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Vacation or Internationalization?
An Ethnographic Exploration of the Nelson Mandela University
Study Abroad Program and its German Participants

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Themes: International Education, Whiteness, Identity, Auto–Ethnography

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Bio

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the relationship between the university as a central institution of knowledge validation and higher education transformation through internationalization. Guided by a decolonial framework, I examine the role of the Nelson Mandela University study abroad program in constructing both physical and discursive spaces that implicitly or explicitly uphold the global epistemological security of eurocentrism. I employ autoethnography, Erving Goffman's performance theory and W.E.B. DuBois's theory of double consciousness to center my own positionality and that of my German peers. In this way, I exploit my own amorphous socio-historical position as a Black German participant in the study abroad program to explore Nelson Mandela University's current global partnership and study abroad program participant demographics. Through this descriptive analysis, I question whether the study abroad program's current prioritization of western European and US-American students will support the growth of an internationalization project capable of advancing the university's own social justice goals.

The question of identity is a question involving the most profound panic—a terror as primary as the nightmare of the mortal fall. An identity is questioned only when it is menaced, or when the mighty begin to fall, or when the wretched begin to rise, or when the stranger enters the gates, never thereafter, to be a stranger; the stranger's presence making you the stranger, less to the stranger than to yourself.

—James Baldwin, 1976

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Prologue

Other

"Ach, so kann man hier farbig[1] werden! *(Ah, so this is how one can become Black here!)"* he announces to me, to himself, to no one at all, a creeping smirk stretching satisfaction across his already sunburnt face. It is the last day of January 2018 and well into the warmest summer months in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. The air is still and heavy, its weight forcing the sloppy union of sweat beads and lotion that, had I bothered to check the humidity, I would have known better than to apply. We are sitting in a long narrow classroom on the ground floor of Building 06, South Campus. The grass quad surrounded by palm trees and cement is visible through small square windows along the entire left wall. Coarse greenish-yellow palm fronds drop gently downwards as they give way to gravity, swaying slowly in the infamous PE wind—on this day lacking the strength to snake its way past the glass barrier and into the classroom.

It is the second day of orientation and I, having travelled to PE on my own, have not yet formed alliances with anyone in particular. So, I am sitting in the fourth row of a series of neatly positioned black chairs—the stackable ones with the cushioned seat found in conference centers across the world—surrounded by white bodies too similar to home. My eyes dart from chair to chair—not lingering long enough to attract the attention of the owner—searching for the affirmation of a body that mirrors my own. I will the hardness in my shoulders to lessen as I spot the two other brown faces in the room clumped together a few rows behind me and vow to befriend them later. At the front of the room stands an older white man, who has been tasked with providing us with knowledge regarding "Goals & Academics" (Nelson Mandela University Office of International Education [NMU OIE] 2018a). This, it turns out, includes a series of jokes about the declining number old white men, like himself, in teaching positions as well as a tragically outlined warning that the level of academic engagement in group work will likely reflect a much lower standard than we are accustomed to at our home institutions.

My irritated skepticism deepens with this statement and I opt to ignore the rest of his presentation, choosing instead to focus on the movement of the trees outside the windows and the occasional group of first year students following a How2Mandela guide during their own, separate, orientation. Their excited chatter rises with each approach and as the crescendo pushes through the glass it provides a welcome disruption to my stupor. The air slows its dance as they move past, settling like dust onto the tired vibrations of the presenter's voice. I wipe the sweat-lotion from my upper lip and resettle myself on my chair, peeling my thighs off of the synthetic seat cover.

Sunlight defying the mundane grey of concrete walkways draws my gaze back towards the windows, but my attention is caught by the movement of the white German student, Paul,[2] sitting in front of me. Paul has had his arm resting over the

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[1] The German word *farbig* translates literally to colored or colorful. However, it is frequently used by 'well intentioned' people to describe lighter skinned Black people without using the word black (*Schwarz*)—a categorization that continues to have an explicitly negative connotation in mainstream German society (Sow 2009: 23). Thus, the word *farbig* can be intended as a highly misguided compliment that seeks to commend a Black person for their proximity to whiteness or distance from blackness. The use of such derogatory identifiers continues despite the well-documented introduction of and preference for the terms *afro-deutsch* (afro-German) and *schwarze deutsche* (Black Germans) (see Ayim, Oguntoye, Schultz 2016; Kelly 2015; Sow 2009). More recently, black communities have adopted the terminology "Black people in Germany," in order to move beyond the restrictions of citizenship.

[2] Names have been changed

back of his chair and, as he lifts it, he notices a black streak where either dust or paint from the chair has attached itself to his sticky skin. He looks at his arm and announces to me, to himself, to no one at all: "Ach, so kann man hier farbig werden! (Ah, so this is how one can become Black here!)." I raise an eyebrow, glare, and try to slow the spread of hot blood across my face and the beating of my heart. As I sink deeper into my seat, I say nothing.

Internationalization at Nelson Mandela University: Self as other/other as self

Through an analytical autoethnographic lens, this work pursues a nuanced understanding of the positioning of the German international student as a primary participant in the Nelson Mandela University Office of International Education (NMU OIE) study abroad program. This exploration of self, of other, and of self as other, employs an intentionally subjective lens that centers experience as "a criterion of meaning" (Hill Collins 1990: n.p.), placing value on the emotion of lived reality rather than the supposed objectivity of positivist approaches. This form of "experiential knowledge […] spotlights subjectivity" (Ohito 2019: 257), through which I actively render visible the contours that shape the permeable boundaries of self in relation to the perceived other. In this way, I navigate my own amorphous positionality to disclose the ways in which my personal experiences of comfort and discomfort reveal the Nelson Mandela University study abroad program's implicit or explicit centering of Eurocentric whiteness. Through this approach, I seek to understand the ensuing or resultant implications for the internationalization, transformation, and social justice potential of the program.

Autoethnography

The parameters of this project suggest the appropriateness of analytical autoethnography as a research and writing method owing to its active encouragement and acknowledgement of the researcher's subjectivity and emotionality as factors that should be transparently incorporated into the research process rather than ignored (Ellis et al. 2011: 274). Analytic autoethnography, as defined by Anderson (2006), places the researcher as "(1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (375). The method I employ here blurs the binary distinction Denshire (2014: 835) has outlined between evocative autoethnography, in which researchers produce "thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience" (Ellis et al. 2011: 277), and analytic autoethnography—blending both the "key features of evocative autoethnography" with the objectives outlined by analytic ethnography (Anderson 2011: 135). The social world of the researcher is thus both revealed through narrative writing and transcended "through broader generalization" (Anderson 2006: 388).

Ethical implications and critiques

Often criticized for its perceived lack of scientific rigor or insufficient literary quality, "autoethnography, as method, attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art" (Ellis et al. 2011: 283). "Writing both selves and others into a larger story" (Denshire 2014: 832) disrupts predominant academic discourse, which requires an 'objective' distancing from the research subjects. It is precisely this reflexive closeness that permits the researcher to reveal themselves as a person "grappling with issues relevant to membership and participation in fluid rather than static social worlds" (Anderson 2006: 384).

The intricacies of social connection revealed through autoethnographic writing require the close consideration of "relational ethics" (Ellis et al. 2011: 281). Given my insider status and the personal nature of this piece, the research subjects are not given the chance to speak directly for themselves, appearing instead as I remember them. The ways in which I "implicate others" (ibid.) who "are unable to represent themselves in writing or to offer meaningful consent to their representation by someone else" (Wall 2008: 49) in my work therefore takes on ethical importance. For this reason, I have changed the names of all subjects mentioned here and identify students only as coming from Germany broadly, so as to obscure any regional or university affiliation that may lead to their identification. Moreover, I recognize that "memory is fallible" (ibid.), while also strongly asserting the demonstrated worth of memory in ethnographic fieldwork. Memory becomes an invaluable instrument of ethnographic data collection, "because fieldwork and the resulting texts cannot be separated from the memories that shape them" (Wall 2008: 45).

The data that I employ in this work includes my own ethnographic writings and observations gathered through participant observation (see Spittler 2001) (field notes, journal entries, protocols), documents (advertising material, websites, brochures, archive material) and memories. With attention to the presence of my subjective perceptions throughout the piece, I draw from Breidenstein et al. (2015: 116) in noting that that which is seen to exist in the data must be viewed as having been created, at least in part, through my analysis (see also Clifford and Marcus 1986). Similarly, in shifting between short vignettes and broader analysis, I borrow from Holmes (2013) in the hopes that "readers are reminded (…) that position, perspective, and context are always involved in the production of knowledge" (200). The difficulty in reconciling my position as both subject and object of this particular work is an encounter incumbent in autoethnographic research. Nonetheless, I continue to be hopeful that I have done the reader, the research subjects, and myself adequate justice in this endeavor.

Terminology

I employ racial categories throughout this work due to their continued socio-historical relevancy. Following Omi and Winant (1994), I define race as a "concept which signifies *and* symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of *human* bodies" (55 [original emphasis]). That is,

human bodies are categorized in terms of their similarity or difference to one's own and this categorization is applied to lend meaning to existing social conflicts. Race, therefore, must be seen as "in no way an 'afterthought,' a 'deviation' from ostensibly raceless Western ideals, but rather a central shaping constituent of those ideals" (Mills 2019: 14). Black, here, is juxtaposed by white—the "normative and often unspoken category against which all other racialized identities are marked as Other" (Dwyer and Jones III 2010: 210). The binary opposition of Black and white is complicated through the acknowledgement that:

> "both globally and within particular nations, then, white people, Europeans and their descendants, continue to benefit from the Racial Contract, which creates a world in their cultural image, political states differentially favoring their interests, an economy structured around the racial exploitation of others, and a moral psychology (not just in whites but sometimes in nonwhites also) skewed consciously or unconsciously toward privileging them, taking the status quo of differential racial entitlement as normatively legitimate, and not to be investigated further" (Mills 2019: 40).

The world to which Mills refers can be understood as a manifestation of *whiteness* that does not necessarily require the immediate presence of white skin for its continued realization, relying instead on the maintenance of white people's hegemonic position within peculiar hierarchies of power. As Mills indicates, I am also implicated as a beneficiary of this structure—although in ways distinctive to those of my white peers—by virtue of my European and US-American memberships and corresponding proximity to whiteness as power. Thus, I seek to locate the positioning of German participants in the Nelson Mandela University study abroad program within the broader socio-historical context of white supremacy with the intention of heightening both the reader's and my own attention to the impossibility of innocence.

Self

I am wool socks, desert sun, cracked skin, Nina Simone, home alone, queer woman dancing. I am afraid of the ocean. I am hysterical laughter chased by vacuum cleaner, chasing my three-year-old self, tracking down memories of father. I am memories of father. I am first-generation daughter of immigrant mother trying to learn my mother tongue in school. I am mispronouncing sixth and jaguar the way they crawled off of mother's tongue. I am one drop rule. I am middle-class-private-school. I am triumphantly lost in a field of sunflowers, wishing sand would turn back into boulders. I am chasing nightmares with memories of sunflowers, holding brown faces wrapped in candlelight; I am forever singular and multiple.

The articulation of my own socio-historically positioned body (Ohito 2019: 262) is tremendously difficult for precisely the same reason that this positioning is essential to my analysis. I am US-American by birth and German by blood. When I leave those countries, I carry membership to the European project and access to malignant colonial wealth. I am Black. A cis-woman. Afro-German. African American. I am diaspora, not in the sense of longing to return to a mythological home, but as a recognition of necessary difference and heterogeneity in identity production and transformation (Hall 1994: 41). My educational,

familial, and class backgrounds taught me the language and the codes of US-American middle-class whiteness, which I speak as fluently as one can a second language. Sometimes this language marks me as not Black enough, sometimes it marks me as just white enough. I have lived in Germany for the past six years and have learned the codes and language of whiteness here, too. I speak it as fluently as one can a third language. It is with other Black people in Germany—in moments where others' perceptions of me approach my own understanding of myself—that I learned to speak something resembling the comfort of a first language.

For the purpose of this project, I understand myself to be a full member of the German cohort due to my registration for the program through a German university, my German citizenship affiliation, and my housing placement amongst the other German students. This membership is further solidified through my fluency in the language, my comfortable socio-economic positioning, and my familiarity with German cultures, all of which deepened my understanding of and access to the research group. In this way, I use my "experience among and knowledge of others to expand their [my] knowledge of self" (Davies 2007: 180). At the same time, my insider position affords me the privilege and responsibility to "make challenges to the status-quo from an informed perspective" (Costley et al. 2010: 3).

Articulation of comfort/discomfort

Although these intersecting categories of societally imposed labels are "mutually constitutive" rather than "additive," changes in space and time require the prioritization or focus on one or more categories over others (Yuval-Davis 2011: 4). With reference to Goffman's (1959) exploration of self-presentation, I understand my movement through a performance metaphor in which changes to the setting, primarily in terms of geographical situatedness and audience membership (22), often result in disorienting and awkward clashes as I attempt to (re)negotiate positionality of self in particular contexts. These clashes can occur in what Goffman (1959) refers to as "front region" and "backstage." It is in the front region that the performer demonstrates adherence to the socio-historically situated standards set by the particular audience (ibid.: 107), while the backstage or back region houses the contradictions that allow the variations in front region performance (ibid.: 112). I interpret this distinction to extend to the ways in which the various factions of societally imposed labels are brought to the forefront or hidden from view in particular performances. In this regard, audience members may reject my performance as disingenuous should I, for example, claim the characterization of self as Black German to an audience that may have internalized Europe's collective narrative of colonial amnesia to such an extent that the queering[3] of European ethnicity beyond white and Christian becomes incomprehensible (El-Tayeb 2016: 245). Depending on my interest or willingness to provide further explanation, I may choose to mute

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[3] I borrow the idea of queering European ethnicity from Fatima El-Tayeb's (2011) probing of Europe's production of racialized populations as "eternal newcomers" who are relegated positions outside of imagined sacrosanct and immutable European cultures—despite, at times, centuries of residence in Europe (xxix). The continued existence of these populations "defies the existing categories" and in doing so forces a queering of ethnicity (xxxii).

indicators of German affiliation and play the role of African American, knowing that this will be understood as an authentic performance to the particular audience. If we continue to follow Goffman's dramaturgical analogy, we can, as he does, view the backstage contradictions as costumes or props that can be strategically implemented to fulfill the requirements set by a given front region setting.

Following both Goffman's performance theory and Ahmed's (2014) reasoning that "it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (10), I suggest that the boundaries of my own identities are fluid rather than static. Further, the shifting boundaries of these identities are both maintained and transgressed through a constant state of (re)negotiation of which the societal incongruencies that produced my various identity adherences make me distinctly aware. Thus, I inhabit a space of diasporic double-consciousness in which shifting positionalities allow/force me to both see myself and see myself through the eyes of the other (Dubois: 2007: 8). The presence of coloniality— "long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations" (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243)—is the authority of this gaze, which reveals its power to manufacture strangeness in me through its uncomplicated assessment of white European self as the center from which all else is deviant. This heightened and uncomfortable awareness of self in relation to other obligates me to see, in an ethnographic sense (Münst 210: 380), from an outsider position. At the same time, I am a member of the research group, which enables the application of "preunderstanding" to "obtain richer data" without drawing superfluous attention to myself (Brannick and Coghlan 2007: 69).

As an "outsider within" (Hill Collins 1986: 27), I rely on my knowledge of dominant narratives, which characteristically reveal a refutation of the possibility of *my* existence, to demonstrate, through a reincorporation of self, the recurrent pervasiveness of whiteness as norm. I recognize moments of visceral personal discomfort as assertive instances of coloniality authority, through which the systemic affirmation of Eurocentric whiteness forces my own performance adaptation or repositioning of self as other. Given my positioning as an insider outsider, I base my analysis on moments through which my discomfort makes visible the comfort of my white German peers, namely moments in which the continued prioritization of Eurocentric whiteness requires the strategic erasure of my own complexity.

Transformation and the international student

Foundational to the concept of internationalization "at the national, sectoral, and institutional level" as the "process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight 2003: 2; 2005: 13), is the international student. The presence of the international student on a university campus becomes the physical embodiment of the

broader internationalization discourse pursued by a given program and therefore *one* representation of the realization of the program's goals and priorities. Beyond the internationalization rhetoric of a particular program, which can differ greatly from the lived reality of that program (Kishun 2007: 465), the international student's symbolic positioning is dually representative of the program's transformative potential and present status.

This takes on particular significance within the socio-historical context of South Africa and, directly related, the transformation and social justice goals set in response to the national transitions following 1994 and, more recently, the #MustFall movements (South Africa, Department of Education 1997; Otu and Mkhize 2018: 153). Given the overall importance of internationalization as "one of the defining issues of higher education globally" (Zeleza 2012: 2), the international student must be granted comparable distinction (Kishun 2007: 463), particularly when, as is the case with NMU, the majority of study abroad students emanate from a single country. This was evidenced during the 2018 academic year, when Nelson Mandela University hosted 293 study abroad students. Of these students, 159 (54%) were German, 59 (20%) were US-American, and 51 (17%) were French (NMU OIE 2018b). The remaining 24 students (9%) came from nine other countries (ibid.) (see figure 1).
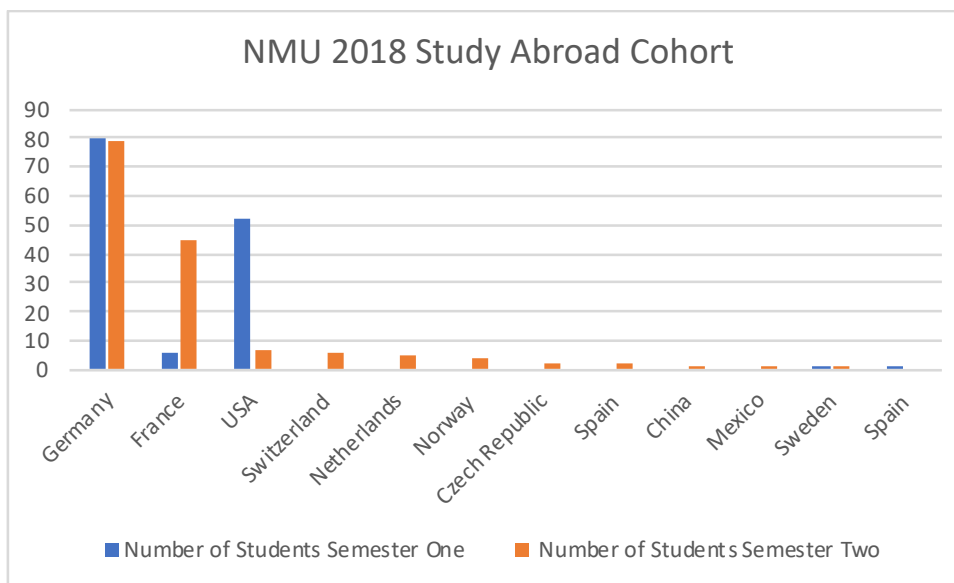

Figure 1 2018 Study Abroad Student Cohort (NMU OIE 2018b)

In recognizing the body as a political location (Alexander 2014: 99) that situates the German international student as representative of the violent socio-historical context of western Europe, I question the limits and possibilities for knowledge (re)production at Nelson Mandela University, which I argue are inextricably bound to the international student and their role as one 'personification' of the university's transformation agenda through internationalization. By virtue of this positioning and through both articulation in language and physical presence, the German student can partake in the reaffirmation of Eurocentric epistemological hegemony. I understand myself to both inhabit and exploit the structural

power of this positioning, while also disrupting the supposed homogeneity from which it draws its legitimacy.

The comfort afforded to my peers in specific housing and university contexts thus represents a preservation of systems of power that allow these students to foster an understanding of self as inherent, legitimate or desirable. This supports them in continuously reproducing the other, rather than questioning the possibility of self as other. In seeking to understand the manifestations of normative Eurocentric whiteness throughout the year, I pursue a deeper appreciation of the ways in which German students interacted with both their(our) living environments, the discourse presented during the orientation week, and with academics. These particular circumstances demonstrate the "*shifting conditions* in which encounters between others, and between other others take place," which call into question "*how* and *where* colonization persists after so-called decolonization" (Ahmed 2000: 13 [original emphasis]). My critique of the maintenance of Eurocentric white comfort, then, is a critique of the maintenance of historical hierarchies of power (Mayar and González 2017: 9). In this way, I question whether current outcomes of the Nelson Mandela University international program limit the university's transformation potential and whether the fulfillment of this potential may require a re-prioritization of internationalization efforts.

Port Elizabeth

Campus Key

I drag my suitcase into Campus Key—dorm-like student housing and one of the two accredited options offered to study abroad students by the OIE[4]—and am met by the pungent stench of spilt beer accompanied by the dissonant roar of Standard American English and German clashing in agonizing incoherence. Jubilant cries of young people fighting to be seen are carried on braai smoke and anecdotes recited too well. The source of the noise—a seemingly endless expanse of white bodies—bob up and down, refilling red solo cups and chasing run-away beer pong balls. I stand frozen for a moment, my confidence shattered and strengthened simultaneously. Having left Germany 18 hours and three flights earlier, I am bewildered by the dread and fear that fill my mouth with the taste of home. Yet I savor the simplicity this familiarity affords me. I know what role to play here. This decision is easy. I find someone with whom I can register my arrival. Make my way up to my room and shut the door. Once inside, I begin to fortify the walls with memories, add layers to drywall—this room must be safe for me. I balance May Ayim's poem "grenzenlos und unverschämt – ein gedicht gegen die deutsche sch-einheit"[5] *carefully on the shelf and watch it fall with every opening and closing of the door. Later, I will wrap my validity in grey sticky tac and force the poem into a semi-permanent upright position. This place must be my sanctuary.*

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[4] At the time of this writing, study abroad students were not permitted to live in university-owned on-campus housing or independently in apartments or houses. The two available options had arrangements with the university, but were not run by the university itself.

[5] English title: borderless and brazen: a poem against the German "u-not-y" (Ayim 2008: 92; 1995: 61)

Playing host to the majority of the 2018 German student cohort, Campus Key is "white space," marked by the enormous overrepresentation of white people and the concurrent disconcerting lack of Black people (Anderson 2014: 13). Entering this space as a Black German subject required the habitual dislocation of self, through which I was forced to probe the boundaries of my own identity entanglements, "revealing the ways in which we are both always particular and plural at the same time; never contained and always messy" (Alexander 2014: 91). White space is notable, because it is often understood by the white subject to be normal or a general reflection of civil society. In contrast, the Black subject enters the space furtively, understanding vividly that the white subjects' perception of self as a bearer of moral authority will confine the Black subject to limited social standing (Anderson 2014: 15). Temporary or conditional acceptance is conferred to the Black subject only after they have executed a "command performance" (ibid.: 14) that demonstrates their value or legitimacy in the space. For me, many of these performances took the form of impromptu language exams which were reliably followed by incredulous exclamations. Each expression of "Wow! your German is so good!" solidified my outsider inside status, relegating me to the position of legal alien—provisionally accepted as permanent other.

Campus Key buildings are "biometric secured" (Campus Key Port Elizabeth 2019a) and the building in which I lived was surrounded by a combination of vertical bar security fencing and a concrete wall with mounted electric fencing. The "trendy CampusKey design style" and "inviting communal spaces" (ibid.) stand in opposition to, or indeed, are made possible by the rigid security apparatus, which requires one to present one's fingerprint at an electronic gate and five additional doors in order to reach the interior of one's room.[6] Moreover, the segregated construction of Campus Key as well as the high concentration of study abroad students living there, I argue, inevitably produces a "prototyped community" that materializes an alternative reality of the kind referred to by Weskott (2009) in her exploration of the proliferation of gated communities in (post-)apartheid South Africa. This "architectural answer to the economy of fear" (ibid.: 270) can be said to act as a "claim for a constructed world in a specific way of life, which doesn't deny reality, but instead changes and remodels it" (ibid.: 264). The real construction of the artificial reality of white majority allows study abroad students to perceive themselves as being 'at home,' thus transferring the burden of stranger or visitor to the unnamed Other, who does not possess the financial[7] or other capital required for community membership. Thus, "strangers are not simply those who are not known (…), but those who are, in their very proximity,

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[6] Here, I focus specifically on the ways that concrete barriers are employed to produce symbolic spaces that are disengaged from 'outside' realities. At the same time, I recognize the severity of gender-based violence in South Africa and acknowledge the work of activists calling for more secure housing and campuses with solidarity and admiration. The construction of this argumentation does not seek to minimize the urgency of these calls.

[7] Single rooms on Nelson Mandela University South Campus range from approximately R21.000-R26.000 per year (currently: 1.338-1.657 EUR/year) (Nelson Mandela University Student Accounts Guide 2019: 14). In comparison, rooms at Campus Key Port Elizabeth begin at R51.000 and extend up to R80.000 (3.251-5.0999 EUR/year) (Campus Key Port Elizabeth 2019b). Although the amenities offered vary considerably and have not been accounted for in this comparison, it does give some indication of the general accessibility of Campus Key as a housing option for local students.

already recognized as not belonging, as being out of place" (Ahmed 2000: 21). With this in mind, the constructed world of Campus Key serves the dual-purpose of encouraging residents to see themselves as part of a supportive, multi-cultural community, while also creating an environment in which the "fact that feeling uncomfortable is an ineradicable part of white life" in South Africa (Vice 2010: 326) is lessened or altogether removed.

The politics of difference as the "structural social processes" that produce Campus Key as a white space, situates white German students at or near the top of the social axes that "generate status, power, and opportunity for the development of capacities or the acquisition of goods" (Young 2007: 83), while correspondingly reiterating the structural social inequality of those below them. This positioning occurs on a micro-level within Campus Key in which the effects of structural racism locate me below my white peers. At the same time, the extrapolation of the significance of the structural social processes solidifying form through Campus Key on a macro-level indicates a complicating of these roles through the introduction of class difference. Thus, the segregated nature of Campus Key as a primarily white, European, and classist living space reproduces the tradition of exclusive, elite communities. Further, the highly regulated access to Campus Key, symbolized by both physical and financial barriers, maintains the exclusivity of the benefits of access to white space as the place where, within a system of structural inequality, "many social rewards originate, including (…) cultural capital itself— education, employment, privilege, prestige, money, and the promise of acceptance" (Anderson 2014: 16). In this way, the micro and macro implications of German students' overrepresentation at Campus Key can be said to produce social consequences that call into question the "tensions between internationalisation as conceived in the Euro-American west and racial justice demands in post-apartheid/post-colonial contexts" (Majee and Ress 2018: 4). These forms of internationalization that seek increased prestige through institutional recognition from the current 'leaders' in higher education located in the Euro-American west, naturally suppress decolonial potential that, at its core, works towards a dismantling of these hierarchies. The alleviation of these tensions through meaningful structural change will require an initial decentering of whiteness through the explicit recognition of whiteness' structural and unequal dominance (Young 2007: 84).

Reproduction of hierarchies of knowing

Our Black South African student orientation guide pauses her chatter to say she would like to move into the shade, she doesn't want to tan. A white German student shouts with incredulity "Can you even get any darker!?"

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I ease my way out of the lecture hall and into the glaring sunlight after completing a particularly difficult final exam. A white German student with whom I had spoken a few times is waiting on a bench, having completed the questions more quickly than I. I ask her how it went, she says alright. We stumble through pleasantries until the conversation veers off into questions of Eurocentric curricula, European ontological security, and grades. She tells me that she wishes she could spend

more time with local students; that she grows tired of having the same conversations with German students; that she sometimes worries when she hears these students say that "Africans" are always late, that they don't want to partner with local students for group work because it is assumed the grade will be low, that many German students have said their worst grades are in group work. She tells me that she thinks these students have reaffirmed the stereotypes they arrived with rather than questioned them.

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I grin when the cashier at Spar tells me I "look beautiful even though I am wearing my hair like a child." I am happy to be auntied by her.

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I break my own rule and allow a white German student who I do not know well to engage me on the topic of race and racism. He tells me race is not a factor for him, that he doesn't see color. I spend too many minutes trying to explain how his 'opinion' expunges violent history and discredits the lived reality of PoC existence. I ask him if he is familiar with German history, South African history, European history. He is convinced of the moral superiority of his stance, I leave, exhausted.

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In conversation with another white German student I learn that her time in Port Elizabeth is generally spent within what she calls "the golden triangle"—encompassing NMU South Campus, the Summerstrand Pick 'n Pay, and the pool at her residence. She expresses dissatisfaction with this reality and assigns responsibility to herself, saying that she made little effort to build friendships with local students, choosing instead to hang out and travel with the other German students from her residence. She says that she gravitated towards other German students or white South Africans in class. She assures me that this is not the consequence of intentional malice, but rather results from an unconscious will to assimilate or blend in.

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On the final day of orientation, we are ushered into a large lecture hall to address "Changing Perceptions" (NMU OIE 2018a). We are shown Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, through which she employs witty humor and personal narrative to remind viewers of individual multiplicity and the inherent limitations of singular stories as well as these stories' potential to adversely affect target populations (2009). Following the video screening, it is gently suggested that we consider engaging with local students and, conversely, that we might benefit from making an effort to seek out friendships and experience beyond the OIE and the study abroad cohort. We are told that many local students will not have the same opportunities to travel abroad and, as such, the presence of study abroad students represents an invaluable influx of differing ideas, ways of being, and chances to learn. I am reminded of the presenter's statement from the previous day during which we were told to expect low levels of work ethic, discipline, and academic rigor from local students in group work settings. I wonder whether the presenter's use of the deficit model to attribute responsibility for low success rates to local students themselves while forgoing recognition of institutional responsibility and historical inequity (Otu

and Mkhize 2018:168) promotes the complacency of European students by allowing them to continue to feel secure in the singular validity of their epistemic and ontological foundations.

In her TED Talk, Adichie tells us that stories are defined by power—who can tell a story and how that story is told must be understood within the framework of hierarchical relationships (2009). Yet, in their use of Adichie's work as a form of rhetorical transformation that relies on "normative equality, diversity, and inclusion policies" (Tate and Page 2018: 7), the NMU OIE strengthens and maintains the continued relevance of these structures (Tuck and Yang 2012: 3). As such, study abroad students are encouraged to consider their biases on an individual level rather than through the lens of "ideological values and their imbrication with white institutional power" (Tate and Page 2018: 7). The call for a dismantling of old epistemologies, the acknowledgement and inclusion of cultural diversity as not a valuable asset, but foundational to the establishment of new ways of knowing, and the insistence that transformation take place across the university (hooks 1994: 21), will first require a deep understanding of the power behind the stories we are able to tell.

Static (de)coloniality

The physical presence of international students on a university campus is the tangible manifestation of one dimension within the internationalization process, namely that of international partnerships. As such, it is of little surprise that the regional demographics of Nelson Mandela University's 2018 study abroad cohort are a direct reflection of its current global partnerships (see figure 2), which the university uses to support student mobility and to promote curriculum as well as research internationalization (NMU OIE
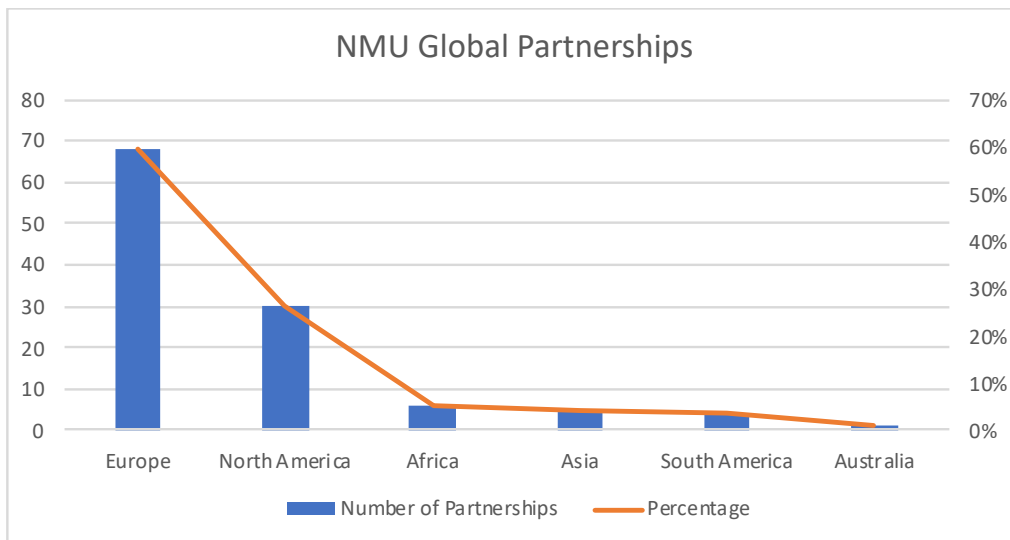

Figure 2 NMU Global Partnerships (NMU OIE 2018c)

2018c). With 68 partnerships in Europe, 30 partnerships in North America, and 16 partnerships in Africa, Asia, South America, and Australia combined, the internationalization project at Nelson Mandela University suggests clear regional foci. A further breakdown of European partnerships shows Germany with 28 partnerships, followed by Norway and France with 11 and 10 respectively (see figure 3). The

OIE elaborates on its position in stating that "the Nelson Mandela University is committed to developing its international links with universities from developing countries, with specific reference to Africa. However, it also values its links with universities from the North, and uses these to develop and stimulate its drive towards excellence" (NMU OIE 2018c). The characterization of universities from the "North"
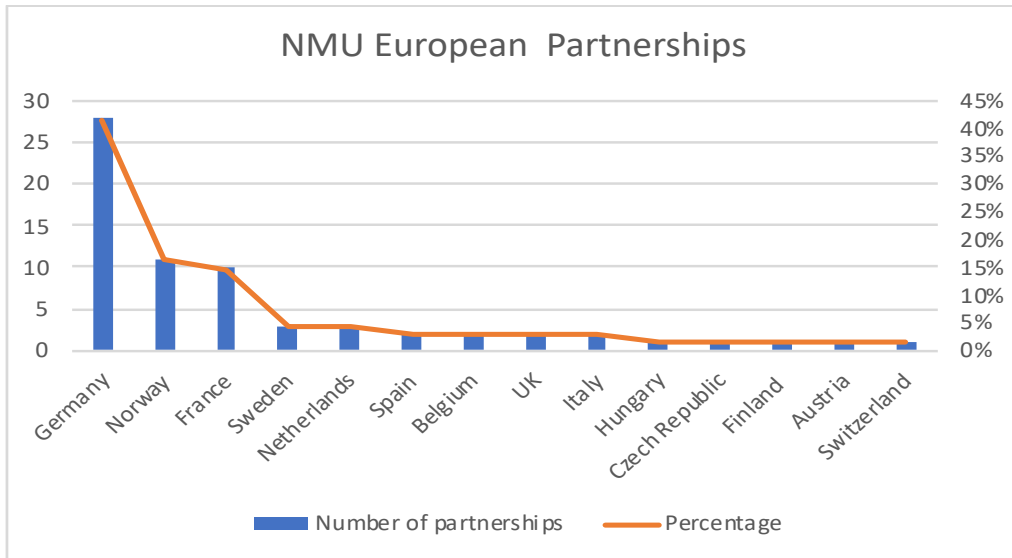

Figure 3 NMU European Partnerships (NMU OIE 2018c)

as representative of excellence and those in African countries as requiring development stimulation from the "North," follows a common understanding of a mapping of the world "with the Europe of the colonial age as its outstanding, incomparable center of ideas" (Mayar and González 2017: 4).

The regional foci presented by the NMU OIE cannot be said to indicate decolonial transformational intent. However, the purpose of their implementation as a means of achieving global standing can be seen as a logical response to the competitive conditions set within the field of higher education globally. Worldwide ranking systems such as the UK-based *Times Higher Education Supplement* (THES) generate prestige for high-ranked universities, their students, faculty members, and research output (Yudkevich et al. 2015: 412), though the measures applied in evaluation processes have been criticized for favoring large universities in the UK and the USA (Brooks and Waters 2011: 26). The 2019 THES rankings place the University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, and Stanford University in first, second, and third place, respectively (Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019). Nelson Mandela University does not appear on the list at all; South Africa's highest ranked university being the University of Cape Town at number 156 (ibid.). These rankings not only suggest that the standards set by universities in the UK and the USA correspond to those followed by the THES as a ranking institution, but that, correspondingly, an increase in status would require an adoption of these same standards by lower ranked universities.

Moreover, the site of 86% of Nelson Mandela University's global partnerships in Europe and North America (see figure 2)—of which 25% are located in Germany and 25% are located in the United States—can, in part, be attributed to the lingering effects of Apartheid era language-based ties that were

severed in the 1970s, but quickly reimplemented after 1994 (Stumpf 14: 2005). Nevertheless, Nelson Mandela University's explicit valuation of the "North" as a center of excellence indicates an attempt to emulate THES standards through the development of European and North American influence in both research and curricula and thus increase its own global positioning within this paradigm. That such an attempt may have more adverse than positive effect is highlighted by Zeleza (2012) in his concern that universities in the global South will forgo the opportunity to act as catalysts of local and regional intellectual development within their given societies, "thereby foreclosing any possibilities of restructuring the global system of knowledge production itself" (14, 15).

Throughout my year in South Africa, I had the honor of engaging with degree-seeking students and Nelson Mandela University faculty who view the university as both "contested terrain" and an "arena of struggle" (Cordova 1998: 20). Through seminars, workshops, and my participation with the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation (*Cr*SHET), I had the opportunity to witness higher education transformation in action as these dedicated individuals not only challenged archaic structures, but also forged new possibilities for the legitimization of varied ways of knowing through the university as an authority lending institution. I remain eternally grateful for their grace and acceptance. Nonetheless, the impact of the 2018 German study abroad cohort on these efforts as a whole can be said to be negligible at best and regressive at worst. As a coordinating body for internationalization efforts, the NMU OIE plays an essential role in determining which narratives and whose voices from the international community will be centered within the Nelson Mandela University student body. Thus, the NMU OIE can be said to be of critical importance in leading the response to demands for educational equity and the redress of historical inequalities (Majee and Ress 2018: 2; Kishun 2007: 456) through invaluable international collaboration; whether it will fulfill this transformation potential will depend, in part, on its willingness to disrupt its current preservation of hegemonic whiteness through the inequitable, misaligned study abroad program.

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to highlight my personal experience as a Black German participant in the Nelson Mandela University study abroad program to reflect on the challenges that arise when the internationalization efforts of a university conflict with the social justice transformation goals of that same university (see e.g. Nelson Mandela University 2018a; 2018b). Through a subjective analysis of my own experiences of comfort and discomfort within both housing and university settings, I understand the complexities of my own socio-historical identity positioning as an outsider within to reveal the porous malleability of identity boundaries. Using performance as a lens, I recognize moments of compulsory repositioning of self within the context of interactions with other members of the 2018 German study abroad student cohort to demonstrate the pervasiveness of whiteness as norm. Further, I seek to

understand possible linkages between this pervasiveness and aspects of the program that can be said to preserve latent structural hierarchies of power that prioritize the epistemological and ontological security of whiteness. In this way, eurocentrism can be seen as less a "container of power inequality," than as consisting of a "centuries-old web of relations" to which its continued hegemonic status is owed (Mayar and González 2017: 3). The university, as "a central location for establishing knowledge as a discourse of power" (Cordova 1998: 17), demonstrates the unique potential to either validate this positioning or to disrupt it through the legitimization of both counter-narratives and varied epistemological standpoints. Thus, I question the efficacy of Nelson Mandela University's current global partnership and study abroad program participant demographics in building a foundation for future international collaboration that will foster meaningful and necessary social change.

The Nelson Mandela University Office of International Education indicates a clear acknowledgement of the link between internationalization efforts and educational excellence. However, the particular execution of these goals through the study abroad program does not do justice to the professed decolonial and transformational intent of the university as a whole. Nelson Mandela University's transformation goals acknowledge the historical positioning of the institution as having been shaped by "the apartheid legislative framework and its oppressive policies" (NMU 2018a); as such, Nelson Mandela University specifies the necessity for transformation that has a reparatory impact on race and gender injustices, while also actively responding to the needs and interests of South African society (ibid.). Student-led initiatives to 'Africanize' the curriculum and to decolonize the university represent an important driving force behind these efforts. Within the context of these urgent demands for institutional change, I question the utility of the current study abroad program. My own ethnographic work throughout the year revealed that many European study abroad students view their time in Port Elizabeth as more of a vacation than as a university-bound educational opportunity, using the city as a base for road trips, surfing expeditions, and travels to neighboring countries. While this activity may be economically relevant to the country, it does not contribute to critical dialogue or the advancement of the university's transformation goals. If one is to conclude, as I have, that the possibilities for knowledge (re)production are constructed, at least in part, through the university's faculty, staff, and student body, the efficacy of the study abroad program in contributing to social justice-related transformations depends on its willingness to reassess its structure, international partnerships and recruitment processes.

As this narrative has sought to illustrate, internationalization efforts, much like identity formation, are neither simple nor one-dimensional, involving myriad stakeholders, restraints, and points of departure. However, as Nelson Mandela University embarks on this new chapter of its own identity reconfiguration through its latest rebranding from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (Nelson Mandela University News 2017), tremendous potential for the concurrent reevaluation of the purpose and goals of internationalization arises. The celebrated inauguration of Vice-Chancellor Prof Sibongile

Muthwa in 2018 (Nelson Mandela University News 2018), as well as the formidable array of renowned international social justice scholars who have shared their work at Nelson Mandela University over the same period, exemplify the tangible reality of this potential. The opportunities incumbent in this process emerge through Nelson Mandela's own understanding of education's role as an invaluable tool for human liberation (Nelson Mandela Foundation News 2017)—an understanding that establishes the guiding principles which frame the NMU OIE's ability to build a strong global network that advocates the humanism for which Nelson Mandela is exalted. Thus, I end in borrowing from Professor André Keet and ask: "What is it that I do and don't do that generate discontent with the social justice transformation project of the university?" (Keet et al. 2017: 7). The opportunities are undeniably immense, and our ability to access the potential that they represent will depend on each of our willingness to grapple with not only the power we hold to enact change, but also our complicities in upholding the structures that limit the fulfillment of this capacity.

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