Discussing Stuck and Sticky contributions of Critical Academic Mobilities research

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These are the notes compiled for oral contributions, by Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi & Dr Roxana Chiappa, as invited discussants at the launch of the Special Issue: 'Stuck and sticky in mobile academia: reconfiguring the im/mobility binary', edited by Tzanakou, C. and Henderson, E. F., and published in 2021 in the journal Higher Education *82:4. It arose from the work of the Academic Mobilities and Immobilities Network.*

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Introduction

Dr Belluigi:

As researchers in HES, many of us are concerned with problematizing the very myths that may have intrigued us, in our naivety, when first imagining this strange space of academia. Through 8 papers about contexts as diverse as Greece, Japan, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand and the UK, this special issue of *Higher Education* grapples with one of the myths that is so assumed, that it is central to the dominant schema, of learning as transformation, disequilibrium and 'frontiers'; of career growth and disciplinary knowledge exchange; institutional promotion rewards, and national and international funding programmes: that of mobility. The problematizing of this myth is the structural hinge by which this Special Issue opens us to the possibilities of what the Critical Academic Mobilities Approach seeks to do, as the co-editors Charoula & Emily outline eloquently in the first article, *Stuck and sticky in mobile academia: reconfiguring the im/mobility binary*. I utilise metaphors extensively in my work, both as a method of enriching the data generated in conversation with participants, and in trying to represent the complexities of forces and experiences *within* the university. *That* metaphor – with its stuckness, in place, time, geography, identities, and stickiness of relations, realities and (im)mobilities - is deliciously evocative for pulling us in as readers towards its refusal of either/or, hailing the affective, socio-cultural murkiness of experience which is familiar to many of us but rarely reflected on the façade of dispassionate academia and its current priorities.

As an international-migrant academic myself, having moved in 2017 from one postconflict context to another – from an elite rural South African settler university to a more massified urban UK/EU-facing Northern Ireland institution – I chuckled when first seeing the special issue being published. Licked my lips almost, with rare anticipation (if I'm being honest as a scholar from the majority world), that what I would read would not be unfamiliar to my own experience, but provide the double delight of reverberating with various levels of the knowledges I hold, very possibly provide me more analytical and theoretical means to understand the experiences I negotiate daily, and inevitably which I encounter in my participants' and collaborators' stories, be they academics in South Africa, India, in exile or on my host island of Ireland. So when I was invited to be a discussant, it was my lucky day – and then even more lovely, when Roxanna, who moved to the university I was at in South Africa in her own migrant academic journeys, moving from Chile to the United States to South Africa and now Chile again, and around it, when she agreed to respond and appreciate these texts together as discussants. Interestingly, neither Roxana nor I are 'from' the areas or even continents of the globe covered in this collection, an issue that is identified by the editors early on in the package, they are actually amazingly good in that introductory chapter, but in terms of this they noted that Asia and Europe as regions are strongholds of academic mobility policy and research. I have a sense that African research - about braindrain, colonial lines and African-American interchange etc, and the academic freedoms and unfreedoms of such mobility - of which there is good work, is perhaps positioned within different disciplines and platforms, and indeed if anything, we can hope to see more noted and fruitful boundary crossing and permeation and consideration between these academic lands, and others of the majority world soon.

Then when I read more carefully, I was lifted well beyond my own self-interest, and admittedly tunnelled field of view, to think of stucknesses and stickinesses in various academic communities, including of course recently from various hard and soft lockdowns of Covid, visa issues; layers of access and inaccessibility from varied resourcing of our selves,

institutions, countries; mobility and various abilities/ disabilities; analogue and digital modalities. And I really began to get excited as a discussant to think more creatively, about the layers of movement and affiliation, reverberations, slippages, boundedness and boundary-crossing across disciplines, networks - and abyssal lines of thought.

So Roxana and I exchanged ideas and decided that rather than offer distinct contributions, we would organise across our talks and select a few themes which spoke to us. These begin with – perhaps inevitably when we talk about the uni-versity and also the global – they begin with the colonial matrix, and one of the explicitly engaged-with concerns within this special issue, that of gender and care. Roxana will launch us into thinking about that, and where it does and could journey. I will then turn to questions that arise about the modes of modality engaged with, asking questions about the borderedness of the institutional, and then from that how academic citizens are seen/ not seen, and what that may mean in the many incidences of the erosion of the institutional and of academic status and communities, from economic disempowerment, oppression, war, displacement, and so on. We will interweave ideas into these of course, but the second part of our discussion, turns to the critical study of critical Higher Education Studies, and what this Special Issue inspired us to deliberate, including questions such as, *what brings our attention as researchers to what we ask, and what is the relation of that to stuckness, stickiness, place, power and its conditions?* Which of course then leads us to thinking *what are we not answering?*

Part I: Themes

Dr Chiappa:

The matrix of coloniality

I am delighted to "be" here with all of you, speaking from Arica, a city which is located on the border of Bolivia, Perú and Chile, ancestral land of the Aymara people.

Similar to what Dina described, I genuinely enjoyed reading this set of papers on academic mobility from the lenses of these two concepts: stuck and sticky. I appreciated that this set of studies challenge the many times unquestionable idea that "international" mobility is intrinsically positive. …For whom? Who benefits from this type of scholarship? Is there any more desirable type of mobility than others? How do the meanings of stuck and sticky unfold in place and time?

While I was reading the chapters, I was living a process of mobility myself within the country of Chile. I just moved from Santiago de Chile, the capital, to Arica, a city located among dunes with serious problems of pollution and water supply, that is currently under a state of exception due to an immigration crisis. There is a major displacement of people coming from Venezuela and other neighbouring countries who are seeking to enter into Chile.

During this process of moving, several colleagues in my field expressed to me their surprise with my mobility decision. I suspect that their surprise may be rooted in a traditional view of what means "desirable mobility", which over-emphasises the importance of institutional prestige of employer institutions and the closeness with the centre of power in the outcomes of academic careers. In Chile, Santiago is seen as the metropolitan area, where most of the resources and elites are concentrated.

Inevitably, the collection of articles in this issue and my own experience inspired me to think about what is underneath the notions of stuck and sticky, and what is pictured as "academic desirable mobility".

And within this context, I would like to mention the concept of coloniality of power, and amplify an argument that several authors in this issue mention: International academic mobility (and in general higher education) in its different forms, happens in an unequal neoliberal/global higher education system, which is totally linked to our colonial history.

Anibal Quijano (2000), a Peruvian scholar, proposed the concept of the colonial matrix of power to explain the historicity of the hierarchical rubrics that still shape most, for not saying all, of our social relationships, and I would add, also our individual desires. In this sense, the terms of matrix reflect how intertwined the global neoliberal/capitalistic system is with the racial, class, gender, sexual, linguistic, and epistemological hierarchies that

end up determining the conditions of living of all individuals and their social position, including the chances of wanting or being forced to move from one place/institution/discipline to another.

The concept of colonial in the term colonial matrix of power reminds us that this system of hierarchies dates back to colonial times. The invasion and occupation of few European countries into the African, Asian, Americas, and Oceania continents set up rules and social institutions creating and normalizing a hierarchical structure of race that has systematically favour the superiority of European-Anglo white people, mainly male, and their ways of being and knowing.

This racial/gender hierarchy has been at the core to configure and normalise a global neoliberal capitalist system, based on an international distribution of labour, that has naturalised and allowed the mistreatment of women, indigenous and black population across the world.

In the epistemic domain, indigenous knowledges systems from Africa, the Americas, Asia have historically been neglected or treated as if they were inferior knowledge. The organization of scientific systems, in the structure of disciplines, professional associations, academic departments, and universities, journals, emerged from this colonial matrix of power and functional to it, which partially explains why only certain countries with certain position in the world economy appear to concentrate the largest number of scientific publication.

Lynn Mario de Souza (2018), a decolonial scholar from Brazil, reminds us that the notion of universal scientific knowledge came from European interest, and their need to become universal where the rest system of knowledge have been treated as local.

Similar dynamics happens around the domain of language, and the naturalized and accepted predominance of English as the preferred language of scientific communication.

Likewise, the predominant views of scientific knowledge have denied the knowledges perceived and produced by the body, as if the phenomenon of knowing were separated from feelings. An aspect that the dimension of stickiness in the conceptualization of the articles address.

I am not saying anything new here, but I am highlighting these facts because when we analyse patterns of academic mobility in its different formats, the legacies of coloniality continue operating.

In other words, what I am proposing here is that what one could understand by "being stuck" or "having sticky attachments" is connected to this colonial matrix of power and the position that academics and their networks occupy within this matrix.

Our colleagues James, Mary, Ganon, and Thornchanok, in their article on the movement of migrants' academics from the North in Thailand, talk indirectly about this concept of the matrix colonial of power when they define the concepts of north and south. In their paper, south is not just alluding to a geographical point, but it includes all the intersecting variables that determine a position of subaltern in the geo-epistemic and socio-cultural domain.

The mentioned article mainly discusses the narrative of two male academics who come from the north and their perception of feeling "stuck" in Thailand. The perceptions of these two male academics show a discourse of certain degree of discomfort with the living conditions of Thailand, framed as south, as well as the academic rules in the country, which were heavily affecting their academic career. Interestingly, before moving to Thailand, these two academics also experienced some degree of stuckness in terms of the difficulties to gain an academic job in Europe.

Without wanting to generalise on the experiences of these academics, this finding eloquently reveals that the causes of feeling "stuck" and "sticky" change across contexts and heavily depends on the positions that individuals have in the colonial matrix of power at different times.

And here, I would like to mention the paper written by Louise, Paul, and Hiroshi, who analysed the experience of international academics in Japan and other Japanese academics who worked overseas. From a framework of theory of affection, our colleagues highlight that "in the neoliberal economic policy framing, the ideal internationalised subject is presented as a neutral category—unburdened by embodiment, social difference or affect".

I would add to their argument that the representation of neutral subjects goes hand in hand with ahistorical understanding of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education, as if the forces of becoming mobile would be separated from colonial history.

In the article, these colleagues discuss how the gender regime in Japanese society puts women at a disadvantage due to a traditional view of the role of women as a spouse and mother. In their words, "we found examples of heterosexual male migrant academics supported by wives who had sacrificed their careers to follow their partners to Japan, or supported by Japanese wives who undertook all the cultural mediation and translation, childcare and homemaking for them".

Similarly, the work of Emily Henderson, in their analysis of how women go about their decision of travelling to conferences, shows that the existing gender hierarchies stuck women from their chances to travel due to their role of care. Emily, in her findings challenge the broad notion of care, arguing that both women and men assume activities of care, but what is different in the type of care of women is the level of frequency and scope of care. In other words, it was not the care that stuck women from engaging in extended periods of travelling mobility, but the division of labour underneath the care activities.

The mentioned articles as well as the others that are part of the collection allude to how the intersection of variables of gender, nationality, race, disciplines, influence and inform the conditions of stuckness and stickiness when academics had the chance to "move" or the freedom to decide to move. But I did not find much about the variable social class of origin of academics and how such variable heavily influenced their academic path, including the chances of entering prestigious PhD universities.

I personally pay attention to the variable of social class of origin in association with race and gender and geography, because in the contexts where I have worked, social class ends up defining the geographical trajectories of academics.

Anyhow, an intersectional lens to critically understand the phenomenon of international academic mobility is crucial particularly at this moment, where the action of moving or stay is affected significantly by the chances of war, level of government corruption, global drug industry, and climate crises.

Constructed boundaries within the SI

Dr Belluigi:

So my concern here is that even though much attention is given to pushing against the grain of dominant conceptions, the Special Issue constructs its own boundaries in the analysis by what it has considered. It does a great job, without a doubt, of laying bear, and I here I quote the editors, in the first paper, that "free, unrestrained mobility has been a popular myth circulating within and shoring up the norms of the academic profession" where the papers effectively "remove the illusion that mobility occurs above national constraints, within a borderless global HE sector" (Tzanakou & Henderson, 2021, p. 687). Charoula and Emily note that the papers, bar Emily's sole authored one (Henderson, 2021), for the most part contain the gaze within national borders, and that that is in part to address the fields' appetite for large scale surveys and secondary data, by providing indepth, rich qualitative insights; but they also suggest that this interest in the national may be symptomatic of the power, still, of the nation state.

So what we find is that the modes of mobility focused upon (conferences, international exchange, relocating or emigrating to take up an academic job, fellowships, visiting scholarships etc) for the most part construct the institution (and indeed the nation state) as intact, and the conditions of the possibility of mobility are then mapped within and against that ideal. Mobility is unhinged but not the institutional. And, in turn, that constructs 'the academic' within its gaze in ways that remain, to certain degrees, intact.

Don't get me wrong, we find within these papers academic citizens in nearly all the variations of graduate students, researchers, lecturers, professors, ECRs, and also bringing together of that not often into proximity within HES, such as: the embodied experiences of early career academics with the internationalisation discourse of excellence in Charoula's piece from Greece (Tzakanou, 2021) and geoccasional workers, such as those stretched across Swiss spaces, as in Marie's piece (Sautier, 2021), and as Roxana has discussed also gendered aspects; but also of nationality and where they attained their phd credentials; where migrant academics within supposedly high prestige contexts

find themselves anchored, but not with the positive association of the security that a ship needs not to be adrift, rather as if wedded to deteriorating work and employment conditions in UK in Toma's (Pustelnikovaite, 2021) paper; and conversely, the self-positioning of those from the Global North when negotiating the 'weirdness' (their term) of mobility destinations in the Global South, Thailand specifically, constructed by respondents as at the periphery of ambition and prestige (I imagine you had such blunt questions posed of you too Roxana of Makhanda as I have had of Belfast; shew, that paper by James, Mary, Ganon and Thornchanok's (Burford et al, 2021) really struck a few of my postcolonial nerves in the papers' sharpness around undesirability and what it revealed about the geopolitics of knower producers through international mobility), a powerful foil to and companion with Marie's (Sautier, 2021) paper which offered constructions of European academics against the romance of the *peregrinate academicus*. The reverberations, within the Thai paper, of us and them were also negotiated with subtlety, this time at the level of micropolitical dynamics between academics in Japan in Louise, Paul and Hiroshi's text (Morley et al., 2021), and academics disposability, and of course various forms of their labour. What works so convincingly is how the papers are operationalised to dispel the myths of the seeming autonomous nature of the agentic academic to move about unfettered by the social, political attachments of community or personal world.

What would also be important to look at, is about stuckness and stickiness not only of the *intact* -albeit relational individual or institution- but also that not of that con-figuration? I am thinking of the displaced academic, and academics in diasporic communities within large migrant groups. In the continent of Africa, this braindrain is literally a named concern of the African Union (Ngwe, 2018). This is of course linked to geopolitics, economics, and flows of trade and opportunity that are often from established colonial lines and neo-colonial interests and networks (which the Thai paper engages), also Cold War connections, political allegiances and solidarities, and linguistic affordances from these legacies.

When the institution itself is not ideal but is weak or eroded, such as within oppressive states, or economically weak, or from conflict – so not post-national, no, but academics and institutions entrapped by the limits on their freedoms and autonomy, such as from flaws in international law about nation states, where they and their institutions are conflict-affected, which is by and large a huge part of our universities in this contemporary world.

Many listening will think of the Ukraine, where there has been a strong response by the academic communities for academic communities at risk to move or those already displaced, including students and academics; but there are visible differences in terms of which academic communities get support, care, hosting, recognition within that form of mobility; one only needs to contrast the current responsiveness, to that expressed to our academic colleagues from Syria and their treatment as academics in Turkey versus Germany versus when hosted somewhere in the UK or middle east; and colleagues racialised adversely from South Sudan or Eriteria in the UK; or those from Zimbabwe or Nigeria in South Africa, where my collaborators, Nandita Dhawan, Grace Idahosa and I noted in a study about academic agency that those 'foreign' found it curtailed due Afrophobia, and similarly complex, interesting insights of academic South-South mobility which were noted in a paper by Vandeyar and Wissing's (Vandeyar et al., 2019) called 'Portrait of a female sojourner academic: reconstructing professional identity in a xenophobic context'… so, how movement (voluntary, forced, collective, individual, internal, external) how such movement affects their/our practice, self and attachment to home (a different but also intersecting attachment of care, as inevitably remittances are sent, there are means of smuggle, teaching and mentorship may continue for those left behind, for instance); and then if they do go, their return and the reception of their return for those stuck or choosing to remain; (something perhaps with resonances of the complexities of the positions you explore in your article of Greek ECRs Charoula (Tzanakou, 2020); and I anticipate also of getting locked out of academics spaces, intellectual heritages, a concern of yours Toma, and also possibly locked out or with more kudos within the political elite when returning to independence or for peace settlement negotiations). However, displacement or exile have some fundamental differences in that the positive discourses and associations with that mobility are not dominant, albeit that it may create opportunity for some it may alter the hard-won status of others, particularly for those already vulnerable to misrecognition in academia: women, those with less capital (of sorts) to migrate their selves, families, credentials, status, knowledge systems; those racialized as different or subordinate too within the host countries. In terms of the latter, the recent vignettes communicated on social media about responses to visibly Indian, African and Roma students at the borders of the Ukraine – manhandled by border officials, attacked by the far right in Poland, treated with dignity in Romania,

disregarded by some of our own governments – give a real sense of the importance of considerations not only of the norm, but of the real, complex, uncertain world we live in.

I raise this issue not to be difficult; and I don't think it is a typical argument that most of your readers would have either. I do it genuinely because I think it aligns with the intentionality expressed in the introduction paper, of the 'stuck-sticky' framework enabling realistic portraits, rather than working from the perspective or presumption of normative ideals that are invalid for most of us and most countries. I admit to grappling with this in my own scholarship of course.

I'll explain in relation to a very beautiful conceptualisation I read in a paper by Alina Sajed (2021) published last year speaking to her intellectual community of international political scientists about Egypt. She draws from Naeem Inayatullah's (2017) paper who feels that, it is more fruitful, perhaps more ethically responsible (though hard emotionally and professionally, I'll add) to resist idealised framings of what should be the right or wrong questions to be asking in our analysis; to not operate with the idealism of what she calls "uncrushed hopes".

Working from the standpoint of *crushed* hopes "speaks not only about the gap between desire and reality, but, most importantly, it points to a crucial question: what was actually possible?" (Sajed, 2021). This is not defeatist or pragmatic, it is about seeing the complexities that have emerged from the "agony of crushed hopes" where hope is "the only viable resource", for those of us scholars seeking generative solidarities (Belluigi & Parkinson, 2020) through our scholarship. It also enables "us (as feminist scholars, of the majority world) to turn an archive" of crushed hope "into an inheritance" (Inayatullah, 2017, p. 1).

Part II: Critical HE Studies

Dr Belluigi:

Both Roxana and I are members of a network trying to figure out how to advance Critical University Studies for the global South - you will get a sense of this in this second part of our discussion, if you have not already. It is fair to say that the authors and editors of this Special Issue have cognate interests with how such studies are advanced through critique, and so we offer this second part in that spirit, but very much enmeshed with each of our own thinking admittedly. So we'll first look at the question of:

What brings our attention (as researchers) to what we ask, our investments, and how we expound it?

The Special Issue enables reflection of how, when one moves, one's horizons of possibility as a researcher alter; but also - one's own positioning, privileges, allegiances and sense of self do alter too, of course because we are psychosocial beings: some of this being interactional, some about the politics of belonging, some about structures on one as an individual or in the host space, or about what happens between.

What is less clear in the papers, but perhaps is a possibility for elsewhere and indeed has been touched on to some extent, I am thinking here of Zuleika Arashiro and Malba Barahona's (2015) anthology, 'Women in Academia Crossing North–South-Borders: Gender, Race and Displacement', is to look at how the author-as-researcher comes to choose and have chosen for them (negotiating push-pull-tensions and space), their subject, approach and process of study, mode of representation? The methodological notes are in the papers, but Roxana and I were talking about those layers of biography and intentionality of the authorial self, and the negotiation of the structural powers and socio-cultural commitments we negotiate in context, including the methodological nationalisms, as Chris Gilligan (2021) calls it, and blindspots, and the prestige economy of certain topics/ issues/ peoples' concerns over others (recognising that research is not only produced because it is enabled by its space, it can also be produced as an ethical obligation to resist within that space or to witness, whether funded, rewarded, disciplined or not). This is somewhat alluded to within the editors' paper, particularly around the nature of the funding being modest (attained via scholarships or institutional pots), but just as the editors claim, we too feel that (and I am going to quote what they wrote) "In a field that is characterised by reflexivity due to the 'meta' focus, it is important to reflect on the funding conditions that contribute to the prevalence of particular study designs" (Tzanakou & Henderson, 2021, p. 687), and it is also important to consider how such conditions of mobility subjectify us as scholars. Hints are made about how mobility itself enabled the SI, with going to and fro/ leaving-joining, in that introduction. Perhaps, in this SI, it is the ethical

concern to represent the 'hidden narratives of mobility' (Morley et al., 2018, p. 2) that arose from the standpoint of the participants, that take precedence, with the inevitable stepping back of the author when one does that, especially in the short account of the journal article. However, just to reiterate in this space, there is indeed scope for more to address what you write about in that introduction, and I quote from p.688:

> *Though the papers in the special issue have not engaged in personal reflection on authors' positionality in relation to academic mobility, we have all been personally involved in different forms of academic mobility and have developed our stances on the field through our personal experiences of dis/alignment with the im/mobility binary.*

More voyaged and chartered are the theoretical meanderings of the authors, due to the nature of the field of HE Studies but also academic mobility studies, with less gatekeeping, and pourousness for moving between disciplinary silos. And so there is this lovely oscillation around the central concepts of stuckness and stickness, and as verbs and nouns and ways of being, imprints on identity formation and tactility with the internationalisation discourses salient within policies, as Louise, Paul and Hiroshi reveal (Morley et al, 2021), creating fertile ground for the scholars within the SI, and us as readers (and discussants) to play, reflect and critique. I thought the editors did a great job of avoiding disciplining this enquiry and discussion into one direction of intellectual travel, but providing a framework to work within, resist and stretch. Part of why I enjoy the metaphor of a framework for the collaborations I most thrive within myself! The conceptual became a third space, an almost malleable material in this SI. I end my contribution on that appreciative note, and hand over to Roxana.

What are we not asking or answering?

Dr Chiappa:

Thank you, Dina. You raised a very important point by suggesting the authors dive deeper in how their positionality informs the questions and approaches taken in their respective research projects.

On that note, I genuinely think that a critical approach to the analysis of academic mobility greatly contributes to the field of international higher education. And I also wonder whether the focus of the research should be exclusively on academics.

I ask this question from my current position, as a scholar working in a university located in a border zone that has serious problems recruiting academics. I often get conflicted by noticing how my surrounding environment is facing a major displacement of people who cannot even enter into higher education, and still my research agenda is not capable of including it.

Reflecting from my experience and inspired by the authors, I would like to invite the colleagues to expand their attention to other subjects who, because of "free will" or "external forces", experience some kind of mobility, and how those experiences are shaped by the colonial matrix of power.

Again, thanks so much for allowing us to engage in a dialogue together and for calling into question the normalised views that treats academic mobility as a neutral and positive phenomenon.

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