

Immersed in the Dominant Global Imaginary: Reflecting on Internationalization of Higher Education Discourses in Brazil

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Abstract

As a result of the reconfiguration of the functions performed by higher education worldwide, efforts directed at the process conventionally called internationalization are intensified and expressed as an imperative. In this study, an extract of a doctoral research supported by the epistemological lenses of Modernity/(De)Coloniality and based on principles of the Critical Discourse Analysis, we contextualize and discuss the discourses undertaken by an organization with discursive power towards the internationalization of Brazilian universities. The analysis suggests the existence of a hegemonic narrative around the meaning of internationalization, giving the broader context that this Association is immersed. The privileged narratives end up reinforcing the idea that in Brazil internationalization is, above all, an object of external determinations. In this sense it tends to ignore the complexity-heterogeneity of the Brazilian university and the international relations that have been unequally constituted over history, and which are functional to the advance of currently ongoing global university capitalism.

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Introduction

In this paper, inserted into the line of critical studies on internationalization of higher education (Stein, 2017), we assume that: 1. Any critical efforts to deal with the university and international relations established in this domain are enriched when situated in colonial history; 2. This process is immersed in a hierarchical paradigm that potentially reinforces inequalities of power, knowledge and being; 3. The way discursive practices are configured favors reproductions and transformations, and discursive change often precedes and makes social change easier, and 4. In Brazil the process of internationalization of higher education has consolidated hegemonically, in accordance with the dominant perspective worldwide.

Supported by the epistemological lenses of Modernity/(De)Coloniality (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018), we contextualize and debate the discourses undertaken by an organization with discursive power on the directions taken by internationalization at Brazilian universities, given its involvement with the international offices of universities. We produced data by direct observation (2017, 2018, 2019), individual interviews (2019), documentary and bibliographical research, and analyzed these data based on Fairclough's general principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (2003, 2006, 2016), which examines the role of language, both in the reproduction of social practices and ideologies, and in social transformation, given the understanding that the discourse is, on the one hand, shaped by the social structure and, on the other, constituted by this structure.

The Invention of Universality

For studies that conceive colonialism as a condition of the present and denounce its consequences on contemporary modes of being, thinking and acting, modernity cannot be understood in its totality by reference to internal factors of eighteenth century Europe, such as the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

The Research Network on Modernity/Coloniality (*Modernidad/Colonialidad*) moves the origins of modernity to the conquest of America and the control of the Atlantic after 1492, identifying the subalternization of cultures and knowledges as one of its structuring dimensions. According to this understanding, *Abya Yala*¹, or Latin America, represents the genesis of a standard of power characteristic of relations of appropriation and extractivism that expanded worldwide (Escobar, 2003; Mignolo, 2003) and nowadays ontologically degrades bodies and souls in the belief that "everything that differs from the Eurocentric view of the world is inferior, marginal, irrelevant or dangerous" (Sousa Santos, 2022, p. 18).

This perpetuated pattern of power was edified through the naturalization of the idea that phenotypic features reflect a distinct biological structure, as well as by the

articulation of all historical forms of controlling and exploiting work around the capital and the world market. Its global expansion culminated in instituting world capitalism as a hegemonic structure of production relations, and situated Western Europe at the heart of a system that articulates race and labor according to the needs of capital, to the benefit of the white Europeans (Quijano, 2005).

From this perspective, the end of colonialism did not undo coloniality which, as a complex structure of power extends up to the present time and influences the various material and subjective dimensions of everyday social existence (Adams & Abba, 2022). Behind the rhetoric that “promises happiness and salvation through conversation, progress, civilization, modernization, development and market democracy” (Mignolo, 2018, p. 142, our translation), the narrative of modernity builds fields of representation that perpetuate the expansion of capitalism and the reinscription of humankind into a radical hierarchy. Thus, at the same time it includes a rational concept of emancipation, it develops an irrational myth that justifies its genocidal violence.

Challenging the Imperative of Internationalization of Higher Education

In times of reconfiguration of the functions of higher education in the world, internationalization has been treated by dominant discourses as an unconditional asset; an unequivocal and neutral path to be traveled by those who aspire to become an active part of the ‘global economy of knowledge’. As a counterpoint to this narrative, a growing perspective of internationalization studies (Stein, 2017) sheds light on the circumstantial character of this process, showing how the global trends in higher education are ‘digested’ differently and denouncing the discrepancy of the roles played in this context.

In Brazil, the process of internationalization has been historically subordinated to the priorities and developmental interests of the State. The implementation of policies depending on international relations has always been linked with the development of the system itself, given the participation of external actors – especially the United States – in determining historical processes, such as the creation of the first public universities, the modernization of higher education, and the expansion and consolidation of the postgraduate system (Knobel et al., 2020).

Critical studies on internationalization in Brazil characterize this process as colonized and colonizing (Piccin & Finardi, 2021), incipient, reactive and passive (Amorim & Finardi, 2022), more competitive than cooperative (Finardi et al., 2022), induced by developmental interests (Knobel et al., 2020) and not situated nor directed toward the needs of the Global South (Leal et al., 2022). Privileged strategies meet the broader purpose of inducing the University to achieve higher levels of international reputation: an individualized competitive advantage perspective that integrates the logic of accumulation and stratification of the capitalist economic mindset (Leal, 2020).

Impositions on internationalization, however, do not occur through determination or oppression; these are seductive and ‘rational’ movements that naturalize specific practices as needed (Leite & Genro, 2012). As a consequence of the restrictions on what is associated with ‘quality’ or ‘excellence’ and classified as ‘international’, countries, universities and individuals are associated with specific places and social roles, reinforcing unequal geographies of power, knowledge and being.

Methodology

As part of a doctoral research that analyzed discourses on internationalization in different institutions involved with higher education in Brazil, this article focuses on discourses on internationalization evidenced in the context of a Brazilian association of international education. Results have been published in articles, book chapters, and reports.

Data production included direct observation, an individual interview - complementing other published interviews and declarations - and documentary and bibliographic research. To conduct the interview, we had a pre-script (guiding questions). Yet, we sought to privilege the dialogical character of the interaction so that the discourses emerged in the most authentic and natural way possible. Those questions were: 1. How would you define the Association in terms of its main missions and work it develops?; 2. How is the relationship between the Association and the federal government, for example, in regard to programs such as the Science without Borders and the Institutional Program of Internationalization (Capes-PrInt)?; 3. What were the Association’s most significant recent projects?; 4. Who are the Association’s main partners today?; 5. In your recent interview with The Pie News you mention the importance of fostering relations with the Global South, could you talk more about this and mention ongoing projects in this regard?

The research covered the period from 2013, when the Association reached a prominent level of recognition in the landscape of internationalization, and started to advocate more actively for the internationalization of Brazilian universities. The environments milieus of direct observation were three annual conferences in which we had the opportunity to participate in person, in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The interviewed participant was the President of the Association. The interview took place in the online format, on December, 2019, and lasted 41 min. The documental and bibliographic materials which supported the interpretation of the data were the following:

- Institutional documents such as the organization statute.
- News disseminated by and about the Association from its official page and publications on social media.
- Interviews given by the Association executive board and chairmanship.
- General information and programs of annual conferences of the Association.
- Publications and presentations performed by the Association, precisely: 1. Guide to Brazilian Higher Education Courses in English (2016); 2. Guide to English as a Medium of Instruction in Brazilian Higher Education

Institutions (2018); 3. Higher education and Student Mobility: A Capacity building pilot study in Brazil (2017); 4. Language policy for the internationalization of higher education (2017); Webinar on internationalization strategic planning; 5. An article on internationalization (2019).

We grouped the primary data as: 1. Transcript of the interview; 2. Transcripts of lectures on direct observations and 3. Field notes on the direct observations. We also grouped the secondary data as: 1. News published by and about the Association ; 2. Published interviews of the Association representatives; 3. General information and annual conference programs; 4. Other publications related to internationalization; and 5. Videos.

While fully reading the produced material and grouping its content according to its type/nature, we selected free quotations with commentaries that would later provide information for our analyses. After, we organized the contents of the free quotations according to the convergences found in the narratives on ATLAS.ti 8[®] software.

We used the principles of Fairclough' Critical Discourse Analysis of Discourse (CDA) (2003, 2006, 2016) for the interpretation exercise, seeking indications of coloniality (and of detachment from the colonial logic) in the narratives on the internationalization that predominates in the context of the Association. CDA examines the role of language both in the reproduction of social practices and ideologies, and in social transformation, given the assumption that discourse is, on the one hand, shaped by the social structure and on the other, a constituent of this same structure. This means that for CDA, discursive change often precedes and facilitates social change (Fairclough, 2006, 2016).

The theoretical-analytical framework built by Leal et al. (2018) also served as a background for the analysis. This framework is constituted by thirteen dimensions whose descriptions help reveal the dominant epistemological orientation in discourses of internationalization: 1. Historical background; 2. Conception and values of higher education; 3. Conception of valid knowledge; 4. Predominant motivations and interests; 5. Scope of management of internationalization; 6. Concepts, dimensions and indicators of internationalization; 7. Direction of policies, programs and strategies; 8. University Relations with Society 9. Understanding of Global South and Global North; 10. Evaluation policies; 11. Curricular policies; 12. Language policies; 13. Research agendas.

Analysis and Discussion

While several studies discuss internationalization from the perspective of higher education institutions, given their supposed autonomy to outline and operationalize strategies, the literature has pointed to direct and indirect, objective and subjective, active and passive influences of actors outside these institutions on the directions of this process (Leal, 2020). Therefore, we will present the analysis of the discourses of the Brazilian Association of International Education in five points: (a) positioning

within the landscape of internationalization of Brazilian higher education; (b) projects and partners preferences; (c) the promotion of English as the language of internationalization; (d) the orientation of conferences; and (e) the overall understanding of internationalization and the place of the global south.

Positioning Within the Landscape of Internationalization of Brazilian Higher Education

In Brazil, there is an Association of International Education which significantly influences the international relations offices of Brazilian universities. This agency was created in 1988 and spells out its fundamental purpose as promoting the betterment of international exchange and cooperation as instruments to improve teaching, research, extension and administration of affiliated institutions, seeking to stimulate the constant improvement of management of international exchange and cooperation (Brazilian Association of International Education, 2019, p. 1, own translation).

Recognized (and self-recognized) as the Brazilian organization that is the greatest advocate of internationalization in the country, this agency promotes publications, seminars, workshops, regional meetings and annual international conferences on the topic, besides proposing to divulge Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (HEI) *“to the development agencies, diplomatic representations, international agencies (organs) and programs”* (Brazilian Association of International Education, 2019, p. 1, own translation).

The following discourses provide examples of perceptions regarding the role played by the Association and its search for legitimation *“to act as privileged interlocutor in decision-making in the field of academic international relations”* (Stallivieri, 2004, p. 10, own translation):

“There are very few studies analyzing the process of tertiary education institutions in the region. We can cite [...] the research studies of regional associations such as [...] [Association’s name]” (Gacel-Ávila, 2019, p. 12. Our italics, own translation).

“It is recognized not only nationally, but internationally. It has this function of connecting. Many people seek out [Association’s name] to reach a larger group of institutions. We are a channel for connection, opportunities, contacts, and this is very clearly perceived. I think it was an achievement that occurred over time, an association that manages to articulate throughout the country and has a range of members that is a good representation of the system in this country. [...] All federal institutions are with us, all the state ones are with us [...]” (President, 2019, in interview. Our italics, own translation).

By *“capacitating, advocating and promoting Brazilian higher education abroad”* (executive director) (The Pie News, 2014, p. 1, own translation), [Association’s name] takes unto itself the mission of driving the internationalization process at the

associated institutions and considers that it has “*an important role in the development of strategies, plans, priorities and objectives in terms of internationalization of Brazilian higher education*” (executive director) (The Pie News, 2014, p. 1, own translation).

The Association attained an outstanding differentiated level in the scenario of international higher education, and began to advocate more actively in favor of internationalization in the context of the implementation and development of the international academic mobility program Science without Borders (Ciência sem Fronteiras) (CsF), in 2011:

“[...] we also began to be known. [...] For [Association’s name] it was a major component in the change that [Association’s name] made in its own way of structuring the conferences, [...] in this context [Association’s name] managed to perform a good development of its role as articulator, it managed to make good use of the moment in its role of advocating internationalization of higher education in Brazil” (President, 2019, in interview. Our italics).

It was in this scenario that the agency began to interact more intensively with governments, universities, and other institutions of the Global North, besides integrating projects funded by programs such as Erasmus + of the European Union. It also began to organize missions abroad with representatives of the better positioned universities of Brazil and booths in the annual fairs of NAFSA (United States) and of the *European Association for International Education* (EAIE) (European Union), “*the two largest world events in the field of international education*” (Executive-Director) (Zicman, 2019, p. 255, own translation).

The Association covers over two hundred full members and collaborators, with associated HEIs in all regions of Brazil. and in 2019, 53.3% of its members were public institutions gathering 24.7% of the post-graduate enrollment in Brazil (Zicman, 2019), which enjoy greater interaction with the Brazilian government through the Ministry of Education (MEC) and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Staff (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Capes). The following reports express the relevance of the Association in this environment:

“I would say that [Association’s name] has played an increasingly important role [working with the Brazilian government] and has an open dialogue with the representatives of the Brazilian government – the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Development and the Ministry of Foreign Relations – the three with whom we work in close collaboration” (Executive Director) (The Pie News, 2014, p. 2, own translation).

“Last Tuesday (18) the board of directors of [Association’s name] participated in workshops about the quality of the internationalization offered by Capes to the British Council during the seminar “Guarantee Of Quality in Internationalization” (Brazilian Association of International Education, 2019b, p. 1, own translation).

Projects and Partners Preferences

Among recent projects in which the Association has participated or participates, we highlight the following, which were mostly developed in partnership with USA and European organizations, above all from the United Kingdom:

- (a) The *Brazilian Virtual Exchange* (BRaVE) Program, that encourages the implantation of virtual academic exchange at associated universities through *Collaborative Online International Learning* (COIL);
- (b) The transnational Project *Turning América Latina* (ACE), co-funded by the European Commission, within the sphere of the Erasmus + Program CBHE, that involves more than twenty institutions in Latin America and Europe;
- (c) The ‘*Virtual Wednesdays*’ webinars, that offer capacity building in practices on internationalization, and ‘*International Talks*’, in partnership with the British Council;
- (d) The Covid-19 repository which “gathers reports on experiences, good practices, measures, orientations, recommendations and other actions and documents related to dealing with Covid-19 by the HEIs and other organizations of Brazil and abroad “ (Brazilian Association of International Education, 2022, p. 1, own translation).
- (e) The *Tomorrow: Global Perspectives for Higher Education Internationalization* Project that gathers together the statements of 33 “specialists from different regions of the world about the challenges and opportunities for the internationalization of higher education, in the current and future context” (Brazilian Association of International Education, 2022, p. 1, own translation).
- (f) Collection of data for the report *Higher Education and Student Mobility: A Capacity Building Pilot Study in Brazil*, in partnership with Capes, for the IIE Center for Academic Mobility Research and Impact (IIE, 2017), aimed at “*developing resources and tools that can be used by national institutions and agencies to create or improve their collection processes for data on higher education and international mobility*” (IIE, 2017, p. 3, our translation);
- (g) The Erasmus + Program Regional Network for Development of Internationalization of Higher Education in Latin America (RIESAL-Erasmus+), which aimed at “*contributing to the improvement of the management culture for internationalization at the higher education institutions of Latin America and the Caribbean*” (RIESAL-Erasmus+, 2019, p. 1. Our italics, own translation) and comprised the following: a) Training Program Improvement of management of internationalization in Higher Education; b) *Webinars* focused on sharing ‘good practices’ of internationalization; c) Courses, seminars and conferences; and d) Publications of studies/books on internationalization in Latin America and the Caribbean. During the *2019 Conference of the Americas on International Education*, members of

RIESAL-Erasmus + launched the RIESAL *Network*, for capacity-building actions for internationalizations to be developed even after the Project ended (The Pie News, 2019; President of the Association, 2019, in interview, own translation);

- (h) Project Recognition Matters (REC-MAT-Erasmus+), conceived in the Erasmus + Program, aiming to “contribute to facilitate and promote the exchange between students from Europe and Latin America” besides “sensitizing the teaching staff to the importance of complete academic recognition, as well as to the relevance of internationalization of the Higher Education Institutions” (REC-MAT-ERASMUS+, 2019, p. 1);
- (i) The Latin American Initiative for Internationalization of Higher Education (INILAT), created during the Covid-19 pandemic by networks and associations of international education in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Peru, “to share challenges and develop actions based on a regional perspective with a global view” (Brazilian Association of International Education, 2022, p. 1);
- (j) The joint publication with the British Council of the *Guide to Brazilian Higher Education Courses in English* (British Council Brasil, 2016) and of the *Guide to English as a Medium of Instruction in Brazilian Higher Education Institutions* (Gimenez et al., 2018), which has a portal to search for courses/disciplines offered in English at Brazilian universities (British Council Brasil, 2019). In 2022, Brazilian Association of International Education performed a survey of Courses, Disciplines and Activities Offered in Foreign Languages in order to update these publications.; and
- (k) The organization, in partnership with UNESP, of the 2023 edition of the International Congress of Virtual Exchange, held in Brazil for the first time.

The Promotion of English as the Language of Internationalization

In the opening of the *Guide to Brazilian Higher Education Courses in English* (British Council Brasil, 2016), the president of the Association highlights:

“We are certain that the information contained in this guide can encourage more higher education institutions to develop courses and disciplines in English, increasing the possibilities of attracting international students to Brazil and contributing to the process of internationalization of Brazilian higher education (President) (British Council Brasil, 2016, p. 4. Our italics, own translation).

In the context of the publication of the *Guide to English as a Medium of Instruction in Brazilian Higher Education Institutions* (Gimenez et al., 2018), the executive director spells out the role of the Association in the advocacy of using English as a means of instruction: “*We have [told] the universities that by offering opportunities in English [they] will be able to receive international students*” (Executive Director) (The Pie

News, 2018, p. 1 Our italics. Own translation); a view that had already been shared in a 2014 interview: “*We cannot be global in this part of the world without offering courses or diplomas in English.*” (Executive Director) (The Pie News, 2014, p. 1, our translation. Our italics). She also attributes an equivalence between international activity and the use of English as a means of instruction: “*The executive director of [Association’s name] [...] highlighted that of the 2,400 Brazilian HEIs, many do not offer international activities*” (The Pie News, 2018, p. 1, our translation).

The former president of the Association, in a RIESAL-Erasmus + Webinar, expresses the meanings he attributes to internationalization when he establishes a direct relationship with the use of English as a means of instruction and diffusion of the production of knowledge, denoting certainty regarding the need of this language and doubt about the others:

“What could internationalization be? [...] Is Internationalization teaching in English: Yes, increasingly, internationalization is to teach in English. Only in English? Maybe not, maybe it is necessary to teach in other languages, but a question we have to face and be aware of is that it is impossible to avoid this question of teaching in English. Often in Latin America we face problems related to this teaching in English” (Ex-president of the Association, 2018, in RIESAL-Erasmus + Webinar) (RIESAL-ERASMUS+, 2018. Our italics, own translation).

“Is internationalization publishing in English? Yes it is publishing in English. In other languages, yes, other languages also, but again we have to accept the matter of English as lingua franca. Disseminating the knowledge we produce does indeed require publication in English” (Ex-president of the Association, 2018, in RIESAL – Erasmus + Webinar) (RIESAL-ERASMUS+, 2018, own translation).

The Association also seem to attribute to the other languages the condition of ‘accessories’ in the context of internationalization, naturalizing English as the only vehicle for knowledge in the modern world :

“[Association’s name] developed a project with the British Council to get to know the international activities, such as short duration courses, disciplines, internships offered by its members. [...] This resulted in a Guide of English as a Means of Instruction (Guia de Inglês como Meio de Instrução) recently published and found for downloading at the sites of [Association’s name] and the British Council. There you can have an overview of what is offered not only in English but also in other languages, including Portuguese for foreigners. It should be emphasized that language is essential for any international process and cannot be ignored by the Brazilian HEIs that intend to promote internationalization” (President of the Association) (The Pie News, 2019, p. 1. Our italics, own translation).

Also in the domain of the relationship between language and internationalization, in 2017 the Association created a Work Group on Linguistic Policies for

Internationalization aiming to “*elaborate suggestions to guide the linguistics policy of internationalization of higher education of Brazilian institutions*” (Brazilian Association of International Education, 2017, p. 4). Although it acknowledges that “*it is essential to always consider, in planning and executing the internationalization actions, the linguistic issues based on the specific interests presented by the academic communities*”, the document uses a functionalist approach to treat both internationalization and linguistic policies and confers on English the *status* of instrument to advance the process of internationalization institutionally, emphasizing the need for indicators to evaluate it and recognize the individual actions undertaken in this sense.

The Orientation of Conferences

Besides participation in these projects, the annual conferences reach a significant number of participants from Brazil and abroad. In 2018, there were 770 participants from 29 countries, representing all continents, with international leaders, university presidents/vice presidents, representatives of international organizations, diplomats, governments and companies, besides specialists, teachers and students/researchers (Brazilian Association of International Education, 2018). The reputation of the conference in the domain of international higher education is expressed by different actors in the field:

“Most important event on internationalization of higher education in Brazil” (DAAD Brasil, 2018, p. 1. Our italics);

“Brazil was the center of the university world [...] the [Association’s name] Conference was held, on the topic of ‘Internationalization and Research: Challenges and Strategies’, organized by the Brazilian Association of International Education” (OUI-IOHE, 2018, p. 1. Our italics);

“[Association’s name] is the most important event on internationalization of higher education in South America” (Embaixada e Consulados dos EUA no Brasil, 2018, p. 1. Our italics)

A look at the prominent characteristics of Association’s annual conferences, including the contents discussed in the programs, enables us to point to the following patterns:

1. Predominant use of English as the language for communication, in detriment of Portuguese and Spanish, both in the opening and closing lectures, and in the presentations, workshops and roundtables, although the conferences accept papers submitted in all three languages. In addition, a significant growth in linguistic matters (and of English) as topics of discussion, as demonstrated by Baumvol and Sarmiento (2019, p. 45, own translation) in the analysis of

lectures from 2013 to 2017: “[...] due to its status as world language in the academic and scientific environment, [...] it was by far the most frequent language in all conference programs”.

2. Focus on the operationalization/‘good practices’ of the internationalization process in the context of the Brazilian HEI (with rare discussions that problematize more structural issues related to the phenomenon), reflected in the large amount of presentations aimed at this purpose and on the prescriptive and hegemonic approach adopted in most cases, such as: *“How to manage an International Relations office”*; *“Double degrees: what, why and how to make them happen?”*; *“The use of the English Language in a Brazilian University: The Praxis of implementation”*; *“EMI: Teaching your subject in English”*; *“How to prepare a good Erasmus + Capacity Building project”*; *“Supporting the Internationalisation of Higher Education through English”*; *“A good practice experience of the Erasmus + Project”*; *“Parana speaks English: a program to support internationalization in Parana State”*;
3. Greater importance placed on relations with the countries that compose the center of the world system, reflected mainly in the:
 - (a) Large number of *workshops*/presentations specifically aimed at strengthening such relations, with a frequent predominance of approaches that, objectively or subjectively, situate the North as a model, supplier of services or recipient of academic flows, besides the choice of a representative of the World Bank as keynote speaker in the 2019 edition.
 - (b) Significant presence of representatives of governments and consultants of USA and European organizations as presenters, such as: U.S. Embassy Brazil; U.S. Department of State; EducationUSA; NAFSA; IEE; SUNY COIL Center; EURAXESS Brazil; Delegation of the European Union to Brazil; Erasmus; Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Brazil; DAAD; Nuffic Neso Brazil; Embassy of France in Brazil; Embassy of Italy in Brazil; Ministry of Education and Research of Italy; Swissnex Brazil; Education New Zealand; Australian Embassy in Brazil; QS Intelligence Unit; and Cambridge Assessment English.
 - (c) Emphasis given to institutions and countries of the Global North at the opening ceremonies and during the conferences, as from 2014 to 2022 the vast majority of sponsors were from the United States or Europe. Regarding the profile of sponsors, there were: 1. Companies recruiting international students (such as FPPEDUMedia and BMI) and companies that develop educational products and tests (such as ETS); 2. Governmental diplomatic missions (such as the USA Diplomatic Mission and the Embassy of France in Brazil); 3. Official agencies of higher education of governments (such as *Campus France*; the *British Council*; *Education in Ireland*, and *Latino New Zealand*); and 4. Agencies of the Brazilian Government (such as Capes). Only in 2022 there were international sponsors from Global South, such as the

Programa de Internacionalización de la Educación Superior y Cooperación Internacional; and the *Feria Internacional de Educación Superior Argentina*.

4. Overall marginalization of the relations with Global South/with Latin America during the conferences, reflected mainly in the:
 - (a) Small number of presentations focusing on such relations;
 - (b) Small number of Brazilians present at the sessions on Latin America, which induced the dialogue regarding the topic to remain limited to other Latin American countries;
 - (c) Growing presence of an abstract and naturalized discourse saying that the Latin American countries do not cooperate with each other and that it is necessary to expand relations, without reflexive discussions on the reasons why this happens. Regarding this aspect, we found that, to a large extent, the presentations by individuals from Latin American countries introduced in the conferences a more problematized bias about internationalization. The contents of papers such as the following highlight this: *“University internationalization from a non-hegemonic perspective. Contributions from the Network of Studies on the Internationalization of Higher Education in Latin America; “We celebrate diversity and seek solidarity in internationalization; Perceptions, concepts and practices of internationalization: looks from different actors; “Internationalization and integration of the social commitment and innovation from the public universities of AUGM; Strategies of university internationalization in Argentina. Perspectives and challenges in the promotion of CRES 2018; “One hundred years of the Cordoba Movement: Genealogy for a Latin American perspective of internationalization of higher education”*”.

The Overall Understanding of Internationalization and the Place of the Global South

The patterns of the analyzed material suggest how the Association, with its actions, priorities, approaches and epistemic activities involving internationalization tends to favor the advance of the hegemonic discourse on this process. This tendency is also present in its active participation and support to programs such as Capes-PrInt, an initiative created in 2017 by the Brazilian government to promote institutionalization of internationalization at some of the country’s universities that are well-consolidated in terms of research. As argued by Knobel et al. (2020, p. 683, own translation), Capes-PrInt is a strategy for internationalization supported by an explicit competitive basis: “[...] it establishes criteria that exclude most of the university institutions of the Country”.

Arguing that internationalization is an imperative – *“It is impossible to be a modern HEI without a high degree of internationalization”* – and presuming that there is only

one adequate path to internationalize (the one that has been established by situated actors with specific interests, most of which refer to the Association's main partners), The Association considers that the institutions that do not participate on Capes-PrInt should follow the same steps.

Behind the idea of 'raising awareness' to internationalize is an understanding that internationalization is an objective process to which all university communities should bow. As a consequence of an imaginary that categorizes this process as inevitable, the absence of a culture aimed at internationalization is put in deficit terms. This epistemological confidence and the sense of superiority about what it means to internationalize, as well as the appropriate perspective of internationalization to be pursued, induces institutional actors who 'oppose' to the consolidation of this process to be developed (civilized, improved, educated) (Dussel, 1993) In large measure, English is considered the language of internationalization, and also as a means to receive international students, which suggests its preference for a specific type of international student: the Westernized individual. In the same way, it transposes the abstract concept and rhetoric of internationalization from the Global North to the Brazilian context without problematizing the dilemmas associated with this phenomenon:

"A major factor: you have there a link [...] to this book. And it is free of charge, you can download it [...] and it is excellent material for an initial contact [with internationalization]. This year Professor Hudzik launched a second publication, which is not yet freely available, but the first version is very rich material that is worthwhile consulting [referring to the work 'Comprehensive Internationalization by Hudzik, 2011, published by NAFSA]" (Ex-president of the Association, 2018, in RIESAL-Erasmus + Webinar) (RIESAL-ERASMUS+, 2018. Our italics).

"Another small figure developed by the American Council on Education [...]. It shows that broad internationalization has to be something transversal to its institution. It has to be a commitment articulated with all sectors of the institution, it has to be present in the administrative leadership of your administration, it has to be present in the curriculum we offer our students [...]" (Ex-president of the Association, 2018, in RIESAL-Erasmus + Webinar) (RIESAL-ERASMUS+, 2018. Our italics).

"How can one internationalize? I think that this is done by understanding the benefits that internationalization gives to the institutions of higher education [...] and seeing how this can benefit our institutions. Rendering the managers effectively aware, engaging them in the internationalization. (Ex-president of Association, 2018, in RIESAL-Erasmus + Webinar) (RIESAL-ERASMUS+, 2018. Our italics).

The Association also privileges, by various means, the relations with the Global North, and they appear in their discourses as the strongest and most traditional. It is not by chance that the Association considers the European Union as the main reference

for Brazil and, in mentioning the main partners, limits itself to organizations and countries of the North:

“And most of them [of the international students in mobility in Brazil] are European, because our European partners were the most important in Brazil, especially Germany, France and the United Kingdom” (Executive Director) (The Pie News, 2014, p. 2. Our italics, own translation).

“I would tell you that we have several important partners, we have Germany, we have New Zealand, we have Ireland, we have the United Kingdom, they have always sought us out, they have always participated in [Association’s name], they have always, in a way, sponsored our conference [...]. There is Canada, the United States that have always been present with us, and I think that they see [Association’s name] as a very important space for articulation” (President, 2019, in interview).

Although the most recent discourses of the Association emphasize the need to develop relations with the South, such countries are perceived by the Association as strange, unknown, difficult to interact with:

“[...] I would say that in the last 10 years we have observed an increased South-South collaboration [...]. Indeed, we know little about the educational system on those continents.[...]. Brazilian higher education institutions know more about the systems of higher education, their quality and evaluation in Europe and the USA, than in any country in Latin America. What I’m saying is that we must get to know each other better and achieve trust. [...] (President) (The Pie News, 2019, p. 1. Our italics, own translation).

“We know very little about the other structures. We know very little about the structures of Latin America [...] We know very little about the structures and procedures of Africa, the Asia/Pacific. So, for many decades we have been closer to the European countries, to Canada, to the United States, than, for instance, to Chile, to Colombia, to Argentina” (President, 2019, in interview).

In essence, relations with the South tend to be conceived as something outside the ‘true internationalization’ (the Eurocentric one, legitimate, ‘universally’ valid); an alternative (including in ‘times of crisis’) to interaction with North American and European universities, treated as models. Furthermore, in practice, interactions with the South established with the participation of the Association, tend to occur through actors of the center of the world system:

“[Association’s name] participated in an Erasmus + project called RIESAL [...], that aims to create capacities at the higher education institutions of the region for the design, implementation and management of the higher education internationalization

process. It involved 14 institutions of higher education and three associations of international education [...]. It is a type of initiative with a high potential to promote international partnerships in the Latin American region". (President) (The Pie News, 2019, p. 1. Our italics, own translation).

"Together with cooperation with the largest institutions in the world, [Association's name] recognizes that cooperation between institutions with similar profiles must also be a priority for the Brazilian higher education institutions." (Executive Director) (Zicman, 2019, p. 256, our translation. Our italics).

When advocating for internationalization at any cost, hardly challenging the underlying unequal structures in which this process operates, the Association tends to ignore issues of power, privilege, marginalization and hegemony. By conceiving internationalization as a kind of unconditional good, the Association limits reflexivity regarding the implications of its choices on the directions of Brazilian higher education, although acknowledging its capacity to influence and shape discourses and strategies in the field.

Privileged perspectives reveal the absorption and reproduction of a consensual and hegemonic view about what it means to internationalize, in general limited to: the use of English in teaching and knowledge production; change of curriculum to meet the expectations of the capitalist world market; attracting students and researchers from "world class universities"; and institutionalizing partnerships with universities that are well-positioned in university rankings. Regional and South-South cooperation emerge, ultimately, as resources for recognition as an international leader. Combined, these strategies meet the broader purpose of inducing the university to attain higher levels of international reputation: a perspective of individualized competitive advantage.

In summary, the epistemology that sustains the perspective of internationalization that is predominant at the Association shows itself to be functional for the current stage of global university/academic capitalism under development: yet unintentionally, it tends to favor a logic of accumulation and stratification, based on narratives that naturalize unequal relations.

Yet, as highlighted by Leal et al. (2022), one of the recent developments in the field of internationalization is a greater recognition of ethical and political issues that are complex, contradictory and contestable. This tendency has been observed in the most recent initiatives of the Association, such as in the themes of its two last annual conferences: "Building knowledge with all voices" and "Inviting for a new journey". Understanding if such initiatives transcend the colonial imaginary and indeed recognize and promote the plurality of the world is an empirical question. As such, it requires going beyond the promises and discourses emphasized about it.

Final Considerations

Epistemology prescribes and shapes the ontology or materiality of the world. As a cultural matrix of power, coloniality contemplates not only material dimensions, but also

epistemic dimensions, which reveals the importance of “denaturalizing ideological issues sustained by the discourses, but of which, in general, people are not conscious in their social practices” (Salles, 2014, p. 28, own translation). In this study, based on the critical studies on internationalization of higher education (Stein, 2017), the assumption of Modernity/(De)coloniality and on principles of Critical Discourse Analysis, we contextualized and discussed the discourses undertaken by an organization with discursive power regarding the directions taken by the internationalization of Brazilian universities. The purpose, however, was not to judge the organization itself, but to demonstrate how discourses of internationalization in different Brazilian institutions, like this one, involved with this process have a colonial background.

Although internationalization proposes to ‘cover the world’, dominant discourses about this process do not appear to contemplate the complexity and diversity inherent to the contemporaneous Brazilian university, nor to consider the academic relations that have been unequally constituted throughout history. These discourses contribute to the volatilization and disappearance of the other epistemological possibilities that do not stick to its principles. On taking distance from broader discussions about geopolitical structural inequalities, ethical responsibilities and alternative possibilities of engagement among cultures, they remain attached to the dominant rationality, moving away from the possibility of transforming internationalization into a more democratic and pluralistic project.

Considering the effort to emphasize the complex of relations hidden behind the modern/colonial rhetoric on ‘progress, happiness and salvation’ that permeates dominant discourses of internationalization, we encourage the development of studies aimed at tracing signs of struggles, actions and uses of agency/autonomy that have enabled the (re)imagination of alternatives to the dominant model. Regarding the limits of the study, we highlight that, ultimately, results reflect a specific corpus of analysis and period of time. Mostly, they relate to the broader context in which the Association is immersed. Despite these limits, our expectation is that the research will stimulate the development of more reflective, systematic and participatory analyzes on the reasons for internationalizing and the ways of internationalizing the University.

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Note

1. Abya Yala, in the language of the Cuna indigenous people, means Mature Land, Flowered Land, and has been used by indigenous peoples and other social movements as a form of identity and belonging within the territory of Latin America.

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