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TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION: THE POLITICS OF MOBILITY, MIGRATION AND THE WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores some of the background issues regarding international students and seeks to identify the ways in which the experience of transnational education by international students in higher education is positioned within academic debates, policy debates, literature and theory. This paper argues about the need for new ways of exploring the phenomena of international education and that many of the theoretical frameworks used are inadequate to account for the complexities that characterise transnational higher education and what international students experienced. In the context of globalisation and anxiety about immigration, the paper argues that the theoretical positions have identified international students as a "risk" but it is more often the student that experiences risk. It is argued that the approaches to researching international students tend to be instrumental and focused on market analysis rather than the experience of students in terms of educational, social and cultural interactions. International students are often constructed as "a problem" and this paper argues for a different approach that sees students as important as "designer migrants' in developed countries, important for capacity building and establishing international networks for their countries of origin. The paper asserts that international students and transnational education should not be seen exclusively in market terms but as an opportunity to develop notions of the "global citizen".

DEVELOPING A NEW THEORY TO INTERPRET GLOBAL STUDENTS MOBILITY

There are important questions that this paper asks about how we theorise the phenomena and experience of global student mobility in a way that captures the complexity and diversity of the international student experience. How do we develop models and interpret existing practices and behaviours that are associated with global mobility? How do we develop theoretical frameworks that can inform ways to improve practice to respond to the challenges of

globalisation and the retreat to regressive localism? This paper seeks to find new ways of exploring and interpreting global student mobility.

Much of the data that describes global student mobility is statistical material that documents the global movement of international students. This is a conventional and established way of viewing the mobility of international students and this tends to be a totalising process that does little to capture the individualised and collective experience of many students. There is also a need to develop theoretical frameworks that capture and inform global tendencies that are not preoccupied with narratives about individual stories. There is a need not only to value and profile individual stories but also to develop intellectual tools that offer broader and universalised solutions and proposals or action.

There is much international statistical material developed by national governments, research centres, and economic and trade organisations. A reliance on these statistical collections creates a dilemma for those looking for answers to the questions posed by this chapter. The authors of this paper argue that the statistical material reinforces an instrumental and positivist approach that objectifies human behaviour and commodifies this behaviour. Positivism has a tendency to dehumanise the human experience through processes that promote an objectification of experience and the characterisation of relationships through "calculable rules" which are the characteristics of bureaucracy and industry. Early twentieth century sociologist, Max Weber described these interrelated process as:

> The "objective" discharge of business primarily means a discharge of business according to "calculable rules" and 'without regard for persons'. Without regard for persons is also the catchword of the "market" and in general of all pursuits of naked economic interests…"Calculable rules also is of paramount importance for modern bureaucracy...Its specific, nature which is welcomed by capitalism, develops the more perfectly the more the bureaucracy is "dehumanised" (Weber cited in Gerth & Mills 1946: 215–216).

Aligned with this Weber and others such as Habermas (1990) argued that reductionism and objectification is promoted by the application of scientific principles to human activity. This application of scientific principles seeks to predict and control human behaviours through the application of uniformity and standardised categories. In this way human behaviour is assigned rigid categories and descriptions that simultaneously standardise and individualise human behaviour. This individualisation includes the assignment of complex categories around individual features

and characteristics and "types". These categories and types are artificial creations and tend to have superficial connections with reality that have the effect of impeding the understanding of complexity and diversity. This is evident in the shifting categorisation used to differentiate international and foreign students where there is a lag and inconsistencies with the realities that prompts shifts in populations.

The descriptions of the mobility of international students feature many of the principal features of reductionism and positivism. The application of metaphors derived from the natural sciences is evident in much of the analysis of the mobility of international students. The mobility of international students is commonly described by the metaphor of "flows" within the context of a transnational education marketplace. Altbach (2004) describes the environment of higher education associated with globalisation using this term

> Large numbers of scholars and scientists travel abroad temporarily for research or teaching. There is substantial migration abroad for academic work as well. Globalisation encourages these flows and ensures that growth continues. Academic system become more similar and academic degrees more widely accepted internationally, as immigration rules are tailored to people with high skills levels, and as universities themselves are more open to hiring the best talent world wide the marketplace will expand (Altbach 2004: 8).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) uses a similar metaphor in describing the relationship between globalisation saying that there is a "general trend towards freely circulating capital, good and services, and coupled with changes in the openness of labour markets have increased the demand for new kinds of educational provision in the OECD" (OECD 2006: 284). The metaphor of circulation has commonalities with the motion of hydraulic flows and is evidence of the way in which science and scientific principles are used to describe social phenomena.

The promise of modernity and the imagined social relations of globalisation expressed in the notion of "global flows" were explored by Marginson and Sawir (2005). Marginson and Sawir (2005: 281) question why "the liquid metaphor of 'flows' become central to the understanding of cross border relations and effects" suggesting that flows and networks, commonly used terms invoke water and electricity. In introducing discussion on globalisation, they suggest that notions of connectedness carry the sensibilities of moving and joining, of soaking and flooding, of linkages,

circuits and systems bearing power, that talk of our sense of living in the global. However they also question what the metaphor of flows can do to "tell us what is distinctive about the global in higher education and where higher education might be heading" (Marginson & Sawir 2005: 282). They also argue for some interrogation of the concept of flows to consider what it says about subjectivities, behaviours and organisational transformation.

Appadurai's interpretation of globalisation uses a framework of "five dimensions of cultural flows" termed "scapes". Perhaps the most importance for analysing international students is the notion of "Ethnoscapes" that describes the mobility of people as workers, tourists, migrants, refugees and students. Other "scapes" are interconnected and include "Financescapes" which refers to the global movement of capital, "Technoscapes" which describes the rapidly changing technologies and their influence on production and knowledge. "Mediascapes" refer to the capabilities of the electronic technology to produce and disseminate information. "Ideoscapes" are seen as "concatenations of images (Marginson & Sawir 2005: 284).

Marginson and Sawir (2005) also see these "scapes" as "asynchronous, uneven and overlapping" and enabling "analytical flexibility" that can develop an understanding of the complex and multi-dimensional aspects of globalisation. Appadurai proposes that globalisation, although a powerful force is not homogenising and immutable and suggests that significant opportunities for adaptation, hybridity and agency exist where the local can influence the global.

Altbach (2004) supports the notion that there will be an interplay and adaptation between the local and global forces associated with globalisation suggesting that "while the forces of globalisation cannot be held at bay, it is not inevitable that countries or institutions will necessarily be overwhelmed by them or that the terms of the encounter must be dictated from a far" (Altbach 2004: 3).

Marginson and Sawir's analysis is also informed by Castells' (2000) interpretation of the "space of flows" which is configured and arranged by "networks". These networks are described as inter-connected nodes where society, space and time are compressed. These nodes are also seen as fundamentally related to the capital accumulation and the replicating the social relations that underpin global capitalism. According to Castells the "space of flows" is vectored by electronically based circuits, the principal nodes and hubs located in geographic places such as global cities and the dominant social groups that are characterised by mobility. These conditions are seen as promoting interconnectedness and mobility and see opportunities within global dimensions as organic and ever present. The assumptions about connectedness and networks assume that organic systems actually

exists in social systems and portrays mobility as flows and where fluidity and cyclic patterns are representative of reality. In contradiction to the theoretical interpretations where there is a stress on certainty and uniformity, this chapter utilises theoretical positions which challenge the objectified and systems based viewpoints and introduces an analysis of risk.

THE RISK SOCIETY: GLOBALISATION AND IDENTITY

Ulrick Beck described the notion of the risk society that proposes that there is a new conception of a post-industrial society. Beck suggests that there is a central paradox in the risk society that sees the internal risk of society generated by "processes of modernisation which try to control them" (Beck 1998: 11). The risk society is viewed as beginning where traditional society ends and that traditional certainty cannot be guaranteed and that the less society is reliant on traditional securities the more risk that have to be negotiated. Beck argues that the distinctions between nature and culture are increasingly subject to a hybrid relationship. This suggests that "nature is inescapably contaminated by human activity" and that there is an interrelationship which sees science and culture intertwined.

This means that there is a universal quality that erodes traditional boundaries between class, nation and the rest of nature but it does not mean that Beck shares the post-modern view that politics is ended but there is a new form of politics. Beck suggests that the risk society has reshaped the political sphere as the questions are no longer around notions of distributing goods but what Beck refers to as the "bads" such as environmental degradations and the consequences of the inequalities of global capitalism.

Beck argues that risk society is reflexive which means that reliance on science and technology ensures that these perceived advances become an issue and generate problems for itself. This means that innovations or progress create dilemmas and new levels of uncertainty that are often beyond the control of governments. As a consequence Anthony Giddens and Beck argue that there is a need for a manufactured certainty emerges to overcome and eliminate the scientific, social and political risks that arise from the consequences of this are described by Beck

> Under the impact of modern risks and manufactured certainties, the modes of determining and perceiving risks, attributing causality and allocating compensation have irreversibly broken down, throwing the function and legitimacy of modern bureaucracies, states, economies and science into question (Beck 1998: 16).

An important point that Beck makes is that the nature of risk society is not a cultural conflict as the nature of risk transcends cultural boundaries and that people are being placed in positions typified by contradiction and uncertainty. This now means people, experts and nations are having work in collaboration to overcome the intensified risks. This collaborative approach is however hampered by the fundamental conditions of neo-liberal globalisation that valorises competition and deregulation erodes collective action and undermines collaborative agency. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) argue that neo-liberal economics relies on the fiction of the "autarkic" human that assumes individuals alone can master the whole of their lives. They argue that the self-sufficient individual undermines collective action and ultimately implies a disappearance of any sense of mutual obligation. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) any analysis of the social condition, and attempts to collectivism, needs to account for the fact that individualism, diversity and scepticism are written into western culture (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001: 23). They propose 15 comments on the notion of "a life of ones own" which is representative of individualisation in the context of capitalism. This included the fragmented and discursive nature of life experienced in neo-liberalism and the contradictory tensions between tradition and individualisation. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001) argue that the conditions of the risk society promotes an individualisation that erodes the social structural conditions for political consensus and depoliticises the public sphere by collapsing issues to matters of individual choice. They argue that there is a paradox which is summarised as:

> The paradox is that this happens because political involvement is increasing at the microcosmic level and sub-political society is governed from below in more and more issues and fields of action. The closed space of national politics no longer exists. Society and the public realm are constituted out of conflictual spaces that are once individualises, transnationally open and defined in opposition to one another (Beck & Beck Gernsheim 2001: 29).

Affinity and association of individuals within the context of the risk society remain a key question. How in the context of the social and structural patterns that promote competition and social fragmentation do people associate and become "friends"? This question is placed against a context where life is seen as a risky venture so that a normal life story becomes seemingly a "risk biography". In seeking to ask questions about association in the risk society Pahl (1998) explores the notion of friendship describes the need for "character friendship". This concept accounts for the

need for more open and changing associations in a society that is more fragmented and the way in which family and kin have been displaced as central figures in the lives of people. Pahl (1998) also argues that there is a need to overcome the barriers to friendship that include imbalances of power owing to class as well as the "anxious self". The suggested way forward is the development of identity sharing partnerships that are personally liberating and that have a de-institutionalised quality. Pahl describes these relationships as:

> Friendship is about hope: between friends we talk about our futures, our ideals and larger-than-life meanings. There is an idealism of strong friendship because it is detached from the fixtures of role, status and custom (Pahl 1998: 113).

The notion of friendship is not depoliticised but related to the notion of *philia politike* where constant talk and discourse united citizens of the ancient Greek *polis*. The notion of friendship is important for international students seeking to establish life in a host destination and Arndt suggests new forms of friendships have to have a "regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us" (Pahl 1998: 113). Although the notion of the risk society emphasises catastrophe and dire consequences for global survival, Beck does not have a pessimistic view of the future. The inability of the established formal political structures to cope with the dimensions of threat at a global level creates the potential for changes in the political structures that are reliant on nationalism and hierarchy. Indeed Beck argues that there is the possibility of a historic alternative for political action that allows for the fundamental transformation of national/international, state and non-state politics. Beck argues that the inability of existing state arrangements to cope with crisis creates a game in "which boundaries and basic rules and basic distinctions are renegotiated" (Beck 2006: 342).

The new politics will be facilitated by an arrangement of "enforced cosmopolitanism" where risk and the scope of catastrophe force a more congenial and cooperative response as people are forced to respond to the threat of global catastrophe. This mutual accommodation often between divergent and diverse interests is a described by Beck as *cosmopolitan Realpolitik* and as a "golden handcuff" that because it forces the establishment of networks and transnational interdependence and cooperative response to global issues that can not be solved by the old politics of nationalism (Beck 2006: 343).

The importance of this mutual interdependence and the erosion of traditional power structures is also extended the global corporations. The dimensions of global catastrophe, including social, ecological and economic, as a consequence of their actions means that they cannot escape scrutiny and remain immune from political and community action, often on a global scale. There is a reflexive quality in the risk society that sees what is termed as an involuntary enlightenment because future sustainability and viability of capital is dependent on a social and political environment where risk are minimised. Beck argues that the politics of risk acts as wake-up call for the national state and the politics associated with the nations state but warns that a fake cosmopolitanism will simply re-institute the legitimacy of cosmopolitanism for the old politics of national-imperial purposes (Beck 2006: 343). Beck suggests that nation states try to resolve global issues like a drunk man trying to find his wallet on his way home in the cone of street light and he suggests even that states in the west are acting like failed states. The quest for the future that Beck suggests is a methodological challenge to see issues will be how to find ways "to decipher the links between risk and race, and the image of the enemy, risk and exclusion" (Beck 2006: 345). Part of this challenge according to Beck is to overcome the tensions between the over dramatisation of risk by the mass media at the same time they are claiming these risks as diverse as HIV, global warming, and terrorism can be ever brought undercontrol and mediated by the old politics of the state when this is really an impossibility.
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IMPLICATIONS OF THE RISK SOCIETY FOR STUDENTS

These theoretical positions have important practical and theoretical implications for analysing the international student experience because the analysis of international students has been accompanied by an absence of a critical analysis of the global context that characterises the environment for international students. The lack of a critical analysis has also meant that the research methodologies utilised used to analyse the experience of international students have failed to capture the authentic "lives of ones own" described by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001).

There has been an instrumental approach to international students that sees students as participants within a market context typified by a benign and neutral environment. Their participation has also been seen as passive and compliant, conforming to market trends and this has acted to diminish their identity as individuals and as people capable of exhibiting agency and action. The ways in which much of the data and research is depicted and

described has a tendency to feature a positivist theorisation that sees the phenomena of international education and mobility within quantified measures. This quantified analysis also seeks to replicate the methodologies of the natural sciences using quantified measures to draw up trends and tendencies and make predictions based on statistical measures without recourse to other material that situates a context for the experience of students. Consistent with this type of epistemology the participants are seen as passive and conforming to immutable laws of the market. Indeed the metaphor of global flows is a good example of how physical sciences and metaphors intrude in matters associated with complex social and cultural questions.

As mentioned by Beck and others like Habermas (1990) under these theoretical assumptions means that international students are seen as participants in a market the decisions who are limited to making use of value judgements about consumption. This orientation on consumptions tends to depoliticise and mask the tensions and dilemmas arising from transnational education in the risk society. As mentioned earlier in this chapter the reflexive nature of risk society creates opportunities for the nation state and also threatens to trigger ongoing political and administrative crisis. While the inflow of international students creates boundless opportunities for finance minded universities and bureaucrats concerned about the balance of payments, this same influx might trigger resistance in other sites and settings. The presence of international students, their diversity and ambitions to become citizens in their host countries triggers the xenophobic and racism responses that characterise the emergence of regressive localism and the attempts rally around mono-cultural nationalism. To account for these countertendencies, Habermas (1990) has suggested, that the state has to act and resorts to the juridification of the market that has seen increasing levels of legal and legislative measures to regulate the activities of the market and the mobility of international students. This juridification has been witnessed in Australia and the United States with the introduction of tough new visa restrictions on students. In Scandinavia also manifested itself with the threat to introduce fees for foreign students in places such as Sweden where there has been no charge.

The concept of risk is however better directed to the analysis of the individual experiences of international students as they are more vulnerable to some of the reflexive qualities of the risk society. Students, like all individuals, in order to survive the consequences of the risk society have to,

survive the rat race, one has to become active, inventive and resourceful, to develop ideas of one's own, to be faster, nimbler and more creative –not just on one occasion but constantly day after day. Individuals become actors, builders jugglers, stage managers of their own biographies and also their social links and networks (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001: 23).

This is not easy for international students who may have limited financial, linguistic, social and cultural resources within a context where there may be hostility, or at the very least experience ambiguity about their presence in their host nation and the academy. Questions about how international students traverse and negotiate the risk society and centre on how to establish relationships and interactions that not only enhance the productive and creative energies of students but enable them to have relationships which promote global connections. It is an important challenge on how to transcend the dilemmas of the risk society and the isolating processes of what Beck terms individualisation and to develop meaningful friendships. It is how to ensure that the risks are replaced by reciprocity, collaboration and interconnectedness rather than fragmented isolation. Part of this as we have described is a methodological issue about looking at international students and trans-national education very differently and developing alternative paradigms that challenge reductionist positivist approaches that perpetuate dependence on market models and reify the commodification of the life experience.

The mobility of students is also characterised by a dynamic quality that sees shifts in the movements of students to and from destinations, institutions, nations, cities and study disciplines undergoing swings in popularity. However the representation and descriptions of the discursive and complex aspects of the student experience has featured instrumental and mechanistic discourse that fails to capture the organic nature of these global movements. The theoretical positions in this paper provide alternatives to explore the experiences of international students and to account for the consequences of mobility in a risk society. This provides an alternative to the limited and instrumental ways of interpreting global student mobility.

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