The 'New' Professional Emigrant: Complexities and cultural challenges of Cross Border transitions as a university lecturer from Cameroon to Scotland and England. (0101)

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Background

In post-colonial Africa, the socio-economic and political situation has had a huge impact on how education is resourced. The route to development and full education for all in most African countries has been blighted by a number of factors: most notably, inappropriate systems of education, war, famine, AIDS and poverty. The post colonial picture for many countries was of a legacy of an education system designed to train an elite of students to service the administrative needs of the colonial power (UNESCO, 2010). In most cases, these structures were inadequate to cope with the realities and the needs of an emerging nation, which needs to educate the majority of students to a good level rather than the minority to a very high level as compared to education in Western countries like France, England and Scotland.

Cameroon where this academic comes from has faced similar challenges as above. The demand for Education far outstrips supply in Cameroon (UNESCO, 2009). The demand for HE places is rising at a considerable rate and the majority of Cameroon like most African countries is struggling to cope with this demand both in terms of the resourcing of facilities and in terms of qualified professionals. A good number of qualified professionals have fled wars, persecution or relocated to other countries as economic migrants and this has led to a huge brain drain ofthe African continent. The negative impact of drain by richer countries of qualified professionals has hit the pool of suitably qualified teaching staff at all levels in Cameroon. This has meant that typically one lecturer may cater for a large university lecture session of more than 100 students. The outcome has been a teacher and content-based approach to teaching, which sharply contrasts with the researcher's experiences in Europe where learning is a negotiated interactive process.

Cameroon is a miniature of all French former colonies in the way that educational practice and policy in France affects education in its colonies. For example, as in the rest of Francophone Africa, the HE framework in Cameroon is based on a series of cycles (reflecting mostly the French origins of education). Furthermore, in Cameroon the official languages of instruction in schools are French and English but French dominates in most HE colleges, universities and providers of professional courses. Using French in education, media, army, banks and all public and official life in former French colonies shows the direction of new identities into which citizens of former colonies are shaped into. By implication, the researcher has had to deal with different educational and linguistic contexts teaching in British universities.

Conceptual Framework/Theory and Challenges

This paper employing autobiography narrative (Robyn & Haden, 2008) presents the researcher's renegotiation and mediation of his professional identity in international universities as a lecturer. The plurality of identities adopted to 'fit in' or conform often raised conflicting tensions posited by the international lecture's home country education and professional backgrounds as well as his transition from secondary school teaching to university lecturing. The paper draws from professional agency in one's home country set against the reconstruction of intercultural realities in a continuously changing policy/practice in the foreign university that repositions one as a 'new' professional migrant seeking empowerment while at the same time embracing the cultural challenges as a re-construction of oneself into a flexible and reflexive intercultural learner and human being (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004).

The paper examines specific issues that mitigate to shape and reshape the foreign teachers as an academic where a range of ever changing factors including institutional practices, disciplinary conventions, cultural values, personal life and professional aspirations and a country's political direction sometimes empower, contradict or harmonise with each other, or become fragmented trajectories during the professional journey. The paper exposes transitional context specific issues like - re-professionalization in HE; e-Learning; balancing research with teaching; student as consumer; recruitment and retention, research funding, league tables; student satisfaction surveys; students attendance; assessments and 'othering' which the researcher is exposed to in the UK. As a result, identify renegotiation becomes the gateway for renegotiating these issues and meeting the required expectations in the foreign contexts in his effort to reposition themselves as a lecturer in Britain. The issues are reconciled through adjustments and adaptations and noting that academic practice for lecturers should be perceived as reflexive space in a foreign country (Brew & Peseta, 2009).

Identity is viewed as a developmental process, unfixed, fluid, co-constructed and reconstructed over time. Identity is also impacted by various social and cultural factors (such as race, gender and social status), which are context specific (Coffey 1999; Colbeck, 2008). These various social and cultural factors directly or indirectly impact on the perception of self and the way self is perceived by others in the case of lecturers in foreign countries. Gee's (2001) review of identity as an analytic lens shows that the transformation of academics in a foreign country can be quite challenging. They place a 'great deal of identity capital to a place where their current cultural, social and human capital are devalued and new capital must be renegotiated (Hall & Burns, 2009). This suggests that identity development for the intercultural 'other' is dependent on personal histories, dispositions and values of the individuals, and the multiple roles and intentions of the individual in engaging in various academic practices within teaching work in foreign countries.

In closely reflecting on and examining our personal experiences and identity change, the researcher argues that the many unspoken personal distinct past experiences in one's home country are powerful because they are a representational way of our 'knowing' in shaping our identities of becoming intercultural academics during

teaching in foreign countries. Despite a common identity as international academics and in this paper 'professional emigrant', university lecturers in a foreign country have various prior personal understandings and concerns that are being enacted in multiple, often, conflicting representations of 'Otherness'. As a result, they find themselves questioning several core values resulting from differentiated subjectivity, agency and power (Walker, 2001).

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