

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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From 'Geopolitics of Being' towards Inter-being: Envisioning the 'In/visibles' in the Globalization of Higher Education

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**Abstract:** Amid the growing debate about globalization of higher education (HE), remaining absent is an analysis of the onto-epistemic grammar underlying the articulation of this global phenomenon. This essay posits that our understanding of the nature of globalization of HE cannot be separated from questions of a) emotions, b) temporality, and c) ontology. Drawing on the extant literature on globalization of HE to date and personal experiences, it demonstrates the efficacy of these above three concepts, and argues that our understanding of globalization of HE insidiously perpetuates a *geopolitics of being*, and constrains us from knowing/embodying inter-being. It suggests pursuing inter-being as an alternative to the prevailing onto-epistemic grammar, embedded in fixed notions of human progress and coloniality of knowledge. By refusing to tame uncertainty or provide 'probable outcomes', this essay intends to provoke and imagine *alternative* ways of knowing/being.

**Paper:** Many have looked at globalization of higher education (HE) from different angles, spaces, and probed the intersections between economic, cultural, technological, political, linguistic, and/or mobility realms (see King, Marginson & Naidoo, 2011; Unterhalter & Carpentier, 2010). This literature has done a remarkable job in illuminating the 'visible' aspects of HE. However, the above literature neglects the 'invisible winds' of globalization that we feel but cannot or do not wish to see. I will posit that our understanding of globalization of HE cannot be separated from the *invisible winds* of a) emotions, b) temporality, and c) ontology. In this paper, I suggest considering these invisibles as starting points to be *otherwise* and in so doing, ask different set of questions as we work towards reconsidering anthropocentric, secular, rationalistic, and/or socio-materialistic notions of being human in the globalization of HE. Drawing on the extant literature on globalization of HE to date, and sharing some of my own personal experiences, this paper will demonstrate the efficacy of these above three concepts. I will argue that globalization of HE as *a discourse* and *process* perpetuates, what I call the *geopolitics of being*— a particular structured way of knowing/being that is

transhistorically constituted by coloniality/modernity and informs our dominant onto-epistemic grammar (Stewart-Harawira, 2005)

Globalization of HE scholarship ignores our emotive ways of being. Most globalization of HE discussions (and the research itself) assume emotionally detached, rational, and objective human subjectivity (Kenway & Fahey, 2011). This lack of engagement with emotions are due to a dominant onto-epistemic grammar privileging the disembodied rational human subject. By emotions, or affect, I am referring to individual feelings and collective affective conditions that are underpinned by relational and intersubjective relations (Ahmed, 2004). For instance, emotions like the desires of belonging, fear, shame, or competition drive global competition in HE (Naidoo, 2018). Furthermore, many regions, nation-states, institutions and individuals are forced to navigate the precarity norm in HE. Within a growing neoliberal climate of academic and financial precarity, many faculty (particularly short-term or migrant academic labor), students, and institutions are forced to navigate volatile work conditions, labor markets, and funding markets, causing tremendous anxiety and vulnerability (Brown et al., 2011). Emotions also shape student and faculty mobility, while steering policy discourses and movements (Morley et al, 2019). Emotions are integral to popular culture's (i.e., movies, television, the Internet, magazines, etc.) role in mobilizing desires and aspirations among HE audiences. In short, by making the 'invisible' emoscapes more visible, we can also enable our emotive ways of being to arise, that are rendered invisible by the geopolitics of being.

I suggest that globalization of HE also embodies a temporal phenomenon underpinned by a *calculating geopolitics of being* obsessed with certainty, knowability, and taming one's futurity. For instance, the geopolitics of being obsessed with futurity and control is embodied within global, national and local HE policy discourses, mobilizing hypothetical "future disasters into the present in order to know how to organize ourselves for the inevitable disasters they present" (Adams et al., 2009, p. 248). The geopolitics of being, seeking security and certainty, mobilizes metrics and policy by numbers. By offering a means to counter uncertainty, display virtue, and protect against fate, numbers have become the dominant backdrop against which members of a HE community understand themselves (Espeland & Sauder, 2016, p. 27). For instance, global university rankings, and performance indicators have emerged as the HE decision-making norm globally (Hazelkorn, 2016). The temporality culture of futurity and certainty informs the growing data-driven institutional culture in HE. The overriding question I have been discussing so far is: what are the 'temporal contexts' of globalization of HE? Furthermore, how does our temporal assumptions as scholars delimit our ways of knowing and being?

Instead of simply being reflexive of our epistemologically and geopolitical standpoints about globalization of HE, we need to be *ontologically* reflexive. There have indeed been important interrogations of ontological underpinnings of globalization of HE as they help foreground the nature of movement, human agency, and space (see Marginson, 2008; Szadkowski, 2018). Missing to date has been critically interrogations of the ontological standpoints about human existence in general. I suggest we need to pose difficult questions about the 'terms of existence and reality' informing our current articulations of globalization of HE. For instance, globalization of HE literature presume that living beings are autonomous, and that we are separate from other-than-human beings (i.e. land, animals, plants, etc.). For instance, for the Maori people, identity is linked with all other things living

and inanimate and with the very earth they inhabit (Stewart-Harawira, 2005). In other words, within the dominant structure of intelligibility, other beings like trees, mountains, coyotes, or a hummingbird are simply objects of curiosity or consumption, and not considered teachers (Andreotti, 2016). Furthermore, if we were to draw upon, for instance, Eastern ontological perspectives of Śūnyatā, we could highlight a tiered multi-stratified notion of reality (Izutsu, 2008), pointing to 'alternative' views of knowing and being. Such an ontological standpoint would complicate the 'Self-contained' entities that we assume in understanding globalization of HE, such as 'nation-state', universities/colleges, economy, global, local, national, self, agency, and so on. Therefore, we need to keep asking ontological questions such as: what kind of human being, or our relationships with the nonhuman world (i.e. the land, this planet, or rest of the universe), are being imagined, desired, and/or excluded through such global HE discourses and outcomes?

Overall, I am suggesting moving simply beyond geopolitics of knowledge, or epistemic shifts, and instead we need to raise questions about the *geopolitics of being*. We rarely question: Which and whose structured ways of being shape our understanding of globalization of HE? How we answer these questions will shape what ways of knowing and being can emerge. I suggest that acknowledging our inter-being may help provide a more pluralistic and 'messy' description of globalization of HE.

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