The Market for a Public High School Degree
Examining the Construction of Core Credential Demand among Periphery Elites

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Abstract

Here, we question the ways in which the preponderance of international students as tuition-paying consumers of public (and private) schools in the core is shifting the model of education, and the vision of citizenship, in the world system. Although significant work has been done to illuminate these dynamics in higher education, we argue that the nascent market at the secondary level is particularly instructive of global trends in late capitalism. A thoughtful consideration of the presence of tuition-paying high school students in U.S., British, Australian, and Canadian public-school systems demands an engagement with the cultural colonization of periphery knowledge systems that accompanies the extraction of all surplus commodified value in service of the idea of development. In the high stakes globalized free market—in which the gap between core and periphery grows ever-larger—core secondary schools become places to attain core credentials, core values, and core belonging. The students' tuition dollars represent an increasing proportion of underfunded school districts' revenues in austerity regimes, blurring the line between education as a public good and education as a salable commodity. We empirically demonstrate the dynamics of the market in international secondary education using existing public data, and we explore its contingencies, beneficiaries, and victims. We posit a world system in which commodified children are coerced consumers of core value systems and are credentialed as honorary members of the "haves." We argue that, in the increasingly zero-sum competitions for artificially scarce resources, inequality drives demand for international secondary school education, which in turn drives inequality.

Keywords: International Education, Public Schooling, Inequality, Hegemonies

International students continue in the long tradition of schooling as both a colonizing and civilizing mission. Both public and private schools across North America, the UK, and Australia are seeing growth in the numbers of international high school students leaving their homes to attend school in the core (Australian Government 2020; Farrugia 2017; Government of Canada 2020a; Government of the United Kingdom 2019). The promise of "opportunities to enhance learning through the integration of international, intercultural, and/or global perspectives, cultures, and experiences" (Ontario Ministry of Education 2015:12), or reciprocity, is belied by the evidence that schools in the core are positioned as uniquely desirable when contrasted with their counterparts in the periphery and semi-periphery. Rather than benefitting from an exchange of knowledge systems, an increasingly younger and vulnerable group of students are cleaved from their families to facilitate the production of a citizen identity that is molded along traditional colonial lines (Joseph 2008; Kumar 1989; Walker 2014) and is poised to increase alienation and precarity (Thomas 2017).
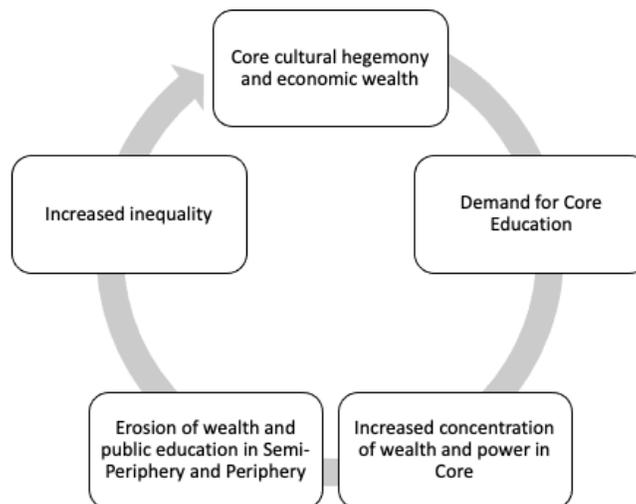
The idea of there being value in international and intercultural exchange among students in late adolescence is not new. Exchange in an equal power relationship is not inherently problematic, and can be useful for any number of reasons within the larger citizen-building model of education (Otten 2003). However, in the context of a world system in which some are subordinated—and others privileged—in deeply inegalitarian economic, cultural, and racial-ethnic structures, these exchanges have myriad repercussions for both home and host societies, as well as for the children who migrate to be credentialed from a "good" school. Here, we explore the ways in which public high schools in the core are constructed as inherently good. We argue that this goodness is a function of colonized understandings of what knowledges are worthy, and whose knowledge renders the bearer meritorious.

In a world-system in which core products are fundamentally valuable, core public schooling becomes a valuable export *ipso facto*. But the core states add additional value by furnishing student entry visas only to those fortunate enough to attain admission to a particular core secondary school. Extensive theory within the world-system tradition postulates ways in which the core nation-state functions to uphold quasi-monopolies within national borders (Wallerstein 2004). In this case, the full value of core schooling is in living in the core during as an adolescent—allowing the buyer to develop into a core adult.

As the public sector becomes revenue-starved, the ability to attract paying students from the periphery becomes more attractive. Their tuition dollars represent an increasing proportion of under-funded school districts' revenues in austerity regimes—blurring the line between education as a public good and education as a salable commodity in the world-system. Here, we question the ways in which the increasing preponderance of international students as tuition-paying consumers of schools in the core is shifting the model of education, and the vision of citizenship, in the world system. Although significant work has been done to illuminate these dynamics in higher education, we argue that the nascent market at the secondary level is particularly instructive of global trends in late capitalism.

A thoughtful consideration of the presence of tuition-paying high school students in U.S., British, Australian and Canadian public-school systems demands an engagement with the cultural colonization of periphery knowledge systems that accompanies the extraction of all surplus commodified value. In the high stakes globalized free market—in which the gap between core and periphery grows ever-larger—the secondary schools of the core become places to attain core credentials, core values, and core belonging. Certainly, there is incentive in the core to re-package public education as a monetized commodity for consumption. Employing econometric modelling techniques, we demonstrate the growth of the market in international secondary education, and we explore its contingencies, beneficiaries, and victims. Ultimately, we model a world system in which commodified children are coerced consumers of core value systems and are credentialed as honorary members of the haves in the free global market. We outline a complex series of relationships that ultimately serve to only reinforce the feedback loop illustrated in Figure 1, below. Throughout, we have integrated analyses of what limited data is available on the realities of international education to highlight the realities of what may be understood as a burgeoning business in shaping young periphery minds.

Figure 1: Feedback Loop of International Education

Power Inequities, Citizenship, and the World System

We know that the narrative around citizenship in the world system has changed. Theorized as industrial citizenship (Fudge 2005) or, more often, market citizenship (Deckard and Heslin 2016; Somers 2008), citizenship models in the individual neoliberal nations of the world system do not promise access to the national community, but rather to national labor markets. This access is of limited value in the labor markets of the periphery nation states, but is of tremendous value in those of the core.

Market citizenship has been theorized in tandem with post-national citizenship, and the two theoretical positions converge at the realization that an empowered market position dictates a belonging that effectively transcends the boundaries of the nation (Deckard and Heslin 2016; Sassen 2002). For the global elite and near-elite, inclusion that was impossible under versions of citizenship that demanded ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic belonging (Arendt 1966) is now available, effectively, for purchase (Kaag 2013; Sklair 2001). In contrast, those who do not have the capital cannot easily migrate from their nations of birth, an eventuality that too often represents a death sentence for the impoverished of the post-Washington Consensus nations of the Periphery (Deckard and Heslin 2016). Indeed, current work in the anthropology of immigration postulates the existence of a newly constructed "Wall around the West" that systematically stanches ever-growing numbers of economically impoverished immigrants seeking to migrate from the periphery to the core (Fassin 2011). This metaphorical wall grows in tandem with "birth tourism" (Ji and Bates 2018) and "citizenship for purchase" (Shachar 2018)—simultaneously closing opportunities for the periphery poor while opening the world to the core wealthy.

These trends are not philosophical or theoretical. One can quantify the worth of core citizenship to periphery elites. An analysis of "citizenship for purchase" programs shows a clear picture throughout the core—belonging is a salable good, and one for which there is considerable demand. The E-5 "Investor" visa in the United States, for example, requires a minimum investment of US$900,000 in identified areas of high unemployment and US$1,800,000 in areas with more normal levels of unemployment, and is a path to permanent residency and eventual citizenship for the visa-holder, a spouse, and dependent children (US State Department 2020). The distribution of visas in 2019 was weighted heavily towards non-core nations. Of the 9,347 investor visas issued in 2019, 8,176, or 87 percent, were issued to citizens of periphery and semi-periphery nations.[1] This represents a movement of, at a bare minimum, US$7,358,400,000 from the periphery to a single, albeit large, nation in the core. Estimates from as recently as 2009 put the total revenue from the Investor visa program as US$600,000,000—implying a growth of 1100 percent in the total program size over a single decade (Invest in the USA 2020).

These individual decisions to purchase Core credentials in the form of Core passports do not exist without the larger social context in which they unfold, and countries are part of a larger global structure (Wallerstein 2004). As nation-states move towards a uniformly neoliberal vision of the social contract intra-nationally (McMichael 2001), inequality has increased internationally (Wallerstein 2004; Milanovic 2016). The extent of this inequality cannot be over-stated—while living standards in the core have remained fairly high, the plight of the poorest periphery citizens has become increasingly dire (McMichael 2011; Milanovic 2016). For the elite and near-elite of the periphery, the stakes for maintaining and replicating their relative privilege have never been higher. Figure 2 illustrates the substantial growth of economic production in the core, and the comparatively paltry corresponding increase in the value of periphery production. While those

[1] Throughout this paper, we use World Bank estimates of Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, used to categorize Low, Lower-Middle, Upper-middle, and High Income countries, to proxy position within the world-system (The World Bank 2020).

limited to the periphery are limited to its growth trajectory, making a transition into a core nation model increases opportunity. Given the changing nature of citizenship, accessing the relative privilege of the north may be understood as crucial to economic and physical security.

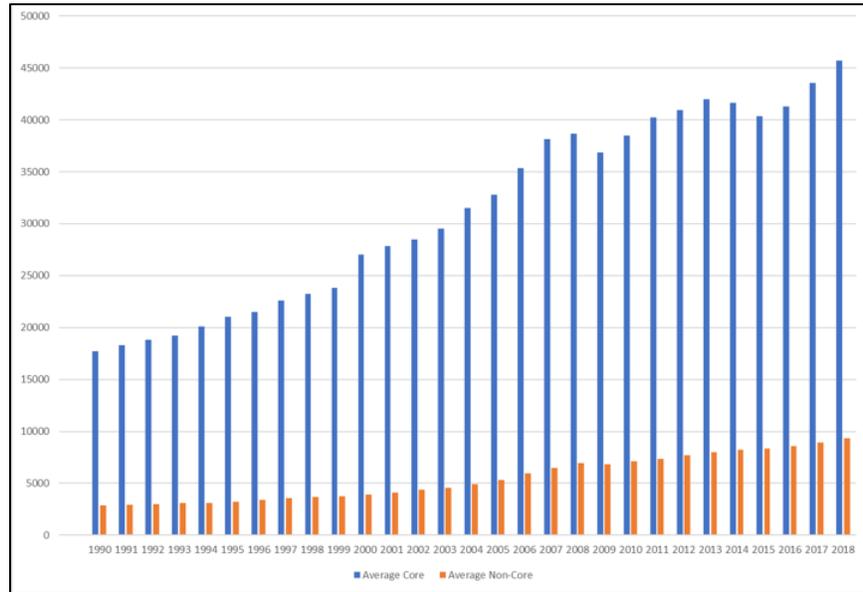**Figure 2: GDP per Capita Growth in Core versus non-Core Nations**

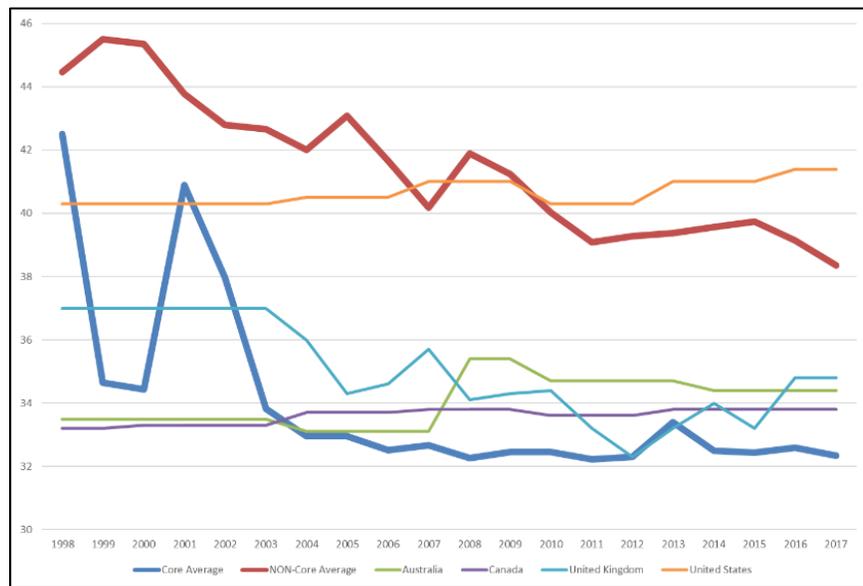**Figure 3: Gini Across the World-System**

Figure 3 depicts the reality of recent movements in inequality within nations. Using national Gini coefficients to proxy economic inequality, the figure makes obvious: 1.) the wealth of the core is more evenly distributed among residents of individual nations than is the wealth of the semi-periphery and periphery—where nations' wealth is largely monopolized by the elite; and 2.) differences within nations have been collapsing over the last twenty years. The United States is an outlier in these terms, with increasing inequality that has exceeded the non-core average since 2010. For those who want to position their children for the elite of the elite, core credentials create the human capital necessary to propel inclusion in a world of high growth, for comparatively everyone.

Thus, the differences between core and periphery become categorical rather than quantitative. The boundaries of these categories become rigid and more difficult to traverse, and authorized migration becomes more difficult. Yet the global free movement of capital that allows for the accumulation of wealth in the core at the expense of the periphery is allowed to continue, even as the hierarchy of the world-system is narrated as natural, organic and even desirable.

Colonial Complicity: The Erasure of Difference

Core countries, evidencing a "colonial complicity" (Mikander 2016: 71) in their constructs of the civilized citizen, continue to draw on the philosophies of liberal colonialism (Arneil 2016; Mikander 2016). This citizen strives for individual rights, ownership of property, industriousness in service of the empire, rationality, and benevolence toward the yet uncivilized (Arneil 2016; Kumar 1989). The model is fashioned in opposition to the depiction of the uncivilized as lazy, unethical, and unprepared to be governed. Implicit in its critique of the colonized subject is a sense of asymmetry: the colonizer possesses an inherent ontological and epistemological superiority. The imbalance can only be partially recuperated through the civilizing mission leaving the residue of a permanent sense of lack among natives of the periphery.

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, works in countries around the world, with the declared mission to "save children's lives, to defend their rights, and to help them fulfil their potential, from early childhood through adolescence" (United Nations Children's Fund 2020). Education is one of the areas in which UNICEF makes recommendations, and the agency's judgements are particularly important in the nations of the periphery (Jones 2006). Its assessments of the status of nations' formal schooling system are part of the overall consideration of children's status in the society—and proposals are uniformly rooted in core understandings of best educational practices. Predictably, UNICEF-approved educational systems are understood as a path to national economic development, and the children within these systems as potential sources of collective upward mobility.

Here, UNICEF speaks to the condition of the formal education system in Rwanda (United Nations Children's Fund 2020): "The quality of education requires significant attention. Primary students score too low in numeracy and literacy exams. Teachers are also unable to teach in English, the official language of instruction, and rely too heavily on traditional, teacher-centred

instruction." Similarly, in their report about Cambodia, UNICEF elaborates along the same themes (United Nations Children's Fund 2020). Here, an abbreviated quotation of the UNICEF assessment:

> Cambodian children continue to fall behind in school for a number of reasons, including not being adequately prepared for school, experiencing poor quality teaching and learning, and attending school irregularly…
>
> Inadequate learning in the early years of life, coupled with insufficient nutrition, leaves children developmentally behind. There not enough qualified teachers, and the quality of learning environments is poor… Violence is a problem in schools, with teachers using corporal punishment… Many parents cannot understand the value of education. (United Nations Children's Fund 2020)

Irrespective of the degree to which these observations are true, they evoke a particular set of beliefs about the national school systems to which they refer. English should be the language of instruction, presumably to facilitate pupils' eventual integration into a global labor market dominated by English speakers, despite the fact that teachers do not speak it and, perhaps, students struggle with it as well. Although inability to understand the non-native language of instruction might work to explain low rates of learning, it is the "traditional" instruction that is mentioned as a space of improvement. If teachers were to learn English and reject pedagogical methods traditional to Rwandan communities, then educational systems in Rwanda would be greatly improved. Cambodian children are similarly situated—with the addition of explicit criticism of their parents, who have not adequately prepared them for school or understand the "value" of education. In the words of the United Nations, periphery education is fundamentally hamstringed by the presence of periphery people.

The Sixth Wave of the World Values Survey[2], administered between 2010 and 2014, asks respondents whether "not being able to give [their] children a good education" was a worry for them. Over 55 percent of periphery respondents were "very much" worried, while 43.8 percent of core respondents found themselves in that position. In the periphery, as respondent social class increases, so does the reported size of the worry.[3] It is the very people whose educational systems are most degraded that are most concerned about those educational systems—and blamed for degrading them.

The Civilizing Mission

The civilizing mission is not a new aim in education. As scholars from Said (Rizvi and Lingard 2006) to Gramsci (1971) to Bourdieu (1986) have acknowledged, schools have long been sites of inculcation. The school is a natural site for the replication of the traditional colonial dynamic, since the formation of the colonial subject relied on a model of the colonizer as adult, and the native as child (Kumar 1989). The colonizer fosters pathways for the native to support, if not become part

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[2] Data is accessible at: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp

[3] R = 0.053, p<0.001

of, the leading hegemonies. This includes acquisition of the dominant language, training in desired skills, and exposure to Western values. The dynamic advances a power differential, epistemic certainty, and an implied debt of gratitude as the civilizer promises to bring natives into a space for moral and economic betterment. In this vein, the civilizing mission furnishes a vast global market for international education.

A key characteristic of contemporary citizenship in core states is the prominence of citizen-as-laborer. In lieu of emphasizing citizenship according to aims of participation in the political life of the city, schools increasingly marshal education in favor of producing laborers. Arendt (1998) helps illuminate this distinction in her description of the private and public realm by noting that by becoming pre-occupied with the necessities of economic survival, meaningful political participation was degenerating. The observation that poverty acts as an agent of quiescence is strengthened by such diverse work as Inglehart (1981), Gaventa (1982), and (Deckard and Browne 2015). If poverty is to be lifted, acceptance of existing systemic inequalities must be achieved in another manner.

The citizen-as-laborer is not called to action, but rather is compelled to behave in ways that conform to the rules of participation in the global market. This produces two outcomes. The first is the erasure of the political and the exceptional from the arena of public life. Instead of the public realm being the space for the agonal spirit, for the expression of dissent, and for the cultivation of difference, the citizen-as-worker is encouraged to uphold the numerous rules and expectations of the core, in a relentless march towards the acquisition of capital. Conceptualizing citizens as workers also engenders a desire for conformity. Arendt's (1998) useful distinction between action and behavior suggests that the disruptions and dissentions of the individual were being replaced by the requirement for behavior that erased expressions of individual difference, followed patterns, and produced trends and data that could be adopted by economists.

In drawing prospective laborers from the periphery, core countries reproduce the constructs that render them dominant. The civilizing mission positions the values, knowledge, and ontologies of the core superior, casting them as both aspirational and attainable. The construct of citizen-as-laborer prepares the civilized student for a life of unquestioned behavior in conformity to the system. This phenomenon is particularly visible in the Canadian immigration system, which is among the most overtly labor-market centered of the core nations. In that system, a "score" of approximately 450 is required to be competitive for permanent resident status in Canada. One accumulates 150 points for speaking one of the two official languages—deemed necessary for integration into the labor market—with up to 100 points for being of optimum employment age, 200 points for having a firm job offer from a Canadian employer, up to 140 points for an advanced degree, and 100 points for established Canadian work and educational experience (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2020).

The Failed Promise of Development

The dual expression of discipline upholds core hegemonies by producing desirable behaviors. It also has a real effect on periphery countries grappling with the failed promise of development. the core/periphery bifurcation encourages a flow of wealth and resources, including children, from periphery to core. Despite this directional flow from periphery to core, the availability of international educational opportunities is narrated as an opportunity for the periphery. The promise is that increased education of the right sort will come with increased economic prosperity, at both the social and the individual level.

Indeed, this may be thought of as a fulfillment of the idea of world citizenship for those on the wrong side of the core-periphery wall. Per our analysis of the World Values Survey, 40.3 percent of respondents from periphery countries "Strongly Agreed" that they were World Citizens. In the core, only 23.5 percent responded in this way. Simply, citizens of the wealthy world did not have to situate their claims-making in their humanity—they can identify as nationals.

The implicit promise is that the wealth and opportunity of core countries will translate into improving outcomes globally. But the rising tide does not lift all boats. An analysis of the average incomes of the bottom 40 percent of wage earners in several periphery states reveals that real income growth has been stagnant since the 1970s. The only realized promise of development has been the rising inequality between the wealthy and elite class in these nations and an evanescing middle class. Palma ratios represent the ratio of the earnings of the top 10 percent of income earners to the incomes of the bottom 40 percent of income earners. Palma ratios in the core countries average to 1.37. In the semi-periphery and periphery, however, Palma ratios are 2.097 and 2.1, respectively. These numbers speak to the Gini ratios in a very particularly way—making real the ways in which development in the periphery is a volatile and ephemeral imaginary.

Disciplining the Periphery Child

Wallerstein (2004) describes hegemony as the economic and political superiority that permits one state to exercise control over another. Gramsci (1971) works with the concept of hegemony more broadly, and in ways that are more helpful to understanding the role education plays in the reproduction of the power relationship between core and periphery. Moving away from the economic and militaristic delineations of hegemony, Gramsci casts light on how "capitalist-class ideas"—adapted from the Marxian concept of "ruling ideas"—are pervasive across social and political structures (Clayton 1998), and reinforced in institutions such as schools. This broader definition of hegemony cultivates a tension between coercion and acceptance, or even desirability. That is, as hegemonic practices become the *de facto* modes of operation in core countries, these norms become associated with promises of wealth and success.

Dominant hegemonies also offer a code, or literacy, for participation in the global market. As certain ideas and practices ossify into legitimacy, Arendt's (1998) distinction between behavior and action is relevant. A hegemony provides a construct for desirable behavior and a lasting hegemony requires sustained complicity. The citizen-as-laborer behaves in the hope that she may

realize the promise of economic and social mobility. Action is not simply unnecessary, but ideologically disruptive. Core countries, including the United States, UK, Canada, and Australia, encourage behavior over action through the growing criminalization of dissent (Watts 2020). Since 2001, these liberal democracies have mobilized irrational fear of ideological difference (Wilkinson 2018) to propagate mechanisms of control under the guise of increased security (Watts 2020).

Disciplining the child takes on two meanings when moving along the spectrum from coercion to desirability. On one hand, the child of the periphery is brought into the core educational fold and is disciplined against deviances in behavior. This begins with a deficit mentality that presumes the primary culture is less-than the new, core culture. These children are often cautioned against using their first language, particularly in education contexts as teachers perceive English language learners as a "problem" to remedied (Arias and Morillo-Campbell 2008). They are under pressure to master English so that school success measurements do not suffer (Crawford 2008). They are tacitly and explicitly encouraged to adopt belief systems that align with core values as they renegotiate their identities and strive for belonging (Miller 2000). Further, they discouraged from overt expressions of difference, especially when these are rooted in religious differences that are perceived to be threatening (Syed 2013; Wayland 1997).

On the other hand, as children from the periphery become more fluent in the literacy of the dominant hegemony, they are considered more civilized. Their mastery of core ontologies and acceptance of core epistemes serve them with the means to evince more discipline in their roles as citizen-laborers. The notion of embodied discipline, desirable as a representation of core hegemonies and desirable as a promise to economic betterment, is congruous with elite schooling. In one study of the schooling choices of elite Nigerian parents, Ayling (2019) finds that the appeal of core hegemonies is a function of a fusion of colonialism and capitalism, such that elite parents from periphery and semi-periphery states exploit the international education market to legitimate their economic and social gains. Gaztambide-Fernández notes:

> For these elites, it is not what, but who teaches (and to some extent how they teach) that matters the most; and it is white teachers (specifically British) that these parents want teaching their children. Elite schools know this, and Ayling shows that the schools draw upon these parents' desires and anxieties to sell to them not just a particular kind of eliteness, marked by a specific kind of British comportment and a "proper" English accent, but also a particular kind of "world-class-ness", marked by detachment from the local. (Ayling 2019: xi)

In this case the promise of education is not simply class mobility, but also a hedge against the loss of status from one generation to the next as tides of capital and power move globally. Education takes on the role of adhering children more closely to core hegemonies, cleaving them from their native context and potentially serving to devalue local ways of knowing and being.

This movement is predicated on a colonial logic of development through disciplined obedience to one's betters. Certainly, the existing literature demonstrates a greater reliance on themes of obedience in child rearing in the periphery than the core (Alwin 1988; Choi et al. 2013), with parents from "developing" nations more likely to demand their children demonstrate obedience to authority figures, including themselves, teachers, law enforcement, and the like. Our

analysis of recent data from the Sixth Wave of the World Values Survey, conducted between 2010 and 2014, quantifies these observations. When asked to identify which of a number of qualities respondents thought were important to teach children at home, respondents from periphery countries mentioned "obedience" nearly 60 percent of the time, while a mere 31 percent of respondents from the core chose the response—preferring qualities like "imagination," "self-expression," and "independence."

Internationalizing Secondary Education in the World System

There is a significant body of literature detailing the challenges and promises of internationalization in the context of higher education (Bennell and Pearce 2003; Guo and Chase 2011; Naidoo 2003; Pashby and de Oliveira Andreotti 2016; Teichler 2004; Wihlborg and Robson 2018), including work that puts educational analysis and trends in higher education in conversation with world-systems theory (Demeter 2019; Griffiths and Knezevic 2009). Less study has been done on the growing trend of international education in secondary, and even elementary schools. Research reveals growing numbers of families seeking out the educational promises of economic and social mobility in core countries.

Figure 4: Home Nations of International Secondary Students in the United States, 2004-2016
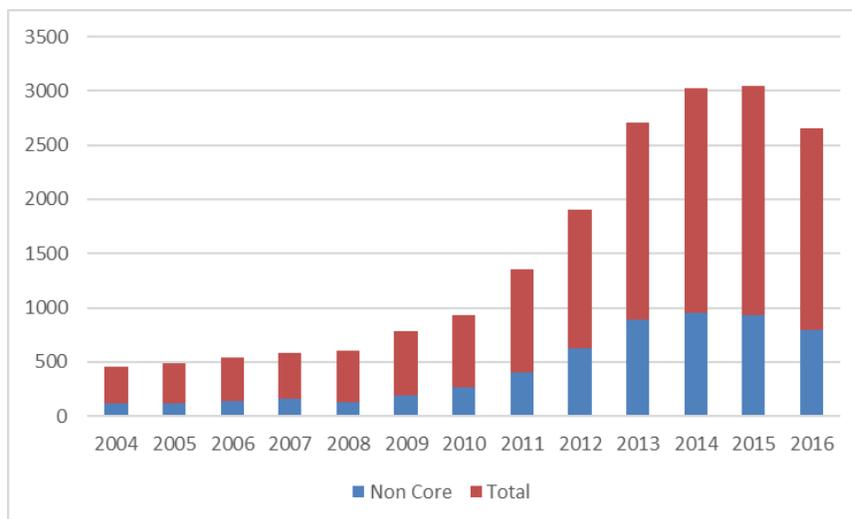

Figure 4 depicts the origins of secondary school-level international students studying in public school systems in the United States. These students pay tuition, as well as the costs of visas, homestays, and ancillary costs at school in all 50 states. Though the chart does not specify, these students are represented at both traditional "neighborhood" schools and charter schools, which have only minimal oversight from school boards or Federal authorities (Vergari 2001). Since 2004, the number of students in these arrangements has increased from 331 to a high of 2114 in 2015.

Importantly, the percentage that came from non-core countries changed significantly—moving from an average of 33 percent before 2010 to a high of 49 percent in 2012 and 2013.

In the United States, the Institute of International Education finds that international student enrolment in high schools tripled between 2004 and 2016, with nearly 82,000 international students in U.S. high schools (Farrugia 2017). In Canada, the number of students enrolled in secondary or elementary schools grew from 82,000 in 2015 to over 100,000 by 2017 (Government of Canada 2020b). In Australia in 2017, nearly 400,000 enrolments were documented in Vocational Education and Training, English Language Intensive Courses, and schools in preparation for higher education (Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020). Some of the issues and challenges that arise when younger students travel abroad for their high school education overlap with the concerns raised in higher education; however, the international mobility of these students also manifest unique vulnerabilities, both in the cohort and in core and periphery systems of education they affect.

Students under the age of 18, who leave their homes and countries to study abroad, are differently exposed to harm than adult students in colleges and universities. Their younger age also suggests that these students are more susceptible to the colonial narratives that inform the core country's dominant hegemony. They have developed less of an identity, awareness of and attachment to their home cultures. The students, as minors, are frequently placed in guardianship arrangements in strangers' homes without the supports of authentic parenting and the security of family. While there is not much scholarship directly surveying the experiences of this cohort of students, some journalists have exposed the lack of safety these brokered guardianship arrangements present, including limited ability or willingness to help if the student is struggling academically or emotionally, higher risk of abuse and exploitation, and increased likelihood of depression and anxiety (see, for example, the *Toronto Star* investigative journalism series "Price of Admission" 2019).

In addition to the vulnerabilities detailed above, the sparse population of international students at any one high school is likely to translate to limited institutional supports. Unlike colleges and universities with thousands of international students on campus, the smaller scale of schools and school boards necessitates a more *ad hoc* approach in responding to the particularities of international student needs. These comprise language supports; socialization concerns, including homesickness; legal guardianship issues; and transitions to higher education. While schools and districts position these learning pathways as intercultural exchanges, the reality is that students entering high school in core countries are often linguistically and socially isolated. In addition, these children are managing outsized responsibilities and expectations, especially when the marketing of international high school education are linked to promises of entry into post-secondary education as a route to citizenship. For younger students, who have had even less time to accumulate the educational and professional accomplishments needed for permanent residency status, disappointment might be even harder to weather.

International Education as a Revenue Creator

The international mobility of high school students presents challenges to education systems in both core and periphery countries. Education systems frequently serve to reinforce dominant hegemonies. When students move from semi-periphery and periphery countries' public education to core systems, the effect compounds economic inequalities. One concern is that this recruitment of children from around the world has evolved in a context where neoliberal educational reforms of the past several decades have eroded tax funds for public education, lowering per pupil spending, and forced school boards to supplement their revenue. Core countries undermine the public aspect of their education offering by eroding the funding from their own tax bases by drawing in alternate streams of revenue from international student tuition. Some provinces and states are quite forthright about the economic rationale for these programs.
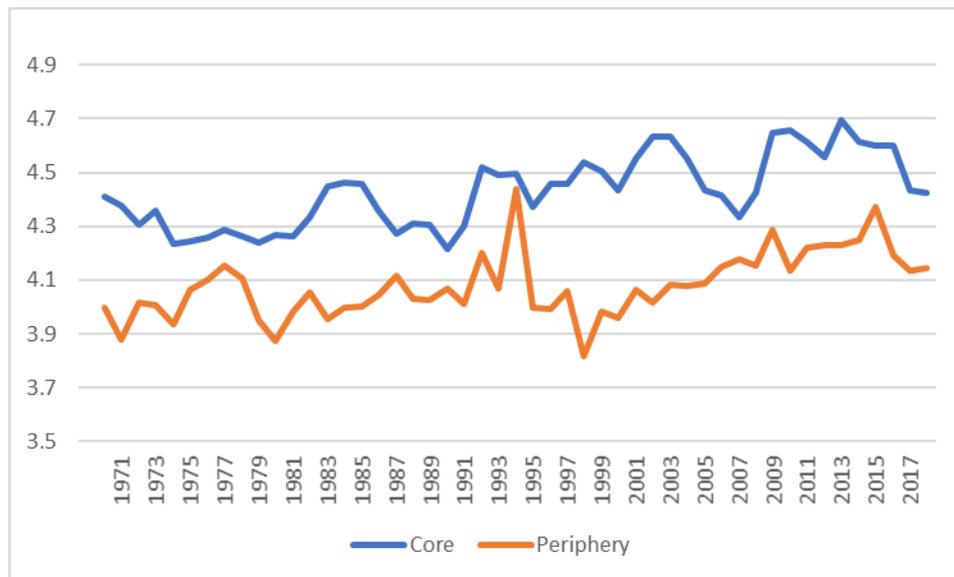
The Canadian province of Ontario has a strategic planning document for kindergarten to grade 12 international education that suggests that it might furnish an additional source of revenue for public districts (Ontario Ministry of Education 2015). Across Canada, tuition amounts to significant revenue streams for a growing number of public school districts: CAD$5.3 million in international student tuition to Edmonton Public Schools in 2018-19; CAD$28 million to the Vancouver District School Board in 2019, and nearing CAD$20 million in the Calgary District School Board. Australia has a similar system of revenue-generating international student enrolment at the secondary school level. In the province of New South Wales, for example, public schools enrolled 5,038 international students – 93.5% at the secondary school level, living outside of parental homes (Government of New South Wales 2020). Analysis of tuition rates and enrolment figures suggests that these students represent a total annual revenue to the province of approximately $49 million dollars.[4] This revenue comprises nearly one percent of the school system budget of New South Wales.[5]

In addition to tuition, the United States documents the economic contributions of international students in higher education for each state, noting that they contribute nearly $41 billion to the U.S. economy and support 458,290 jobs (NAFSA 2019). These are jobs and monies that are being drained from the periphery and being funneled into already wealthy core markets. As students leave their local countries even earlier to join secondary schools abroad, one can extrapolate that these economic inequities are exacerbated. In addition, as wealthy cohorts of students leave semi-periphery and periphery countries, their local systems of education are bereft of the local political and social capital their parents possess.

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[4] Using fee information from 2018-2019 school year: https://www.deinternational.nsw.edu.au/study-options/fees

[5] Budget information accessed through: https://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/

Figure 5: Average Educational Expenditures as a Percent of GDP in Core and the Periphery

To this point, core nations consistently outspend their periphery counterparts in both the percentage of their GDPs allocated to public education, and in the resultant total expenditures per student. Figure 5 illustrates this disparity historically and underlines the degree to which core nations' extraction of surplus value from the periphery in the form of tuition exacerbates an existing global disparity. Simply, capital is drained from already resource-poor systems to supplement artificially starved ones in the core.

Conclusion

As the pressure to hold core credentials increases, the number of students participating in international education in core countries grows. This occurs in two ways: first, while international education was once the province of the elite, greater numbers of middle class and upper middle-class families are striving to send their children abroad; second, younger students being sent to study in core countries at both the elementary and secondary level. Because this second development is a more recent phenomenon, there is a dearth of data. Here, we have employed statistical analysis of the limited sources of data on international education available through governmental organizations, including those in both core and periphery nations. But, despite the impact at the local level, there is limited transparency about the numbers of international students attending public and private schools in core countries. More research is needed to learn about: the programs on offer across local educational jurisdictions; the conditions of home stays and custodial arrangements; the impact on public school funding in core communities; the impact on public school funding and social capital in periphery communities. In addition, further research is needed

to better understand the experiences of students who are minors, including their transitions to higher education, pathways to citizenship, mental health, and relationships with family and country of origin.

The ramifications of global neoliberalism are manifold. As the global free market continues to consolidate wealth among the already wealthy, the distance between life outcomes in the core and the periphery widens, becoming a categorical chasm. This chasm demands higher and higher investment to be on the winning side—making the acquisition of core credentialing crucial for the parents of periphery adolescents and resulting in increased demand for secondary school in the core. All this comes at a cost to the periphery, with tuition dollars paid by periphery parents going into core bank accounts, while the loss of talent and social capital is also born in the nations least able to afford the cost. Concurrently, the tenets of neoliberalism demand reduced taxation and investment in public goods—leading to decreased public funding for education in the core. As core citizens seek to pay less to fund their schools, periphery parents present a new revenue stream to increase the resources available for textbooks and teacher salaries. The victims of this feedback loop of monetization are almost certainly the students themselves, who are forced to learn in a system presumed superior by virtue of it not being theirs.

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