Higher Education's Care/Control of Refugee and Displaced Students

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Abstract: There is growing interest in higher education's intersections
with displacement, a term used here to encompass the movement of
refugees, asylum seekers, and those from otherwise forced or
precarious international migration backgrounds. In particular, higher
education institutions' infrastructure and student support services are
sometimes leveraged in response to displacement crises. Here, we
propose a conceptual distinction between higher education's *reception*
and *recruitment* of displaced students, which share similar
characteristics yet function in structurally different ways. We then
consider how the modern/colonial global imaginary informs higher
education's relationship to bordering regimes and the framing of
displaced students. We suggest that in addition to being problematically
positioned as 'charity' - and, to a lesser extent, 'cash,' 'competition,'
and 'labor' - some displaced students are also produced as 'threats' by
bordering regimes. This highlights the importance of recognizing the
'care/control nexus' – that is, how care simultaneously operates as a
form of control in the context of humanitarianism. We suggest the
concept of 'implicated subjects' can help those embedded in higher
education institutions move beyond overly simplistic
victim/perpetrator/bystander categorizations in relation to supporting
displaced students. We also offer one social cartography and two sets
of hyper-self-reflexive questions as pedagogical tools to examine the
imprint of a colonial system on both our higher education institutions

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and those of us who work within them. We suggest adopting an ongoing practice of hyper-self-reflexivity in order to respond differently to the impacts of current displacement crises and better prepare us for those to come.

Keywords: Forced migration, higher education, refugees, social cartography, student affairs

Introduction

Across much of the Global North, two trends have emerged: (1) growth in both international student and first-generation immigrant participation in higher education (HE) (OECD, 2022), and (2) neoliberal approaches to immigrant 'integration' (Dauvergne, 2016; Gurer, 2019). As a result, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly *de facto* immigration actors (Brunner et al., 2025) embedded within state bordering (Brunner, 2023; Jenkins, 2014; Ratini, 2019) and assimilation (Flynn & Bauder, 2014; Shokirova et al., 2022; Yao, 2015) regimes. To varying degrees, many governments now rely on HEIs to support newcomers as they navigate housing, job markets, health care, immigration, and other complex systems (Brunner et al., 2024). However, HEIs generally lack mandates, oversight, or direct funding for these new roles, resulting in inconsistent approaches.

It is within this context that HEIs more specifically support displaced students, an imperfect term (Brunner et al., 2023; Hamlin, 2021; Vigil & Abidi, 2019) used here to describe students who are refugees, asylum seekers, or from otherwise forced or precarious international migration backgrounds. There is growing interest in the intersection of HE and displacement, especially how HEIs' existing infrastructure and student support services can be leveraged in response to displacement crises (Azari & Clark-Kazak, 2022; Unangst, 2022; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023). This includes the role campuses can play in providing access to education, housing, and other supports (Every Campus a Refuge, n.d.) as well as the more direct role HE can play as a pathway to protection itself (Berg et al., 2023; Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, n.d.; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018). As a result, HE-based supports for displaced students are receiving increased attention (Baker & Naidoo, 2023; Student et al., 2017).

We welcome this focus on improving supports for displaced students. This is not to say they are a homogeneous group with uniform needs; on the contrary, they come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, hold various immigration statuses, and may or may not consider themselves 'vulnerable,' 'at-risk,' or in need of specialized support (Brunner et al., 2023). However, more tailored, nuanced approaches – such as a contextualized, trauma and violence-informed ethics of care – can be relevant for many (Baker & Naidoo, 2023; Doughty, 2020; Shalka, 2024; Suarez, 2016).

At the same time, some supports designed for displaced students function as overly simplistic solutions to deeper issues. This risks conflating education with a paternalistic form of care that can unintentionally harm systematically marginalized students.[5] Trauma and violence can occur not just in a displaced person's country of origin and/or transit, but also in a 'safe' country as a result of the resettlement process itself (Miller & Rasco, 2004). In this way, HE itself can also be a source of (re)traumatization and violence in which *care* can simultaneously function as a form

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[5] See Ahenakew (n.d.) for a parallel discussion of how education can also be conflated with a "colonial form of care" that protects systemically privileged students from being made aware of their complicity (para. 1).

of *control*. This is not necessarily caused by any one individual or program, but rather through the (re)production of systemic harms associated with bordering, assimilation, and humanitarianism. Such harms are difficult to overcome, and, paradoxically, can even be reproduced through interventions aiming to ameliorate them (Viczko & Matsumoto, 2022).

Showing up differently

In order to show up differently for displaced students, those of us working in HE need to first identify the ways we are implicated in wider systems that (re)produce trauma, exclusion, and violence. Otherwise, we are unlikely to interrupt their harms. Our paper thus invites fellow faculty, administrators, student affairs professionals, and other educators to join us in stepping back and considering the ways an enduring global colonial system shapes not only our work with displaced students but, more broadly, our institutions' responses to displacement crises. In doing so, we ask: (1) how each of us are (albeit unevenly) complicit, and implicated in, coloniality in our responses to displacement, and (2) how this acknowledgement might translate into practice.

We first position displaced students within the context of HE and propose a conceptual distinction between the *reception* and *recruitment* roles of HEIs. We then discuss the ways in which the modern/colonial global imaginary historically produced, and continues to entrench, a Western HE which frames displaced students in particular ways. We suggest that in addition to being problematically positioned as 'charity,' 'cash,' 'competition' (Stein & Andreotti, 2016), and 'labor' (Coustere et al., 2024), some displaced students are also produced as 'threats' by bordering regimes. In response, we discuss the role of HEIs in perpetuating these tropes, particularly through what is known as the 'care/control nexus' (Agier, 2008/2011). We conclude by offering one social cartography and two sets of hyper-self-reflexive questions (Kapoor, 2004) as pedagogical tools to help us examine the imprint of a colonial system and its production of deeply-formed assumptions of superiority, benevolence, and innocence which can influence our actions, often in unconscious and unintentional ways. We suggest adopting an ongoing practice of hyper-self-reflexivity to help us respond differently to the impacts of current displacement crises and better prepare us for those to come.

Who is this paper for?

Before proceeding, we offer one caveat. Global displacement is expected to grow as the climate emergency worsens, and the majority of displaced people will likely continue to seek refuge in other Global South countries (UNHCR, 2024a). However, our paper's intervention is primarily directed at those who, like ourselves, work in the Global North and do not personally come from a forced displacement background (even though our individual encounters with migration and border regimes vary). We believe we are not the right people to suggest what is relevant and responsible for colleagues working in the Global South, nor for colleagues from displaced backgrounds working in the Global North. Because different contexts have different histories and relational dynamics, we argue that interventions need to be tailored, rather than assumed to be universally applicable across all contexts.

At the same time, the issues discussed in this paper are not limited to the Global North. Many universities located in Global South contexts have adopted or inherited hierarchies and divisions common in the Global North (Grosfoguel, 2013; Hwami et al., 2024). More generally, there are uneven internal power dynamics within the Global South. Among the many critiques of the Global North/Global South binary, one is its over-simplicity (Haug et al., 2021); we can, for

example, differentiate between low-intensity and high-intensity struggles occurring within both the North and South (de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020). With this in mind, scholars and practitioners located in the Global South might derive insights from this paper; however, the implications of these insights would still need to be translated and adapted in contextually relevant ways.

Context: Displaced students in a higher education context

Despite the assertion that access to HE is a protected human right and "should be guaranteed regardless of location or status" (UNESCO, 2023, p. 7), displaced students' participation in HE is characterized by numerous barriers, including legal restrictions, financial constraints, documentation challenges, and the non-recognition of prior qualifications. Globally, 7% of refugees have access to HE, compared to 42% of non-refugees (UNHCR, n.d.). The vast majority of displaced students are in low or middle-income countries neighboring sites of conflict, placing additional demands on HE systems already stretched thin (UNESCO, 2023). The proportion reaching 'safe' third countries, whether to make asylum claims (if they are eligible) or through resettlement, is very small. Displaced students generally enter HE systems through one of two paths: *reception* or *recruitment*.

Receiving displaced students

Displaced students have long sought entry points to HE through both distance and in-person education. This can occur from many different locations, including a transit country or third country. The physical mobility of displaced students to a third country within the Global North is one well-known entry point, even though it is relatively uncommon. For example, a spike in the number of displaced people entering Europe in 2015, and again in 2022, increased public awareness of displaced people's desire to participate in HE (Berg et al., 2021; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2022; Council of the EU and the European Council, 2024). When displaced students enter HE independently – that is, their enrolment in HE is not directly connected to a resettlement pathway, nor is it their primary mechanism for mobility – we describe this as HE's *reception* of displaced students.

Recruiting displaced students

A less common way for displaced students to enter HE is through an explicit, predetermined resettlement pathway to a third country in direct coordination with a HEI. An estimated 2.9 million people will seek resettlement in 2025 – more than double compared to 2021 (UNHCR, 2024b). In response to the growing number of such people requiring international protection yet lacking a durable solution, the 2018 UNHCR *Global Compact on Refugees* called on states to supplement the small number of existing third country resettlement allocations with new admission pathways. This call stressed the need to ensure such complementary pathways "are made available on a more systematic, organized, sustainable and gender-responsive basis…and that the number of countries offering these opportunities is expanded overall" (2018, p. 37).

One pathway highlighted was 'complementary education pathways,' or "educational opportunities for refugees…through grant of scholarships and student visas, including through partnerships between governments and academic institutions" (p. 38). Post-secondary complementary education pathways are historically small in scale, such as the World University Service of Canada Student Refugee Program launched in 1978. In recent years, complementary

education pathways have operated in a range of countries including Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, and the United States (Evans et al., 2022). We describe this relationship between HE and displacement – in which HE enrolment is itself a mechanism for a third country resettlement – as HE's *recruitment* of displaced students.

The complexities of reception and recruitment

We suggest a distinction between (1) *reception*, which describes HE's engagement with displaced students who enter HE systems more or less independently, and (2) *recruitment*, which describes HE's engagement with displaced students who enter HE systems through coordinated resettlement pathways. We make this distinction because HE's reception and recruitment of displaced students are structurally different. They also tend to occur in different contexts and evoke different discourses.

Many HE systems are engaged in reception and recruitment to different degrees, and both are rife with complexities which can be obvious or subtle. For example, initiatives can be instrumentalized for reputational gain; savioristic attitudes can belittle students and diminish their agency; and 'one-size-fits-all' approaches can ignore individual students' situations and positionalities. These problematic approaches can be difficult to recognize and unlearn. While a growing body of literature offers strategies to improve the logistics of displaced student supports (Berg et al., 2021; Berg et al., 2023; Institute of International Education, 2016), there is limited discussion about the logics underpinning them. It is here that this paper seeks to contribute.

Theoretical framework: Higher education and the modern/colonial global imaginary

To problematize HE's engagements with, and representations of, displaced students, we turn to the modern/colonial global imaginary as a theoretical framework, which is rooted in the concept of social imaginaries. Taylor (2004) defined a social imaginary as a "common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy," (p. 23), constituting a taken-for-granted reality. Because a social imaginary is simultaneously descriptive and normative, its power lies in both its (1) normalization of social hierarchies and understandings, and (2) delegitimization or erasure of alternative possibilities (Stein et al., 2019; Taylor, 2002).

Andreotti (2015), Stein et al. (2016), Stein and Andreotti (2016, 2017), and Stein et al. (2019) developed the concept of a dominant modern/colonial global imaginary based in de-/post-colonial theories and critiques (Quijano, 1999/2007; Spivak, 2004). They locate the origins of this modern/colonial global imaginary in the 15th century, when "Europe first envisaged and asserted a totalizing - i.e., global - vision for the planet, through a single narrative of space and time in which Europe stood as the geographic center, and as the leader of linear, universal human progress" (Stein et al., 2016, p. 3). While not the first with such aspirations, Stein et al. (2016) argued that European empires were unique in their scope and scale; and while the modern/colonial global imaginary's content has shifted over time, its frame has endured, propelled by the West's accumulation of both ideological and material power.

HEIs historically functioned as the infrastructure of empire. In particular, colonial intellectuals have long articulated and "popularised discourses that bolstered support for colonial endeavours and provided ethical and intellectual grounds for the dispossession, oppression and domination of colonised subjects" (Bhambra et al., 2018, p. 5). Through Western HE specifically, colonial knowledge has been, and continues to be, created, institutionalized, and normalized. In

other words, HE remains a key site in which the modern/colonial imaginary sustains, and further entrenches, coloniality. It is within this ongoing frame that Western HE has been positioned as universally superior, tied up in the modern/colonial global imaginary's promises of "security, material prosperity, possessive individualism, linear progress, democracy, meritocracy, and universal knowledge" (Stein et al., 2016, p. 3).

Importantly, as an institutional nexus of colonial, legal, social, and political power, HE is not a bounded entity but rather a porous space (Snaza & Singh, 2021). Cast within a wider colonial ecology, HE is both contaminated by, and reproduces, "the civilizing engineering of Whiteness/Westerness" (Lee, 2014, p. 80). Such engineering is rooted in divisions of humanity and, more specifically, "asymmetries, in terms of which forms of life and liveliness are biopolitically invested for flourishing (while others are defunded, marginalized, delegitimized, uninvited, eliminated, etc.)" (Snaza & Singh, 2021, p. 1-2). HE's complex entanglement with bordering regimes reflects these interactions, including its recruitment and reception of displaced students.

The framing of displaced students in the modern/colonial global imaginary

Displaced students are not necessarily international students. However, the rationales offered by HEIs for the reception and recruitment of displaced students bear some similarities to those of international students. Here, the work of Stein and Andreotti (2016) and Coustere et al. (2024), both of which examine the link between international student recruitment and their experiences with racism, is useful. Stein and Andreotti argued that, over time, international students in the Global North have been framed by three dominant, problematic tropes within the modern/colonial global imaginary: as (1) 'cash,' or "sources of income and intellectual capital that support the continued prosperity of the Western university and nation-state," (2) 'competition,' or inferior competitors in the social mobility 'game,' and (3) 'charity,' or recipients of the West's knowledge and development (2016, p. 226). While all three continue to circulate, the 'cash' framing currently predominates. In many contexts, these frames are so hegemonic they have become 'common sense' in the structuring of HE. Coustere et al. (2024) later stressed that 'labor' should be added as a fourth problematic trope to highlight the Global North's dependence on international students as workers operating within stipulated limitations (e.g., hours of work, location of work, etc.).

In the case of displaced students specifically, the 'charity' trope is most relevant, particularly in HE's *recruitment* of displaced students. This trope is linked to Western humanitarianism's origins in imperialism (Barnett, 2011) and the ways in which notions of charity, compassion, and care were intertwined with faith-based movements which "rode on the back of the colonial political projects" (Hammond, 2017, p. 540). Many of the first modern humanitarians were missionaries who spread colonialism under the auspices of salvation. For example, Belgian King Leopold II invited Christian missionaries to civilize the local population in Congo, strengthening control over the local population (de Laat, n.d.). British Missionaries, described by Cox (2007) as an enterprise, had missions across Southeast Asia and Africa, while French missionaries in Algeria aimed to spread domination globally (Okkenhaug & Sanchez-Summerer, 2020). Later, with the outbreak of WWII, humanitarianism expanded to support displaced populations impacted by the war. Although most humanitarian organizations claimed at the time to be non-political, humanitarian assistance became a tool to promote the interests of superpowers through soft power (Hammond, 2017).

Today, in the age of liberal humanitarianism (Barnett, 2011), these logics are still present. While the discourse has shifted structurally, the architecture of the post-WWII discursive formation remains (Escobar, 2011). The logic of development framing displaced students as 'charity' ranges from explicit (e.g., in institutions' strategic plans, advertising campaigns and scholarship/recruitment projects) to implicit (e.g., in day-to-day interactions within HEIs). Yet whether its logics are clearly visible or veiled and dispersed, the 'charity' trope celebrates the generosity, superiority, and innocence of Western HE. Through this trope, the West's Others are positioned "as objects of benevolence" to ultimately benefit the West (Stein & Andreotti, 2016, p. 234).

To a lesser extent, displaced students are also framed by the other three tropes ('cash,' 'competition,' and 'labor'). For example, those who do not pay high differential student tuition are still sometimes framed as 'cash' based on their value to HEIs and national international education strategies as part of source-country diversification projects. Displaced students awarded scholarships are also sometimes framed as 'competition' for their receipt of limited resources, in contrast with more 'deserving' domestic candidates. The 'labor' trope applies to displaced students as well; for example, the UNHCR's argument for complementary pathways often stresses the value of displaced people's potential future contributions to third country labor markets.

However, given their unique position in relation to bordering regimes and particular forms of exclusion, displaced students are also framed in additional ways not discussed by Stein and Andreotti (2016) or Coustere et al. (2024). We suggest that, while overlapping with the 'cash, competition, charity, or labor' framing, displaced students – particularly those *received* by HE – are *also* framed by an interrelated racist and colonial trope we name as 'threat.' In the next section, we provide an overview of bordering regimes from a conceptual perspective and explain how this positions some displaced students as 'threat.'

Bordering regimes and the production of displaced students as threat

Bordering regimes name a set of practices, technologies and meaning-making systems that work to structure the (im)mobility of people (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). Colonial and imperial histories and violences, both covert and overt, are inherent in these practices, technologies, and meaning-making systems (Gamal & Swanson, 2018). As globalization "harbors fundamental tensions between opening and barricading" (Brown, 2010, p. 7), these tensions materialize "as increasingly liberalized borders, on the one hand, and the development of unprecedented funds, energies, and technologies to border fortification, on the other" (p. 7). In other words, borders are relatively open to some mobilities – e.g., the movement of economic capital – and closed to others, including the movement of marginalized people.

While globalization produces specific forms of contemporary closure, today's bordering regimes are in fact part of a historical trajectory in which the state has long sought to curtail the movements of certain populations (Mayblin & Turner, 2021). Bordering regimes use a range of methods and techniques which rely on judicial-political orders for their legitimacy, such as restriction or denial of access to welfare and basic services. These not only contain and immobilize certain populations, but also mobilize everyday racism to justify excluding and containing these populations. A range of restrictive immigration policies and infrastructures have been, and continue to be, used to selectively regulate and constrain people, including visa policies, carrier sanctions, surveillance, safe country lists, and camps (Cowen, 2017).

Importantly, borders are not just fixed structures. They are also practices which *produce* conceptualizations such as 'migrant,' 'refugee,' and 'illegal,' not as pre-existing categories but

those which name particular relations of difference which are dictated by the state (Danewid, 2023, p. 82). In other words, borders are more than physical markers at the exteriority of a territory. They are also "meaning-making and meaning-carrying formations" (Brah, 2022, p. 51) because they enact histories of colonial control of movement, practices of stigmatization, and discrimination through modes of selection, sorting, and exclusion. The security practices at the border flatten the complex drivers and experience of people's movement (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017) by using policy categories like 'asylum seeker' to establish the legitimacy of claims to international protection, as well as to disqualify and convert the 'unwanted migrant' into the category of 'illegal and deportable migrant' through what De Genova (2013) refers to as the border spectacle.

Although the 'categorical fetishism' (Apostolova, 2015) used in sorting the mobility of others constructs these categories as pre-existing and unmediated by political and popular discourses, the Global North actively "*produces* refugees, rather than merely receiving them, through a differential, racialised and classed distribution of the freedom of movement" (Picozza, 2021, p. xxiii, emphasis in original). At the same time, asylum policies and practices produce the West and Westernness, both as an identity and "an imagined material and legal space" (Picozza, 2021, p. xxiii) of "innocent hospitality" (Picozza, 2021, p. 13), where 'newcomers' are afforded the opportunity to 'integrate.'

As meaning-carrying systems, borders also produce a set of relations. By criminalizing certain types of mobility, borders create stratified classes of people, such as 'the undocumented,' with differential access to benefits, protections, and rights (Danewid, 2023). Consequently, the racialized figures of the 'illegal' or 'undesirable' are "stigmatized with allegations of opportunism, duplicity and undeservingness" (De Genova, 2013, p. 1181). In turn, this stigmatization functions as a form of power. On one hand, it is experienced intimately through practices of Othering, degradation, humiliation, and microaggressions such as looks, comments, and slights – yet it is also reproduced through bordering regimes embedded in wider structures of "expropriation, domination, discipline and social control" (Tyler, 2020, p. 17). To function, stigmatization draws on practices of representation which dehumanize displaced people (Tyler, 2020, p. 124). As Mayblin and Turner (2021) argue, coloniality/modernity is a cultural, political, and economic project that sustains itself through constantly reinforcing a hierarchical ordering both overtly and covertly. The tropes of de-human, inhuman, and less-than-human are thus invoked to justify "practices of segregation, incarceration, expulsion and torture" meted out to "constitutive outsiders" (Tyler, 2020, p. 125) as part of the trajectory of coloniality/modernity.

Such hierarchical ordering needs to be understood within the context of the perpetual struggle over the definition of humanness, as well as who gets to live and who dies (Bhattacharyya, 2024; Snaza & Singh, 2021). The migrant deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, protracted immobilization of refugees in camps, outsourcing of border controls to other territories, reduction or elimination of safe migration routes, funneling of migration routes into the deserts of the US south, as well as the criminalization of solidarity can all be understood as "governing migration through death" (Squire, 2017, p. 514; Mbembe, 2003). As Williams (2015) notes, through these practices, death and the potential of death gets mobilized in an attempt to shape potential migrants' actions and govern mobility.

Taken together, these bordering practices and their inherent violence (immediate or otherwise) lock migrants, including displaced students, into an affective economy (Ahmed, 2004a) that generates and distributes differences along a civilizational grid. Affects here are performative in that they are generative of their object, e.g., 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker.' Affects also enable a reopening of "past histories of naming" (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 131) and associations, thus invoking histories of colonialism, hierarchizing, and the violent grammar and practices of racism.

This, then, is how many displaced students enter the space of Western HE: containing an irredeemable sense of 'threat' through the logics of bordering regimes, which can evoke powerful emotions, both conscious and unconscious, among those who encounter them. This is particularly the case among those *received* by HE in contexts where displacement is seen as suspicious. The 'threat' is informed by a circulating, disembodied rejection which works "*to differentiate some others from other others, a differentiation that is never 'over,' as it awaits for others who have not yet arrived*" (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 123, emphasis in original). In the case of displacement, anyone can be seen as "bogus, such that their 'endless' arrival is anticipated as the scene of 'our injury'" (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 123).

This injury is closely associated with fear, as displaced students can also embody threats of lost jobs, money, and land (Ahmed, 2004b). In other words, through their displacement, they can provoke anxieties about potential losses of perceived entitlements granted by the modern/colonial imaginary, as well as insecurities about the very fiction of the logics underpinning the modern/colonial imaginary itself. These anxieties and insecurities can emerge even among those who are tasked with, and genuinely committed to, providing support to displaced students.

The limits of HE's reception and recruitment of displaced students

Thus far, we have argued that displaced students are framed by the modern/colonial imaginary in several problematic ways. On one hand, they are positioned similarly to international students – most often as 'charity,' but to a lesser extent 'cash,' 'competition' (Stein & Andreotti, 2016), and 'labor' (Coustere et al., 2024). Displaced students *recruited* by HE are especially likely to be framed as 'charity.' On the other hand, displaced students' unique relationship to bordering regimes can also position them as a particular kind of 'threat,' especially those *received* by HE. Importantly, these frames are interrelated, often overlap, and can operate contradictorily.

Surfacing these tropes highlights the logics unintentionally underpinning many HE initiatives and practices designed to support displaced students. This is particularly true for those of us primarily engaged in low-intensity struggles – that is, we who are relatively privileged and largely the benefactors of the harms produced by the modern/colonial global imaginary (de Oliveira, 2021). Because displaced students are more likely to be engaged in higher-intensity struggles than those designing and delivering services for them, this power difference has particular implications for practice.

The care/control nexus

The 'charity' and 'threat' frames are linked to what is known as the care/control nexus (Agier, 2008/2011). In an analysis of what he described as 'humanitarian government,' Agier wrote that, in the context of refugee camps, "humanitarian intervention borders on policing," noting that "behind the wonderful screen of the interventions of rescue, protection, reconstruction and 'peace building'" was a "political strategy and control technique" (2008/2011, p. 4) managing the movement of people. Indeed, to Agier, humanitarian action is deeply ambiguous, as care cannot exist without control. That is, the power differentials inherent to humanitarianism produce an inextricable relationship between care and control, in which care is always-also a form of control.

HEIs are not refugee camps, but they *are* powerful governing institutions which mediate power differentials with students. In their reception and recruitment of displaced students, they become intertwined with the governance of displacement through the care/control nexus. Similar to humanitarianism, control is often intertwined with 'caring' and 'helpful' intentions which can

conceal the logics of the modern/colonial imaginary. Scholarship stipulations and conditions, mandatory documentation and personal data submission requirements, and even the selection of housing on behalf of a student are acts of control *even as they may also be* acts of care.

Many of us in HE would prefer to shy away from this ambiguous aspect of our work, preferring to see it *only as care*. However, recognizing the inherent dimension of control may help us 'care better' in that we may more carefully distinguish between which elements of control are necessary and which are merely convenient for our institutions or jobs. It may also encourage us to recognize, sit with, and process the responsibilities that come with our implications in broader systems which may simultaneously do harm even as they 'help.'

Implicated subjects

The 'charity' and 'threat' frames are also linked to the ways in which we frequently rely on familiar tropes such as 'victim,' 'perpetrator,' and 'bystander' when faced with inequalities rooted in complex historical violences (Rothberg, 2019). For example, recognizing one's role in the care/control nexus can be uncomfortable and prompt moves towards innocence. However, those of us supporting displaced students may alternatively see ourselves as 'implicated subjects,' which:

> is to occupy a particular type of subject position in a history of injustice or structure of inequality—a history or structure one may enter, like an immigrant, long after the injustice at issue has been initiated or, like a beneficiary of global capitalism, far from its epicenter of exploitation. (Rothberg, 2019, p. 48)

This concept offers the analytical potential to "bridge the gap between 'individualising responsibility' and 'thinking institutionally'" by helping us understand how individual, micro-level actions are part of wider unjust structures that perpetuate harm (Bryan, 2021, p. 337; Gamal et al., 2024). By moving away from dualist approaches to undoing harmful effects that privilege either personal actions or macro-level practices, the figure of the implicated subject instead foregrounds an understanding of the multiple ways in which individual actions both sustain, and are entangled with, structural conditions. This involves a process of unlearning and disinvesting "from the inherited material, intellectual, and affective economies that frame our shared meanings and collective desires" while simultaneously "learn[ing] to invest in other forms of feeling, knowing, being, wanting and relating" (Stein, 2019, p, 679). It also throws into relief the various operations of colonial scripts that authorize 'care professionals,' including those working in HE, to innocently perform the roles of simple do-gooders wishing to help (Gebhard et al., 2022), thus reproducing the narratives of benevolence and invisibilizing the ways we reproduce the modern/colonial imaginary.

It is this day-to-day work we wish to both problematize (by troubling 'good intentions') and support (by suggesting 'better ways onward'). We have witnessed how, in our practice and research, internalized dominance (Tappan, 2006) can impact programs and ways of working not only with displaced students, but humanitarianism and even student affairs more broadly. We suggest that adopting an ongoing practice of hyper-self-reflexivity (Kapoor, 2004) can help us respond in more ethical, accountable, and critically engaged ways. To do so is not easy, as it requires us to face complex and often uncomfortable concerns without discouraging, alienating, or frustrating existing efforts. However, engaging with social cartographies and other pedagogical tools offer possible paths forward.

Social cartography and hyper-self-reflexivity tools

In this section, we delve into specific complexities that can emerge when serving displaced students in HE and invite readers to sit with them. We first do this by using social cartography, or 'mapping ways of seeing' (Paulston, 1996). Social cartography originated in the 1990s within the field of comparative education (Paulston & Liebman, 1996). Paulston (1999) challenged his colleagues to move beyond either/or ways of thinking and into a more critically reflexive space through a form of discourse mapping. For Paulston (1999), social cartography functioned as a tool to visualize complex knowledges.

Social cartography identifies intertextual fields through maps in an attempt not to provide "a fixed, totalized, or idealized representation of truth" (Andreotti et al., 2016, p. 85), but rather "a cognitive art" (Paulston & Liebman, 1994, p. 223). These maps act as metaphorical devices (Rust, 1996) which "allow for multiple ways of seeing to be simultaneously acknowledged, affirmed and addressed in their inevitable particularity and partiality, without imposing demands for immediate resolution or consensus" (Andreotti et al., 2016, p. 86-87). Through this process, Paulston (1996) believed that social cartography demystified ideas, relations, and assumptions by bringing to light what is otherwise hidden and rendering explicit what is often taken as implicit. Social cartography's ability to complicate analysis, interrupt prescriptive critique, and illuminate new possibilities thus makes space for questions which are structured to offer provocations which intentionally complexify discussions rather than seek simple solutions (Ruitenberg, 2007; Stein, 2017).

Approaches to supporting displaced students

In Table 1, we offer a social cartography outlining three general orientations to working with displaced students in HE: those who (1) feel they *cannot* do such work and thus center themselves, for various reasons; (2) those who *want* to do such work, yet also center themselves; and (3) those who decenter themselves in order to *learn* to do the kind of work that is *needed*.

When engaging with this cartography, three points are important. First, recognizing one's inability to do this kind of work can be laudable, e.g., recognizing burnout or a lack of adequate preparation. The implication is not that everyone *should* work with displaced students in HE, but rather to invite those who do (as well as those who hire and supervise others) to intentionally consider their approach. Second, it is difficult to recognize the centering of the self. It is rare, if not impossible, for someone to completely decenter themselves at all times. Finally, one person may find themself within different orientations throughout their career, stages of a project, or even day to day.

Table 1
Social cartography of approaches to supporting displaced students in higher education

Approach to the work	I *cannot* do this work	I *want* to do this work	I will *learn* to do the work that is *needed*
Positioning of self	**Centers** the self		**Decenters** the self
Affective dispositions	- Beyond one's comfort zone (*It's too complicated*) - Stakes too high (*I'm afraid of making a mistake*) - Compassion fatigue (*I'm too tired to keep doing this*) - Not adequately resourced (*I'm overworked*) - Disguised arrogance (*I did it without support or hand-holding; why can't they?*)	- Seeking affirmation of positive, benevolent self-image (*I hope I am recognized for the good I am doing*) - Seeking personal validation (*I want to be friends with the students*) - Voyeuristic or curious (*The students are interesting because they're so different from me*) - Savioristic (*I'm changing the world one student at a time*)	- Aware of socialization in modern/ colonial global imaginary (*We are inseparable from broader systems which need to be interrogated*) - Recognizes complicity (*Care is also a form of control, which is both problematic and unavoidable*) - Beginner mindset (*Ready to un/learn and adjust preconceptions*) - Emotionally stable and secure (*Ego in check*)
Possible implications	- Disengagement - Encourages sink-or-swim approach - Susceptible to secondary traumatic stress, vicarious trauma, or burn out - Can become apathetic or cynical - Prioritizes easiest or least complex tasks	- Lack of emotional boundaries - Encourages dependency - Work becomes identity and source of novelty and self-worth - Overly publicizes accomplishments - Prioritizes tasks which bring the most satisfaction or	- Balances empathy and compassion with strong emotional boundaries - Encourages empowerment - Can accept critique and adjust practice accordingly - Prioritizes tasks most needing to

		visibility	be done

Social cartographies are not meant to be prescriptive or suggest a linear progression; instead, the invitation here is to engage with the assumptions that underlie each orientation and the implications of mobilizing each in practice. It is up to each individual to discern what is the most responsible and viable intervention in their context. At the same time, we have highlighted the depth to which each orientation engages with the dynamics of the modern/colonial imaginary; whichever orientation people employ in practice, it is important to attend to how these dynamics can be either reproduced or interrupted.

To engage with this social cartography, we encourage a consideration of the following self-assessments:

- Where does my approach to my work fall on this table? Would the displaced students whom I work with agree with this assessment (keeping in mind this will vary among the students)? Have I fostered a relationship in which they could be honest with me about their assessment?
- Where do I want to be? What are the internal, institutional, and systemic barriers to me moving in that direction? What kinds of practices could better enable me to move in that direction?
- How am I responding to the cartography itself – that is, what discomforts, resistances, or insights does the process surface? Where are these responses coming from in terms of both my personal history and systemic socialization? What are these responses teaching me?

Reflecting on assumptions in our work

In addition to the social cartography above, we offer two sets of hyper-self-reflexive questions (Kapoor, 2004) to encourage further reflection. The first set invites reflections on unexamined assumptions we may be carrying. Table 2 offers questions regarding assumptions about (1) the students we work with, (2) our country of work, (3) HE, and (4) ourselves.

Importantly, our assumptions are both conscious and unconscious, and it is especially difficult to recognize the unconscious ones. Additionally, these assumptions are a product of our socialization and education within a wider modern/colonial imaginary (rather than a product of us being 'bad' individuals). Most of us do not believe that we carry many of the assumptions listed below. However, we encourage a careful reflection on each of the example assumptions, each of which are taken from actual, observed instances we have either seen or assumed ourselves in our work.

Table 2

Hyper-self-reflexive questions about embedded assumptions in the support of displaced students in higher education

What are my assumptions…	Examples of potential assumptions

…about *students*?	● **Saviorism**
	   ○ They want my help
	   ○ They feel (or should feel) grateful, lucky, and/or happy to be 'here'
	● **Stereotyping**
	   ○ Their religion (and that they are religious)
	   ○ Their sexuality and gender identity
	   ○ Their class
	   ○ Their ability
	   ○ The language(s) they speak
	   ○ Their desire to connect with others from the same country/region/background
	● **Superiority**
	   ○ They are from a lower class than me
	● **Paternalism**
	   ○ I know what is best for them
	● **Projection**
	   ○ I know their goals and what they want from their education and/or life

…about *the country where I work?*	● **National exceptionalism**
	   ○ It is the best (or one of the best) countries to live in
	   ○ It offers the best higher education
	   ○ It is accepting/multicultural/embraces diversity
	   ○ There is no discrimination here
	   ○ A newcomer would never want to leave
	● **Eurocentrism**
	   ○ It is civilized, developed, and/or peaceful
	   ○ Our ways of living should be modelled to others for their own benefit
	● **Ahistoricism**
	   ○ Its involvement in colonialism is in the past

…about *higher education?*	**Neoliberalism** - It should only be for those who can afford it **Benevolence** - It is an unfettered social and individual good **Meritocracy/hegemony** - It is necessary for a 'good life' - It is superior to other types or levels of education - It is a fair, objective process of rewarding hard work
…about *myself?*	- I am a good person if I do this work - I know best how to do this work - I am culturally sensitive/competent and know how to work with diverse individuals - I am helping the less fortunate - My work is more important than others' - I am innocent and not 'part of the problem'

While engaging with this set of questions, we again encourage a consideration of the following self-assessments:

- What assumptions do I recognize in myself? Are some assumptions more difficult to recognize or face than others? Why?
- What assumptions do I recognize in others? Is it easier to recognize these assumptions in others or in myself? Why?
- How am I responding to the cartography itself? Where are these responses coming from in terms of both my personal history and systemic socialization? What are these responses teaching me?

Many of us unconsciously carry some assumptions even if we have a conscious critique of them, and it is very difficult to move away from them entirely. Instead of seeking a place of 'purity' from which we no longer reproduce these assumptions, the invitation is to develop greater self-reflexivity about when and how these assumptions are operating within you and with your context of work in HE, so that you can begin to denaturalize, unlearn, and interrupt them while recognizing that this process is likely to be ongoing and lifelong.

Stepping back from our work

Our second set of hyper-self-reflexive questions encourages us to periodically step back from our work and take a more holistic look at our perspectives more generally. Table 3 draws from questions first developed by the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures collective in 2021 and subsequently expanded (Brunner, 2022; Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures, 2023; Stein et al., 2024). It suggests approaching complex problems by first taking 'six steps back' and considering what additional questions we might ask.

Table 3
Hyper-self-reflexive questions to encourage 'six steps back'

Step back from…	Questions to ask
…*myself*	• What are my investments, insecurities, hopes, fears, and intentions? • What does my ego feel entitled to? • What is driving my decision-making?
…my immediate *context, time, and community*	• How do the challenges in my immediate context reflect wider social patterns of change in society across different timescales? • What is the 'bigger picture?'
…my *generational cohort*	• How are the associated challenges perceived and experienced by other generations? • What is my generation being called out on? • What is my generation being called on to do?
…the universalization of my social, cultural, economic, and other *parameters of normality*	• What does my privilege prevent me from seeing and experiencing? What does it allow me to see? • What does my marginalization allow me to see and experience? What does it prevent me from seeing?
…familiar *patterns of relationship building and problem solving* that I have been socialized into	• To whom and what am I accountable to? • What possibilities for more responsible steps are already viable but currently unimaginable to me?
…the *scale* of my thinking and sense of responsibility	• What boundaries (geographical or otherwise) define who and what I consider, conceptually and morally? • What other scales am I forgetting/unaware of? • How might proposed solutions at one scale generate costs and problems at other scales?

While engaging with this cartography, we similarly suggest a consideration of the following self-assessments:
- What questions are easiest to answer? Which are the hardest?
- What might be preventing me from answering these questions differently?
- How am I responding to the cartography itself – that is, what discomforts does the process surface?

Conclusion

Echoing Gebhard et al. (2022), we have advocated for a reassessment of the well-intentioned student supports embedded in HE, particularly in the Global North, and the unarticulated desires and values tied up in our notions of help and care. We are not suggesting to *not help* or *not care*. We instead invite a more explicit acknowledgement that well-intentioned care may in fact harm (Allen, 2022) if practiced in ways which perpetuate the colonial myths of Western superiority.

One small step towards this goal is to displace oneself in our work and to surface and examine assumptions we may unconsciously carry. This demands intentional, ongoing self-reflection and awareness of one's self and desires. Through hyper-self-reflexivity (Kapoor, 2004), we may better recognize (1) our complicity in control, (2) the ways in which our desires and actions are informed by the modern/colonial global imaginary, and (3) how both impact our perceptions towards, and work with, displaced students.

We live in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous time underpinned by multiple systemic crises. In order to ensure our responses are not just ethically responsible but relevant to our present condition, we need to deepen our capacities to step back and engage in the accountability and discernment required of us (Stein, 2021). This is the first step towards interrupting systemic trauma (Ahenakew, n.d.) which we ourselves may be perpetuating.

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