

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Thinking from the Borders: Colonialism and Latin American Universities

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Abstract: Latin American universities are subject to old and new forms of colonialism. While old forms of colonialism are based on a matrix of race and labour divisions emerged during colonial times, currently new forms of colonialism attached to prestige and international rankings pervade higher education systems and their universities in Latin America. By means of both a bibliometric and a thematic analysis, this paper examines the scholarly work on new and old ways of colonialism in universities in the region. The paper argues that Latin American universities have developed both local and global-oriented mechanisms based on border thinking so as to mitigate these colonial forces. These mechanisms are helping to develop a border thinking so as to transform universities.

Paper: Latin American universities are currently shaped by old and new ways of coloniality that originate within and outside universities. On the one hand, old forms of racism remain so that, for example, indigenous populations across the region are under-represented in higher education, are less able to obtain degree certificates, and their knowledges have not been sufficiently recognised as legitimate knowledges (Mato, 2016, 2015; Schmelkes, 2009). On the other hand, Latin American universities have been subject to forces associated with elite higher education institutions in the Global North (Ordorika and Lloyd, 2015) attached to international rankings, prestige and academic productivity (Collyer, 2018; Guzmán-Valenzuela & Gómez, 2019).

Latin American universities have been making attempts to contest both older and newer forms of colonialism and proposals have been made for new ways of thinking about the university (Eschenhagen, 2013; Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2016; Mato, 2016). Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) have developed the concept of 'critical border thinking' as a means of questioning and transforming new and old structures of coloniality in the periphery.

The research questions are: (i) What are the main patterns of publication contained in the Web of Science, Scopus and SciELO journals about colonialism in universities in Latin America; (ii) What are the main challenges identified in the literature regarding forms of colonialism that shape universities in Latin America (iii) In which ways have Latin American universities been coping with these tensions and contesting forms of colonialism?

A search with key terms was conducted of articles published between 2010 and 2019 and authored by at least one academic affiliated to a Latin American university, and across three well-known journal indexes: Web of Science core collection (WoScc), SCOPUS and SciELO. Only papers – either theoretical or empirical - were considered in the sample. A total of 124 articles were identified and later, all the papers published in 2019 were chosen to be thematically analysed.

Key issues emerged about the ways in which universities in Latin America position themselves and deal with the tensions produced by old and new forms of colonialism. For both forms of colonialism, spaces promoting border thinking are glimpsed in the papers at different levels, dimensions and actions. *Local-oriented mechanisms* mitigate old forms of colonialism within the university and include concrete policies and initiatives at different levels (access, curriculum, formation, and research) in relation to indigenous peoples. *Global-oriented mechanisms* are critical examinations of global trends in higher education that attempt to counterbalance academic imperialism. Both mechanisms are part of border thinking and take place *within* universities although one is oriented to action (local mechanisms), while the second one is reflective (global mechanisms).

The paper shows that there is an increasing interest in publishing critical papers on colonialism in Latin America. Many of the studies and reflections in these papers address historical discriminations and processes of *invisibilisation* towards indigenous populations in the Latin American region, with many papers documenting colonial experiences across universities at different levels. Also, many papers are reflective texts about new forms of colonialism that rely heavily on internationalisation and that promote a hegemonic idea of world class university.

Universities occupy a privileged position of power in society and, as a result, they have played a part in reproducing and reinforcing hegemonic imaginaries about universities and their missions. In analysing the patterns of knowledge about internationalisation and colonialism forces as interrelated concepts, a *double discrimination* emerges: (i) an inherited discriminatory pattern that has been reproduced and reinforced within Latin American universities based on race and labour divisions that originated in colonial times and (ii) a discriminating situation arising from processes of exportation and importation of imaginaries about elite world-class universities that draw heavily on international rankings. These imaginaries are sustained by those universities that occupy positions of power in the Global North and have been accepted and emulated by many Latin American universities.

However, there are spaces for hope and critical agency for Latin American universities. Multiple spaces in promoting border thinking have been identified which can confront old and new forms of colonialism. Local-oriented mechanisms include concrete initiatives at different levels in the university that are intended to repair historical discriminations experienced by indigenous peoples. Global-oriented mechanisms contest global tendencies in higher education imported and legitimised by Latin American universities and that limit their identities. Both types of mechanisms are part of a

border thinking that creates spaces for difference and respect and give voice to subalterns, so transforming Latin American universities.

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