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## Choose France! Containment, circulation and postcolonial (dis)continuities in transnational education

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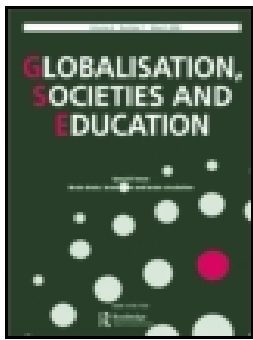
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# Choose France! Containment, circulation and postcolonial (dis)continuities in transnational education

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## ABSTRACT

Understanding the post-colonial geographies of transnational education spanning France and Africa requires a closer look at the actors that facilitate and inhibit international student mobilities: transnational higher education institutions. Conceptualising offshore campuses as infrastructures of selective (im)mobility, we analyse how French business and engineering schools shifted their strategies from envisioning their campuses in Francophone Africa as ‘alternatives to migration’ towards facilitating various circulations. We show how French offshore campuses do not simply enact French migration and higher education policies but increasingly adapt to competitive pressures and demands of fee-paying students for mobility, thereby emulating ‘Anglo-Saxon’ market-oriented strategies.

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## Introduction

In a speech held at the University of Ouagadougou in November 2017, French President Macron encouraged French higher education institutions (HEIs) to develop transnational higher education (TNE)<sup>1</sup> in Africa:

I therefore call on French universities and business schools, engineering schools and business schools to waste no more time and to come and meet you to develop these crossed paths to which both our youths aspire. And this profound change, which consists in reviewing, in revolutionising our entire way of thinking, is indispensable. I don't want a young Burkinabe, as soon as he says 'I'm going to study' to have only one goal: to study in France! No. I want him to be able to carry out all his studies in Burkina Faso if he wants to. (Macron 2017)<sup>2</sup>

The project to increase French TNE in Africa is part of a higher education policy called *Bienvenue en France / Choose France*<sup>3</sup>. Launched in 2018, Choose France aims not only at increasing the number of international students in France but also at enhancing the reach of French higher education through offshore provision. Colonial continuities are an integral part of Choose France: unquestioned are the wish to receive a French education as the ultimate goal of young people in Francophone Africa and the ‘choice’ of immobility while receiving a French education *in situ* (Macron 2017).

The French state has embarked on a quest to enrol transnational HEIs in the political project of continuing its influence on Africa by delivering French degrees, while simultaneously restricting immigration to France. Post-colonial relationships continue to structure international student mobilities (Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2015). TNE, similarly, is constituted by asymmetric

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power relations and uneven opportunity structures. It is in this context that França, Alves, and Padilla (2018, 327) argue that

The training of the new elites of the ex-colonies in the former metropolis, the use of the colonial language, the implementation of a similar curricula and the facilitation of students' visa processes [are] the key features of the neo-colonial space under which international student mobility currently takes place, enabling old power asymmetries to survive.

We contribute to a post-colonial analysis of transnational education, by empirically analysing the extent to which French TNE in Africa constitutes a break with or rather a continuation of (post)-colonial higher education geographies and student mobilities.

The landscape of French TNE in Africa is diverse and includes offshore campuses, French-foreign universities, franchises, academic partnerships, centres for continuing education and online education. Our empirical discussion focuses on a group of institutions called upon by President Macron in Ouagadougou (Macron 2017) and that drive the development of French offshore campuses: *Grandes Écoles*<sup>4</sup>, especially business and engineering schools. While envisioned to play a role in enacting French interests across national borders (Campus France 2018), business and engineering schools act relatively autonomously from the state when setting up offshore campuses. Unlike French public universities involved in 'French-foreign university' cooperations funded by the French Foreign Affairs Ministry and the French Development Agency and using a similar terminology (e.g. the French-Senegalese 'campus') (Campus France 2018), most offshore campuses are self-funded and operated by private institutions (France Stratégie 2016).

We investigate the shifting strategies of French offshore campuses in Africa and question how those are entangled with political strategies. In particular, we question how offshore campuses' strategies align or diverge with the project to use TNE as a tool to manage migration while keeping influence over former colonies. Our focus on the meso-level of HEIs is novel, since much research by international higher education and migration scholars focuses on the mobility decisions of individuals or on changing higher education and migration policies. Moreover, by focusing on French higher education in Africa, we aim to provide alternative examples of the mechanisms that structure and influence post-colonial higher education provision beyond the 'export' of Anglo-American higher education providers, usually situated within more market-based systems, and beyond the primarily studied 'importing' regions of Asia and the Middle East.

Our findings are based on a mapping of French *Grandes Écoles* in Africa, a document analysis of French TNE policies towards Africa and interviews conducted with political stakeholders and higher education managers of several business and engineering schools with campuses in the Maghreb, Western and Central Africa. Showing how French offshore campuses do not simply enact French policies but increasingly adapt their strategies to competitive pressures and demands of fee-paying African students for mobility, we reveal the frictions inherent in post-colonial TNE.

In the following, we develop our conceptual framework on offshore campuses as infrastructures of selective (im)mobility, before section three outlines the methodology. The next section situates French offshore campus in Africa historically and geographically and their role within French migration policies. Section five analyses French offshore campuses' shifting strategies. Those latter manifest an increasing adaptation to demands of a globalising higher education market as illustrated in section six. The last section summarises the findings and their main contributions to post-colonial research on TNE.

## **Towards post-colonial understandings of (im)mobility in transnational education**

We review geographic literatures on student mobilities/migration, on policies of international student mobilities and on TNE from a post-colonial perspective. Then, we proceed to develop our

conceptualisation of HEIs as, to date, understudied transnational actors whose offshore campuses provide infrastructures that modulate the circulation and containment of students.

### ***Geographies of international student mobilities/migration***

Research on the geographies of international student mobilities/migration<sup>5</sup> (ISM) tends to focus on individual students, their desires, motivations, experiences and trajectories (Brooks and Waters 2011; Findlay et al. 2012). We contribute to a post-colonial perspective on ISM that pays attention to the ‘complex and historically layered multiscalar and multi-polar circulations that characterise the changing and uneven terrain of international study’ (Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2015, 695). International higher education mobilities are embedded within post-colonialism and the ‘reputational geographies’ of particular HEIs and their nation states as ‘world-class’ institutions (Findlay et al. 2012; Jöns and Hoyler 2013; Marginson 2004). Existing research has shown how geographical imaginaries (Collins 2013), (neo)colonialism and uneven power relations in international education shape the geographies of transnational education (Leung and Waters 2017; Phan 2017; Sidhu 2006; Siltaoja, Juusola, and Kivijärvi 2019). Critical geographic research on the globalisation of higher education has engaged with Massey’s (1994) notion of ‘geometries of power’, which pervade socio-spatial relations and affect the opportunities of individuals or social groups to act in relation to translocal flows. Leung and Waters (2017) use the concept to highlight the role of power relations and borders in transnational education. Focusing on the empirical case of British degrees delivered in Hong Kong, Waters and Leung (2013) argue that these international degrees are constituted by ‘immobilities’, as they are fully delivered in situ. Students enrolled in TNE appear to be perceived as ‘lacking’ due to their absent mobility (Waters 2018). This suggests that the quality and reputation of overseas degrees received in situ are tenuous. They primarily tap into students’ desires for Western education, even if these degrees are perceived in some contexts as mediocre (Phan 2017).

Student experiences and ‘choices’ for immobility at the micro-level have been central in this strand of research. In the next section we extend the view and look beyond individual students’ decision-making to understand the ‘actors, entrepreneurs or systems of governance involved in facilitating student mobility and migration’ (Beech 2018, 611) by focusing on the role of state-led ISM policies.

### ***ISM policies between circulation and containment***

‘International study does not operate on a benign level playing field but in a ruffled terrain riven with inequalities, immobilities and differences’ argue Madge and colleagues (2015, 692). Borders and immigration policies shape students’ abilities to become internationally mobile. Whereas some scholars have shown how states have introduced similar policies intended to attract international students (Geddie 2015), others have highlighted the contradictory nature of deterrence and attraction in the ISM policies of different European countries (Levatino et al. 2018; Lomer 2018; O’Connor 2018). A key tension arises from the ‘contradictions between international students as ‘desired’ because of their internationalism and fee contributions, and as ‘unwanted’ because of the politics of migration control’ (King and Raghuram 2013, 127). International ‘student-migrants’ (Robertson 2013) are caught up in the education-migration nexus and may be stigmatised in anti-immigration debates.

This is reflected in policies by European states, which introduced forms of ‘managed migration’ through which they filter migrants according to their supposed utilitarian labour value for the knowledge economy. Drawing boundaries between (un)desirable categories of migrants, policies of managed migration have implications for gender and racial inequalities (Kofman 2007; McDowell 2009). For instance, since the early 2000s and the ‘immigration choisie’<sup>6</sup> policy of the then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, international student mobility as a pool for ‘talents’ has been favoured over family or labour migration in France. Illustrating how student mobility is entangled

with migration policies and colonial histories (França, Alves, and Padilla 2018), French policies of managed migration have been particularly detrimental to students with lower qualifications and economic capital, notably from Africa (Kabbanji and Toma 2020). Changing migration policies by the state thus affect international student mobilities and require to be given scholarly attention (Beech 2018; Riaño, van Mol, and Raghuram 2018).

Transnational education has been enrolled within state's policies of managed migration show studies on British or Australian TNE (Levatino 2016; Levatino et al. 2018). Yet, offshore campuses' impact on international student mobilities is unclear. To understand how offshore campuses enable and inhibit international student mobilities, we need to turn to HEIs and their spatial strategies.

### ***Offshore campuses as infrastructures of selective (im)mobility***

We now shift our gaze beyond students and policy making to the meso-level of HEIs to analyse 'the spatiality of higher education and its relationship to student mobility (Raghuram 2013, 139). If HEIs and their degrees themselves become mobile, this has repercussions for international student (im)mobilities. Following an intervention in the field of migration studies that takes into view the 'infrastructures of migration' (Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012), educational scholars have argued that 'mobility is shaped not only by student 'choice' but also by the social and institutional networks within which students circulate' (Collins 2013, 480). They conceptualise the infrastructures of student mobility as the 'relatively stable social and institutional connections that support or enable student mobility' (Collins 2013, 480).

Serving as a 'solution' for countries and HEIs that have grown dependent upon international students' tuition fees in former colonies, offshore campuses may constitute a way of 'actualising the lucrative international student market while retaining them within the global south itself' (Gunter and Raghuram 2018, 196). At the same time, offshore campuses can act as facilitators of student mobilities: recent figures show that one in five international students who started their study at a British offshore provider then transferred to 'on-shore' education in the United Kingdom (UK) (British Council, and Universities UK International 2020). In contrast to discourses that suggest a resolution of the inherent tensions of earning export revenue through international students and restricting immigration, offshore education provision also enables selective mobilities.

University campuses in general act as sites of containment *and* circulation of international students, which are co-constitutive, show Sidhu and colleagues (2016) in a study on the construction of 'global' universities in Asia as well as Rottleb and Kleibert (2022) in a study of TNE in Dubai and Qatar. Similarly, offshore campuses can be conceptualised as infrastructures of mobility *and* immobility as they have the ability to reconfigure international student mobilities in manifold ways (Kleibert 2021). While most research up to date has stressed the role of TNE as providing students a choice of 'immobility' (e.g. Breines, Raghuram, and Gunter 2019; Waters and Leung 2013), we conceptualise offshore campuses as infrastructures of selective students' (im)mobility.

### **Methodology**

We question how the strategies of Grandes Écoles exporting campuses to Africa are entangled with French political strategies. Our methodology is based on a mapping of offshore campuses by Grandes Écoles in Africa (Table 1), a document analysis of French TNE policies towards Africa as well as interviews with political stakeholders and higher education managers.

Based on a desktop research, the mapping focuses on campuses set up by HEIs that belong to the 'Conférence des Grandes Écoles', an association created in 1973 to represent the interests of its members, most of them engineering and business schools (CGE 2019). We follow Kleibert et al.'s definition of offshore campuses (2020) as *physical infrastructures*, thereby excluding other

forms of TNE such as online learning or joint degree partnerships. They can operate independently or in collaboration with business and/or academic partners (2020).

The policy analysis is based on three documents. First, a report on French TNE commissioned in 2015 by the then Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by the Ministry and the State Secretary for Higher Education and Research (France Stratégie 2016). The very fact that the report, published in 2016, calls for the ‘urgent need of a strategy’ in French TNE (while French HEIs have set-up offshore campuses since the 1990s) illustrates how the French state has long been absent from offshore campuses’ manoeuvres but attempts today at enrolling them within national strategies. Second, Emmanuel Macron’s speech at the University of Ouagadougou, which delineates the contours of France’s higher education strategy towards Africa (Macron 2017). Third, the 2018 press release of the Choose France strategy (Campus France 2018).

Finally, 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted between April 2019 and July 2020 in French and English, either face-to-face or via video call. Ten interviews were conducted with political stakeholders engaged in French TNE, five with directors and international relations (IR) officers of Grandes Écoles with campuses in Africa, and two with (former) campus managers. In order to cover shifting strategies, the sample focuses on HEIs that have been present in Africa for about a decade. The interview data was consolidated by information gathered in the HEIs’ strategic reports and websites.

## Situating French offshore campuses in Africa

The establishment of French campuses in Africa is situated within a (post)colonial history and geography that we now turn to.

### French higher education in Africa

French educational institutions and the French language were major components of the Republican ‘civilisational mission’ of the French Empire (Barthélemy 2010; Conklin 1997). Fearing the rise of an intellectual elite that would question the colonial order, tertiary education was limited in the colonies to professional trainings. Only four university centres opened in the French Empire in Alger, Hanoi and on the brink of decolonisation in Tunis and Dakar, of which only the university in Hanoi was open to the ‘indigenous’ population (Singaravelou 2009).

**Table 1.** Offshore campuses by French Grandes Écoles in Africa.

Offshore campuses	City (country)	Field of study	Year opening (closure)
Toulouse Business School Casablanca	Casablanca (Morocco)	Business	2004
EIGSI Casablanca	Casablanca (Morocco)	Engineering	2006
BEM Dakar Bordeaux Management School	Dakar (Senegal)	Business	2008
Dauphine Tunis	Tunis (Tunisia)	Business	2009
HEI ISA ISEN Maroc	Fez (Morocco)	Engineering	2011 (2016)
Institut Ucac-Icam Douala	Douala (Cameroon)	Engineering	2013*
École Centrale Casablanca	Casablanca (Morocco)	Engineering	2015
Emlyon Business School Casablanca	Casablanca (Morocco)	Business	2015
Centrale Nantes Mauritius	Flic-en-Flac (Mauritius)	Engineering	2016
Dauphine Casablanca	Casablanca (Morocco)	Business	2016 (2019)
École internationale du management et de l’entrepreneuriat	Yaoundé (Cameroon)	Business	2016
Junia Maroc	Rabat (Morocco)	Engineering	2016
ESSEC Afrique	Rabat (Morocco)	Business	2017
Institut Ucac-Icam Pointe-Noire	Pointe-Noire (Republic of the Congo)	Engineering	2018**
BEM Abidjan Bordeaux Management School	Abidjan (Republic of Côte d’Ivoire)	Business	2020

Source: desktop research.

\*Campus launched in 2013 but programmes delivered since 2004.

\*\*Campus launched in 2018 but programmes delivered since 2002.



Inheriting from this colonial history and geography, French offshore campuses concentrate in countries that share a colonial past with France, especially Morocco but also Senegal, Cameroon or Côte d'Ivoire (Table 1). A Grande École, as well as further French HEIs, have also set up campuses in the so-called Uniciti Education Hub launched in 2017 in Mauritius (Kleibert et al. 2020), suggesting a new orientation of French campuses towards English-speaking Africa confirmed in our analysis. Table 1 also shows a dominance of engineering and business schools, most of them private institutions (France Stratégie 2016).

Business schools have driven the development of French offshore campuses, manifesting the marketisation of a sector facing cuts in public funding and (inter)national competition pressures (Blanchard 2009). While not their main destination, they have invested since the early 2000s and increasingly so since 2015 in Africa where they deliver mainly continuing education (e.g. MBAs), but also Bachelor and Master degrees in management. French engineering schools' transnational strategies focus more on academic collaborations than on setting-up offshore campuses (France Stratégie 2016). Concentrating in Africa, the few engineering schools' offshore campuses have been set up in response to demands from the hosting state or from public and private partners (for instance French companies) for the development of the local industrial sector. Reflective of the generalist orientation of French engineering schools (Delespierre 2016), they deliver undergraduate and graduate courses in social, human and management sciences next to more technical courses.

While self-funded and run by private institutions, in the last years the French state has shown an increased interest in enrolling offshore campuses in the project to keep influence over former colonies while restricting immigration to France. This manifests in the Choose France policy to which we now turn to.

### *Offshore campuses as instruments of the state?*

The 2018 Choose France policy encourages TNE in Francophone Africa. In a context in which Francophone African students growingly turn to Anglosaxon destinations such as the United States or South Africa (Campus France 2017), French TNE is envisioned as a tool to strengthen the Francosphere of influence:

[...] to reject the French language because English is more fashionable in Africa is to ignore the future! French will be the number one language of Africa and maybe even of the world [...]. (Macron 2017)

But Choose France is also a strategy of immigration restriction, the stated goal being to offer 'the youth of our partner countries the possibility to enrol in programmes developed by French institutions without having to leave their own country' (Campus France 2018, 21). French education provision in Africa should strategically retain African students in French HEIs while keeping their bodies outside of France.

Not all African students are 'unwelcomed' to France. The 'desirability' of African students depends on their perceived potential to contribute to the French economy. The circulation of a transnationally mobile African elite is for instance encouraged through the so-called Talent Passports delivered yearly to 1.000 African researchers, entrepreneurs or artists (Macron 2017). It is no coincidence that the Choose France strategy is coordinated by the agency Campus France, which is both in charge of promoting French higher education abroad and of selecting incoming international students (Bréant and Jamid 2019). Under the disguise of 'welcoming' more international students, Choose France continues selective migration policies that discriminate students with a lower economic capital, notably from former African colonies (Kabbanji and Toma 2018).

This is mirrored in a highly controversial measure of the policy: the raise of tuition fees for non-EU students in French universities. According to Campus France (2018), introducing differentiated fee-structures will improve international students' services, but it is also a strategy of selection along socio-economic and (discursively overlapping) geographical origins. A respondent argues that



The recent ‘welcoming’ system which has been put in place, which now charges non-European foreigners, is basically a way of selecting the type of students, the origin of foreign students. We see many more Asians who can pay, who are creditworthy, and much less Africans. (Interview with political stakeholder in French TNE)

Much has been written on Choose France’s tuition fees policy as a further measure of selection among incoming international students (Bréant and Jamid 2019; Kabbanji and Toma 2018, 2020), but less is known about the entanglements between French offshore provision and migration policies. Envisioning TNE as a way to improve ‘the quality of incoming flows, either through a selection of the best or through the preparation of the candidates to incoming mobility’ (France Stratégie 2016, 141), Choose France introduces offshore provision as a way to manage migration, ostensibly in line with studies on the UK (Levatino et al. 2018).

It is against this (post)colonial background that we now analyse how French offshore campuses’ strategies align or diverge with the project to use TNE as a tool to manage migration while keeping influence over former colonies.

## From containment to multiple mobilities

All interviewed higher education managers initially envisioned offshore campuses that opened between 2000 and the early 2010s in the Maghreb and in Western and Central Africa as alternatives to migration. The director of an engineering school (ES1) with a campus in Casablanca explained:

The project was to offer our excellent training in situ and to avoid for all these young people to come to France, where there are two problems. The costs of living [...] and then above all - well also, not above all - the visa problems [...]. We open up much more to people who don’t have the means to prove that they have the means of subsistence in France because visas [...] are granted to people who prove that they have enough money to live in France.

The framing directly aligns with the restrictive immigration policies of that time, from Sarkozy’s ‘chosen immigration’ of the early 2000s to the Guéant circular of 2011 (later repaled in 2012) which aimed at reducing the number of foreign students working in France after graduation and impacted strongly African students (Kabbanji and Toma 2020). However, a shift of strategies occurred over the years. While offshore campuses in Africa were initially envisioned as enabling the containment of African students in their home countries, since around 2015 French higher education managers construct their campuses as enabling multiple forms of circulation: selective mobilities to France, intra-African mobility and broader transcontinental mobility.

## Enabling selective mobilities to France

First, we observe a shift in ES1 and another engineering school in Morocco (ES2) from envisioning the campus as an alternative to migration towards envisioning the campus as a facilitator of selective mobility to France. Notions of ‘mediocrity’ (Phan 2017) with regards to the quality of Western TNE used to characterise engineering offshore campuses, since for many years the degrees they delivered were not recognised by the French state. This echoes with the colonial practice to deliver degrees that were only valid in the colonies (Singaravelou 2009). Despite post-colonial power relations, that place a reputational premium on French education, the degrees themselves and their lack of recognition by the French state made ES2 largely undesirable to prospective students: only nine students enrolled in the campus in the first year, leading to financial losses and campus closure. Whereas Phan showed with respect to TNE in Vietnam that ‘English-medium programmes, however poor quality they can be, are still something desirable’ (2017, 222), the export of French programmes faced severe limits.

ES2 opened a new campus some years later with a different strategy: students now start the programme in Morocco and finish it in France where they obtain a French degree (3 + 2 years model). Facilitating mobility to France, the 3 + 2 model diverges from the political project of containment but aligns with the project of selective migration, since it funnels only post-graduate students to

France. A former governmental consultant on French TNE policies explained how Choose France supports the development of ‘French programmes at the Bachelor’s level in Africa’ as to ‘lower the number of Francophone students who go to France at the Bachelor’s level and to have more at the Master’s level’. It also supports the selection of students according to their economic capital: tuition fees in ES2 and ES1 amount to 55,000 MAD/year (around 5000 €)<sup>7</sup>.

According to the HEIs’ managers, the 3 + 2 model is less motivated by the aim to support immigration policies but rather aim to accommodate the post-colonial desires of relatively privileged Moroccan students for mobility to France. Even though the very reality of visa policies structure African students’ mobilities, the 3 + 2 model manifests efforts of French HEIs to responds to ‘consumer’ demands:

Three years on site plus two years in France. In the end, it’s a bit a decompression chamber or an adaptation phase before, finally, obtaining a visa and having a project [...]. We could have had a five-years project [...]. You have to look at the customer promise. For us, the promise is three years in a French school in Morocco, which means that they are already putting a foot in France. (Interview with ES2 director)

A similar dynamics is observed in ES1, also operating a campus in Morocco. Today, the degrees delivered in the campus are accredited by the French state, meaning that students receive exactly the same degree in Morocco as in France. While students now ‘can have the [French] degree while staying there [in Morocco]’, they still prefer to go to France<sup>8</sup> explained ES1’s director. Despite the stated aim of constituting an alternative to migration, the campus functions as a ‘broker’ of selective mobility to France for Moroccan and Francophone Sub-Saharan students. The ‘immobile transnationalism’ (Waters and Leung 2013) linked to receiving a French offshore degree did not prove to be a sufficiently attractive alternative to studying in France.

The shift towards envisioning the campuses as facilitators of selective mobilities thus aligns with the political projects of migration selection but, most importantly, supports the post-colonial desires of fee-paying students for mobility to France.

### ***Enabling intra-African mobilities***

Second, we observe a shift from containment towards envisioning the campuses as facilitating intra-African mobilities in ES3 and a business school, BS1. A Jesuit institution, ES3’s expansion to Africa inherits from a colonial missionary history. Early campus developments were motivated by logics of containment and for ten years the institution did not allow African students to go on exchange to France ‘so that they don’t feel like staying in France’ (Interview with ES3’s director). This strategy responded to demands from local academic partners and French firms for the development of the industrial sector, suggesting a relation between French offshore provision and projects of economic influence in Africa. According to the campus manager, the institution now wants to integrate intra-regional mobility within a so-called ‘pan-African’ strategy driven by further campus investments in Africa. Based on South-South cross-campus mobility, intra-regional mobility constitutes a further strategy of containment through circulation. This supports the claim that containment and circulation are less oppositional than co-existing (Sidhu et al. 2016) as illustrated in this quote:

We have far too many young Africans who only dream of Europe or North America. But in Africa, in areas other than Central Africa, a lot is happening. It is very dynamic. There is also a good part of Africa that is English-speaking, and that would allow us to have a multilingual experience without necessarily having to leave Africa. (Interview with ES3’s campus manager)

Projects of intra-African mobility do not only respond to students’ desires for mobility but also to market competition logics in the global South, as further observed in BS1. Starting out as a partnership, in 2016 MS1 took over 50% of the African campus capital, a shift which went hand in hand with a new strategy: while the campus was initially envisioned as providing French degrees to ‘local’ students, today it is envisioned as a ‘hub’ attracting international students. Such re-orientation towards international students is often seen as critical in the construction of a ‘world-class’

university identity (Sidhu et al. 2016). Similarly to ES3, BS1 plans to expand in Africa, the continent and 'its' students being increasingly perceived by French HEIs as 'global' educational markets to invest in, as opposed to neo-colonial visions of the French 'civilisational' mission in Africa and to logics of containment.

While the shift towards envisioning the campuses as facilitators of intra-African mobilities and as 'hubs' still 'contains' the students in Africa, it also illustrates efforts of the higher education managers to increase the international visibility of their campuses through capital investments across African countries. This corroborates findings on offshore campuses in South Africa revealing how those serve as 'regional education hubs' integrated within regional dynamics of internationalisation of higher education (Gunter and Raghuram 2018).

### ***Enabling transcontinental mobilities***

Lastly, we observe a shift towards envisioning the campuses as nodes within a transcontinental network. This strategy is nothing new for French business schools that have set up networks of campuses across continents. Mobility between those campuses have yet been reserved for many years to the French students. For instance, a strategic document reveals that in 2010 it was mainly Moroccan students who studied at Toulouse Business School (TBS) Casablanca, whereas TBS Barcelona was filled with French students (Hceres 2010). It is only recently that business schools started to open cross-campus transcontinental mobilities to the African students. Although mainly a strategy of French business schools, programmes facilitating the mobility of the African students to France, Brazil, India or China are observed since 2019 in ES3 and in a business university (BU1). Marking a break with former logics of containment, transcontinental mobility aims as 'train[ing] African, Asian and European students together and not just to have a logic of training African students in Africa' (Interview with BU1's IR officer).

Transcontinental circulation of students connects in several ways to the broader political project of managing immigration to France. First, it connects the African campuses to 'emerging economies' such as India defined by Choose France as providers of 'desirable' (creditworthy) students (Campus France 2018). Second, transcontinental mobility produces short stays (e.g. one semester) of economically privileged students and thus aligns with Macron's wish to enhance 'cross-circulations' of a transnationally mobile African elite welcomed to France for a stay but eventually going back 'to pull the African continent' (Macron 2017). Yet, the strategy diverges from the project to make French 'the first language of Africa' (Macron 2017). Even though the French language remains the main medium of instruction, transcontinental programmes introduces courses fully taught in English in the French campuses and manifests further efforts of the institutions to position their African campuses on the global stage.

### **Shifting strategies: French offshore campuses in global competition**

In interviews, higher education managers contrasted the 'opportunities' that initiated the campus developments to the 'global strategies' they pursue since around 2015 in Africa. The shifting strategies of French Grandes Écoles in Africa shed light on their increasing adaptation to competitive pressures in a globalising higher education market. Several respondents relate how they perceive French TNE as less attractive compared to Anglo-Saxon offers. ES2's director explains how he perceives the French campus in Morocco as a second choice option for students who cannot afford to enter more reputable programme in the United States or the UK. In this context of asymmetrical reputation, the French institutions increasingly devise strategies, such as enabling mobilities, to enhance their attractiveness beyond building on their colonial reputation.

Those shifting strategies reflect an increasing orientation of French HEIs towards 'Anglo-Saxon' market-driven strategies. Several French HEIs increasingly turn to Anglophone Africa and introduce courses in English, which was equated, unlike French, with a 'global' orientation: 'it's not

by remaining Franco-French that we'll think about global solutions' explained ES3's manager. Leaving behind what are perceived to be lower-hanging fruits and traditional spheres of influence in Francophone Africa, the expansion to Anglophone Africa requires a more global orientation and reputation, as symbolised by the statement that: 'If you're strong enough, you can target English-speaking Africa' (Interview with BS1's IR manager). The segmentation of Africa in reputational geographies is also reflected in Choose France's marketing campaign which encourages students from non-French speaking Sub-Saharan Africa to 'choose France' as a study destination (Campus France 2018).

Strategies of circulation furthermore illustrate the growing importance of market-driven strategies of French offshore campuses in Africa. For a campus such as ES3 whose resources – according to the campus manager – rely at 80% on tuition fees, promises of mobility seem lucrative:

We have a flyer for this year's recruitment that highlights the opportunities for international mobility. All the schools are doing mobility here, that's what sells. We don't see why we wouldn't do the same. (Interview with ES3's campus manager)

Competitive pressures mean that French providers had to shift their strategies from containment to circulations as the promise of mobility proved desirable to fee-paying students.

## Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to understand the changing post-colonial geographies of education and international student mobilities by looking through the shifting strategies of French offshore campuses in Africa. Conceptualising offshore campuses as infrastructures of selective (im)mobility, we show how French business and engineering schools shifted their strategies from envisioning their campuses in Francophone Africa as 'alternatives to migration' towards facilitating various, selective circulations. Our analysis shows how transnational strategies of French HEIs are entangled with higher education and migration policies. Educating elites in former colonies, offshore campuses serve to retain influence and expand the higher-skilled labour pool potentially available to the French economy. However, offshore campuses' strategies do not necessarily align with the political projects of the French state to filter immigration and strengthen a Franco-sphere of influence.

Facilitating circulations of students, planning campuses in English-speaking Africa, introducing courses taught in English are all strategies that suggest an increasing orientation towards 'Anglo-Saxon' market-driven transnational strategies. Financial logics driving many overseas investments by HEIs from highly marketised higher education systems are relevant for French *Grandes Écoles*, above all business schools. Similar to British universities, whose transnational strategies suggest 'a continued orientation of universities away from nation-state bound actors towards (economic) players in global markets' (Kleibert 2020, 18), French HEIs in Africa growingly understand themselves as 'global' institutions competing for fee-paying students.

The study has implications for wider theoretisations for post-colonial studies on TNE. Existing studies have largely focused on TNE as an alternative to international student mobilities. Here, we have illustrated the complex and shifting nexus between international student mobilities and transnational mobilities. Moreover, by looking at the efforts of transnationalising HEIs to create variegated circulations of students, we shed light on post-colonial discontinuities in French offshore provision. We corroborate findings on the limits of the neo-colonial reputation of transnationalising universities (see Phan 2017 or Siltaoja, Juusola, and Kivijärvi 2019) by illustrating how the value of French education in former colonies is not straightforward. The empirical focus on France moreover contributes to understanding how spatial strategies beyond the Anglosphere follow their own neo-colonial logics but are also deeply influenced by an Anglo-American hegemony in global higher education. The findings yet also shed light on the impact of the internationalisation dynamics of higher education in Africa on the strategies of Western institutions, thereby inviting further

research looking beyond the ‘international’ as solely European or Anglo-American (see Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2015).

To date, little has been written on TNE beyond the ‘export’ of Anglo-American higher education providers and the primarily studied ‘importing’ regions of Asia and the Middle East, a lack which calls for further research if we are to understand how post-colonial geographies of higher education and student mobilities are hierarchically (re)configured.

## Notes

1. Transnational education is defined as cross-border delivered higher education, in which HEIs or their programmes become mobile across borders (Knight and McNamara 2017).
2. Speech translated from French to English by the paper’s authors.
3. Referred to as ‘Choose France’ in the following, not to be confused with a strategy of the same name aimed at attracting investments to France.
4. The Grandes Écoles are selective French higher education institutions that train leading professions in management and engineering but also in the military or public administration (Vinokur 2010).
5. Following King and Raghuram (2013) we use the term ISM to connote international student mobilities and migration literature.
6. ‘chosen immigration’
7. To put this figure into perspective: in 2018, the minimum salary in Morocco was 2799 MAD/month (around 254€) for the private sector and 3000 MAD/month (around 272€) for the public sector (Velluet 2018).
8. Since 2010 France has hosted between 23% and 30% of all African students studying abroad (Campus France 2017).

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