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## Reflections on symmetries and asymmetries in the internationalization of higher education in Brazil and Canada

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**Reflections on Symmetries and Asymmetries in the Internationalization of Higher  
Education in Brazil and Canada**  
**Réflexions sur la symétrie et l'asymétrie dans l'internationalisation des études supérieures  
au Brésil et au Canada**

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**Abstract**

In this article we reflect on how internationalization is articulated in different ways within the context of a relatively new global educational credentials industry (GECI). This industry emerged largely as a response to decreased public funding of higher education in specific “education export” countries. We take Canada as an example of one of these countries, to illustrate how the marketization of internationalization in higher education is reproduced and contested within that context. We contrast how internationalization is articulated in Canada with the context of internationalization in Brazil. We offer the case of a Brazilian university—UNILA, the Federal University for Latin American Integration, as an example of internationalization that attempts to challenge the global credentials export industry. The example of UNILA shows how a commitment to international public service stands in contrast to transactional internationalization processes that sustain dominant trends of student and knowledge flows in North-South asymmetrical engagements.

**Résumé**

Dans cet article, nous discutons des différentes façons dont l'internationalisation s'exprime au sein d'un contexte, relativement nouveau, d'une industrie d'éducation globale d'exportation des accréditations (GECI). Cette industrie a largement émergé en réponse à la baisse du financement public des études supérieures dans les pays “d'exportation d'éducation.” Nous prenons le Canada comme exemple de ces pays afin d'illustrer comment la commercialisation de l'internationalisation dans les études supérieures est reproduite et contestée dans ce contexte. Nous contrastons la manière dont l'internationalisation est présentée au Canada avec le contexte d'internationalisation au Brésil. Nous présentons le cas d'une université brésilienne—UNILA, l'Université Fédérale pour l'intégration latino-américaine—comme exemple d'internationalisation essayant de contester l'industrie globale d'exportation des accréditations. L'exemple de UNILA démontre comment un engagement à un service public international s'oppose à un processus d'internationalisation commercial qui contribue à maintenir les courants d'étudiants et le flux des savoirs dans les engagements asymétriques Nord-Sud.

**Keywords:** internationalization, higher education, neoliberalism, ethics, Canada, Brazil

**Mots clés:** internationalisation, études supérieures, néolibéralisme, éthique, Canada, Brésil

**Introduction: Principled Internationalization**

In response to the intensified internationalization of higher education (HE) over the last few decades, a number of scholars have raised critical concerns about the motivations driving this push, and its intended and unintended effects (Adnett, 2010; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Khoo & Torres, in press; Marginson, 2012; Naidoo & Williams, 2015; Paasi, 2005; Rizvi, 2000; Stein, 2017; Stein & Andreotti, 2016; Stein, Andreotti, Bruce, & Suša, 2016; Suspitsyna, 2015; Zemach-Bersin, 2007). Of particular concern is the economic focus of much international activity, especially the recruitment of international students. This focus is clearly evident in Canada, where it is “estimated that in 2015, 357,000 international students collectively spent more

than \$10 billion in Canada and generated employment for some 90,000 Canadians.”<sup>1</sup> Partly in response to these developments, in 2014 the Association of Canadian Deans of Education ratified the Accord on Internationalization. The Accord outlines different areas of concern, suggesting that the fast pace of internationalization has strained the capacity of institutions to respond to new challenges and demands in principled ways, and that current pressures of economic rationalization of services and of income generation in Canadian HE have intensified the potential for exploitative and unethical internationalization activities. The Accord draws attention to the impact of internationalization on vulnerable and marginalized communities abroad and offers guidelines for “principled internationalization” in relation to international mobilities, partnerships, curriculum, and the preparation of staff, faculty, leadership, and students for systemic institutional change.

While we applaud the courage and initiative of the Accord to start these needed conversations, we suggest that it nonetheless remains within a global imaginary premised on a single, Western-led story of progress, development, and human evolution (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). In this way, it is likely to reproduce unequal relationships with individuals and communities in the Global South, despite its stated intention of ensuring greater equity and avoiding overly-economist rationales. In this paper we suggest that we need to denaturalize this global imaginary in order to articulate a more substantive challenge to commonsense ideas about what is possible in the context of internationalization. We draw on scholarship that aims to problematize and transform the dominant geopolitics of power and knowledge production in higher education (Ashcroft, 2005; Connell, 2007; Kenway & Fahey, 2009; Santos, 2007), to rethink international education with a focus on ethics and solidarity (Khoo, 2011; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), and to move discussions about the relevance and role of higher education beyond what is currently imaginable (Barnett, 2013). Barnett (2013) states, “the imagination is the faculty through which creative ideas emerge and new possibilities are discerned” (p. 155), but suggests that we cannot imagine new ideas and possibilities until we have dislodged dominant imaginaries. The first step to that end is to realize that there is a “discursive regime” at work (Foucault, 1980, p. 113) that is resisting opening itself to alternative ideas” (Barnett, 2013, p. 16). This discursive regime circumscribes what is considered normal, desirable, and intelligible within a specific imaginary (Taylor, 2007).

In order to identify and denaturalize this “discursive regime” of internationalization, we consider an example of solidarity-based internationalization from a university in Brazil as a means to prompt readers to think “outside the box” about internationalization and the role of universities in relation to global inequities and interdependence. From here we also offer additional suggestions for “principled internationalization” as an invitation to take discussions even further, in line with, but also extending the Accord’s intention to equip higher education institutions to respond more wisely to the complex, volatile, interconnected, and unprecedented global challenges we face today. These challenges require a deep understanding of the social, cultural, economic, and historical forces and flows that connect peoples, places, spaces, and world views, and of the difficulties of intervening in complex and dynamic systems. Without this deeper level of analysis, practices of internationalization tend to reproduce unequal relationships between dominant and marginalized populations as well as propose simplistic rationalizations of inequality, and instrumental and ethnocentric imaginaries of global citizenship, diversity, and social responsibility (Andreotti, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.international.gc.ca/media/comm/news-communiqués/2016/02/22a.aspx?lang=eng>. Accessed 24March2016

We start this article with an outline of the shifting rationales for internationalization vis-à-vis the rise of a global educational credentials industry (GECI), focusing on Canada as an example of a “credential-exporting” country. The second section of the article offers an overview of the context of internationalization of higher education in Brazil, which demonstrates that multiple forms of internationalization can coexist within the same country. Next we present the case study of a new university in Brazil, UNILA, to show how a commitment to international solidarity stands in contrast to transactional internationalization processes that sustain dominant trends of student and knowledge flows in North-South asymmetrical engagements. Rather than argue that Canada should adopt a particular approach to internationalization, we suggest that examining how internationalization operates in different contexts can help to denaturalize the dominant global imaginary in which mainstream approaches to internationalization are conceptualized and enacted in the Global North. It is both possible and necessary to maintain that *another internationalization is possible* without prescribing a vision for what this should look like, which would only reproduce the hegemonic mode of single stories that we are trying to resist. Thus, even though spaces of dissent are increasingly curtailed and even criminalized in Canada, we need to make use of the institutional resources that still remain in order to have more critically informed, socially accountable, multi-voiced, rigorous and sober conversations about not just alternative approaches to internationalization and higher education, but also alternative societies, economies, and futures.

### **Shifting Rationales for Internationalization and the Global Educational Credentials Industry**

Different social, political, academic, and economic rationales for internationalization have been put forward since the early 1990s (see for example Knight & de Wit, 1997, 1999). Stier (2004) has proposed that difficulties experienced in the field emerge from three competing ideologies of internationalization: idealism, educationalism, and instrumentalism. Idealism, which, according to Stier is common among university teachers in the humanities, frames internationalization as a given good, contributing to the creation of a “more democratic, fair and equal world” where universities “foster citizens that adhere to an emancipatory outlook on the world” (p. 88). From this perspective, international cooperation is about expanding democratic values by providing access to knowledge and expertise to poorer countries in ways that emphasize tolerance, empathy, and solidarity. Educationalism, Stier argues, prioritizes the educational value of crossing national borders in terms of personal growth, self-actualization, and meta-reflection:

Exposure to a new, perhaps unknown, national culture—with its unique features, social expectations and language—is a learning experience per se where cultural competence is acquired and respect for the equality and value of cultural differences and similarities is developed. (p. 92)

Stier argues that the ideology of instrumentalism focuses on pragmatic and economic goals that prioritize the rationalization of processes and the generation of income. Internationalization, from this perspective is “assumed to meet the demands of the capitalist, global and multicultural world” (p. 90), turning both education and international mobility into global commodities. We suggest that the ACDE Accord on Internationalization is most closely aligned with Stier’s idealist and educationalist approaches, and is articulated as an important critique of the dominant instrumental approach to internationalization as it is practised in Canada.

These three ideologies presented by Stier each enact a different mode of relationship with people and knowledges of the Global South. Within the first ideology Southern contexts are perceived as recipients of expertise, the second frames them as resources for the individual self-actualization of Northern students, and the third sees Southern contexts as markets to be tapped

(see also Stein & Andreotti, 2016). Although the educationalist ideology speaks of respect and equality, its orientation towards individual self-actualization lacks reflexivity, placing international relations in an allegedly neutral context of even power relations, and foreclosing further examination of normalized and naturalized global asymmetries. For respect and equality to be enacted against the grain of powerful narratives within the dominant global imaginary in which lesser value is attributed to Southern knowledge production, a firm commitment to systemic and historical analyses would need to be prioritized in internationalization efforts. Without this emphasis, none of the ideologies described by Stier presents the necessary conditions for academic knowledge producers in Southern contexts to be seen as symmetrical partners in mutual exchanges. This is significant as it underscores an uneven playing field in terms of the value of academic labour and of economies of prestige exacerbated by new global trends that mobilize and are mobilized by international university rankings.

Indeed, Bolsmann and Miller (2008) have found similar trends to Stier in their research looking specifically at international student recruitment in England. They have identified the instrumentalist ideology expressed as economic competition to be dominant. This discourse sees higher education as “an investment in human capital which will enhance competitiveness and rewards to the individual, corporations and the national economy” (p. 78). Drawing on Naidoo and Jamieson (2005), they state that this view “sees market competition as the most efficient means for the delivery of goods and services [constructing] academics, departments and universities as competitive providers of a service and students as rational, individual consumers who can know what they are buying” (p. 78).

These trends in international student recruitment are symptomatic of profound ideological changes in higher education. Olssen and Peters (2005) argue that since the 1980s, a “new public management” ideology has shifted the ways higher education justifies its existence. The traditional professional culture of open inquiry, debate and public service has been replaced by the corporate culture of knowledge capitalism focused on “strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits” (p. 313). They argue that this shift has been driven by state disinvestment in higher education and, at the same time, by the state’s recognition that higher education is an important export industry in knowledge economies. These two shifts converge in requirements for institutional change translated into demands for institutional economic viability (the economic rationalization of university processes) and competitiveness in a global educational credentials industry where branding depends on predefined quantifiable international performance indicators. As a result, institutions are pushed to promote entrepreneurial skills and to enhance outputs (Olssen & Peters, 2005) according to new economic targets focused on increasing the perceived value (and price) of the educational credentials offered. This form of knowledge capitalism has moved the economic driver “from the fringe of institutional interest to the very core” (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2010, p. 31) of institutions in Canada, the USA, UK, Australia, and New Zealand, which are the key exporters in the global educational credentials industry (see also Hill, 2010; Verger, Lubienski, & Steiner-Khamsi, 2016; Stack, 2016). This economic drive is expressed explicitly in recent policies related to the internationalization of education. The title of the recent national-international education strategy in Canada offers a clear example of the economic focus associated with internationalization: “Canadian International Education: Harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity” (Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Development, 2014).

As institutions increasingly tend to conceptualize internationalization based on economic and reputational targets, they start to pay far “less attention to the benefits that can result for

students” (Jones & Killick, 2013, p. 166). This trend shifts the way we conceptualize the role of higher education and of knowledge production. Slaughter (2004) has described it as a form of “academic capitalism” that imposes a new system of rewards, in which

discovery is valued because of its commercial properties and economic rewards, broad scientific questions are couched so that they are relevant to commercial possibilities (biotechnology, telecommunications, computer science), knowledge is regarded as a commodity rather than a free good, and universities have the organization capacity (and are permitted by law) to license, invest, and profit from these commodities. (p. 107)

Knowledge capitalism also fundamentally changes the understanding and practices of teaching and learning by setting students against lecturers, and institutions against each other (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) explain that

consumerist mechanisms in learning and teaching [...] apply pressure on academics to become more responsive to external demands by reducing their power to define the curriculum, determine acceptable standards of student achievement and decide on appropriate pedagogic strategies (p. 268).

Recently, Naidoo and Williams (2015) have concluded that, although seeing students as consumers has led to some beneficial changes related to practices of transparency, student evaluations, and complaints mechanisms, the negative effects of consumerist thinking on teaching and learning far outweigh its benefits. They argue that when students see themselves as consumers, they engage in learning as a commercial transaction, placing themselves outside of the academic community and perceiving academic success as an entitlement (Naidoo & Williams, 2015). In addition, student-consumers tend to lose responsibility for their learning, to resist changing their frames of reference and to refuse to engage in education “as a process rather than a purchasable product” (p. 216). Therefore, despite students feeling empowered in the immediate term, the passive and instrumental application of consumer logic in teaching and learning may, ironically, trap students in choices that do not extend their intellectual horizons, deepen their “knowledge capital,” or prepare them for “life-long learning,” contrary to the very aims of the policies that promote the knowledge capitalism model. Naidoo and Williams (2015) also point to the negative effects of the consumerist logic on the offer and development of curricula as a response to student demand, and short-term pressures from the business sector. They look at how this has severely reduced the scope of courses on offer, threatened academic freedom and standards, and entrenched academic privilege. They also point to the vast detrimental impact this has had particularly on the humanities and social sciences, and on the erosion of the public role of the university.

In the international context of the global ECEI, knowledge and academic capitalism, as well as student consumerism, push universities and countries to focus on the creation of specific corporate brands to compete for international students. This trend is observed in policies in countries already competing or aspiring to compete in the ECEI. The Canadian brand “EduCanada” launched in 2016 (to substitute an earlier brand) illustrates this trend (Stein, 2018). Their website states:

The number of Canadian embassies, high commissions and consulates around the world implementing education-related promotional activities grew from 28 in 2008 to 108 in 2015. The Government of Canada has supported some 240 Toronto, ON, Canada (YTO-All Airports) activities related to the education sector abroad over the past year. Canada ranks first among the 34 members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in the proportion of 25- to 64-year-olds with a post-secondary qualification. The EduCanada logo will be displayed prominently at education promotion events organized by the Canadian Trade

Commissioner Service around the world. It will appear on branding materials from governments as well as educational institutions, such as Canadian universities, colleges, CEGEPs, language schools and kindergarten to Grade 12 schools.

### **North-South Asymmetries: International Student Flows in the GECI**

In the logic of the global educational credentials industry, international student recruitment is perceived to be the driving force of internationalization efforts. Ample evidence in research supports the assertion that, far from being a globalized, universalizing and homogeneous process, the model of internationalization of higher education within the GECI is geographically unbalanced and highly uneven in nature—revealing the social, political, and economic injustices implicated in such spatial differentiation. Brooks and Waters (2013), for instance, claim that internationalization of higher education is a “multi-dimensional process” in the sense that “whilst some countries and institutions are thriving in this environment, others quite simply are not” (p. 114). This is because

global flows of international students generally represent the entrenching of existing patterns of power and influence in higher education. These patterns are a legacy of colonialism and imperialism; international HE would seem to do little to redress historical patterns of dependency and uneven development (Brooks & Waters, 2013, p. 119).

Such recognition of an uneven *geopolitics of internationalization* at play in higher education worldwide highlights the spatial inequalities between geographical regions, and indicates the emergence of a highly uneven map that, for the most part, continues to favour the Western over the non-Western nations of the globe. It is with this in mind that we might make sense of the comment made by Dr. Jo Beall, the British Council Director of Education and Society, in face of the release of data about higher education international student enrollments and qualifications obtained at higher education institutions in the United Kingdom for the academic year 2011/12:

The UK’s overall growth in international student numbers of 4,570 is tiny compared to recent US figures of a growth of 41,000 students over the same period. This suggests that we are beginning to lose out in an incredibly competitive market. Although the UK has attracted 11,000 more Chinese students in 2011/12 than in the previous year, the drop of almost 25% in the number of students from India, and 13% drop from Pakistan is very alarming indeed. Not only are these countries with large numbers of ambitious students aspiring to study overseas, but they are also countries with which we have historically been actively engaged in the areas of higher education and research (British Council, 2013)

Indeed, a critique of international student recruitment practices shows a very imbalanced reality. When the countries involved in international student mobility are separated according to their role, either as primarily sending or receiving countries, one finds on the top of the list of the sending side a relatively small number of countries in East Asia—China, Malaysia, South Korea, and Singapore as well as India. Likewise, on the receiving side, a very small group of Western Anglophone countries are the ones that are most searched for by individual students and governments: US, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Brooks & Waters, 2013).

Data on the situation is indicative of broader systemic problems. The number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship increased more than threefold, from 1.3 million in 1990 to nearly 4.5 million in 2013, representing an average annual growth rate of almost 6% (OECD, 2013). However, of all the tertiary students abroad, the largest numbers have been from China, India, and South Korea. Overall, 53% of all students studying

abroad in 2013 were from Asian countries. The Asian group (53%) is followed by Europeans (23%), particularly citizens from European Union (EU) countries that are also members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the EU21 (14%). Students from Africa account for 12% of all international students, while those from the rest of the world account for only 12% (OECD, 2013). Although there have been some signs of change with the recent growth in Asian markets for overseas students and an improvement in the international ranking positions of some Asian higher education institutions, clear inequalities remain.

According to OECD indicators, of all international students enrolled in OECD countries in 2012, only 6% were from Latin America and the Caribbean, which amounted to nearly 205,000 individuals. As for international students enrolled in Latin American and Caribbean countries, they were only 1.58% of the worldwide figure (just over 71,500 individuals), a drop of over 4,500 when compared to the 2010 figure that had more than doubled over 5 years (OECD, 2014, pp. 350 & 361).

Anglophone “credential-exporting” countries have invariably used, to that intent, three tools to attract overseas students: international rankings and national league tables; national and international policy institutionalization; and English as the medium of instruction. Rankings and league tables become, in this context, a means to create branding narratives around various national education systems and individual educational institutions, thus “perpetuating the geographical unevenness of international education” (Brooks & Waters 2013, p. 125). These yearly global rankings help to create a global hierarchy of institutions that, at the same time, introduce and maintain a self-serving discourse of difference between national higher education systems (see also Stack, 2016).

Furthermore, it has become apparent that Anglophone credential-exporting universities have taken up internationalization as a paramount goal in their institutional strategies and policies, and have been further aided by similar national and regional policies. International benchmarking organizations, such as OECD, UNESCO, and the World Bank, have reinforced the process, as they emphasize the outstanding quality of these receiving institutions, by nation and by region (Brooks & Waters 2013). In addition, they have added to their advantage the fact that English is their medium of instruction, which satisfies the market demands of “credential-importing” countries for access to the language that is considered the main conveyor of science, technology, business, and trade in the world today (Sidhu, 2009).

It is no surprise, therefore, that as a result of the progressive adoption of English as a global language, Anglophone nations, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States are the prevalent destinations of students who do part of or the full program of their undergraduate and graduate studies abroad. Indeed, they are likely “to have learned English in their home country or wish to improve their English-language skills through immersion in a native English-speaking context” (OECD, 2014, p. 345)

On the other hand, when it comes to offering non-Anglophone students an international experience at home, various critiques point to the nature of the knowledge conveyed in the internationalized curriculum of the available courses in terms of “manifestations of both English hegemony and neo-colonialism” (Choi, 2010, p. 233). The same critique applies to the increase in the number of courses taught in English in non-Anglophone universities; and to the privileging of “Western modes of thought and modes of knowledge over the domestic ones” as regards courses that take up a “seemingly universal” ideology (Rizvi 2000), which contradicts the perceived role of education in terms of questioning “received wisdom” (Axelrod, Anisef & Lin, 2001).



Likewise, research with international doctoral students on their return home show asymmetries in the nature of knowledge transfer by those who train abroad (Madge, Raghuram, & Noxolo, 2009). Sidhu (2006) argues that materials emanating from various international student destinations also highlight particular assumptions about the direction of knowledge transfer and present a clear “Othering discourse” which construct overseas students as “both passive and in need of instruction from Western nations” (p. 313). She also claims that few discursive spaces for developing more “transformative scholarship” are offered in the hosting universities in the West, or for “building non-territorial solidarities that liberate humane and democratic expressions of cosmopolitanism and foster authentic international collaborations” (p. 313).

On the other hand, some researchers have suggested that knowledge flows are more complex and rarely only one-way (Madge et al., 2009). Brooks and Waters (2013) summarize this position by stating that “international students should not be seen as passive recipients of an overseas education, but as active agents in knowledge-making in the country of destination as well as of origin” (p. 150). Nonetheless, they argue, there are “notable differences by country in the extent to which international students are able to effect ‘knowledge transfer’ on their return home” (p. 150).

What we have presented thus far shows that, from the perspective of its geographies, the reality of internationalization is highly uneven and “far from global in scope and reach” (Brooks & Waters 2013, p. 45). Scholars such as Paraskeva (2011), Rizvi and Lingard (2010), and Soudien (2010) propose that the global flows of international students and of knowledge transfers clearly show the unequal global relations of power and flows of knowledge at play in global capitalist knowledge economies. Khoo (2011) observes that, in this context, governments “want higher education to expand, but with less funding” (p. 337); therefore, internationalization has become the preferred means to compensate for state disinvestment and to re-affirm previously set expansionist goals.

In the Canadian context, the global educational credentials industry is indeed an extremely profitable investment in terms of national and expansionist goals, although it is difficult to measure whether the income generated is used to address the areas most affected by state disinvestments in HE. For instance, Global Affairs Canada<sup>2</sup> refers to how higher education compared, in 2010, with other ordinary items of the Canadian export industry:

Overall, the total amount that international students spend in Canada (\$8 billion) is greater than our export of unwrought aluminum (\$6 billion), and even greater than our export of helicopters, airplanes and spacecraft (\$6.9 billion) to all other countries.

Consequently, institutions increasingly compete aggressively against each other to attract full fee-paying international students—who usually have to pay at least double the amount of fees compared to their domestic peers (CSF Fact Sheet, 2013<sup>3</sup>). Similarly, Marginson (2008) has argued that the dominance of the US within the field of higher education is akin to its global hegemony in other areas such as media, finance, and technology, and is underpinned by the country’s “global use of English; research concentration and knowledge flows; and its success as a ‘people attractor’, through offering superior salaries for staff and scholarships for students” (p. 305).

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<sup>2</sup> Economic Impact of International Education in Canada - An Update. Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Retrieved from <http://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/economic-impact-economique/index.aspx?lang=eng>

<sup>3</sup> International Students in Ontario. Retrieved from <http://cfsontario.ca/downloads/CFS-Factsheet-InternationalStudents.pdf>

Taking the wider context of neoliberalization of public services into account, it is not surprising to see this shift towards more corporate and entrepreneurial imaginaries of internationalization and of universities themselves, operating within a free market, competition-oriented agenda (Barnett 2013). Indeed, within much of the Global North, including Canada, we have seen a shift in hegemony from a civic imaginary of higher education to a more corporate imaginary, although they continue to co-exist. A civic imaginary is associated with “the expansion and democratization of access to higher education and the fostering of civic engagement,” while the corporate imaginary “focuses on training graduates to be social and economic entrepreneurs and on strengthening university–industry partnerships” (Andreotti, Stein, Pashby, & Nicholson, 2016, p. 89). This shift can be understood metaphorically as a gradual move from “the ivory tower” of knowledge production serving the national population aspiring for (more) social mobility, to a “shopping mall” of educational credentials serving the globally mobile upper classes. Returning to Stier’s (2004) distinctions between ideological, educational, and instrumentalist ideologies of internationalization, the more instrumentalist the orientation of internationalization, the less capable an institution is of creating spaces (both literally and metaphorically) where meaningful and productive exchanges of diverse knowledges and approaches can occur between students from different cultural backgrounds, as suggested by scholars such as Marginson and Sawir (2011). We extend this insight by arguing that the more a university subscribes to a neoliberal model and advances its position within the GECI—that is, the more it practises a corporate imaginary of HE and an instrumental approach to internationalization, the more it distances itself from intercultural propositions oriented towards global mindedness, justice, peace, solidarity, or international collaboration for the common/public good. While the idealist and educational approaches to internationalization that Stier (2004) describes do not necessarily avoid the traps of the dominant global imaginary, the instrumental approach shrinks the available institutional spaces in which these problematic tendencies can even be identified and debated.

### **The Brazilian Context: Holding on to a Civic Imaginary of HE**

Brazil has a multiple-tier system of postsecondary education with private and public institutions using different private/public funding models. The federal, state, and municipal higher education systems are still fully publicly funded, which means they are free at the point of delivery to students. According to the 2014 figures released by INEP<sup>4</sup> (the government agency responsible for monitoring Brazilian education), the higher education public system consists of 298 institutions of which 111 are universities (63 federal; 38 state; and 10 municipal). In the federal system alone, there was a growth of 3.7% in number of students enrolled in their first year when compared with 2013.

Despite the fact that, in 2014, these public universities were serving nearly 1.7 million students in the 26 states and the federal district, there is an acute shortage of places in the public system as a whole. This becomes evident in view of the most recent population census that shows an 18–24 age group—the most likely to be potential university entrants—of well over 23 million individuals. As a result, of the total of over 7.8 million students enrolled in their first year of undergraduate courses in 2014—a growth of 6.8% when compared with the previous year—82.3% were in private higher education institutions (most of them for-profit type institutions). As to the enrollments in graduate courses, INEP statistics show an inverse situation: over 250,000 students were enrolled in master’s and doctoral degrees in public universities, against 48,000 in their private counterparts.

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<sup>4</sup> INEP (National Institute for Research in Education). Retrieved from INEP (<http://portal.inep.gov.br/>)

The Brazilian public university system tends to uphold a civic university imaginary (Andreotti et al., 2016). Higher education is still largely placed in the realm of the public, the socially inclusive, and the racially democratic (Daflon et.al 2013). This commitment has been translated into specific affirmative action policies painstakingly implemented over the last two decades. In what concerns equity in higher education access, for instance, a 12-year left-wing labour party government has introduced affirmative action policies so as to guarantee that these institutions become a more diverse and socially just environment<sup>5</sup>. Although it is still an environment that discriminates and favours the privileged classes, the quota for students who come from the public secondary school system has increased to 50% of the total federal university vacancies<sup>6</sup>. Since 2012, these have been filled according to a criterion that associates family income with the racial profile for each state in the country, both established in the latest national population census. Thus, the number of visible minorities and Indigenous people entering the public federal postsecondary system has become proportionally higher.

As concerns equal access opportunities in the private higher education sector, a federal government sponsored program called ProUni (University for All) was implemented in 2004 to increase the number of university vacancies for the poorer segment of the population. In response to the program, private institutions have their federal taxes excused in exchange for filling their remaining vacancies with previously selected grant holders. The criteria for admission and continued enrollment in the program demands from the candidate a minimum score in the national secondary-level exam (ENEM) and good performance during their academic years. If the Brazilian government has consistently been able to hold a plan that can, in the long run, work towards a more just and equitable tertiary education for a larger number of people, what about the quality of the education provided by these institutions?

Brazil holds a high regard for quality assurance of its higher education through a long-standing, well-respected, government-sponsored and organized, peer-review evaluation system which is dynamic and has evolved systematically over the last three decades. This system guarantees that courses at the undergraduate level and programs at the postgraduate level, once deemed adequate and admitted into their respective systems, are regularly monitored so as to maintain or improve their start-up quality scores. This is enforced as a condition put to all higher education institutions (both public and private) if they want to confer legally recognized higher education certificates and diplomas to their students. Quality assurance in the higher education system is, thus, maintained over time.

In terms of internationalization, there is a long-established model of international cooperation, which has consistently promoted and funded collaboration between Brazilian researchers and their counterparts abroad. This model has established long-standing bilateral partnerships according to a logic of (a)symmetry of each country's installed research capacity when compared to Brazil's. The following criteria places Brazil as either "mutual partner," "user," or "provider" according to whether it engages in a "two-way" or in a (a)-symmetrical partnership, with the countries with which it maintains international relations. Such logic is at the basis of Brazilian politics on international relations more broadly<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore, in countries with recognized higher or same infra-structural research capacity, students and staff remain for the maximum period of four years, on government-sponsored scholarships, for full or "sandwich" doctoral degrees, sabbatical leaves and, with the *Ciencia sem*

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<sup>5</sup> In the current political context in Brazil, these policies thrive in spite of being under attack.

<sup>6</sup> This is established in Law no.12.711, August 2012. [http://portal.mec.gov.br/cotas/docs/lei\\_12711\\_2012.pdf](http://portal.mec.gov.br/cotas/docs/lei_12711_2012.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> PNPG 2011–2020, p. 235

*Fronteiras* (CsF) program, three to 18-month undergraduate programs. In such partnerships, Brazil is seen as “user” or “mutual” partner, depending on whether the receiving universities are seen as more advanced or at the same level of development in the specific area of study and research focused in each program.

By the same token, Brazil also maintains a sustained relationship, based on the value of solidarity, with countries whose infra-structural research capacity is recognizably lower than Brazil’s. In that case, it is the Brazilian receiving universities that stand as “providers.” One of these graduate programs is Programa de Estudantes-Convênio de Pós-Graduação (PEC-PG)<sup>8</sup> which is matched with students’ scholarships for master’s and doctoral degrees provided by the Brazilian government to enable students from the 56 “developing” nations with which Brazil maintains educational, cultural, or scientific-technological agreements to remain in Brazil for the period necessary to complete their programs in the “receiving” Brazilian universities. The program has been going uninterrupted for over 30 years. As a selection requirement, the student must return to his/her country of origin after completion of a degree in Brazil and remain there for at least two years. Only then, may the student, at his/her discretion, apply for a more advanced degree.

As we have shown so far, Brazil has over the years developed a varied model of internationalization based on international cooperation. This international cooperation has been consolidated in the form of bilateral and multilateral programs operating according to each country’s relative research capacity when compared to Brazil’s. As a consequence, Brazil has maintained international cooperation programs on both the North-South and on the South-South axes, which are oriented by somewhat divergent rationales. Whereas the first are inscribed in the North-South imaginary and tend to follow a vertical, hierarchical rationale based on different aspects of “knowledge capitalism,” the latter emerges as a result of the relationship with the nations of the South and has been promoted through principles of solidarity and integration. It is in this spirit that, in the next section, we showcase the vision of internationalization of a university created specifically to promote South-South cooperation.

### **South-South Cooperation: UNILA’s Vision**

Brazil was brought to the international higher education spotlight through its bold *Ciência sem Fronteiras* (CsF)<sup>9</sup> international mobility program, which began in 2011 and, since 2016, has been put on stand-by due to severe cuts on the Education and Science & Technology budgets implemented by the current conservative government. Due to its magnitude, CsF soon became the most well-known Brazilian internationalization initiative. However, Brazil has a longer and more complex history of internationalization guided by different rationales. Whereas CsF’s uptake was driven by the rationale of scientific and technological innovations and followed the dominant logic of North-South STEM knowledge flow, we will use the case of a Brazilian public university—the Federal University for Latin American Integration (UNILA)—to illustrate that Brazil has also engaged in significant internationalization efforts with a view to interrupt uneven and unjust global political economies of knowledge production.

Besides UNILA, two other federal universities—the Afro-Brazilian University of Integration (UNILAB) and the University of Amazonian Integration (UNIAM)—were created by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as projects of political-pedagogical innovation intended to

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<sup>8</sup> There is also Programa de Estudantes-Convênio de Graduação (PEC-G), an undergraduate program founded on the same premises as Programa de Estudantes-Convênio de Pós-Graduação (PEC-PG). We will focus, however, only on PEC-PG for which we dispose of data.

<sup>9</sup> Known in English as the Science without Borders (SwB) Brazilian international mobility program

enhance, in the long term, global integration and to unite different countries through more symmetrical educational collaborations. While in this article we focus specifically on the vision for internationalization of UNILA, and provide evidence for how it demonstrates solidarity, respect, and critical intercultural engagements, all three institutions stand in contrast with the dominant trends of internationalization driven by uneven flows of knowledge, competitive branding/ranking, and aspirations for progress and prestige grounded in a single story of human and social development.

UNILA is based in the city of Foz de Iguazú, in the state of Paraná, Brazil, close to the tri-border of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil. This physical situation carries a symbolic meaning, as it follows an international orientation that from the outset was built in its Institutional Development Plan (PDI 2013–2017). This international orientation proposes “interculturality, bilingualism and multilingualism” as well as “interdisciplinarity and democratic management” (p. 15) as key institutional principles. Accordingly, the policies, legal instruments, and plans that support this initiative are marked by values such as integration, solidarity, and mutual respect<sup>10</sup> as they refer to UNILA’s commitment to “form human resources capable of contributing towards Latin-American integration, regional development and cultural, scientific and educational exchange, especially as it regards Mercosur”<sup>11</sup> (UNILA’s website). Thus, “academic exchange and cooperation based on solidarity” (UNILA’s website) are promoted in the South-South axis, with a focus on the member countries of Mercosur, but also with other Latin American countries, the Caribbean, and Lusophone countries in Africa.

Latin American integration is placed firmly as a key goal, and the path established to achieve it asserts cooperation based on solidarity and mutual respect as its tenets. In practice, these are expressed in the actions aimed at guaranteeing: (a) diverse social background of the incoming students; (b) the multinational/multicultural composition of the university’s faculty and student bodies; as well as the (c) formal adoption of bilingualism, to the extent that both Portuguese and Spanish are the languages of everyday communication in the university environment, as well as the promotion of plurilingualism by offering and encouraging students to learn different languages, including Indigenous languages.

Institutionally, the international orientation of the university is embodied in the Mercosur Institute of Advanced Studies (IMEA-UNILA),<sup>12</sup> which is structured along the lines of three major Latin American consulting bodies.<sup>13</sup> These bodies, together, designed the new university in terms of its three dimensions: teaching/learning, research, and service. Since the university opened, IMEA has become a “locus of knowledge” in the sense that it is in charge of channeling reflection towards the goal of attaining Latin American integration. It seeks to do that by promoting specialized nuclei of advanced investigation, and supporting fora and academic chairs invested in exposing problems and proposing solutions for the political, economic, social, and cultural issues that are deemed to be major obstacles to its goal.

UNILA is a federal university, and therefore there are no tuition fees, but the costs of living in Foz do Iguazú could limit access to students from marginalized backgrounds, especially from economically disadvantaged regions in Latin America. Hence, diversity in the student body

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, the LEI N° 12.189, DE 12 DE JANEIRO DE 2010 (the federal law that created UNILA), at <http://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/lei/2010/lei-12189-12-janeiro-2010-600347-norma-actualizada-pl.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) as mentioned on the institutional site <https://www.unila.edu.br/conteudo/institucional>

<sup>12</sup> <http://portal.mec.gov.br/ultimas-noticias/221-2107596713/14047-conselho-do-mercosul-aprova-verba-para-nova-universidade-no-parana>

<sup>13</sup> These are: Latin American Consulting Council (CONSULTIN); College of Latin American Chairs (CATELAM) and the Latin American Scientific Board.

has been supported with active student recruitment in these areas and a pilot student subsistence scholarship program. In 2014, this program distributed more than 3,000 grants to support students' expenses with accommodation, meals, transport, and participation in academic events, according to students' specific needs. The program also incorporated Brazilian affirmative action policy into its admissions processes. In addition to the grants, the university has been investing in equipment and proper facilities to cater to the academic community's demands for assistance towards access to health, sports and technology.<sup>14</sup> More recently, the university's administration has sought partner countries' financial participation in the student subsistence program, as mentioned in the governance report.<sup>15</sup>

Fifty percent of UNILA's places are reserved for students from the Latin American and Caribbean countries with which Brazil has established educational and cultural partnerships. According to UNILA's University Act, the selection process is to be carried out both in Portuguese and Spanish and the topics to be discussed are those that can be fairly approached by any candidate, irrespective of country of origin in the region. On the same account, these selection processes are to be conducted by international examining boards, with a balanced representation of nationalities from the region as a whole (Universities Act–Lei 12.189/2010). These rules apply to the selection of the student body and the faculty.

UNILA's two official languages are Portuguese and Spanish, considered to be the two main languages of instruction in Latin America. However, to be truly loyal to its mission of internationalization via integration in a region that is so vast, ethnically diverse and socially unequal as Latin America, there is a plan, underway, to teach Portuguese and Spanish to students whose first language is neither Spanish nor Portuguese. This is done alongside the promotion of Indigenous languages such as Guarani, Quechua, and Aymara. More recently, French has become part of the unofficial plurilingual campus, as a group of Haitian students have also joined the student body (UNILA's news portal)<sup>16</sup>.

The political-pedagogical orientation of UNILA shows its trend towards rethinking and reimagining Latin America and the role of universities within it. All incoming undergraduate students are required to attend a mandatory "common cycle," which includes a three-term course on the "Foundations of Latin American Integration," and a one-term course on "Ethics in Sciences and Principles in Research." In addition, it also includes the option of either Portuguese or Spanish language courses designed to also include intercultural and inter-disciplinary understanding and skills. Altogether, the "common cycle" corresponds to 650 contact hours (PPC-Cinema<sup>17</sup>, p. 8). Overall, the course-syllabi reflect questions related to the geopolitics of power, and reinstate the university's commitment to enhancing solidarity over competition, reciprocal partnerships over top-down leadership, and substantive engagement and involvement of racialized students in place of tokenistic inclusion (Stein et al., 2016).

Despite considerable challenges on the ground, UNILA continues to be faithful to its initial set of priorities based on the values of solidarity expressed in its 2014 Governance Report as "respect to all forms of diversity"; promotion of interculturality and plurilingualism; and the

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<sup>14</sup> 2014 Governance Report, p.14

([https://www.unila.edu.br/sites/default/files/files/Relat%C3%B3rio\\_de\\_Gest%C3%A3o\\_2014\\_-\\_UNILA.pdf](https://www.unila.edu.br/sites/default/files/files/Relat%C3%B3rio_de_Gest%C3%A3o_2014_-_UNILA.pdf))

<sup>15</sup> 2014 Governance Report, p.92

([https://www.unila.edu.br/sites/default/files/files/Relat%C3%B3rio\\_de\\_Gest%C3%A3o\\_2014\\_-\\_UNILA.pdf](https://www.unila.edu.br/sites/default/files/files/Relat%C3%B3rio_de_Gest%C3%A3o_2014_-_UNILA.pdf))

<sup>16</sup> Information taken from the site in Dec 2015: <https://www.unila.edu.br/noticias/portugues-e-espanhol>

<sup>17</sup> PPC is the syllabus designed for each course. Retrieved from the Cinema syllabus

[https://cursos.unila.edu.br/sites/default/files/ppc\\_-\\_cinema\\_e\\_audiovisual.pdf](https://cursos.unila.edu.br/sites/default/files/ppc_-_cinema_e_audiovisual.pdf)

“protection of human rights, of life, of biodiversity and of a culture of peace.”<sup>18</sup> This characterizes a transformational approach to internationalization oriented towards challenging imaginaries, shifting paradigms, and transforming identities and commitments at multiple levels (Khoo & Torres, in press; Robson 2011).

UNILA’s internationalization proposition reinforces international cooperation on the South-South axis to the extent that it challenges the asymmetrical model, with its emphasis on North-South knowledge economy flows, and embraces a more horizontal, democratic relationship among the member nations of Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite the contextual challenges of policy implementation, UNILA illustrates the possibility of South-South engagement based on solidarity, as determined by language, culture, and history shared within the region, with a view to achieving integration based on a common struggle towards social justice.

### **Conclusion: Continuing Steps Towards “Principled Internationalization”**

It is clear that educational policies and practices around the globe are increasingly dominated by an imaginary that sees education as a business instead of a public good (Barnett 2013; Rizvi & Lingard 2010; Torres & Schugurensky 2002). Particularly in the Global North, this has meant that internationalization efforts are most strongly driven by instrumentalist rationales (Stier 2004), concerned primarily with generating revenues to make up for declining public funds and feeding a potentially exploitative educational credentials industry. At the same time, this trend is also contested, and alternative practices emerge in pockets of internal and external critique. The guidelines for “principled internationalization” put forth by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2014) gesture to the fact that other modes of internationalization remain not only possible, but also ethically compelling (see also Stein et al., 2016).

Inspired by the ACDE document but desiring to push discussions even further, in this paper we have sought to articulate a more substantive challenge to common sense ideas of what is possible in the context of internationalization, using the example of UNILA in Brazil. This challenge draws attention to the ethical imperative to trouble the asymmetries, ethnocentrism, and universalism prevalent in the political economy of knowledge production that are exacerbated in the context of the global educational credentials industry. Beyond internationalizing the curriculum and seeking to establish ethical and reciprocal partnerships, as the ACDE accord suggests, the UNILA example shows that the design and enactment of principled internationalization require a strong critical stance towards what has become the “business-as-usual” of internationalization in the corporate imaginary of higher education. This involves distancing international education from the rationalization of internationalization as income supplementation, the reification of global rankings as international measures of quality education, and the branding of educational credentials solely as exports that function as passports to social mobility. If UNILA’s approach seems utopian from the context of the Global North, then it is worthwhile to remember Jameson’s (2007) idea that utopia is not something to be achieved, but something that serves to inspire and to remind us that it is necessary to think beyond what is perceived as “possible” within normalized imaginaries. In this vein, UNILA is a good reminder that postsecondary institutions and internationalization can be re-imaged in radically new ways mobilizing a type of education oriented towards shaping societies and global trends rather than adapting to the new order of neoliberal austerity.

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<sup>18</sup> 2014 Governance Report, p.19

([https://www.unila.edu.br/sites/default/files/files/Relat%C3%B3rio\\_de\\_Gest%C3%A3o\\_2014\\_-\\_UNILA.pdf](https://www.unila.edu.br/sites/default/files/files/Relat%C3%B3rio_de_Gest%C3%A3o_2014_-_UNILA.pdf))

However, for this to be possible, internationalization needs to be (re)oriented towards co-existence in a finite planet facing unprecedented multiple crises, which requires that different frameworks of thought and global collaborative efforts be addressed. The fact that there are multiple, viable approaches to HE internationalization within Brazil, of which UNILA's solidarity emphasis is only one, contrasts with much of the Global North, where an instrumental approach to internationalization (Stier, 2004), organized by the broader context of an increasingly corporate higher education sector, has shrunk the available spaces and opportunities for debating, let alone creating, alternative approaches to internationalization. We therefore conclude this article not with a prescription that higher education in Canada should aim to be more like that of Brazil, but rather with a call to re-emphasize the importance of preserving postsecondary institutions as spaces where critically informed, socially accountable, multi-voiced, rigorous and sober conversations about alternative societies, economies, and futures can take place.

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