

SRHE 2019: ABSTRACTS

CHEER Symposium: *Critical Assemblages: Creating New Political Imaginaries and Contesting the Neoliberal Global Knowledge Economy.*

Rationale

The Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) enjoys an international reputation for its critical sociology of higher education in rapidly changing policyscapes. This symposium interrogates aspects of the neoliberal global knowledge economy and aims to offer visions, imaginaries and strategies for alternative modalities. Key questions relate to how current cultures of financialisation, marketisation, the prestige economy, and competition in late capitalism are forming and having an impact on diverse functions, processes and challenges including internationalisation, transnational higher education and mobility, employment regimes, gender and leadership, and doctoral education. The symposium includes a range of methodological and theoretical approaches including affect theory, the political economy of neoliberalism, and feminist and post-binary gender theory to problematise concepts of casualisation and precarity, unbundling, performativity, *stranger danger*, academic freedom, masculinities, and representation. In line with CHEER's international research, papers will include focus on Egypt, Finland, the United Arab Emirates, Palestine and the UK. Reflecting CHEER's policy for multi-directional capacity-building and knowledge exchange in higher education research, the symposium assembles late, mid and early-career researchers to co-create critical knowledge for alternative futures.

Morley and Lund's research considers gender and leadership in Finland and considers how, in one of the promised lands for gender equality, leadership is being interpreted by women, and whether they have been able to lead their universities into post-gender spaces. Morris explores gender and changing employment regimes in the UK, and the social, human and economic costs of casualisation and precarity. Tiernan probes the complex and contradictory message that positions international students both as a lucrative market and as a major security risk in the UK. Kosbar scrutinizes his developing reflexivity about positionality as an Arab man researching gender in the Global South. Rensimer continues the exploration of internationalisation in the market economy by analysing unbundling in the context of the UK's transnational higher education in the United Arab Emirates. Attia considers transnational higher education in times of conflict, and investigates concepts of scholars at risk, and academic freedom and asks what it means to develop a programme for teachers who live under military occupation and siege in Gaza. Roberts focuses on the current crisis discourse of mental health challenges among doctoral researchers and asks whether the policy spotlight on individual distress needs to be theorised more reflexively in relation to the wider socio-political context of austerity, uncertainty and disposability in the neoliberal knowledge economy.

1. Women Leaders in Finnish Universities: Doing/Undoing Gender?

Louise Morley and Rebecca Lund

Does increasing the representation of women leaders have an impact on university gender regimes? While some women are flourishing as leaders in the global academy, many are subjecting leadership to critical scrutiny and disqualifying it as an unattractive career option involving compliance with the political economy of neoliberalism that often conflicts with feminist values and epistemologies. This paper is based on 10 interviews with women university leaders in Finland. Theoretically, it intersects feminist affect notions, gender performativity and neoliberalism. Areas of affective intensity that participants reported included: gendered authority, financialised performance cultures, conflict and unpopular decision-making, precarity, and ageism. We conclude that while there is substantial evidence of gender inequalities in higher education, and problematic restrictive gender binary categories, more attention should be paid to imagining and leading post-gender universities. The politics of representation i.e. counting more women into neoliberal universities should be replaced with a politics of vision.

Keywords: Affect; Leadership; Post-gender, Higher Education; Finland

2. Disposable Academics? Resisting the Normalisation of Academic Precarities **Dr Charlotte Morris**

In the light of increasing casualisation of academic work across the UK higher education sector, this paper interrogates the affective, professional and equity implications of this model and asks how we might envisage more sustainable ways of working. It draws on an institutional survey, focus groups and interviews with early career women academics on non-permanent contracts. With a focus on gender, it considers ways in which academic precarities intersect with other identity characteristics to create multiple layers of marginalisation. Yet it is not only individuals and their careers who are adversely affected; there are potentially negative consequences for academic outputs, alongside the costs of poor staff retention and stress-related absence. In the long-term many colleagues, apart from the most privileged, are likely to be dissuaded from pursuing academic careers, thereby undermining equity goals. This paper aims to open up discussions about how current normalisations of widespread precarity can be resisted.

3. Student Visas: Technologies of Control?

Aisling Tiernan

The Tier 4 Visa is a necessary component for many, although not all, international students studying who choose to study in the UK. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 29 visa required international students who studied in the UK between 2012 and 2017, this paper presents the many aspects of securing a Tier 4 visa. By interrogating the entirety of the student visa process, which is embedded throughout an international students' journey, this paper shows how student visas are an example of control in higher education. Furthermore, control is exerted through several organisations including the UK Home Office, visa processing agents and UK universities. The paper concludes with some thoughts on how student visas lead to the construction of an ideal international student and questions the consequences of UK universities involvement in the management and administration of student visas.

Key words: international students, student visas, control in higher education

4. Trespassing and Transgression: Arab Masculinities and Gender Equality Research

Yasser Kosbar

The engagement of men in academic research in gender and education has been explored by some theorists (Hearn, 2014, Shepherd, 1997). However, the involvement of Arab men in gender research remains an under-developed area of academic research in the globalised neoliberal knowledge economy. In this paper, I reflect on my positionality as a postgraduate and post-binary Egyptian male researcher investigating international education experiences from a gender perspective. This paper is based on 15 interviews with Egyptian female postgraduates from UK universities. I explore Arab men's relationship to feminist gender equality research, and the concepts of vulnerability, ethical risks and post-gender universities. I also reflect on my journey in developing feminist consciousness in relation to choice of research methods, negotiating access, power dynamics and location (meeting participants in person) or remotely via teleconference technologies in cross-gendered research. This paper aims to open up discussions on southern masculinities and gender equality research.

References

Shepherd, M. (1997) "Feminism, Men And The Study Of Masculinity Which Way Now?", *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 17 Issue: 1/2, pp.116-128, <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb013295>

Hearn, J. (2014). Introduction: International Studies on Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality. *Men and Masculinities*, 17(5), 455–466. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14558232>

5. **Offshoring Responsibility: Transnational Higher Education and Risk in the Neoliberal Imaginary**

Lee Rensimer

The contemporary British university is characterised as competitive and surplus-seeking in response to decades of market-based reforms. Transnational higher education (TNHE) presents vast opportunities for universities to accumulate surplus and profile, with some inherently more ambitious and riskier. In the neoliberal imaginary, risk is framed through a strictly organisational lens (e.g. reputational damage, capital loss) and delinked from responsibility (e.g. students' futures, contribution to the public good), with the latter effectively 'offshored' in the transnational context, given that most TNHE engagements are limited to teaching only. This study uses McGowan's (2017) conceptualisation of 'unbundling' as a way of interrogating surplus-seeking TNHE activities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where higher education needs of a majority expatriate population is satisfied primarily through transnational provision. The study asks how this unbundling of higher education is driven by neoliberal logics governing what is possible, desirable and indeed necessary in the contemporary UK university.

Keywords: transnational higher education; neoliberalism; marketisation; risk; United Arab Emirates

Reference

McGowan, T. (2017). Higher education, unbundling, and the end of the university as we know it. *Oxford Review of Education*, 43(6), 733–74

6. **Teacher Education in a Context of Military Occupation and Siege: The Power of Purpose**

Mariam Attia

What does it mean to develop a teacher education programme for teachers who live under military occupation and siege? What are some opportunities and challenges? What are some ethical issues involved? What can we learn from such experience that can help us support teachers in similar contexts of human suffering?

This presentation offers a reflexive account of the experiences of a teacher educator working (as part of a team) on developing and facilitating an online course to teachers in Gaza, Palestine. Her relationship with the Palestinian teachers began when she was involved in a large project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in the United Kingdom (2014-2017). One of the project's objectives was to set up an online teacher education programme as a way of recognising the human aspirations of besieged teachers in Gaza, creating employment opportunities for them, and helping them defy military occupation. The situated teacher education programme was informed by a spirit of resistance and hope, and rested on five interconnected pillars: context, language, (critical) pedagogy, technology, and creative arts, which were developed in the light of the needs of the teachers, and the particularities of the setting. The presentation highlights the value of sustaining international collaborations beyond funded projects, and foregrounds the

collective force of 'wanting to make it happen' for overcoming possible challenges, supporting capacity building, and promoting global social justice.

Keywords: teacher education; military occupation; purpose; international collaboration; global social justice

7. **Mental Health – Affect and the Individual**

Paul Roberts

Mental health has become a dominant discourse in UK Higher Education and Society. The ESRC's 2019 Delivery Plan cited the need for Mental Health Research in relation to: Productivity, Prosperity and Growth; Living with Technology; Changing Populations; and in relation to positioning the UK in a Changing World. If as Mozzarella (2009) argues that society is inscribed on our nervous system and in our flesh before it appears in our consciousness; what is the affect that this is creating? Are individuals rather than social structures being targeted? Drawing on a mixed methods systematic review on the mental health of PGRs and reflections on work of the University of Sussex's Research England and Office for Students PGR Catalyst project this paper explores the extent to which the mental health 'tsunami' is manipulated and integrated into the machinations of the global knowledge economy (Ahmed, 2010; Binkley, 2014).

Keywords: doctoral students, mental health, knowledge economy, affect