

# Career Guidance Policies: Global Dynamics, Local Resonances

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### Abstract

This paper considers the spate of reviews of career guidance that have taken place since the year 2000, and which were commissioned by such supra-national entities as the OECD and various agencies and directorates of the European Commission. The paper argues that this series of overlapping comparative studies – involving 55 countries in all – constitutes a powerful discursive field which has helped to frame career guidance in particular ways, and that it has led to opportunities for policy lending and policy borrowing on an unprecedented scale. The paper examines the dynamics of such policy learning, identifying some of its potential motives as well as key mechanisms by which transfers take place through 'push' and 'pull' forces. It then goes on to raise a series of questions regarding the viability of deterritorialized policy exchange, noting that social practices such as career guidance are inscribed in a particular complex of values, meanings, and significations that are tightly coupled to the ecological climate in which they thrive. Two case studies – one focusing on career guidance in small states, the other on career guidance in Arab countries – are presented in order to illustrate the way trans-national, globalised agendas are reconfigured and reinterpreted at the local level. The paper concludes by reflecting on the ethical and epistemological responsibilities that need to be confronted by 'boundary persons' who mediate between the global and the local.

### Introduction

Over the past eight years, I have had the privilege and the fortune to be involved in a set of inter-related and overlapping trans-national projects whose objective was to examine how career guidance is defined and practised in different contexts, marked by diverse economic, political, social and cultural realities. The research projects went beyond description and analysis, given that they were framed within a policy imperative that sought to promote specific, even normative understandings of career guidance as a practice that could respond to and realise public aspirations – such as improved economic efficiency and a better fit between labour demand and supply – while

catering for the individual good through, for instance, facilitating enhanced self-knowledge and fulfilment, supporting the search for more meaningful lives, and opening up more options and opportunities for people, at whatever stage they happen to be in their lives.

When Tony Watts called me on the phone some ten years ago asking me whether I wanted to help out in accompanying him and Richard Sweet during two country visits as part of the OECD review of career guidance services in fourteen national contexts (OECD, 2003), I did not know then what I was getting myself into. For, on the basis of that brief but important experience, I was asked to take part in a European Training Foundation (ETF) project that had, as a goal, the surveying of the state of career guidance in eleven countries that were due to accede to the EU as member states in May 2004, or who were candidates for membership. I wrote the report on my own country, Malta (Sultana, 2003a), and was then asked to draw up a synthesis study of the 11 reports that had been submitted by national experts (Sultana, 2003b). After that, ETF's sister TVET agency, CEDEFOP, commissioned me to expand my synthesis to include all 27 countries that were eventually to become EU member states, as well as two European Economic Area (EEA) countries, namely Iceland and Norway (Sultana, 2004).

In all this work, I was mentored, guided and inspired by Tony Watts, with whom I eventually carried out three other studies. One was commissioned by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and focused on career guidance in Europe's Public Employment Services (Sultana & Watts, 2006). A second study was commissioned by the European Training Foundation which looked at career guidance in 10 Mediterranean countries, i.e. 8 Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa, Israel and Turkey (Sultana & Watts, 2007). Under the auspices of the European Lifelong Expert Group, Tony and I also co-authored a policy handbook, which was jointly published by the European Commission and the OECD (EC & OECD, 2004). The ETF then expanded its series of studies on career guidance to include the West Balkan region, and I was involved in writing up reports on Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina, thus feeding into a synthesis report

that was written by Richard Sweet (2006). Most recently, I have worked with the ETF in supporting the development of a career guidance strategy in Egypt (Badawi, Sultana & Zelloth, 2008), and with UNESCO in mapping the opportunities for the development of career guidance services in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Sultana, 2008).

Earlier I referred to these studies as contributing to a trans-national 'project', and I did so in order to highlight the fact that most of the initiatives I have briefly alluded to are actually closely linked (see Watts & Sultana, 2004, and Watts, 2008 for an overview). They are linked not only because we find the same people involved in what has become a tightly-knit community of experts and 'policy entrepreneurs' (Mintrom, 1997), but also because many of the studies – including the one carried out by Tony Watts and David Fretwell on behalf of the World Bank (Watts & Fretwell, 2004) – use the same or a slightly modified survey instrument, and much the same methodology and analytic frameworks. Those of us who have become part of this trans-national research community have also been members of two European policy-oriented bodies, namely the Lifelong Guidance Expert Group, which started meeting in 2002 and which was dissolved last year in order to establish the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network. The latter is more formally representative of EU member states, and each country, in principle, sends a guidance delegate from the education and the labour market sectors, with the possibility of also having a representative from the social partners. The European Commission has funded both the Expert Group and the Policy Network.

For a small man coming from a small country, this has been a heady experience. When I look back at the last eight years and recall the literally thousands of pages of country reports that I have read and analysed, the countries that I have visited, the guidance staff I have met in the field, and the policy makers I have interviewed, several thoughts and reflections come to mind – far more than I have been able to express in written format thus far. For instance, the way career guidance has attained a policy visibility that is probably historically quite unprecedented is a striking phenomenon that begs

analysis. Questions as to why and how this took place, what is behind it, who is driving the agendas, and in which direction they are being driven immediately come to mind, and are of great research interest not just for those working in the career guidance field, but beyond that, leading as they do to a consideration of the dynamics of trans-global policy influence where policy learning is clearly taking place, even if this is not always followed by policy transfer. Similarly intriguing to the researcher interested in globalisation is the way quite different supra-national organisations and entities – including not only the OECD, the World Bank, and the European Union, but also the ILO (Hansen, 2006) and UNESCO – end up collaborating together, sharing information and expertise, and shaping the field in particular ways, despite diverse political remits and institutional cultures, apparently conflicting ideologies, and contrasting operational protocols.

The series of overlapping and linked initiatives which I have briefly referred to therefore provide the social scientist and the policy analyst with an extraordinarily rich opportunity to examine how policies and particular understandings of a field first become articulated and then globalised. They also afford us a living laboratory which helps us understand how ideas travel, and how sometimes they do not, or how these ideas and practices are received in different ways and transformed to fit more comfortably in the new environment, so that even though the language used is the same, the reality they reference may be quite different.

I have taken your kind invitation to give the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Lecture of the International Centre for Guidance Studies as a good opportunity to put to paper some thoughts which have been both occupying and preoccupying me during the international work that I have been involved in. I have therefore set myself two tasks for today: first, I would like to share with you a series of critical reflections on the notion of policy lending and policy borrowing. I will then explore these reflections in more contextual detail by referring to two case studies that I hope will help us better understand the points I wish to make. The case studies will focus on the way trans-national career guidance

policies are subject to processes of reception, resistance, accommodation, and reinterpretation when they are introduced – through what I will refer to as 'push' and 'pull' factors – [a] in small states (Malta), and [b] in developing countries and territories – here represented by a focus on Egypt and Palestine. I will conclude by trying to tease out the implications that these reflections have for doing international work in career guidance in a globalised world. Let us turn first to the issue of policy lending and policy borrowing.

### Part One: Policy lending and policy borrowing

Much of my research work in education involves comparative analysis, and in this field as in many others that use comparison as a lens to generate deeper understandings of social phenomena, the complexities of policy lending and policy borrowing – and some prefer to refer to these processes using other terms, such as 'copying', 'appropriation', 'assimilation', 'transfer', 'importation' (see Phillips & Ochs, 2003) – have been an object of intense scrutiny for several decades. The rise of the nation state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, together with the entrenchment of competitive capitalism as the matrix through which relations between nation states were organised, led to a profound interest in understanding how neighbouring countries organised their systems, and the extent to which specific practices gave some a competitive advantage over others. With processes of globalization becoming intensified over the past few decades, and especially since the introduction of the new information and communication technologies which have helped to compress time and space, the issue of 'travelling ideas' has become even more topical, with a vast literature developing on the subject (see, *inter alia*, Finegold, McFarland & Richardson, 1992; Halpin & Troyna, 1995; Phillips, 2000; Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Turbin, 2001).

This is not the place to provide you with a review of this work, which has looked not only at the way policies travel *between* countries but also *within* them, and has asked such questions as: Why did

policy makers argue for emulation of practices in other countries, when these were already present in their own? Why are controversial policies exported to other contexts? How does the borrowed policy become transformed once it is implemented in a different context? Why was something borrowed never implemented, or implemented only in selective ways? Does the borrowed policy have the same effect in the new context as it did in the context from where it was borrowed? Why do we have 'policy epidemics', with some policies spreading like a virus to all corners of the world, while other policies do not travel at all? Are there patterns here, in terms of content or methods that facilitate exportability, and in the spatial and institutional flows directing the travelling paths of policy ideas? Are the intensified processes of policy borrowing and lending leading to a policy convergence in a range of sectors, and is this commendable?

Interestingly, some of this work has also examined how policies travel *between sectors*, by looking at the way, for instance, a policy solution adopted to address economic problems is then used to address educational challenges, even when the two sectors are imbricated with different epistemes and regulation mechanisms (Henig, 1994; Colley, 2000) – a case in point in the career guidance field is the increasing emphasis on self-service guidance and personal action planning, which reflects a liberal economic view that reconstructs the relationship between the state and the citizen in terms of a reduction of collective responsibility in favour of an increase in individual responsibility. Others have tried to identify the different stages in the borrowing process, noting that typically one first finds cross-national attraction, which is followed by a decision to borrow, leading to an implementation phase, and internalisation or indigenisation (Phillips & Ochs, 2003).

For our purposes, it will suffice to highlight some of the more important matters that could help us place the set of influential overlapping, inter-linked initiatives we have referred to earlier within a context that facilitates a deeper analysis. As such, Part One of my address will raise some questions as to: [a] *why* some countries lend policies, and of course its corollary question, why it is that others are

keen to borrow policies from others; and [b] *how* policies are lent and borrowed. The Second Part of the address, which focuses on how trans-national policy agendas are received in specific contexts, will also throw some light on a third question germane to an analysis of policy travel, i.e. [c] *what happens* to the policy once it is borrowed.

Each of these questions requires a paper to itself. What I hope to do in the context of a public lecture is to merely tease out some of the more pertinent issues, while suggesting that what we have in front of us is in fact a generative and exciting research agenda.

### **Reasons for lending and for borrowing**

#### *Lending*

At first blush, the *reasons* for lending and for borrowing seem pretty straightforward: some countries, regions or sub-regions, for reasons such as earlier economic development, the availability of technical expertise, or even happenstance, come up with ideas and practices in response to particular policy challenges or aspirations that are implemented in what are presumably particularly successful ways, thus encouraging interest and emulation by others. Indeed, the whole field of comparative education, for instance, started with what have been referred to as ‘travellers’ tales’ (Noah & Eckstein, 1998), with individuals visiting other countries observing practices which they judged to be interesting and useful, and which they then tried to introduce when they returned home (Gonon, 2004). In some ways, it could be argued that emulation is an intrinsically human trait, with transnational lending and borrowing being an ‘indispensable’ if not inevitable practice based on cumulative knowledge and experience.

In contrast to such a rational, almost pedagogical approach are views that consider the policy-making process and policy exchange as “ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs”, marked by complexity and messiness, and as nothing more than acts of ‘*bricolage*’ with those responsible ending up “borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing and amending

locally tried and tested approaches, combining theories, research trends and fashions, and not infrequently flailing around for anything at all that looks as though it might work” (Ball, 1998, p.126). Those who subscribe to an understanding of policy-making as messy and in many ways irrational also point out that policies are closely related to politics, and as such tend to embody normative stances “that cannot be readily, fully or permanently resolved through rational deliberations or unanimous agreements. As a result, these policies tend to be adopted and implemented through political processes that reflect the relative power of contending groups more than the relative merits of policy options” (Malen, 2006, p.83).

It is not surprising, therefore, that decades of research in the area of policy transfer have suggested that motives for lending and borrowing, and the processes involved in the exchange of policy solutions, may not be as straightforward as one might initially think, and that there are indeed a plethora of economic, ideological and cultural reasons why policies travel... and why sometimes they do not. Let us consider these in terms of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ forces.

Focusing on the ‘push’ forces first, there are clearly many motives that could drive a country or an agency to export a particular policy – apart from international solidarity, that is. A consideration of three of these motives will serve our purpose, which is to problematize the portrayal of policy transfer as innocuous, if not outright helpful, and to see it instead as necessarily enmeshed in webs of power. Of course, power dynamics in a globalised world are far too complex to permit reductionist, essentialist and simplistic accounts which pit the good against the bad and the ugly. Indeed, the problem or challenge of analyzing power is that the good, the bad AND the ugly are too often entwined one around the other, making both identification of motives, and an understanding of the moves across the chessboard of international influence a difficult, perhaps even impossible task – not just for the spectator, but for the players as well. The examples of the following three motives for exporting policies are ample illustration of this.

First, for some countries or agencies, policy lending may represent *an opportunity to become more politically and economically present in a country*. The dual model for vocational education and training promoted by the German agency GTZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*), for instance, has been and is still vigorously promoted in many developing countries the world over as an effective way of training the workforce and promoting industrial development. This despite the fact that, as several research studies have indicated, it is difficult for that dual TVET approach to thrive outside the particular economic, institutional and cultural context from which the model historically evolved (Lewis, 2007; Mayer, 2001). But along with the dual model comes a whole army of German technicians and engineers, German-made equipment, German companies that donate or sell German machinery and technology to vocational schools, thus ensuring that vocational graduates have been suitably trained for work in German enterprises that relocate in search of more amenable environments for capital accumulation, and so on and so forth. The GTZ also promotes career guidance in several of the Arab states I have been to, but not surprisingly ties guidance narrowly to the TVET sector, generally seeing it as a way to encourage students to take up the vocational route rather than the general one. Along with the GTZ comes the German Development Bank, which opens the road to loans, and to the generation of an appropriate investment climate that has privileged links to German markets. Needless to say, the use of development aid to leverage comparative advantage in external markets is a widespread strategy, especially when conditionalities are tied to such aid (Sayed, 2006).

There are therefore clearly benefits that can accrue to a country, an agency or any service provider for that matter when it promotes its policy solutions, thus creating new markets for itself overseas, with beneficiaries typically including consulting firms, training institutions, and producers of sector-specific resources. This should not surprise us, given the current state of capitalism where competitiveness is the discursive and material matrix that frames and underpins social and economic action, driving most states and supra-national blocs such as the EU into a

neo-colonial search for markets – of which the Lisbon agenda is just one exemplar. That search for markets is sometimes described in terms of ‘cross-national policy attraction’ (Philipps, 2004), where such matters as old colonial ties, or geographical or linguistic proximity, facilitate policy lending and borrowing. From the point of view of the policy-takers, of course, a key question is whether this is a zero-sum game, or whether they actually benefit in what some might wish to portray as a win-win situation.

Another motive to promote particular policy solutions abroad has to do with aspirations to *inculcate specific ideologies*, such as those of democracy, the free market, peace, and so on. From this perspective, career guidance, for instance, is not merely seen as a viable policy response to the usual set of challenges which, if successfully addressed, lead to a number of public and private goods – such as a better balance between the supply and demand of skills and social inclusion. Rather, career guidance is seen to vehicle a total world view which celebrates individual volition and the centrality of work, which gives self-determination and self-fulfilment pride of place, and which encourages the labour market to be organised according to a specific rationality and logic. As I will note in greater detail in the Second Part of this address, the whole notion of career guidance is quite simply alien in some contexts, where community and collectivist orientations – in the sense that these words are employed by Hofstede (2001) – are stronger than individual ones, where the notion of choice is almost irrelevant if not pernicious, and where labour markets are organised around the logic of informality, with occupational opportunities depending on networks of solidarity among extended family members, and therefore on a completely different notion of meritocracy. Promoting career guidance in these contexts is therefore, consciously and willingly or not, an intervention into particular constructions of world views. One could argue that such policy interventions are never innocent, irrespective of whether the ideas travel as a result of push or pull forces. One could also argue that, irrespective of intention, policy lending is a conduit for *systemic* change, in that no idea travels ‘singly’, but rather

each idea packs the worldview that gave rise to it in the first place. Promoting career guidance in some contexts in the developing world, for instance, is, from this viewpoint a way to also promote a particular understanding of practices such as democracy and gender equity, and opening the road to a 'free' market. This reflection also goes some way in explaining why policies tend to travel only from the economic North to the South, and from the West to the East – rarely the other way round.

A third reason for lending a particular policy – a motive that is not frequently referred to in the literature – is that the very survival of this policy in a particular country can depend at least partly on whether it is borrowed by other countries, thus giving it a *legitimacy boost* that might even survive political contestation in the context in which it was initially implemented. Here, a semi-fictitious example will help us understand this fine point better. Denmark has recently introduced a quality assurance system that, among other things, obliges schools to publicly display on their websites a series of indicators showing how successful or otherwise their career guidance staff are in providing services. In some ways, then, this functions as a league-table of sorts, with quality gains being driven by a 'name and shame' mechanism. I would not be surprised at all if this new policy by the education ministry is resented and possibly resisted by schools and career guidance practitioners, not least because, as we all know, such comparative information fails to take into account the complexity of contexts through which services such as guidance are provided. But let us imagine that the Danish Ministry asks the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network to define this as an example of 'good practice', and that a peer learning visit is consequently organised to observe the Danish innovation *in situ*. One can easily understand the boost that the Ministry's policy implementers will get if the practice catches on in other countries, with Danish practitioner resistance potentially being neutralised given that, to all intents and purposes, emulation has validated the policy, and claims made by Danish authorities on its behalf. Furthermore, the ELGPN would have acted as an informal 'certification agency', giving the Ministry's policy a legitimacy that, in our imagined scenario, it sorely needs in order to blow the wind out of the

sails of its internal critics.

### *Borrowing*

Let us now turn to *policy borrowing* or, in other words, to a consideration of the forces that 'pull' policy solutions towards a country, which very often interact with push forces in ways that, in themselves, are of research interest. Here too there may be a number of different motives as to why a country would want to adopt policies that have proved to be successful elsewhere, or that at least have a reputation of having been successful (Phillips & Ochs, 2003). 'Pull' forces could arise out of *internal dissatisfaction* with the policy solutions that have been tried thus far, or from a *systemic collapse* that leads to the loss of legitimacy of members of the local policy-making apparatus. A country might have suffered from a *negative external evaluation* by such an influential body as the OECD, for instance, leading to the frantic search not only for political scapegoats – particularly if the outcomes of the comparative research has led to 'scandalising' tactics by the media and oppositional political groupings (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004) – but also for 'quick fix' policy alternatives drawn from those countries that have performed well in the same evaluation. The dynamics that the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has released in this regard are instructive, as are the flows of what has been referred to as 'policy tourism', where many roads tend to lead to Finland in an attempt to understand its 'comparative advantage' when it comes to student achievement. As Steiner-Khamsi (2004, p.209) notes, "Politically speaking, PISA served as a much-needed certificate for accelerating a standards-based school reform that, for the past few years, had been in debate [in Germany] but had little chance of passing due to scepticism and resistance among political stakeholders."

Some countries are only too happy to claim an interest in a particular set of policy solutions, but use this as a '*flag of convenience*' (Phillips, 2004), i.e. they use policy interest as a bargaining chip in order to secure financial resources attached to borrowed policy discourse. I have seen a number of countries claim a commitment to career guidance, for instance, even when the objective conditions for the

implementation of this practice were clearly missing. What I felt was happening here was the positioning of the country positively in relation to the current funding opportunities, even if that meant using the resources, once obtained, for purposes quite tangential to career guidance. The result is what some call 'policy mimicry' (Ganderton, 1996), or even 'phony borrowing' (Phillips, 2004).

Other countries refer to external policy solutions that are marketed as having been successful when such solutions are likely to prove *unpalatable and unpopular* when implemented at home. As Schriewer (1990) notes when discussing what he refers to as the 'externalization thesis', much policy borrowing – especially in times of rapid political change – is motivated by an effort to circumvent criticism or resistance. Politicians will, for instance, refer to an imaginary international community (such as 'international standards') or a concrete 'other' (e.g. national education systems, reform models, reform strategies, and so on) as a source of external authority and as a rhetorical device to legitimise their actions. A good example of such policy externalization comes from a number of new EU member states – including my own – whose governments have had to introduce several reforms in a rather short period of time, and which they frequently have tried to legitimise not only by claiming – rightly or wrongly – that 'this is what Brussels wants', but also by arguing that such policies have proved successful in other member states. Such claims are more often founded on political convenience than empirical fact.

### **How policies are lent and borrowed**

Let us now turn our attention to *the way* policies are lent and borrowed, thus specifying some of the *mechanisms* by means of which policies travel. A number of these mechanisms have been identified, particularly in those analyses that attempt to uncover the conduits that promote not only 'globalization', but also 'internationalization' (i.e. international convergence), and 'Europeanization' (i.e. 'harmonization').

I have already mentioned some of these mechanisms in the introductory section of this paper, without,

however, identifying them as such. I will in this context focus on three. **First** are *supra-national organisations and entities*, such as the OECD, the World Bank, the European Union, the ILO, UN agencies, and so on, which effectively constitute transnational policy communities. One and all have the power to promote specific policy options, using the usual tools which include research, publications, conferences, e-mail list serves, and so on. Indeed, some publications – such as the one Tony Watts and I prepared for the OECD and the European Commission – are specifically about promoting policy options, in this case in relation to a range of issues linked to career guidance. The association of such publications, conferences, workshops and so on with powerful and influential organizations and entities helps to give prominence to one set of policy solutions over others, and to legitimise some options rather than others.

It needs to be said here that such rituals of knowledge production are obviously not innocent. My own experience of writing comparative analyses and syntheses for the European Commission has been instructive in this regard. In many ways, research not only reports on the object of its analyses, but at one and the same time constitutes it. This the author does through the particular theoretical lenses he or she adopts in order to make sense of the data, the categories that are used to organize that data, the decision to stress and foreground some elements and to downplay others, and to infuse the document with particular ideological and normative orientations, and so on. In other words, texts – even when they purport to report 'scientific' research in 'objective' ways – are in fact constructs that position readers and the policy field in particular ways. Sometimes, that positioning reflects the ideological orientation of the commissioning body in quite directive ways. An email written by an official that reached me by accident while drafting one of our studies on career guidance illustrates this beautifully: the wayward email advised colleagues to watch out for what we were writing, given that, in his view, we were too influenced by Rogerian and humanistic approaches and insufficiently attentive to economic imperatives. This example obviously raises very important questions about what happens to researchers when

they place their intellectual labour at the service of commissioning entities or employers, not simply in terms of their ability to write counter-texts – and hence to use the organisation as much as the organisation uses them – but whether such ‘products’ maintain their contrapuntal edge when read within the matrix of power they are inscribed in.

The influence of supra-national agencies and entities on policy lending is exercised not only singly, but also in inter-connected ways, so that we can speak of the policy field as being a highly networked one (Laval & Weber, 2002). Such ‘policy networks’ (Marsh, 1998) are indeed a **second** important mechanism through which ideas travel globally in a range of fields, and indeed some have argued that governance by policy networks is rife at the level of the European Union because it is such a highly differentiated polity which is dominated in important ways by experts and highly dependent on ‘government by committee’ (Peterson, 2003). Key organisational leaders within and between countries – what some refer to as ‘policy élites’ – are often connected through personal and institutional friendships that are fostered through frequent interchange and the sharing of common concerns (Watts, 1999). Policy makers in fact often end up exercising a mutual influence on each other, with policy challenges being seen in particular ways. It is not uncommon for them to make use of the same pool of international experts, or to be guided by the same studies and research conclusions. Some policy-oriented entities actually organise encounters between high level administrators from developed and developing countries, with the express intention of facilitating policy learning through conferences, as well as peer learning visits. They therefore act as hubs for generating policy and trans-national ‘epistemic networks’, which are sometimes nurtured through targeted funding in order to support the policy learning process – a model that has become particularly popular in co-ordinating knowledge and policy flows between the North and the South since the 1980s (UNCTAD, 1999), and which has been used by such agencies as the ETF in such areas as TVET and career guidance.

As a result, ‘referential webs’ (Vavrus, 2004) are

created that often transcend sector-based policy deliberations, and create resonances among local protagonists who end up believing in and advancing specific policy agendas. Social network analysis – a theoretical strand that is increasingly used in understanding borrowing and lending, reception and diffusion – reminds us that our consideration of policy networks should be underpinned by a sensitivity to the fact that the world is not composed of egalitarian and voluntarily chosen connections, but rather by ties that are often asymmetric, and intermeshed within hierarchical structures.

A **third** mechanism for steering policies in particular directions, one which has particular relevance to the EU member states, is the *Open Method of Coordination* (OMC) – a new soft form of governance which uses Europe-wide benchmarks and indicators in order to steer national policy-making into directions that are compatible with EU aspirations. The OMC is particularly relevant to such areas as education and career guidance, where the Union has little formal competence, but where, in the post-Lisbon phase, Concrete Future Objectives that all member states should strive for have nevertheless been articulated (Grek, 2008; Souto-Otero, Fleckenstein & Dacombe, 2008).

Several authors (*inter alia*, Dale & Robertson, 2006; Field & Murphy, 2006) conclude that, thanks to the OMC, the European Union has adopted a greater policy role than it has previously been able to establish. Field & Murphy (2006), for instance, refer to the EU’s ‘creeping competence’, pointing out to funding leads via EU programmes, to muscular invitations to harmonise policy and practice (e.g. the Bologna, Copenhagen, and Maastricht processes), to the way key officials become socialised into the trans-national culture of EU policy-making, and to the incitation to emulate what is benchmarked as ‘good practice’. Peer pressure between member states is exercised through the publication of comparative research that adopts a ‘league table’ approach, defining some countries as excellent, and indirectly shaming others whose performance falls below par – leading some to define such benchmarking exercises as ‘governance by numbers’ (Greg, 2008). Through the OMC, member

states may remain free to develop their own coherent and comprehensive strategies, and to design and manage their own systems, but the goal ultimately is that they broadly move in the same direction, on the basis of a shared normative foundation for common action. Several aspects of the OMC have been used to steer policy developments in career guidance, with CEDEFOP, ETF and the ELGPN making use of peer learning visits as a key tool in policy learning and policy transfer.

### Part Two: Complexities of lending and borrowing

Lending and borrowing, therefore, are a fact of life in the policy-making field. We have seen that there can be several reasons and motives for engaging in either lending or borrowing, and that some of these may be more commendable than others. We have also considered some of the mechanisms by means of which policy ideas travel. A keen eye on the politics of lending and borrowing alerts us to focus not only on *what* is borrowed and lent, and *how* it is borrowed and lent, but *who* is involved in the process, and *why*. While some countries or agencies are keen to generate knowledge about a range of policy options, others are guided rather more by self-interested agendas which may end up – willingly or not – promoting dependency (Todd, 1995; Spreen, 2004).

These complexities concerning motives and effects are of interest to me both as a research agenda, as well as an ethical one. In the introduction to this paper I made reference to the fact that while the international work on career guidance that I have been involved in has been immensely satisfying and enriching, it has also disturbed and preoccupied me in some ways. For, in my role as a ‘boundary person’ producing such ‘boundary objects’ (Star & Griesmer, 1989) as reports and research papers, mediating knowledge and meanings between different communities of practice, I wonder about the resonance that my work and that of my colleagues has in the specificity of local contexts. Is it at all meaningful? How does what we are saying matter, and how does it support the needs and aspirations

of those who engage with our work? Do our efforts, imbricated as they necessarily are in globalising and Europeanising agendas, feed into and sustain international and local hierarchies of privilege, or do they serve to challenge them? How is our work taken up within the new contexts, and how are our policy intentions reconfigured, and towards what ends?

This constitutes a major research programme which, intriguingly, has not been set at the European level in relation to the work that we have been doing in career guidance, possibly because we are somewhat too ready to read off policy results from policy intentions, and also because, as Steiner-Khamsi (2004) has noted, there tends to be a resort to an imagined world culture as if there exists an international agreement and consensus on how particular challenges should be addressed. The very ‘semantics of globalization’ (Schriewer, 2000) promotes the ‘deterritorialization’ and ‘decontextualization’ of so-called policy solutions, leading to a forgetfulness about the fact that social practices – such as education and career guidance for instance – are culturally bounded systems, intimately linked to specific political, economic and cultural contexts.

### Re-territorializing policy

One way of rendering back to the notion of policy transfer the complexity that it entails is through a process of ‘re-contextualization’ and ‘re-territorialization’, i.e. by acknowledging that meanings and policies are re-interpreted and re-created in specific contexts. In the Second Part of my paper I will therefore reflect on the notions of ‘re-contextualization’ and ‘re-territorialization’ by focusing on case studies where I played the part of a ‘boundary person’ mediating and vehicling notions of career guidance as articulated in the trans-national projects that I referred to at the start. The contexts are Malta, which I will use as illustrative of *small state dynamics*, and Egypt and Palestine, which will here be discussed in terms of their representativeness of *developing societies* where religion deeply informs people’s perceptions of the world around them, and their relationship to that world.

My association with the three contexts differs in significant ways: I am native of Malta, but only a frequent visitor to Palestine and Egypt. Despite the fact that I live at the historic and cultural crossroads of Semitic and European influences, and my native tongue is an Arabic dialect, there remains the danger of 'othering', 'exoticising' if not 'orientalising' the other here, which, while I will try to avoid, is in some ways inevitable. I ask your forbearance but also your vigilance on that. At the moment I am working on all three countries as 'cases', trying to tease out the implications that re-territorialization has for our understanding of career guidance on the one hand, and policy transfer more generally on the other. I have made most headway with the focus on small states, having carried out exploratory research with career guidance specialists in five small states (Sultana, 2006). My aspiration is to develop both substantive and more formal theoretical insights into these issues. In the context of a public lecture, I necessarily have to be brief, and only sketch some of the key arguments in order to hint at the research agenda ahead.

**Career guidance in small states**

Let us start with Malta, a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean packing 400,000 people on a rock which is barely 30 miles long and 15 miles wide. We adopted career guidance as a practice in our schools soon after our independence from Britain in 1964, and had turned to the UK for inspiration as to how to implement the service as a policy response to the economic challenges facing us then, as well in an effort to entrench a pastoral element in a highly competitive educational system (Sultana & Sammut, 1997; Sultana, 2003). The study of small states is a field of research in its own right, with a burgeoning literature that looks at various aspects of island and small state living (see, *inter alia*, Bacchus & Brock, 1987; Baldacchino & Greenwood, 1998; Bray & Packer, 1993; Selwyn, 1975; World Bank, 2000). I have trawled that literature, whose main conclusion is that small countries are not simply 'scaled down versions' of larger states, but that rather scale creates a 'micro-climate' that generates sets of social, economic and cultural relationships that are specific – or at least *particularly applicable* – to small states, and

therefore *intrinsically different* from those to be found in large states. There is some consensus that 'scale' is a useful prism through which to look at social realities, and valuable in understanding social dynamics and processes in particular contexts.

What I have attempted to do is to tease out the potential implications of the specificity of scale in order to propose a series of issues for career guidance that seem to have particular relevance to small state contexts, and which may have an impact on the reconfiguring of the theory and practice of career guidance, and thus on the dynamics of policy borrowing. In this context I will only refer briefly to the way the *notions of 'career' and 'career identity'* – so central to career guidance – can assume different shades of meaning in small states. In my larger study I have also looked at *socio-cultural issues* which are impacted by the dual influence of scale and population density, leading to interestingly diverse challenges for career guidance than what we usually find in larger contexts. Here in particular I considered such ecological features as *enforced familiarity, favouritism, and personalised hierarchies* which are empirically identifiable in several small state contexts, and which have a very important impact on re-defining and re-contextualising career guidance perspectives developed in different scalar contexts. I also tackled the issue of *resourcing* career guidance, where economies of scale are missing, leading small states to borrow not only mainstream theories and approaches, but also the resources that have been developed to support them – such as career inventories and occupational descriptions – lock, stock and barrel.

In my study, I advanced several hypotheses, of which I here focus on four that concern the way notions of 'career' and 'career identity' differ in small states – particularly in economically vulnerable small states – and attempted to encapsulate my thesis through the coining of the term '*chameleon careers*', focusing on the notions of '*shifting career identities*', '*shifting notions of expertise*', '*occupational multiplicity*', and '*multi-functionality*'.

First, I noted that small states tend to have restricted and limited labour markets, and the nature of opportunities they offer differ from those available

in larger states, and are rarer. In small states, opportunities are like ships that come to harbour from time to time, and will not stay long: for them this is only a port of call. It behoves the small state citizen to board the ship and exploit the situation as long as it lasts, before the ship moves on. The principle: 'Make hay while the sun shines' has particular relevance to citizens of small states, and influences the approach to occupational choice as well as to career management throughout the life span. It can also be hypothesised that it has an impact on how the 'self' is defined. Given the ephemeral nature of opportunities, one's occupational identity cannot afford to be as fixed and set as it is in other contexts, where the labour market is more differentiated, stable and hence subject to more formal regulation. Thus, in relation to occupational identity, one can speak of the self as having a 'hard core' and a 'flexible periphery', with the latter being more important in small states given that the construction of an occupational identity has to shift more readily in response to fleeting opportunities. The notion of 'chameleon career' is particularly relevant and useful in small state contexts, in that for citizens, the flexible editing of oneself in relation to what is available, and the changing of colours according to signals from the surrounding environment, is nothing short of a way of life.

A second hypothesis that concerns career identity building in small states concerns *shifting notions of expertise*, and the way 'expertise' tends to be defined and claimed in small states. A person in a small state quickly puts on the hat of 'expertise' in a particular area in response to necessity and when opportunities arise, and changes that hat and puts on another when different prospects appear on the horizon. Here we have the notion of 'flexible specialisation', with individuals making strategic choices as to how to represent and market themselves. Such '*chameleon expertise*' has its downside, of course, but within the contexts of small states, and irrespective of what career theories cooked in larger countries might say, there is both rhyme and reason for it when seen in context. This leads to a third hypothesis, one that looks at career identity from the perspective of *occupational multiplicity*. At any point in time, a person in a small

state can be found to be wearing different occupational hats, leading to our fourth hypothesis: the notion of '*multi-functionality*' (Farrugia & Attard, 1989). Such multi-functionality is a direct result of the nature of labour markets in small states, with administrative responsibilities having to be organised in ways that concentrate a larger repertoire of tasks in the hands of one person or one office, which in larger states would be catered for by staff with more specialised work roles. Clustering capacities can be a smart strategy in a situation marked by a narrow pool of expertise, and the lack of an economy of scale. Empirical studies of public administrators in small states have shown that, given the multiple tasks they have to handle, lead civil servants end up becoming 'gifted generalists', able to 'speak' several different technical languages. They are adaptable, cover a lot of ground, and are constantly stretched (Warrington, 1998). Gifted generalists may indeed have an advantage over the narrow specialisation in the occupational roles that larger states can afford, in that they often have a better grasp of how the different parts fit in and contribute to the whole. But it does mean, for instance, that at least in a number of cases, occupational classifications and career information material produced by large states cannot be simply imported and adopted by small states, as the same work categories may not have the same content in the different contexts. Multi-functionality also impacts on guidance service provision: clustering of roles may lead guidance to be one of a broader range of student services, for instance, making specialisation difficult or impracticable.

The implications of this preliminary study for a consideration of policy lending and borrowing are clear: as ideas about career guidance travel from centre to peripheries – with periphery being defined in terms of geographies of space and of influence – one needs to see how diverse host ecologies – here defined by scale – reinterpret, re-imagine, and redefine career guidance in ways that make the practice meaningful. In this case as in many others, we may find the use of the same terms and concepts, but on closer examination discover that these have very different referents in diverse contexts.

If scale has an impact on the way career guidance is re-territorialized, one can hardly begin to understand the gap that exists between reality and illusion when it comes to examining policy travel in developing country contexts. It is to that challenge that we now turn.

**Career guidance in developing contexts**

Over the past ten years, true to the representation of people from small states as being multi-functional and leading double if not triple lives, I have been fortunate to also carry out a fair amount of research in Arab states. I have largely worked for UNICEF looking at educational innovation in such places as Syria (where I tried to understand the links between schooling and democracy); Tunisia (where I focused on curriculum reform), in Egypt (where I documented the introduction of girl-friendly schools in remote and rural areas), in Jordan (where I carried out a qualitative capture of parental education and early childhood education initiatives), in Lebanon (where I looked at the schooling of Palestinian children in the refugee camps) and in Palestine (where I have gone several times to document different initiatives, including the setting up of an education management information system in support of wholesale reform efforts; a distance education project that tried to get schooling to children rendered home-bound during the second Intifada; and the design of a teacher education strategy)<sup>1</sup>. As I noted earlier, I have recently worked with Tony Watts in carrying out a comparative study of career guidance in the Mediterranean region, involving 8 Arab states, and am also supporting career guidance policy development in Egypt and in Palestine. I will focus specifically on the latter two experiences in the next two sections, but will also draw on my broader understanding of issues in the Arab states since they too have been particularly formative and have greatly influenced my understanding of the complexities of policy borrowing and policy lending.

Like many other initiatives I have been involved with in the region, the expectation is that we bring to

bear the knowledge, experiences and interesting practices that we have developed in the ‘west’ in – in this case – career guidance, in order to support a developing country see how to adapt and adopt the practices, if they thought that they were useful to them. The agencies I have worked for – the ETF in the case of Egypt, and UNESCO in the case of Palestine – are, generally speaking, quite non-directive and respectful of differences. There are of course issues that need to be raised and practices that need to be problematized, but for the purposes of this particular narrative, let us say that their approach is not laden with what are referred to as ‘conditionalities’, i.e. agendas that require countries to steer their policies in particular directions if they want to benefit from technical or financial support (Heyneman, 2003).

And yet, despite the very soft, open, respectful, even sensitive stances through which the field is approached, several issues nevertheless arise which often made me ask myself during meetings with Ministers, directors, and leaders from the education and employment sectors: What *on earth* are we trying to do here? Are we pushing a practice that has little if any cultural and social anchorage, particularly among the poorer sections of the population which, incidentally, make up the vast majority in both the urban and rural areas? To what extent is career guidance at all meaningful – or appropriate – in environments where labour markets are dramatically segmented into a small, regulated sector and a large, informal even underground sector where regulation is minimal, if it exists at all? How do notions of career guidance, deeply rooted in particular understandings of labour market theories and models, connect with situations where workers find employment on the strength of who they know, with family, political and religious networks being the main credential that has currency and force?

In such developing contexts, the very notion of choice is not just a luxury, but a cruel taunt for people whose main concern is to get some food on the table for that day. Has the shoeshine boy ever

thought of his occupation as a ‘career’ or a ‘calling’ – in the way we understand such words to mean – and has he ever thought of ever doing something different, or that doing something different was at all an imaginable option? What does career guidance mean to a girl in a small hamlet in Bani Sueif, Sohaag or Fayyoun, who grows up in what, from our worldview, would epitomize a conservative Muslim or Christian Copt environment, one which defines her future very narrowly in gender typified ways? Centuries of socialisation into specific male and female roles render any challenge to the gendered division of labour not only problematic, but highly disruptive of intricately and tightly connected social practices that extend beyond the world of work into the intimacies of family life, and one’s ethical convictions as to what is appropriate and what is ‘*haram*’ – forbidden. How does one engage young people and adults in a discussion about choice, options, opportunities, self-determination when, in many cases, and especially in relation to the deprived social classes, life is generally experienced as a stream whose course has been set by others – whether that course-setting is engineered by God, nature, or powerful others such a father or the elder of the clan?

Key building blocks of the career guidance ‘gospel’, including individualism, self-determination, the centrality of work in the project of self-construction, autonomy in the face of authority, priority to self-actualisation, the striving to define and realise a life project – one and all seemed somewhat out of phase with reality in, say, the conflict-ridden occupied Palestinian territories where the largest group of non-citizens in the world finds access to options and opportunities severely restricted by limited mobility and rights. How does our almost missionary zeal in proclaiming the western liberal dream of the self as primordial, and democracy as both a manifestation of that self, and a context for its realisation, translate into contexts such as the ones we encounter in Egypt, in Palestine, and in several parts of the developing world?

One answer to such questions and challenges is that it is *precisely* through career guidance – as one among other tools, of course – that we can support a country’s development project in responsible ways

– particularly if the model of career guidance that we employ is firmly embedded in emancipatory impulses, i.e. when it strives to ensure freedom from external obstacles to self-guided choice and action, and when it tries to realize an autonomous will, one generally shaped by the dictates of ‘universal reason’ or ‘self-interest’, and hence unhindered by the burdens of tradition or a transcendental will (Irving & Malik, 2005). Indeed, those who commission us in developing countries, as well as those whom we work with in the field, generally share a view of guidance that is enabling, in terms of opening up options and opportunities for the economy and the individual alike.

However, there is a danger here in assuming that the understanding of career guidance of the administrative élites we tend to work with in the host country, as well as their goals and motives for policy borrowing, are majority views and positions. They often are not, and indeed almost by definition they tend to be secular, liberal and western in orientation, and thus quite unrepresentative of the vast majority of citizens to whom our joint policy intentions are addressed. Career guidance, for instance, has caught on and is a highly organised service at the American University of Cairo, and is offered in a most effective manner through the Youth NGO *Sharek* in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In both cases, however, service providers and most users are from among the most privileged groups, having an eye on employment with western companies based in the Middle East or internationally. Of course, this is not necessarily pernicious, and historically it is not uncommon for a practice that starts among the better off sections of the population to eventually trickle down to other, less privileged social strata.

So perhaps what we are doing when we are in places like Palestine and Egypt is to plant a seed that, in time, will grow deeper roots into a society, consolidating efforts to re-organize its economy, its labour markets, its cultures and traditions to make it more compatible with a western-type economy and polity. In other words, career guidance becomes one facet of the development agenda, encapsulating values and worldviews that reproduce, in miniature, the secular liberal model that, presumably,

<sup>1</sup> Publications related to this series of research studies in Arab states, as well as several of the reports on career guidance by the present author, can be downloaded from <http://www.um.edu.mt/emcer/aboutdirector/publications>

developing countries aspire to copy. In that case, policy lending and policy borrowing, while technically complex for the reasons given, is an ethically defensible one – and I can pursue my international work without, in principle, too many qualms of conscience.

But is western-type democracy and free market economies the only form of life that can be envisaged, which all human societies aspire to and will eventually, and in the fullness of time, ineluctably metamorphose into? This would not explain the contestatory movements we see across the planet, and the vigorous, even military attempts by the west to appease, co-opt and ultimately control those who will not buy into the liberal narrative. Most of my work involves relatively short but cumulatively lengthy stays in the Arab world, where, if one refracts phenomena away from one's horizons of prejudice, what one witnesses is the desire to subject to critical scrutiny our liberal notions of justice, autonomy, tolerance, individual rights and so on, from the standpoint of the Islamic traditions. Here, the pressing project is not to consider how, in this case Muslims, can become better liberals, but rather, how the world can be lived differently, in the face of the homogenizing, globalizing force of modernity that will brook no arguments for an alternative vision. From the point of view of devout Muslims – as it is for many others – it is modernity and its Siamese twin, economic liberalism, that represent the fundamentalist threat, given their universalising, even predatory logic.

We are so enmeshed in our own life worlds that it becomes almost impossible to make the leap of imagination that is required to understand that others see reality in very different ways. My claim is that ethically informed 'boundary' or 'glocal' (Wellman, 2002) persons who engage in crossing cultural and epistemic borders in order to lay the ground for travelling ideas, need to 'parochialize' their understanding of the phenomena they are dealing with – in our case, career guidance. In other words, they need to carefully consider what the practice might mean not in relation to the system of values and related practices with which they are so familiar, but rather in relation to that of the country hosting them. This entails a process of 'making the

familiar strange', something that anthropology, despite its origins in colony and empire, is particularly adept at doing.

In my effort to problematize my own international work in career guidance, I have found the work of the Pakistani anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2005) particularly useful – not in resolving the issues we are discussing, but in rendering them their complexity. Between 1995 and 1997, Mahmood carried out ethnographic work among three classes of women who attend three different mosques in Cairo. Despite their diverse social locations, all three groups are part of a grassroots pietist movement, another manifestation of the Islamic revival which, while focusing on ethics rather than on radical activism that seeks to seize or transform the state, nevertheless has a strong political dimension to it. What Mahmood does brilliantly and bravely in her acclaimed book *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, is to understand the meanings that the women she interacts with give to their actions, resisting the facile ploy of filtering them through the secular-liberal principles that are usually employed when the west attempts to hold Islamist movements to account.

Needless to say, such attempts at 'going native' are not only doomed, given the sheer epistemic impossibility of total empathy with other lifeworlds, but also dangerous, in that, as she herself states, "to render unfamiliar lifeworlds into conceptual or communicable forms is to domesticate that which exceeds hegemonic protocols of intelligibility" (p.199). Having said that, however, Mahmood's account does provide us with a sensitive portrayal of women who, though from diverse social class backgrounds, nevertheless opt to adhere to the patriarchal core of the movement they belong to, effectively decentring and displacing key assumptions within liberal and feminist theory about freedom, agency, authority and the human subject. In other words, these women consider the self not as referencing a pre-existing identity whose potentiality needs to be freed from the social constraints of tradition – which would be the redemptive narrative encouraged by liberal feminist thought, and the task of career guidance conceived as an emancipatory project. Rather, Mahmood

shows how, for these women, the 'self' and the body are schooled into reproducing such core Muslim values as modesty, shyness, diffidence, sincerity, fear and awe, as well as *sabr* or forbearance, in a lifelong process of ethical formation, thus learning how to be pious in their everyday lives not just through wearing the veil, but through other forms of bodily enactments of piety.

The study, though obviously not written with career guidance in mind, has major implications for those of us grappling with alternative visions for the field, especially as it becomes increasingly globalized. For, for the women in the mosque movement, their life project is neither to find themselves nor to express themselves through work. Rather, it is to construct a virtuous self through performative behaviour that shapes inward disposition. Here, action does not result from natural feelings but creates them, and it is "through repeated bodily acts that one trains one's memory, desire, and intellect to behave according to established standards of conduct" (Mahmood, 2005, p.157). What Mahmood tries to capture, therefore, is how from within the lifeworld of the women in the mosque movement, the question of individual freedom is rethought in ways where "the distinction between the subject's own desires and socially prescribed performances cannot be so easily presumed, and where submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition for the self to achieve its potentiality" (p.149).

The contrast in the approach to the self is nicely caught in the corresponding contrast between two women that Mahmood introduces us to in her narrative. Both Sana and Nadia are married and cannot bear children, a fact that causes them much personal suffering. Sana faces up to this pain and disappointment by privileging a strong personality and self-empowerment through self-esteem, a psychological capacity that, in her view, enables one to pursue self-directed choices and actions unhindered by other people's opinions. She is not interested in virtuous patience and fortitude, such as that demonstrated by Ayyub – the equivalent of the biblical Job – whose *bravura* lay not in his ability to rise above the pain, but rather in the manner in which he *lived* his pain. "Where does *sabr* get you?" Sana asks Mahmood. "Instead of helping you

to improve your situation, it just leads you to accept it as fate – passively" (p.172). Here, then, is a woman after our own hearts, resisting destiny, acting as a 'free agent', defining her own projects in line with her own desires, values, and goals, and not those of others. Our toolbox of career guidance repertoires and strategies would come in handy here.

Nadia, on the other hand, values *sabr*, not because it alleviates her suffering, but because it is a quality that helps her live her pain in a virtuous way. This is not defeatism or fatalism in the grips of the inertia of tradition, as inscribed in the meanings attributed to it by Sana, where virtues such as humility, modesty, and shyness "have lost their value in the liberal imagination and are considered emblematic of passivity and inaction, especially if they don't uphold the autonomy of the individual" (Mahmood, 2005, p.174). Rather, *sabr*, in the sense described by Nadia, does not mark a reluctance to act, but is "integral to a constructive project: it is a site of considerable investment, struggle and achievement" (p.174).

Mahmood's work is therefore helpful in underscoring the key point I wish to make, namely that in thinking through the complexities of policy lending and policy borrowing, we should not assume that, in the encounter with the Other, and in the process of culturally translating other lifeworlds, our own certainty about how the world should proceed can remain stable. Career guidance is intensely political, perhaps even more in form than it is in substance, and we need to keep that firmly in mind not only as we travel with policies and ideas from country to country, but also as we encounter diversity at home, for there is nothing that can make us more blind to difference than that difference that clothes itself in familiarity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, what I have tried to do today is to outline some of the key issues that arise in the processes of policy lending and policy borrowing. We have considered that from a technical point of view, in terms of both the motives behind policy

transfer and the mechanisms through which policy ideas travel. However, we have done so in order to consider the epistemic and ethical issues that must be engaged with when we are involved in facilitating policy border-crossings. The more pragmatic and practice-oriented among you might say: Well, what is the conclusion to all this? Is this merely about agreeing with Lord Polonius, who in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Act 1, Scene 3) advises his son Laertes: "Neither a borrower nor lender be?" You will, I hope, forgive me for refraining from coming up with such easy answers, even if Polonius' advice has attained new meaning and has become the 21<sup>st</sup> century mantra for bankrupted banks and jilted citizens everywhere. To provide policy directions now would be to foreclose analysis, and while it is vital that policy and research do not ignore each other, it is equally important that they are not collapsed into each other either. What I have tried to do in this paper is to 'claim sanctuary' by distancing myself a little from the urgency of the demands of policy and practice – with their understandable concerns for prompt and immediate action – in order to prise for myself some space for critical self-reflection. It is my hope that this will not have seemed to you to be a vain luxury and an exercise in self-absorption, but rather that these reflections of a small island man gone global resonated with some of your concerns as well.

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