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Beyond the Dominant Discourse on Internationalization of Higher Education: Interview with Dr. Chrystal George Mwangi, Associate Professor at the College of Education of the University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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ABSTRACT

Research on internationalization of higher education has been predominantly non-theoretical and positivist rather driven towards the consecution of practical objectives than concerned with the structures in which internationalization operates, or its dilemmas and contradictions. Dr. Chrystal George Mwangi, an Associate Professor at the College of Education of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, United States, is one of the academic voices that has questioned the idea of internationalization as an 'unconditional good' as often emphasized by dominant political and academic discourses. In this interview, conducted in June 2020, Dr. George Mwangi reflects on internationalization of higher education from a critical approach, addressing issues such as the impact of choices on how to engage on this process; the challenges of being a scholar-practitioner in this field; and the role of internationalization in the Covid-19 pandemic context.

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Para Além do Discurso Dominante Sobre Internacionalização da Educação Superior: Entrevista com Dr.a Chrystal George Mwangi, Professora Associada da Faculdade de Educação da Universidade de Massachusetts Amherst

RESUMO

A pesquisa em internacionalização da educação superior tem se configurado de forma predominantemente a-teórica e positivista: antes orientada para a consecução de objetivos práticos do que preocupada com as estruturas nas quais a internacionalização opera, ou com seus dilemas e contradições. Dr.a Chrystal George Mwangi, Professora Associada da Faculdade de Educação na University of Massachusetts Amherst, Estados Unidos, é uma das vozes acadêmicas que tem questionado a ideia de internacionalização como `bem incondicional` frequentemente enfatizada pelos discursos político e acadêmico dominantes. Nesta entrevista, conduzida em Junho de 2020, Dr.a George Mwangi reflete sobre internacionalização da educação superior de uma abordagem crítica, tratando de temas como os impactos da escolha de como engajar nesse processo; os desafios de ser um técnico-acadêmico; e o papel da internacionalização no contexto da pandemia do Covid-19.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Educação superior. Internacionalização. Pesquisa crítica.

Más Allá del Discurso Dominante de Internacionalización de la Educación Superior: Entrevista con Dr. Chrystal George Mwangi, Profesora Asociada de la Facultad de Educación de la University of Massachusetts Amherst

RESUMEN

La investigación sobre la internacionalización de la educación superior ha sido predominantemente teórica y positivista: más bien orientada hacia el logro de objetivos prácticos que preocupada por las estructuras en las que opera la internacionalización, o por sus dilemas y contradicciones. Dr. Chrystal George Mwangi, Profesora Asociada de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Massachusetts Amherst, Estados Unidos, es una de las voces académicas que ha cuestionado la idea de la internacionalización como un 'bien incondicional' a menudo enfatizado por los discursos políticos y académicos convencionales. En esta entrevista, realizada en junio de 2020, Dr. George Mwangi reflexiona sobre la internacionalización de la educación superior desde un enfoque crítico, abordando cuestiones como los impactos de elegir cómo participar en este proceso; los desafíos de ser un técnico-académico; y el papel de la internacionalización en el contexto de la pandemia de Covid-19.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación superior. Internacionalización. Investigación crítica.

2

Introduction

Largely understood as an intentional process aimed at the integration of international, intercultural, and global dimensions to the higher education purposes, functions, and delivery, internationalization has configured as one of the most critical factors shaping higher education in the world over the past ten years. Research on internationalization has also evolved but remains predominantly non-theoretical and positive: rather driven towards the resolution of practical problems, and consecution of practical objectives, than concerned with the structures in which internationalization operates, or with its contradictions and dilemmas.

As growing inequalities at all levels suggest that internationalization of higher education has not fulfilled its promises, its definition as a neutral, coherent, and knowledge-based intervention is recognized and questioned. For George Mwangi *et al.* (2018, p. 3), international higher education researchers and journals frequently fail "to address power and hegemony that are embedded in existing higher education systems and partnerships". Buckner and Stein (2019, p. 2) observe that "mainstream resources are overwhelmingly oriented toward achieving 'successful' internationalization, rather than prompting thoughtful engagements and systemic analysis around why or how we should do so". Leal (2020, p. 264, own translation) adds that "structural assumptions of the mainstream literature are mostly supported by narratives that were built from unequally constituted relationships throughout history and tend to frame the phenomenon as an inevitable, stable, and isolated social fact over time". As a consequence, research on the topic "neutralizes tensions, contradictions, and contextualities, establishing zones of 'non-being' by universalizing what is situated".

Assuming that it is through knowledge that relationships and entities are conceived, perceived, felt and described – or, in other terms, that epistemology prescribes and shapes the materiality of the world – one might conceive that the way knowledge on internationalization is built plays a crucial role in the impact of internationalization in reality.

Dr. Chrystal George Mwangi is an Associate Professor at the College of Education of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and one of the academic voices that has questioned the idea of internationalization as an 'unconditional good', as often emphasized by dominant political and academic discourses. Broadly, her scholarship centers on: 1) structures of opportunity and educational attainment for underrepresented populations; 2) impacts of globalization and migration on U.S. higher education at the student, institution, and policy levels; and 3) African and African Diaspora populations in higher education.

In 2018, Dr. George Mwangi received the Association of International Educators (NAFSA)[1] Innovative Research in International Education Award for her work "Partner Positioning: Examining International Higher Education Partnerships through a Mutuality Lens". Her awarded research explored 60 international higher education partnerships between the Majority (the United States) and the Minority World, through the lens of mutuality (equity, solidarity, autonomy, and participation), examining how partners negotiate and navigate power. Recognizing that "much of the rhetoric surrounding international higher education partnerships emphasize transformational and reciprocal relationships" (GEORGE MWANGI, 2017, p. 55), her findings "highlight a more one-directional learning process" (p. 53), reflecting a "power differential, which positioned them differently within their partnerships" (p. 54). Thus, heightened attention to mutuality, through intentionality, might "help individuals and institutions in partnerships uphold the shared ethical principles of higher education" (p. 58).

In this interview, conducted in June 2020, Dr. George Mwangi presents her perspective on doing research on international and internationalization of higher education from a critical approach, reflecting on issues such as: dilemmas and contradictions of internationalization; the impacts of choices on how to engage research on internationalization and the meaning of conceptualizing internationalization using critical theories and frameworks; the limits of the eurocentric critique to internationalization; the challenges of being a scholar-practitioner in the field of international higher education; internationalization in the Global South; as well as the role of internationalization in the Covid-19 pandemic context.

The interview is expected to serve as a resource and contribution to the area of critical internationalization studies, which, by problematizing the technical, non-political, and non-historical nature of conventional approaches (STEIN, 2017), associates internationalization

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[1] The Association of International Educators (NAFSA) is an association of higher education professionals, founded in the United States in 1948 as the "National Association of Foreign Students Advisers" to promote the professional development of university employees in the United States who were responsible for assisting and advising the 25,000 foreign students who went to study in the United States in the context of World War II. Over the years, it expanded its scope and, in 1964, changed its name to "National Association for Foreign Student Affairs". NAFSA's relations with the US federal government intensified in 1976, when the association also began to promote studies abroad. In 1990, when the number of international students in the United States approached four hundred thousand, the association covered 6,400 members on 1,800 campuses. To reflect its role in this broader context, it changed its name again, this time to "Association of International Educators". Among the various activities currently carried out by NAFSA in the field of international higher education, there is the Annual Conference and Expo, in which approximately ten thousand participants from more than one hundred countries participate; courses and training for members, in addition to a series of prescriptive publications aimed at 'internationalizing' American universities (often through recruitment of international students) and to boost the individual career of professionals in the field of international higher education in that specific context, for skills development. As Buckner and Stein (2019) note, in the 21st Century NAFSA has been a strong supporter of global higher education. In addition to the training and publications it offers, an example of an active policy aimed at promoting 'internationalization' is the award "Senator Paul Simon Award for Campus Internationalization," which recognizes colleges and universities in the United States that are making significant progress, as well planned, well executed and well documented towards internationalization comprehensive (NAFSA, 2020).

with global social justice, conceiving this process as a means to transform the reality (LEAL, 2020). Dr. George Mwangi's reflections emphasize the importance of 'being in the frontier' (MIGNOLO, 2017) when working as a practitioner and/or as a researcher in the field. That is, detaching from the dominant rationality and confronting local histories with global projects, looking for other ways of doing, thinking, living and being in higher education international relations.

1.   **From a critical lens, what may be considered the main dilemmas and contradictions that permeate the process of internationalization of higher education today?**

One of the main dilemmas or contradictions that I see is internationalization's part in the direction that higher education has been heading in, which is this whole kind of neo liberal very fiscally-driven approach that I believe internationalization and the internationalization of higher education amplifies and reifies. I do not think it is only happening through internationalization, but that higher education as a sector has tended to move from being learning centered towards these other kinds of more fiscally driven priorities. However, I do think that our approach to internationalization around the world in many ways just reifies this direction.

Internationalization is not as equity centered or learning centered as it could be as a practice. And there are many opportunities for it to be more equity oriented and student centered. So, for example, when I think about issues like study abroad. Oftentimes, populations who are less privileged are experiencing barriers for being able to study abroad. Or when we think about international student enrollment around the world and student mobility, we need to think: who are the students who are able to be mobile? And for instance, who is being recruited to different universities? Thus, there could be so much that internationalization can do to foster positive social change and things like that. But unfortunately, this is not the direction it always takes in practice on campuses and is oftentimes used as a tool to be incredibly economically driven as a practice.

The other aspect or another main dilemma or contradiction around internationalization is also, this is from both a scholarly and a practice perspective, the whole issue of what counts as internationalization. How we define it can also be problematic and limited. For example, in the U.S. internationalization is oftentimes considered to be study abroad, recruitment of international students, and international research collaborations. Maybe now there is more conversation around things like internationalization at home and approaches like that. But what about students who have a transnational background, but are not international temporary students? Those who are immigrants that are nationalized citizens now (or who aren't)? They bring global elements and engagement to a campus, so why don't we think of them when we think about internationalization?

We think about the practice of internationalization in narrower ways than we need to and in ways that do not connect global and local contexts. Internationalization needs to be defined more expansively and inclusively.

And then, another dilemma, is given the pandemic and what has happened around the world. We need to be more innovative in our thoughts about what internationalization does and in its movement towards social action and change that fosters equity, which goes back to a more expansive definition and inclusive definition. So, when we have situations where people cannot necessarily travel or where these crises occur, the idea of global engagement should not go away or be like thinking "Oh, we can't do this anymore" or "The days of internationalization are over." Instead it is important to consider: What is the essence of internationalization? What is it meant to foster? It's meant to foster connections and collaboration and learning and all these things that can still happen. But the way that internationalization of higher education has been currently pursued put us in this dilemma, it is so limited and needs to be re-imagined.

2. **What does it mean to conceptualize internationalization of higher education from a critical approach? What are the impacts of the choices in how we engage research related to international higher education and internationalization of higher education?**

I just wrote a book chapter with Dr. Christina Yao, who is another scholar who does a lot of internationalization related work, and we developed what we are calling an equity-oriented lens for internationalization of higher education. It includes four components, integrating equity-driven conceptual and theoretical perspectives, de/constructing internationalization, defining the sociohistorical context of internationalization, and connecting internationalization research to the contemporary forces of globalization. She and I really talked about this idea of a critical approach requiring certain things to be foregrounded when we think about internationalization of higher education. So of course, I mentioned equity and issues of power and oppression. And again, what are the ways in which internationalization reifies those things or works to mitigate them. I understand that a critical approach does that. Another thing that is required is taking a sociohistorical perspective of internationalization and recognizing that it is not just about contemporary practices, but that those practices stem from something and the way that we think about internationalization stems from historical elements related to colonization, and issues from slavery and other forms of inequities that have happened in our society. And policies and politics and all of those things. All of those things that have happened over time and shaped where we are in terms of internationalization today. How we define international students or think about education abroad or think about higher education partnerships – all of those pieces are things that were shaped from a sociohistorical context. And so, a critical approach really requires one to acknowledge that. And a critical approach requires thinking about internationalization of higher education not just foregrounding equity and oppression and marginalization, but also thinking about how to foster positive change in using

internationalization as a tool to foster greater equity and doing those things as well. There is something action-oriented about the approach for sure. Even if you may not change the world with one practice. But, thinking about even just disrupting, by bringing a critical approach because you're disrupting the *status quo* - that is an action as well. So, the action-oriented component is also really, really important to conceptualizing internationalization from the critical approach.

It is also complex because internationalization and research around it has been for so long on this train that is just going, and people just do not want to veer off to thinking about other possibilities. We are at a moment where there are more scholars doing that thinking. And that is wonderful. But it is interesting that we have gone so long without a critical lens having a stronger voice in this kind of work. It has always been there, but it is becoming a stronger and more mobilized voice in internationalization.

3.   **Recently, even authors who have developed research on internationalization from a functionalist approach have recognized that alongside the opportunities that this process offers, there are issues that are contradictory and contestable. The dominant discourse, in the case, is that economic rationales have stood out other rationales to internationalize, or that internationalization has lost its way. What are the limits of this critique?**

In terms of critique and limits it is important not to oversimplify challenges around internationalization or approaches to internationalization. This goes back to the idea of a critical approach – that a critical approach also helps to deconstruct and maybe complicate things a little bit. When we say that the economic rationale stood out to other rationales to internationalize I agree the economic rationale is a very, very powerful one right now. But there are also other very powerful rationales that can make internationalization a tool that is inequitable. For example, I would say that geopolitical issues are on pair with the economic piece. It is important to think holistically about the multiple ways in which internationalization functions.

And internationalization in terms of losing its way[2] – I don't believe that internationalization has ever been like this perfect thing. So I don't know if losing its way is also the best way to frame a critique. Some have even questioned if higher education is losing its way because it is become so neoliberal. But I would argue that higher education has always been a function of elitism so I don't know if it has ever really lost its way. I think it has done what it has always been setting out to do, which is to provide education to some and not to others. To create mobility for some and exclude others. That has always been a function of it. And so, some of the critiques can be a little too simplistic and just are not considering a sociohistorical thinking about these other things that are also really, really important.

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[2] In reference to Jane Knight`s claim that internationalization of higher education is "losing its way" (KNIGHT, 2014, p. 76) used to refer to the idea that in this field 'competition' advances at the expense of 'cooperation'.

7

It is like a little band aid for this big challenge. They say a band aid on a bullet wound. It is not going to really heal anything. And so, it is just a little, a surface level kind of solution. Those are important things to consider. And I also recognize that this is part and parcel of the challenge because, for example, for me, it is easy. It is easy, in quotes, but easy for me as a scholar to provide critique. But for practitioners who are engaging in internationalization on the ground, they are having to deal with so many pushes and pulls. It is important for scholars, it is important for me as a scholar, for example, to provide critique in those things, but to also recognize that the people engaging in practice are not bad or evil people. They are trying to negotiate lots of things. And so how can scholarship be accessible to them, in ways that allow for change to happen because if I am just spouting off all these critiques all the time and not providing any support around well, "How can thing change?" That is not helpful either to actually creating change. It is important to keep that in mind. And that is a kind of a different piece of it, but I think it is also important.

This coming year I am actually going to have a joint appointment. I will be half-time faculty and half-time administrator in the International Programs office at my university. I will be trying to work with them on their strategic plan for internationalization and things like that, really trying to bring in more of an equity-oriented lens into their strategic planning and assessments. It was important for me to do that because the longer I am a faculty member – I started as an administrator – but the longer that I am a faculty member, I feel the further I am away from, like, "Okay, what do practitioners actually really, really do around this issue now?". And so, I wanted to offer my expertise but also learn from the things that they are experiencing and try to kind of come together as well. I think sometimes with a critical approach people think you just have to be like fighting, fighting, fighting against the administration and organization and things like that. But I do think it is important to also try to find common ground and ways to collaborate and still have a critical voice too and be that voice. So, it's lots to navigate.

4.   **The predominance of a functionalist approach on research on international higher education is often justified by the strong presence of practitioners in the field, who are mostly interested in solving practical problems so that internationalization takes place successfully. You've been a scholar-practitioner and, yet, your scholarship is aimed at transforming the reality. How did this begin and what advices can be given to practitioners who are becoming or willing to become researchers?**

I started as an administrator, but my lens has always been – I think the way I see the world – is around thinking about, "Why are things the way that they are and how can things be better?" And when I was an administrator, I first worked in college admissions and I just saw a lot of inequity around students who were prepared for college and students who were not prepared for college. Again, it was no fault of their own, it was the circumstances in which they grew up in and just the inequities that we have in our society. But I recognized as an administrator that I could only help students who are in front of me and support those

students, and that is important work. But I really wanted to consider what are the system and structures that are impacting those students that maybe could be changed. And are there ways for me to think about it from that macro perspective, rather than working with students to overcome circumstances that they should not have to be overcoming because there should not be barriers to exist at all. That was really when I began kind of trying to think about, "Okay, well, is that engaging in policy related work? Is it doing research?" And I went back to school and eventually became a faculty member and decided to go down this track, one in part to do this work through my research. The other part was around being able to train people who would be practitioners and scholars and policymakers around this lens. And so, it was a dual purpose on both sides.

It is important for practitioners, regardless of whether they want to become faculty, one day, or not, to be able to read research. I always tell my students, especially masters students, "it does not matter if you ever want to get a doctorate or not, or become a researcher, it is important for you to be research literate because you are going to be asked in your job to use data to inform your practices or to look at what scholars are saying or best practices are saying. And you should not just take those at face value, you should be able to critique – read it and say, okay, then question it. And figure out, for example: Does this really fit for your context? Is what they are saying really accurate? Is it taking into consideration all of the nuances of the situation they are talking about? And so, as a practitioner, if you cannot do that, then you are just again going to reify the same things in your practice that you may actually be wanting to fight against. So, I understand that it is really important for practitioners to engage in research or just being research literate and being able to look at data and articles and glean things from them. And critique them and understand them.

In regard to practitioners who really want to engage in research, in and of itself, and want to kind of pursue that pathway, even if it is, again, solely to inform their practice, I understand research as a tool that can be used and in academic spaces and that it is a tool that is respected and upheld. And I suppose that is the elitism of academia. But, being able to have a voice and have the ability to make change requires you to be able to also understand what you are up against in that regard. And I think that it can be very easy for senior level leaders or other faculty to dismiss practitioners who do not have a sense of how to engage in that kind of research base and work and have data driven evidence. So, that is also really important and it does not necessarily require someone to go back and get a doctorate. Although that certainly is a pathway. But information is so readily available in so many different kinds of ways that there are other ways to learn about research and the research process. It is really just about finding the time and support to do that.

The one other thing that I would say for practitioners who are more at a senior level, who have staff, I would say it is important to be able to give staff space to learn about how to conduct research. And to do that, as well as part of professional development because we cannot just expect people to be able to do it on top of everything else they have going on at work. So, there has to be structures in place to support practitioners engaging in research and

9

collaborating with researchers and all of that, too. The collaboration piece and collaborating with faculty or others can also be a way to kind of making the research process more manageable.

5. **You received a prize from an organization that has been considered by many as hegemonic for the position it occupies in the United States and in the world system. Yet, your awarded work addressed issues of unbalanced power, injustices, and asymmetries/ inequalities in higher education. Using the words of decolonialist Walter Mignolo, what is the importance of "being in the frontier" (for instance, by publishing critical work in hegemonic journals and engaging in hegemonic networks) and how to do so?**

I think this is an accurate question and a critique that the organization is aware of. And it is a question that I think about and I definitely talk about in my work. Because even with this NAFSA award – a colleague nominated me for the award. So they said, "okay, I'm nominating you for this award." And I was like, "Sure thing. Thanks!" – I wasn't expecting to get it because my article that they awarded me for was very critical of internationalization. But I think that is a good thing on some level. And I feel very confident now in my work and my voice and where I am in my career that I think that I can engage organizations who do not necessarily, as a whole, follow my same worldview because I'm not going to be persuaded otherwise. I'm just going to continue talking about and sharing it. I'm never going to go and be like "NAFSA is this perfect organization," you would never hear me say that.

For example, after I got the award, they asked me to do different things with their organization. One was to go to their research symposium and give a keynote to this research symposium. And I was very critical of internationalization during the whole keynote. At the end, I also said it is challenging for practitioners too, but I'm sure people there thought "oh geez," you know. But it also created a lot of conversation afterwards. And people said, "Yeah, I hadn't thought about things this way" or "I think about things this way all the time, but I just never felt comfortable being able to say it." And because of my reputation around my work now if an organization like NAFSA gives me an award they kind of know what they are going to get. So, I feel that somehow my work can be able to infiltrate sometimes these organizations to accept and have this voice be present because if you do not engage these organizations at all, then that voice may not be present. And I do not think I am going to change NAFSA altogether. No, but I think I can create greater awareness and support people who are thinking about a critical lens and continue to mobilize this voice in that space. And while also knowing that there are challenges around that space and critiquing those challenges and there are times when I do that.

10

And there are times when I am not going to engage in certain ways or with certain projects. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)[3], they have this grant out right now called something like "Support to American-Style Higher Education in Iraq." Some colleagues are working on writing a proposal for this grant and they sent it to me and some other people asking, "Would you be willing to collaborate?" and I thought, "No, I'm not willing to collaborate on this grant." It is just too much away from anything I can support. But, for some, they might decide, "Okay, well I'm going to do it and try to be subversive." However, I did not think that was possible and I felt like that was too far gone. I cannot participate in something like that, it does not align with me. So I make choices all the time around what works and there is no hard line on that. You just start to get a sense of things and knowing when it is worth engaging: "okay in this space, I can disrupt this space." And knowing at other times, "I'm not going to be able to really disrupt this space. I'm going to do more harm than good if I engage in this way." But I think that at the end of the day, it is really processing through and thinking through and being reflective about those things. That is the key aspect, rather than just going along in any which way direction.

Also, I understand sometimes saying, "No, I'm not going to do it" is okay too. I think all of those things are okay as long as we are really thinking about it because being a critical scholar requires a lot of emotional energy and labor beyond just even the regular research process itself. It is an additional layer of things. You have to be able to take care of yourself and think about these things because you do not want to burn out and then not be able to do the work at all. So, you have to negotiate those things, going back a second time and saying, "I'm going to be confident and I'm going to do it. And let the chips fall where they may." That is usually how I am around my work. Like with NAFSA and other things that I have been asked to come and present at that I am always like, "are you really sure you want me to come and do this? I'm probably going to say things you don't like." But, then I'm like, "they asked me to come. So, you know, I'm going to share this perspective and maybe turn some light bulbs on and provide voice around things that people are thinking about but might be too worried or scared to talk about in the type of role that they have or whatever."

So, I see that the means of disruption can be a good thing, and even as a mentioned before with my joint appointment this year. Some may say, "Oh my gosh, why would you work with the International Programs office? They haven't always been super supportive of international students, they haven't done this, they haven't done that." And I say, "Regardless, they will continue to exist. So let me go and see if I can do something." Maybe I can't. Maybe after this year long appointment – I'm not going there to work full time forever – I'm going to

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[3] USAid is a U.S. government agency created in 1961 as part of the U.S. 'international development assistance' efforts. According to agency's institutional statement, its purpose is "to support partners to become self-reliant and capable of leading their own development journeys. We make progress toward this by reducing the reach of conflict, preventing the spread of pandemic disease, and counteracting the drivers of violence, instability, transnational crime and other security threats. We promote American prosperity through investments that expand markets for U.S. exports; create a level playing field for U.S. businesses; and support more stable, resilient, and democratic societies. We stand with people when disaster strikes or crisis emerges as the world leader in humanitarian assistance" (USAID, 2020). Much criticism has been made about USAid's work around the world, being often associated with a tool of soft power.

take a year to see if there are ways and they are open. They know my scholarship, and they know these things about me, and they want me to still come work with them so I'm going to give it a shot. And if it doesn't work out, then it doesn't. But I am, at the end of the day, I'm an educator I have to always have hope that people can learn and change and grow. If I stopped thinking that, then I'm no longer an educator. I have to have hope that there are possibilities and at least I feel like try and if it doesn't work out, then, you know, I still tried to be an educator. I think it's important to keep that perspective as well.

6.   Governments and universities in the Global South tend to engage on internationalization in a 'passive way' (LIMA; CONTEL, 2011), often reproducing models and strategies that are detached from their own reality and, therefore, contributing to inequalities of knowledge, power, and being (LEAL, 2020). Why do you believe this happens and what recommendations could be given to those interested in developing policies of internationalization that are explicitly aligned with broader social justice efforts?

This is a real challenge in the Global South. I'm actually supporting a student right now who is one of my doctoral advisees and her dissertation is around internationalization in Egypt. We have these conversations as well. I'm also thinking through the role of internationalizing because internationalization tends to feed itself into this idea of things external to the nation state or to the local. So, it's the following. "Okay, internationalization will help with global rankings and will help with prestige"; it will help with these things that are very detached from local issues and local inequities. But I don't think that has to be the case. It's just how internationalization tends to be framed in general, but specifically it's magnified in Global South nations. The models around the internationalization reify inequitable power dynamics between Global North and South. If Global South nations are not careful, and some have not been careful, they then themselves reify these things in their practices too.

Thus, the question becomes "how can we think about developing policies of internationalization that are explicitly aligned with broader social justice efforts?" How can this process of internationalization being practiced in higher education spaces, and also this notion of global engagement, be used to reinforce positive social change for citizenry? Around issues of equity in our nation? How can it be used as a tool of educating versus we are doing this to boost the image of a higher education institution or boost the image of a nation or to engage in competition or to be able to partner with Global North countries in ways that again reify inequitable power dynamics.

There is more growing voice around the positionality of Global South nations regarding internationalization through a critical lens, especially in research. But there is certainly room for much more. Because as I think of my work in a U.S. context around internationalization even through a critical lens, it can still have this very U.S., Global North, Western gaze on Global South nations. I have also tried to be mindful of that. I had a student

12

the other day who is doing his dissertation in India, the Indian context and internationalization. And he is drawing from a lot of U.S.-based scholars who are critical scholars, but I told him that it is also important to draw from local scholars and knowledge in the Indian context and have that voice be present. And to think about how those critical theories, whether from internationalization or not, or whether from academics or not, can be embedded into this understanding of internationalization in India. There is opportunity, for that more than we are seeing, and I would actually like to critique myself because I do not feel like I received an education that allows me to have a full awareness of that perspective, it is more me learning and engaging in that now in my work as a scholar.

7.   What reflections can be made about internationalization of higher education in the context of Covid-19 pandemic?

I feel that we are at a really important moment to be rethinking and reimagining what internationalization could be. And this is a time when with the pandemic, the social unrest that is happening all over the world, the political conservatism that is happening all over the world – all of these things are providing this moment to really say: "what can be done differently to move in a more positive direction in all aspects of life?". But, specifically for internationalization, this is a critical moment. All of what is happening is forcing us to engage in internationalization in different ways than it has been in the past. If we can really be intentional, I believe that this moment could lend itself to a better approach and a more thoughtful, critical approach. Unfortunately, again, sometimes people are just too quick to just keep going without really thinking about it, but it is a really critical moment.

Internationalization, in my mind, should be a process to an end goal. It is not the end goal to be internationalized as a higher education institution. It should be a process of doing something to achieve a goal like greater learning, greater accessibility, broadening participation in higher education, retention of students, or helping to mitigate global challenges. It should not be just about sending some students abroad or student mobility. Internationalization is a process that should lead to something greater. That is what needs to continue to be kept at the forefront. And unfortunately, many organizations, practitioners, and scholars have started to treat internationalization like that is the goal. If that continues, then that is always going to be the challenge around internationalization as a potential tool for positive social change and improved equity.

13

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14