Retaining international students in northeast Ohio: Opportunities and challenges in the 'age of Trump'

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ABSTRACT

Donald Trump's recent restrictive migration regime – symbolized by border walls, Travel Bans, and 'Hire American' policies– presents new concerns for student migrants, the practitioners who advise them, and the institutions that rely on their tuition fees. But a competing migration regime exists at the subnational scale that frames international students, particularly those who study in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and business fields as ideal future citizens. Recent geographical scholarship on the local as a site of contested immigration politics suggests a need to understand student migrants in the 'age of Trump' as also enmeshed in multiple kinds of spatial politics of the states and cities in which they reside, as well as the institutions they attend. This article is concerned with international student mobility in the 'age of Trump,' with a focus on the local geographies of exclusion and inclusion this 'age' both instigates and contests. The study findings are based on eighteen in-depth interviews conducted with recent graduates of six northeast-Ohio colleges and universities. Their experiences demonstrate the emergence of new and differentiated everyday landscapes of exclusion, which introduce new obstacles for international students and the local as a scale of inclusionary immigration politics.

1. Introduction

As the largest receiver of international students worldwide, shifts in United States visa policies have substantial domestic and global implications for international student mobility. Donald Trump's recent restrictive migration regime – symbolized by border walls, Travel Bans, and 'Hire American' policies– presents new concerns for student migrants, the practitioners who advise them, and the institutions that rely on their tuition fees (Moser et al., 2017; NAFSA, 2018; Saul, 2018). International students in the US now live in a "precarious world" in which no visa is a certainty and globalization is positioned as an incipient threat to national identity (Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood, 2017). This world cannot be taken for "business as usual," but reflects a broader emergence of "extreme and extremist geographies" of xenophobia (Scott, 2017). Scholars have yet to examine how international students are navigating this regime.

This article is concerned with international student mobility in the 'age of Trump,' with a focus on the local geographies of exclusion and inclusion this 'age' both instigates and contests. A competing migration regime exists at the subnational scale that frames international students, particularly those who study in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and business fields as ideal future citizens. This regime aims to "work within" current US immigration law by encouraging international students to move across "stepping stones" from education to migration (Khalid, 2017; Redden, 2014; Robertson, 2013). US-educated international students may extend their visas to work for up to three years after graduation through the Optional Practical Training (OPT) period (USCIS, 2017); and, if students can find an employee sponsor, they may also seek specialty occupation (H-1B) visas that may later convert to a green card (Ruiz, 2014, 2017). Recent projects like Michigan's Global Talent Retention Initiative and Ohio's Global Reach to Engage Academic Talent (GREAT) are part of emerging regional "development-oriented inclusionary" agenda that promote immigration as the key to post-industrial rebirth (Filomeno, 2015; Pottie-Sherman, 2018). 'Middle America' is thus a key site for understanding how this contradictory coding of migration at the federal and state level shapes student migrants' dreams and realities.

Here, I frame this issue within three recent developments in geography. First, challenging portrayals of international students as "nomadic" global elites, geographers have emphasized the role of the state in shaping students' aspirations and abilities to migrate (Bauder, 2015;

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Mavroudi and Warren 2013). Visas and naturalization channels are highly stratified "materials of mobility" (Szewczyk, 2016:373; Waters, 2006). While the movements of international students to the US have long been circumscribed in the name of securitization (Ewers and Lewis, 2008) recent work in geography underscores the need to interrogate new 'racist-spatial dynamics' of immigration (Ehrkamp, 2017:1). The January 2017 Travel Ban reflected the "first line of an attack orchestrated by the Trump administration on racialized migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees" (Moser et al., 2017:176). Trump's "Buy American, and Hire American" Executive Order appeals to nativist anxieties about skilled migrants as 'job stealers.' These developments allude to the far-reaching consequences for student migrants engendered by this extreme politics of exclusion.

Second, while the local is an increasingly active site of immigration politics in the US, states, counties, and cities are unevenly involved in the domains of citizenship and foreign policy (Steil and Ridgley, 2012; Varsanyi, 2010; and Walker and Leitner, 2011). Geographers link this variegated landscape of pro- and anti-immigrant initiatives to the interplay of the "politics of scale, networking, and place" (Walker, 2015:486) highlighting the "regional asymmetries" in local activism (Pottie-Sherman, 2018). Local initiatives to retain international students have emerged in jurisdictions downscaled by globalization (Filomeno, 2015; Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2010) where international students are perceived as agents of place promotion and economic development (Lane et al., 2014; Owens et al., 2011). This scholarship suggests a need to understand student migrants in the "age of Trump" as also enmeshed in multiple kinds of spatial politics of the states and cities in which they reside, as well as the institutions they attend.

Third, despite the best efforts of states – and increasingly the subnational scale – to manage migration through neatly defined categories – i.e. 'study' or 'work', 'stay' or 'return' – migration is a process formed across multiple "social and material assemblages" (Collins, 2018:968; Moskal, 2017; Waters, 2017; Wu and Wilkes, 2017). International students' decisions cannot be reduced to rational, individual economic calculations occurring linearly and at 'singular' moments, but instead, their desires for movement unfold unpredictably over complex "spatial and temporal horizons" (Collins, 2018:969; van Liempt, 2011). Collins' conceptualization of migration implies that mobility regimes such as Ohio's GREAT or the 'age of Trump' are constituted by assemblages of actors, ideas, and materials and variously introduce or 'block' migrant trajectories. Importantly, however, they represent only single dimensions of migration as a process and do not determine the desires which ultimately "animate" global movement.

Taken together, these insights underscore the need to "think beyond international student as a category" by acknowledging the heterogeneity of this community (Madge et al., 2015:681) and by disentangling the particularity of the US context. In doing so, I ask: (1) what kinds of blockages has the Trump immigration agenda introduced for international students at the intersection of education and migration? and (2) How has this macro-level politics of blockage shaped the migration aspirations, ability, and everyday lives of recent graduates?

To address these questions, I conducted eighteen in-depth interviews with recent graduates of six colleges and universities in northeast Ohio who had found (or were seeking to) work in the area after graduation through Optional Practical Training (OPT) or H-1B visa sponsorship. The students included in this study represent the first cohort of students to graduate during the Trump Presidency and these interviews examined the paths taken by international students who wish to remain in the US after graduating, and the impact of restrictive federal immigration policy changes on this transition. Their experiences demonstrate the emergence of new and differentiated everyday landscapes of exclusion, which introduce new obstacles for international students and the local as a scale of inclusionary immigration politics.

2. Conceptualizing international student mobility in the 'age of Trump'

The "age of Trump" describes the nativist, anti-globalist, and racist policies and discourses enacted and promoted since the inauguration of Donald Trump as US President in January of 2017. This regime has had immediate and profound consequences for higher education and academic mobility, although it is crucial to note that violent borders and "detention-as-spectacle" predate this administration (Mainwearing and Silverman, 2017; Moser et al., 2017). The recent 'travel bans' – directed at Muslim-majority countries – play into longstanding Islamophobia about Muslim international students as threats to national security (Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood, 2017). "Travel Ban 3.0," entitled "Enhancing Vetting Capabilities and Processes for Detecting Attempted Entry into the United States by Terrorists or Other Public Safety Threats," upheld by the Supreme Court, now restricts nationals from seven countries: Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen. While most student visas are exempted from the current ban, students and researchers face heightened scrutiny and substantial "insecurity about being banned suddenly with no recourse" (Moser et al., 2017:177).

More broadly, these policies have had consequences beyond the passports targeted by the ban including unpredictability at the border, feeling "unwelcome" in the US, concerns for physical safety on campus, and contracting post-graduation work opportunities (Farrugia and Andrejko, 2017:2). Many international students have invested substantial resources into US higher education with the expectation that they will be able to work temporarily in the US when they finish their studies (Farrugia, 2016). But the Trump administration has also called these opportunities into question (Mayberry, 2009; Wadman and Stone, 2017). Trump's "Buy American, and Hire American," Executive Order, issued in April of 2017, foreshadowed an overhaul of the H-1B specialty visa lottery, stipulating that the executive branch would "rigorously enforce and administer the laws governing entry into the United States of workers from abroad," insofar as they threaten the "economic interests" of American workers (Trump, 2017).

Early analyses of enrollment data reveal no "single" national trend, however, and suggest the "age of Trump" is having an uneven impact on US higher education, most pronounced at smaller, less research-intensive institutions (i.e. R2 and R3 schools), at the Master's level, and in the South and Midwest (Farrugia and Andrejko, 2017). Enrollment provides a limited indicator of impact, however, given the complexity of global trends in higher education (Thomas and Inkpen, 2017). To better conceptualize the impact of the "age of Trump" on international student mobility, in the remainder of this section, I propose a conceptual framework that draws insights from scholarship on (1) the state in international student mobility; (2) the local as a site of contested immigration politics; and (3) migrant aspirations, desires, and abilities.

2.1. The state in international student mobility

One starting point for understanding Trump's impact on international students concerns the profound role of the state in mobilizing and immobilizing students (Bauder, 2015; Collins et al., 2017; Mavroudi and Warren, 2013; Robertson, 2011; Robertson and Runganaikaloo, 2014). International students in the US have long had to navigate the paradoxical policy agendas of neoliberal higher education and the securitization of migration (Ewers and Lewis, 2008; King and Raghhuram, 2013; Pottie-Sherman, 2013; Urias and Camp Yeakey, 2009). As Ewers and Lewis (2008) note, on one hand, policymakers frame international students through "axes of risk," posing a threat to national security, identity, and domestic wages, and exploit political "gains" associated with these narratives. On the other hand, policymak-

ers also view declining international student enrollment and the US' inability to retain "trained in America" international graduates as a threat to the American economy (Sa and Sabzalieva, 2017).[1] An extension of the Optional Practical Training period for STEM graduates, passed in 2016, reflects the only successful compromise between these two agendas to date. STEM graduates can now remain in the US to work for an additional two years, thereby filling strategic labour market needs. There is no formal path from study to permanent residency and; although it is possible to transition from OPT to a specialty occupation H-1B visa, and then to a green card, few make this transition (Peri et al., 2016). As I will show later in this analysis, the 'age of Trump' has introduced a new axis of risk that makes student to migrant transitions far less likely.

Thus, while many OECD governments over the last several decades have developed formal "two step" immigration pathways for international students trained at their institutions, in the US the pathway is more akin to a "labyrinth" (Peri et al., 2016). The "education-migration nexus" (Robertson, 2013) refers to the continuum of "staggered entrance" policies to selectively retain international students in the host society labour market. To acquire permanent residency, international students must endure a period of temporariness while complying with the state's vision of an ideal migrant. This period is characterized by substantial insecurity, as students are not yet legally migrants and there are never guarantees that pathways will remain open (Goldring and Ladolt, 2011). Importantly, scholars have also shown how, at this nexus, experiences of political exclusion can have unpredictable consequences for migration trajectories. Szewczyk (2016), for example, highlights how a climate of resentment towards young Polish migrants in the UK encouraged a pattern of "go stop go" mobility, where some pursued naturalization in the UK in order to move elsewhere. In other words, the "stepped" migration schemes of OECD countries may not align with the actual "stepped" or "staggered" mobility decisions of migrants (van Liempt, 2011; Szewczyk, 2016).

2.2. The local as a site of contested immigration politics

While immigration policies at the national level regulate international student entry and their ability to remain in the country after graduation, international students are also enmeshed within shifting power assemblages formed by higher education institutions, and by policies at other scales – including at the state and municipal levels (Moskal 2017:127). The subnational scale has emerged as a site of contested immigration politics in the US (Steil and Vasi, 2014; Varsanyi, 2010). States, counties, and cities have become variously involved in shaping a "patchworked" landscape of inclusionary and exclusionary local immigration initiatives (Furuseth et al., 2015; Walker, 2015; Walker and Leitner, 2011). Recent work in geography attributes this unevenness to locally contingent scalar relationships including the tension between federal (and often state-) level immigration debates which problematize immigration, and inclusionary initiatives in cities like Charlotte, Dayton, and Pittsburgh that frame immigration as a characteristic of a "city on the rise" (Furuseth et al., 2015:17). Within this landscape of local inclusionary practices, "development-inclusionary" initiatives have emerged in the Rust Belt which 'welcome' immigrants as an economic strategy (Filomeno, 2015; Pottie-Sherman,

2018). Studying the pathways of migrants in locations that have been "downscaled" by neoliberal rescaling is important because, as Glick Schiller and Caglar (2010:191) note, the "relationship between migrants and a locality with limited opportunity structures and local narratives of the disempowerment of place has its own trajectories." The downscaled nature of regions like the 'Rust Belt' or cities like Cleveland may pose distinct challenges or opportunities for migrants in the 'age of Trump' (Filomeno, 2015; Pottie-Sherman, 2018).

Despite their legal authority on matters of public education, US states have only recently become involved in managing internationalization efforts in higher education (Lane et al., 2014). Increasingly, states view internationalization as a regional economic development strategy and one that mitigates lost state tax revenues post-financial crisis (Owens et al., 2011). International students comprise a more significant share of STEM graduates than do domestic students in the US and are valued for their potential to contribute directly to regional economies after graduation by working and spending. They are also evaluated increasingly for their indirect contributions as agents of place promotion who can assist states to "cultivate" their "international image" and "expand global awareness" of their institution and jurisdiction (University of Buffalo, cited by Lane et al., 2014:8).

These efforts to manage migration at the state-level reduce migration to an economic practice and seek to =articulate (Collins, 2018) the process by which a US education can pay citizenship dividends to international students. Ohio was the first state to pass legislation promoting the economic benefits of retaining international students after graduation (Ohio Board of Regents 2015).[2] House Bill 484 created a "post-secondary globalization liaison," framing international students as "highly skilled workers" and therefore crucial agents in Ohio's broader "globalization efforts." The Global Reach to Engage Academic Talent (GREAT) initiative celebrates Ohio as the "first state to approach and codify in law the opportunity that educating international postsecondary students presents to bolster the state's global economic competitiveness," including to "encourage international post-secondary students to remain in the state beyond their study" (Ohio Board of Regents, 2014:2-4). One key objective of this policy is to demystify the US non-immigrant visa system for both international students and potential employers. This initiative reflects prevailing views in migration management that "'regulated openness' will lead to orderly flows that will be mutually beneficial and where the politics of migration is business as usual" (Collins, 2018:965).

Over the last two years, the US politics of migration has been anything but business as usual.

Across the US, international student enrollment declined by 2.2 percent and 5.5 percent at the undergraduate and graduate levels, respectively, from Fall 2016 to Fall 2017 (Redden, 2018). In some places, declines appear to be more severe. For example, the number of international students enrolled at Cleveland State University declined by 13.8 percent during the same period, particularly at the graduate level (CSU, 2018). Fluctuations in international student enrollment also have important implications for the financial-structure of US higher education, since foreign students may pay as much as twice the tuition paid by domestic students (Saul, 2018).[3] There remains a need, however, to go beyond enrollment data, and to understand migrant decisions as more than singular points in time.

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[1] Proposed legislation in this area includes the Stopping Trained in America PhDs from Leaving the Economy (STAPLE) Act of 2009, which would provide green cards to doctoral graduates in STEM fields, and the 2012 STEM Jobs Act, which proposed to create 55,000 visas for graduates of particular universities. As it stands, students seeking F-1 study visas must demonstrate "non-immigrant intent" in order to qualify, assuring Consular officers that they will return home after completing their studies (Mayberry, 2009).

[2] In terms of the broader geographies of international student attraction, the state of Ohio ranks 8th, hosting 38,680 international students in 2017, predominantly from China, India, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Kuwait.

[3] The collapse of tuition dollars has prompted Moody's to downgrade the credit ratings of institutions – like Wright State in Dayton, Ohio – who relied heavily on international fees in the wake of the global financial crisis (Saul, 2018).

2.3. Student migration as assemblage

Finally, I also draw insights here from recent scholarship on migrant aspirations and abilities (Carling and Collins, 2018; Carling and Schewel, 2018; Scheibelhofer, 2018). Students' desires to migrate are shaped by the interplay of the subject positions they occupy and by the reality of possibilities before them. For Collins (2018:973), migration is best understood as a process of constantly shifting connections between people, ideas, and objects – "social and material assemblages" – that traverses diverse spatial and temporal scales. Migration is therefore both a production of "transformation" but also an agent of change that shifts the "subject positions that migrants inhabit" (Collins, 2018:969). Particularly important to this study is Collins' discussion of the 'blockages' encountered by migrants and the role they play in shaping migration. These intervening obstacles, from the rejection of a study visa application, job loss, or graduating in a time of political uncertainty or economic recession – may impede or "redirect" the actualization of desires for migration, but not curtail them. Challenging individualistic, linear depictions of migrants as rational economic actors, Collins instead frames migration as an unpredictable process:

> ...articulated through other desires that emanate from variable, if not fully distinct, assemblages – a desire to embody different identities as a 'global subject' or 'cosmopolitan,' feelings of filial piety and commitment to community and place, a yearning for travel, adventure and experience or to escape from social and institutional constraints...The actualization of migration articulates the complex interplay between these expressions of desire, between strategic planning and opportunism that manifest in movements to achieve or avoid certain kinds of futures. Migration in this respect is never singular in its temporality, but rather is an ongoing process where past, present, and future are folded together in the emergence of migrant lives. (2018:967)

Conceptualizing student migration in this way allows for a more sensitive understanding of the complexity of motivations among migrants and the often contradictory ways in which government agendas and intermediaries shape their aspirations and abilities and variously expand or contract their "possibilities of migration" (Collins, 2018:968; Robertson, 2013; Zell, 2017).

In summary, research so far has suggested the broad impacts instigated by Trump's politics of xenophobia for international students. Recent scholarship on local immigration activism and migrant aspirations and abilities underscores the need to look beyond enrollment numbers and examine how international students in the "age of Trump" are also embedded in multiple temporal and scalar relationships. The contribution of this paper is to explore the blockages that Trump's agenda has introduced at the local level, and how competing migration regimes at the federal and state levels inform student migrants' everyday lives, aspirations, and abilities. Recent international student graduates at the nexus of education and migration provide an ideal cohort in which to examine the impact these questions. They entered the US during a period of federal expansion in US visa policy towards international students and the increased internationalization efforts at the state-level in Ohio, but have graduated in an environment of increasing restriction and uncertainty.

3. Methods

This article is based on eighteen in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with recently graduated international students at six Cleveland-area universities and colleges. The study area includes institutions in Cuyahoga, Portage, and Lorain counties, three public and three private. All participants had entered the United States on student visas for higher education (F-1) and had completed a bachelors or masters degree from a certified college or University between 2015 and 2017. All participants had extended (or applied to extend) their visa to work in the US through Optional Practical Training (OPT) or H-1B visa sponsorship. Table 1 summarizes the respondents' characteristics.

Most of the participants had completed a STEM degree, with engineering management, chemical engineering, information systems, and aeronautics among the fields represented. Non-STEM fields represented in the sample included economics, global studies, accounting, business, and industrial-organizational psychology. Of the eighteen participants, six were working locally: two on H-1B visas and four had OPT placements. The remainder were job searching, either with OPT approval (six) or awaiting authorization (six).

The sample was designed to achieve as much variation in the students' countries of origin as possible. As Table 1 shows, Indian students are the largest group represented, which reflects their greater uptake of OPT opportunities nationwide (Ruiz, 2017). I was unable to recruit participants from any of the countries impacted directly by the Muslim travel ban, likely due to their small percentage of students in northeast Ohio (Ruiz, 2014). It is also possible that these students were dissuaded from seeking OPT by discriminatory immigration policies and left the country (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2017).

The interviews were conducted in person, in June of 2017, in libraries or public places on four campuses. I also conducted several interviews at an immigrant service organization's downtown office when more convenient for participants. These interviews ranged from 30 to 54 min in length (the average length was 41 min). The interview questions examined the rationale for seeking OPT, the impact of shifting government policies on the OPT experience and on the everyday lives of international students after graduation, and to investigate how international students responded and navigated this policy environment. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then coded systematically, with the assistance of qualitative data analysis software. Combining codes that stem from study research questions with in vivo codes (i.e. themes emerging from the data and not foreseen by the researcher) allows for a better "understanding of social phenomena"

Table 1
Characteristics of respondents (N = 18).

Sex	Origin country	Field of study	Degree type	Institution	Field	Visa status (at time of interview)
Female (10) Male (8)	India (9) China (4) Nepal (2) Nigeria (2) Lebanon (1)	Business, management, marketing, & related (8) Engineering (7) Physical sciences (1) Arts (2)	Masters (15) Undergraduate (3)	Case Western Reserve U. (8) Cleveland State U. (4) Kent State U. (3) Oberlin College (1) Cuyahoga Community C. (1) Baldwin Wallace (1)	STEM (13) Non-Stem (5)	H-1B (2) F1-OPT & working (4) F1-OPT & job searching (6) F1-waiting for OPT (6)

(Copes, 2017:4). Pseudonyms have been used to protect participants' anonymity.

4. International students in Trump's Middle America

> So when the change happened [the travel ban], international students – and the things that had been said, people started panicking. And then followed by what happened at the airports and everything, international students were not [trails off]...so people were more like confused. They were afraid. They were more like...it was mostly fear because people didn't know what to do – Sonya, 33-year old, graduate student from Nigeria

In the "age of Trump," international students in the United States are navigating new everyday landscapes of exclusion. Sonya's statement conveys the panic among international students on a large public campus after Trump took office. After Trump was elected, Sonya explained that she had to become more careful and more aware of her everyday interactions, paying attention to "who supports the leadership and those who don't." She describes this need for such self-regulation as a limitation on the freedom of international students in the US. "I had a friend who was from Iran. A bunch of them were so afraid, and they were all staying indoors. One of the guys said that one of his colleagues told him that he shouldn't want to come back to work." She watched the news every day: "every second we see them [the Trump administration] making plans," but since they do not know what will happen, she urges: "let's pay attention, let's be ready." Scholars of international student mobility in other contexts like Australia have highlighted that students occupy an "interstitial" position within national migration regimes, characterized by social and legal precarity (Robertson and Runganaikaloo, 2014:212). But Sonya's urging that her friends should "be ready" – for another set of dramatic displays of exclusion by Executive Order – is also instructive of the broader "precarious world of insecurity" (Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood, 2017) that non-citizen students in the US now inhabit.

Two additional vignettes also underscore this insecurity and demonstrate the complexity of "racist-spatial dynamics" (Ehrkamp, 2017) experienced by international students living in a post-Trump world. Tanya, a 23-year old student from India, had just completed an information systems graduate program on a large public campus. She recounted media coverage of immigration after the November 2016 election: "They are saying they are sending everybody back." Coverage of the shooting of two Indian engineers in Olathe, Kansas, by a white navy veteran yelling "get out of my country," had also made a jarring impression. According to Tanya, "few media are saying that as this new rule came over [the travel ban]…they wanted, it made them to kill." Although Tanya felt that the shooter's motivation was more complicated than the media had made it seem (as she put it, "everything doesn't pile up with immigration"), her parents were worried for her safety. When I asked Tanya if she felt afraid, she replied, "sometimes no. But recent days, yes," describing a recent experience she had in a taxicab in Chicago. The cab driver had insinuated that Indians in the US were 'illegals':

> The driver, he was black, and he was like so, like talking, in a rude way, attitudinal way. I'm just a customer, just a rider. He was saying that due to you people, they are even now, concentrating on us. I said, what, come on? …A few people, yes, they are coming illegally. Doesn't mean that every Indian comes illegally.

Tanya's experiences draw attention to the wider consequences of xenophobia and violence attached to media narratives about immigration for international students, and how racialized borders operate within US territory including for students who are presumed "illegal" (Ehrkamp, 2017:8). Her reflections echo van Liempt's (2011:574) interviews with Dutch Somali immigrants who became objects of fear on trains and buses in the Netherlands as public opinion transitioned away from multiculturalism and towards "neo-Patriotism." Tanya expressed resentment at having paid international student fees with the assumption of being able to find work experience after graduating, only to graduate in an environment dominated by nativism. "I have paid, not come here for free. I'm not taking anything. I'm just learning and giving back to you," she explains. "They are saying that no, we are taking the knowledge or taking the jobs which US people get." By referencing her tuition fees and potential contribution, Tanya articulates the "logics of deservingness" (Ehrkamp, 2017:8) implicit in the education-migration nexus.

Other participants also reflected on the heightened entanglement of racism, nativism, and securitization in shaping status hierarchies under the current immigration regime. These connections play out in media coverage and in intimate spaces such as the backseat of a taxi cab, as well as in the everyday spaces of college campuses. Jane, a 22-year old student from China, was in her final year of an undergraduate economics degree at a small, private campus during the 2016 election. She described the "change of people's feeling," since the Trump administration had taken office. "Overnight people just went crazy, and there were also hate crimes and everything because it's [college name]. Yeah, it was bad, she explained, referring to the small, isolated campus in a majority white county. After the election, a local grocery store became a flashpoint when three African American students were arrested on shoplifting and assault charges. The arrests led to student protests alleging racial discrimination and the College's student senate passed a resolution asking students and the community to boycott the store. The students were protesting in front of the store: "Don't buy from them, they're racist!" explains Jane. Counter-protesters in support of the store threatened to bring guns to the protest. "It went a little bit out of control, and students didn't understand what was going on, but they also felt really angry about the fact that Trump got in." She continued, explaining that "I think, it's my speculation, there was no way they can just relieve their anger…[…] it's just this huge chaos."

Sonya, Tanya, and Jane's descriptions of the spaces in which they inhabit paint a picture of abrupt and alarming change that mirror the experiences of exclusion and fear that international migrants have encountered in other contexts where attitudes towards migration have hardened (van Liempt, 2011). Importantly, these vignettes underline that border walls and other "hypervisible" (Mainwaring and Silverman, 2017) actions represent only one dimension of the exclusion wrought by the current regime. International students, while sometimes coded as 'good' 'deserving' or 'desirable' migrants, are also increasingly, targets of fear, resentment, and criminalization.

4.1. Optional practical training as a multi-faceted material of mobility

Second, the state of Ohio's efforts to encourage international students to move through neatly defined channels of 'study' 'work' and 'stay' "obscure the uncertainties of migrant mobilities" (Collins, 2018:965) which have become even more uncertain in the "age of Trump." The impact of this uncertainty is highly differentiated by access to different 'materials of mobility,' (Szewczyk, 2016:373) including the presence or absence of family in the US, having a degree in a STEM field, and the burden of financial investment in education.

Varun, a graduate student from India, for example, did not have a definitive aspiration to 'stay' or to 'return' to India. Instead, his migration trajectory depends on the parallel trajectory of his sister's family, the immigration opportunities available to him, and the intervening obstacles he may face from an increasingly restrictive immigration regime:

> I mean, it all depends. Maybe after 3 years, I don't know, but I just want to experience US culture, US people. You know maybe

my thoughts might change in 2 or 3 years, so I would probably stay here if I feel comfortable living here but all my family is in India, so I don't know. My sister lives in California and they're going to move back to India. But if they come back maybe I would stay here. I don't know. But, I'm trying to be here because US is a good place for opportunities. But I don't know maybe the immigration might not support...also I would have to apply for H-1B visa, so I don't know how things are going to work.

This perspective is reminiscent of Collins' (2018) interviews with temporary migrants in South Korea whose descriptions of their migration path centered on an "always evolving-sense of they [wanted]." Varun was applying for Optional Practical Training positions in order to gain American work experience, and was weighing an unpredictable set of variables, including family migration decisions, personal relationships, and immigration policy.

Anthony, an engineering management graduate from Lebanon, was in the midst of applying for Optional Practical Training work positions that would extend his visa for three more years, possibly leading to H-1B sponsorship.

> So if you look at a job, you think that OPT gives you a one year extension, you should work something related to engineering at least. Then after, as STEM, you can extend it for a year and a half, so this exception gives you access to apply for H-1B within a company that you really want for a few years. When you have 2 years and a half, you have to apply for H-1B, which has a cap. So this is a better way than having an MBA. MBA usually are, they have only one year of OPT that's it. It's really difficult to get H-1B.

As this quote shows, Anthony understands OPT as symbolic capital that can be "strategically accumulated" (Waters, 2009:637) but also as unlocking a series of temporalities, and linked his choice of program as crucial to his future mobility.

> If you think about it long term, you can go for one year and then jump to another one, but *time is running*, so you have to stay, prove yourself there, and after five years move on or stay with the company [my emphasis]

He frames his future within a fluid and uncertain path, envisioning a potential transnational career between his home in Lebanon and the US. He hoped to contribute to Lebanon by building "bridges" to the US. "I'm trying not to go back [home]," he explained, citing the state of the economy and his desire to work in the US for six years. Yet, he continued: "For me, it's not like six years [in the US] and then done…[…] I want to create this culture bridge to them [Lebanon]…I think it's always going to be in between." Dubai, however, was Anthony's 'plan b' should he not find an OPT placement: after working there he could re-apply to MBA programs in the US. For him, 'staying' in the Cleveland-area after graduation could mean launching into a 'transnational triangle' (van Liempt, 2011) whereby 'home', 'belonging,' and work are spread across a constellation of spaces. For Anthony, remaining in the US may generate new opportunities (Waters, 2009) for future staggered mobility (Szewczyk, 2016), but he also recognizes that migration involves personal transformation in ways that he cannot predict, aligning with Collins' (2018:971) finding that movement may stem from a wish to "become otherwise."

While Anthony is trying to avoid an undesirable option – immediate return home – for him, Optional Practical Training represents only one in a series of cascading possibilities. In contrast, Sakshi's experience – a graduate student from India – problematizes understandings of international students as highly mobile global elites. After investing substantial resources in her education in the US, she was counting on working in the US to pay off her student loans before returning to India. She de-scribed a situation of substantial financial precarity that was motivating her to remain and work in northeast Ohio, although she faced a dwindling set of opportunities

> Because another serious concern is that I have taken a huge financial loan to afford this particular program, so if I go back it would be very difficult for me to survive. So that's the reason, one of the biggest concerns, it's a necessity in a way to stay here even at the most, even in a situation where I have to just, I have to do any odd jobs or stuff like that. Otherwise, if I don't find anything I know I have to go back [to India] but I really don't want to do that.

At the time of the interview, Sakshi was still in the process of applying for OPT positions and explained that she lived in "constant fear" that visa regulations would change before she had a chance to find work. Sakshi, compared to Anthony, is much less able to "choose the speed [she] wants to move" (Szewczyk, 2016:378). In an environment where opportunities are contracting quickly and unpredictably, time must also be understood as mobility material.

Varun, Anthony, and Sakshi's contrasting post-study motivations also call into question the efforts of the Ohio government to manage international students' movements through neat categories from 'study' to 'work' and 'stay.' They do not frame their trajectories in this way. While they all want to 'stay' in Ohio after graduation, Optional Practical Training actually serves as a means to eventually return home: a chapter in a wider migration path.

4.2. Navigating a new axis of risk in the education-migration nexus

Subnational international student attraction and retention projects like Ohio's GREAT depend on the willingness of employers to take OPT students and to engage with the US immigration system by sponsoring H-1B visas and green cards. Small and medium-sized firms in weaker or less specialized labour markets have less experience with, and capacity and willingness to engage with the US immigration system (Ruiz, 2014). Trump's politics of exclusion has introduced a new dimension of constraint on the local as a site of contested immigration politics by encouraging these firms to view the hiring of international students as a risk to their financial stability.

Vinay's experience on the job market illustrates this emerging axis of risk (Ewers and Lewis, 2008) in geopolitical framings of international students. Vinay had recently completed a STEM graduate degree and was searching for an OPT position. He felt that even companies who would otherwise "welcome" internationals were wary of doing so under the Trump administration. "They might be open themselves," he contended, "But I think in this atmosphere of ambiguity, they themselves are not clear where this is heading to. So they don't want to take a risk." Firms associate international hiring with financial and other costs, including paperwork, the costs of hiring an attorney and the general "burden" that accompanies the regulatory process. They are balking, however, because of the unpredictable return on investing in international students under an unpredictable immigration regime. One of their concerns is that there will be a higher minimum salary cap of $100,000 in place on H-1B visa holders such that an employer might hire an international student now, and then be required to pay them $30,000 more or "let them go" if the rules change.

More specifically, the future of the H-1B visa system presented a significant concern. Vinay describes this as the "H-1B saga" and had been told by employers and company contacts that they were wary of their ability to *retain* international students because of changes foreshadowed by Trump's "Buy American, and Hire American" Executive Order:

> Most of them have told me, right now, they are in a hiring freeze, just because the political environment is not stable right

now. And they have no idea where this H-1B saga is going to head to. They are still skeptical. As I said, if it's a big company, but a smaller, or mid-sized company. I've given a few interviews in the Cleveland area. They like me. But they couldn't sponsor me. So they didn't want me to be in the company for just three years.

Varun's experience was echoed by other students, who were told by recruiters that because of changing visa policies, "they [didn't] think this is the right time for an employer to hire an immigrant or an international student" and described local employers as having "gone into a shell." Significantly, his statement also illustrates the spatially uneven migration opportunity structures that international students in the US must negotiate (Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2010). The politics of exclusion – and its overlapping axes of risk – filters unevenly across Ohio's variegated landscape of downscaling and disempowerment.

Pranay – also a graduate student from India – was encountering similar difficulties in his search for an Optional Practical Training position, which he attributed to employers "waiting out" the "volatile" political situation. He compared his experiences at major career fairs held in September of 2016 to June of 2017. Whereas a considerable portion of companies had indicated they were willing to hire international students in 2016, this number had dwindled in 2017 after Trump was elected. As Pranay explained, at the second career fair, "We were like outright rejected, like we're not taking international students as of right now…[…] if you compare the list [of companies willing to sponsor visa applications] from both the semesters, you realize that say about a hundred companies were open to sponsoring or open to international students in the fall, but only thirty of them were open in the Spring semester." Pranay's anecdote brings to the light the far-reaching consequences of a macro-level politics of xenophobia, where even campus career fairs are experiences of exclusion and bordering processes (Ehrkamp, 2017). Both Pranay and Varun's experiences illustrate the profound impact of the state in limiting the migration and mobility opportunities of international students (Bauder, 2015; Robertson, 2013). While Trump's immigration regime has instituted a dramatic spectacle of exclusion, it is also necessary to consider the insidious walls that this regime has also constructed to date.

4.3. Redirection in a new policy environment

In response to these obstacles to their post-graduation mobility, students were redirecting their energies in various ways. Some described the potential reforms to the H-1B visa system as a motivating force that would require them to be more competitive and to build resumes that distinguished them from other candidates and made them worthy of higher salaries. When I ask Samita, a 28-year old student business student from Nepal if she had any concerns about the direction of the Trump administration, she replied:

> No. He's [Trump's] a businessman. So I'm also gonna do business [laughs]. Whatever he's thinking, even if I'd be in his place I'll be thinking only first for my country, second for the other people. So that's a businessman. So I don't feel any…I'm ok with, ok whatever he says, because right now he's the President. So he will, because he has something good that's why he became the President. So we don't judge him.

Expressing strategic agency, Samita acknowledges her precariousness and adopts a "resilient attitude" in the face of contracting opportunities (Robertson and Runganaikaloo, 2014).

Others, while frustrated, maintained that they could and would find opportunities elsewhere if forced to leave the United States. Sam, a graduate student from Nigeria, maintained the US was a "great place" with many opportunities but was weighing his options given the direction of the Trump administration. Sam explained that he had left Nige-

ria for better opportunities in the United States, "but if it [the US] chooses not to be welcoming, then I'm sure I will find other opportunities." Sam was considering further graduate studies in Canada or Europe, explaining that

> In terms of choosing to stay, it's based on government regulations, you know? I can't force myself to stay if the government policy does not allow me to stay, you know? …[…] I would love to stay, but if opportunities are not there, then what do I do? I left my country for better opportunities, and if the opportunities are not there, then excuse me I might as well find other opportunities.

Sam said he was afraid to leave the United States as a student and no longer felt "accepted" in the United States, to the point where he felt was not treated as a human being. The following statement illustrates Sam's distress over recent immigration debates:

> I appreciate the opportunity the United States gives, but the truth is that we humans – not even humans – living things have to shift to places where they're loved, where they're accepted. We are all human beings, for crying out loud. You don't get to treat us as though – yeah, I understand we're in a foreign land, but all the same.

Although he wished to remain in the US, Sam had been unable to find work, and was now reevaluating his options: to return home or pursue further study. Sam's experience highlights that migration should be viewed as an ongoing, incomplete, and unpredictable process (Collins, 2018) albeit profoundly shaped by experiences of political exclusion.

5. Concluding discussion

The central goal of this article was to explore the local geographies of exclusion and inclusion spurred by Trump's politics of xenophobia, with a specific focus on higher education. I focus on a cohort of international students at the nexusof education and migration (Robertson 2013) whose temporalities position them uniquely to shed light on this problem. This cohort entered the US under one set of conditions – namely, a policy environment in which opportunities at the education-migration nexus were expanding both federally and at the state-level. But, they graduated in an altogether different environment and have had to weigh this new exclusionary landscape against their migration desires. This research takes a qualitative approach, and in so doing, addresses an important gap: namely, while there has been considerable speculation about the consequences of Trump's politics on international student mobility, scholars have yet to ask students directly about their experiences. Analyses to date have focused solely on enrollment numbers, which provide an incomplete understanding of the impact of the new geographies of xenophobia on a globalized system of higher education.

This research documents how fallout from the Trump administration has obstructed the mobility processes and opportunities made available to international students in the US – requiring some to leave the country, catching others in limbo, while many more face the prejudice and violence accompanying media rhetoric about immigration. It reinforces calls to avoid depictions of international students as elite, global citizens, whose variegated social and legal precarity has been documented in other contexts including Australia and the UK where attitudes towards student-migrants have also hardened in recent years (Goldring and Ladolt, 2011; Mavroudi and Warren, 2013; Moskal, 2017; Robertson, 2011). The interviews conducted for this project reveal the differentiated impact a politics of exclusion has for international students with varying access to mobility materials because of their choice of study, their variegated access to financial capital, and

their visa status. Sakshi was under enormous pressure to work in the US after graduation because of the financial gamble she had made while Anthony, for example, took the uncertainty in stride, planning to return to the US for another degree, predicting a migration trajectory akin to the "go stop go" mobility the Szewczyk (2016) identified among Polish post-graduates in the UK who naturalized to shore up future mobility prospects.

This paper also contributes to scholarship on the local as a site of contested immigration politics by drawing attention to the new everyday landscapes of exclusionary spatial politics international students must navigate, evidenced by their accounts of racist and anti-racist conflicts on their campuses, in taxi cabs, and at campus jobs fairs that have gone cold on visa sponsorships. Uncertainty about the direction of federal immigration policy – particularly on the OPT and H-1B visas and the socio-political environment induced by the recent Travel Ban and 'Buy American, Hire American' Executive Orders – has stymied local retention efforts in Ohio by dissuading employers from hiring international students. In this environment, international students are framed by yet another axis of risk – employers are increasingly wary of immigration changes to the system and do not want to risk hiring international students whose opportunities to remain in the US may be revoked, or whose salaries may become more expensive. This study thereby adds nuance to an understanding of how macro-level policies constrain local inclusionary immigration practices and calls attention to the need for migration scholars to pay heed to the experiences of migrants in downscaled locations (Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2010), including low-immigration destinations in the Midwest (Filomeno, 2015; Pottie-Sherman, 2018). While the State of Ohio is enlisting the desires of international students in order to challenge its regional disempowerment, the federal immigration regime is disrupting these efforts by cultivating an atmosphere of extreme policy uncertainty.

Finally, the findings presented here underscore the importance of acknowledging international student mobility as mediated not only by rational economic calculations but also by the many assemblages that constitute the desire for movement (Collins, 2018). Viewed with this lens, post-graduation work functions both as a "material of mobility," (Szewczyk, 2016) as well as a path to "becoming otherwise" (Collins, 2018). If the education-migration nexus in the US is a system of stepping-stones (Robertson, 2013), this research shows that, under the Trump administration, the water between the stones is rising. Yet, faced with blockages – namely the contraction of post-graduate work opportunities, students have redirected their energies, towards distinguishing their resumes, choosing particular degree programs, and considering moving home or pursuing a doctorate.

This study is limited in that it does not capture the experiences of students from banned countries, nor of students whose status is now precarious because of the failure of Congress to reach a compromise on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Yet, by examining students who are, on paper, exempt from these new restrictions, this study reveals the far-reaching impacts of Trump's politics of exclusion. This research also raises two additional sets of questions for future research on the politics of migration. The first area concerns the uneven impact of Trump's politics of exclusion on the economic geographies of higher education across the US. Some institutions have blamed declining international student enrollment for their downgraded credit ratings and subsequent program cuts (Saul, 2018). Given the imbrication of internationalization and financialization of higher education, how might new flows of student migration reshape or interact with an uneven global landscape of emerging markets and disinvestment by governments in higher education? The second area concerns the wider global reverberations on international students flows and the rival destinations – the UK, Canada, Australia, Netherlands, New Zealand, or Singapore – that may be beneficiaries of student flows away from the US. What are the implications of this potentially expanded spatial reach of non-US institutions? Might international student mobility constitute new realms of soft power (Trilokekar, 2010) within these emerging global landscapes of Trumpism and Brexit?

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