

“To Educate and Liberate?” Moving from Coloniality to Postcoloniality in the International Branch Campus Model

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ABSTRACT

The international branch campus is a model of transnational higher education that establishes institutional outposts abroad to expand student access, collaborative research, language proficiency, and recognized degree programs to participants. The growing body of literature on IBCs presents this phenomenon as an exercise in intercultural managerial effectiveness, which overlooks its role in the perpetuation of colonial constructs, narratives, and practices. This article critiques the impact of IBCs on host cultures through postcolonial and decolonial theory, asserting that meaningful transnational collaborations are predicated on dismantling hegemonic belief systems, as well as structural legacies of colonial relations.

Keywords: decolonial theory, globalization, hegemony, international branch campus, postcolonialism

“Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate.”

- Edward W. Said, *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 2003

Introduction

International Branch Campuses (IBCs) have emerged as a major phenomenon in global higher education over the past two decades, predominantly initiated by established institutions in developed of the North and West¹ and installed in less developed nations. A recent report from the Cross-Border Education Research Team identifies 306 IBCs operating in 37 countries, with the most prevalent exporters based in the U.S. (86), the United Kingdom (43), France (38), Russia (29), and Australia (20) (C-BERT, 2020).

¹ The descriptors “Western” and “Northern” are used interchangeably here, as the literature uses both to denote characteristics of Eurocentric or North American hegemony, linked to global capitalism and its instrumentalist attributes that are imposed on societies of the Global South through economic, political, and cultural domination. Conversely, the “South” and “East” denote formerly colonized countries that are in an earlier stage of economic development.

There are myriad motivating factors behind this trend, emanating from the respective political and economic agendas of both sending and receiving countries. Yet, there is limited critical analysis of the cultural impact of IBCs in their host countries, particularly with regard to the hegemonic role they play in defining host national identities, dominating the higher education sector, and suppressing local knowledge production. While Transnational Education (TNE) has made many positive contributions to cross-cultural knowledge, it cannot be disentangled from the complex power relationships between participating countries and their institutions. Of the varied manifestations of TNE, IBCs occupy a unique position in the spectrum, as they physically insert foreign university branches into host cultures that often hold distinct cultural values and national priorities.

Garrett (2018) of the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (*OBHE*) defines the IBC as:

An entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; and provides an entire academic program, substantially on site, leading to a degree awarded by the foreign education provider (p. 14).

This project focuses specifically on branch campuses that are established by Western institutions in non-Western host countries, to more effectively track the perpetuation of historical colonial ideologies into the present. As Stein (2021) asserts, “(w)ealthy Western nation-states continue to have the most political, economic, and epistemic power, largely owing to the ongoing legacies of colonialism... However, they are certainly not the only countries (re)framing their curricula toward the imperative of national advantage” (p. 7).

Motivations for Western institutions to establish IBCs include “push” factors, such as the pressure to increase tuition revenue, internationalize home campuses, enhance global reputation, and ensure control over facilities abroad for research and study abroad (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Guimon, 2016; Lanford & Tierney, 2016; Wilkins, 2020). Also present are “pull” factors that originate from the host country government or funder: the promotion of direct foreign investment through tax incentives or government subsidies, reduction of “brain drain,” development of an internationally trained workforce, and external validation of national institutions that host or partner with IBCs, to name a few (Guimon, 2016; Hill & Thabet, 2018; Knight 2011; Lanford & Tierney, 2016; Mackie, 2019).

With the significant global decline of governmental support for higher education in both Western and non-Western countries, there has been a corresponding proliferation of private and transnational institutions that endeavor to generate displaced revenue and a shrinking student market (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Kent, 2020;). Further, with the classification of higher education as a traded “service” under the articles of the General Agreement on Trade and Services of the World Trade Organization, the activities comprising TNE are commonly framed through the lens of commerce (Altbach & Knight, 2007; McBurnie & Ziguas, 2007). As a result, the literature on IBCs reflects an instrumentalist perspective that is centered on business indicators, such as risk assessment, return on investment, market penetration, international branding, quality control, and transnational management strategies (Altbach, 2004; Bori, 2018; Holborow, 2007, 2018). This conceptual approach reduces the analysis of IBCs to transactional descriptions that assess the success or failure of a transnational service or foreign investment strategy (Guimon, 2016; Healey, 2018).

There is still limited research that explores the deeper cultural and societal impact of these ventures on host cultures: how IBCs contribute to or disrupt the local academic landscapes, and what competing

narratives are introduced that may undermine national identity or sovereign educational priorities. More importantly, there are few studies on whether IBCs contribute to the perpetuation of historical power imbalances between Western knowledge production and local epistemologies through the imposition of unfamiliar linguistic, curricular, and structural standards (Elliott & Grigorenko, 2007). Undeniably, there is a demand for Western education in the countries and regions hosting IBCs; yet postcolonial theorists argue that the perception of the superior value of Western academic degrees and “brands” is further evidence of hegemony (Bori, 2018; Holborow, 2017).

A critical analysis of IBCs reveals striking similarities with classical, colonial educational models of the 16th to 19th centuries, recognized as overt efforts to dominate underdeveloped societies for economic, geopolitical, or religious goals. The colonial education model is characterized by Teferra and Altbach (2004) with the following attributes:

- limited access by the indigenous population;
- exclusive use of European languages as primary mode of instruction;
- limited institutional authority, with control emanating from colonial centers; and
- limited curricula, featuring vocational and instrumental subjects.

This article first assesses the current characteristics of IBCs within this definitional framework to assert that the historic power imbalances of colonialism have been perpetuated in the globalization of education and, more specifically, through the branch campus model. Second, it applies key aspects of the postcolonial and decolonial theory to the practices and impact of IBCs to reveal a lack of local access and the perpetuation of elite networks, language primacy, suppression of traditional knowledge, and diminished institutional and national autonomy. Through the critical themes of identity, agency, and sovereignty, these works articulate the structural, epistemological, and psychic damage of the continued modernization project that coloniality supports. The conclusion suggests strategies for resistance to the structural framework of higher education that reinscribes the dominant neoliberal narrative.

The goal of this project is not to moralize about cultural hegemony nor to advocate for the dissolution of IBCs: both are likely here to stay. The legacy of colonialism is increasingly obscured by the desire for global recognition of national legitimacy and the promise of individual prosperity that are constitutive of the Western narrative. This message is reinforced at many levels: multilateral funding organizations, IBC host governments, Western home institutions, and public perception. By recognizing the embeddedness of the coloniality narrative, we may identify and reject perspectives and practices that reinscribe the narrative in order to forge new models that feature more equitable partnerships and reciprocal knowledge production.

The Perpetuation of Coloniality through the International Branch Campus

Colonialism and coloniality are causally related, yet manifest differently: Maldonado-Torres (2007) articulates the relationship between historical colonialism and ongoing coloniality:

Coloniality... refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day (p. 243).

This relationship constitutes a self-replicating continuum: the imposition and valorization of Western, positivist educational practices, content, and knowledge production during the colonial period is perpetuated through the acceptance and internalization of this hierarchy by colonized peoples. For critics of modernity from and of the Global South, the evolution of postcolonial and decoloniality theory following the independence of colonial territories marked a shift in perspective. Rather than employing Western “logos” and “ethos” to critique modernization, decolonial theorists draw from indigenous cultural values to reframe epistemological and ontological questions and respond from their experiences. This reframing is particularly complex the further removed a culture is from formal colonization; even after generations of nominal independence, the absorption of Western values and acceptance of “cultural supremacy” is evident in the aspirations of individuals who seek to attend educational institutions that embody Western values rather than traditional local culture (Andreotti, 2007, p. 5; Bori, 2018; Kwek, 2003).

Limited Access

Returning to Teferra and Altbach’s model, the first characteristic of classical colonial higher education - limited access by the indigenous population - is apparent in the student and faculty demographics of IBCs. At a surface level, “access” may be primarily controlled by the financial resources of prospective students. The tuition structure of IBCs is often adapted to local economies, as charging home institution tuition (e.g., from the U.S. or Europe) would be unrealistic; yet, in order to recover operating costs, the fees are significantly higher than those of local, national universities. (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012). Not coincidentally, the regions with the largest growth in IBCs are Asia and the Gulf States, two regions with burgeoning upper income quartiles (OECD, 2019). For local students, access is largely predicated on a prospective student’s financial means and academic preparation to pursue transnational higher education. These criteria are, in turn, linked to socioeconomic status, class, gender, and, in some cases, the ethnicity of prospective students (Holborow, 2018; Le & Barnawi, 2015). IBCs may not overtly limit access based on these factors, in observance of the “equal opportunity” principles espoused by home campuses, but the reality in most developing countries is that the tuition charged and admissions standards are beyond the means of most citizens (Altbach, 1991; Dzulfikar, 2019; Ilie & Rose, 2016).

The restriction to access created by socioeconomic class is not merely limited to the ability to pay tuition. The admissions criteria of IBCs generally require specific prior preparation for a Western-style program: English language skills (or other non-native language), a familiarity with standardized entrance or placement tests, a knowledge of pedagogical approaches and expectations, as well as the aspiration to pursue a non-native model of higher education (Piller & Cho, 2013). These factors presuppose a level of prior privilege that is actualized over the years: students who have attended private or otherwise elite primary and secondary schools have a distinct advantage in meeting the criteria for admission and successful completion, reinscribing a cycle of privilege that benefits few of the broader population (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Kapoor, 2004). Therefore, the student population with sufficient resources and privilege to choose to attend an IBC is already a small minority of the host country population, challenging the rationale that this institutional model provides a broader benefit to national higher education. In addition, IBCs draw students who may be most academically competitive away from national institutions (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007). Though many state-sponsored institutions cannot accommodate the vast number of eligible applicants, the selection criteria are divided between those who meet specific Western criteria and those who meet national standards. (Ghabra & Arnold 2007; Guimon, 2016; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007).

At a deeper level, the discrepancy between standards for IBCs and national norms creates a competing narrative that English-medium education, Western pedagogies, and assessment criteria are more desirable than those of the native institutions. This insinuates a hierarchy of knowledge that subordinates existing native standards and practices to those of the foreign institutions. The motivations for pursuing a degree from an IBC, such as greater employability, global mobility, and social capital (Hill & Thabet, 2018; Le & Barnawi, 2015; Wilkins et al., 2012), relegate the local educational pathway to a less desirable, less ambitious option. While many of the benefits of an international “brand” degree may be realized, the perception of inferiority of national knowledge production is inherently damaging.

Full recognition of local faculty by Western home institutions is also limited. IBCs often confer greater value on faculty educated and trained in the West, due to their presumed familiarity with Western pedagogies, curriculum, teaching methods, and standards. A common expectation of students and their families is that instructors at IBCs will be predominantly white and/or Western, indicating equivalent quality with the faculty at the home institution (Jaschik, 2013) and conferring higher status to the education received at the IBC (Hill & Thabet, 2018). However, the percentage of expat and Western-educated faculty is often limited due to additional human resources costs (for the institution) and the career disruption that a relocation and the short-term contract can cause (for the faculty member) (Altbach, 2010; Guimon, 2016; Sidhu, 2009). While these are pragmatic operational and professional considerations, these hiring practices send a clear message to host country nationals that they are considered to be “second tier” and in need of further training in Western pedagogies, theories, and epistemologies to meet home campus expectations. Their value to the IBC is often justified on the basis of cost effectiveness to the remote home institution, rather than through recognition of their cultural knowledge and familiarity with student needs, their understanding of the national academic network, or the stability they can offer their programs and institutions through longer-term employment (Gopal, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2009; Pyvis, 2011).

Language of Instruction

The second criterion for assessing the coloniality of IBCs is the language used as the primary medium of instruction. It is well documented that English is the most widely non-native language of instruction globally, and specifically among IBCs (Garrett et al., 2016; Mackie, 2019). Three of the predominant countries establishing IBCs in non-English speaking countries are the U.S., the U.K., and Australia (Healey, 2017; Garrett et al., 2016; Wilkins, 2020), and it is widely accepted that English language proficiency is considered a critical skill for economic mobility (Bori, 2018; Felix, 2019; Holborow, 2018; Le & Barnawi, 2015). Textbooks and learning resources are overwhelmingly available in English, in comparison to many less widely spoken languages, and the subject matter is often culturally more relevant for residents of the countries of IBC home institutions, particularly in the humanities and social sciences (Alatas, 2000; Bori 2018; Kwek, 2003).

These factors may produce cultural “disruption” at three levels: 1) the dismissal of a native language as a vehicle of learning and knowledge production; 2) the paucity of academic materials in the native language; and 3) a failure to achieve learning objectives due to second language interference. The literature on non-native language instruction and bilingual education suggests that the presentation and reception of content material is greatly enhanced by native language or hybrid delivery, rather than delivery that is solely in the target foreign language (Agbedol et al., 2012; Felix, 2019; Ramachandran, 2017; Smits et al., 2008). Assuming that the educational goals are comprehension and mastery of content, the language of instruction should facilitate these objectives. However, in the interest of maintaining consistent learning

materials, entry requirements, and accreditation eligibility between home campuses and IBCs, the language of instruction is generally that of the parent institution. Additionally, students who reside and study in predominantly non-English speaking communities face the challenge of constant code-switching between the classroom and their daily lives (Barnard & McLellan, 2013). The degree to which English is used in the host country at large impacts the consistency of student proficiency and fluency (Altbach, 2004; Ramachandran, 2017).

Host country faculty at IBCs are also impacted by the linguistic requirements of their teaching and research (Felix, 2019; Healey, 2017). Though many have Western credentials, they are expected to conduct their classes and use texts in English for students who are predominantly from their own country and language of origin. The medium of instruction necessarily impacts pedagogy, particularly through an instructor's depth of explanations, references to supporting materials, and, ultimately, student comprehension. Instructors may be proficient in the target language (usually English), but the effectiveness of their teaching may be compromised (Healey, 2018; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; Pyvis, 2011). More broadly, the mandated communication of ideas in a non-native language to a classroom of native speakers by a native speaker is an artificial contrivance that elevates IBC compliance with foreign home institution curricular "equivalency" over meaningful interlocution (Pyvis, 2011). The expectation that non-native speakers at the IBC would master material at a comparable level as students on the home institution campus, most of whom are native English speakers, implies either an unrealistic grasp of learning theory, a dismissal of local context, or both.

A third area where the primacy of a Western language serves to exacerbate institutional coloniality is in academic journals, textbooks, and research. The overwhelming use of English and other Western languages in major publications and instructional materials is well-documented and is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is noteworthy that host country faculty are limited in their opportunities to conduct and publish research that can enhance their status at the home institution or in their region (Alatas, 2000; Murphy & Zhu, 2012). Due to the implicit prestige attached to the major international journals and publishing houses that publish in English and various European languages, faculty are less likely to produce scholarly work in non-Western languages that will advance their careers outside of the local context (Healey, 2017; Murphy & Zhu, 2012). This serves to reinforce the dominance of English language research outlets.

Institutional Governance of IBCs

The governance and policy frameworks of IBCs may reflect a further power imbalance between home and host countries and institutions. Western-style IBCs are often controlled by principles and processes set by the home institution and conducted unilaterally, either from the home campus apparatus or from transplanted administrators who are temporarily assigned to the host campus (Hill & Thabet, 2018; McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; Ziguras, 2008). This model is not uncommon for large, multi-campus state university systems within the U.S. context, yet it can be problematic for IBCs given the significant cultural and regulatory differences (Kent, 2020; Sidhu, 2009). As the literature shows, most IBCs are based in non-Western cultures with significantly different conceptions of leadership and authority. This may influence the degree to which they adopt governance processes and policies to local culture and comply with national guidelines set by ministries or educational licensing authorities (Healey, 2018; Lanford & Tierney, 2016; Tierney & Lanford 2015; Vora, 2015).

While the stated objective of Western home institutions to promote more participatory, democratic policy-making at offshore branch campuses is well-intentioned, this effort often ignores the governance conventions in the host country, many of which are regulated by a national ministry (Ziguras, 2008). This assumption also implies that Western university systems are demonstrably inclusive and “democratic” in their governance and policy-making practices, which may be overstated in reality (Vora, 2015). The adoption of Western home institution governance practices may in fact jeopardize the IBC’s standing with local or national regulators, resulting in operational restrictions or a loss of local funding (Kent, 2020; Kwek, 2003; Sidhu, 2009).

The organizational structures of IBCs include a range of models which necessarily impact how governance is implemented and to what degree of autonomous management the branch is afforded. IBCs may be wholly owned by a home institution or by the local host government; they can be fully financed by a private or educational partner; or the facilities may be rented from a private party (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Garrett et al., 2016; Lane, 2013). The ownership structure may also determine the regulatory authority of the host country, varying from education ministries to commercial oversight agencies depending upon the designation of an IBC as an academic institution or as a foreign-owned enterprise (Wilkins and Huisman, 2012). Likely disparities between home institution and host country conventions often necessitate an explicit decision to accede to unfamiliar host guidelines and practices to achieve the legitimacy to operate. Healey (2018) describes cases of host country ministries that specify the length of degrees, mandatory course offerings, hiring practices, and research restrictions that may conflict with regulations governing home institutions. For example, China’s Ministry of Education dictates four-year bachelor’s degrees (despite the three-year format in Commonwealth countries), mandates courses in Physical Education and Political Economy, and blocks certain internet search engines commonly used for research at Western institutions (p. 2). Many host countries, such as Malaysia, have labor laws that dictate separate hiring practices for expatriate and local employees, creating regulatory distinctions between academic and support staff (p. 3). These academic and administrative discrepancies can diminish the qualitative replication of the home institution programs at its branches.

In cases of host countries that have instituted compelling “pull factors” to attract IBCs, governments frequently incentivize the investment by waiving licensing requirements, granting tax exemptions, and providing facilities and infrastructure, among other inducements (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Guimon, 2016; Hill & Thabet, 2018; Lanford & Tierney, 2016; Mackie, 2019; Wilkins, 2020.) According to Wilkins (2020), one-third of existing IBCs are significantly supported or assisted by host governments. As mentioned previously, the benefits to host countries in exchange for these inducements may include modernizing the national higher education system, promoting ties with prestigious Western institutions, and minimizing “brain drain” of talented students to the West (Clifford & Kinser, 2016). Yet behind most of these scenarios is the implicit acceptance of developmentalist remediation of national education standards, with a clear implication that a Western approach is better than the endogenous (Alatas, 2000; Bori, 2018; Kwek, 2003).

In the case of many IBCs, the standards that govern the home institution in the West are carried to the branch by extension, with little or no acknowledgment of host country regulatory guidelines. Kent (2020) explores cases of U.S.-based IBCs that were forced to close due to poor communication and/or a lack of compliance with host government criteria. For instance, the Community College of Qatar (originally a branch of the Community College of Houston) failed to obtain local accreditation and was taken over by

local authorities. In another instance, the New York Institute of Technology in Bahrain was poorly reviewed by host accreditors and consequently barred from enrolling new students, rendering it financially unviable (p. 14). These examples of failed IBCs can be largely attributed to the failure to recognize the necessity of careful coordination with the host country's authority.

Though institutional accreditation may not be a requirement by the host government, myriad inequities can emerge through the superimposition of a foreign model in a new context (Lane, 2011; Lanford, 2020; Tierney & Lanford, 2015; Ziguras, 2008). With regard to “imported” academic and administrative staff, salary and contract discrepancies between expatriate and local employees may bypass host country labor and immigration laws and create tensions among colleagues (Healey, 2018; Lanford, 2020). Policy decisions may be determined by the home institution without consultation of hosts on local conventions or input by host country faculty and staff. Entry requirements for students may adhere to home institution admissions criteria for the ostensible purpose of maintaining equity, but may not acknowledge local educational preparation, familiarity with subjects, standardized testing exposure, and language proficiency. Finally, conflicting interpretations of academic freedom in scholarly research and approved course offerings may pose restrictions on IBC content that challenge national norms and practices of the host country (Jaschik, 2013; Pyvis, 2011).

Regardless of which governance models and policies have greater weight or merit, the imbalance in power dynamics between the home and host countries often determines which norms prevail. One justification for replicating Western norms is the aspirational goal of equivalency between home campus policies and curricula and those of the IBC, yet there is little evidence in the literature that such equivalence is achieved (Altbach, 2010; Healey, 2017; Hill & Thabet, 2018). Western faculty and administrators seconded to the IBC may be in the host country on a short-term basis, however, and fail to gain sufficient knowledge of the cultural context. Conversely, when IBCs hire longer-term leadership – either local or expatriate – these officials may have no direct familiarity with the home campus culture. In either case, when disparities exist in management, staffing, admissions criteria, or curriculum, the reputation of both the IBC and the home institution can be damaged (Healey, 2017; Sidhu, 2009).

The guidelines for best practices in TNE established by UNESCO and OECD (2005) clearly hold the educational provider (i.e., the home institution) responsible for the quality and cultural relevance of programs and instruction delivered to another location (p. 14), but these agencies do not provide any regulatory mechanism or mandate approval by the host government (Ziguras, 2008). Multilateral funding organizations, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, may require host countries to demonstrate evidence of the adoption of neoliberal measures in higher education as a condition for foreign aid and loans, exerting pressure to accommodate Western standards of practice and governance (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; Tikly, 2004). Therefore, while clear mission statements and operational plans of the university/branch relationship are essential, it is unlikely that institutional agreements can overcome more deeply ingrained structural inequities.

Curriculum

The fourth criterion characterizing educational coloniality addresses the nature of IBC curricula and degree programs, which disproportionately favor vocational and instrumental skills-based knowledge. The distinction between academic offerings in the core and periphery nations is increasingly blurred, as Western institutions have intensified their focus on more technical subjects that lead to employability

(Craig, 2017). The liberal arts model, a hallmark of U.S. higher education, has declined in popularity over past decades, as institutions are pressured to adopt a consumerist interpretation of “return on investment” for higher education (Felix, 2019; Godwin, 2015). However, a countervailing trend is the global recognition that the “soft skills” fostered by the liberal arts – critical thinking, communication, problem-solving strategies – are also valued by employers (Lanford, 2016). An inherent tension within IBC curricular decisions is the urgency of providing pre-professional skills to host country nationals versus the desire to emulate “American” (or more generally, Western) programs, which often include a broad, general education foundation.

According to the latest OBHE report (Garrett et al., 2016), the most frequently offered degree programs at IBCs are business, engineering, and computer science. This is unsurprising, given the global trend of more vocational credentials that seemingly ensure gainful employment following graduation (Godwin, 2015). From the pragmatic perspective of Western home institutions, business and computer science are fields that require a minimal investment in physical facilities to establish, though engineering programs often suggest a more extensive commitment to building laboratories and providing advanced technologies. Notably, fields of study that promote critical analysis of social policy, political institutions, and creative arts in the social sciences and humanities are relatively rare (Ghabra & Arnold, 2007). This may reflect the preferences imposed by host governments, if consulted; investment choices by the home institutions; or merely market data among the prospective student “consumers.”

Another factor in the choice of program offerings at IBCs is the challenge of recruiting Western faculty from the social sciences and humanities to relocate to a host campus. Because of a historic Eurocentric focus that has shaped many of these disciplines, such scholars may not be well suited to conduct research or perform community service in the host country. Furthermore, due to the propensity of Western scholars to conduct research that challenges social norms, a posting at a branch campus may not afford them the academic freedom to which they are accustomed (Altbach, 2001; Khoury & Khoury, 2013). One of the major concerns expressed by faculty at IBCs is the discrepancy between actual or perceived liberties in academic research, teaching content, textbook selection, and conference presentations that exist in Western and non-Western societies (Altbach, 2001; Healey, 2017; Jaschik, 2013).

One obstacle to adapting academic content and limiting scholarly inquiry to comply with local culture or government restrictions is that such actions create inequities between host and home programs. This contributes to the perception - or reality - that the respective credentials are separate and unequal. As a result, the home campus “brand” may be devalued, causing reputational damage abroad as well as lower demand by the IBC’s target market (Healey, 2017; Hill & Thabet, 2018). However, actions by a host country’s ministry to liberalize criteria for the accommodation of foreign curricula can also be problematic. A Western-centric curriculum may include content that is not widely relevant for students in a distant IBC, such as local state histories of public universities, pre-professional classes that are controlled by jurisdictionally specific licensing bodies, or national literatures requiring in-depth cultural familiarity. The adoption of Western curricula may also force branch campuses to forego national curricular requirements that are deemed important for the country’s development goals or civic agenda. If the motivation to adopt identical home campus programs and courses is to comply with the equivalence provision of accreditation bodies, or to augment local admission of students seeking a strictly Western program, neither national nor student interests are served. The balance between curricular “equivalence” and “relevance” is under constant tension (Healey, 2017, p. 9).

Situating the International Branch Campus within Postcolonial Theory

The prior examples demonstrate ways in which IBCs may perpetuate the defining characteristics of colonial education despite the historical disruptions of independence movements and the nominal sovereignty of states in the Global South. Critical theory has long challenged the dominant metanarratives in society and articulated the processes by which power is exercised with or without the consent of the subjects (Gramsci et al., 1971, p. 56). A postcolonial theory emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a branch of critical theory, applying questions of identity, agency, and sovereignty to the lived experience of formerly colonized individuals, as well as to newly independent nations. An inherent paradox that emerged was between creating self-sufficient societies within the globalizing world order and preserving allegiance to cultural identity, including language, values, and social structures. Two or more generations after many national independence movements, these societies still grapple with this dilemma: the options for education and social mobility often require a choice between dominant Western influences or local institutions that are undervalued. The proliferation of IBCs brings this contrast into the local context of host institutions, exacerbating the competing cultural narratives of Western hegemony, nativist sovereignty, or complex hybridities. Central to the project of postcolonial theory and relevant to an examination of IBCs are the issues of identity, agency, and sovereignty. This discussion will link key concepts to the emergence of IBCs as a manifestation of the continued challenges of these issues.

Identity

The construction and subjugation of identity occurs at many levels: the individual, the community or cultural subgroup, and the national. The impact of colonialism on the individual psyche of the colonized subject is a major theme in the work of Franz Fanon (1952, 1961). His contributions explore how the social markers of race and dominant language are assigned value by the dominant culture in a colonial setting, instilling a profound sense of deficiency in the subaltern. The colonized subject equates the adoption of the dominant language and values as an acceptance of a “superior” culture and assumes that this concession is the only path to social ascension, though they may be dually stigmatized due to ethnic distinctions and the partial mastery of cultural markers (Hilton, 2011). In the context of the IBC, one of the primary motivations for host country nationals and their policymakers is the promise of economic and social mobility in exchange for the relinquishment of local language and culture in the institutional setting.

Yet there are multiple identities that must be negotiated in the presence of a dominant culture. Albert Memmi (1957) builds upon this theme, examining the complex relationships between and within each respective group in colonial societies. Memmi concurs with Fanon that the most damaging form of oppression is the internalization of subordinated identity. The acceptance of the caricature of native culture as primitive and in need of remediation effectively limits subjects’ capability for resistance. He also asserts that “sympathetic colonizers” cannot truly assist in the liberation process despite good intentions, as their racial, ethnic, and economic status will always exempt them from the fallout of the struggle. These identities parallel those of the contemporary educational context: colonized subjects may well be self-colonized through their internalization of the characterization, and the role of “colonizers” may be either revenue-conscious administrators of a home institution or well-intentioned faculty imparting the accepted Western canon. Memmi’s point is that the message of subordination is delivered through each of these perspectives.

At the time of many colonial independence movements, there were policy experiments in preserving native culture and language through national educational strategies. The early goals of postcolonial practitioners embraced nativist principles in an effort to redefine national identity, often in resistance to the emerging bipolar world system following World War II (Clarke, 2011). Though many leaders were educated in the West prior to leading these movements, they recognized the inherent damage of negating indigenous identity, values, language, and authority in favor of a foreign, dominant system. The works of M. K. Gandhi, Julius Nyerere, and Paulo Freire demonstrate how educational policies in their respective countries negotiated this tension, providing examples of different precedents in the decolonization effort. Mahatma Gandhi's revolutionary views on education charted an early roadmap for the social transformation of India. Gandhi (1953) addresses many of the major themes of colonial resistance and nation-building through education, such as the use of indigenous languages in schools rather than English, which he viewed as a dominating instrument of Empire:

Real freedom will come only when we free ourselves of the domination of Western education, Western culture, and Western way of living which have been engrained in us, because this culture has made our living expensive and artificial, both for men and for women. Emancipation from this culture would mean real freedom for us. (Gandhi, 1947, "Talk with Englishwomen," in Johnson, 2005)

Julius Nyerere similarly advocated a strong nativist platform in his "Education for Self-reliance" program for newly independent Tanzania (Nyerere, 1968). He outlined new policies for national schooling that included Kiswahili as an official language, instruction in practical agricultural skills, and a system centered around his economic plan of *Ujama* (collective farming, or "villagization"). Though inspired by both Gandhi's call to restore indigenous traditions and language, and his staunch rejection of foreign intervention, Nyerere's education program restricted citizens' early access to English in the primary and secondary grades, and thus their mobility to pursue fields of study that were dominated by English texts and resources or outside the scope of regional economic needs (Regmi, 2020).

A common thread throughout postcolonial theory is the role of language as an instrument of cultural identity. In his seminal work *Colonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) asserts the following:

[A] specific culture is not transmitted through language in its universality, but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history... Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other... Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world... (pp. 15-16).

Ngũgĩ characterizes the use of English in African education as a "cultural bomb" which is detonated by the "deliberate disassociation of the language of conceptualization, of thinking, of formal education, of mental development, from the language of daily interaction in the home and in the community" (p. 28). He directly links the use of colonial languages to native cultural erasure through its role in diminishing indigenous epistemologies and histories.

These examples of early postcolonial efforts to protect native culture through language, point to several key challenges in policy implementation, such as: the tension between valorizing indigenous tradition and preparing students to participate in a global economy; rejecting the language of the colonizer in favor of native languages and thus losing available educational resources; and initiating dramatic educational reforms without the financial support, and thus intervention, of foreign aid (Kwek, 2003). To

the present day, these tensions have continued to resonate in educational policy in the developing world and are clearly present in IBCs. One opportunity for IBCs to address this dilemma is to incorporate local languages and literatures into IBC curricula, enhancing learning material with bi- or multi-lingual skills that are valuable attributes in the global workforce. IBCs are well-positioned to prepare students to succeed in multiple cultural contexts, particularly where employers need to be educated, multicultural staff in non-Western markets. This strategy both provides a “competitive advantage” to graduates and surpasses the Western home campus curricular requirements while valorizing native languages and cultural traditions.

Agency

Though early efforts to enact nativist language policy were short-lived in most cases, a more transcendent form of resistance to colonialism emerged to identify native epistemologies and ontologies that could acknowledge and sustain local cultures. Paulo Freire’s contribution to pedagogical models featured a dialogic dynamic of education that validated indigenous knowledge and facilitated a reciprocal exchange between teacher and learner. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), Freire echoes the work of Fanon and Memmi in his analysis of the damage incurred by the oppression of both colonizers and subjects, concluding that each must liberate themselves. He denounces the Northern narrative of knowledge as a “regime of truth,” describing the process of “banking education” in which prescribed knowledge is deposited in learners for subsequent withdrawal in the service of colonial power (Freire, 1972, in Clarke, 2011, p. 61). The acceptance of an exogenous model of instruction or mode of communication without reflection on its impact is a manifestation of oppression. Instead, Freire encourages the fusion of insight with action in his notion of “praxis.”

Knowledge production and ideology are inherently complicated by the roles that the respective agents, beneficiaries, and subjects occupy. Cultural domination does not exist as a clear binary formation between colonizer and colonized, perpetrator and victim, subject and object. While most societies identify their citizens as belonging to an In-group with specific traits and goals distinct from those of other geopolitical groups, binaries serve to essentialize the diverse composition and aspirations of a people. Clearly, no citizenry is monolithic: the process of constructing a national or collective identity also serves to negate the contributions of marginalized subgroups (Spivak, 1988). Yet, since the central tension of a subaltern group is with Western domination, it may be necessary to strategically essentialize a culture for the purpose of liberatory social activism. The danger, Spivak cautions, is that this process can actually serve to reinscribe and perpetuate neo-colonial domination by its dependence upon Western texts and representations to articulate the struggle. Subgroups defined by class, ethnicity, race, or religion may be expected to suppress their agendas in the public sphere in the name of unity against external domination. Thus, within the target culture, the “heard” voices are those privileged with access to education, economic means, and government representation; in other words, a system of “class apartheid” is engendered in which the elite segments of society are more likely to accommodate institutions of Western power (Kapoor, 2004). This group is the targeted student market of most IBCs, which is not representative of national demographics in host countries. Thus, the group that has already benefitted materially from Western influences – the national elite – embraces and perpetuates the attendant values by choosing to attend institutions that replicate them, further exacerbating class differences within the host countries.

Bhabha (1984) also addresses the process of essentialization as an attack on nationhood through narrative representation that informs social structures. He takes issue with the binary oppositions between

“colonizer” and “colonized” that Fanon and Memmi discuss, arguing that this relationship is more ambivalent and discursive. Bhabha (1994) also examines cultural hybridity and mimesis as complicating factors of identity but suggests that each formulation of the subaltern identity creates space for resistance to colonial power. In both cases, the subject adopts elements of the dominant culture in order to survive a repressive regime or to advance within it by mimicking aspects of the colonizers. Hybridity describes a more involuntary process through which behaviors, language, and beliefs may be absorbed by the subaltern on the basis of their efficacy within a colonial context. Through exposure to a duality of cultures, elements of each are retained, so that neither culture exists unaffected by the other. Conversely, mimesis is an expression of agency by the subject who selectively assumes features of the dominant culture to thrive within it. There is an element of parody in mimesis, where the subaltern reconstructs his identity based on that of the colonizer, but simultaneously rejects it:

(M)imicry represents an ironic compromise... the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite... Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power (1984, p. 126).

Bhabha’s explication of cultural appropriation goes beyond binary categorizations to show both the reciprocal “osmosis” that occurs between/among proximate cultures and the role of the subaltern subject in exercising agency to negotiate it. These processes are clearly in play within a bicultural educational setting: the imported culture of a Western university will necessarily transform the host institution, just as it will be altered from that of the original home campus. Host country nationals (including students, faculty, and administrators) at the branch campus must continuously define their place in the interstices between the two cultures. In order to more effectively balance the perception and practice of cultural agency at IBCs, institutions should provide opportunities for expatriate staff and faculty to learn local languages and customs in order to assimilate to the workplace and host culture (Gopal, 2011; Pyvis, 2011). The resulting message that cultural familiarity is reciprocal serves to equalize host and expat norms by challenging the comfort zone of Western staff and creating an authentic exchange of culture.

Sovereignty

For the purpose of this discussion, “sovereignty” here refers to the provenance of knowledge, values, and subjective histories of a people, rather than control of the geopolitical boundaries imposed by imperial powers. The erasure of indigenous sovereignty was a result of the imperialist quest to exert economic, political, religious, and military domination and exploitation over subject nations, yet it is the subjugation of beliefs and ideas that endures as coloniality. The cumulative erosion of national sovereignty is evident in the governmental, legal, and social structures of formerly colonized nations, such that both internal and external forces continue to reinforce Western values and logic. As Parmar (2015) describes:

After gaining independence in the 1950s and 1960s, the leaders of new nations in the developing world were eager to gain Western knowledge, in the belief that understanding the ideas and the technology of the former colonial power would enable them to gain a greater degree of economic and political independence... Thus, access to Western knowledge became a new source of rivalry in many countries. More importantly, Western style learning also re-oriented the elites in developing countries toward the global centers of power and capital and away from their own national traditions (p. 4).

This foundation set the stage for new leaders to embrace the model established under colonialism in order to retain their privileged status and power. The concept of “Coloniality of Power” traces the historical role of imperialism, global capitalism, and labor relations in the suppression of indigenous cultures within the Americas that resulted in Europe’s rise to dominance in the world order and subsequent formulations of control (Quijano, 2000). The legacy that endures is the emulation of Western institutional structures, values, and knowledge in the Global South. Walter Mignolo (2003) expands upon this theme with a definition of “the colonial difference,” the perspectives from the Global South that resist the Eurocentric narrative of modernity. Yet even in acts of resistance, the representational tools available to the subaltern are formulated from Western positivism. He refers to the “Coloniality of Knowledge” and “Coloniality of Being” to locate the exercise of Western power within specific realms of human experience and to demonstrate its ubiquity. By situating resistance within its territorial origins and temporal histories of the South, there is potential to challenge Western epistemologies, languages, and logics.

“Science” (knowledge and wisdom) cannot be detached from language; languages are not just “cultural” phenomena in which people find their “identity”; they are also the location where knowledge is inscribed. And, since languages are not something human beings have but rather something of what human beings are, coloniality of power and of knowledge engendered the coloniality of being (Mignolo, 2003, p. 669).

The next step in regaining intellectual sovereignty, according to Mignolo, is to decolonize the epistemologies and indigenous histories that inform the culture and shape the worldview. This process is complicated by the layers of coloniality; it is not simply a shift from a Western to a subaltern narrative, or a blanket rejection of Eurocentric knowledges. As de Sousa Santos (2018) explains, “(s)ince colonialism is a co-creation, however asymmetrical, decolonizing entails decolonizing both the knowledge of the colonized and the knowledge of the colonizer” (p. 107). To reclaim intellectual sovereignty, non-Western scholarship might generate a more reciprocal cultural exchange by identifying comparative aspects of local epistemologies, histories, and values to both valorize the local and to educate Western scholars on alternate approaches and perspectives. The challenge is to generate knowledge that is additive to - rather than imitative of - the hegemonic.

Concluding Thoughts

The internationalization of higher education through IBCs has effectively come to mean “Westernization,” due to the aspiration to replicate U.S. and European academic institutions in the Global South and East. Access, curricular content, faculty qualifications, and governance of exported models are designed to mirror Western institutions rather than reflecting the local cultures and contexts of host countries. The advent of IBCs represents a recent manifestation of globalization, rooted in economic expansion to new markets and new sources of revenue for Western universities with declining funding, rising costs, and a shrinking domestic student population. As postcolonial theorists would argue, this dynamic has perpetuated colonialism by constructing standards and aspirational goals that serve to validate Western norms and reinscribe coloniality.

The cultural disconnects between IBCs and home institutions reveal the distinctive values, resources and needs of their respective societies, yet the core issue is the existence of historic structural inequities rather than a lack of sufficient cultural sensitivity. The project of constructing empire – either geopolitical or epistemological – necessitates the suppression of subject identity, agency, and sovereignty,

and IBCs have demonstrated intent and progress toward this end. The inevitable disparities between home institutions and branch campuses threaten the perceived legitimacy of both, yet each strives for homogeneity of content, instruction, and services that ignore or deny cultural context. Universal acceptance of education as a public good has been conflated with adaptation to Western standards and approaches. In addition, the myriad motivations of stakeholders in transnational higher education further complicate the dismantling of its inherent coloniality. As a result, resistance to the hegemonic features of TNE is difficult.

Therefore, any strategy to reverse the perpetuation of coloniality must address these drivers at their respective levels. While effective leadership and intercultural competence are crucial for any successful educational venture, they are insufficient to change the developmentalist narrative of the branch campus project. Efforts to preserve meaningful international collaboration will need to change fundamentally at the structural level, resulting in more equitable partnerships between institutions and comparable requirements to embrace and validate the cultural difference. This can be implemented through enforcement of regulatory requirements by host country ministries, requiring foreign institutions to comply with national educational standards and goals while operating within the country. Western universities can opt for local partners in target countries to provide more joint or dual degrees, ensuring that the respective institutional criteria are met. Regional and national accrediting authorities can negotiate reciprocal recognition of curricula and degree programs for more flexible mobility and portability. Students can be encouraged to foster dual sets of cultural and linguistic competencies, to provide both local and multinational employers a more versatile skills set. And faculty who opt to teach or conduct research abroad should be expected to invest in in-depth cultural training before accepting contracts or grants, rather than engaging in “academic tourism” that is represented as international expertise. More broadly, all stakeholders in transnational education must be vigilant that the forms and content of knowledge production meet the highest standards of educational quality within the context of practice, rather than merely accepting the narrative of “cultural supremacy” of the West.

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