

## “Another university is possible?”: A Study of Indigenizing and Internationalizing Initiatives in two Canadian Postsecondary Institutions

### « L’Université peut-elle devenir autre ? » : une étude d’initiatives d’autochtonisation et d’internationalisation dans deux établissements canadiens d’enseignement postsecondaire

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Volume 51, Number 1, 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105679ar>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5206/cieeci.v51i1.14829>

[See table of contents](#)

#### Publisher(s)

University of Western Ontario

#### ISSN

2369-2634 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

#### Cite this article

Chatterjee, S., Shahrokni, S., Gomez, B. & Poojary, M. (2022). “Another university is possible?”: A Study of Indigenizing and Internationalizing Initiatives in two Canadian Postsecondary Institutions. *Comparative and International Education / Éducation comparée et internationale*, 51(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.5206/cieeci.v51i1.14829>

#### Article abstract

The aspirational postsecondary strategies of Indigenizing and internationalization claim to address pressing political questions such as racism and systemic inequities in the university. Through close examination of these initiatives in two key postsecondary institutions in Toronto, Canada, we show how these priorities instead betray strategic investment in diversity in three specific ways: first, universities are positioned as a horizontal “community of changemaker” that are themselves disarticulated from global relations of inequities. Next, international and Indigenous students’ welcome is made conditional and contingent on their becoming “diversity informants” for the university and its normative membership. Related to that, the claims of curricular diversity reify established epistemic hierarchies. We end the article with some final reflections on the merits of reforming the university, discussing the tensions, and the limits and possibilities of this project.

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# Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale

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Volume 51 | Issue 1 Special Issue International Students from Asia in Canada's Postsecondary Institutions: Disconnections and Connections

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November 2022

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### Recommended Citation

Chatterjee, S., Shahrokni, S., Gomez, B., & Poojary, M. (2022). “Another university is possible?”: A Study of Indigenizing and Internationalizing Initiatives in two Canadian Postsecondary Institutions *Comparative and International Education/Éducation comparée et internationale*. 51(1). 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.5206/ciceci.v51i1.14829>

**“Another university is possible?”: A Study of Indigenizing and Internationalizing  
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**« L’Université peut-elle devenir autre? » : Une étude d’initiatives d’autochtonisation et  
d’internationalisation dans deux établissements canadiens d’enseignement postsecondaire**

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**Abstract**

The aspirational postsecondary strategies of Indigenizing and internationalization claim to address pressing political questions such as racism and systemic inequities in the university. Through close examination of these initiatives in two key postsecondary institutions in Toronto, Canada, we show how these priorities instead betray strategic investment in diversity in three specific ways: first, universities are positioned as a horizontal “community of changemaker” that are themselves disarticulated from global relations of inequities. Next, international and Indigenous students’ welcome is made conditional and contingent on their becoming “diversity informants” for the university and its normative membership. Related to that, the claims of curricular diversity reify established epistemic hierarchies. We end the article with some final reflections on the merits of reforming the university, discussing the tensions, and the limits and possibilities of this project.

**Résumé**

Les stratégies visant l’autochtonisation et l’internationalisation se targuent de s’adresser aux questions politiques de l’heure, à savoir le racisme et les inégalités systémiques au sein de l’université. Un examen approfondi de ces démarches dans deux établissements clés d’enseignement postsecondaire à Toronto, au Canada, révèle que ces priorités vont à l’encontre de l’engagement envers la diversité de trois façons particulières. Premièrement, les universités se positionnent comme « communauté horizontale d’agents du changement », en soi désarticulée des rapports globaux d’inégalité. Ensuite, l’accueil aux étudiants internationaux et autochtones est assujéti à leur volonté de devenir « informateurs pour la diversité » pour le compte de l’université et de ses membres normatifs. En parallèle, la diversité dont se réclament les curriculums sert à réifier les hiérarchies épistémiques en place. Pour conclure, nous mettons de l’avant quelques réflexions sur les mérites d’une réforme universitaire, tout en invoquant les tensions, les limites et les possibilités d’un tel projet.

Keywords: indigenizing initiatives, internationalization, postsecondary, racism, diversity, systemic inequities, epistemic hierarchies

Mots clés : initiatives d’autochtonisation; internationalisation; postsecondaire; racisme; diversité; inégalités systémiques; hiérarchies épistémique

It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 26)

## Introduction

None of the inequities structured along race, anti-Blackness, gender, and class hierarchies, and the shallowness of liberal equality and freedom talk that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed came as revelations for those with critical and experiential standpoints to the study of society. These are matters that we—as anti-racist feminist scholars—daily unpack in our teaching/learning. What we had less thought through was the pandemic exposing similar structural geographies within the university. As the virus meticulously followed the cracks in our society, and hunted down its most marginalized members, it is these members of the university who were also disproportionately affected (James, 2020; Shalaby et al., 2021; McCoy & Yee, 2021; Staniscuaski et al., 2021). However, the university, being an institution that feeds off of, *and* into societal divides and hierarchies, embraced the mantra of “we are in this together” while denying tangible support for its members particularly vulnerable to the pandemic (Davis, 2021).

For us, racialized female faculty members and graduate students who daily live and witness the tension between the university’s public commitment to equity and inclusion and its intensifying business model, the pandemic indeed was a portal (Roy, 2020), spurring us on a journey to reevaluate the substance in recent postsecondary claims to diversity, inclusion and tackling global civil society problems. Being faculty members and doctoral students at a large metropolitan university at a time of decolonial and racial reckoning, we witnessed, with no small excitement, the growing (even if still frustratingly slow) presence of racialized, Black and Indigenous Peoples as faculty and students into our university, and the Canadian postsecondary system generally. We, however, also noticed a rather long and stubborn shadow between the institutional rhetoric of their welcome and the actual landscapes of equity. Most importantly, we noticed that the expansion of equity and diversity initiatives often came at the cost of faculty and students who are accorded increasingly minimal roles in how these are envisioned and implemented. As such, amidst clamorous administrative claims to turn the university into a space of actual possibilities for historically marginalized communities who nevertheless kept disappearing in the *undercommons* of the very same institutions (Harney & Moten, 2013), we decided to pay cautious attention to the possibilities of what Emejulu (2017a) has called “another university.”

Following the footsteps of decolonial scholars of modern epistemic traditions, we start this article by situating our concern—the possibilities for “another university”—within a long lineage of political struggles over shaping the modern university. We then discuss our conceptual and methodological inspirations, our rationale for choosing to examine, primarily, internationalizing, and Indigenizing strategies and allied strategic documents published by senior academic/administrative leadership in the University of Toronto and York University, and the processes of data gathering and selection. Following from that, our data analysis establishes how these strategic priorities re-centre the university’s innocence by casting it as a community of changemakers, commodifying racialized international and Indigenous students as bearers of diversity and diverse cultural knowledges, and finally, reifying modern epistemic hierarchies by commitments that are non-performative (Ahmed, 2012). In conclusion, we consider the merits of reforming the modern university as distinct from embracing a positionality of in-betweenness where we could be *in* the university while not being *of* it (Harney & Moten, 2013; Tungohan, 2022).

## II. “Our” University?: Lineages of Political Struggles Over Access to Higher Education

The modern university, as historians and sociologists of modern epistemic traditions tell us, has been an elite, European, and male bastion (Emejulu, 2017a, b; Mignolo, 2003, 2009), often rooted in a slave holding and plantation economy (Wilder, 2013), antisemitic practices (Karabel, 2005), and invested in settler colonial discourses and practices of dispossession and nation building (Stein & Andreotti, 2017; Deloria, 1969; Stonechild, 2006; Tuck, 2009). In contrast, the university we partake in now claims itself to be a more equitable space. A substantial role in this so-called democratization was played by the post-World War II economic imperatives, shortly followed by anti-colonial uprisings across the European colonies between the 1940s to 60s, and intensified with the 1960s progressive movements worldwide, including, but not limited to, demands for international human rights, Black civil rights (e.g., James Baldwin delivered his famous “Talk to teachers” in 1963), and queer, feminist, and anti-racist movements. One would, however, be mistaken to consider these signs of a reparative institution. On the contrary, as Bell (1980, p. 524) argued in the context of the landmark case *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the major civil rights win of desegregation was not due to state benevolence, but rather to a series of social and economic benefits that accrued for the American state. Indeed, it was a temporary “convergence of black and white interests” (p. 526), he contends, that made *Brown* possible.<sup>1</sup> Alongside the civil rights movements, the 1950s & 60s also witnessed the emergence of international higher education, (especially American but also Canadian and western European), first as a site of recruitment into cold war bipolar ideologies (Bu, 2003), and also as one of higher learning and leadership for postcolonial nation builders. Postwar higher education is thus more meaningfully understood as a site where the instrumental concerns of dying and emerging empires, new international relations, and diplomatic and business ties were assessed and responded to.

The 1980s witnessed a worldwide reckoning of Indigenous rights to self-determination (Moreton-Robinson, 2015), bringing Indigenous conversations and methods on decolonial education to the fore (Archibald, 2008; Pidgeon, 2016). More recently, progressive movements’ growing acknowledgement of curricular Whiteness (see, for example, Dismantling the Master’s House collective at University College London), and Indigenous land-based sovereignty as fundamental to decolonial aspirations (Tuck & Yange, 2012) ushered in a new era of thinking about education as collective liberation.

In the 1990s, following the systematic public de-funding of universities across the Western world, the status of international higher education started shifting, from cold war ideological tensions and postcolonial nationalism to a battle over global skills and revenue generation. This was the decade for a competitive scramble for Asia and Asian students among North American and European institutions, largely following from, not democratic instincts, but discourses of “Asia rising” and “Asian century” (Chatterjee & Barber, 2020).

Democratic and anti-colonial currents in the university therefore are complex, sometimes contradictory and frequently circular. The welcome and recognition of non-normative subjects is almost always cautious and strategic (Choudry & Vally, 2020). While best read at their local and temporal conjunctures, these processes mark the ongoing power struggles over who define and shape the university, and by extension, our collective futures. It is these struggle—movements for curricular decolonization at the Oxford University, the SOAS, the University of Cambridge, the

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<sup>1</sup> Bell identified these interests as the American stakes in “win[ning] the hearts and minds of emerging third world peoples” (of clear political significance in the era of Cold War), and further industrialization of the American south. For “American blacks” on the other hand, Bell argued, desegregation brought meaning to the world war era rhetoric of freedom and equality. In the same article he then went on to offer evidence of how, during various follow-up cases calling for actual desegregation, the logic of local control over school boards were mobilized to maintain the status quo in American public schools.

*Rhodes Must Fall* campaign at the University of Cape Town, Dalit students organizing in elite Indian institutions and postsecondary conversations following the 2015 report, and recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, to name but a few—that led to a stream (admittedly uneven and hierarchical still) of racialized and Indigenous Peoples, those belonging to the working class, and women, indeed people falling on a vast spectrum of intersecting identities and differences, entering an institutional site that was not imagined to be theirs historically. As Ferguson (2015, p. 48) cautioned however, comparative studies and indeed, studies of minority difference, while primarily envisioned as projects of freedom from hegemonies of Western knowledge, have been tethered to an “increasingly administrative future.”

Within this cacophony of progressive challenges and the stifling administrative and managerial moves towards maintaining the status quo that characterizes the modern university, we ask whether the institutional talk of anti-racist inclusion and the strategic priorities of Indigenizing and internationalizing—frequently proposed as ameliorative of and attentive to colonial injuries—create, as they claim, the conditions of possibility for “another” university, i.e., where genuine anti-colonial imaginaries could materialize.

### **III. Examining the Conditions of Possibility for “Another” University: Methodological and Conceptual Frameworks**

Our overarching question, as we discuss above, has long and complicated histories, and also variously manifests across the current postsecondary landscape. We, however, purposefully kept this inquiry empirically smaller, local, and recent in terms of its temporal focus. Our choice of the University of Toronto and York University (hereafter UofT & YU) as archival sites is due to their being major urban, globally known universities in a racially diverse metropolitan area, with explicit scholarly and strategic engagements with questions of anti-racist diversity, and more recently, internationalizing and Indigenizing. Our decision to limit the study between 2015 to 2021 was guided by the phenomenon of institutional engagements with both Indigenizing and internationalizing reaching a peak about 7 years ago, following first, the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s reports/recommendations in 2015 and secondly, Canada’s 1st International Education Strategy in 2014. Our analysis draws on the close reading and critical discourse analysis of university-wide planning and strategy documents—e.g., academic plans, strategic research plans, annual reports on Indigenous initiatives, and documents on internationalization, anti-racism etc.—produced by UofT and YU senior administration since 2015.

Our analysis specifically delves into the ways in which these documents frame and discuss internationalization and Indigenization of the university. It unpacks the ideation aspirations in these processes, and the sets of arguments and rhetorical devices through which they are celebrated. What goals and ideals does the university achieve through these trends? What shifts, if any, do these embody from past practices and logics? Specifically, to what extent are Indigenizing and internationalizing trends claimed to decolonize the university?

These are particularly salient questions as decolonization is a promise that tends to be rather superficially attached to any and every claim, progressive and otherwise. Decolonization, as a number of Indigenous scholars powerfully argue (see Byrd, 2011; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Nichols, 2020; Tuck and Yang, 2012), has to be materially grounded in/as concrete responses to settler colonial dispossession, i.e., in Indigenous land-back. Equity and diversity as well are harnessed more for generating corporate profits and institutional promotion than conceptualized substantively as both pathways to and promises of decolonization. Further to these, we are deeply

aware of the diverse subjects of these initiatives. Internationalizing is majorly targeted towards international students (overwhelmingly racialized as Asian as we write), actively welcomed by the Canadian state in ways (e.g., as future citizens) that contribute to its ongoing project of dispossession. Indigenizing, on the other hand, frequently focuses on memorializing and culturalizing the Indigenous subject in what Anishinaabe legal scholar, John Borrows, has called a frozen-rights approach (Yellowhead Institute, 2019).

In examining these initiatives together, we do not mean to collapse their crucial and productive differences. We rather posit decolonization as the largest possible ethico-political framework, and one that incorporates freedom from both displacement and dispossession, and from being managed differentially by the capitalist colonial state. Within such a framework, we acknowledge the complicity of the racialized subject while also identifying their arrivant subjectivity (Byrd, 2011), and place biographical complicity within structures of dispossession that reproduce commodity relations of land as property (Nichols, 2020). Following from these, our engagement with these concepts as they appear in the stated documents is meant to attend to and, in the process, underscore the gaps between the administrative vision of a just and egalitarian university and its reinforcement of ongoing global and local inequities.

The following table captures a snapshot of various strategic documents that were analyzed (see Appendix for full citations of these archival documents).

**Table 1: Data Analysis Reference Documents**

<b>York University</b>	<b>University of Toronto</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2015–2020 University Academic Plan</li> <li>• The Indigenous Framework: A Guide to Action, Indigenous Council (2017)</li> <li>• The Indigenous Framework: A Guide to Action 2017–9 Update, Indigenous Council, Vice Provost Academic</li> <li>• 2020–2025 University Academic Plan</li> <li>• Strategic Research Plan: 2018–2023 Towards New Heights, Vice President, Research and Innovation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three Priorities: A Discussion Paper, Gertler, M. President, University of Toronto (2015)</li> <li>• Global Engagement: UofT in the World, UofT International Strategic Plan (2015)</li> <li>• Global Engagement: UofT in the World, The 2017–2018 Annual Report of the Vice President, International</li> <li>• 2018–2019 Annual Report of the Vice President, International</li> <li>• The Strategic Research Plan 2018–23 Division of the Vice President, Research and Innovation</li> <li>• 2019 Indigenous Initiatives Annual Progress Report, Office of Indigenous Initiatives</li> </ul>

For both UofT & YU, the key driver for their Indigenizing strategic documents was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s 2015 report (hereafter TRC, 2015). Indeed, Indigenous

initiatives continue to maintain a significant presence within the academic and research strategies of both universities.

In regard to internationalizing, YU does not have an established framework. However, the President's Council on Internationalization and Global Engagement (PCI), has announced plans to develop "an integrated institutional strategic plan" and ensure "York's place as a locally and globally engaged university" (PCI, n.d.; PCI, 2019, p. 2). Traces of YU's focus on global engagement and internationalization are currently more robust outside of the PCI, such as the development of a global network learning approach, global partner dialogues and documents like the 2020–2025 Academic Plan which includes goals of international student enrollment and global engagement (York University, n.d.-a). Prior to this, documents like the 2017–2020 Strategic Mandate Agreement (York University, 2017b) and 2018–2020 Vice Provost 2 Year Strategy Report (Vice Provost Students, n.d.) suggest that global engagement and internalization has been and continues to be an important area of focus for York University.

Unlike YU, UofT has an institution-wide International Strategic Plan. Additionally, since 2017, UofT has produced annual international reports that outline their yearly progress and establishment of new initiatives. The website of their International Office also includes global university affiliates and partnerships, such as in regions of Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. This level of accessibility to their various reports and strategies is not found with other offices like that of Indigenous Initiatives, where access to their Indigenous "Annual" Initiatives Report was limited to 2019. Finally, we also consulted allied documents produced by such sites as the Vice President Equity offices, Offices of Special Advisors to the President, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) offices. These offices are formally responsible for the promotion and maintenance of EDI initiatives within the universities. While we did not examine these as core archival data, we want to underscore the need to do so to examine the extent to which overarching equity, inclusion and diversity initiatives inform the frameworks of Indigenizing and internationalizing.

Far from being monoliths, universities are sites of negotiation, contestation, and resistance; spaces in which multiple and competing discursive frames and actions tied to anti-racism, internationalization, and Indigenization coexist. Yet, writing about university president's statements on the United States travel ban on Muslim countries, Stein (2018) rightfully reminds us that "not all responses hold equal weight in terms of setting the agenda for an institution, and the symbolic weight of university presidents' statements should not be understated" (p. 912). Hence, our decision to draw heavily from university leadership documents as empirical data.

Our analysis indeed shows that key administrative bodies and leadership positions contribute to the discursive framing and "set ... the tone" (Cole & Harper, 2017, p. 330 as cited in Stein, 2018, p. 912) for discussing and implementing various strategic projects. Building on Michel Foucault, we understand discourse as producing particular "truths" about the world, which simultaneously, as Hall (2001) writes (p. 76), "'rules out' or forbids other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it." As such, through their circulation within the university, discursive frames regulate, and constrain both the ways in which its members may act and reimagine modes of interacting, working, and being in this institution (Almeida & Kumalo, 2018; Stein, 2018). In so doing, they further naturalize, legitimate, and reinforce a set of historically contingent power relations structuring everyday practices and interactions. Our analysis shows a few different ways these frames emerge, circulate, and naturalize; all in turn delimiting the terms of membership of racialized, Indigenous, and international students.



Here, we propose that through the frameworks and policies they put forth, universities assign international and Indigenous students to a specific role within the institution. They are indeed constructed as key informants of “diversity,” boosting at once representational capital for postsecondary spaces in a globalized educational market and honing the “intercultural skills” that domestic students increasingly need in competitive labour markets. Indigenous and international students are thus commodified in distinctive, albeit similar ways and expected to perform a particular labour within these universities. Their inclusion, we suggest, is thus at best fragmented, conditional, and transient. Furthermore, this particular framing of international and Indigenous bodies and the specific location they are assigned to within the universities can best be apprehended through the racial capitalism framework. Departing from conventional Marxist thinking, scholars, like Robinson (2000), Lowe (2015), and Melamed (2015), have contended that since its inception, capitalism has relied on the construction and the exploitation of racial difference. It posits that racialization and capital accumulation are co-constitutive processes, bolstered through historically contingent, nation- and institution-specific narratives through which these very processes, while well in place, may be effectively disguised. Here, we contend that while internationalizing and Indigenizing policies are rooted in mutually constituted imperial political economic and racial logics, the neoliberalizing<sup>2</sup> trend within universities pushes for the elaboration of discursive frames which efficiently occludes these systemic processes. Internationalization and Indigenization are indeed tied to a broader mission to increase “diversity” and create intercultural dialogue. Yet, this mission is not constructed as necessary to discontinue long-standing epistemic hierarchies within universities, nor does it point to concrete measures and practices through which the systemic racial barriers that its non-White members receive may be addressed. Our analysis reveals that current modes of internationalizing and Indigenizing align with organizational “diversity work” which, to paraphrase Ahmed (2012, p. 51), has consisted in not the dismantling of the Whiteness in all aspects of university life, from curriculum to governance, but rather, its reconfiguration. As Ahmed writes, “Diversity becomes changing perceptions of whiteness, rather than the whiteness of organizations [emphasis in original]. Changing perceptions of whiteness can be how an institution can reproduce whiteness, as that which exists but is no longer perceived” (p. 34). The gaps and contradictions between dominant discursive frames which celebrate the institution’s “decolonizing” initiatives, its embarking on a path of “ethical internationalization” while simultaneously centring nationalist sentiments, erasing colonial foundations of Canada, and reaffirming the university’s expansionist ambitions further remind us of the author’s concept of “non-performativity”: “how things are reproduced by the very appearance of being transformed” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 2).

In unpacking the discontinuities between the grand principles used in these administrative documents and the practices which sustain inequities in the university, we hope to “reanimate words such as diversity and difference by linking them with social justice” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 3) and push towards transformative processes.

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<sup>2</sup> We understand neoliberalism as a set of policies put in place increasingly as of the 1980s which leads to the gradual privatization of public institutions and the deregulation of state services. Neoliberalism is further rooted in ideological tenets which centre “‘neutral’ efficient, and technical solutions to social problems; and the use of market language to legitimize new norms and to neutralize opposition” (Dawson & Francis 2016, p. 27).

#### **IV. The Architecture of Inclusion: Innocent Changemakers, Commodified Belonging, and a Raceless Diversity**

We organize our findings into an overarching thematic of “the architecture of inclusion” that involves a number of subthemes, each with various rhetorical and discursive moves which demonstrate ongoing power struggles over terms of access, and the modern university’s fierce, almost relentless capacity to appropriate critique and reinvent itself, thereby rendering “another university” a distant dream.

##### ***Establishing the University’s Innocence***

*A community of changemakers.* YU’s 2020–2025 Academic Plan (n.d-b) opens with a sense of urgency. More than ever before, we learn, universities have the “responsibility” to engage in “global cooperation and borderless education” to contribute to “positive change.” Internationalization of its programs, partnerships, and student populations is a direct response to this critical time, it is explained, and one which emanates from the institution’s longstanding commitment to “social justice, equity, sustainability.” In the coming phase of development of its internationalizing agenda, the university will reinforce this “commitment to ethical internationalization,” a model governed by “integrity, reciprocity, reflexivity, inclusivity, and sustainability.” In their opening sentence, the UofT’s 2017–2018 annual report of the Office of the Vice-President, International (2018), conveys a similarly pressing concern. More than ever before, the world needs UofT: “social justice, economic growth, the environment” (p. 1), critical challenges of our time, call for the university to deepen its global engagement. An intensified process of internationalization rooted in “ethical reciprocal partnerships” and generating “mutual benefit” will “empower” students, faculty, and staff. Most importantly, it will contribute to “the global community,” help solve the world’s most significant challenges and ultimately foster “positive difference in the world” (p. 1). In these narratives, pointing to the “internationalization imperative,” and the inherently good nature of this process, the institution is depicted as a critical agent of change (Buckner & Stein, 2019). As YU’s 2020–2025 Academic Plan (n.d.-b) highlights, the institution embodies a “community of changemakers” standing outside and beyond a world in turmoil, a figure of moral authority and a knowledge producer which observes and produces “positive change.”

What also merits attention is the multiple and consistent usage of the term “community” that establishes the universities’ “innocence.” The idea of community, as Pratt (1991), following Anderson, argues, indeed assumes the horizontal alliances which tie together the members of any given social world. It is laden with “values like equality, fraternity, liberty” (p. 38) supposedly shared by a unified and homogenous group of people. Yet, rooted in nationalist thinking, the notion of “community” has commonly served as a discursive tool obscuring the power dynamics in which relations between members of a social institution are so deeply embedded as to further naturalize them (Anderson, 1984; Pratt, 1991). We further contend that this idea of the university as a community bringing together its members on egalitarian terms is produced through a range of additional discursive techniques, notably, by masking the university’s embeddedness in settler colonial nationalist logics, and a conceptual and administrative separation between Indigenizing and internationalizing frameworks, both of which we discuss below.

One of the priorities for YU’s 2020–2025 Academic Plan, for example, is “21st Century Learning: Diversifying Whom, What, and How to Teach.” We are told that the university’s objective is to make 20–25% of their students international. “Diversification” is further stated as the only rationale for this desired number. Yet, as a vast literature has now clearly established and

we also gesture to in section II, internationalization is primarily a response to pressing economic interests for higher education institutions. As Stein et al. (2019, p. 24), building on Usher (2018) note, “as combined government transfers (provincial and federal) to universities have steadily declined since 2009, cuts in funding have largely been filled by growing numbers of international students and their rising tuition costs.” International students further bring billions each year to the Canadian economy through their participation in multiple national markets. Internationalization is also deeply tied to migration policy, as a path through which desirable future candidates for permanent residency are selected (Stein, 2021). In short, the desired figures outlined in these reports are underpinned by nationalist logics masked by rhetorical commitments to diversity. As one of these authors can attest, being an international student means inhabiting a contradictory place of offsetting decreasing postsecondary funding by prohibitively high tuition fees (Usher, 2021) while also being heralded as “ideal candidate[...] for permanent residency” (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021).

Similar to the above, the imperative to increase Indigenous student enrollment is stated across multiple documents, yet never contextualized. We further do not notice any ethical attempt to locate the university as a key instrument for settler colonial violence and epistemicide, nor do we see clear, consistent, and readily available statistics about the currently enrolled Indigenous students. In fact, finding data on Indigenous students proved to be extremely difficult. For YU, we could not find a specific source that included data collected over the years on Indigenous student enrollment. Data on the number of Indigenous students at UofT was also limited. It was not found in the annual facts and figures reports nor within the Indigenous Initiatives Office, which was believed to be a likely source considering most of the reports, strategies, and initiatives (many of them stressing the importance of increased Indigenous student enrollment) were derived from this office. Instead, we were able to obtain some data on Indigenous student enrollment through a report created by UofT on the results of the 2020 National Survey of Student Engagement. Of those participating in the survey, a mere 1% in 2017 and 2% in 2020 identified themselves as Indigenous. This lack of data coupled with the lack of contextual information on data, speaks to the disconnect between calls for action and their implementation (Newman et al., 2020). Omitting these numerical figures in discussions about Indigenous student engagement further downplays their stark underrepresentation. It is all the more troubling if juxtaposed with the steadily increasing and actively accounted for international student bodies, especially if/as they are considered the very embodiments of diversity as we discuss below.

*Embodying “Canadian openness.”* The settler colonial nationalist imaginary is most explicitly revealed in the multiple ways in which the benefits of internationalization are framed as tied to the growth of the “Canadian nation.” For example, in UofT’s Global Engagement International Strategic Plan (2015), we read that the university’s internationalizing trends are rooted in and epitomize “Canadian openness” (p. 6), a narrative which at once obscures and legitimizes the ongoing displacement, dispossession, and erasures of Indigenous Peoples, the forced migration and enslavement of Black peoples, and the relentless exploitation and precarity of largely racialized immigrants, key elements of the Canadian nation-building project. The university’s “global engagement” is, it is proudly stated, a “reflection” of this national “openness” and inscribed in Canada’s celebration of cultural diversity. The document further points to the instrumental gains of such values for the nation: it is this “openness,” we learn, that has ensured the economic, political, and cultural growth of the nation over time:

In 2017, Canada reached its 150th year as a nation, one that celebrates and is strengthened by its openness to global engagement in migration, cultural exchange, and trade. UofT’s commitment to

global engagement and academic exchange in an interconnected world is truly a reflection of these Canadian values. (p. 6)

Similarly, YU's 2015–2020 Academic Plan establishes the Canadian-ness of the university's progressive values and associated policies, in particular as relates to internationalization. These, we learn, emanate from belonging to a nation which embraces "diversity," and from being located in a city which best exemplifies this national value, "York University is part of Toronto: we are dynamic, metropolitan and multicultural. York University is part of Canada: we encourage bilingual study, we value diversity. York University is open to the world: we explore global concerns" (York University, 2016, p. 3).

Again, these self-congratulatory statements present internationalization as a project reflective of the nation's glorious values and history, thereby simultaneously masking and legitimating Canada's settler colonial project and its erasure of Indigenous presence. The university as a site for and a beneficiary of settler nation building, the legacies of struggles over accessing its resources, often led by the very same communities the university is now seemingly welcoming, are also erased (Almeida & Kumalo, 2018).

*Together but separate.* Finally, framing the university as fraternal community is further re(produced) through a neat discursive separation of the conversations on internationalizing and Indigenizing. Through this separation, the contradictions between the university's claims of changemaking and the reality of ongoing colonial logics through which it operates are effectively concealed. For example, in the 2017–2018 Annual Report of UofT's Office of Vice-President, International (2018) we read that, "through the intercultural learning" fostered via the recruitment of international students, "our students are better equipped to appreciate diverse perspectives and cultures" (p. 3). Here, the benefits of global engagement are predicated on an ongoing erasure of Indigenous presence and perspectives. The domestic space is imagined as the culturally homogenous space of the White settlers to which "diversity" is brought. One cannot help but also wonder about these claims of being a community when little to no opportunities for interactions between these mandates and/or conversations between their intended subjects, e.g., international and Indigenous students, seem institutionally available or possible.

Pratt (1991, p. 39) writes that the classroom in "transculturalized"<sup>3</sup> places is far from being a "homogenous community or a horizontal alliance." Rather "a contact zone ... where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths." The potentials for such conversations among urban university communities in the city of Toronto is something we daily witness and appreciate in our teaching/learning, and yet, both frameworks and attendant initiatives are kept discursively and materially separate, thereby disallowing the possibilities such conversations could foster. Our concern over this potential proximity yet intra-institutional disconnect is not political naivete, to be dismissed as a mere lament for loss of morally uplifting conversations. No such conversations in a world ranked by race, gender, nationhood, class, and political affiliations etc.,

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<sup>3</sup> Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz developed the concept of "transculturation" "to replace overly reductive concepts of acculturation used to characterize culture under conquest." Ortiz proposed instead to "describe processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (Pratt, 1991, p. 36). Pratt built on this notion while discussing her experience of teaching a course on "cultures, ideas and values" and developing her ideas of what she calls "pedagogical arts of the contact zone," i.e., ways to make the cultural crossroads that is the America's into the best possible site of learning. As gestured towards in our analysis of the data and in conclusion the political possibility of a pedagogy of contact is foreclosed in the current postsecondary context.

we acknowledge, is possible without old wounds opening up and newer ones being inflicted. And yet, we *insist* on drawing attention to this separation as a management of differential subjects of the state, and wonder about the lost political possibilities, challenging and hurtful as they may be in their effects.

### ***Commodified Belonging: Conditional Welcome Within the University “Community”***

The documents we examined are replete with words emphasizing the ethical turn in which these two universities find themselves, and the contributions of their internationalizing and Indigenization policies in creating a more just world. Yet, a close reading of Indigenous and internationalizing documents at both universities reveals a racial capitalist logic informing references to Indigenous and international student members. In particular, both are recurrently framed as fulfilling a specific role in the university, i.e., as “informants” offering their unique perspectives to the university’s more normative members (Almeida & Kumalo 2018, p. 14). Deservingness for both seems indeed to derive in part from the “diversity labour” they are expected to fulfill for the university (Ahmed, 2012). In the UofT Indigenous Initiatives Annual Report (2019), we learn, for example, that “Indigenous faculty and staff members are vital to enhancing the University’s curricula and research. They provide an Indigenous perspective and contribute academic and cultural support for Indigenous students” (p. 14). Here, the value of an Indigenous presence is directly tied not only to the mentoring they bring to Indigenous students, a labour which is established as a given, but also to the diversification of the curricula and research it brings to the academy, whose epistemic centres are implicitly construed as rooted in Western knowledges. Thus, “Indigenous perspective” is made desirable in a depoliticized, commodified form, in its ability to improve the university’s core activities. We thus follow Almeida and Kumalo (2018, p. 14) who, in their analysis of “decolonization” in the Canadian university, write that decolonisation authorises “permissible” and *fragmented* forms of inclusion, voice and scholarship, in ways which continue to render the Indigenous body/scholar as the native informant in the Canadian academy .... Natives are assumed to represent themselves, their “true essence,” unchanged by the outside world or their interactions with others.

Similarly, international students are collectively framed as a resource enhancing the “intercultural fluency,” “intercultural competency,” and the reputational capital of the university globally. In other words, these students produce a kind of labour which offers “us,” implicitly construed as the White domestic student-consumer of diversity, “global perspectives” and represent precious informants on “global issues,” skills that are now essential for the future employability of Canadian university graduates. For example, a large majority of international students in UofT and YU have been and continue to be from Asian countries, clearly following from a highly instrumental policy focus on “Asia literacy” for building the business acumen and competitiveness of Canadian students (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2012), and their presence in Canadian institutions is legitimized via commodification of diversity (Ahmed, 2012; Warikoo, 2016). This commodification process, whereby international students’ “deservingness” largely derives from the “intercultural competency” or “global fluency” they bring “us,” is highlighted in the global engagement section of York University’s Academic Plan 2020–2025 (n.d.-b): “York University draws people from around the world ... to gain the global fluencies needed to work locally and across borders toward a better future.”

Similarly, the 2017–2018 Annual Report of UofT’s Office of Vice-President, International (2018), mentions, “Our international students and research projects bring multiple, global points

of view to the university, just as our Canadian diversity helps us maintain strong connections to the rest of the world” (p. 3).

This utilitarian rationale for internationalization, and the corollary construction of international students as valuable informants on global issues is most notable in “Three Priorities. A Discussion Paper,” published in 2015 by the Office of the President, UofT: “The inflow of international exchange students is an excellent way of bringing greater diversity into our student body, and of enriching the experience of those of our students who cannot travel themselves” (p. 15).

This process of commodified inclusion indeed is one of the mechanisms through which racialization materializes, and racial inequities (re)produced in our supposedly “post-racial” times (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). It reveals the racial capitalist logic which underlies the terms of inclusion and determines, at least in part, the worthiness of international and Indigenous bodies in normative academic spaces. Our findings here echo Melamed’s (2015) contention that “contemporary racial capitalism ‘deploys liberal and multicultural terms of inclusion to value and devalue forms of humanity differentially to fit the needs of reigning state-capital orders’” (p. 77, cited in Stein, 2018, p. 899).

This logic is similarly reproduced in respect with an emphasis on the diversification of these universities’ knowledge production process. Indeed, as these documents reveal, diversifying is not only limited to the domain of recruitment and to the expansion of the university’s local and global partnerships. Most crucially, we find out, it is concerned with reinventing the knowledge production process and transforming postsecondary learning and teaching experiences. Diversifying is about the “diversity of thought,” as the YU Academic Plan 2020–2025 states. It translates, we learn, into “decolonizing the curriculum.” Yet, as the document reveals, decolonizing is not about imagining new ontologies, nor is it about attending to stubborn Euro/Western domination over knowledge production which “circumscribe both the questions that are deemed worth asking and the answers that are deemed legitimate” (Stein & Andreotti, 2017, p. 173). On the contrary, “decolonization of the curriculum” is framed as part of a broader priority for the university to make students employable in increasingly competitive labour markets, making them ready to navigate the “21st-century world.” It is not about defying but about reinforcing the utility-maximizing logic shaping the neoliberal knowledge production process.

Diversifying thought further illuminates a depoliticized and de-historicized understanding of knowledge production at the core of the universities. “Global” and “Indigenous” perspectives seem to now be grafted onto preexisting core epistemic traditions; they become readily available along other, unnamed, mainstream perspectives to create uniquely “enriching” learning and teaching experiences. Hence, in the UofT Strategic Research Plan 2018–2023, we read that the university’s “administration, training, practices, and policies” commit to “embracing Indigenous knowledges, practices, and perspectives as valid and equal to other knowledge systems” (Division of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation, n.d., p. 20). Indigenous perspectives therefore do not interrupt the epistemic hierarchies on which modern Western universities such as UofT are founded. Rather, these are incorporated in an additive mode, expanding the repertoire of knowledges available to ameliorate teaching and learning experiences, and reaffirming the authority of these institutions as key centres of knowledge production.

While the language of diversity is recurrently mobilized to frame the value of international and Indigenous bodies, these communities are ironically framed in monolithic terms, erasing individual members’ intersecting positionalities and complex identities as gendered, classed, and raced subjects. In particular, the documents mobilize a colour-evasive language in reference to

international students which is particularly puzzling in a context of the vast majority of Canada's international students being non-White, whose educational experiences is widely documented to be informed by systemic racial barriers (Buckner et al., 2019).

Challenges to successful educational experiences among international students are outlined, yet predominantly framed as resulting from intercultural miscommunications, linguistic difficulties, or isolation, a range of issues rooted in a deficit model, and calling for individualized remedies such as honing their intercultural communication skills, improving their language proficiency, etc. For example, the 2018–2019 annual report of UofT's Office of the Vice-President, International (2019) points to a number of projects funded to improve the experiences of international students, which range from stress management initiatives to the promotion of physical exercise programmes. Initiatives aimed at creating inclusive and dignifying experiences for Indigenous members of the university further do not foreground anti-racist policies. Rather, emphasis is placed on “supporting cultural activities,” as UofT's 2019 Indigenous Initiatives annual report highlights, for Indigenous students to “feel included, comfortable, and acknowledged” (p. 24). Similarly, while the principles outlined in the Indigenous Framework for YU stress the valuable need to create “spaces for Indigenous cultures and community with the University” (p. 6), they do not raise the issue of anti-Indigenous racism in academic spaces.

Conforming with our previous observation about the university's claims of changemaking while extricating itself from the global contexts of inequities, many of the documents we reviewed make only brief and passing allusions to the need to change respective organizational cultures. In YU's 2020–2025 Academic Plan, for example, one reads that “The ethical and moral imperatives of social movements—such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, among others—need to inform our policies and direction as an academic community and as a force for good in the world.” Yet, there is no elaboration on the material and symbolic architectures of the university which need to be reimagined through the teachings of such movements. Nor is there any acknowledgement of racist campus culture which Black students have long called out and organized against (Tomlinson et al., 2021; Bero, 2021). The documents reveal no course of action through which this transformative process should come about, leaving us uncertain of what these changes should be. Left with vague statements and commitments, we are reminded of Ahmed's (2016, p. 1) notion of “non-performativity,” which is the process through which institutions make commitments because “commitments do not commit to a course of action,” and therefore through these discursive processes, “they can reproduce themselves at the very moments they appear not to be reproducing themselves” (p. 6).

## **V. Conclusion: Another University is Possible?**

As our analysis shows, the legacy of liberal inclusion into the modern university under commodity logics continues unabated. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the university's hollow promises of equality and claims of leadership on key social issues (Thobani, 2020). A plethora of writings, discussions, and recommendations about a post-pandemic future for the university continues to appear even as we write. What dominates however is a relentless pursuit of the bottom-line on the part of the university administrations, and at best, a liberal reformism of an equally relentless nature. Our analysis also appears at a time when overt mechanisms of dispossession and displacement are cohering with the symbolic recognition of Indigenous and multicultural Others in the Canadian political economic landscape (Coulthard, 2014; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021). The university, as one of the key instruments of legitimation for the state, it seems, is also responding to the political claims of Indigenous and

racialized subjects in ways that dislocate attention from its own foundational violence. Conditional welcome, revalorization of Euro-modernist epistemes, and commodifying diversity at the service of the normative core of the university, we need not say, are not decolonial moves. They are anything but.

What do we, then, envision in “another” university?

In Gift Contract, Andreotti et al. (2021) challenge the usual narrative of change that offers mere alternatives to a system “not working” as decolonizing moves. Arguing that we are fundamental parts of and codependent on the very dysfunctional systems we critique, they suggest a “cognitive, affective and relational ‘decluttering’” before we can even begin to imagine “something genuinely new.” Else, they caution, “we will only be able to want and imagine different versions of the same thing.” The priorities of Indigenizing and internationalizing, we assert, are just that, violences of modernity re-packaged and re-presented as freedom.

Is “another university” then a gesture towards a future outside of capitalist colonial extractivism that the modern university continues to be a key engine of? Can we even imagine this future while working within its profit and commodity driven tentacles? We pose this question to ourselves, in recognition of our own ambiguous location within the university, as never outside of it, “even when ... perceived as outsiders” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 3). While being fiercely critical of the neoliberal, corporatizing, diversity-peddling university, we also enable its reproduction through various professional activities. Even activities we believe are critical, change-making and space-creating, we know, are folded into the highly flexible, self-congratulatory machinations of the institution, thereby making us both complicit in and subjects of its abusive power. These are particularly poignant realizations. That we could unravel (even if partly) the inner political mechanisms of the institution has to do with our observing these from within, and yet the institution has never been “ours.” We do not mean this in a possessive, proprietorial sense. Rather, to convey our belief that for the university to be an institution of public good, the public—in all its diverse manifestations, ideas, questions, curiosities, and challenges—should be populating its hitherto exclusive corridors, classrooms, laboratories, and boardrooms. The philosophers’ walks should be reclaimed as thoroughfares, i.e., taken back “for us” (Emejulu, 2017a). However, whether “we” can achieve this from within the current structures and operating logics—which oppress and implicate us—is a concern/question that animates this article.

In *El Etnografo*, Argentinian author Jorge Louis Borges sketches the character of Fred Murdoch, an ethnographer researching the “esoteric rites” of Indigenous “medicine men” in the American west, but then refusing to share his learning with his supervisor and committee members. When probed, Fred says,

That's not it, sir. Now that I possess the secret, I could tell it in a hundred different and even contradictory ways. I don't know how to tell you this, but the secret is beautiful, and science, our science, seems mere frivolity to me now ... And anyway, the secret is not as important as the paths that led me to it. Each person has to walk those paths himself.

In his refusal to devise an alternative way of sharing Indigenous knowledge, one that will reify the established parameters of the university, Fred challenges the ethnographic and extractive foundations of the modern university while also underscoring the limits of additive frameworks that are typically proposed as pathways to freedom.

The university, some would say, is nevertheless worth fighting for. We ourselves wrote this article with a conflicted vision for higher education as a space that has contributed to our



precarity, un-belonging, exhaustion, and silencing and yet has also allowed the space for staunch critiques, transformative imaginaries, and critical camaraderie. As Harney and Moten (2013) write, It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony ... *to be in but not of*—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university. (emphasis added) (p. 26)

We remain informed by the progressive struggles that it has taken to bring the modern university to where it is now. It is to honour these struggles that we refuse to let go of the university, most importantly, our imagination of what it could be/have been. Hence, our insistence on examining the various modes of welcome to previously unwelcome subjects, our lingering scepticism, and our ongoing commitment to refuse what, in the context of the Canadian state management of Indigenous resurgence, Coulthard has called the “death dance of recognition” (Gardner & Clancy, 2017).

In conclusion, while this article focused heavily on institutional texts and talks, we acknowledge this inquiry will benefit from ethnographic insights. We also focused on Indigenizing and internationalizing as relatively newer initiatives that drew a more substantive institutional focus. However, we note that these strategies unfold within an overarching strategic climate of anti-racism and anti-racist inclusion. Examining all three in relation to each other is crucial to challenge their mutual disconnect in the postsecondary policy landscape (see Heath, 2019; Knutson, 2018; Montsion, 2018). It is also crucial in order to encourage a practice of reading and thinking across what are perceived to be separate objectives but actually deeply structurally driven towards maintaining the status quo in the university. We make these observations both as commitments to further research and as invitations to colleagues asking similar questions and desiring similar futures.

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