

## Book review

### The Bloomsbury Handbook of the Internationalization of Higher Education in the Global South

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#### Abstract

In this review of *The Bloomsbury Handbook of the Internationalization of Higher Education in the Global South*, Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela discusses why this book might come to be considered a first port-of-call for recognising that internationalisation of higher education is a narrative firmly rooted in western ideologies and which serves as a totalising imaginary. The book, Guzmán-Valenzuela argues, helps to understand the many faces and dimensions of internationalisation in higher education and invites us to think further about what is appropriate to each country given its historical, cultural, political, educational and epistemic background. For Guzmán-Valenzuela, this is a crucial task.

The *Bloomsbury Handbook of the Internationalization of Higher Education in the Global South* constitutes a formidable effort at putting together an overview of the processes of internationalization of higher education (IHE) within the global South. For the most part, this debate has hitherto focused on internationalisation within the global North, so this is a welcome addition to the literature.

## Overview

In its 36 chapters and more than 600 pages, the 6 editors and 32 authors of the volume shed light on the ways in which internationalisation is perceived and has been put into practice across countries chosen to represent the regions of Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, North Africa and the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa. The volume offers a comprehensive overview of the changes and challenges experienced by higher education systems in countries and regions, some of which have received little attention in the literature or are less visible to international audiences. The book provides grounds by which to compare IHE within and across regions in the light of global trends such as the globalisation and massification of higher education. Many of the challenges and recommendations provided in the chapters offer insights not only to academics and students but also to policy makers in these countries as well as in international agencies.

In the Introduction, the editors give an account of the rationale for the volume, offer a brief conceptualisation of the concept of internationalisation, profile the so-called 'global South' and scope out the regions and countries analysed in the book. This introduction is followed by two thematic chapters. Chapter 2 offers theoretical insights about internationalisation and tackles key trends in higher education around the world, those of massification and the knowledge economy, that shape internationalisation processes. Also, the chapter provides an overview of internationalisation as an evolving concept and refers to the relatively new development of 'internationalisation of the curriculum at home'. Chapter 3 presents a synthesis of key indicators to guide systematic thinking about national policies of internationalisation, including matters of degree of involvement, stakeholders, history, geographic forces, tactical focus, and effectiveness. It also presents a synthesis of the results of a survey – 'National Tertiary Education Internationalization Strategies and Plans' (NTEISPs) – conducted in 2018 in low- and mid-income countries plus a set of useful policy recommendations.

The following 4 sections are devoted to internationalisation of higher education across regions and specific countries that constitute case studies. Each section includes an introduction and a concluding remarks section. Section 1 is devoted to the Asia-Pacific region and includes the cases of China, Japan, Korea, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and India. Section 2 is focused on Latin America and the Caribbean and contains the cases of Brazil, the Caribbean, Chile, Colombia and Mexico. Section 3 is focused on North Africa and the Middle East and includes cases of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia and Palestine. Finally, Section 4 is devoted to sub-Saharan Africa, and includes the cases of Ethiopia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria.

The book ends with a chapter with overview observations and lists emerging issues of internationalisation in the global South. It provides a helpful table that maps key internationalisation strategies for the global South and proposes new trends organised around policy articulation and

policy formulation, key actors, geographical focus points, mobility of staff and students, and partnerships and collaborations. The chapter also notes that internationalisation of the curriculum is near-absent and also comments on dimensions that were not part of the NTEISP framework, those of intercultural competence, internationalisation training, and decolonisation. Finally, the chapter highlights the importance of technology in internationalisation processes, an issue that is paramount given the current situation related to COVID-19. (The volume's editors, however, signal that the handbook was compiled before the pandemic so making difficult any speculation about the consequences of this health emergency on internationalisation processes in the global South.)

## Review

The book is helpful not only in gaining knowledge about internationalisation processes, policies and indicators in the global South but also in learning about the higher education systems in the countries included in this handbook. Also, the book offers insight into ways in which each country, given its historical, political, religious, geographical and financial settings, deals with limitations and challenges so as to become more 'international'. The book will help academics, policy makers and students in gaining an understanding of the complexities of IHE, especially within poorer regions of the world.

There are some key issues, though, that deserve some further unpacking and examination. The editors identify some crucial points about internationalisation processes in the global South in the Introduction and in Chapters 2, 3 and 36. Also, the section focused on sub-Saharan Africa is particularly powerful regarding the matter of decolonising higher education. However, some of these aspects deserve further discussion and depth, especially regarding two aspects.

### *The concept of internationalisation*

Although the editors acknowledge the different dimensions that are part of internationalisation processes around the world and particularly in the global South, they fall short of recognising the complexity of the concept in the light of geopolitical considerations and tensions around language, colonial legacies and, especially, epistemic imbalances. Internationalisation has become a ubiquitous concept that, as the editors and many of the chapter contributors recognise, is a rhetorical concept that is present (implicitly or explicitly) in national policies but that, in reality, it is difficult to put into practice given financial, political, cultural and even religious conditions. Throughout the volume, much of the concept of internationalisation is seen as attached to advancing human capital, research capacity and the consequent economic development. Rather lightly, the editors and contributors refer to sustainable development as part of internationalisation processes within countries and their policy implications.

Issues that need further examination emerge and are related to financial constraints experienced by some of the poorest countries in the world. In these countries, the configuration of higher education systems differs markedly from those in the global North. Given these circumstances, and the preponderance of international rankings, the competition for resources and international students, brain drains, pressures on academic productivity and high impact factors of publications, it is difficult for many countries in the global South to be part of internationalisation processes (at least in the way that it is known in the global North). What we have here are rather first-class and second (or even

third) class processes of internationalisation that are heavily reliant on economic and geopolitical advantages/disadvantages.

The issue of English in knowledge production is problematic, especially for the social sciences, the arts and the humanities. While English dominates the landscape of IHE, it will be difficult for non-English speaking countries to keep pace with internationalisation processes. Furthermore, research collaboration between the global North and South usually involves epistemic and language asymmetries, aspects that deserve further examination. In this respect, South-South collaboration seems key (which is mentioned in the book although not sufficiently developed) and the creation of hubs in Africa and Latin America so as to boost partnerships within and across regions of the global South.

Tensions between IHE and indigenous populations and knowledges also deserve more recognition than afforded by this volume. The section devoted to sub-Saharan Africa, in its various chapters, highlights the importance of valuing local and indigenous knowledges amid powerful narratives of IHE that can be seen as a new form of colonialism and as a hegemonic narrative imposed upon the South. It is disappointing, though, that this set of large issues was not aired in the section devoted to Latin American and Caribbean regions not least considering their colonial legacy and the increasing importance and value given there to indigenous knowledges and the struggles experienced by their universities regarding international rankings, research collaboration and English as a tool of epistemic power.

Many of the above points are related to epistemic tensions and the ways in which certain knowledges are valued and visible while others remain invisible (Connell, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2014). Epistemic asymmetries, though, are not sufficiently addressed in the Handbook.

#### *The definition of 'global South'*

This is a difficult and complex concept since it enables a differentiation of regions and countries in geographical, political, cultural, educational and historical terms (Connell 2007). The global North includes those countries that disproportionately control global resources (the USA, some countries in Europe plus Canada, Australia and China) and enjoy political and economic stability. The global South, however, is a contested concept. Usually, it includes emerging countries with fragile economies, political instability and a high degree of inequality and poverty. Also, most countries in the global South were colonised by European countries for centuries, processes that included the imposition of political, religious, language and cultural frames and frameworks.

Given this definition, the inclusion of certain countries as part of the global South in this Handbook is somewhat problematic. First, countries such as China, Japan, Korea, the Gulf states and even India exhibit economic conditions that mark them as different from low-GDP countries. Several distinctions could have been more developed so as to classify regions across the world from a geopolitical perspective: (i) periphery and semi-periphery countries (these last ones being industrializing nations located between the core and periphery countries); (ii) the distinction between the East and the West (Said, 1979); (iii) 'BRICS' countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) believed to be the future dominant suppliers of manufactured goods, services and raw materials by 2050 (Majaski, 2020).

Second, the rise of China as a key player in the higher education landscape is changing the internationalisation of higher education so that it is now a global science production centre that is competing strongly with the USA and Europe in international rankings. Furthermore, a regionalism trend in higher education in East and Southeast Asia is gaining momentum and China is playing a key role. Asia-Pacific countries, especially China, are generating important geopolitical changes so as to shape internationalisation processes in new and unexpected ways.

Third, Gulf countries are extremely rich and powerful (and some of them have been part of well-known geopolitical tensions for centuries). Little is known about HE systems in these countries, at least among international audiences. However, given their cultural, political and financial characteristics, it is hard to understand why they have been considered to be part of the global South in this volume. Nevertheless, the chapters devoted to these countries provide good insight about the ways in which higher education systems have been developing in the light of internationalisation trends and their challenges and aims, and this is valuable in itself.

To sum up, this is a formidable handbook for understanding internationalisation processes in higher education and in connecting them with countries that, for geopolitical reasons, are different in nature compared with countries in the global North. The Handbook is a first port-of-call in recognising that internationalisation of higher education is a narrative firmly rooted in western countries and that, mostly acts as a totalising imaginary. This book, therefore, helps to understand many faces and dimensions of internationalisation in higher education and invites us to think further about what is appropriate to each country given its historical, cultural, political, educational and epistemic background. For countries with an important colonial legacy, this is a crucial task that will help in imagining new horizons of international higher education.

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