Rethinking Employability of International Student Graduates of US and UK Universities from a Postcolonial and Critical Realist Lens: A Narrative Review

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To cite this article:

Published online: 14 December 2023

Rethinking Employability of International Student Graduates of US and UK Universities from a Postcolonial and Critical Realist Lens: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

From a critical realist and postcolonial angle, this paper explores the underlying socio-cultural mechanisms driving international students in their decisions and actions when transitioning from university to employment. For international students coming from the Global South (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), studying in a university in the US or UK requires not only multiple steps of actions involving a lot of money, effort, and time, it places them in a consistent state of uncertainty and emotional struggle from systemic racism, insecurity, and structural integration. In this paper, I will use Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of 'third space' or 'hybridity' and Roy Bhaskar's (1975, 1989) critical realist 'stratified ontology' to rethink international students' employability and provide an alternative perspective to understand the realities of international student employability. This narrative review explores the conditions that enable students to transition to the workplace and experience shifting their identity from an international student to an international employee. Rather than problematizing international students' ability to gain employment, I will take away the general focus from 'student competence' and use a morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1995), where I rethink employability as a process rather than as an ability. This allows us to uncover the cycle of social injustices that international students encounter since coming to study in the US/UK. In this review, I illustrated how current ways of learning in universities in the global north might oppress their transition options and mobility. I will conclude by discussing how hybridity can be used to uncover sociocultural mechanisms in international student transitions to the workplace and suggest perspectives that can be useful for universities, employers, policymakers, and future international students.

Keywords: International higher education, Social justice in higher education, Employability, International students, Postcolonialism, Decoloniality, Third space, Critical realism

Introduction

The United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) have been the top destinations for degree-seeking international students since the end of World War II. The IIE Open Doors Report has shown constant growth of international students, from about 200,000 in the 1950s to surpassing 1 million in 2020 (IIE, 2021). The UK has also seen a constant increase in the international student numbers in their universities, reaching about 559,825 non-European Union (EU) international students in 2022 (HESA, 2022). With the growth of funding bodies and government scholarships, pursuing a degree in these countries has become more achievable for students from the global south (Neil, 2014; Campbell & Neff, 2020). However, attending a university in the Global North is just the beginning of a cycle of barriers for students from the Global South. In the process of adapting to university requirements in their host country, they need to familiarize themselves with new language/writing styles and standards, adapt to the systems, norms, and practices of their university, they even need to cope with the academic demands by quickly adjusting to a learning culture that is still new to them (Sovic & Blythman, 2012). Global South in this paper refers to countries in Latin America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, and elsewhere that hold most of the world's population yet are usually politically or culturally marginalized from Europe and North America (Dados & Connell, 2012).

In this integration process, international students are potentially left with limited space to process how to benefit from their knowledge in ways that need to be explored in present ways of teaching and learning in universities (Lent et al., 2022). Hence, the knowledge and scope of understanding taught to them may only sometimes apply to how they can utilize that knowledge in the labor market. When they graduate and look for a job, their view of 'how they can be useful to society' may only be limited to a single perspective of how their education can transform into talent and work. If they decide to go home, they may not be able to effectively translate what they learn into a form of knowledge that is 'immediately' acceptable to their home culture. If they choose to stay, their transition to the labor market in the host country may also not provide enough space to grow into a foreign employee who is as valued and respected as the domestic employees. These are why rethinking 'employability' is necessary when reflecting on international students' transitions to the labor market.

Literature Review

Background

Since the introduction of the Dearing report in 1997[1], there has been an explicit call for higher education to enhance graduates' employability skills actively. There have been many initiatives within higher education geared towards improving how 'employable' graduates are upon graduation (Tomlinson & Holmes, 2018). However, these initiatives have also constructed the norms of what university support should look like while ignoring the importance of reflexive learning to complement the international student experience in a university that may not align with their culture and prior ways of knowing.

Surveys such as the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DHLE) compiled by the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) or the First Destination Surveys by the US's National Association for Career Education (NACE) put more emphasis on how fast graduates land a job, the kinds of jobs, and other degree outcomes, such as salary average. The numbers do not differentiate international students' data from domestic students, although some categories are differentiated by ethnicity (First Destination, 2021). This is an issue because underlying structural barriers that may have nothing to do with the student's competence or ability may lead to unequal graduate outcomes due to inconsistencies between what students gain from the university and what students need for work. This means that their transition will involve longer processes due to immigration requirements, reintegration into their home country, and adjusting the knowledge learned in college to the system and know-how of the country they chose to settle in.

When international students decide to stay, they have work authorizations and immigration fees to consider (Gopal, 2022). If they return, they will need time to reintegrate into their home country's structures,

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[1] The Dearing Report was a series of recommendations commissioned by the UK government and published in 1997. It proposed several inquiries into future of UK's Higher Education, including funding, expansion, and maintenance of academic standards.

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standards, norms, and culture before being able to work effectively (Li, 2012). They then struggle to adapt to a job market that may not accept them immediately and has continually shifting requirements (Clarke, 2008; Bridgestock, 2017). Moreover, these surveys put a tag on the value of their US or UK degrees. Knowing the average salary of others who graduated with the same degree and program as them not only pressures them to seek a higher-paying job but also devalues their educational investments when they can only seek jobs that would sponsor their work authorization. To this end, the international student transition involves many more structural barriers than the public understands. Although some have proven and argued that international degrees provide opportunities, the process of obtaining them is much more complex. It would not do justice if their transition were only investigated 'on the surface level,' where the explanation is generally limited to, for example, the existence of laws and regulations that determine how and whether they are allowed to work.

Mapping out the Transition

There is an abundance of studies on international students' motivation to study in the US and UK (Haisley, 2021; Yasmin, 2022), as well as multiple frameworks and studies on how international students can improve their 'employability' or what this means (Tomlinson and Holmes, 2018). There is also a group of literature that looks at how universities could improve to better facilitate international students (Sovic and Blythman, 2012; King and Bailey, 2021; Lochtie, 2016). Although closely related to these schools of literature, my interest is in the pre-conditions and generative mechanisms[2] that are crucial for the transition to take place, which are rarely explored. With all the different frameworks and strategies offered to improve student competence and the tendency to land a job, how can we map out the complexities of this transition process? This review is part of my doctoral dissertation, and I hope it can illustrate why rethinking employability through the critical realist and postcolonial lens may be useful.

Changing the 'Employability' Narrative

The phenomenon I am interested in is the international students' transition to the labor market. Other critical realists, such as Cashian (2017), have explored generative mechanisms in employability and found 'employability enhancements' that grouped the following elements to be the underlying factors for gaining employment: class of degree, prior educational attainment, age, social class, gender, ethnicity, parental background (income and contacts), institutions attended, and degree as the determining mechanisms for students' successful transition to the labor market. These are undeniably important mechanisms, but can we account for the underlying factors that generate why these mechanisms are important in the first place? The career transition for international students cannot ignore the role of identity clashes and transformations due to the university experience and its influence on how international students negotiate all these elements in making their career decisions. Even though there are also scholars who focus on international students' employability from specific countries, such as Li (2018) or Zhao et al. (2022), who have highlighted the importance of socio-political climates, internships, and demystifying the career transition process for international students, there is still a lack of exploration on the internal conflicts that occur in these transitions. Finally, discussions on how different the transition to work experience is for international students compared with domestic students have not fully mapped out the reflexive narratives among them. This will help us understand the mechanisms and conditions that have led them to take actions that are not 'normative' and how the international student transition to the workplace can be reframed/ re-understood.

Employability: Not as an 'ability' but a 'process'

In this paper, I am intrigued to first de-emphasize 'employability' from its general definition of individuals' "ability to find work" (Yorke, 2006). Instead, I am rethinking employability as a process of transition from university to work. In this way, I can focus on the question of *'How do these generative mechanisms interact differently between the international student university experience from the domestic, and how can it liberate their transition to the labor market?'*. From a critical realist lens, I am utilizing Roy Bhaskar's (1989, 1998) stratified ontology that suggests three realities: empirical (observable experiences captured through our senses and perceptions), actual (events that occur but are not observable), and real (generative mechanisms or causal powers that are responsible for the outcomes that are observable). There is a

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[2] *Generative Mechanisms* are the structures that enable and constrain actions. It is often used interchangeably with causal power, underlying or causal mechanisms (see Archer, 1995 or Bhaskar, 1989).

vast amount of literature on employability and international students' experience. However, the issue of international students transitioning to work after graduating from university in the global north is still very prominent (Buck, 2022). Cashian's (2017) 'employment enhancements' consider mechanisms such as degrees and the reputation of institutions they gained them from as generative mechanisms.

Here, I will reflect on Cashian's employment mechanisms as empirical and actual level realities because I view them as *observable* forms of achievement symbols, labels of identity, and capitals (social, cultural, identity, personal, etc.). This paper will explore a deeper level of reality that makes these important forms of mechanisms in the first place. The deeper 'real' level would potentially capture a perspective that is a new and liberating way to think about the international student experience, which will lean on the importance of understanding the merging of 'identity/culture' as a result of studying abroad. However, my interest in deemphasizing the importance of competence or skills in this research on the transition to the labor market does not dismiss the many years of previous research on employability. This process only attempts to uncover "aspects of the underlying structures" that have not gained the attention it deserves (Cashian, 2017, p.125).

International Students from the Global South: Utilizing 'Hybridity'

In conjunction with the growth of international students from the Global South coming to the Global North in the 50s is the increasing popularity of competence-based learning and Western universities' emphasis on ensuring their students' employability or ability to find employment (Yorke, 2006). Universities have continuously added various skills awareness or components to the curriculum and provided career counselling and other support to help students gain employment (Kisch, 2015). Hartmann and Komljenovic (2021) argued that discussions on employability have generally lacked criticality because of not being reflective of their discursive effects. My review of the literature leads me to believe that the higher education field's understanding of what a university does and what it can achieve has grown with competence-based learning and knowledge standards that are decided based on global north epistemologies as de Sousa Santos (2018) has described in his book *The End of the Cognitive Empire*.

The skills being targeted are what would align with Western economies, sociocultural settings, and political environments, without considering that these skills are imposed just as they did when diffused in the global south from the early 50s through policy diffusion (Allais & Unit, 2011). This was when countries were required to adopt competency-based education in their country in return for aid, although countries have yet to agree on which competencies matter most (Care et al., 2016; Kathryn & Gardinier, 2021). The young students, believing that they are learning from the experts, predictably receive these perspectives without being taught how to be reflexive or critical of their contexts within their home cultures or communities. This reproduces a specific cognitive framework that international students from the global south unconsciously grow to understand and accept. There are two crucial problems I see with this. First, this process ignores the basic fact that countries have different political-economic systems that regulate how each of them acknowledges career preparedness (Hall & Soskice, 2001), and second, not only would the international students bring with them a specific framework (Wheelahan et al., 2022) that does not translate smoothly to their home countries' labor markets or if they choose to stay and work in their host countries, they could also be prone to become agents of western thinking that tends to put superiority and hierarchy to knowledge and information that is acceptable and valid in the west (de Sousa Santos, 2018).

Drawing on Decoloniality in Employability

This decolonial understanding brought me to a postcolonial lens for this paper. Decoloniality aims to uncover the hidden matrix of colonial power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Drawing on Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of 'third space or third culture,' I imagine that international students consistently negotiate and articulate their cultural identities. Being an international student and previously working as an international education advisor myself for several years, I became interested in rethinking what employability would look like without the constant emphasis on Western standards and 'proxy measures' (Burke, 2017) created by institutions and policies that decide what students need to present to be 'considered' employable. This review will explore international students' inevitable shift in identity as they struggle to define their beliefs and how they can utilize their third culture to flourish in their transition to the labor market. The first culture I am referring to here is the culture of their upbringing, the second is the culture they gained in university, and the third is the hybrid mediation of both cultures, where the 'domains of difference' may overlap. However, 'hybridity' can be used as

a site of 'resistance' (Bhabha, 1994), where international students can potentially use their sense of hybridity as a source of power that dignifies their transition to the labor market.

Bridging the Migration Regime

International student 'hybridity' can potentially be utilized as a bridge in the transition when using Bhabha's (1994) description of the concept. This argument is drawn by considering the mediating nature that grows with international students from the Global South because of their constant need to 'negotiate and articulate' their opposing cultures in various contexts. A longitudinal qualitative study by Gebhard (2012) looked at adjustment problems international students had while studying in the US and found that there are various kinds of adaptation challenges but also different behaviors that international students have used to cope with them. He saw in this decade-long research that the mechanisms that work have all included using reminders of their home culture and how they solve challenges based on their upbringing.

He categorized all the peaceful actions in solving adaptation issues in class or university environment, such as 'giving in' and flight instead of 'fighting,' into 'good or bad behaviors' without considering the fairness of the situations and the discursive effects these approaches have to the students in the long-term. For example, this study categorized students' behaviors as positive and negative. He applauded the behaviors of those who looked for support systems rather than making complaints as those who behaved correctly or those who put in the extra work to excel academically rather than demanding others to understand them, without considering that their very action may have derived from an epistemological difference or understanding of the world. However, Gebhard (2012) did show that international students formulate their 'hybridity' from the moment they attend university in a country different from their own, and they indirectly learn how to negotiate their differences. Unfortunately, like many international student transition studies (Deardorff, 2006; Kashima & Loh, 2006), he only takes a psychological approach and puts the responsibility of adaptation on the students. He did not explore how the student narratives from this study could reflect on the injustices that international students face daily, how they need to consistently 'give in,' and how this impacts their career-seeking attitudes and motivations. The actions explored were only forms of 'survival mechanisms' in university and 'not getting in trouble,' which limits exploration of the underlying issues of knowledge production and transfer in global north universities for international students.

Problematizing the Structural Differences between Countries

The migration regime in this paper refers to discussions involving bridging the structural differences between countries to ease international students' transition to the labor market. Other than Hall and Soskice's (2001) view on the differences in skill formations of each country due to their political-economic spheres, the migration regime also includes discussions about international student mobility. Most studies on international student transnational movements have focused on where they choose to pursue a degree but very little on where they transition after their studies (Popadiuk, 2014). Although limited, the re-entry or re-integration challenge for international students has been discussed in the international education field and was a significant part of Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) study that analyzed the progression of integrating into a new culture for international students. They developed the importance of the returning phase in cultural adaptation from Lysgaard's (1955) original U-Curve, which only studied adaptation to a new country but not after the experience. However, the conversation about what happens after the degree in the transition to the workplace is still focused on what makes students employable rather than what structures are challenging the process of international students in this transition. Bridging the migration regime allows us to rethink international higher education from the traditional narrative of a global south-to-north transition to a global north-to-south transition and an interplay of both.

Limitations of the Universities' Support

Universities recognize that international students possess an edge in the employment market, as their study abroad experience not only equips them with international experience, but they also graduate with multiple language proficiency and cross-cultural competence (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016). However, many international students "fall under a catch-22 predicament of trying to gain work experience, but visa regulations

limit their ability to work"[3] (Collum, 2019; Migration Policy Institute, 2020; Gopal, 2022). International student mobility has been prevented by various forms of 'assemblages of power' that enable and constrain their life trajectories (Robertson, 2013; Moskal, 2017). Universities in the US and UK have provided various forms of support services for international students, such as career service staff who would help them navigate through the various internship opportunities they could consider and how to apply for them, or international student advisors who can advise them to be flexible because of the limited options they have due to their status, help map out their trajectories, and understand their visa restrictions/work authorizations (Kisch, 2014; Matherly & Tillman, 2015). However, these support mechanisms likely produce only surface-level information that is necessary but inadequate. They are handy to some extent but are not sufficient to overcome unexpected career barriers that international students must deal with throughout their lives, such as discrimination and injustice in recruitment processes, negotiating salaries, and defining their value in the labor market or the application of their hybrid perspectives (Gopal, 2022). In other words, bridging the migration goes beyond knowing the steps and challenges they may face, but, more importantly, how to navigate them in the long run.

Underlying Structural Constraints

Navigating the transition to the labor market requires various forms of capital. Capitals that come with the students prior to entering university, and capitals gained through the university experience. There is a selection of perspectives that investigate forms of capital that play a role in the workforce transition, such as Identity Capital (Côté, 2005) or Bourdieu's (2018) Social and Cultural Capital. These are all indeed significant for the students, but to the extent that they understand how to negotiate or apply them. The issue can be that these forms of capital may not be accepted on equal footing across different political-economic spheres. Côté (2005) describes that identity capital can be developmental in both cognitive-structural (Piagetian) and psychosocial (Eriksonian) senses. A university experience, thus, considering these perspectives, cannot equally benefit their students with the same outcomes. This is why international students need to be empowered to overcome and manage the disadvantages of enrolling in a university that does not align with their early learning background and is not located in a country of their nationality. Acknowledging and drawing on Hybridity, this concept presents an underlying explanation that reflects how international students' merged identity could be instrumental in helping us understand how identity is negotiated and navigated to meet the expectations of the labor market.

Each international student, depending on their background, would accept knowledge in variances depending on the attributes that they brought with them from home and come to adopt as they are in university. Bourdieu's (2018) framework explored how the educational experience of students of the same degree may not result in the same economic (financial resources), cultural (understanding), and opportunities (social) capital. According to Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital (1986), since the allocation of individuals to positions in the occupational structure is still based on differences in power, status, and 'capital,' multiple dilemmas relating to political and economic pressures are still tied with student transitions to the labor market. How international students can land jobs after graduation continues to be ambiguous and very dependent on various factors, constraints, and enablement. For example, Huesmann et al. (2020) reflected on Bourdieu's social and cultural capital theory to describe that students from less advantaged backgrounds face a glass ceiling at university. They encounter sticky steps from when they seek internship opportunities and throughout each stage of their career ladder. An increasing number of international students from the Global South study in the Global North with full scholarships. This could, for example, be from the host government or their government (Kent, 2018). However, scholarships do not provide them with capital adjacent to self-paying students, such as parental connections and access. This is why they would still transition to the labor market with a disadvantage.

There is also a vast amount of literature on human capital theory (HCT) limitations, where enrolling in a university is perceived as an investment (Becker, 2009). Marginson (2019) criticized that HCT fails the test of realism due to the weaknesses of its methods, its inability to uphold how education leads to productivity, or how it "undermines the importance of other capitals" such as social, cultural, and financial capitals (Piketty, 2014). Brown (2020) has also suggested that a perfect market where skills supply and demand work harmoniously (the more investment in education, the more return in the labor market/ personal enrichment) is rarely evident in practice. With the dramatic rise of global higher education participation since the early 2000s (Marginson,

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[3] A Catch-22 predicament is a paradoxical situation that individuals cannot escape from, in this case, international students can't get a job because they can't get an internship and they need an internship to get a job.

2016), not all graduates can access professional jobs, and income inequality continues to increase (Piketty, 2014). This brings into question the traditional role of universities in the changing economy by creating more learned professionals, especially those who gained their degrees abroad, to gain a competitive advantage.

Between Financial and Work Authorization Barriers

The concern is, does studying abroad give a competitive advantage? Contrary to what is often assumed, Kommers (2022) found that studying abroad does not result in a higher job income four years after graduation. This consideration has led to other critical works that interact with the wider labor market structures. However, many still relate the transition to students' ability to find a job instead of taking a more structural-agency approach to understanding the barriers in the transition for students from the global south. The problem is not whether international students from the global south can find jobs but rather the unequal process to get a job that does justice to their qualifications. Although international students, in general, do benefit from studying abroad (Roy et al., 2019), many of these studies focus on international students who studied in the global north but from the global north and not usually from the global south (ex. Pinto, 2020; Netz and Cordua, 2021, Van Mol et al., 2020). For international students studying abroad from the global north to another global north country, international education is an additional attribute that can boost their value. However, additional attributes do not always translate into value for students from the global south because of systemic barriers such as financial costs, gaining work authorization, or issues with knowledge translation/production (Loo et al., 2017; Mazenod, 2018). For example, an international student from a low-income country must pay larger fees to process work authorizations.

Moreover, work placements are not guaranteed and are very competitive to get, and they receive no income throughout the waiting time. In the US, Optional Practical Training (OPT) or Curriculum Practical Training (CPT) authorizations do not have any cost to employers (USCIS, 2023). However, the fact that these training programs only allow international graduates to work for a certain amount of time unless they want to sponsor the students through the H1B status, an authorization that would cost the employers, which not all employers are willing to do, and puts the international students at a disadvantage compared to domestic students. In addition, gaining these programs does not guarantee employment. They can spend much more than domestic graduates to cover their living costs while searching for opportunities and waiting for authorization. This has led some students to 'trade down' their qualifications in the search for more loosely matched job openings. International students from the global South would have to be open to being 'under-employed' if there is a way to transit within a reasonable time to one where there is a better fit to their profile (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2013). This is why transitioning to the workplace for international students can no longer be based on vocational identity fit or 'congruence' as defined by Holland (1997) but on the potential to grow into a career identity. Hybridity continues to be influential in this sense, as it helps international students shape their potential for available opportunities for them.

Glass et al. (2019) studied the socioeconomic stratification in the experiences and relationships that international students identify as meaningful during their university education. The narratives from the interviews they conducted showed different interests in their studies depending on their funding source. They found that well-financed and single-sourced students took a much more cosmopolitan, intrinsic approach to engagement in the formal and informal curriculum compared to those who pooled funding from many sources. International students who are not self-funded tend to be more career-minded and have a utilitarian approach. This socioeconomic stratification is only an example that raises the complexity and inequalities of the international student transition to the labor market. It is essential to recognize that the logic of practice does not always harmonize across these spheres, where there are differences in the interests and priorities of students who come from lower to middle-income backgrounds compared with those that has a more stable ability to pay for their international education experience (Choudaha, 2017). These structural conditions show that employability looks differently for international students because of various political-economic, socio-cultural, and psychosocial perspectives, as previously discussed.

Discussion

The push and pull factors in transitioning are at the heart of discussion for transitions after graduation because they highlight the various systems among countries and what bridges them. However, studies rarely

investigate deeper than observable facts, such as international students' contribution to Western countries' economies through tuition fees, and often ignore how this has made international education "a marketization project which not only devalues the status of international students as 'cash cows' that also emulates wider global hegemonies of economic power and knowledge capital between the 'Global North' and the so-called 'developing world'" (Findlay et al., 2011; Ploner & Nada, 2019, p. 374). Bhabha's (2004) concept of hybridization offers a new take on how student agency overcame and navigated structural barriers. In other words, it can be borrowed for first, presenting the unequal global dynamic between the global north and south and, second, uncovering how international students are currently transitioning to work despite these barriers. The fact that international students have traveled from the South to study in the North in the past three decades has made me wonder whether the benefits of leaving the South to gain a degree in the North still supersede the various challenges that would come after graduating and transitioning to work. However, without rethinking how current universities educate young minds from opposing cultures and regions, could this tide potentially change where students choose to study? This thought made me interested in researching their internal dialogues as they reflect on their university experience and what led them to their actions and decisions in relation to their future career.

So why Hybridity?

This review covered how competencies continue to be central to discussions about employability, even though historically, there was never an explicit global agreement about what competence or skill sets are most important and needed to be incorporated in universities (Care et al., 2016). By de-emphasizing skills and competence to focus on the underlying barriers, I could see the consistent role of international students' hybridity in shaping their future. Hybridity grows naturally with the students as they experience university outside their home country. However, universities have not explored how to help students better utilize them so that they can use their hybrid identity as a tool against injustices and difficulties they may face as international students and, later, if they decide to stay abroad, international employees. Competence-based learning has led society to overemphasize matching an individual's vocational identity to a particular role that suits them rather than what they can grow to become.

Universities and institutional agents are consistently trained to help find students congruent careers without recognizing that there is only a very small chance that international students can find a 'matching' position fresh out of university, considering all the structural barriers mentioned in this review. Pritchard (2011) found that psychological issues are less of an issue in transnational transitions than socio-political issues such as adjustment to different rationales and ideologies. These barriers are formed structurally but also individually, fuelled by people's tendencies to box, segregate, and separate. Thus, 'Hybridity', as a form of merged identity due to cultural exposure and identity struggle, can show us how to shift the matrix of learning style from competence-targeted to a more reflexive form of learning. Supporting international students by liberating their way of learning and allowing them from the moment they begin studying abroad to consider knowledge application in different contexts or how they can creatively apply what they know across different fields can help them navigate critically the knowledge they receive. This empowering knowledge can hopefully become a new area of research that can improve international students' employability overall.

Conclusion

Rethinking employability from the postcolonial and critical realist perspective is liberating. This is because reflecting on what universities could be if structures and systems do not limit international students to think or act a certain way is a form of decoloniality, more specifically, decoloniality of international higher education (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; de Sousa Santos, 2018). This review is part of my doctoral dissertation. It has yet to incorporate my fieldwork data and analysis in the form of international student graduate narratives on their transition to the labor market. This review aims to reimagine how the higher education systems can be re-designed to be more equitable and inclusive. International students are integral to the world's knowledge development and economy. However, with the existing barriers and challenges, as presented above, are we maximizing international education and the benefit we can all gain from it? International students have shown to be one of the most active groups because they believe their commitment and contribution can bring them more opportunities and provide them with more career options. It is a form of injustice to continue promising this

dream when universities, governments, and employers can do more justice. A collaborative approach to better value international students' hybridity and its potential to contribute toward career progress and a more stable economy may potentially energize our way of utilizing higher education. To this end, I must reiterate that this review does not intend to undermine the positive impact employability studies have previously brought to the field. However, I am interested in underlining that international students are struggling because the way universities understand transitions to the labor market demerits their value and talent. A new structure of learning that emphasizes 'reflexivity' in higher education can benefit international students and provide sustainable solutions for universities and governments.

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