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Pluralizing Educational Mobilities: Towards a More Equitable and Inclusive Discourse

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Pluralisation des mobilités éducatives : vers un discours plus équitable et plus inclusif

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Editorial

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Pluralizing Educational Mobilities: Towards a More Equitable and Inclusive Discourse

This special issue on pluralizing educational mobilities was conceptualized by active contributors to two networks: the Critical Internationalization Studies Network (CISN) and the Global Collective for Study Abroad Researchers and Administrators (GCSARA). These groupings were established with inherently “pluralizing” intentions, respectively, to “reimagin[e] dominant patterns of relationship, representation, and resource distribution in the internationalization of education” (Critical Internationalization Studies Network, n.d.) and to “promote [study abroad] research, and its dissemination, that draws on alternative epistemologies and situated cultural understandings” (GCSARA, n.d.). Both these networks, and others like them, have flourished in recent years precisely because the unexplored terrain that opens up when we “imagine [educational mobility and] internationalization otherwise” is vast, as a result of the naturalization and entrenchment, over many decades, of dominant discourses and practices that have severely limited the way in which this area of human endeavour has been conceived and organized (Castiello-Gutiérrez et al., 2023).

As noted in our call for papers, of late “there has been a critical turn in international education scholarship (including education abroad), placing a stronger focus on issues of equity and inclusion, which trains a decolonial lens on research and practice around international mobilities.” Recently, this turn has significantly “pluralized” some zones of discourse that might be considered mainstream in international education practice and enquiry, so that well-established organizations, such as NAFSA: Association of International Educators or The Forum on Education Abroad, now have growing bibliographies of research and practical resources that reflect ever more critical and diverse viewpoints. Other work published in the last 5 years, such as the Routledge Studies in Global Student Mobility Series, now numbering fourteen volumes with titles such as *Inequalities in Study Abroad and Student Mobility* (Kommers & Bista, 2021) and *Critical Perspectives on Equity and Social Mobility in Study Abroad* (Glass & Gesing, 2022), has both opened out the field of vision and nuanced the discourse by incorporating more scholarship from non-Anglophone contexts and by democratizing the production of such scholarship across a wider range of roles (scholar, practitioner, participant, host, mediator).

Nonetheless, whilst many researchers and practitioners in the field may increasingly find consensus in the need to reconfigure internationally mobile education, both conceptually and in practice, the obstacles remain formidable and the inequities stubbornly ingrained: by and large, the privileged retain their privilege, even as it is increasingly questioned from within as well as from without. It could not be otherwise, because the inequities are structural: student mobility is a function of the global tertiary education system, in which settler-colonial interests largely continue to prevail and, in many instances, are being reinscribed by the anti-intellectual populist ideologies that have proliferated recently (Douglass, 2021). As a result, it continues to be the case—though to a somewhat lesser degree than a decade ago—that “study abroad research is still disproportionately generated in a small number of university systems in the global-North sending nations of shorter-term study abroad and is still overwhelmingly centered on students of those countries” (Craig, 2022, p. 66). We might now add the nuance that this attention is “centered on students of *and in* those countries,” as the experiences of international students from without move into the mainstream in the primary research-generating locales of the Global North.

As guest editors, we acknowledge our own privileged location in this global matrix: we would not be welcome guests without the capital conferred by our position in institutions that all, to varying degrees, participate in the rigged game of prestige and power entailed by the dominant globalized system of higher education. Nonetheless, we make bold to assert the validity of this small contribution to pluralization in the field of educational mobilities, in the

spirit of la paperson's "third university," which "assembles decolonizing machines out of scrap parts from colonial technology" (la paperson, 2017, Chapter "A Third University Exists within the First").

Pluralizing educational mobilities extends beyond simply exploring the different learning opportunities that travel promises. In essence, it invites us to reexamine the relationship between travel and learning itself. Moves to pluralize invariably confront questions about the purpose and kind of learning that has inspired educational mobility: have we been aiming for instrumental knowledge about the other, or transformational knowing about the self? To pluralize something is to loosen the grip of a familiar story we have been telling and hearing about it.

Pluralizing entails examining the assumptions, worldviews, and interests underlying established lines of enquiry in the field. Educational mobility research has intensified the gaze on students from the Global South as an object of research. As noted above, pluralizing the questions we ask necessitates expanding this gaze to include motivations and experiences of diverse stakeholders—researchers, practitioners, institutions, governments, students' own extended networks—with explicit attention to the macro-structural design which shapes the relational dynamics between these nodes. In "Voices From the Periphery: Lived Experiences of Women International Students From the Global South Studying at U.K. Universities," Alina Schartner, Samantha Shields, and Yao Wang use narrative enquiry to draw out how socioeconomic categories inform experiences of international students. They further resituate these experiences within postfeminist discourse, demonstrating the potential of educational mobility research to pluralize constructions of society and the hierarchical international (dis)order. For future research, inclusion of this study in the special issue points in the direction of diversifying the lived experiences receiving attention in research to rectify the present imbalance while grappling with and clarifying the limits of narrative enquiry.

Taking a different tack, in "Plurilingual and Pluricultural Practices in Turkish Study Abroad: The Intersection of Minority Identity and Lx Communities," Bianca Brown exemplifies how we might pursue study abroad research outside the edifice of Western modernity as the default measure and vocabulary of our globalized condition. One of the ways in which the author achieves this is by identifying biases in enquiry within existing research (see para 1 of conclusion, p. 28). By recognizing that "some sojourns may function to decrease participants' intercultural sensitivity," this study troubles a simplistic causal link between study abroad and intercultural learning, while also holding research accountable for improving practice in the field. In addition to program structure, an important consideration is greater awareness about how direction of flow matters. Specifically, whether the direction of mobility is within the English-speaking core, or from the rest of the core to the English-speaking core, from the peripheries to the core, or from one peripheral location to another, greatly influences the kind of learned power asymmetries that are in play.

One of our goals was to demonstrate through this special issue how engagement with allied fields of research might prove fruitful for our subfield. Highlighting enhanced potential collaboration between study abroad and language learning research is Brown's contention that while language learning—especially second language acquisition—has "embraced the multilingual turn," "study abroad research often assumes that learners are situated in monolingual host societies." On the other hand, Badreddine El-Kacimi's contribution somewhat complicates this distinction through in-depth examination of challenges and opportunities faced by multilingual students from sub-Saharan Africa entering the multilingual schooling system of Morocco. "*Intégration linguistique des élèves-migrants subsahariens dans l'environnement scolaire au Maroc : au croisement d'expériences familiales*," innovatively responds to the need for a networked and relational approach mentioned above by delving into

what families experience when school-going children must aim for proficiency in a completely new language. In contrast to Schartner et al.'s use of narrative enquiry with individual respondents, El-Kacimi opts for focus group interviews in order to facilitate targeted, yet profound and synergistic discussions and allow for easier exploration of issues of a socially sensitive nature.

In “International Student Mobility to Canada and New Zealand: ‘Edugration’ or ‘Transience’?”, Conrad King, Catherine Gomes, William Shannon, and Ruonan Lu use data from international students and policy proclamations by the governments of those countries to explore the concepts of “edugration” and “transience.” Their analysis of this latter concept is of particular interest and highlights the importance of sensitivity to generational trends in educational mobility research (in other words, the extent to which “our students are not just us, some 15, or 100, years later” [McGregor, 2020, p. 173]). Whilst the notion of transience may not at first appear striking in the context of student mobility motivated by employment prospects, the way it is viewed by a number of respondents in this piece—as a neutral or even desirable condition resulting from the sojourn—seems to disrupt traditional metaphors of “getting on the ladder” or “a foot in the door” in order to advance in linear fashion towards some stable goal (including permanent migration). Accordingly, many young international students today may view transient status post-sojourn simply as the normal state of affairs, rather than an inferior outcome when compared with long-term “edugration.” As this piece demonstrates, the architects of government policy in the host contexts continue to ascribe motivations to international students that may be rather outmoded, on occasion benevolently holding open the so-called “back door to migration,” perhaps without realizing that a significant proportion plan to exit through it voluntarily in a few years’ time.

Finally, in “Uncovering the Nexus of Identity and Forced Migration: A Collaborative Autoethnographic Study of Afghan Women’s Experiences in Diaspora,” Narjes Hashemi and Safia Amiry provide a nuanced account of their experiences as Afghan women navigating the complexities of forced migration and educational mobility. Their stories vividly capture the resilience and determination required to overcome obstacles such as the Taliban’s suppression of women’s rights, cultural adaptation in host countries, and the psychological toll of being rendered stateless. Their personal narratives resonate strongly with this special issue’s aim of giving voice to internationally mobile students from the Global South and examining contexts of student mobility that are underrepresented in the existing literature. By sharing their lived experiences, the authors offer alternative narratives and situated cultural understandings that disrupt dominant discourses within international education scholarship. In doing so, this article also sheds light on the transformative potential of education for marginalized women, exemplifying how access to quality education can empower individuals to become advocates for social change and gender equality.

Future Directions

The title of this special issue is borrowed from an earlier piece by one of its guest editors, Kalyani Unkule’s “Pluralising Mobility: Women Pilgrims and Wandering Bodhisattvas” (2022), which explores the rich potential of alternative precedent narratives for educational mobility. Whilst this special issue did not attract similar explorations, we continue to believe they should be afforded attention: given the complexity of mobility flows, the oft-cited European Grand Tour is self-evidently a relevant precedent for only a small proportion of experiences of educational mobility and the contexts that give rise to them. Validation of alternative discourses of precedent for educational mobility is an important counterbalance to the received assumptions that arise from Eurocentric narratives and is thus, potentially, a way in which “[t]he third world university breaks faith from its own machinery by inspiring the

academic automaton with a fourth world soul” (la paperson, 2017, Chapter “A Third University Exists Within the First”).

We see potential for further research to glean insights from these contributions to develop well-specified proposals for changes in policy and practice at the institutional and governmental levels. We also hope this special issue inspires collaborative research projects that bring together scholars, practitioners, and participants from diverse backgrounds and contexts and offer a promising avenue for further pluralizing educational mobilities. By actively involving stakeholders with varied perspectives and lived experiences, such collaborations can challenge traditional power dynamics and hierarchies within knowledge production. These projects can create spaces for co-creation, where marginalized voices and epistemologies are centred, and diverse ways of knowing are valued and integrated. In doing so, these plural collaborations that transcend academic silos and national containers can yield novel insights and methodological approaches, enriching our understanding of the multifaceted nature of educational mobilities.

We also encourage scholars to develop de/post/anti-colonial methodologies and research practices as crucial for actively challenging Eurocentrism and promoting the co-creation of knowledge “with,” rather than “about,” marginalized communities and stakeholders (Mittelmeier et al., 2023). De/post/anti-colonial approaches demand a critical examination of the ways in which colonial legacies and power structures continue to shape knowledge production, research agendas, and the very framing of research questions. By prioritizing ethical and culturally responsive methods, researchers can engage in reciprocal and respectful relationships with participants, recognizing their agency and expertise as well as researchers’ positionalities and biases. Accordingly, as scholars involved with envisioning and facilitating the special issue, we also take with us lessons for deeper introspection and hope they will positively reflect in our scholarship and community engagement in times to come.

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