Constructing 'international' space in studies of international student mobility

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Overview of presentation

Key foci of literature on international student mobility (ISM)

Understandings of international space within ISM

Disciplinary disconnects

Looking to the future: exceptions and evidence of change

Key foci of literature on ISM

Large literature on **students' experiences** – primarily those who move

Majority of work focuses on 'whole degree' mobility

But also an important body of work on 'credit mobility' e.g. on Erasmus scheme (e.g. Deakin, 2014; King, 2003; van Mol, 2014); international work placements (e.g. Cranston et al., 2020); and other forms (e.g. Courtois, 2018)

Emphasis on: motivations and variables that affect a decision to move abroad; experiences whilst abroad (pedagogical and social); and subsequent outcomes (e.g. employment, political identity, propensity to travel again)

Increasing emphasis on heterogeneity of students' experiences (related to both geographical and social diversity)

Key foci of literature on ISM

Growing body of work on **supply side factors** e.g. role of education agents (e.g. Beech, 2019); education policies (e.g. Brooks, 2018; Geddie, 2014; Lomer, 2017); marketing approaches (e.g. Sidhu, 2006; Findlay et al., 2017)

In general, ISM significantly expanding area of research

Cross-disciplinary interest: geography, education and, to lesser extent, sociology (with some degree of cross-disciplinary referencing)

But some differences in emphasis e.g. student as 'learner' or 'migrant' (Yang, 2016)?

Understandings of international space within ISM

Analysis combines work that has looked at students' experiences and that which has focused on supply-side factors

Structured by: decision-making/motivations; experiences whilst abroad; subsequent experiences

Four key studies chosen for each area (illustrative, not exhaustive)

A decision to move abroad

Brooks, R. and Waters, J. (2009) A second chance at 'success': UK students and global circuits of higher education, *Sociology,* 43, 6, 1085-1102.

Fong, V. (2011) *Paradise Redefined. Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World* Stanford University Press.

Lomer, S. (2017) *Recruiting Students in Higher Education. Representations and Rationales in British Policy* Palgrave.

Sidhu, R. (2006) *Universities and Globalization. To Market, to Market* Laurence Erlbaum Associates Ltd.
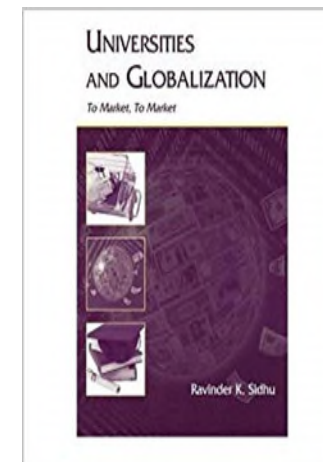
A decision to move abroad

Very circumscribed 'international geographies'
- Typically focused on movement from Global South to Global North (Fong, Sidhu)
- Even when moving from Global North, limited range of destination countries (Brooks and Waters)

Hierarchical positioning of nations e.g. 'developed world citizenship' (Fong); images from UK HEIs (Sidhu)

Access to international space closely related to students' social characteristics (Brooks and Waters), although some evidence that this may be changing (Fong)

Emergence of international map of value and distinction in HE – most valuable form of HE perceived to be that within 'global circuits' (no longer national) (Brooks and Waters; Fong; Sidhu)

A decision to move abroad

Some difference in meaning attributed to such movement by geographical positioning (e.g. individual positional good vs. collective endeavour)

Contradictions and ambivalences in understandings of movement through international space (Lomer)

Globalisation typically understood as neo-liberal globalization rather than the idea of a 'global commons'
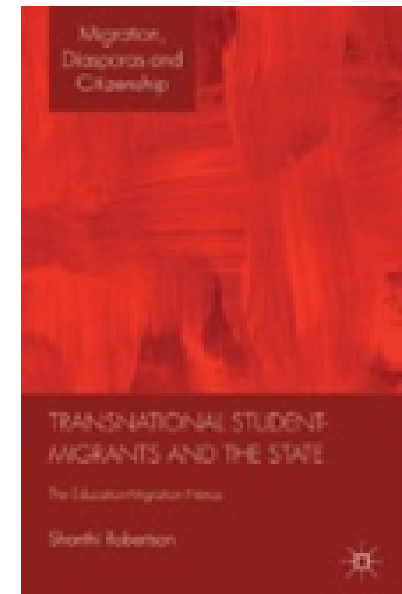
Experiences abroad

Courtois, A. (2019) From 'academic concern' to work readiness: student mobility, employability and the devaluation of academic capital on the year abroad, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 40, 2, 190-206.

Fincher, R. and Shaw, K. (2011) Enacting separate worlds: 'international' and 'local' students in public space in central Melbourne, *Geoforum*, 42, 5, 539-549.

Robertson, S. (2013) *Transnational Student-Migrants and the State. The Education-Migration Nexus* Palgrave.

Tannock, S. (2018) *Educational Equality and International Students. Justice Across Borders* Palgrave.

Experiences abroad

Again, circumscribed geographies of mobility
- From Global South to Global North (Tannock, Robertson, Fincher and Shaw)
- Within the Global North (Courtois)

Spatial 'separation' of international students, e.g.
- Within 'international' student residences (Fincher and Shaw)
- Became problematic when students moved into inner city areas (Robertson)

Many other ways in which binary between 'international' students and others reproduced e.g.
- Tuition fees (Tannock)
- Specific HEI practices required or stimulated by migration policy (Robertson; Tannock)

National framing of equality measures (although frequent staff commitment to more international forms) (Tannock)

Experiences abroad

Understandings of a 'global' or 'international' education (Tannock)

- Variation in extent to which a 'global commons' or a neo-liberal global worker is being prefigured

Hierarchical positioning of different types of international experience (Courtois)

- Academic vs. lifestyle
- Low status 'proximate' countries vs. higher status non-European locations

Hierarchical positioning of different types of international student (Robertson)

- Ostensibly related to focus of study, but strong links to social class

Subsequent impact

Murphy-Lejeune, E. (2002) *Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe. The New Strangers* Routledge.

Sin, I.L. (2013) Cultural capital and distinction: aspirations of the 'other' foreign student, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34, 5-6, 848-867.

Van Mol, C. (2014) *Intra-European Student Mobility in International Higher Education Circuits. Europe on the Move* Palgrave.

Waters, J. (2008) *Education, Migration and Cultural Capital in the Chinese Diaspora. Transnational Students Between Hong Kong and Canada* Cambria Press.
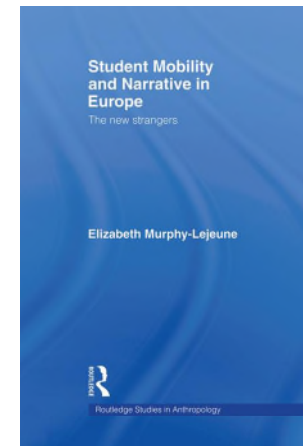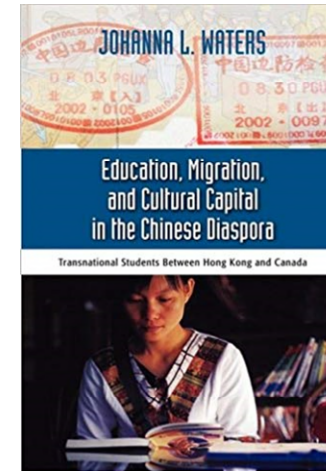
Subsequent impact

Same limited geographies of movement:
- Global South to Global North (Waters; Sin)
- Within Global North (Murphy-Lejeune; Van Mol)

Questioning of borders and ideas of home; national frames less relevant (Murphy-Lejeune)

'An open, wider world'; transformative potential (Murphy-Lejeune)

Development of identities, less bounded by the nation-state?

Fostering of 'European' identities as a result of intra-European mobility (van Mol)
- Not self-evident in all countries; subject to national variation
- Influenced by: historical presence of country in EU; visibility of EU integration in daily lives

Subsequent impact

In 'right' national context, significant employment advantage achieved; 'international' valued above 'national' (Waters) – but 'international' defined in limited terms

Moreover, value of 'international' degrees largely dependent on national context in which employment sought (Sin; Waters)

Immobility preferred in some situations (Sin)

Circumscribed understandings of 'international space': often understood in relationships between two specific places (e.g. Vancouver and Hong Kong in Waters' study); more accurate to conceptualise them as bi-lateral

Common themes & disciplinary disconnects

Focus primarily on **movement from the Global South to the Global North**, or **within the Global North**

Thus, circumscribed geographical focus and limited conception of international space

To some extent, relates to dominant flows of students, but also perspectives and location of researchers themselves

- 'Research on patterns of ISM and the dynamic shaping these patterns has been dominated by studies reflecting a Western orientation, discourse and understanding' (Kondakci et al., 2018)

Despite emphasis on mobility from the Global South, little connection with research in **development studies**

Common themes & disciplinary disconnects

Focus of much ISM research is on **relationships between particular nation-states**

- Between: one sending nation and one receiving nation (e.g. Waters); multiple sending and one receiving (e.g. Robertson; Fincher and Shaw; Tannock); one sending and multiple receiving (e.g. Fong)
- Thus, tends to construct international space as something closely related to nation-states, and often bi-lateral in nature

Implicit rejection of those who have argued that globalization has brought about the questioning of the national as the 'natural' scale of politics and policy (e.g. Ozga and Lingard, 2007)

But, despite emphasis on nation-states, very few comparative studies, and little connection with sub-discipline of **comparative studies**
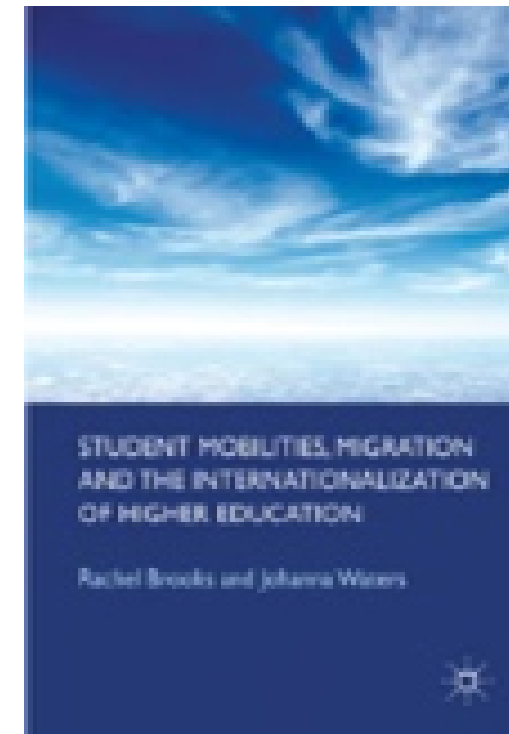
Evidence of disconnect

Academic studies of ISM citied in our 2011 book:

- Only two (out of 120) had an explicitly comparative focus
- Only two had an explicit focus on development and/or countries of the Global South as a destination for international students

Few articles on 'international students' or 'international student mobility' in journals *Comparative Education* and *Compare*

- e.g. search indicated only four in *Comparative Education* (and only one of these employed a cross-national comparison)

STUDENT MOBILITIES, MIGRATION AND THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Rachel Brooks and Johanna Waters

Evidence of disconnect

IBSS database

Search criteria: published in last 12 months; 'international student' in title; peer reviewed; written in English; substantive focus on higher education = 161 articles

Circumscribed geographies

Global North (as destination): 137

China (as destination): 9

Other country of Global South (as destination): 15 (Malaysia: 6; Korea: 2; Thailand, 2: South Africa: 2; Taiwan: 1; Mexico: 1; Iran: 1)

Vast majority are single-nation studies (commonly US or UK), with strong pedagogical focus

Comparative or cross-national: 4 (out of 161)
- Employ quantitative methods and report trends across countries rather than make comparisons

Explaining these disconnects

Emergence of ISM and its disciplinary orientations

Epistemology and areas of focus

Methodological issues

Practical issues

Emergence of ISM & disciplinary orientation

Emergence within geography

Grew from population studies/human geography, and is more aligned with migration studies than development studies

Came late to issues around post-colonialism and decolonialisation because of this rooting in population studies (which is itself rooted in demography with its tendency towards methodological nationalism)

Development studies: associated with World Systems Theory and Marxian idea of 'uneven development' and more recently a critique of colonialism and Empire, and neo-colonialism in development practice (e.g. World Bank and IMF models of development as well as ideas related to Western forms of charity)

ISM has not engaged with issues above; more influenced by traditional migration theories of push and pull factors

Emergence of ISM & disciplinary orientation

Emergence within geography (continued)

ISM has engaged with issues about class inequality and racist discrimination in host country, but not in the 'structural' way of entrenched, historical disadvantage characteristic of development studies

ISM has not had the explicitly political agenda that development studies has had (with respect to development or deconstructing development)

Less engagement with cultural differences in knowledge construction (often taken for granted as a 'thing' to be acquired)

Different traditions of geographical focus in ISM and development studies: development studies typically on Africa, ISM on a relatively small range of 'destination' countries

Emergence of ISM & disciplinary orientation

Emergence within education

Pedagogical focus, motivated by increasing numbers of international students in classrooms within Anglophone Global North – thus allied to particular national challenges (so not comparative) and focus on Global North (so not development focussed)

Policy analyses of internationalisation – again with clear link to national imperatives and policy – or assuming similarities across many countries (in tracing emergence of 'internationalisation' agendas)

Emergence of ISM & disciplinary orientation

Emergence within sociology

ISM closely linked to mobilities paradigm, developed by John Urry where was an emphasis on movement linked to changes in communication and transport and a notion that 'the world is their oyster' (Urry, 2007, p.3) (Beech, 2019)

Contrast with development studies which tends to focus on immobility and/or neglect mobility altogether

Epistemology and areas of focus

With respect to comparative research

Often focus is on more than one country, although typically focus is not comparative

Implicit assumption in some studies that can generalise across countries (e.g. across Anglophone nations of Global North in terms of destination countries – motivated by same neo-liberal logics) – thus explicit comparisons not necessary

In contrast, implicit assumption in other studies that national contexts so varied that need to explore single nation in depth to understand fully the relevant factors (e.g. Wiers-Jenssen (2018) re Norway; UK and US – reputation of HE, league table positionings, English language)

Link between sending and host country deemed more important than comparing two different sending countries, for example

Epistemology and areas of focus

With respect to development studies

Majority of work has focussed on migration to Global North, to reflect dominant flows of students; developing nations have typically not been studied as host nations

Majority of mobility from the Global South has been from the affluent middle classes, so not a key interest of 'development' scholars

Above issue has influenced who has moved into ISM and their areas of interest, previous research histories – e.g. scholars who have previously researched elites and or middle classes such as Courtois, Brooks

Within countries of Global South, more pressing issues with respect to migration have typically focussed on low skill workers and refugees

Within work in Global North, emphasis often on micro social processes within classrooms, rather than macro influences

Methodological issues

With respect to comparative research

Means of controlling variables/making studies more feasible e.g. when focussing on one destination country likely to be a variety of sending countries and vice versa

Often reliant on ethnographic and other qualitative methods, thus expensive and time-consuming to cover more than one country e.g. Fong (2011), Koh (2017), Murphy-Lejeune (2002); Robertson (2013), Waters (2007), Yang (2016)

Linked to previous points, assumption that can explore explanatory variables by asking those involved about them and/or observing behaviours; thus, no need to use comparisons as means of establishing what variables are significant (c.f. Stocpol and Somers, 1980)

Practical issues

With respect to comparative research

Popular PhD topic, which then gets converted into book or influential articles e.g. Lomer (2017), Robertson (2013), Beech (2018), Yang (2016) – thus constraints of time and money

Sometimes government-funded, and so only want researcher to cover national context e.g. King and Findlay

Scholars often interested in conducting work only in own country – may be due to level of knowledge and/or constraints of time and/or money

Linguistic abilities of researchers

'Publish or perish' culture; impact of research metrics and/or institutional performance management

Practical issues

With respect to development studies

Researchers have been much more likely to research own nation, and are more typically located in Global North

Impact of constraints of time and money, and wider research culture

Disciplinary tribalism and insular citation practices

Implications

Impact on type of knowledge generated, e.g.

- Limited to particular parts of the world
- Significant emphasis on relationships between nation-states, and their impact on student motivations and experiences; international space conceived in terms of bi-lateral relationships
- But less knowledge about patterns across international space more generally (different assumptions about whether we can generalize from an individual study)

Impact on explanations offered for identified patterns

Lack of emphasis on processes of transnationalism and globalization?

But: some important exceptions and evidence of change?

Comparative focus

- Similarities and differences within Anglo-American countries e.g. Sidhu's (2007) work on marketing campaigns; Geddie's (2015) analysis of policies and policy transfer
- Within Europe: Erasmus (King, 2003; van Mol, 2014); Europe more generally (Brooks, 2018)
- Within Global South: Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2015); Yang (2016)
- Acknowledged need for more comparative work on ISM (Tight, 2019)

Development focus

- Cross-border movement of refugees e.g. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2015)
- Long-term impact of colonial past e.g. Koh's (2017) study of migration from Malaysia
- Regional hubs: South Africa for Sub-Saharan Africa; Turkey for Middle East; South Korea and Hong Kong for South East Asia (Kondakci et al., 2018; Gunter and Raghuram, 2018)
- Increasing acceptance of China as a destination country (e.g. Yang, 2016)
- Changes being driven to some extent by increasing interest among countries outside Global North in attracting international students