Singapore Management University

Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University

Research Collection School of Social Sciences	School of Social Sciences

12-2018

The flexible University: Neoliberal education and the global production of migrant labor

Yasmin Y. ORTIGA
Singapore Management University, yasmino@smu.edu.sg

Follow this and additional works at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/soss_research

Part of the Education Commons, and the Sociology Commons

Citation

ORTIGA, Yasmin Y..(2018). The flexible University: Neoliberal education and the global production of migrant labor. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 38(4)*, 485-499.
Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/soss_research/2750

This Journal Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Sciences at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Collection School of Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email cherylds@smu.edu.sg.

Published in British Journal of Sociology of Education,
Vol 38, Issue 4, December 2018, Pages 485–499
DOI 10.1080/01425692.2015.1113857

The flexible university: higher education and the global production of migrant labor

Yasmin Y. Ortiga

The flexible university: higher education and the global production of migrant labor

Yasmin Y. Ortiga

Public Policy and Global Affairs Programme, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

ABSTRACT
This article demonstrates how neoliberal higher education has come to play a distinct role in the global market for migrant labor, where a growing number of developing nations educate its citizens for overseas work in order to maximize future monetary remittances. Located in the Philippines, this study shows how local colleges and universities attempt to impose an ideal notion of flexibility, quickly shifting academic manpower and resources to programs that would produce the 'right' types of workers to address foreign labor demands. Based on qualitative interviews with Filipino college educators and students, the article then discusses how such 'flexible' strategies undermine the job security of college faculty and lead to the constant restructuring of physical space within university campuses. Such changes negatively affect both students and teachers.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 25 September 2014
Accepted 13 October 2015

KEYWORDS
Neoliberalism; higher education; flexibility; marketization; Philippines; migration

Introduction

The past few decades have seen a massive transformation of the university, where ideals of managerialism and corporate culture have come to govern the operation and delivery of higher education (Apple 2000; Giroux 2002). These changes are largely contextualized against the global spread of neoliberalism, a policy regime that discourages government intervention, and upholds market ideals as the best means of running both economic and social institutions (Harvey 2005; Ong 2006). Education scholars describe the impact of such a phenomenon in various ways: some optimistic about the emergence of a new university 'enterprise' (Marginson and Consindine 2000; Wildavsky 2010), while others wary of growing 'academic capitalism' (Aronowitz 2000; Slaughter and Leslie 2001). Amidst such academic discussion, current literature is replete with case studies of changes within the university, such as dwindling public funds and heightened competition to recruit tuition-paying students (see Washburn 2005).

Yet, despite this growing literature, existing studies tend to be situated within wealthy nations, creating a situation where higher education issues within specific countries like the United States largely inform the theories used to analyze universities across the world (Shahjahan and Kezar 2013). As noted by Gulson and Fataar (2011, 270), many scholars apply ideas of neoliberal education as if 'it has no geographic and historic specificities.' Higher education theories provide a rich discussion of how universities must negotiate educational goals with the neoliberal demands of the 'market,' yet few have sought to define the diverse forms that this market can take, and how its effects are felt in particular ways within different contexts. It remains unclear as to how market-driven policies and structures shape higher education on a 'global' scale, especially in the case of developing nations beyond the West.

In this article I demonstrate how a particular form of neoliberal higher education has come to play a distinct role in the global market for migrant labor, where a growing number of developing nations actively train citizens for overseas work in order to maximize future monetary remittances (De Haas 2005). Here, local colleges and universities adopt market strategies in the hope of addressing the needs of foreign employers, altering program offerings and curriculum in line with labor demands beyond national borders. Migration scholars describe this phenomenon as a global commodity chain of migrant labor, where poorer nations produce the workers needed by wealthier countries (Yeates 2009, 2012).

I locate my study in the Philippines, one of the largest labor-exporting nations in the world, where close to a million workers leave the country for overseas jobs every year (DOLE 2011). In particular, I discuss how the country's mostly private colleges and universities attempt to produce graduates for 'export' by imposing an ideal notion of flexibility, similar to the post-Fordist model of production popularized after World War II (Piore and Sabel 1984). Flexibility emphasizes a company's ability to cater to multiple consumer demands and adjust to unexpected change in a global market, supposedly ensuring long-term sustainability in the face of increasing competition. I argue that, in a similar way, the migrant labor commodity chain encourages such flexibility from Philippine higher education, pushing school administrators to predict labor gaps in other countries, and quickly shift resources to programs that produce the 'right' types of workers at the 'right' time. Yet this article also shows how such attempts at flexibility lead to problematic outcomes for teachers and students, undermining the job security of college faculty and creating a haphazard use of space, as administrators build and convert classrooms depending on the demand for particular majors. I conclude this article with a discussion of how neoliberal higher education institutions within migrant-sending nations actually behave less like the academic 'corporations' or 'enterprises,' popular labels used to describe the current marketization of universities in the West. In the case of the Philippines, colleges and universities act more like the Third World factories that produce goods for today's global economy, and 'flexibility' is the ideal standard by which school owners and administrators define higher education.

The neoliberal university and the role of flexibility

Western scholars trace neoliberal changes in higher education to the 1980s and 1990s, often in parallel to structural shifts in the governance of powerful states like the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the growing influence of international organizations like the World Bank. In these contexts, neoliberal policies have encouraged the 'rolling back' of state support for higher education, forcing public institutions to seek other ways of financing their operations (Giroux 2002, 2008; Olssen and Peters 2005). These events reinforced Milton Friedman's (1962) assertion that schools should operate like commercial firms, where academic faculty work as either managers or wage laborers, while students are the consumers of their educational services. As such, a majority of scholars define neoliberalism within academia as a shift towards managerialism, where universities operate like private companies, driven towards maximizing the institution's profits (Apple 2000; Olssen and Peters 2005).

Such changes have been met with massive criticism, as academic scholars lament the transformation of higher education from a public good that aims to produce critical community members to a private commodity for individual consumption (Brown 2011; Fitzgerald 2012). In pushing for a market approach to higher education, neoliberal ideology interpolates students as self-interested individuals, making educational choices that will provide the most personal benefits (Molesworth, Nixon, and Scullion 2009). As such, for many universities, the neoliberal shift has meant a large-scale emphasis on recruiting tuition-paying students amidst growing competition in the national and international arena (Washburn 2005). Attracting these students entails prioritizing academic programs that are most 'profitable' for the university and pressuring faculty to make university courses more 'relevant' to industry needs (Olssen and Peters 2005, 328). Higher education degrees have also become increasingly vocational, as students seek majors that promise the best opportunities after graduation (Boden and Nedeva 2010; Brown 2011).

Despite extensive discussion on such features of neoliberal education, notions of flexibility have received far less attention from educational researchers and policy-makers alike. This gap is surprising, given that flexibility has often served as the 'normative model' for both public and private institutions in today's neoliberal economy (Brehony and Deem 2005; Vallas 1999). Scholars have defined the concept of flexibility in various ways, discussing its implications in the study of work and organizations. For this article, I focus on the concept of flexibility in the context of the global manufacturing industry. Here, scholars refer to flexibility as a way for companies to more efficiently use resources to increase profits. Flexible strategies include addressing multiple market demands through the quick allocation of manpower and resources to the production of different commodities (Hirst and Zeitlin 1997; Piore and Sabel 1984). While profitable for corporations, sociologists have argued that flexible work regimes disadvantage workers by allowing employers to demand more of their labor without providing benefits or stable employment (see Kalleberg 2009; Smith 1997). As such, flexibility represents increasing accountability in the context of diminishing job security.

In contrast to the literature on the flexible production of commodities, few researchers have investigated the role of flexibility in higher education.[1] Focusing mainly on the United States and the United Kingdom, these studies cite the decline of tenure-track and full-time positions for academic staff, despite the growth of tuition-paying students pursuing higher education. These changes come with overdependence on a low-wage contingent workforce that keeps universities 'flexible' to variations in student demand for courses (Brehony and Deem 2005; Tirelli 1998). This article then seeks to investigate how flexibility shapes higher education in a context where universities are expected to respond not only to local industry needs, but to a global market of migrant labor. What does it mean to be 'flexible' to industry needs, when such industries are well beyond national borders? What are the 'costs' of flexibility for faculty and students? The following section highlights the characteristics of Philippine context and the factors that led to the emergence of its export-oriented education system.

Philippine higher education: producing graduates for export

The Philippines gained prominence as a migrant-sending nation when former president Ferdinand Marcos decided to institutionalize outmigration in 1974. Philippine state agencies took charge of certifying migrants' exit papers and qualifications, ensuring their safety, and brokering their labor to potential employers (Rodriguez 2010; Tyner 2009). While supposedly a temporary measure to address unemployment, subsequent administrations continued Marcos's labor export policies, recognizing that Filipino workers' remittances had a significant contribution to the country's economy. Meanwhile, local economic problems and political instability pushed more Filipinos to seek better opportunities overseas, increasing the outflow of migrants from the country. Today, international policy-makers have praised the Philippines' ability to use outmigration as a prospect for development, making its migration policies a model for other migrant-sending nations (Asis 2006).

Although given less scholarly attention, the development of the Philippines' labor brokering strategies came with the emergence of a higher education system geared towards producing 'employable' migrant workers. Like many postcolonial nations in Southeast Asia, higher education in the Philippines is largely a private enterprise (Altbach 1989). Current literature on western countries generally portrays the privatization of universities as a recent phenomenon, driven by the rise of neoliberal economic policies and declining support for public services and institutions (Deem 2001; Marginson 2004). In contrast, privately owned universities have long dominated Philippine higher education (James 1991). After the Philippines achieved independence in 1946, its war-torn government barely had the capacity to run its universities, much less establish new institutions (Isidro and Ramos 1973). As a result, 71.5% of the country's 2299 higher education institutions are privately owned – 347 of these institutions are sectarian while the rest are operated by corporations and family-owned businesses.

Despite the Philippines' long history with private higher education, it was only in the 1990s when private university owners explicitly took on the role of producing migrant labor for overseas employers. This is not to say that all highly educated Filipinos remained in the country, or that students

did not pursue higher education as a means to migrate. Similar to other migrant-sending countries, many Filipinos gave up professional positions in order to leave the country, even if this meant taking on blue-collar jobs overseas. However, before the 1990s the Philippine state, and the Filipino public generally, regarded the departure of highly educated individuals as a loss for the nation. The idea of intentionally educating college students for overseas work would have been considered ludicrous, if not harmful to the Philippines' future development (Ortiga 2015).

Yet by the end of the twentieth century, the Philippine government had publicly recognized emigration as an important part of economic development (Rodriguez 2010). This shift was reinforced by a discourse of neoliberal education, where educational purpose became largely about providing student consumers with the best means to access lucrative opportunities in the job market. As such, colleges and universities were institutions that would not only enhance human capital for national development, but for 'export' to other countries as well. Private institutions willingly took on this new role in the nation's labor export strategies, eager to offer majors that would be popular among the many aspiring migrants within the country.[2]

This export-oriented higher education system has received much praise from international policy-makers, with organizations such as the World Bank commending these colleges and universities for their effective 'supply response' to global labor needs (Alburo and Abella 2002; Tan 2009). In contrast, this article argues that in order to fulfill this 'role' as a producer of future migrant workers, Philippine colleges and universities tried to embrace an ideal of flexibility, often with disastrous results for faculty members and students.

Method

This article is part of a larger research project on the impact of emigration on Philippine higher education, conducted from 2010 to 2014. I draw my findings from qualitative interviews with 90 faculty members and 50 students from private colleges and universities. In particular, I focus on two programs: Nursing; and Hotel and Restaurant Management (HRM). As noted in the previous section, the desire for employability and future work drives the popularity of particular majors within Philippine higher education institutions. Yet college majors that experience the most sudden peaks in enrollment are often also those that Filipinos associate with greater chances of working overseas (Jimenez-David 2008). While there were majors associated with local demands in the Philippine labor market (e.g. accounting and criminology), the biggest peaks in enrolment came with majors linked to jobs overseas. I chose to focus on Nursing and HRM because both courses were linked to overseas opportunity and reflected different phases of 'demand' among incoming students at the time of my fieldwork.[3] In the early 2000s, Philippine nursing schools experienced unprecedented enrollment rates due to reports of job openings in the United States. However, this rise was followed by a drastic decline in students after 2008, when the global financial crisis slowed the hiring of foreign nurses in the United States and Europe (ICNM 2012). As Nursing declined, HRM became one of the Philippines' most popular majors, given the reported need for migrant service workers in international hotels and resorts.

I recruited participants by sending out letters of invitation to private school associations within the Philippines. Once given access, I introduced myself to potential interviewees through faculty meetings and student events. In some institutions, administrators referred me to faculty members who were willing to speak to me about their work. Later in my research, I then asked interviewees to connect me to other colleagues and friends, including those working in other universities. These interviews provided first-hand information on how Philippine universities attempted to anticipate and adjust to predicted labor demands overseas, and how these efforts implicated faculty and students. I asked instructors how they thought about their role in preparing students for overseas jobs, what they consider the challenges of their work, and how they negotiate the expectations of school owners and students. In student interviews, I asked participants how they chose their college majors, their struggles in the program, and their thoughts about future job prospects.

To supplement interview data, this article also draws on observations within two mid-tier private universities in Metro Manila. Top-tier private universities are very expensive while the few public institutions only accept students with competitive grades. Therefore, most Filipino high school graduates enter mid-tier schools run by private corporations or family-owned businesses. I looked at how educators from Nursing and HRM negotiated the anticipated demands of foreign employers and how they translated these into classroom practices.

Themes relating to flexibility and labor export emerged from my preliminary interviews with school owners and administrators. I noted a constant emphasis on the need to 'adjust quickly' to changes in labor demands overseas, with interviewees often making allusions to the flexible business strategies of global companies. It was through my later interviews with faculty and students that I saw how such 'adjustments' was based on a system of fluctuating job security and a constant reallocation of physical resources. I coded interview and field data according to participants' experiences in programs of both low and high 'demand'; comparisons between Nursing and HRM; references to the Philippines' policies of labor export; and faculty's perceptions of changes within their universities. These themes allowed me to understand how the ideal of 'flexibility' guided school owners in their attempt to 'respond' to the needs of foreign employers. Similar to many qualitative studies, the generalizations made in this article are limited by the fact that I only interviewed a specific group of faculty and students within a few higher education institutions. Moreover, I did not include the public institutions that make up 20% of the country's higher education system Hence, I would be careful in generalizing my findings to all universities within the Philippines.

The flexible university: working within the migrant labor commodity chain

Both public and academic discourse attribute Philippine tertiary enrollment trends to students' decision-making behavior, familial pressure, and a dominant 'culture of migration' that portrays overseas work as an ideal life goal (Asis and Batistella 2013). However, I find that Philippine colleges and universities also contribute to the expansion of 'popular' programs in their own efforts to 'respond' to the wants of student consumers and their future foreign employers. Private higher education institutions, in particular, seek to predict labor gaps in migrant destination countries and develop programs that would be appealing to aspiring migrants. In fact, most of the school administrators I interviewed shared that they monitor reports from the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency, noting possible job openings in places like the United States and Canada. As the popularity of a certain program grows, these institutions expand their student bodies accordingly, arguing that they are merely addressing the 'demands' of the market. Yet, in many ways, their definition of 'demand' remains tied to a program's potential to bring tuition-paying students into the university. As one university president explained:

> So when I say there are 'popular' [majors], they are *not necessarily the most in demand*, they just majors with the most enrollees. We have a major on Fisheries and these graduates are really in demand [in the local industry], but no one wants to do fisheries! They would rather major in Nursing! So the administrators of these universities will offer these popular courses to get more enrollees, more enrollees more income.

Often, the opportunity to attract more students also leads colleges and universities to offer 'trendy' majors, even if such fields are not in institutions' area of expertise. As such, reports of overseas labor gaps also spark sudden increases in the number of Philippine universities establishing new programs in fields such as information technology, nursing, and maritime engineering (Tan 2009).

Yet for every 'peak' in student enrollment, Philippine colleges and universities also grapple with equally massive declines in demand. Labor demands in foreign countries can disappear as quickly as they emerge, whether due to economic crisis, new immigration policies, or saturated labor markets (see Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). Given such fluctuating trends, the school owners and administrators in my study refer to flexibility as the key to survival in the higher education market. In many ways, their definition of flexibility paralleled the ideals of global production, promoting the quick reallocation of resources and manpower to address changes in consumer demands. The following sections discuss two major strategies these institutions used to achieve such flexibility: maintaining a flexible faculty, and creating flexible spaces within the campus.

Flexible faculty: rapid recruitment and retrenchment

In their attempt to produce graduates in line with overseas labor demands, Philippine colleges and universities heavily depend on a flexible pool of faculty manpower – specifically, one that can easily be shaped in response to fluctuating enrollment in 'popular' programs. Much like the case of America's adjunct faculty, such flexibility is partly defined by a large number of untenured instructors. Yet for Philippine institutions, the unpredictability of overseas labor gaps also requires the rapid creation of this pool of teachers while there is still a demand for a particular degree. In the case of nursing, many instructors witnessed the sudden expansion of their program, often with very little warning from administrators. As shared by Arlene, a clinical instructor at a private family-owned university:

> When I started teaching, there weren't many students at all, that was the second semester of 2004. But then the very next year, we suddenly had more than 30 sections [with 50 students each] of incoming nursing students! I remember because each section had a corresponding letter, section A, section B … and suddenly we had a section 'AL,' 'AM.' We had so many sections, we had gone through the entire alphabet!

The sudden increase of students meant that school administrators needed a large group of instructors to teach classes and handle clinical rotations. Given that there were few qualified teachers available, many colleges and universities resorted to skirting academic requirements to quickly recruit instructors. For example, the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED 2013) requires all tertiary-level faculty to at least have a master's degree in order to teach major subjects. To get around this requirement, school administrators declared that bachelor's degree holders could become instructors, as long as they pursued graduate school classes while working. Fresh graduates could then take on faculty positions, even without work or teaching experience. Raymond, a nursing instructor at a private university, shared how he and his friends graduated in 2007, took the nursing board examinations in the same year, and then promptly returned to their *alma mater* as full-time faculty in 2008. School owners applied the same strategy when HRM enrollment increased in the late 2000s. At the time I conducted my interviews, many HRM instructors were still pursuing their master's degrees, often at for-profit institutions that can 'fast track' their courses and provide them with flexible class schedules.

To compensate for their instructors' lack of experience, universities and colleges obliged faculty to attend seminars and workshops for 'additional training.' In some institutions, both HRM and Nursing administrators implemented 'team teaching' strategies, where a group of three instructors (two fresh graduates and a senior faculty member) 'shared' the task of teaching one course. Each instructor only had to 'learn' particular parts of a lesson and lecture the same concept to multiple classes of students. Administrators rationalized this piecemeal approach as a way to ensure that inexperienced instructors were less burdened with class preparation. However, the practice of repeatedly teaching only certain parts of a course also stunted instructors' professional development. Interviewees admitted that while 'easier,' their work was boring and repetitive.

Despite the heavy teaching load and repetitive course assignments, many of the instructors I interviewed admitted that they remained complicit with school policies. For some, the large number of students signaled that their program was the administration's 'favorite' – providing the tuition profits that kept other departments in the university running. At the same time, faculty members within 'in-demand' programs also received the highest wages in the university, to the point that even part-time instructors could demand rates higher than full-time faculty in other programs. However, such favored status also came with increased pressure from school administrators. After student enrollment in Nursing began to decline, HRM became the next 'popular' major, as news of manpower shortages in the Middle East and Asia encouraged more students to pursue careers in the hospitality industry. Like their counterparts in Nursing, HRM instructors witnessed the sudden increase of new students and faculty. Carlo, an Assistant Dean at the College of HRM in a private university, shared how this shift changed the nature of his work: 'Now, there is a lot of pressure to maintain [enrollment]. The administration gives your college a lot of money so you have to show them that you're worth it.' He explained that school administrators recently allotted a large amount to fund HRM students' participation in national culinary competitions, with the expectation that winning these awards will lead to

higher enrollment numbers for the college. Faculty members were then expected to work overtime and help students train for the event.

Rachel and Jackie, two HRM instructors from another private university, expressed similar pressures in their own work. 'Well you know, we're the favorites right now so they expect more,' Rachel said: 'Teaching load is heavier, there's more paper work. I also go to a lot of training seminars just to be up-to-date [on what's going on in the hotel industry].' Jackie added: 'There are more universities offering [HRM degrees] now so there's more competition. During the summer, all HRM programs require their students to do their practicum in restaurants …We have to work harder to maintain the university's industry linkages.' In many ways, school administrators relied on faculty like Jackie to quickly make a program attractive to students and their parents. For HRM, this meant winning competitions and offering good training opportunities within the hospitality industry, while for Nursing the administrators focused on board examination results. This task became more difficult during 'peak' periods of enrollment, as other institutions either expanded existing departments or established their own programs, creating more competition for these opportunities. While well compensated, instructors took on extra work beyond teaching and research, from coordinating events to running review classes for students.

However, despite increased investments in popular programs, the practice of rapidly expanding faculty numbers during periods of 'high demand' negatively affected classroom teaching, as the large pool of instructors made it difficult to properly guide or mentor new teachers. Interviewees also argued that the high compensation and loose standards attracted individuals who were not really motivated to teach. As such, more teachers did not necessarily lead to better instruction. Anna explained:

> I experienced the time we had 270 plus faculty members. You didn't know who were your fellow teachers because you never got around to meeting everyone anyway. Now, we are only 30 [instructors]! As a teacher, I have to admit that classroom learning is much better now. The dean can keep track of her faculty. You have less students and more time to give them.

Ironically, students whose tuition fueled the expansion of such programs were also likely to lose out most in these periods of high demand. Nursing students, in particular, were very critical of instructors who were too tired to meet with them after class, or too inexperienced to address their questions. Jay, a nursing student, shared his frustrations with the young instructors who comprised the bulk of faculty at his university:

> Sometimes, I look at [instructor] and wonder, '*Estudyante ba 'to?*' [Is this a student or a teacher?]. I always see them consulting with older instructors, as if they don't know what they're teaching us! I remember telling myself, '*Ano ba 'to, mabobobo tayo dito*' [This is crazy, I will not learn anything if I rely on this person]. I realized I needed to do extra reading on my own.

As universities continuously expand the number of people within their popular programs, the more individual faculty and students feel like they are left on their own. Instructors describe large, boisterous (*masaya*) faculty get-togethers and constant meetings for retraining and professional development. Yet they also mention the lack of meaningful exchange among faculty members and the loss of proper teaching mentorship. Meanwhile, students describe crowded, noisy classrooms, while complaining about the isolation of having to do 'self-study' because they cannot rely on their instructors to teach them well.

Yet as quickly as universities expanded and built their faculty manpower, declines in enrollment numbers also led to the rapid retrenchment of faculty members. For nursing instructors, their once 'favored' status within the university became suddenly precarious, as the number of enrollees per year started to decrease. Philippine officials blamed the financial crisis on western nations, as well as the 'overproduction' of nursing graduates, many of whom could not get the requisite hospital experience needed to work overseas. As media outlets published reports of nurse graduates unable to leave the country, the status of the nursing profession also decreased among parents and incoming students. Annabel, a clinical instructor at a family-owned university, said that she started to see the warning signs when she would see former students wearing uniforms associated with other majors like HRM. University administrators also began announcing the projected number of students for every semester

in order to prepare instructors for possible retrenchment. Janice, an instructor at a large private university, shares:

> At the end of the semester, you can see everyone is scared. Anytime, the dean can give you a call and tell you to leave. That's also when we find out if we are all retained for another semester … If none of us are fired and there are not enough students, none of us would have enough teaching load to be paid sufficiently.

While school owners had no problem bending the rules of faculty hiring at the height of enrollment demand, they stringently applied the same standards to retrench teaching staff as the popularity of these programs began to fade. A common practice was to fire faculty members based on qualifications and teaching performance – two things that were compromised at the height of nursing demand. In one university, a group of former nurse instructors filed a complaint at the Philippine Department of Labor to contest their retrenchment. However, the government ruled in favor of the university, arguing that school owners were 'just following policy' because none of the complainants had a master's degree when they were dismissed.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, even HRM instructors have expressed fears regarding their job security. Instructors admitted that the number of students pursuing HRM degrees had hit a 'plateau' and HRM may no longer be the 'feeder major' for the university. Alan, a new instructor at a family-owned university, explained:

> I worry that another course will become in demand. Just like what happened to nursing. You know, the university [administration] is supportive, but there is something mercenary-like about running a school. The resources go where the demand is … Enrollment has gone down you know. We used to have 20 sections [per year] in HRM, now we have 15 …

Alan worried about his own status because he had yet to finish his master's degree in HRM. Between supervising students and teaching 11 courses, he was unable to focus on graduate studies: 'My days would start at 7:30 AM and end at 8 PM. Then, on Saturdays, I have to go check on the students in their OJTs [on-the-job training]. I have no time to write my dissertation.'

In many ways, cycles in the overseas demand for particular degrees are directly linked to waves of recruitment and retrenchment among faculty members. Strikingly similar to the flexible strategies adopted by Third World factories, this practice allows higher education institutions to quickly provide student consumers with the degrees they desire, while also claiming to 'produce' graduates who fill important labor needs overseas. Yet, as seen in this section, such flexibility places countless faculty members in precarious positions, shifting between situations of high compensation and increased accountability and periods of unstable job security.

Flexible spaces: restructuring and displacement

Attempts to achieve flexibility are felt not only in terms of college instructors' job security, but in the changing structures within Philippine colleges and universities. Studies on neoliberal higher education have mentioned how efforts to increase revenues often lead to constant 'restructuring' within universities, including the closure of departments deemed unprofitable to the institution and the creation of new programs and administrative offices (Slaughter and Leslie 2001). Philippine higher education institutions also adopted the same strategies. In the case of HRM, administrators transformed what was formerly a 'sub-specialty' under the College of Business Administration into a college of its own, in order to accommodate a larger number of enrollees.

However, aside from altering the organizational structure, being flexible to fluctuating enrollment has also meant a pressing need to make physical space. As a result, school owners and administrators have poured funds into the construction and renovation of school structures to fulfill requirements for classrooms, laboratories, and faculty rooms. Lanie, an HRM graduate, remembers that when she entered college, her cohort only had three sections, with 40 students per classroom. By her senior year, the number of sections had doubled and there were more than 50 students per class. School owners then constructed a new 'HRM building' shortly after her graduation. Ona, a nursing instructor, recalled how the owners of her university also scrambled to build new classrooms as the number of nursing

enrollees increased. Yet, given the limited space inside the university's campus, some of these new structures were in awkward locations:

> I remember in the 2000s, [nursing students] occupied most of the buildings in the main campus. At the end of the day, all you could see was this sea of white [uniforms]! So the owners built a new building, 15 minutes away from the campus, *just for our junior and senior students*! Imagine that. Faculty members had to take a jeepney to go to their classes.

Perhaps extending the concept of flexibility even further, school owners and administrators quickly reallocated buildings and classrooms as one program's popularity waned and another's increased. In my early interviews I found it difficult to imagine how universities were able to accommodate so many nursing students in the mid-2000s. Chris, a nursing graduate from a large private university, reminded me that the current structures I saw in my research sites were all newly 'renovated,' making them very different from how they looked at the height of nursing enrollment:

> Now you see regular-sized classrooms, maybe for thirty students. But before, we had these long rooms, with only dividers in between. That way, they could fit in more students …There were so many of us! Forty students per section and more than 60 sections per level … most of our classrooms were like huge auditoriums and even then, some people had to sit outside … When the demand fell, they [administration] changed everything back to small classrooms.

Interviews with faculty confirmed that spaces formerly occupied by nursing students were quickly rebuilt for other colleges. Laboratories became industrial-style kitchens, while classrooms became practice spaces for other allied health programs like physical therapy. It was then unsurprising that visitors like myself found it hard to imagine a time when Nursing was the biggest program on campus. Faculty and students from other universities echoed the same experience, often referring to different parts of the universities that 'used to be' theirs, but eventually got allocated to other programs.

Not all structural changes are smoothly implemented. As I visited more university campuses, it became easy to notice problems with the universities' attempts at 'making space' for changing labor demands. In one campus, the virtual laboratory for nurses was located in a building for 'International Hospitality Management,' and the nursing dean's office was two blocks away in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences. In another campus, a graduate school library for Business was on the third floor of the 'Medical Tower.' Such dispersed locations made movement within campus awkward and inefficient, as students and faculty rushed to get to their classes on time. Some students complained that with all the changing locations within the university it was getting harder to keep track of where their instructors held office hours. However, other interviewees were resigned to such changes as a 'normal' part of the university's 'development.' Katrina, a nursing instructor at a private university, said:

> We used to have three skills labs. One of them is now a library! They did keep all our equipment so who knows, we might be able to use them again. Meanwhile, our other nursing classrooms were also given to the College of Medicine. But it makes sense, before, the Nursing college took over classrooms from Medicine. At that time, they were the ones with few students. Now, we're the ones who are at a decline and they're the ones with increasing enrollment, so they get our classrooms.

Katrina's statement indicates that, just like the number of faculty members, physical space signaled a program's favored status among administrators. This status was also linked to enrollment rates and a degree's supposed association with migration opportunities overseas. As less popular programs were displaced to older buildings or smaller spaces, animosity grew among the different departments on campus. HRM instructors felt particularly targeted by other faculty, given that the program now had one of the larger populations on campus. Alan shares:

> Now, we're the ones with all the space. The faculty from Pharmacy and CAS [College of Arts and Science] got mad because they got moved out of their building. The CAS dean probably thought, 'I'm the dean! You should be adjusting to me!' But then, there's nothing he can do. Now his office is our office.

In some cases, school owners build facilities in anticipation of growing enrollment, assuming that the promise of overseas jobs will eventually attract more students into the program. When actual enrollment does not reach expectations, schools work harder to market the major to incoming students. Therefore, while students' migration aspirations may initiate the popularity of particular programs,

universities and colleges also encourage incoming students to pursue these degrees in order to recoup investments in facilities and space. One school owner's biggest concern was whether the number of HRM students would stay high enough to earn back the money the institution spent in building hot kitchens for the program. These issues indicate how universities and colleges could not completely realize school owners' goals of keeping campus structures 'flexible' to 'new' demands. Instead, such efforts to respond to a global migrant labor market led to awkward reallocations of space and undermined teaching and learning within the campus.

Conclusion

In making sense of the many changes they witnessed within their universities, the faculty and students who participated in my study often used a narrative of survival in a volatile market. This notion of the unpredictable 'market' took on two forms: either a commodity chain of migrant labor, defined by the fluctuating needs of foreign employers; or a competitive higher education market, driven by students' migration aspirations. In both these cases, the concept of flexibility shaped university policy, reinforcing the neoliberal ideal that schools must remain malleable to the different demands that these two 'markets' create. For many of my interviewees, these challenges were generally normalized, accepted as a natural part of teaching and learning amidst changes beyond their control.

Yet as argued in this article, the pursuit of flexibility led to serious problems for faculty and students and compromised classroom teaching for institutional revenue and profits. In the case of faculty, cycles of recruitment and retrenchment negatively affected instructors' job security and professional development. Similar to many American institutions, Philippine colleges and universities allotted administrative support depending on a program's popularity among incoming students. While the liberal arts and humanities have borne the brunt of such policies in western institutions, the Philippine case revealed a more unstable hierarchy, where the status of Filipino faculty members depended on what majors were associated with job opportunities overseas. The popularity of these majors came and went in a matter of a few years, making the work of college instructors extremely precarious and insecure. Even in periods of high enrollment, college instructors grappled with high expectations from administrators, as they worked to show school owners that their labor is 'worth' the university's 'investment.' Instructors become responsible for maintaining the enrollment numbers that ensures their job security, adding much pressure to their already heavy workloads.

At the same time, efforts to accommodate the rapid expansion of students in popular programs led to a constant restructuring of physical space. As school owners and administrators allocated classrooms and buildings to popular majors on campus, the displacement of other programs created animosity among faculty. Because new structures had to be built in such short periods of time, departments and classrooms were placed in awkward locations within university campuses, adding unnecessary stress to the work of faculty and students.

In many ways, the creation of flexible manpower and spaces within Philippine universities indicates how the ideals of neoliberal education manifest in the context of a migrant-sending country. While western scholars have compared current university policies with the business models of modern corporations, I find that Philippine higher education institutions operate more like the Third World factories of today's global economy. Similar to the just-in-time manufacturing of goods such as clothes and gadgets, Philippine colleges and universities attempted to 'produce' graduates to address the needs of multiple foreign employers. In doing so, these institutions adopted flexible strategies to offer the educational 'products' that aspiring migrants seek to obtain, despite the fact that its implementation was never truly realized and generated outcomes that disadvantaged both faculty and students.

Lastly, the Philippine case highlights the problematic role that neoliberal higher education has taken on within the global market for migrant labor. Few education scholars have recognized how higher education institutions within migrant-sending countries can purposely produce skilled workers for 'export,' making emigration a desired outcome after graduation. Even fewer associate this production process with a neoliberal ideology that portrays universities as producers of future employees, and

students as consumers investing their own future employability. Yet as more countries begin to use emigration as a development strategy, practices of flexible faculty and university spaces are likely to spread other contexts. In recent years, state agencies in Vietnam, Indonesia, and China have begun to use the Philippines as a model for labor export, making its higher education system a blueprint for these nations (Brush and Sochalski 2007; Yeates 2009). These trends place colleges and universities in a competition among migrant-sending countries, pressuring educators to produce migrant workers who will have an advantage over other nationalities. This article emphasizes the importance of understanding how this global phenomenon affects colleges and universities, as well as the teachers and students within these institutions.

Notes

1. An exception is the growing literature on lifelong learning. Studies in this area have argued how notions of flexibility justify the need for individuals to continually upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to remain flexible for the new economy (see Gerrard 2015; Olssen 2006).
2. The expansion of higher education also led to a massive number of professionals who seek opportunities in popular migrant destination countries like the United States and the United Kingdom (see Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2011). While the rise of elite universities in countries like Singapore and India signals rising competition for western graduates seeking coveted professional jobs, Philippine universities exhibit a more deliberate effort to fill labor gaps within receiving nations, in line with the state's labor export policies. Of course, we can question whether the recruitment of migrant workers really does imply a true 'lack' within the host country. However, within Philippine institutions, the discourse in 'educating for export' is definitely driven by the desire to fill 'labor gaps' and not compete with native counterparts overseas.
3. Perceptions of fluctuating labor demands overseas create an unstable hierarchy of academic programs within the university. While I choose to focus only on Nursing and HRM, I observed that other programs had also gone through similar peaks and dips in 'demand.' While it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the experiences of students and faculty within these other programs, the issues I describe in this article are by no means limited to just Nursing and HRM. I provide a more detailed account of the particular experiences within the two programs in other publications based on this research (see Ortiga 2014, 2015).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

Alburo, Florian A., and Danilo I. Abella. 2002. *Skilled Labour Migration from Developing Countries: Study on the Philippines*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

Altbach, Philip G. 1989. "Twisted Roots: The Western Impact on Asian Higher Education." *Higher Education* 18: 9–29.

Apple, Michael W. 2000. "Between Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism: Education and Conservatism in a Global Context." In *Globalization and Education: Critical Perspectives*, edited by Nicolas C. Burbules and Carlos Alberto Torres, 57–78. New York: Routledge.

Aronowitz, Stanley. 2000. *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Asis, Maruja M.B. 2006. "The Philippines' Culture of Migration." Migration Policy Institute. http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=364

Asis, Maruja M. B., and Graziano Batistella. 2013. *The Filipino Youth and the Employment Migration Nexus*. Makati City, Philippines: UNICEF Philippines.

Boden, Rebecca, and Maria Nedeva. 2010. "Employing Discourse: Universities and Graduate 'Employability.'" *Journal of Education Policy* 25: 37–54.

Brehony, Kevin J., and Rosemary Deem. 2005. "Challenging the Post-Fordist/Flexible Organisation Thesis: The Case of Reformed Educational Organisations." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 26: 395–414.

Brown, Philip, Hugh Lauder, and David Ashton. 2011. *The Global Auction: The Broken Promises of Education, Jobs, and Incomes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brown, Wendy. 2011. "The End of Educated Democracy." *Representations* 116: 19–43.

Brush, Barbara L., and Julie Sochalski. 2007. "International Nurse Migration: Lessons from the Philippines." *Policy, Politics & Nursing Practice* 8: 37–46.

CHED (Philippine Commission on Higher Education). 2013. "Higher Education Institutions." http://www.ched.gov.ph/index.php/higher-education-in-numbers/higher-education-institutions/

De Haas, Hein. 2005. "International Migration, Remittances and Development: Myths and Facts." *Third World Quarterly* 26: 1269–1284.

Deem, Rosemary. 2001. "Globalisation, New Managerialism, Academic Capitalism and Entrepreneurialism in Universities: Is the Local Dimension Still Important?" *Comparative Education* 37: 7–20.

DOLE (Philippine Department of Labor and Employment). 2011. *Annual Report*. Manila: Philippines.

Fitzgerald, Tanya. 2012. "Tracing the Fault Lines." In *Hard Labour? Academic Work and the Changing Landscape of Higher Education, vol. 7*, edited by Tanya Fitzgerald, Julie White and Helen M. Gunther, 1–22. United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Friedman, Milton. 1962. *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Gerrard, Jessica. 2015. "The Limits of Learning: Homelessness and Educating the Employable Self." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 36 (1): 69–80.

Giroux, Henry A. 2002. "Neoliberalism, Corporate Culture, and the Promise of Higher Education: The University as a Democratic Public Sphere." *Harvard Educational Review* 72: 425–465.

Giroux, Henry A. 2008. *Against the Terror of Neoliberalism: Politics beyond the Age of Greed*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Gulson, Kalervo N. and Aslam Fataar. 2011. "Neoliberal Governmentality, Schooling and the City: Conceptual and Empirical Notes on and from the Global South." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 32: 269–283.

Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hirst, Paul and Jonathan Zeitlin. 1997. "Flexible Specialization: Theory and Evidence in the Analysis of Industrial Change." In *Contemporary Capitalism: Embeddedness of Institutions*, edited by J. Rogers Hollingsworth and Robert Boyer, 220–239. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

ICNM (International Centre on Nurse Migration). 2012. "The Impact of the Financial Crisis on Nurses and Nursing: A Comparative Overview of 34 European Countries." *ICNM News*, April 12.

Isidro, Antonio, and Maximo D. Ramos. 1973. *Private Colleges and Universities in the Philippines*. Manila, Philippines: Coordinating Council of Private Educational Associations.

James, Estelle. 1991. "Private Higher Education: The Philippines as a Prototype." *Higher Education* 21: 189–206.

Jimenez-David, Rina. 2008. "The Migration Trap." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, June 17. http://www.inquirer.net/specialfeatures/nursingmatters/view.php?db=1&article=20080617-143072

Kalleberg, Arne. 2009. "Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition." *American Sociological Review* 74: 1–22.

Marginson, Simon. 2004. "Competition and Markets in Higher Education: A 'Glonacal' Analysis." *Policy Futures in Education* 2: 175–250.

Marginson, Simon, and Mark Consindine. 2000. *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance, and Reinvention in Australia*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Molesworth, Mike, Elizabeth Nixon, and Richard Scullion. 2009. "Having, Being, and Higher Education: The Marketisation of the University and the Transformatin of the Student into Consumer." *Teaching in Higher Education* 14: 277–287.

Olssen, Mark. 2006. "Understanding the Mechanisms of Neoliberal Control: Lifelong Learning, Flexibility, and Knowledge Capitalism." *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 25 (3): 213–230.

Olssen, Mark, and Michael A. Peters. 2005. "Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: From the Free Market to Knowledge Capitalism." *Journal of Education Policy* 20: 313–345.

Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ortiga, Yasmin Y. 2014. "Professional Problems: The Burden of Producing the 'Global' Filipino Nurse." *Social Science and Medicine* 115: 64–71.

Ortiga, Yasmin Y. 2015. *Educating for Export: Producing Filipino Migrant Workers for the Global Market*. Ph.D. Syracuse University.

Piore, Michael J., and Charles F. Sabel. 1984. *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity*. New York: Basic Books.

Rodriguez, Robyn M. 2010. *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Shahjahan, Riyad A., and Adrianna J. Kezar. 2013. "Beyond the "National Container": Addressing Methodological Nationalism in Higher Education Research." *Educational Researcher* 42: 20–29.

Slaughter, Sheila, and Larry L. Leslie. 2001. "Expanding and Elaborating the Concept of Academic Capitalism." *Organization* 8: 154–161.

Smith, Vicki. 1997. "New Forms of Work Organization." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23: 315–339.

Tan, Edita. 2009. *Supply Response of Filipino Workers to World Demand*. Philippines: International Organization of Migration.

Tirelli, Vincent. 1998. “Adjuncts and More Adjuncts: Labor Segmentation and the Transformation of Higher Education.” In *Chalk Lines: The Politics of Work in the Managed University*, edited by Randy Martin, 181–201. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Tyner, James A. 2009. *The Philippines: Mobilities, Identities and Globalization*. New York: Routledge.
Vallas, Steven P. 1999. “Rethinking Post-Fordism: The Meaning of Workplace Flexibility.” *Sociological Theory* 17: 68–102.
Waldinger, Roger, and David Fitzgerald. 2004. “Transnationalism in Question.” *American Journal of Sociology* 109: 1177–1195.
Washburn, Jennifer. 2005. *University Inc: The Corporate Corruption of Higher Education*. New York: Basic Books.
Wildavsky, Ben. 2010. *The Great Brain Race: How Global Universities Are Reshaping the World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Yeates, Nicola. 2009. “Production for Export: The Role of the State in the Development and Operation of Global Care Chains.” *Population, Space and Place* 15: 175–187.
Yeates, Nicola. 2012. “Global Care Chains: A State-of-the-Art Review and Future Directions in Care Transnationalization Research.” *Global Networks* 12: 135–154.