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Toward a Sociology of Time-Future in the Making of Global Education Markets

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Abstract

This paper argues that two developments, that of reordering societies as a result of neoliberal projects in making market societies, and bringing education into the circuit of global capital as a value-producing sector, both depend upon, and give rise to, a new temporal order; one that is more directly tied to, and which re/produces, the temporal orientations of capitalism. The paper draws on Beckert's work on imagined futures, to provide a sociological account of the temporal re-orderings of the higher education sector and the recalibration of the cognitive orientations of actors that in turn are shaped by, and also produce, the temporal orders of edu-capitalism. The paper also explores the competing narratives of the future when a new temporal order has yet to become common-sense, and the existing order is yet to die. I reflect on the struggles over meaning and resources in re-reimagining and seeking to materialise education as a global commodity, and the contradictions for capitalism and for societies when the conditions for knowledge production are fixed and regulated in trade rules oriented to an as yet unknown future.

1. Introduction

A special issue given over to exploring the relationship between education and the future is a timely opportunity to think in more theoretically-informed ways about this relation. To be sure, time features in the work of sociologists and historians of education when they explore questions of social mobility, social reproduction, or shifts in education mandates over time, for example. Education policy analysts also implicitly study time and the future in their examination of policies, most of which are aimed at bringing about changes into the future.

There has also recently been a rash of explicit, and some might add instrumental, education and futures work by governments and international organisations, including the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), aimed at challenging and changing the ways in which teaching and learning in education systems is organised and delivered (see OECD, 2000; Vincent-Lancrin, 2004). Such 'futuring' activities have included the development of scenarios about current and future states of education, the promotion of foresight and horizon scanning activities so as to manage risks that might impede the realisation of future states, or storied exemplars of 'good' practices across systems aimed at changing understandings as to what might be involved in delivering competitive 'world class' education (Barber and Mourshed, 2007).

Yet in research on the education sector, too often 'the future' as a theoretical construct is left in either a deterministic relationship to the past - as in the past determines the future (for instance social reproduction theory), an instrumental understanding of the relationship between present states and

possible futures (for example in neo-classical economics theory where rational calculations to lead to a predicted future), or a utopian/dystopian relationship to the status quo (for instance, some lines of philosophy and political theory), with limited attention paid to time-future as a particular temporal realm.

This is not to suggest a sociologist's understanding of the relationship between education and social reproduction is wrong. Far from it. Or, indeed, that a philosopher's interest in utopias and the role that education might play in realising this vision, is unimportant. Rather, it is to suggest that more intellectual work needs to be done in theorising the relationship between the *distinct temporalities* of particular cultural political economies of education, and the ways in which actors are cognitively oriented toward, and produce, this social order. This is particularly pressing in the context of major changes taking place in the education sector, particularly in relation to higher education as it is being tied more closely to global market making and its expansion.

New orders, of course, are the outcome of institutional and cultural transformations, with education as a site of social and cultural reproducing playing a major role in this regard. But as I will show in the paper, education is also now being drawn into the expansion of global capitalism through playing a more direct role in production itself. I will be arguing that these two developments, of the reordering of societies as a result of neoliberal projects into making-market societies (Leys, 2003), and bringing education into the circuit of global capital as a value-producing sector, both depend upon, and give rise to, a new temporal order; one that is more directly tied to, and which re/produces, the temporal orientations of capitalism.

Beckert's (2016) work on imagined futures is particularly helpful for my purposes; he provides a sociological account of temporal orderings with a focus on modern capitalist societies and their distinctive dynamics and orientations. A shift away from one temporal order to another depends upon a reorientation and recalibration of the cognitive frames of actors and their temporal horizons. Yet orchestrating these shifts takes ideational, institutional and regulatory work. It is also potentially fraught in that competing political projects and their distinctive temporal orders are visible and open to contestation. And when new temporal reorders have not yet become common-sense, they are also open to challenge and to possible failure.

The paper is developed in the following ways. I begin by outlining Beckert's (2014, 2016) analysis of the role of time in capitalist dynamics. I then use his key insights to trace out ongoing work by key political actors and institutions engaged in attempting to recalibrate the cognitive orientations of social groups through a series of projects and processes; (i) re-imagining of education as a competitive market with buyers and sellers; (ii) the creation institutions and instruments to make investments in global education markets more certain; (iii) challenges to trade negotiations and global rules and their failure to *fix* this new cognitive orientation; (iv) the relaunch of services negotiations in secret, multiply sited allied agreements that includes education, with a new set of devices to manage the future including modelling future impacts, as well as lock-in and ratchet clauses. In the final concluding section I reflect on the struggles over meaning in re-reimagining and seeking to materialise education as a global commodity, and the contradictions for capitalism when the conditions for knowledge production are fixed and regulated in trade rules.

2. A Sociology of Capitalism

Jens Beckert has developed an impressive corpus of work on the temporal order of capitalism since his first publications in the 1990s (cf. Beckert, 1996, 2014, 2016). His starting point was to pose a question to the burgeoning field of new economic sociology: what is sociological about economic sociology as a field of study? (Beckert, 1996) In answering this question, Beckert's purpose was not to undermine the importance of a sociological reading of economic structures and processes in the tradition of Karl Polanyi (1944) challenging the idea of a free market that sits outside of society. This work was important and continues to be so. Rather, Beckert's insight was to suggest that economic sociology's twin preoccupation; first, with the 'embeddedness' of markets (Granovetter, 1973), and second, a critique of the neo-classical assumption of an; "...individualised homo-economicus who strives restlessly for the maximisation of utility" (Beckert, 1996: 804), has led to the under-development of a set of concepts that might in turn constitute a sociology of capitalism.

Beckert is particularly interested in exploring how economic decision-making amongst actors takes place in capitalist orders, and particularly so under conditions of uncertainty about the future. He argues that

...capitalism institutionalizes an organization of economic activity in which actors orient themselves toward an open and unforeseeable future. Such a future represents both unlimited possibilities for actors as well as a permanent threat to their economic status. At the macro level, the actions induced by this temporal order produce growth as well as sporadic crises, and thus the relentless dynamics of capitalism (2014: 1).

A key claim of Beckert (2014: 2-3) is that both modernity and capitalism embrace distinctly different temporal orders in contrast to pre-modern and pre-capitalist times. Whilst pre-modern societies see themselves as living in a fixed, eternal, present, by way of contrast modern societies tend to view the future as open and uncertain, or as a storehouse of possibilities. Yet as he also notes, much of the writing on temporalities and temporal orientations by sociologists has tended to focus on the development of modern societies and the political, rather than the economic. In speaking to this absence, he poses the question: "...how do perceptions of an open and uncertain future relate to the capitalist economy" (Beckert, 2014: 3)?

To answer this question, Beckert (2014: 3) turns to the work of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, and his accounts of the Kabyle people in French-controlled Algeria. Bourdieu was particularly interested in changes in temporal order within Kabyle society as a result of capitalist modernization in Algeria. He notes how the social and temporal logics of traditional Kabyle society, of solidarity and honour, were eventually replaced by attitudes toward calculation and future profits. This led to "...conflicts in Kabyle society triggered by different forms of economic thinking and new practices which were ultimately destroying the traditional social order" (op.Cit: 4). The main point to be derived from looking at the breakdown of a traditional society like this, Beckert argues, is to; "...highlight the shift in temporal orientation as being at the heart of capitalism's unfolding dynamic" (ibid).

In an emerging capitalist order, actors ranging from companies to entrepreneurs, investors, employees and consumers, must all orient their activities to a more open and uncertain future. "The temporary disposition of economic actors toward the future, and the capability to fill this future with counterfactual economic imaginaries, is crucial to understanding both how capitalism diverges from the economic orders that preceded it, and its overall dynamic" (Beckert, 2016: 2).

Now the paradox for both modernity and capitalism is that, ontologically, the future is open, uncertain, and by definition cannot be known. How, then, do actors orient themselves and make decisions? Beckert (2016) argues that actors have perceptions of the social world, and that they develop expectations about the future which in turn influences their decisions. But these decisions can't be rational. Rather they are combinations of; (i) what is thought to be currently the case (tomorrow will be like today), (ii) emotions such as pride or status around imagined future states, and (iii) the expectations of others. Yet given that the future is unknown, they are in essence 'fictional expectations'. They are 'fictional' in that they provide an orientation in decision-making "...despite the incalculability of the outcomes" (Beckert, 2014: 9). They are 'expectations' in that they are social and not individual phenomena, and are shaped by collective beliefs formed from communicative practices ranging from laypeople to firms, politicians, experts and the media, and are crucial in the formation of imagined futures.

In sum, fictional expectations refer to the images actors form as they consider future states of the world, the ways in which they visualise causal relations, and the ways in which they also perceive their actions as influencing outcomes. The term also refers to the symbolic qualities actors ascribe to goods that transcend the good's material features. These orient their decision-making despite the fact that the future in modern capitalist societies cannot be known. "Actors, motivated by an imaginary future state, organize their activities based on this mental representation and the emotions associated with it" (Beckert, 2016: 9). As a result, "in economic practice, fictional expectations take a narrative form, and become articulated as stories that tell how the future will look and how the economy will unfold into the future from the current state of affairs" (Beckert, 2016: 10).

There are four main 'social' implications of Beckert's (2014; 2016) fictional expectations thesis. First, fictional expectations help actors work together in concert in the face of uncertainty. Second, there are real world consequences in that these expectations help to *affect* the future (also known as performativity) – but they are also broader in that economic theories are not the only framings of a situation with the potential to lead to outcomes, and they do not necessarily lead to the anticipated future. Third, the contingency of expectations is a source of innovation in the economy, giving rise to new ideas despite, and because of, uncertainty. And fourth, the contingency of expectations gives rise to a politics of expectations. And as this paper shows, expectations motivate real decisions that have distributional consequences, and thus become the object of interest struggles amongst actors in economic fields (Beckert, 2016: 11), in this case struggles over the very meaning of education. These discourses also take place in the context and on the basis of - cultural and institutions framings which actors use to interpret the world. Frames include an ensemble of economic theories, such as development, risk and calculation, or technological progress, and are mediated through the deployment of a range of technologies and instruments, such as maps, schedules, statistical trends, impact assessments, risk analyses, and so on. As we will see in the following section, both actors' different expectations and their associated imaginaries around education, as variously a public good, human right or tradeable service, and different actors access to different kinds of resources to shape and affect time/futures, are the object of struggles.

3. Temporal Orderings, Higher Education and Global Capitalism

So far I have been arguing that socialising education actors into the temporal orders of global capitalism takes discursive, institutional, regulatory and performative work. Yet I will also show these dynamics are open to contestation, failure, and for some, disappointment. In this section I explore the temporal dynamics at work in the making of a global education services sector arising from the re-imagining of education as a competitive market with buyers and sellers; the creation of institutions and instruments to make investments in global education markets to socialise and make this more certain; challenges to WTO trade negotiators and negotiations by alternative expectations regarding the future of education and as a result the failure to *fix* a particular version of the future; and the relaunch of services negotiations in secret, in multiply-sited allied agreements that include education, with a new set of discourses, institutions, and devices with a differently recalibrated temporal order.

3.1. Imagining education as a competitive services sector

Most accounts of the beginning of efforts to imagine services as competitive sectors to underpin a new long wave of accumulation in comparison to goods production, point to their genesis in the oil shocks in the 1970s and the economic crisis that followed. David Harvey (1989: 141-2) writes of the time, not only did the United States face growing competition from western Europe and Japan, but also a host of newly industrialising countries in Asia began to challenge US hegemony. When the Bretton Woods system, collapsed in 1973, the US share of output had fallen by 10 percentage points since 1950, and its share of exports had fallen to less than the combined total of Germany and Japan (Mitchie and Smith, 1995: 25-26).

The economic crisis also created a crisis of rationality over the model of development that had underpinned this 'glorious thirty years', with Keynesian models increasingly discredited by "a minority of ultra-liberal economic theologians" (Hobsbawm, 1994: 409) committed to promoting an unrestricted free market as the desired model of economic development. This was a battle of narratives about the economy and the future. For Keynesians, high wages, full employment and the welfare state were imagined to create the consumer demand that fuelled expansion. For neoliberals, however, the future wealth of the nation depended on minimising the role of, and cutting the cost of, government, and creating the conditions whereby the private sector and profit—the real motor of the economy—would be allowed to flourish and boost productivity.

In the struggles that followed, it was the neo/liberal imaginary – of choice and markets, entrepreneurship, efficiency through competition, opening up public monopolies to private sector actors – which won the day, with its appeal to individualism, consumption, efficiency and personal freedom against what it argued was a slow, one-size-fits-all, paternal, bureaucratic order (Berger et al., 1974). This alternative imaginary of the future set in train a new kind logic in sectors like education; a logic which privileged social attributes such as individualism, competitiveness, and forms of calculation which sought to maximise the returns on education investments into the future. Most importantly for my argument, this neoliberal imaginary of the future, with its cultural and institutional frames, was dependent upon, and which produced, a new temporal orientation to the future.

If the governance of education was being refashioned in micro-economic policy through narratives such as human capital, consumerism, efficiencies and so on, so too were the ways in which education was being viewed in macro-economic policy; as central to the development of a global knowledge and as part of a services-based economy (Robertson et al., 2002; Robertson, 2009). Indeed, by the end of the 1970s, trade in services was becoming a major component of international trade, and accounted for an

increasing proportion of international investment. Marchak (1991) argues that the internationalisation of manufacturing firms that took place throughout the 1960s and 70s was a precondition for the growth of the international services sector. However, services sectors presented transnational firms with huge problems around domestic regulations (under foreign direct investment), in turn inhibiting their expansion globally. Key institutional barriers included regulations on investment, establishment, foreign exchange, insurance, shipping, employment and so on (Marchak, 1994: 84). As a result, firms wanting to enter new markets in other parts of the globe argued that state monopolies on services, from telecommunications to banking, education and health, should be deregulated and opened up to competition, and to being included as a services sector, distinct from the production of goods.

Imagining and materializing education as a globally-traded services sector, has taken, and continues to take, a considerable amount of political work, not least because education continues to be regarded in many societies as a public service. The higher education sector has been by far the easiest level to discursively and institutionally transform into a competitive global market (though both schooling and the technical and vocational education have become significant income generators for countries like Australia and New Zealand). One reason for this is that 'internationalisation' is central to the missions of most universities, though internationalisation as a knowledge claim has given ground to internationalisation as an economic strategy (Marginson and Considine, 2000).

A second is that from the early 1980s onwards, governments in a small number of western economies (especially Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom) took the view that higher education could offer them a comparative advantage in trade terms, and that they should therefore locate international education in their *trade* briefs and departments. Facing out to the Asian region in particular, they articulated with national development strategies aimed at building knowledge economies; 'importing' higher education provided an instant means for boosting enrolment in higher education in the region in a context where a growing middle class were used to funding a significant portion of their own education costs. The premium attached to English as the medium of instruction, and the possibilities this would open up in the world of transnational production, enabled English speaking countries to quickly consolidate their positions as exporters of education services. For their own part, full-fee-paying international students were a welcome source of revenue to universities who now found themselves increasingly in a context where state funding did not cover the costs of significant expansion in the sector. Taken together, the result has been a spectacular increase in the volume of student movement from the Asian region shaped by government policy, entrepreneurial higher education institutions, an expanding middle class, and the demand for English (Robertson and Kedzierski, 2016).

Trade in education services has now been constituted as an important 'industry' in countries that include Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada. Yet with such a significant investment in, and dependence upon, the 'education export market', there is also a concern expressed as to how best to maintain, or increase, market-share. Competition has led to major innovations in the sector, to now include specialist firms like recruiters, the growth of for-profit universities who specialize in on-line learning aimed at part-time learners, new financial products aimed at extending student enrolment, new education divisions built in global firms who have realigned their investment strategies in line with projections around 'emerging markets', and so on.

Australia is particularly interesting as a case in that it has gone furthest in reimagining and strategizing the materialization of education as an education services sector. Education is not only described in trade terms as an 'export', but it is placed into equivalences with other extractive resources that are traded on the global market – gold, coal and iron ore as Figure 1 shows.

Australia's top 25 exports, goods and services, 2012

Australia's top 25 exports, goods and services, (A\$ million) – (a)						
Rank	Commodity	2010	2011	2012	% growth 2011 to 2012	5 year trend growth
1	Iron ores & concentrates	49,380	64,097	54,689	-14.7	28.7
2	Coal	42,967	46,691	41,273	-11.6	10.6
3	Gold	14,438	15,077	15,525	3.0	4.9
4	Education-related travel services	16,597	15,155	14,487	-4.4	2.7
5	Natural gas	9,425	11,084	13,418	21.1	17.4

Figure 1: Education represented as equivalent to extractive industries that are traded.

Most recently Australia has developed what it calls a comprehensive 'international education' strategy that projects well into the future (2025). This projection is justified through a look back through a rear view mirror, as Figure 2 shows; a trend in the direction of increasing growth.

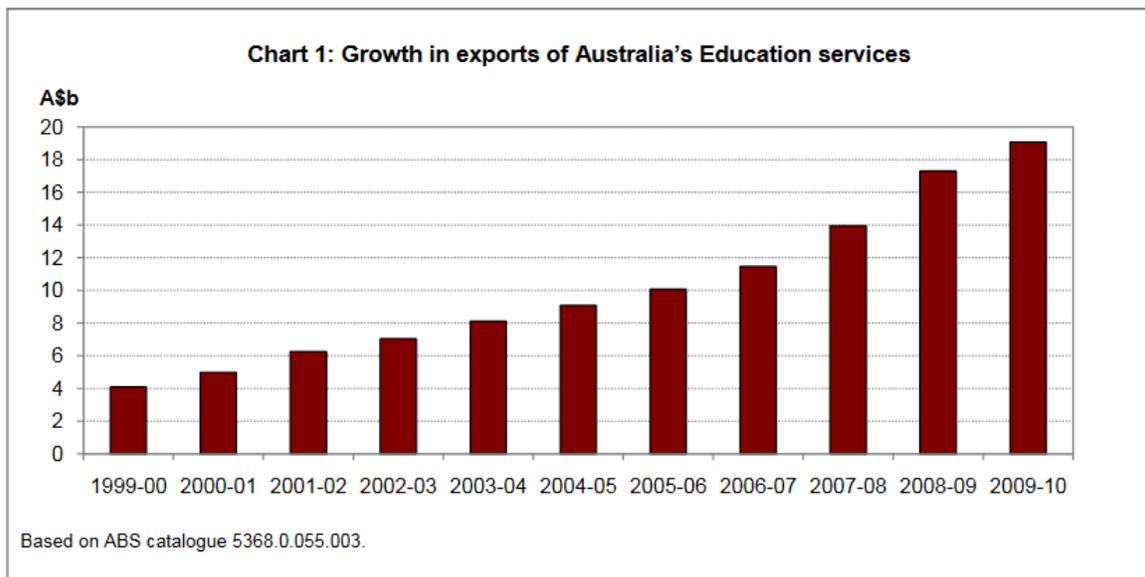


Figure 2: Assumptions of the future through representing the past.

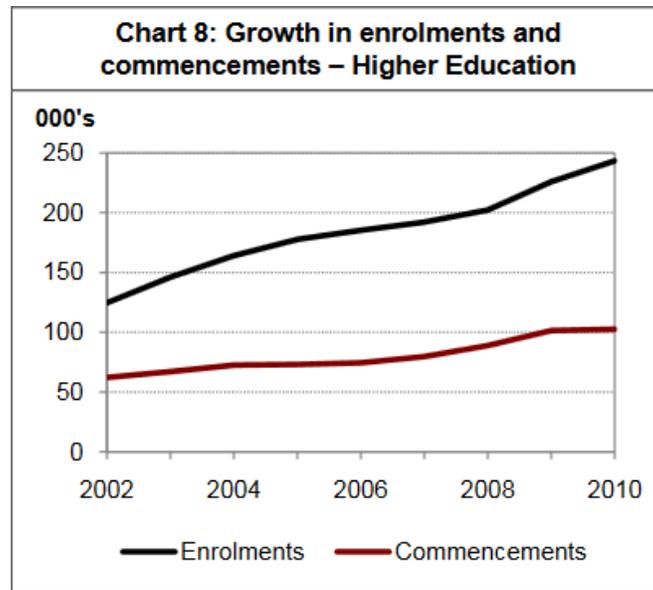


Figure 3: The circumstances and decisions of education consumers

Its national and institutional level strategies are also shaped by gathering considerable amounts of data - some available to the public and other more granulated data which is sold at cost to buyers (see Figure 2 and 3). It engages in considerable amounts of horizon scanning activity, and the production of various kinds of reports and other forms of representation – which all provide a narrative that seeks to link the past and present with an assumed future of education as a tradeable service

In May 2016 the Australian Government launched a National Strategy aimed at expanding the education services sector, composed of “...a trio of key strategies for the expansion of its international education sector: a national strategy for international education, a market development roadmap, and an alumni engagement strategy” (Australian Government, 2016, website) that would now make use of innovations, such as technology-enabled learning via online or blended delivery programmes. It is instructive to look closely as to how the future is imagined and strategized using techniques and devices, such as ‘forecasting services’ by global accounting firms, ‘roadmaps’ (with identified competitors), social groups like ‘alumni’, and other kinds of networks, but always in terms of trade and investment.

The National Strategy for International Education 2025 itself, which reflects a “whole-of-sector” approach and sets out a 10-year plan for further developing Australia’s position as a global leader in education and training. The national strategy is based around three pillars: “strengthening the fundamentals” (including improvements to student services and quality assurance), “making transformative partnerships” (which focuses on links at home and abroad, alumni networks, and visa policy), and “competing globally.”

The Australian International Education 2025 (AIE2025) market development roadmap, is the product of both extensive consultations within the sector and research from Deloitte Access Economics. It provides a 10-year market development framework for Australia’s education exports, including “game-changing” strategies to build scalable, collaborative networks of education providers, attract capital to fuel the sector’s expansion, and target key markets abroad.

The Australia Global Alumni Engagement Strategy 2016-2020 outlines a five-year plan to strengthen and engage Australia's foreign alumni with the broader goals of enhancing the country's diplomatic access and influence and building trade and investment links.

“This signals the sector's and the government's commitment to work together to advance international education by identifying new products and new opportunities for expansion, and building on our current presence in existing markets,” said Minister Colbeck (Australian Government, 2016, website).

The temporal lexicon around the future is distinctive; a ‘ten year plan’, ‘game changing strategies’, ‘expansion’, ‘future innovations’, and so on. The stakes are high for the government and so are the potential risks, given that international education is estimated to be worth AUS\$19.6 billion (US\$14.7 billion) a year to the Australian economy, as the nation's third largest export sector. But the future here is viewed as a world that can be realised through calculation and rational action. As competition has stepped up, so too has concern over who has what share of the global education services market and how that might play out in the future.

Key actors (governments, institutions and transnational firms) within economies from Australia, New Zealand and the United States, have all intensified their interest in the ways in which domestic and international regulatory systems of the inter-state world might impede their project of creating an expanding global trading system in services – an issue I now turn to.

3.2. Competing narratives, uncertain futures

Yet the full-scale transformation of education into a service-sector, and its ongoing development and expansion as a global market, faces ongoing challenges. The first is because education continues to be conceptualised as located in a particular kind of value economy; as a ‘public good’ best delivered as part of the state's responsibility for ‘public services’ as a universal and human right, the basis of progress, and the conditions for the realisation of the modern political and social subject. Within this framing, the distributional battles are for education's positional good status which drives social class strategies leading to differentiation in the sector and to social inequalities, whose tendencies and outcomes are largely masked by ideologies of meritocracy. The openness of the future, and the attendant risks and uncertainties, about an individual's or social group's education future, and the work of education institutions in this process, have until more recently, been broadly shaped by the temporalities of modernity and not those that are explicitly associated with capitalism (cf. Vostal, 2015; Smith, 2015 who chart these processes within the academy).

That education is a service to be traded in the marketplace between sellers and buyers, continues to be an anathema to many, and the source of considerable contestation. As a result, shifting education from one value economy to another is not straightforward, as competing narratives about the future are presented and contested. Those with a stake in education as a tradeable commodity, however, also have a stake in securing the conditions for the expansion of education as a services sector and market, and not its containment. Challenging the perceived barriers to global trade in services has been on the agenda now since the early 1980s, spearheaded by various service coalitions formed to lobby for change, including the US based Coalition of Service Industries (CSI). The CSI used its lobbying capacity to shape negotiations taking place under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) during the 1980s, to include services and not just goods in the mandate of the GATT. Organised interests in the United States, as well as Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom were keen to promote a new post-GATT structure, the World Trade Organization (WTO), with an expanded trade agenda.

In 1995 the WTO was launched to “...formalize, deepen and widen an international system of trade regulation. It was also to bring greater coherence in global policymaking by drawing together the work of the WTO with that of the IMF, the WB as well as to develop relations with other bodies” (Wilkinson, 2002: 129). The WTO now presided over the GATT, along two new areas of trade; the General Agreement on Trade in Service (GATS), and Trade Related Intellectual Property Services (TRIPS). Yet there were problems in defining services using the language of trade in goods. As Winham points out:

...services are processes, defining them is difficult, unless a strict functional definition is employed. ...The tasks for the negotiators at the Uruguay Round were to incorporate GATT principles of transparency, national treatment and reciprocity, as well as newer principles such as market access, into areas of trade that were conceptually dissimilar from trade in goods (2005: 101).

The result was an agreement that “...is not yet complete, not terribly user friendly, with a complex geometry and a carte obligations set against the backdrop of near universal coverage and sovereign immunity in liberalization matters” (Sauve, 2001: 3).

Members who joined the WTO opted in under a single undertaking to a series of binding rules and a built-in agenda to engage in ongoing negotiations leading to progressive liberalisation into the future. A complex set of technologies and devices to secure this cognitive orientation to the future also determined the work of the actors and their relations to each other – from frameworks of rules laying out obligations governing trade in services, to annexes on specific services sectors, and schedules detailing the liberalisation commitments of each WTO member. An exemption would only be granted under GATS Article 1.3 (c); as “...supplied neither on a commercial basis nor in competition with one or more service suppliers” if the service could show that it existed in a completely decommodified form, untainted by the market or the rhythm of capitalism. However public services in many countries had already been pushed into emulating the market through competition and choice policies as the result of New Public Management reforms. In short its temporal reorientation had already been recalibrated to some extent.

The GATS mechanisms are worth dwelling on because of their reworking of time-future orientation. The first is progressive liberalization. In other words, becoming a member of the WTO (of which there are now 162 countries) means a commitment by that country to negotiate ‘freer trade’ policies into the future. Second, negotiations around agreed sectors follow a ‘positive list’ schedule. In other words, a member state lists those service sectors and modes that it is prepared to negotiate over and commit. The rest is thus excluded from the agreement. Switzerland, for example, only committed its private universities in its GATS agreement. Third, once the agreement is in place, the rights of the investor take precedence. Any government who decided to limit or curtail investment, or indeed nationalize the sector (perhaps as a result of a shift in political ideology), much pay the investor future lost income. This asymmetrical relationship between an investor and the wider society over education places limits on that society’s capacity to return the service to the public realm, and is an example of what Beckert (2016) refers to as the relationship between instruments and distributional struggles.

3.3. Frictions and failures

Despite efforts to lock in a particular future that reflected the interests of investors in education services, the GATS negotiations proved to be hugely controversial and in the end largely failed. Each meeting was marked by protests; the iconic Battle in Seattle in 1999 was hugely resonant. Between meetings campaigners organised, and promoted education as a human right and not a commodity. In short, they

enrolled a competing narrative to promote a different imaginary around the future. Campaigners pointed particularly to the right to education as recognised in international instruments – most prominently the International Declaration of Human Rights launched in 1948 after World War II, and the Convention of the Human Rights of the Child launched in 1959.

The GATS negotiations, and their relationship to education as a human right had also become a concern of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. In a specially commissioned report on GATS, the Special Rapporteur for Education stated that the “rapid development of international trade law necessitated a decisive reaffirmation of education as a human right” (Tomasevski, 2001: 5). This led the Rapporteur to observe;

...the liberalization of trade in services, without adequate government regulation and proper assessment of its affects, can have undesirable effects. Different service sectors require different policies and time frames for liberalization and some areas are better left under governmental authority (p. 20)...While the WTO Agreements provide a legal framework for the economic aspects of the liberalisation of trade, they focus on commercial objectives. The norms and standards of human rights provide the means of providing a legal framework for the social dimensions of human rights...A human rights approach to trade liberalisation emphasizes the role of the State, not only as negotiator of trade rules and setter of trade policy, but also as duty bearer for human rights (Tomasevski, 2001: 10).

In her report the Commissioner points to the different ways in which GATS might exaggerate social inequalities in education. For instance, in Mode 1 (cross border supply) those advantaged by virtual suppliers are those who have the necessary infrastructure, such as the internet, to access education. Mode 2 (consumption abroad) could lead to the introduction of a dual market of fees, and exaggerate inequalities if the governments do not have a way of ensuring cross subsidization. Under Mode 3 (commercial presence), if user fees were introduced, then services were likely to become more expensive, and it was not always easy to regulate foreign suppliers. Finally, Mode 4 (presence of natural persons), while it but can enable knowledge transfer and remittances to be returned to the sending country, could also lead to brain drain. Furthermore, locking countries into their schedule of commitments and penalising them for seeking reversals highlights the tension between commercial interests and human interests. In making this point the High Commissioner observed:

From a commercial perspective, holding countries to their commitments to liberalise is important to ensure transparency and predictability in international trade and the payment of compensation is a legitimate commercial response to the settlement of disputes. From a human rights perspective, however, the focus is less on predictability and more on the need for flexibility to modify or withdraw commitments to liberalise services where experience demonstrates that a commitment constrains or limits the enjoyment of human rights. The need for flexibility is particularly relevant for developing countries given that they are in a dynamic process of building infrastructures. ...Moreover, while compensation to affected parties might be appropriate in some cases upon withdrawal of commitments, a human rights approach would question whether states should be sanctioned for taking action to protect human rights (2001: 28).

Other influential commentators, including academic activist Jane Kelsey, argued that GATS would have important consequences for the marginalised and poorer sectors of societies, including indigenous peoples, women and girls as GATS rules did not provide for any recognition of indigenous rights or

cultural identity (Kelsey, 2008). And as a senior official of the global education union also pointed out, the irony, it seems, is that “ if a child does not get the education he/she is entitled to according to the Convention of the Human Rights of the Child (para 28 and 29) there is no way to force that government to meet its commitments. However, if a company trading in education services loses its right to trade in a particular country, that country where the company is based will have, according to the WTO rules, the right to compensation. Rules concerning trade seem to be much stronger in international law than rules concerning human rights” (Fredrikssen, 2003: 8).

These concerns, along with growing disquiet amongst many developing countries as to what free trade really meant for them resulted in ongoing negotiations grinding to a halt by around 2005. An alternative development imaginary about education had won the day, or so it seemed.

3.4. Relaunching negotiations – refixing the future

By 2011 a new wave of trade in services negotiations had begun in earnest, largely stimulated by the global financial crisis in 2008, a decline in productivity and growing unemployment. These negotiations included the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) involving 12 countries in the Pacific Region dominated by the United States; the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and Europe; the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) involving Europe and the United States; and the Trade in Services Agreement (TISA) largely between OECD countries. All negotiations have been held in secret, they all involve frameworks and instruments that aim to lock in the interests of investors into the future, and include education as an important services sector. My intention is not to dwell on the different agreements, their membership and status as I have done that elsewhere (see Robertson and Komljenovic, 2017). Rather, I want to look at the ways in which a new set of actors, institutions, discourses, and devices are seeking to reimagine and strategize their interests in this future, how this future is represented, and mechanisms to ‘lock-in’ this version of the future of education. ‘Impact Assessments’ are particularly interesting here for the role that they play and how the future is presented. Their purpose is to convince sceptics and enrol promoters as to the imagined longer-term outcomes of these deals. The Impact Assessment for TTIP was conducted by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS); a pro-business think-tank located in Brussels (see Pelkmans et al., 2014). Their impact Assessment was used by the European Commission to project the annual gains to be had from the TTIP; of €119b for the EU and €95b for the USA suggesting that European countries would be the main beneficiaries.

But these particular Impact Assessments make assumptions about capitalist markets and futures. De Ville and Siles-Brügge (2015) show that the TTIP Impact Assessment depends on Computational General Equilibrium Modelling (CGEM). CGEM embraces neoclassical economic assumptions: there is no excess demand, all markets clear under conditions of perfect competition, and that we can model market processes through numerical data and results. Yet they argue CGE models have been subject to critique, even within economics, in that there are information asymmetries, individuals are often driven by more complex sets of values, and labour and product markets rarely clear at the same time. The CGEM is used to model three kinds of policy options; from a baseline option to a comprehensive and ambitious one, of removing all duties, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers (NTBs) on goods and services, and on government procurement. For the base-line option, the gains are negligible. The gains on the more comprehensive scenario, the one used by the Commission to make the economic case for TTIP, are

presented as more substantial. And it is this latter future that is used by the Commission in its public defence of TTIP.

However as De Ville and Siles-Brügge (2015) argue, the Impact Assessment acts rather like a black box; it not only skews the terms of the economic and political debate in directions that suit the Commission's agenda, but it also has a particular narrative that it offers of the future. This future does not include the costs that result from macro-economic adjustments – such as alignment to new standards, the displacement and retraining of workers, potential welfare losses in the society, and the threat to public policy goals (De Ville and Siles-Brügge, 2015: 669).

In contesting this Impact Assessment narrative, De Ville and Siles-Brügge (2015) present the case of the North American Free Trade Agreement which also used the CGE. They compare the ex-post evidence with the ex-ante claims which show that both Mexico and Canada fared significantly worse than predicted in terms of economic gains (especially around costs over labour displacements). In relation to TTIP, they argue that a combination of the assumptions built into the CGE, the regulatory mechanism to be used, and the capacity to liberalise across the board, will end up exaggerating the potential economic benefits of TTIP whilst under-playing other likely outcomes – such as a race-to-the-bottom in social, educational and environmental standards.

A second temporal device used in all of these trade negotiations is the use of 'the ratchet effect'. This means any new activity in the sector into the future – which by definition cannot be known - will be subject to the principles of the market and the interests of the investors, as enshrined in the trade agreement. The ratchet process aims to draw more and more of the society into functioning like a capitalist market.

Linked to this is a third device that now works the opposite way to the GATS list; as a negative and not positive list. A negative list means identifying those activities/modalities that are to be excluded so *that what is not on the list is included*. Backed by the Investor State Dispute Mechanism, which investors can and do use used to make claims against the state in terms of future lost earnings, this mechanism tends to produce conservative and self-policing behaviour. In a paradoxical way the expectation is that the negotiators have a god-optic; an all seeing and knowing eye that can see and calculate the present and the future sufficiently to know what to anticipate. This compounds the fictional expectation in new ways. This is a very particular kind of future that is being fixed, which is not without its challenges, contestation and contradictions particularly when it comes to education, knowledge and the future.

4. Knowledge, Power and Contradictions

I have been arguing that making education into a services sector producing economic value, and into a competitive global market regulated through global trade rules, takes a considerable amount of discursive, institutional, regulatory and performative work to reorient cognitive frames toward a future that has a very different kind of temporality. And what is particularly interesting about the case of trade in education services, is that as a sector, it has been difficult to fix firmly in trade deals in ways in which an investors' version is uncontested.

But it is clear that higher education, with its distinctive temporal logics and horizons more generally, and cognitive orientations in particular, is more akin to a pre-capitalist albeit modern, institution. This temporal

reordering and recalibrating is far from complete, though over time there are evident shifts at the macro-structural level that have altered the rhythm of the academy and its gradual realigning with the dynamics of education capitalism: the rhythms of work within the organisation are changed; the need to compete and not cooperate become priorities; pressures to innovate so as to generate new efficiencies, new products and new services; and investing sufficiently to stay on top through charting new courses of action using a myriad of tools – from plans to roadmaps to global positioning systems. Managing perceived risks has become big business, and big business in the education sector too, as managers try to anticipate the future and work backwards.

But as I have argued, for the moment there continue to be alternative narratives at work around what kind of education future, and whether or not education is a human right, public good or public service – or a tradeable commodity. These competing narratives have resulted in the more recent negotiations being held in secret, on the one hand, or assessments of the impact on future communities becoming less visible because of the assumptions that are made about markets, the rationality of actors and the future, on the other. These competing accounts of the outcomes of previous trade deals in turn raise credibility issues in the current trade round, and how credibility itself is managed politically so as to deliver the outcomes that interested actors, governments and investors want – a future where they can predict the risks and calculate and their returns. Various communication outlets, from the media, to think-tanks and fora, work together to coordinate particular worldviews, and to shape the expectations that follow. In the same way, a proliferation of sites, from social media to dedicated websites, wikileaks, and the outputs of investigative journalists, offer an alternative view aimed at shaping an alternative constituency and their beliefs.

Destabilising these possible futures are the huge contradictions that now emerge, particularly for higher education institutions, and the risks to knowledge production from sector as it gets more tightly wound into the circuit of capital, its temporalities, the dynamics of capitalism, and tendencies toward crisis. The efforts to lock in education as a sector and the conditions under which knowledge is produced in ways that suit the investors, paradoxically also encloses knowledge production in such a way that it is no longer dynamic, innovative and open to challenge.

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