

## BSA Early Career Forum Regional Event 2017

### Transnational education at a juncture: Sociological futures post-Brexit

Date & Time: Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2017, 9:30 am to 5.30 pm

Venue: Room CM 0.12, Claus Moser Building, Keele University, Staffordshire

- 9.30      **Registration**
- 10.00      Welcome
- 10.15      **Keynote speech 1:** Understanding educational futures post-Brexit:  
Transnational higher education and the rise of the East  
*Professor Catherine Montgomery, University of Bath*
- 11.15      Brexit, universities and the ‘academic exodus’ discourse  
*Aline Courtois, Aniko Horvath, and Giulio Marini, IOE, UCL*
- 11.45      **Coffee Break**
- 12.00      A game for the rich: Chinese middle class, family strategies, and capital  
conversion at cross-border joint-universities in China\*  
*Yunyun Qin, University of Hong Kong, \*Virtual presentation*
- 12.30      Quo Vadis? Student mobility, European crisis and Brexit  
*Peter Jones, Keele University*
- 13.00      **Lunch**
- 14.00      **Keynote speech 2:** Transnational education and new geographical imaginaries  
post-Brexit  
*Johanna L. Waters, University of Oxford*
- 15.00      Transnational higher education (TNE) students finding their voice: The experts  
and ultimate insiders  
*Keith Pinn and Veronica Earle, University of Hertfordshire*
- 15.30      **Coffee Break**
- 15.45      Weaponised TNE and the post-referendum ‘Empire 2.0’: a Bahraini case study  
*Mike Diboll, IOE, UCL*
- 16.15      The symbolic capital of English HE institutions at the wake of Brexit  
negotiations: Institutional strategies to guard against ‘isolationism’  
*Giulio Marini and Aline Courtois, IOE, UCL*
- 16.45      Discussion and wrapping up
- 17.30      Close

Note: Post-seminar dinner/drinks at Sneyd Arms: if you plan to join on your own cost, please email Reza at [r.gholami@keele.ac.uk](mailto:r.gholami@keele.ac.uk) by 28 April 2017 so we can book a table in advance.

# Abstracts

## Keynote speech 1

### **Understanding educational futures post-Brexit: Transnational higher education and the rise of the East**

*Professor Catherine Montgomery, University of Bath*

Over past decades Transnational Higher Education (TNHE) programmes have centred on those originated in ‘western’ institutions with programmes being transferred from ‘the west’ to East Asian countries (Djerasmovic, 2014). However, the dominance of ‘the west’ as provider and controller of TNHE is increasingly being challenged by China and East Asia. The current political climate in Brexit-obsessed UK is building obstacles and barriers to international education with growing isolationism and tightening immigration controls for international students while China’s strategies smooth the way to higher educational mobility by introducing new measures allowing foreign students to stay on in China after their degrees to take up jobs or internships and reducing red tape around residence permits (Sharma, 2017). This paper will focus on the implications of China’s rapidly expanding TNHE and its massive investment in transnational campuses, both those built within China that bring the world to China and those built beyond China that reach out to the world (Montgomery, 2016). Against the context of UK-Brexit disarray and increasing isolationism in the USA, China is attracting international students from across East Asia, sources of students traditionally bound for ‘the west’. Some elite UK HEIs have the resources to develop new transnational strategies and relationships post-Brexit with Oxford University unveiling proposals to open a satellite base in Paris in a symbolic post-Brexit gesture (Yorke, 2017). Overall the battle for dominance in international education is a battle that the East will win and there will be implications for institutions, academics and students worldwide.

## Keynote speech 2

### **Transnational education and new geographical imaginaries post-Brexit**

*Johanna L. Waters, University of Oxford*

In this presentation, I consider the ‘geo-social’ implications of a post-Brexit world (after Ho, 2017), with specific reference to emergent geographical imaginaries and transnational higher education (TNHE). Brexit-related discourses, prevalent within the British media on the lead-up to the referendum, presented a sometimes insular, parochial and nationalistic view of UK affairs, which could be extended to discussions of higher education. However, there have been nascent signs that Brexit *might* pave the way for a greater number of (not fewer) ‘educational’ engagements with other countries outside of the EU. Brexit *may* initiate and forge unconventional, less traditional relationships around education with a *greater diversity* of ‘foreign’ players. Consequently, the geo-social map relating to international and transnational education might be re-written in interesting and provocative ways. I draw on my own empirical work, and that of others, to consider: a) why a geo-social perspective on TNHE might be both interesting and important; b) how countries such as China are already challenging conventional geo-social relationships when it comes to international engagements in education; and c) how we might speculate on the consequences of Brexit for the UK’s changing geographical imaginaries around TNHE.

## **Brexit, universities and the ‘academic exodus’ discourse**

*Aline Courtois, Aniko Horvath, and Giulio Marini, IOE, UCL*

As soon as the referendum results were announced, British universities made their fears about the negative impact of Brexit known. The retention of EU staff has featured prominently among the concerns they disclosed to the media. Universities communicated extensively on the value they attached to their EU, and more broadly non-UK staff, and some promised to assist such staff should Brexit have implications on their residency status.

However, these discourses mask a number of issues. Higher education is the sector that uses zero-hour contracts the most, after the hospitality industry (Butler 2013; UCU 2016). These contracts designate workers as transient, disposable, ‘guest workers’ within the academy. Their very transience (sometimes embedded in their career strategies [Khattab and Fenton 2016]) disqualifies them from challenging their employment conditions in any meaningful way. Even tenured staff see their employment security threatened as universities implement performance measures, on which the continuation of their employment depends. Thus, the staff retention discourse co-exists with aggressive practices aimed at increasing employment insecurity.

The UK academic market is segmented, and only the ‘stars’ in the top tier have the power to negotiate their salaries and working conditions (Paye 2015). Furthermore, while several EU academics have spoken publicly about their desire to leave the UK, a key question for many is: where to? The casualisation and segmentation of the academic markets in other English-speaking countries (Australia: Ryan et al 2013; Canada: Bauder 2006; Ireland: Courtois and O’Keefe 2015; the US: Berry 2005) make them unlikely destinations for those already marginalised in UK academia. Other European countries are exporters rather than importers of academics; and low-pay, insecure work is becoming the norm (the Netherlands: Bal, Grassiani and Kirk 2014, Finland: Nikunen 2014; France: PECRES 2011).

Finally, as shown by Khattab and Fenton (2016), non-UK workers are concentrated in the lower ranks of the university, in particular temporary research positions; while permanent (or more stable) positions are more commonly filled by UK citizens. The most precarious workers are those likely to also be in precarious positions in relation to their immigration status, with the added difficulty that holding temporary, part-time positions makes it more difficult to negotiate residency. In this sense, these workers may find themselves at the intersection of employment insecurity (academic non-citizenship) and non-citizenship; with fears that Brexit amplifies the vulnerability of those with limited claims to ‘flexible citizenship’ (see Ong 2006).

Based on critical discourse analysis, the proposed paper aims to deconstruct the dominant discourse produced by universities by re-centring the conversation on the relations of subordination and exploitation that exist in the university as a workplace, and how these intersect with broader issues of citizenship.

## **A game for the rich: Chinese middle class, family strategies, and capital conversion at cross-border joint-universities in China\***

*Yunyun Qin, University of Hong Kong, \*Virtual presentation*

The cross-border higher education in Mainland China is growing fast. Data from Chinese Ministry of Education shows that there are currently around 2,000 cross-border joint educational programs and institutes on the Mainland China. Among the existing literature, few studies addressed the issue of social justice in cross-border joint-universities, particularly the role of these universities in promoting or hindering social mobility in the current Chinese society. The purpose of this research is an attempt to respond the issue of social justice by analyzing the process of capital conversion in students’ life experiences from admission to graduation and the strategies the Chinese middle class families employ to

facilitate the conversion procedure by applying Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction. The data are mainly from ethnographic field notes, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and various organizational documents in a cross-border joint-university on the Mainland China. This research argues that the cross-border joint-universities and the Chinese middle class families develop a collusion relationship to facilitate the students' capital conversion and further preserve economic inequalities and differences in social status. In this capital conversion game, the economic capital plays a central role. Although the cross-border joint-universities provide Chinese students more choices of university education, the choices are mainly for the rich.

### **Quo Vadis? Student mobility, European crisis and Brexit**

*Peter Jones, Keele University*

With a focus on patterns of student mobility, this paper sets out to examine the issues which have been thrown into sharp relief by the unfolding crisis of the European Union since 2008 and the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, namely the legitimacy and popular support for the European project itself. The paper presents the patterns of where students move from and to, with relatively thin regionalisation evidenced by increasingly even patterns of flow, going hand in hand with increasing concentration in dominant economic, political and cultural spaces. Having identified the patterns of student mobility, the paper then moves on to critically examine the claims made about what these patterns should be like: this essentially amounts to the ideology of Europeanism within the flat free-market space of the European Union. Given the extent of the unfolding crisis for the European Union, of which the vote for Brexit was only one example, and in particular the turbulence in the peripheral countries of the South and East, as evidenced by the so-called populism, revanchism and nationalism in the political sphere, the paper argues that continuing rhetorical and material support for student mobility, will need to confront the reality of renewed questioning of who goes where and why, with which benefits and for whom?

### **Transnational higher education (TNE) students finding their voice: The experts and ultimate insiders**

*Keith Pinn and Veronica Earle, University of Hertfordshire*

There is a relative lack of recognition in published work relating to the TNE student voice and their experiences at undergraduate level. As Hoare (2012) stated, "We know little about their preferences, even less about the outcomes that they attribute to their TNE experience and nothing in any depth about their longer term career and life trajectories". TNE students have, therefore, not fully had their voices heard (Caruana and Montgomery, 2015). The University of Hertfordshire is carrying out research in Malaysia with its biggest partner to find out from students what they perceive to be the benefits and challenges on their TNE journey. As part of this research we are keen to find out why students value studying on a UK franchised programme and what the host and sending institutions can learn from student experiences in order to deliver a high-quality student experience. Although the research is continuing we are happy to share some of our preliminary findings. If recognised more and better understood, the student voice could prove invaluable in contributing to the improvement of TNE programmes.

## **Weaponised TNE and the post-referendum ‘Empire 2.0’: a Bahraini case study**

*Mike Diboll, IOE, UCL*

This paper will explore the political and crypto-colonial dimensions of UK state-backed TNE, focusing on the use of higher education consultancy and related activities in relation to Bahrain.

Since the British and Saudi-backed suppression of the 2011 Bahrain Uprising, UK education and higher education initiatives have emerged as a crucial area of ‘softpower’ projection used to shore up the legitimacy of the pro-British Al Khalifa regime in Bahrain, to maintain, deepen and extend dependent, centre-periphery relations between the UK, Bahrain and the neighbouring Gulf states, and to lend credibility to Britain’s claim to be an agent for ‘reform’ in the Gulf client-state.

Following the June 2016 plebiscite on the UK’s Membership of the European Union and the subsequent political pressure for a ‘hard’ Brexit, the current Conservative government has spoken explicitly establishing an ‘Empire 2.0’ as a way of making good trade losses with the EU, with intensifying trade relations with the Gulf States – in every sector from arms, securitisation and surveillance to education and higher education – as a key part of this project.

Referencing the experiences of current and former Bahraini students studying in Bahrain and/or the UK, this paper will explore the problematic ethical, pedagogic, political and professional ramifications of a ‘weaponised’ TNE, used to extend and deepen crypto-colonial relations in a context of institutionalised sectarianism, so that educational and higher educational ‘reform’ becomes an enabler of structural violence.

Finally, this paper will problematize the reciprocal part of this dialectic: the Gulf States’ softpower investment in UK higher education, especially in areas such as Gulf, Middle Eastern, or Islamic studies.

As such, this paper will provide a case study of TNE in the neo-Imperial context of ‘Empire 2.0’.

## **The symbolic capital of English HE institutions at the wake of Brexit negotiations: Institutional strategies to guard against ‘isolationism’**

*Giulio Marini and Aline Courtois, IOE, UCL*

With the referendum held in June 2016 the UK chose to leave the European Union. Although negotiations are on-going and post-Brexit outcomes for the UK are hard to predict, many sectors are already devising plans to cope with such a strategic move. The UK HE sector, seen as one of the most successful in Europe and beyond, is linked with strong ties to continental Europe in student intake, research staff and international collaborations, often achieved through European partnership and funding schemes (e.g. Erasmus Program, European funding agencies and the like). The only point that seems to be clear at the moment is that Brexit cannot be neutral for UK HE, considering the ongoing regionalisation of the sector (Robertson et al. 2016; EC 2014) and that regular institutional improvements of current strategies (Smith 2010) cannot be sufficient. Moreover, it is clear that – even if not openly acknowledged – the general stance is a defensive one, as the White Paper “*Ensuring the United Kingdom remains the best place for science and innovation in Brexit trajectory*” implies in its title and in some details in the 10<sup>th</sup> point dedicated to HE and science.

In this paper we focus on the *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu 1989) held by English institutions and their different strategies in dealing with the necessity to keep untouched and not eroded their peculiar sphere of prestige through probably reformulated strategies. Although we agree that prestige is substantially tied-up and not subjected to quick changes (Blackmore 2016), we explore strategies in a context that differs from recent analysis (Holstein et al. 2016). Instead of competing for resources in a market context (Brewer et al. 2001), we maintain Brexit imposes the necessity to assure resources in different ways, changing rapidly

and in a very uncertain environment: for example, the sudden necessity to replace key resources at institutional level, such as EU funding for local development or intake of EU students in 'less prestigious' universities, or retention of successful scientists with EU passports for more research intensive institutions.

The data for the paper comes from qualitative interviews conducted with top and medium-level management in a selection of UK HE institutions, varied by size and 'reputational' standing. The analytical method adopted is that of *Critical Discourse Analysis* (Smith 2014) as it best fits the analysis of discourses on specific plans and strategies, when they are still in a phase of preparation and can be collected only under a very severe confidential pattern and from leaders of institutions in charge of coping with changing conditions. The emphasis over *discourse* is coherent with the assumption by Bourdieu that symbolic capital is the semantic construction that harmonises the other types of capitals. From a HE point of view, the object of the paper is the emergence of a new game of (plural and differentiated) implementation(s) inside and outside institutions and/or HE national system.