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Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2023-02-14

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Cairns, D., Malet Calvo, D. & Clemente, M. (2021). Mobility at the margins. In David Cairns (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of youth mobility and educational migration*. (pp. 371-377). Cham: Springer.

Further information on publisher's website:

[10.1007/978-3-030-99447-1\\_34](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99447-1_34)

Publisher's copyright statement:

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## **Part 5**

### **Mobility at the margins**

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The final part of this book looks at several undercurrents within youth mobility research, many of which have not featured prominently in mainstream studies in this field. In terming this section ‘mobility at the margins,’ there is also acknowledgement that while moving for education, work or training has been a relatively normative expectation for many young people for many years, there are still forms of youth circulation that are relatively undocumented or misunderstood, perhaps due to a certain level of discomfort in coming to terms with certain situations. Academic research has tended to emphasise the wide variety of individual lifestyle benefits and further professional possibilities available open to young people who move, leaving the task of documenting the negative aspects to journalists, with policymakers perhaps preferring to finance interventions via civil society organizations (with a limited potential for conducting research) or focusing on issues that reflect politicians own beliefs rather than the voices of migrants. As such, we lack critical engagement with the consequences of exploitation within youth mobility, with a failure to recognize the unsustainability of the hegemonic neoliberal view of young people’s circulation as a means of generating economic capital for external parties such as universities. This extends to repercussions emerging from the rapid expansion of both the modes of travel and heightened levels of circulation, discussed in parts 2, 3 and 4 of this book, in addition to what are often quite obvious vulnerabilities within fragmented migration trajectories (see also Cairns, 2021a, 2021b).

Another important point to consider is the somewhat limited view of marginality within the study of youth mobility, especially the approach taken to subjects categorized as ‘vulnerable.’ A massive amount of scholarship, albeit much of it grey area literature from outside academia, has focused on young people categorized as refugees or having been trafficked; themes on which several of the chapters in this section focus. But as we have seen in this book, academic researchers tend to focus on much larger populations, including students and trainees, with a tendency to gravitate towards the movement of groups rather than individuals. We therefore know relatively little about what may be outlying experiences that nevertheless have importance due to the humanitarian consequences this mobility has for societies and individuals.

Part of the difficulty we have with studying these topics relates to the positioning of these experiences outside the youth mobility research field. There is also the practical issue of funding on interventions with ‘vulnerable migrants’ being directed towards agencies rather than academics, leading to a lack of documentation in regard to what is taking place, complicated by the methodological difficulties of working with small, hard-to-find populations. This may explain why a distorted imagining has arisen of various forms of non-mainstream mobility, with media or policy discourse imposing frameworks that revolve around stereotypes and biases, rather than robust evidence. We therefore see these migrants presented as ‘victims’ of criminality, wars or political, religious, racial persecution rather than youth engaging in mobility using their own agency. As a result, the study of their migratory experiences remains secluded in criminal and human right studies, where the emphasis tends to be upon political rather than personal impacts. Policies and interventions, despite the frequent use of humanitarian language, hence enforce a top-down pejorative discourse on these forms of circulation, with negative experiences used to justify the control of migration and the

fight against criminal networks, often limited the mobility possibilities for those seeking asylum or ‘trafficked’ in the process.

Returning to what might be assumed to be less contentious forms of exchange, during the heyday of free movement, especially in the European Union, it was fairly self-evident that a potential to if not exactly marginalize then problematize young people via mobility existed, whether due to a kind of contemporary colonialism wherein mobile youth acted as ‘ambassadors’ for agencies like the European Commission (Cairns, 2014: 94) or being an alienating presence within an unwelcoming local community (see especially Murphy-Lejeune, 2002 and França and Padilla, 2021, in this book). We also know, not least from some of the chapters to follow in this section, that student migrants were seen as ripe for exploitation due to their (artificially) liminal position within society. Even within the EU, the global region thought to have the most porous of internal borders and the least number of serious impediments to circulation, certain mobility related ‘crimes’ of exploitation continued to escape censure since students were considered fair game by local interests, or even worse, the systematic divestment of their economic resources was encouraged to the point where they constituted a significant revenue stream for neoliberally governed universities in particular.

‘Mainstream’ mobile youth have therefore been agents and victims of marginalization; two facets that need to be taken into account when evaluating the meaning and value of their mobility practices. This problem is most visible but not exclusive to international students due to the professionalization of the student mobility ‘industry,’ especially in regard to the provision of accommodation, generating high expectation of profits for owners and investors of private property. This will obviously inflate costs for incoming students, but other collateral effects include the exclusion of local students from accessing housing close to their universities and the displacement of local (non-student) population, whose houses have been converted into apartments with rooms to let for students. International students are also highly vulnerable to

fraud and outright abuse from landlords due to their inadequate language competence in a foreign country and lack of knowledge about local and national laws and rights of residence. This is not to mention the targeting of international students by the tourism industry, and the impact of large numbers of incomers on local nightlife, which may lose its traditional flavour and become homogenized in pursuit of profit from foreigners, as well as the organization of ‘international nights’ that preclude local participation, creating exclusion and segregation (see Malet Calvo, 2021).

There is also the question of what young people’s geographical circulation means in the twenty-first century beyond the stated objectives of work, training or education; for individuals and institutions. One example concerns the use of youth migration by the European institutions as a form of soft power. While the dominant view of mobility in academic studies remains fairly positive, and very positive in public and policy discourse, the circulation of students and other groups is not always seen as beneficial to society, or even benign, at ground level. We might then want to consider how, for instance, the EU has used its mobility programmes as a means to interact politically with neighbouring countries and regions. In this book, Marine Sargsyan looks at this issue in the context of Armenia, and the role played by youth mobility in mediating between the EU and Russia at a geopolitical level. She argues that following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Europe has been reconstructing itself politically and economically through interacting with its neighbours intellectually and professionally (Sargsyan, 2021). This includes offering scholarships to non-EU citizens to study in the EU via programmes such as Erasmus, which also provide a platform for non-formal education. Through this means the EU can spread its values in a relatively gentle manner, and in using fixed-duration mobility formats, it can ensure mobility stops short of permanent settlement, neatly side-stepping any potential ‘brain drain’ allegations.

Socio-demographic differentials in mobility take-up also contribute to marginalization among youth. Student mobility may be traditionally associated with the comfortable middle classes frittering away taxpayers' money, but the chapters in Part 2 of this book provided some examples of how movement outside institutional structures, while ostensibly democratic in terms of access, can come at a high personal cost (see, e.g., Toumanidou, 2021), as well as illustrating marked contrasts according to social class within a society through differential consumption of mobility (Carnicer and Fürstenau, 2021). Other dimensions of marginality emerge out of refugee experiences. In Chapter 31, Sahizer Samuk Carignani and colleagues look at refugees' narratives, using evidence from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Congo to illustrate how competing notions of the idea of 'home' can make refugees feel marginal in their new societies. Equally important is the relationship between socio-economic marginality and 'trafficking'. In Chapter 32, Mara Clemente emphasises that, even today, migration is an unequally distributed privilege: being in possession of fewer socio-economic resources, rather than alleged transnational crime networks traditionally associated with trafficking, can contribute to exploitation during the experience of mobility. This is quite a vivid reminder that despite the positive associations attached to much mobility, extreme situations can arise in regard to youth exchanges leading us to reconsider some of our simplistic, static and binary understandings of mobility, including the relationship between social exclusion and working abroad (Clemente, 2021). This (re)definition of trafficking is also evoked by Jeanine van Halteren in Chapter 33, whose study calls attention to one of the challenges which research on trafficking has yet to overcome: the presence of reductive and simplifying images of trafficked young people, with the failure to recognise trafficking as a complex phenomenon, the understanding of which is compromised by dysfunctional hegemonic discourse.

The impression created by these chapters implies that looking at issues such as trafficking is problematic for youth mobility scholars; 'we' don't like addressing subjects that

make us personally uncomfortable, and find our access to research subjects limited by the presence of gatekeeping agencies and policies that effectively reproduce victimization. The chapters that follow may therefore directly or indirectly challenge perceived views about various categories of migration - including human trafficking and asylum-seeking, which characterize, or rather polarize, recent public and policy debates.<sup>1</sup> The case studies in some of these chapters challenge these distinctions, agreeing that they can contribute to the current vogue for ‘categorical fetishism’ (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018), also showing how hegemonic approaches fail to capture the complex lived experiences of young people on the move, inhibiting both our understanding of youth migration and obscuring the actual intentions of policy interventions which often seem, on closer inspection, to restrict movement rather than democratize access to circulation.

Less dramatic but no less important is acknowledgement of the negative health consequences for many young people of engaging in migratory behaviour. In their chapter, Giovanni Aresi, Iena Marta and Simon C. Moore discuss the connections between mobility and health risks, especially mental health issues. While its social and economic benefits are often extolled, mobility also brings many dangers, related to unpredictable societal circumstances, linguistic and cultural barriers, and basic difficulties in accessing healthcare (Aresi et al., 2021). Other risks are perhaps more philosophical or related to the governance of mobility, or lack of effective governance, that creates a potential for economic marginality. The ramifications for youth of short-term mobility is considered by Emrullah Yasin Çiftçia and A. Cendel Karaman in Chapter 35, including the prospects for becoming aware of the ‘dangers’ of neoliberalism emerging out of participation in mobility programmes.

A further neglected issue is the impact of elevated levels of youth circulation on the urban environment. Student mobility, in particular, cannot be regarded as sustainable in its recent forms, with the interpolation of tourism into programmes like Erasmus being particularly

harmful to certain communities. As Daniel Malet Calvo discusses in Chapter 36, certain cities become attractive to students due to their tourist image, a factor that also has an influence on urban change and the pace of gentrification, processes linked to the neoliberal managerialism of cities and problems in local housing markets. In consequence, the anxiety of searching for a place to live is now an integral part of the Erasmus experience, emblematic of wider housing uncertainty in touristified learning hubs (Malet Calvo, 2021).

In evaluating these developments, especially our interactions with policymaking, we do need to inject a certain amount of realism into our appreciation of youth mobility practices. While we can critique student mobility in particular for its high cost and uncertain returns, these opportunities would not exist if they lacked economic value for societies and political significance for agencies such as the European Commission. Neither would young migrants be welcome in host societies if they failed to behave like good consumers. In this sense, the freedom of young people to circulate is tied to their ability to act as creators of value, carriers of specific values and depositors of economic capital in host societies. While they may be able to supplement their personal stocks of mobility capital, the expectation is that they will leave something substantial behind. On the other hand, categories such as ‘trafficked’ and ‘refugee’ youth, and ‘forced’ rather than ‘voluntary’ migrant and, robs young people of their agency, putting them into positions of vulnerability. In conjoining different forms of marginality, we are accepting that the traditional views on marginality resolutely fail to account for the complex and ambivalent experiences and expectations of those who lose something important through mobility.

We can therefore argue that these marginal forms of youth mobility, like student exchanges, have become subject to a kind of neoliberal entrepreneurial logic. It is obvious that the problematized categories of youth mobility have become heavy mobilizers of substantial economic resources, used by national and international, governmental and non-governmental



organizations, as well as culture industries and, admittedly to much a lesser extent, academia (see also Agustín, 2007; Plambech, 2017), with ‘trafficking’ and ‘asylum-seeking’ seen as particularly value-creating categories which only exceptionally produce a benefit for those to whom they refer (Andrijasevic, 2010; Anderson, 2013). What then is to stop us codifying the work of agencies purporting to address mobility related marginalization as de facto traffickers of people and capital?

In putting together the disparate pieces of twenty-first century youth migration, neo-liberalism seems to be both the reason for the fracturing of migration into mobility episodes and the means of putting these pieces back together again; and this may also be the driving force behind apparently humanitarian interventions with highly marginalized young migrants. How then could this have happened, and on such a vast scale? Falling back on the older idea of what might be termed ‘structuring structures’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 72), during the last few decades, neoliberal governance of mobility gained a common sense respectability and, therefore, became a constant contributor to the (re)production of social inequalities (Çiftçi and Karaman, 2021). To a certain extent, mobility programmes in particular were getting away with this due to the promotion of a fantasy version of what was on offer, promoting the potential for individualized success and downplaying the personal and societal costs. This philosophy was also reliant upon relatively favourable external circumstances; everything from the availability of cheap flights to the integration of a tourism dimension into educational mobility. What seems to have been the case is that much, if not most, mobility was being practiced without a safety net, something that became particularly evident during the sudden Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. We will observe in the chapters that follow a number of instances in which young people fell to the ground without this net at a time prior to the pandemic, barely surviving in some cases, and at the present time of uncertainty, we will no doubt be discovering many more cases of mobility-related damage emerging out of the immobility pandemic.

## Notes

1. These categories are currently strengthened by the two recently adopted United Nations (UN) Global Compacts - one on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and one on Refugees (GCR) - aiming at reinforcing the global governance of migration and asylum through separate legal frameworks.

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