

# Reading the “international” through postcolonial theory: A case study of the adoption of the International Baccalaureate at a school in Lebanon

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*Considerable debate has revolved around the question of what constitutes an international school, focusing on attributes such as number of nations represented by the student body, stated curricular goals, and school culture or mission. Less attention has been paid to how “international” is lived within these schools. This article explores the notion of the “international” at an international school in Lebanon that has recently been authorized as an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School. Joining the IB World Schools network comes with many benefits for a school, such as stronger name recognition from parents and universities and access to a global community of educators that promote lifelong learning through international education. It also signals a school’s willingness to conform to the IB’s concept of, and discourse around, the “international”. This article is interested in the possibilities presented by postcolonial theory as an alternative to approaches to international education that presents the nation state as the natural unit of study. Qualitative data collected from the case study school highlights how understandings of the “international” have been shaped by the adoption of the IB, focusing on the central role that methodological nationalism plays within the IB’s understanding of the “international”. The data supports earlier findings that the IB’s approach to international education reinforces the dominance of the nation state as the central unit of study. Further, it shows evidence that not all states are being presented equally and that a continued reliance on national perspectives risks promoting a hegemonic class of states, through formal instruction, which focuses on certain nations more than others. Findings suggests that postcolonial theory could offer an important corrective seeking to rebalance the way the “international” is understood and promoted within the IB.*

*Keywords: International education, international schools, International Baccalaureate, Lebanon, methodological nationalism, postcolonial theory*

## INTRODUCTION

The study of international schools is understood as a subfield within international education (Dolby and Rahman, 2007). Research on international schools has primarily focused on defining the “international school” (Hayden and Thompson, 1995; Hill, 2000; Bunnell et al., 2016, among others). The research shows that there are many ways for a

school to identify as international: national diversity of student body or teaching staff, intentionally international philosophy or curriculum, or teaching in a language foreign to the country where the school is located are some ways a school can foster an international identity. This article explores the notion of the “international” at an international school in Lebanon, which was recently authorized to offer the International Baccalaureate’s Diploma Programme (IBDP). It seeks to understand how the adoption of the IB, one of the largest providers of international education programming, has influenced the way the school community approaches education for, on and about the “international.”

The case study school self-identifies and runs itself as international. It promotes a philosophy and pedagogical approaches that explicitly consider the international. The faculty are mostly Lebanese although many have studied or lived abroad. The majority of students also possess Lebanese citizenship although many hold dual nationalities and the countries represented culturally span six continents. In addition to the IB, the school offers the American Diploma Program and Lebanese Baccalaureate at the secondary school level. This article seeks to extend the conversation beyond definitions and to look at the “international” in action to ask how the school understands the “international”, through both formal lessons and the hidden curriculum, since the adoption of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program.

Joining the IB World Schools network comes with many benefits for a school, such as stronger name recognition from parents and universities and access to a global community of educators that promote lifelong learning through international education. It also signals a school’s willingness to conform to the IB’s concept of, and discourse around, the “international”. Few studies have explored how authorization as an IB World School has influenced understandings of the “international” within a school. A challenge in the field has been the multipurpose use of the word “international” to refer to the type of programming, the spirit of the programming and the content of the programming. One study found that the IB itself uses the word “international” to cover five different concepts (McKenzie, 1998). To increase precision, this article refers to the type of educational programming produced by the IB non-national as it is an alternative to national curricula designed and monitored by national bodies. It is therefore intentionally international in ethos and non-national as an educational program.

This paper approaches the field of international education through a postcolonial lens, which emphasizes the study of power relationships and the interconnectedness of nations and societies. It suggests that the use of postcolonial theory can help uncover asymmetrical power dynamics within an approach to international education that relies on the naturalization of the nation state. The paper presents qualitative data collected through classroom observations and interviews, collected between 2016-18 as part of a larger doctoral project on international education and citizenship education. It focuses on a formal lesson using IBDP programming and then explores how the arrival of the IB has influenced school culture and students’ perceptions of the “international”. It understands the international both as a place in opposition to the “local” and as a more general term that sees which encompasses the “local” and brings larger communities together.

By exploring how joining the IB has influenced understandings of the “international” at the case study school, it finds that while both teachers and students see benefits in the IB educational material and support the adoption of the program, the IB’s approach to the “international” relies on a worldview that accepts and encourages the nation state as the

dominant unit of study. Further, it shows evidence that not all states are being presented through the curricula equally and that a continuing to promote international education through a nationalistic worldview risks promoting a hegemonic class of states, which focuses on certain nations more than others. The focus on the actions and global power wielded by the United States of America is one example of a state dominating the discussion within international education. Students feels that some countries’ histories and knowledges are seen as being universal to the “international”, while more local narratives are less prominently acknowledged. The paper therefore argues that postcolonial theory could offer an important corrective seeking to rebalance the way the “international” is understood and promoted within the IB.

### **CONCEPTUALIZING THE “INTERNATIONAL” WITHIN THE IB**

In 1968, the International Baccalaureate was established to provide a consistent method of education for students whose parents were geographically mobile due to their work. The IB aimed to create programming that could be used by schools around the world so, as children moved with their parents, they could follow the same education track. The IB acknowledges that it was conceived by Western educators to fill a perceived need to have consistent, English-language education, in any country, that could be recognized by Western universities (Walker, 2010). It recognizes that its pedagogies are grounded in methods propelled by educators from the global north. For example, the IB cites four American and European male educationalists as key figures: John Dewey (American), A. S. Neill (Scottish), Jean Piaget (Swiss), and Jerome Bruner (American) (IB, 2015). Another major thought leader for the IB was Marie-Therese Maurette, the former head of the International School in Geneva (Ecolint), an international school founded in the 1920s to teach students whose parents worked at the League of Nations (Walker, 2009). She described how Ecolint was designed to be a school where students “would be brought up in accord with the new world which their parents believed to be in course of construction – a world at peace, with understanding between nations” (Maurette, 1948, p. 3).

Peace, then, equated to preventing or avoiding another world war between countries. Maurette and her colleagues believed that in bringing students from various countries together, students would learn from each other and this cultural exchange could help maintain the status quo and prevent the outbreak of another world war. This belief can be seen as inspirational to how the IB conceptualizes the “international.” Therefore, its claim to the “international” rests more on its content, as it offers lessons on a range of topics and the textbooks and teachers encourage the students to make connections across borders (Van Oord, 2007). The IB is not just educational programming designed by western educators; it is an educational project that came together at a particular moment in history, when educators were looking at ways education could prevent the outbreak of future world wars. It was coming together at a time when empires were collapsing and the borders around the world were being challenged and redrawn. Children enrolled in early IB programs were most likely children whose parents were engaged in this redrawing of the world map in some way, shape or form.

As a non-profit organization, today the IB oversees four levels of educational programming, tailored for ages 3-19, and authorizes individual schools to use the programming. A school that is authorized to use at least one of these programs is called an IB World School and joins a network of nearly 5,000 such schools. The IB does not

run these schools and not every student enrolled at an IB World School is actively receiving IB educational programming. For example, at the case study school, about five percent of the students are following IB educational programming. To join the network of IB World Schools, schools not only sign on to the academic programming produced, and assessed by the IB, but they agree to subscribe to and promote the IB's mission, strives to build "a more peaceful world" (IB website, 2018) and echoes Maurette's aims that through education cooperation between nations can be produced.

Some have pointed to the tension this aspirational vision has with the reality that international education can also be seen as promoting a neoliberal approach to globalization. Cambridge and Thompson (2004) describe the tension that occurs between the "internationalist" and the "globalist" identity of students who have gone through IB programming has been noted. English is not only the dominant language of international education but it replaced French as the global language of diplomacy and is now the main language for international business and trade. Simarandiraki (2005) argues that a student is just as likely to become the internationalist (a diplomat or politician) or the globalist (a leader in a transnational corporation or business) and the IB allows for the support of either in students.

In 2018, the majority of students enrolled in IB programming are considered "local", which means they have political or cultural ties to the country where their school is located (Bunnell, 2014) While the IB's approach to non-national education remains international in intended approaches and scope, the students are increasingly learning about the "international" from a country to which they have some connection.

At the secondary school level, the IB designs and manages the IB Diploma Program, which, upon completion of the two-year course, can result in a certificate recognized by many global universities. The DP is the oldest and most popular of the four IB tracks. Students must take six courses across several disciplines and complete three additional core requirements: write an extended essay, take the "Theory of Knowledge course", and participate for a set number of hours in "Community, Action and Service" (CAS). Some assignments for the DP are externally assessed by IB markers while others are assessed by the school's teachers. Due to its requirements, assessments and the number of universities that recognize it, the IBDP has become the best known non-national qualification students can obtain at the secondary school level (Hill 2002). Some universities in Lebanon, and elsewhere, even allow students to skip freshman year if their IB scores are over certain mark.

## **MAPPING METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM WITHIN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION**

Methodological nationalism is "understood as the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world" (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002, p. 302). Wimmer and Schiller outlined how taking the construct of the nation state for granted has influenced research across the social sciences. Beck (2007) argued that social scientists have become "prisoners of methodological nationalism" (p. 287) and that this tendency to see societies only through a national lens has limited research on the global and the globalized. In the research and practice of international education, the nation state

remains arguably the dominant focus. In comparative education, the unit for comparison is often the nation state. In the research, participants are usually described by the subject they teach and a nationality they possess, as if their individual voice can help explain a national identity. Most international schools define their diversity by nationalities, advertising how many nationalities their students or faculty hold.

Researchers have previously addressed how the International Baccalaureate has conceived of education through the naturalization of the nation state. Hughes argues that “international education as it presently stands is still caught up in the idea of the nation state and does little to cater for multiple – as opposed to national – identities” (Hughes, 2009, p. 123). Although he writes “international education”, his conception of the international education is grounded in the International Baccalaureate as the evidence he presents is from his experience working at an IB World School. As many researchers in the field have professional experience with the IB occasionally the line between what is “international education” and what is “International Baccalaureate’s conceptions of international education” blurs. Resnik’s (2013) work on teachers at IB World Schools in Ecuador also reveals how the International Baccalaureate aligns its programming through methodological nationalism. She cites a teacher who says they teach a unit of US history as there is no unit on Ecuador and this way they can focus on local narratives more. Relatedly, Poosoonamy (2010) contrasted two students’ opinions of the same Theory of Knowledge course, from a school on an island nation in the Indian Ocean. The British student admitted the class, which is often compared to an introduction to epistemology course that explores how students know what they know, was east as it was all “local” knowledge and familiar cultural references. Meanwhile, his classmate, who was raised on the island, struggled to find his culture in the lessons, challenging the idea that the knowledge being promoted as international is equally acknowledged as such to all (Poosoonamy, 2010).

This final point touches upon a related question: If international education is focused on the interplay and relationship of nation states, are all nations treated equally or will some inevitably have a larger role in the curriculum? To address this question, this paper offers a reading of the “international” through a postcolonial approach, which can offer ways of addressing power relationships found in the curriculum.

## **POSSIBILITIES OFFERED THROUGH A POSTCOLONIAL FRAMWEORK**

Grounding international education on a framework of methodological nationalism presents the nation state not only as a dominant unit for study but as the foundation for the “international”. To assume that the nation state is fixed and not socially constructed or “imagined” (Anderson, 1991) risks privileging it as a natural unit that should not be challenged or questioned and risks minimizing other ways to explore, discuss or analyse the world. For Beck (2007) a problem with subscribing to methodological nationalism is this assumption that “humanity is naturally divided into a limited number of nations” (p. 287). Beck’s solution is to replace it with a model of methodological cosmopolitanism, rooted in a Kantian notion of the cosmopolitan. Adopting a postcolonial approach, Bhambra (2011) critiques Beck for the Eurocentrism of his model. She argues that adopting postcolonial or decolonial approaches, two terms that evolved through different

disciplines in different areas of the globe with similar goals to unsettle or challenge the dominant discourses of the day, would be more suitable to rethink the way research conceptualizes and categorizes the globe.

Postcolonial studies developed from the writings of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri C Spivak, writers culturally connected to the Middle East and South Asia who were writing in English, raising questions about power, voice and the voiceless and the localized production of knowledge and notions of the universal between the colonizers and colonizers of the imperial age. Decolonial theorists trace their roots back to South America and often define the colonial project as starting earlier, when European traders first started circumnavigating the globe. Although inspired by both terms, this paper focuses on the postcolonial, directly tracing linkages back to the Said and his work on the European colonial projects across the Middle East, where this paper's case study is located (Said 1968). The "post" in postcolonial not only refers to a specific time period following the end of colonialism in a particular place. Here it is understood as a toolkit of approaches to use as "an attempt to interrupt the Western discourse of modernity through...displacing, interrogative subaltern or postslavery narratives and the critical-theoretical perspectives they engender" (Bhabha 1994, quoted in Bhambra, 2014, p. 116). Andreotti and De Sousa (2012) envision postcolonial theories as "tools-for-thinking rather than theories-of-truth" (p. 3), a stance which acknowledges that postcolonial theories have proven more effective at raising questions and providing new perspectives than on consolidating into a singular, uncontested world view. Postcolonial theory seeks not only to disrupt colonial legacies but could provide a framework for rethinking how power between, and within, nations is conceptualised, taught and understood at international schools. It could also help remind educators and students about how such nations were created and the role played by empires in drawing and redrawing the maps of the world.

There has been increased attention by scholars on the possibilities postcolonial theory could offer the field of international education (Takayama et al., 2017; Andreotti, 2012; Tikly, 1999 and 2001). This journal has also investigated the possibilities postcolonial perspectives could have within international education (Manathunga, 2014; Fox, 2016) and within the IB World Schools, specifically (Wettewa, 2016). In providing spaces to speak truth to power, postcolonial theory believes in making room for those who have been silenced to have their voices heard. Although itself a contested term, postcolonial theory can provide a framework for such underrepresented voices, including those which have become marginalized due to focusing on the nation state.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The case study explored in this article was purposefully selected as it met criteria for a school where most students and faculty have a political or cultural connection to the country where the school is located and therefore would present voices of more "local" recipients of international education. It was not selected to represent all international schools but to provide insights on how one school's adoption of the International Baccalaureate has influenced the way the school approaches the "international". The school is private, as are most schools in the postcolonial world that are authorized to use the IB and most students come from elite families that can afford the high tuition rates.

Data was collected across four visits to the case study school between 2016 and 2018 and by several qualitative methods: classroom observations, focus groups with students, interviews with teachers, and analysis of IB textbooks and materials. As the author of this paper did not want to assume where learning about the “international” occurs, several IB Diploma Program subjects at both the higher and standard level, including Chemistry, Language and Literature, History, Math, Psychology, and Theory of Knowledge were observed. This research grew from an ongoing study that focuses on how education for citizenship is being conceptualized, taught and understood through the IBDP at the case study school. Making claims as to how teachers and students conceptualized and understood education for citizenship, within international education, it was first necessary to understand what the schools understood by the “international” through their application of the IBDP.

The author of this article is American by nationality but has familial and cultural ties to Lebanon, a country where she lived for many years and worked as a teacher at an IB World School. This insider knowledge of the local independent school system and the geographic context helped her gain access to the school and helped establish a connection with the teachers and students at the case study school as she showed she was already comfortable in an international classroom.

## **LEBANON**

In 1943, Lebanon was granted independence by the French, who had seized a mandate over Greater Syria following the Ottoman collapse at the end of World War I, in accordance with the Sykes-Picot Agreement, a British-French agreement that split Ottoman territories between themselves. Overseen by the French, Lebanon’s government structure was organized around sectarian identity: citizens must belong to one of 18 recognized religious sects and seats and power are apportioned to the various sects. At the time of independence, and by French design, the Maronite Christians were the largest sect and power was appointed accordingly.

Lebanon was not the only country in the region to gain its national borders through foreign interference. Many borders in the modern Middle East were decided by European actors and split lands that had traditionally blended culturally and politically. Today, it remains difficult to distinguish what is national politics and what is international. For example, Lebanon became engulfed by a 15-year civil war from 1975-90. Although branded as “civil”, and often simplistically defined as a power struggle between Christians and Muslims, Lebanon’s war was beset with international interferences and served as a stage for several regional power struggles, including those between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Regional and international forces contributed military equipment and training to various factions and Israeli and Syrian occupation of parts of the country lasted over a decade after a ceasefire had been declared. Although sides agreed to a cessation of hostilities, tensions remain across the country and are often exacerbated by regional events.

Most schools in Lebanon are private, that is they are not state run but overseen by religious institutions. However, most schools teach the curriculum produced by the Lebanese Government known as the Lebanese Baccalaureate. There are also many schools that teach the French Baccalaureate. The International Baccalaureate has been

continually offered in Lebanon since 1995. As of February 2018, eleven schools, all private, across the country are authorized to teach the IB Diploma Program. There are two main barriers of entry to the IB for students in Lebanon. The first is financial. Tuition fees at the schools range from USD 6,000-20,000. Tuition is expensive in any country, but in Lebanon, where the GDP per capita was USD\$ 8,257.30, these fees keep out most of the population (World Bank, 2018). Few of these schools offer full scholarships or have the infrastructure to recruit students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Beyond financial resources, Lebanese students must also gain an exemption from the national Lebanese Baccalaureate. They must either hold citizenship from a second country or show evidence that they have studied outside of Lebanon for three years. Complicating discussions around Lebanese citizenship is the national law that bans Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese men the right to pass on Lebanese citizenship to their children. Those children are viewed as foreign in the eyes of the Lebanese government. In Lebanon, therefore, citizenship cannot be isolated from patriarchy or religion and any discussion of the state must also involve talk of religion and patriarchal constructions of the family.

### **CHARLES MALEK HIGH SCHOOL (CMHS)**

Charles Malek High School was established over twenty years ago, but only recently applied to become an IB World School. Prior to becoming an IB World School, the school provided two types of educational programming at the secondary school level. Students could study the Lebanese Baccalaureate, a program overseen by the Lebanese Education Ministry and taught mostly in Arabic, or they could enrol in the American Diploma Program, an English-language program that follows a US high school experience.

When Charles Malek High School, an independent k-12 school in Lebanon, decided to apply for authorization from the International Baccalaureate, one of the largest providers of non-national educational programming, it seemed like the natural next step. As one teacher explained: “We said: ‘We are an international school. Our students are able to do the IB ... We believe the student should be the center of the learning and so we believe in student-centred learning and not teacher-centred approach.’ So we said: ‘Let’s give it a try.’” (Interview with IBC, October 2016).

Unlike many international schools that hire foreign teachers with past IB experience, the case study school chose to provide online training for the staff already employed at the school and placed great faith on the team they had to implement the IB. Of the team teaching the IBDP at the case study school, less than half had taught the IB previously and all have legal and cultural connections to Lebanon. As students must either be non-Lebanese or gain an exemption from the Lebanese Baccalaureate to enrol in the IB, most of the students in the class held passports to two or more nations. However, when asked where they primarily say they come from, most students answered Lebanon despite holding passports from Australia, Belgium, Equatorial Guinea, Greece, Syria, Tunisia, and the United States.

### **EVIDENCE OF METHODOLOGICAL NATIONALISM IN THE IB**

This section provides evidence of how the IB’s conception of the “international” reinforces methodological nationalism. It focuses on how IB educational material

supports the nation state as the natural unit of study within international education using evidence from class observations from Theory of Knowledge. All IB DP students must take Theory of Knowledge (TOK), a course that focuses on examining “how we know what we claim to know” (What is TOK, IB website). There is no one way to teach TOK. There are final assessments, which are graded by external examiners, but the day-to-day programming is decided by the teacher. Textbooks are optional, and anecdotally many experienced teachers have developed programs without them, but there are several options available should teachers desire a framework for the course.

As it was the teacher’s first year teaching the course, she assigned the class a textbook, *Theory of Knowledge: Course companion 2013*, by Eileen Dombrowski, Lena Rotenberg and Mimi Bick. All three authors were employed by the IB as assessors for TOK and the back of the book claims the book has been “developed with the IB”, which was the main reason the teacher chose this publication. The book invites teachers to follow the book sequentially or use excerpts. The teacher at Charles Malek High School started with chapter one, “Recognizing perspectives,” which opens with a request: “Please don’t read the box below yet! First, make sure you have a sheet of blank paper and a pen or dark pencil. Write your name and nationality clearly at the top” (Dombrowski et al., 2013, p. 1). Students start their IB journey understanding that their nationality, singular, is as important as their individual name. There is no space for multiple citizenships or other markers of identity. The activity itself is a seven-minute challenge where students are asked to draw the map of the world “as accurately and completely” as they can (Dombrowski et al, 2013, p. 1). Five student examples are published in the book, which then asks students to match the maps to the nationality of the student who drew it. For example, the map with the oversized image of Japan would belong to the Japanese student, while the only map that drew a border between Canada and the United States was drawn by the Canadian student. Students learn that their views are connected to the country, singular, to which they identify. During the author’s case study school visit in October, their map drawings were hanging on the wall, each signed by a name and a nation. The class was finishing the chapter with a reflection exercise about how their backgrounds might impact their perspectives. This highlighting of nationality is a theme that runs throughout the DP and risks privileging nationality over other social markers. For instance, throughout the researcher’ time at Charles Malek, the question of class and the social status of students was discussed infrequently.

During another TOK session, students were asked to reflect on their backgrounds. While native English speakers might be comfortable understanding the essence of the questions and providing an answer tailored to their unique circumstances, these students were fluent enough to understand the question literally but not familiar enough with English to comprehend the intention behind the words. In answering the questions, they were seeking to align their lives with the options provided and found that the questions did not always provide options that resonated with them. For example, when asked about their “mother tongue”, several students did not know what they should put:

*Teacher*<sup>1</sup>: “If you’re born in Lebanon, then your mother tongue should be Arabic,” the teacher said.

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<sup>1</sup> The class was being monitored by a teacher, who also taught in the IB program, as the lead TOK teacher had been called to the main office on an emergency.

*Student 1: "But what if your parents speak French at home?"*

*Student 2: "I speak English and Arabic. I don't have just one. Can we have two?"*

*Teacher: "It's whatever one you know best."*

*Student 2: "I speak both equally."*

*Teacher: "If you're angry and you want to swear, what language do you use?"*

*Student 3: "It depends on who is around me."*

Speaking two or three languages is common for many Lebanese. Perhaps a teacher who has encountered this question several times would present a more nuanced reply, one that opens up spaces for multiple mother tongues but, as the teacher was new to the course, they, too, stayed close to the directions of the textbook.

Another student struggled to answer whether she grew up in an urban or rural area. "I live in both. I live in Beirut but, on the weekends, we go to the village. What do I put?" While many families live in Beirut, Lebanon's capital and largest city, they retain ties to the villages where they are from and return on weekends to see family or in summers to avoid the city heat. Even if citizens wanted to cut ties to their ancestral roots, the electoral system would make that difficult as voting still occurs in the village where the government sees you're from and not where you currently live. In Lebanon, they learned, a student can be from both the urban and rural yet the students saw neither of these realities in their textbooks.

### **PRODUCING A HEGEMONIC CLASS OF STATES**

The students are also learning that some states are seen as more important than others. When asked why a student chose psychology instead of history, she replied: "I like history but I didn't want to receive an American version of history. I would rather learn it later." This conversation occurred after a class that had discussed the US campaigns of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Lebanon, at the time, was without a president, but this was not mentioned in the class. A second student, who was taking the IB history class, was asked if he would prefer to see more history from the country where he grew up. He replied yes at first but then added: "Actually no. I don't trust that they would give the right history. They would give the American side of my country."

The students enrolled in the IB appreciate the privileges they are afforded through international education but are challenging its claims to a universal brand of the "international". When asked about countries that are discussed frequently, students mentioned the United States the most. "USA. All the time. All the time, we talk about USA," one said. Another responded: "The IB has helped make me see how the US, as a country, is extremely influential to the world." They also note that Lebanon is not present in their formal lessons and they realize that international education is not always reciprocal in teaching about parts of the world. "Students in the US might not even know where we are," said a fourth student.

Teachers similarly acknowledged the limits of the IB. They would like to make more time to discuss Lebanese narratives but are focused on external assessment. One math teacher was appreciative of the local links the IB textbooks, often found in side bar boxes, yet he said he did not always review them in class as he had to focus on the material that would

be assessed at the end of the year. Teachers expressed a desire to incorporate more local knowledge but were limited by the requirements of assessments and by time.

### **THE INFLUENCE OF THE IB’S CONCEPTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL ON THE WIDER SCHOOL CULTURE**

While the previous section focused on how the IB reinforced methodological nationalism inside an IBDP classroom, this section provides preliminary evidence as to how the introduction of the International Baccalaureate is shaping conceptions of the “international” across the campus and within the school community.

The IB features prominently on the school’s homepage and promotional materials. This literature is positive and inspiring and reflects trends in education to be student-centred and inquiry-based. Upon arrival on campus, the language of the IB greets visitors on posters in the hallways. In the staff lounge, a corkboard of colored construction paper displaying the IB Learner Profile, an official list of ten attributes that the IB promotes for the develop of the “internationally minded student”, is the largest and most colourful display in the room. The sign, which is surrounded by a line of construction paper human cut outs reads: “A team that develops internationally minded students: IB learners strive to be: reflective, balanced, knowledgeable, open-minded, inquirers, risk-takers, principled, caring, thinkers, communicators.”

The Learner Profile was displayed in two of the classrooms that the author visited. At the high school level, teachers have their own classrooms, and students move between them. Teachers decorate their classrooms and many have inspirational posters, maps or student work hanging on the wall. Alongside, motivational posters and examples of student work, one teacher displayed a blue and white poster of the Learner Profile, produced by the IB, branded with the IB logo in the corner. The second teacher had written the ten attributes on individual pieces of paper and hung them up in a cloud-shape. These are classrooms used by non-IB students as well, who are seeing that their IB receives special place in classrooms that are used by all students.

The introduction of the International Baccalaureate has also challenged democratic principles within the school. As a perk for students who signed up to the IB, the director of the school offered them some freedoms that are not accessible to other students. These new freedoms included the right to leave campus whenever they wanted and the ability not to wear their uniform. The students were told that it takes a lot of personal responsibility and motivation to complete the IB and the faculty wanted to show that it trusted the students to push themselves. This allows the students to monitor their time and some students leave to get snacks during breaks. However, it is also raising questions of fairness within the student body, especially from those who do not have the opportunity to get an iced coffee between classes. As the CAS coordinator, the teacher who oversees the mandatory community, action and service requirement of the DP, explained: “*They are more serious [than before]. It shows. But the thing is the others look at them as really privileged because [the director], you know, gave them some privileges to attract them to the course at the beginning...So they envy them: ‘Oh you are so privileged, you are so...’ That’s the thing. But they know that it’s a lot of work. It’s tough too.*” (CAS coordinator, March 2017)

Students at Charles Malek, who are enrolled in the Lebanese Baccalaureate or the American Diploma programs have started questioning what they perceived as a favouring

of the IB. They see the students gaining these privileges because they are in the international track, not because they have earned them. Tensions have occurred between IB and non-IB students, including those Lebanese students who might want to join the IB but are denied entry by the Lebanese state who will not grant the exemption for Lebanese citizens who do not hold a second passport. The “international” certificate therefore, becomes a kind of capital that is held in higher regard than other forms of education. As the school is small, some classes are mixed between students in the IBDP and students in the American Diploma program. The class uses the IB textbooks and follows the IB lesson plans. From the teacher’s perspective, this is efficient because the standards for the IB are more restrictive but some students have expressed frustration that they must do the work of an IB class without getting the benefit of an IB degree.

The above findings strengthen past studies that show that international education as conceived by the IB prioritizes the role of the nation state. Further, there is evidence that the IB’s vision of the “international” reinforces the notion that entry to the global community must come through citizenship of a nation state. (Not unlike how the road to citizenship in Lebanon first travels through one of 18 sects). In other words, you must belong to a nation before you can access the global. The examples support claims that the International Baccalaureate’s conception of the “international” as methodologically nationalistic. For student with complicated relationships to one, or more, nation states, this portrayal of the international could be confusing and students feel pressured to conform. Students enjoy the privileges they see are associated with the IB, even while other students resent that international track students are offered more freedoms, yet they are challenging the universality of the IB’s conception of the “international”. For many, they do not see themselves in their lessons. They believe they are learning an American version of education as the US is so dominant across all subject areas and informal discussions.

## CONCLUSION

There is no one way to conceptualize the “international” as it will depend on factors such as time and place and the nature of the school community and culture. In addition, there is no one way to “do” the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. Schools are given independence as to the courses they teach and the methods they use. Final assessments focus on inquiry, not the rote memorization of facts, so they are flexible to incorporate lessons from thousands of schools around the world. As suggested in this article, exploring the IB through a postcolonial lens could support the IB in creating material and approaches in the future, especially material that further unpacks and address questions global power relations and influence. Postcolonial awareness could also address the roots of statehood, as many countries were established or created with outside interference. Nation building cannot be separated from colonialism and any education that examines the role of the nation should also be aware of these intersections.

The experiences at Charles Malek High School reflect how one school, new to its IB journey, was negotiating the notion of the international. As this paper shows, the school joined the IB World Schools network because it felt it was already aligned, pedagogically and philosophically, with the approaches and ideals of the IB. Education is a process and how the IB programming is used by teachers at the case study school and how these

lessons are understood by the students will change yearly. One teacher at the school said she had been told to expect it to take three years before she felt comfortable teaching the IB.

The influence of the International Baccalaureate extends beyond the classrooms of those enrolled in the DP. Although the DP is only a two-year program, teachers have become aware of skills and content they would like to teach to students before they enter the IB, such as a more diverse range of literary styles or strengthening the way lab reports are taught. These skills will be taught with the IB in mind, even though not all the students learning in the younger years will, or can, join the IBDP. Therefore, the school is altering the curricula of earlier grades to pass on relevant skills and content so that if students enrol in the IB they will already possess the knowledge. Although not every student will leave the school with an IB certificate, their education will be inevitably shaped by the pedagogy and philosophy of the IB. Students not enrolled in the IBDP at the case study school are directly influenced by the IB’s pedagogies. Their coursework has changed in some classes to align with the IB. Their peers are given greater privileges around campus as a reward for participating in the IB. While they recognize the academic rigor or the program, some are envious at privileges their peers have been given due to the course in which they are enrolled.

The findings of the case study explored in this article highlight the centrality of the nation state within the IB’s conceptualization of the international. It would be challenging to teach the IB without reinforcing the centrality of the nation state across classes. It encourages an approach framed by postcolonial theory, which supports the provision of alternative narratives to destabilize dominant discourses. As the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (1958) wrote in *Things Fall Apart*, a novel the IB students at Charles Malek read in their Literature and Language course; “If you don’t like my story, write your own.” Future studies, engaging postcolonial theory could address global asymmetries of power and provide a platform for underrepresented voices, and could encourage the IB re-conceptualize the “international” as less Eurocentric and methodologically nationalistic while remaining committed to its ideological beginnings, which were to promote a global culture of peace through progressive, inclusive education.

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