to perpetuate coloniality, driven by economic, social, and political power relations. Coloniality is described as the: “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). According to Grosfoguel (2011), persisting power relations and colonial knowledge production are still prevalent despite the end of colonialism in its formal structure. To differentiate colonialism from coloniality, Quijano (2007) states that “[c]oloniality, then, is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed” (p. 170). If the colonial roots in internationalization are not examined, the employment of internationalization can adopt Eurocentric definitions of transformation, accountability, and fairness (Stein, 2017a, p. iv). In this respect, I incorporate decolonizing framework to explain and highlight the social and cognitive injustice embedded in the internationalization of higher

education, especially in colonial knowledge production and dissemination. The ultimate aim is to reimagine internationalization which can also be a strategy to progress equitable, diverse, inclusive, and decolonizing engagements around the globe.

If we trace the evolution of the decolonial movement, the difference between coloniality and modernity needs to be clarified. Maldonado-Torres (2007), Grosfoguel (2011; 2013), and Quijano (2000; 2007) employ coloniality to address colonial forms of domination in which the West exerts power on the non-West. Then, the Global South scholars declared modernity as a fictional project designed to clear the colonial past and point toward different promises (Dussel 1996, 1998, 2000; Escobar 2007; Quijano 2000, 2007; Mignolo 2000, 2007, 2009). Coloniality and modernity as two sides of the same coin; comparatively, modernity precedes colonialism (Grosfoguel, 2013).

The decolonial movement is a reaction to these colonial forms of domination. The founding scholars of decolonial thinking are often cited as Walter Mignolo (2000; 2002; 2007; 2009), Anibal Quijano (2000; 2007), Ramon Grosfoguel (2011; 2013), Enrique Dussel (1995; 1996; 1998; 2000), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007), and Arturo Escobar (2007). In this paper, I draw on the insights of these decolonial thinkers and often cite them as postcolonial, Indigenous, and Global South scholars, especially those who examine the dominance of the West and address the ‘geopolitics’ of knowledge production (Andreotti 2011; Andreotti et al. 2015; Battiste 2013; Grosfoguel 2013; de Sousa Santos 2007; Smith 2012) and who critique the establishment of colonial HEIs around the globe (Grosfoguel 2013, Maldonado-Torres 2007, Mignolo 2002).

The Hierarchy of Knowledge Production in Higher Education

Grosfoguel (2013) discusses that one of the products of coloniality and modernity is the 'Westernized universities'. Westernized universities are the modern-day tool for coloniality, which creates a dependency on the West and perpetuates the reputation of the superiority of the Eurocentric canon of thought. Coloniality appeared with colonialism but did not end with it. Coloniality still defines how people see themselves, how people think and how knowledge is produced (Mignolo, 2007). The dual presence of modernity and coloniality encompasses epistemic violence and territorial expansion (Mignolo, 2000).

Several authors have argued that institutions of higher education are heavily implicated in the violence of modernity and colonial structures of knowledge production (Andreotti et al. 2015; Smith 2012; Wilder 2013; Wynter 2003). To elaborate on colonial knowledge production, theories in most higher education disciplines enhance epistemic dominance. De Sousa Santos (2007) approaches epistemic dominance, focusing on blindness to other epistemologies created as a result of domination. Because of this domination in internationalization, Western standards are accepted as epistemically universal in HEIs. Epistemic violence rises when non-Western epistemologies are projected as being less evolved or primitive. This violence, as "spacelessness," is manifested as "an epistemically neutral subject who speaks from Europe (or America/Canada) as a privileged epistemic site, adopting a universalistic perspective that does away with the significance of geopolitical location" (Maldonado-Torres as cited in Andreotti, 2011, p. 386). To illustrate, de Sousa Santos (as cited in Grosfoguel, 2013) found that the canon of thought in social sciences and humanities is from Western men in five countries: France, Germany, the U.K., the USA, and Italy. The violence of modernity and colonial structures generated incredible epistemic dominance and epistemic inferiority. Grosfoguel (2013) argues

that researchers have applied those philosophies and theories worldwide when the social realities vary in different parts of the world. Non-Western philosophers' opinions are not as valued since they are not recognized or excluded.

Several scholars address epistemic dominance and express it with various notions. Andreotti et al. (2011) claim that epistemic dominance is a central object of critique in multiple fields, including Indigenous studies, postcolonial, decolonial, world-systems approaches and critical race theories. Epistemic dominance explains how knowledge can be Eurocentric and why there is a tendency to spread it through the international curriculum around the globe. de Sousa Santos (2007) approaches epistemic dominance and highlights 'epistemicide' as the destruction of knowledges (p. 16). Dussel (1995; 1996; 1998; 2000), de Sousa Santos (2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007), and Grosfoguel (2013) employed the term epistemicide when considering the threatened cognitive experience and vanishing epistemologies. Battiste (2013) elaborates on epistemic dominance by proposing the concept of "culturalism" as an epistemic ignorance in which Western culture is universal and Western knowledge is at a neutral standpoint academically and pedagogically. Native American scholar Vine Deloria (1995) uses the term "white lies" to describe White epistemic privilege (as cited in Andreotti et al., 2011).

Through unidirectional mobility of knowledge, HEIs preserve violent, colonial, sexist, and racist knowledge production and epistemic dominance while silencing other ways of knowing. Ibarra-Colado (2006) discloses how epistemic coloniality and otherness are constructed in organization studies in Latin America. According to the author, global knowledge is disseminated through the U.S. and European universities and publishing communities. Shome (2009) adds to the discussion on bringing the dominance of the English language into academia. Shome's article critiques the culture of producing publications in English in a non-Western

context and how the West is not aware of the extra labour in the non-Western part of the globe yet expects publishing to produce in English. In this regard, this paper connects harmful engagement in HEIs and how internationalization maintains this problematic state and proposes a momentous opportunity to reimagine a decolonizing future.

In Quest for Decolonizing Futures of Internationalization

Decolonization is a responsibility that is shared and is a way to interrupt the colonial patterns in the hierarchy of knowledge production and disrupt the Westernization of internationalization of higher education. As aforementioned, the main focus of this paper is to highlight colonial patterns and their implications in international education, which are not fully addressed in Canadian HEIs. One of the challenges of Canadian HEIs is to interrupt the colonial global educational engagement in higher education. As colonialism has many levels and layers, I argue that decolonization should also address various forms of colonialism in higher education, including internationalization. Then, decolonizing, which includes a process to disrupt forms of systemic oppression, should assist in dismantling colonial engagements, structures, patterns, and systems in the internationalization efforts. Internationalization strategies must also be coherent with the decolonizing demands. These demands position Indigenous peoples' perspectives, interests, and knowledge at the center of university education and research (Smith, 2012, p. 41). This requires intensifying the descriptions and implications of decolonization and internationalization in HEIs. Decolonizing efforts should not be limited to considering colonialism as the conquering of the land. They should embody other facets of colonial structures and systems in play, such as in the internationalization of higher education. In other words, decolonizing higher education must also seek ethical, respectful, and sustainable

approaches to internationalization within the decolonizing framework, which voices Indigenous and marginalized populations' perspectives.

Although it seems there is a clash between global as internationalization and local as decolonization processes, higher education institutions should co-exist in these demands, complexities and tensions of today. Besides, decolonizing internationalization has the potential to de-center dominant paradigms and pluralize voices in a way that goes beyond cultural awareness and tokenistic inclusion in global education. Pidgeon (2016) advises us that:

Assumptions can not be made that creates a binary of Indigenous or International. When in fact, Aboriginal peoples can also be from international context and attend Canadian post-secondary institutions. What is needed are equitable approaches to decolonization and intercultural development, as part of Indigenization, to not only meet Indigenous peoples where they are (e.g., physically increasing access to digital and face-to-face learning environments) but also ensuring high quality programs and services. (p. 87)

We may put various layers and levels of colonialism in different boxes to understand its depth and reality; however, in the end, humanity as a whole suffers from oppression, and we must decolonize education. Therefore, efforts to decolonize our institutions have the potential to produce flourishing insights on how to rethink ourselves in relation to others, provide approaches to reach equitable, diverse and inclusive education, and deconstruct our institutions by reflecting its colonial levels and layers.

I realized that there is not only one group or population in higher education who suffers from injustices and colonial structures and patterns in education. Pidgeon (2016) states that “Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples all have a responsibility to act to transform post-secondary education to benefit all” (p. 81). In this respect, decolonizing benefits not only Indigenous people but rather everyone by embracing the potential to remove othering in Canadian HEIs. Battiste (2013) argues that decolonizing education is a shared responsibility that

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benefits the whole nation. If decolonizing higher education addresses colonial patterns and engagement in education, the student body, faculty, staff, and whole society will benefit from its outcomes. It is not on the shoulders of Indigenous peoples, but we all need to be aware of our accountabilities and act on them. Decolonizing internationalization provides tools for international students to engage in decolonizing work respectfully and ethically, allowing them to be allies in decolonizing initiatives.

While involved in decolonizing efforts, we should keep in mind Tuck & Yang's (2012) remarkable notice that "decolonization is not a metaphor" (p. 1), and Battiste's (2013) suggestion that the whole education structure needs to change; we need to rethink and reimagine ourselves in relationships as we share one place: the earth. Furthermore, Shome (2009) emphasizes that we should not think de-Eurocentrism or de-Westernization is decolonization; we should instead consider inequalities within the nation. Therefore, the advancement in the decolonizing process should provide a pathway to move Canadian universities toward equitable, diverse, inclusive, sustainable, and decolonizing futures. Subsequently, decolonizing international education can support international student mobility, international research partnership and many other aspects of internationalization to reorient toward sustainable, ethical, and equitable futures.

There are various ways to reimagine decolonizing futures. Since this paper is in a quest for decolonial internationalization, we can find glimpses of a decolonizing approach, which helps us to reimagine its implications for internationalization. To critique epistemic dominance and demonstrate the potential for decolonizing curriculum in higher education, some scholars emphasize the necessity and complexity of the inclusion of 'othered' knowledge systems (Ahenakew, 2016; Andreotti, 2011; Wallerstein, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Smith, 2012; Stein, 2017), and conceptualize the interface between two or more knowledge systems through a norm

called border thinking (Mignolo, 2002). According to Mignolo (2002), border thinking is the epistemology of the subaltern (marginalized or oppressed group) as a response to the dominant one. Engaging in border thinking is delinking from coloniality and modernity; it allows us to imagine the future differently. Individuals, communities, groups or states can engage in border thinking by having a radical break from Eurocentered modernity and its colonial structures. Furthermore, the decolonizing framework allows the existence of a plurality of epistemologies, perspectives and approaches. De Sousa Santos (2007) advocates for the plural ways of knowing and offers the concept of ecologies of knowledge. This concept is founded on the idea that each knowledge is both insufficient and interdependent on other knowledge. It requires recognition of a plurality of heterogeneous knowledge. Internationalization provides a great case to learn about ecologies of knowledge in Canadian classrooms.

As Canadian universities have a diverse student body, including diversity in both local and international student cohorts (Buckner & Stein, 2020), instructors can utilize prior knowledge of these students and let various ways of knowing to flourish in the classrooms. Another example, in the Canadian context, can be embodying the Indigenous tradition of counter-storytelling in the pedagogy, which permits delinking from colonial patterns and cultivates border thinking in the classroom. To illustrate an example, Thielsch (2020) remarks on the postcolonial and decolonial approaches to teaching, especially to cope with othering in higher education. Thielsch's (2020) article offers an example from cultural musicology seminar course in which decolonial pedagogy is implemented. In this seminar course, the positionality of the instructor is challenged not to be a non-negotiable expert who sits in front of the classroom but rather as guidance for those who sit among the group. The seminar course includes various listening, reading, writing materials and assignments to decolonize ears, minds and engagements.

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Students engage in critical reflection and are encouraged to ascribe their own meaning to the music, contrarily adopting the dominant way of understanding it. Decolonial internationalization fosters utilizing prior knowledge of students and engaging in multiple ways of knowing.

As these decolonial pedagogy attempts increase in our HEIs, it will allow our institutions to dismantle violent colonial structures and adopt equitable, diverse, inclusive methods and practices. This way, colonial benchmarks and systems in the internationalization of higher education can also be deconstructed, and the Western epistemic dominance can be replaced by ecologies of knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2007). To sum up, decolonizing internationalization should incorporate the inclusion of plural ways of knowing.

Final Remarks

International education can reinforce Western standards and perpetuate colonial relations in global systems; conversely, it can be a portal of growth and offer paths toward decolonization. Stein (2017a) agrees that internationalization can be a tool to “support the development of more equitable local and global relations, and more ethical engagements with diverse knowledge systems” (p. iv) if the colonial logic is addressed. Therefore this article is in the quest for decolonial internationalization to enrich the distinct but connected discourses of internationalization and decolonization in higher education studies.

This paper examines the hierarchy of knowledge production in HEIs and reimagines the future of internationalization by utilizing a decolonial lens. Adopting a decolonizing framework is crucial in internationalization studies. In the line of this argument, I would like to end with these reflective questions: To what extent can we foster a dialogue on decolonial internationalization in higher education without compartmentalizing the fields such as the internationalization of higher education and the decolonization of higher education?

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Furthermore, while having this decolonial internationalization discussion, how do we ensure not to suppress voices interrupting other levels and layers of coloniality in higher education?

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