# "Not Me with My American Flag": Transnational Teachers' Trajectories of Language Teacher Socialization

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## Abstract

*As language teachers move across countries with the rise of professional transnationalism, the need for investigating language teacher socialization in new academic cultures has also emerged. Accordingly, this paper explores two comparative cases: an EFL teacher with prior experience as a language learner and teacher in the USA, and an Arabic-as-a-foreign-language teacher with similar experience in Egypt. The main objective is to shed further light on the transnational language teachers' identity work and to better understand their socialization trajectories in which tensions related to conflicting academic teaching cultures occur. In this study, narrative frames and interviews were utilized to collect short stories, which were analyzed by the short story analytical approach (Barkhuizen, 2016, 2017). Informed by the language teacher socialization framework (Üzüm, 2017), the influences of new academic cultures on teachers' identity work in classrooms and across wider contexts of teaching abroad practices were analyzed. Analysis of the short stories, Stories, and STORIES demonstrated that transnational teachers experienced identity tensions due to the conflicting academic teaching cultures. In light of the findings, such tensions related to language teachers' experiences across academic teaching cultures need to be taken into account for an efficient socialization trajectory.*

***Keywords***: *Professional transnationalism, teach-abroad, teacher socialization, teacher identity, short story analysis*

Transnational teachers have become more and more visible around the world with the rise of professional transnationalism (Jeon, 2020). Native or non-native language teachers all over the globe move to other countries to work, and they encounter challenges in their new teaching cultures and experience cultural clash and isolation (Ferguson, 2011), mismatched academic expectations (Hall Haley & Ferro, 2011), and contrasting initial teacher education and background (Üzüm, 2017), and they try to validate this background in the new academic culture (Benson, 2012); hence, they go through a process of re-enactment and re-negotiation of their teacher identities (Wolff & De Costa, 2017). However, despite the growth in teaching abroad, there is still little research regarding language teacher socialization into new academic contexts.

Existing studies have presented important cases of foreign language teacher socialization. They have focused on a single context, either individual case studies, or single academic cultures. In light of this, the current study portrays comparative cases of two transnational language teachers from contrastive academic backgrounds; the first case-participant had prior foreign language teaching experience in the U.S., and she taught English in the Arab world (Lebanon). The second case-participant got his initial foreign language teacher education and experience in an Arabic-speaking country (Egypt), and he moved to the U.S. to teach Arabic as a foreign language. Through their experiences across academic teaching cultures and narratives, I investigated their socialization trajectories as foreign language teachers together with the dynamic teacher identity work involved in their teaching abroad practice. Thus, I examined the intersectionality of language teachers' prior and new academic cultures on their teacher socialization and identity negotiation.

## Academic Cultures

Academic culture is understood as the cultural features of an educational system that requires an understanding of academic values, assumptions, and roles of a given society (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995); accordingly, it is a complex and dynamic system including (but not limited to) the cultures of instruction (Askildson et al., 2013; McGinnis, 1994), cultures of students (Hall Haley & Ferro, 2011), or classroom discourse (McKay & Devlin, 2014). Relatedly, it is seen as a *small culture* along with national culture, classroom culture, student culture, and youth culture interacting and intersecting to constitute the culture in a particular educational setting (Atkinson, 2004).

McKay and Devlin (2014) underscored the importance of contextualizing the concept of academic culture to demystify it so that we can have a greater understanding of it. In the current study, I investigate perceived membership to an academic culture from a language teacher identity perspective. To do so, I drew on the intersectionality (Atkinson, 2004; Norton & De Costa, 2018) and ecological embeddedness (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016) of transnational practitioners' experiences. Accordingly, I define academic teaching culture as a contextual, historical, and dynamic set of cultures and dispositions that have direct and indirect impacts on teaching practices and teacher identities across classroom (micro), institution (meso), and policy (macro) levels.

For transnational (foreign/second/additional) language teachers, academic teaching culture cannot be limited to one particular teaching context but many intersected ones (Atkinson, 2004; Holliday, 1999). Transnational teachers retain their existing dispositions from their previous academic cultures as they navigate through the new academic cultures in which they exercise their practice (Petrón, 2009). Studies drawing on transnational teachers' experiences reported that familiarity with hosting countries (Ferguson, 2011), academic educational background converging with the host academic culture (Hall Haley & Ferro, 2011), and knowledge about the students' culture (Kahraman & Pipes, 2018) have a positive impact on the process of gaining membership in the new academic culture.

## Language Teacher Socialization

Teacher socialization has been used as an analytical framework for investigating teachers' transforming beliefs and practices while they socialize into new academic teaching cultures (Üzüm, 2017). Drawing on Lave and Wenger (1991), Üzüm (2017) used the Language Socialization Theory to focus on three major factors influencing the trajectory of language teacher socialization: biographical factors (including teachers' personal histories, experiences as language learners, and experiences as language teachers), contextual factors (such as teacher-student interactions in the new teaching context and the interactions with the institutional affordances), and dialogic factors (referring to teachers' making theoretical sense of their practice based on their theoretical knowledge base and the interplay of theory and practice). Üzüm (2017) argues that all three factors

interact with each other dynamically and guide teachers to transform their beliefs, practices, as well as identities in teacher socialization.

In academic contexts, teacher identity is a determinant of teaching practices and beliefs (Lindahl & Yazan, 2019; Norton & De Costa, 2018; Trautwein, 2018); thus, teachers' academic socialization should be considered within the boundaries of identity work. Accordingly, Trautwein (2018) examined teachers' academic socialization and identity development in higher education contexts and proposed a three-stage process as shown in Figure 1. In Trautwein's study, this process is suggested to explain the identity negotiation of teachers when they start teaching at higher education institutions and with them, new academic teaching cultures. Figure 1 illustrates this three-stage process of academic teacher socialization.
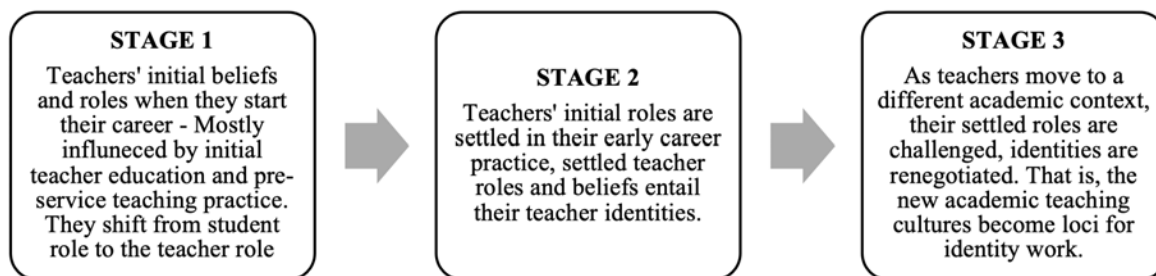


**Figure 1. Process of Teacher's Socialization (Trautwein, 2018)**

With the increasing transnational teacher mobility (Petrón, 2009), teachers often find themselves teaching in different academic cultures across different country contexts even when they continue to teach at the same school level. Therefore, a transnational teacher socialization perspective can be useful for better understanding the identity work emerging from raising professional transnationalism in education. In other words, as more and more teachers move to other countries, they also move into new academic teaching cultures where their pre-existing beliefs and practices may have converge with and/or diverge from those of their new professional context. That requires teachers to re-negotiate their teacher identities (e.g. Petrón, 2009; Wolff & De Costa, 2017) in case they need to reenact their identities within the new academic teaching culture. Especially in terms of language education that is intrinsically related to the linguistic manifestations of the academic cultures (e.g. attitudes towards native-speakerism, (non)native language teacher issues, classroom discourse, or language policies), teachers need to reconsider their stance both as a language teacher and a learner (Lindahl & Yazan, 2019).

A multifaceted investigation of teacher socialization addresses the increasing need to investigate teacher identities in the face of globalization (Norton & De Costa, 2018). In light of this, I use teacher socialization as a theoretical framework to inform my short story analysis (Barkhuizen, 2016) of two focal cases. Accordingly, the short stories of two language teachers with contrasting teach-abroad experiences were investigated to understand the factors (e.g. biographical, contextual, and dialogic factors) influencing practice and identity transformation during teacher socialization (Üzüm, 2017).

## Literature Review

### The Increasing Cases of Transnational Language Teachers

As more teachers start to move across borders and teach in new academic cultures, they experience contexts different from where they had established their original teacher roles (Trautwein, 2018) and identities (Norton & De Costa, 2018; Üzüm, 2017). Several studies illustrate personal trajectories from various teach-abroad contexts and cases (e.g., Ferguson, 2011; Petrón, 2009; Üzüm, 2017; Wolff & De Costa, 2017). For example, Ferguson (2011) reported how a teacher with a *western* background working in *foreign* contexts got isolated and *swung* between the feeling of the perceived power of being a westerner and the feelings of apprehension as a cultural outsider. On the other hand, Üzüm (2017) reported another case study of an Uzbek teacher who moved to the U.S. to teach Uzbek as a foreign language within a teacher mobility program. Drawing on the qualitative data, the findings revealed that the participant experienced fundamental differences during the socialization to the academic culture in the U.S. higher education context. Similarly, in another case reported by Wolff and De Costa (2017), the focal participant, *Puja* came to the U.S. from Bangladesh to study at an MATESOL program, which included a teaching practicum. Before this experience, she received her previous undergraduate and graduate degrees in English Education and taught English in Bangladesh. The authors observed that she had to reshape her teacher identity "in response to a different sociopolitical and sociocultural milieu that placed a greater emphasis on democratic and implicit instruction" (p. 85). That is, Puja had to (and she was able to) negotiate her teacher identity in regard to teacher-mentor, teacher-teacher, and teacher-student relationships as well as her understanding of teacher roles and pedagogies.

In addition to academic socialization trajectories of singular cases, some studies aimed at investigating the phenomenon with multiple participants in a particular teaching context. Accordingly, Kahraman and Pipes (2018) investigated the experiences of five teachers with various L1s such as German, French, Korean, Turkish, and English working at a university-level language teaching context (in Turkey) where English was the medium of instruction. In terms of academic socialization, the authors suggested that teachers were regarded positively by the students due to their native-speaker status, which allowed them to adapt their teaching strategies from their home countries to the new teaching environment (Kahraman & Pipes, 2018). In a different context, Hall Haley and Ferro (2011) investigated native language teachers, who taught Arabic and Chinese in the U.S. and had their initial teacher education in their counties-of-origin instead of the North American (academic) culture. The authors concluded that Arabic and Chinese teachers working in the U.S. held fundamentally different teacher roles and positions than the academic teaching culture in the authors' research context. Despite their willingness to modify their instruction, their language learning experiences, which were mostly teacher-centered and grammar-focused, were different from what was expected from them as language teachers in the U.S. Moreover, these transnational practitioners experienced cultural tensions due to the unfamiliarity with their students' academic dispositions in terms of classroom management and language assessment.

These studies showed that the academic socialization of transnational language teachers differs substantially across contexts. However, it was repeatedly demonstrated that experiences in the new academic culture were critical for the adaptability of previous teacher education and experience as well as the teaching practice and philosophy. Nevertheless, previous studies focused mostly on singular cases; in some studies, the author(s) focused on singular focal participants (Ferguson, 2011; Üzüm, 2017; Wolff & De Costa, 2017) or singular academic teaching contexts (Hall Haley & Ferro, 2011; Kahraman & Pipes, 2018). I argue that a multifaceted short story analysis based on

comparing teacher narratives can shed further light on the dynamic nature of teacher socialization and help us understand the identity work in it.

That said, this study focuses on the narratives of two transnational language teachers in a cross-sectional case study. Relatedly, I addressed the following research questions:

- How does the experience of a new academic culture influence language teachers negotiating their teacher identities?
- How does language teacher socialization relate to teachers' identity work in teach-abroad?

## Materials and Methods

### Researcher's positionality

As the author of this research, I have both studied and worked in different contexts and academic cultures. I have developed a particular interest in the identity work of transnational professionals in higher education based on my own experience because years of teaching in multicultural contexts with academic mobility programs such as Erasmus (in the European context) and Fulbright (in the U.S. context) showed me that expectations and realities related to diverse academic cultures are varied. My professional identity needed to be flexible enough to reflexively deal with tensions, renegotiate my positions, and get immersed after each mobilization. Driven by my personal and professional experiences, I approached my colleagues with similar transnational language teaching experiences during my research visit in the U.S. (another transnational teaching/research practice), and they agreed to share their narratives.

### Participants

This comparative case study examines the experiences of two focal participants who taught their native languages abroad in two different cases. The first participant teacher, Michelle (all participant names are assigned pseudonyms), received her initial teacher education and experienced first language teaching practices in the U.S. In her initial experience of teacher education and teaching, she focused on what she called *best practices* of language education. She also felt that she needed to experience different contexts as she believed it was important for her resumé to include transnational teaching experiences. Later, she decided to participate in a teacher mobility program organized and administered by the U.S. Department of State. She moved to Lebanon for two years where she taught English at a private institution, Beirut University (BU, pseudonym).

The second participant, Ahmed, is an Arabic native speaker who received his education in Egypt. After receiving his BA degree in foreign language education and teaching English in Cairo for a while, he decided to apply for a U.S.-based teacher mobility program, which finances language specialists to teach their native languages at American universities. Ahmed foregrounded his interest in being a transnational practitioner and traveler when he explained his motives to apply for this particular mobility program. Later he moved to the U.S. to a large-scale public university, The Midwestern University (MWU, pseudonym), to teach Arabic.

One characteristic both teachers shared was that both mobilities were supported by established programs promoting transnational teaching practitioners. One contrastive characteristic was that Michelle came from the U.S. academic culture whereas Ahmed's initial experience of academic teaching culture was in Egypt. Therefore, the first two stages of establishing teaching roles in both cases contrasted, and the participants both encountered a fundamentally different context in the third stage according to Trautwein's process (Figure 1).

## Data collection and analysis

The current study focused on Michelle's and Ahmed's experiences while teaching abroad. These experiences naturally relied on the narrators' memories and reflections. To reflect this, I drew on data collected within narrative frames (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008) and interviews to elicit personal short stories (Barkhuizen, 2016, 2017). Barkhuizen (2017) posited that stories are central to our remembering and making sense of personal experiences. Moreover, he argued that story-telling initiates reflection on what has happened and will possibly happen within social and local worlds. These worlds are naturally embedded within broader macro-level structures and are closely related to our social practices, identities, and perceptions (Barkhuizen, 2016). The personal short stories here recounted local experiences from an emic perspective that are embedded in wider contexts and the interface across them.

I collected data after each participant's teach-abroad process had been over. Michelle was back to the U.S.A and was a graduate student in a second language acquisition doctoral program whereas Ahmed was also in the U.S. but stopped teaching Arabic at the institution. Initially, I asked participants to create their stories scaffolded by narrative frames, a qualitative data collection method suggested by Barkhuizen and Wette (2008). The whole frame included 30 prompts. A sample part of the narrative frame is illustrated in Box 1.

### Box 1. Sample narrative frame prompts

When I first started teaching there, I felt _____ because _____.

The main difference between teaching in my country and there was _____. This was probably due to _____. This made me feel _____.

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant. The first round of interviews was conducted before the participants were assigned to work on their narrative frames. In this interview, the participants were asked about their educational background, the general perception of the teach-abroad experience, their general perception of the academic culture in their countries of origin, and the countries where they worked as transnational language teachers. To add, they were asked to elaborate on their teacher socialization trajectories. As Barkhuizen (2016) remarked, the interviews were regarded as a social practice between the researcher and the interviewee.

After the first interview, I introduced the self-developed narrative frames to the participants and gave them enough time to complete the frames at their own convenience. Later in the second round of interviews, the participants were asked to reflect on the experiences they reported in the first interview and within the narrative frames. Short stories were extracted from these sets of data where the participants narrated their past teach-abroad experiences. These short stories were analyzed according to the temporal and spatial dimension(s), action(s), and actor(s) narrated.

Using the short story analysis (Barkhuizen, 2014, 2016), I scrutinized the trajectories of teacher socialization experienced by Michelle and Ahmed at micro, meso, and macro levels of language teaching (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). Barkhuizen (2017, p. 105) draws on the nested conceptualization of the Douglas Fir Group and asserts that when people tell stories, they make meaning of "the worlds that are embedded within broader, macro-level ideological structures".

According to Barkhuizen (2017), short story analysis utilizes two main aspects of short stories: *content* and *context*. Each aspect has three dimensions. Content-wise stories can be analyzed with regards to *who* (characters of the story and their positionings), *where* (places and sequences of

places that host the actions), and *when* (timing of the actions told). On the other hand, there are three contextual levels of the story within the framework of short story analysis. First, the *story* level is composed of actions, thoughts, emotions, and social interactions in the participant-storytellers' immediate contexts. In the *Story* dimension, I analyzed how immediate actions unfold and spread outward to the wider institutional contexts. Finally, the *STORY* dimension helped me orient experiences in terms of broader ideological structures in teachers' identity work such as their beliefs or values (in relation to The Douglas Fir Group's (2016) ecological conceptualization of macro, meso, and micro levels). Dimensions of the content and context cannot be understood independently and should be seen in a dynamic interrelation. In Figure 2, Barkhuizen's three-dimensional narrative space model is presented:
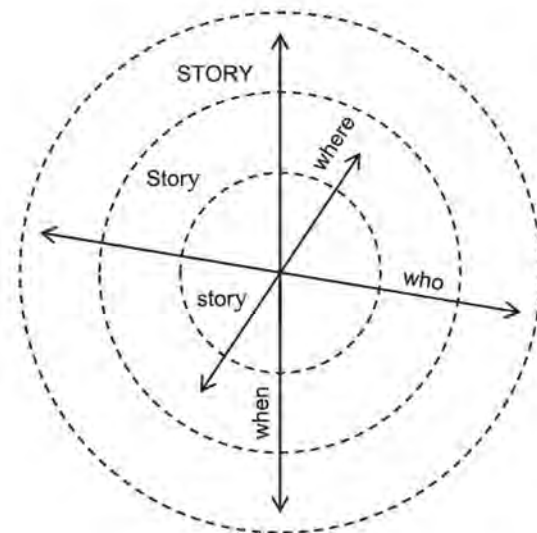


**Figure 2. A Three-Dimensional, Three-Scale Narrative Space (from Barkhuizen, 2017, p. 107)**

Across different dimensions of content and context, I looked for biographical, contextual, and dialogic factors (Üzüm, 2017) that influenced teacher socialization as they are represented in the participants' short stories. I coded the data both deductively (based on the context and content dimensions of my analytical lens) and inductively to avoid being driven completely by my theoretical lens and to be open to new understandings that the narrative data would offer. That said, my intention with this methodological approach is to understand the experiences of transnational practitioners teaching abroad with a socially contextually situated perspective.

## Findings

### Michelle

Hall Haley and Ferro (2011) claimed that language teachers rely on their previous experiences and academic culture both as a learner and teacher, and once formed, these beliefs are not easy to change. After Michelle was appointed to BU by the teacher mobility program, she experienced tensions related to classroom management and to her characteristics such as being a respecter of deadlines. In the narrative frame box below, she explained her initial challenges in regard to the new academic culture at BU.

**Box 2. Michelle's cultural comparison**

When I first started teaching there, I felt *challenged but exhilarated* because *I knew to expect some difficulties/adjustments in adopting best practices to a new and different context, and I was ready for the problem solving (the job I held before did not encourage innovation, and I had become bored in that teaching context).* The main difference between teaching in my country and there was *cultural notions of time and attention to deadlines (i.e., classroom management complications).* This was probably due to *(a) the fact that even for an American I am highly organized and a "respecter of deadlines" and (b) Lebanese culture places a different value on time-spending.*

Note: All punctuation and emphasis markers are the same as in the original narrative frame data.

In the boxes from narrative frames, italic excerpts are the parts written by the narrator. She pointed out her boredom in her previous experience and described her personal and professional reasons to teach abroad in a new context. In the narrative presented in Box 2, Michelle shared a tension she faced in her earlier time in Lebanon. She associated the reason for this tension with the cultural differences regarding time. This understanding was a contextual factor that clashed with her self-positioning as a *respecter of deadlines*. In the interview, she further elaborated on this issue and expressed how her relationship with her students in the new academic culture moved beyond a personal perception of time issues.

**Vignette 1. "In the U.S.A, I didn't have anything like that"**

*(O = Author; M = Michelle)*

*M: Communication with students in the classroom was the primary difference for me.*

*O: Can you elaborate on that?*

*M: Usually that started with an action of students that made my eye twitch. For example, being late to the class. It was not a communication problem but it was where I learned… For example, I had a student who was terrible. He was sweet but terrible. He never did his homework on time but we joked about it. All of a sudden one day, he had a bad grade on a home assignment. And he came to my office and decided to sort of… argue is a too strong word; it was more like sweet-talk, like 'let me try to convince you that I deserve a better grade'. So, I let him do his little spiel. Then I said no, sorry, you don't deserve a better grade because these [showing a piece of paper] were the requirements and this [showing another piece of paper] was what you gave me. And I thought we were done. Nope!*

*O: Where was this happening?*

*M: In my office. [He was] between me and the door. He was not being inappropriate, but in my head, I was going 'why is he still here? What is happening? I don't understand.'. And he kept going. It was odd to me but it seemed fine to him. In the U.S., I didn't have anything like that; if you have a conversation like this with a student, it generally gets more emotional or angrier. It goes on and escalates. But for him, it was not. He was literally repeating and I was like 'No… No… No…'. And I was thinking in my head, when is this thing going to end?*

*O: What did that make you feel?*

*M: I was getting really worried. Again, he was not getting inappropriate. I was looking at the clock and the door. He was standing at the door of my office. If he had started to be inappropriate, I would not have got out of the room. He finally gave up and left.*

*O: When was this happening?*

*M: Not at the end of the semester but near. Maybe it was the final home assignment before exams.*

Barkhuizen (2017) suggests starting short story analysis with content and especially with *who* dimension to have a more grounded insight of social interaction and positioning. In the story above, there are two characters, Michelle and a male student at BU. The story is co-constructed with me during the interview when we were talking about Michelle's narrative frame and her remarks regarding teacher-student relationships in her Lebanese experience. According to Michelle, all the previous joking about his grades in the classroom may have encouraged her student to go to Michelle's office and to bargain about the grade of the homework assignment. In other words, on the *story* scale, the action unfolded over a short period (during the private conversation in the office). However, on the wider *Story* scale, it took place through the end of the year, shortly before the final exams (*when*) at BU university (*where*) which were very decisive for any student. Notably, Michelle and the student had different previous academic cultures. Based on Michelle's experience in the U.S, such conversations escalate and get emotional but it was not the case at BU. The student's "little spiel" was something acceptable for Michelle at first, but it felt tenser for her as the student kept bargaining and the situation did not escalate as she thought it would. The tension might be due to the different gender roles; however, Michelle clearly stated that the student did not act inappropriately.

As for the *STORY* dimension, the ascribed identities of Michelle as a teacher (from the student's perspective) and him being a student (for Michelle) were not in alignment; in that respect, the student may have targeted Michelle pragmatically due to her easygoingness, which was a normal teacher behavior for Michelle. Accordingly, Michelle got a first-hand insight (and perception) of the teacher-student relationships at BU (*meso-level*) and in Lebanon (*macro-level*) throughout this experience. She was positioning herself as an easygoing teacher in the classroom, which resulted in an encounter that worried her.

Barkhuizen's (2017) decision to start short story analysis with *who* dimension intends to take social interaction and relationships between the narrator and the other characters as the base of the narrative. The importance of social relationships is also underlined by The Douglas Fir Group (2016), who argued that a meso-level set of social identities must also be considered; such identities are "defined by the role relationships people create or are assigned to in the various activities of social institutions" (p. 31). In Michelle's case, different characters were in association with different activities at BU (as the social domain) during her time in Lebanon. For example, her BU administrator's actions were associated with institutional policies, and these associations were ascended to her understanding of the macro-level context driving the academic teaching culture in Lebanon as in the following vignette.

**Vignette 2. "This should have been my colleagues, not me with my American flag"**

*O: How did you handle this best practice issue you mentioned in your narrative frame?*

*M: In the classroom, it was easy because I was in charge but at the administration level, let me give you an example, grades at the end of the term. In my quote-unquote western mind, grades should be merit-based. But not so in that particular context. Once we were all sitting down in a meeting at the end of the term. We were discussing a particular student's grade, who failed. She [the administrator] said 'yes I agree but no, that's somebody's nephew, we are going to let him pass.'.*

*O: What did it make you feel?*

*M: Oh, it was infuriating.*

*O: Can you tell me more?*

*M: I don't remember the specifics about the student, and uncle issue might be different as well. But what I remember, in the whole meeting, she made me change this student's grade.*

*O: You did?*

*M: Yeah. Because, as immoral as it was, again, who am I to say? My colleagues agreed with me, and they all said later that I was right. There are tons of people hating the corruption there but it is there. I think if somebody had been to oppose this, this should have been my colleagues, not me with my American flag. The embassy would not have wanted me to do that.*

In the meeting, the main character, Michelle, mentioned her BU administrator and her colleagues, but she mainly focused on her interaction with the administrator (*who*). In the story, actions unfolded at the end of her first year (*when*), during a meeting at BU (*where*). An unjust action was asked from Michelle that she assented due to her concerns of being an outsider to that academic context after a whole year of teaching. It is an unfair overgeneralization to suggest that corruption is a part of this specific academic teaching culture; however, according to her narrative, it was real at that specific time and place. She also mentioned her concerns related to security issues as she repeated her responsibilities to her mobility program administrators and embassy officials. In terms of context, this story is an example of how a content element (the administrator) available at micro and *story* scale context governs her wider understanding of academic teaching culture in meso (the institution) and macro (country) levels. The short story elements and Michelle's positionings (e.g. the administrator and herself) evidenced institutional and ideological perceptions.

Michelle's narratives and short stories show how three scales of context are embedded in one another as suggested by Barkhuizen's short story analysis. This intersectional example demonstrated Michelle's self-marginalization in the new academic teaching context, that is, her understanding of the new academic culture was in a clash with her previous one. This clash was so evident to her that she positioned herself as a person who was an outsider (Ferguson, 2011) and had no right to transform what was going on there "with an [her] American flag" in her hands and with so-called "Western" ideas in her head.

## Ahmed

Learner diversity is an important aspect of the academic culture in the U.S., which may be challenging for transnational teachers (Hall Haley & Ferro, 2011). Accordingly, the cultural diversity in Ahmed's new academic teaching context stood out in his narratives. It was a clear difference between his previous academic teaching culture and the one he entered at MWU. In the box below, Ahmed explained the influence of this diverse academic culture on his teaching practice.

### Box 3. Ahmed's responsibility and commitment

When I first started teaching there, I felt *excited* because *it was the first time to teach my native language even though I was familiar with college-level foreign language classes in Egypt.*

The main difference between teaching in my country and there was *the diversity of student populations*. This was probably due to *the cultural diversity in the U.S. and at U.S. universities.* This made me feel *more responsible to commit to careful planning as there was a lot to consider.*

Box 3 illustrated how the cultural differences in the academic context of MWU were so noticeable for Ahmed that it made him reflect on his previous teaching practice, which took place in a more culturally homogenous academic context. In his interview, he particularly elaborated on his experience during his initial weeks which was a challenge for him. At MWU, he mentioned a clear

agreement made between the instructors and the students by way of an established syllabus. Unlike his previous teaching practice, syllabi were important mediational tools for students, and the students expected them to be fulfilled. Moreover, his MWU administrators had also expected him to finalize his syllabi before the courses started in terms of all aspects: individual lesson plans, materials, assessment protocols, rubrics, and so on. Ahmed described that this experience was unfamiliar. However, according to him, his MWU supervisor's constructive feedback and support made it easier for him to get involved in this institutional aspect. Additionally, he thought his effort was worthy thanks to students' respect and commitment to the syllabi. This was an academically new cultural practice for his teaching, and he was immersed in it.

Immersion was another key term that Ahmed kept repeating in his narratives and interview. In contrast to Michelle and what Ferguson (2011) reported, Ahmed underlined a cultural immersion process that he had been experiencing. He mentioned that teaching in the U.S. was not only a cultural immersion into the U.S. culture. In other words, immersion did not appear only as an acculturalization aspect in Ahmed's case; he also mentioned his professional immersion during his time at MWU. However, he declared that this immersion did not support him in the long run. That is, getting immersed in academic teaching culture "spoiled" him (Ahmed's own words) as a teacher in terms of teaching practice that is desired in a different academic teaching context. The identity he ascribed to being a transnational foreign language teacher changed after he went back to his home country and intended to pursue his transnational teaching career in another country in the Arabic-speaking world.

**Vignette 3. "And he was like, so you were in the U.S. for one year, uh?"**

*(O = Author; A = Ahmed)*

*A: Some people didn't hire me because I was in the U.S.A I was being interviewed in Egypt to teach in one of the gulf countries after I came back. It was an international school giving an amazing salary. One of the interviewers said 'You were in the U.S.A, and you now want to go to this country. I don't think it is going to work out'. He was like 'You have been exposed to this culture; this freedom of doing whatever you want. I don't think you are going to survive in this gulf country as a teacher'.*

*O: Can you tell me more about the interview?*

*A: At first, they [the interviewers] were like 'yes, you are a great candidate for this job'. Then they asked me to tell them more about my previous experience. I listed all the experiences I had, and finally, I mentioned my time teaching Arabic in the U.S.A. And he [an interviewer] was like 'so you were in the U.S.A for one year, uh?', 'Yes'. 'And you want to go to this country after the U.S.A?'. I said sure, it is another teaching abroad context, an opportunity even to improve. The salary was good so I did not mind the contextual difficulties. He didn't reject me there. But eventually, someone else got the job. And I also know the person who got the job. He never left Egypt once in his life.*

In this short story, there were three characters: Ahmed, the interviewer, and the other candidate who eventually got the job (*who*). The interview unfolded after Ahmed's mobility process had been over and he had turned back to Egypt (*when*). However, the value he ascribed to teaching abroad made him look for further such teaching opportunities. This time, he chose to work in an Arabic-speaking Gulf country for financial reasons. The interviewer was an Egyptian veteran teacher representing the target institution in Egypt. The interview, which was made at the office of an international education agency working with the target institute (*where*) did not end up as Ahmed desired. His reflection on the classroom management style he had experienced at MWU turned out

to be true. That is, the interviewer also thought that the way he got used to teaching at MWU would cause problems. At the *story* level, Ahmed thought his teaching experience in the U.S.A would support his professional investment in teaching abroad in the Gulf countries, but it was not the case during the interview. The *story* scale context is supported by the *Story* level fact that American academic teaching culture is not always welcomed within the Arab world (Gardiner-Hyland, 2014). On the *STORY* level, the expression of "doing whatever [Ahmed] wants" was an example showing how the interviewer, who was a teacher and recruiter working in the Arabic context, positioned teachers who have been "exposed" to American academic teaching cultures. The interviewer embodied a second-level social identity (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016); he was the agent of the institutional and wider policies in the *story*. In sum, Ahmed's story also presented examples of the new academic teaching culture's impact on previously ascribed teacher roles and positionings. Renegotiation of the new teacher identity embedded across academic cultures thus both influenced and was influenced by the wider contexts.

## Discussion

In this study, I investigated the influences that new academic teaching cultures had on Michelle's and Ahmed's teacher identity work. Üzüm's (2017) framework of dynamic factors underlying the process of teacher socialization into new academic cultures suggested that teachers need to transform settled teaching practices, teacher beliefs, and identities according to the cultural landscape of the new academic context. Analyzing short stories with Barkhuizen's analytical approach provided an emic understanding in terms of biographical, contextual, and dialogic factors underlying the trajectory of teacher socialization to the new academic teaching culture. In light of the research questions, findings regarding Michelle's and Ahmed's cases indicated that a teacher in the new academic teaching culture navigates through biographic (e.g. their negotiated teacher roles and beliefs before the mobility), contextual (e.g. how classroom, institution, and country contexts entailed identity re-enactments and socialization), and dialogic factors (e.g. interplay of theoretical, practical, and moral issues regarding teaching practice in the new academic teaching culture). In this sense, the current paper supports Üzüm's (2017) earlier findings.

Similar to Wolff and De Costa's (2017) case study, my focal participants also went through a process of teacher identity renegotiation, which reshaped teachers' roles acquired during their initial teacher education/experience similar to stage one of Trautwein's model (2018) and initial teaching years. Furthermore, the participants' vignettes demonstrating them as interacting with different agents within the new academic teaching culture and provided self- and other-positioning examples. Wolff and De Costa (2017) demonstrated how Puja repositioned her teacher identity concerning various interpersonal strata, each stratum having its contextual specifics which can differ independently such as teacher-mentor, teacher-teacher, and teacher-student relationships. In my study, I described and analyzed Michelle's relationship with her BU administrators, colleagues, and students. Unlike her relationship with the administrator, she positioned her colleagues as supporters and resources. In the interview, she pointed out that she was still in touch with her colleagues. She also had a clear experience of teacher-student relationships as in Vignette 1, which made her reflect on the teacher-student relationship aspect in the new academic teaching context. At the interpersonal level, each stratum contributed to her resettlement as a transnational language teacher. In Ahmed's case, he decided to stay in the American academic context. He pursued his graduate studies in his academic culture in which he felt immersed.

More specifically, both focal participants' stories underscore the dynamic and multifaceted nature and ecological embeddedness of teacher identity. Norton and De Costa (2018) suggested that researchers engaging in identity work focus on how identity is implicated at global, national,

institutional, or interpersonal levels. The short stories in this study showed that identity negotiation and work permeated all levels of teaching abroad; that is, both Michelle's and Ahmed's resettlement of teacher roles were dynamic experiences that were intertwined across these levels. Nevertheless, they did not always resonate in the same way across all levels.

The reason for that was probably the particular power relations across different levels in Michelle's and Ahmed's transnational teaching experiences. That is, the structure of power relations among the *story* characters (e.g., Michelle and her administrator; Ahmed and the interviewer) are governed by academic cultures (and tensions created between them) and, most importantly, across wider narrative levels in the same academic culture (for example *Story* and *STORY*). Thus, understanding the role that transnational teachers may undertake may not depend merely on one factor, for example, the nativeness or non-nativeness of transnational language teachers. Both Michelle's and Ahmed's cases demonstrated that the academic cultures they previously immersed were of critical importance in the way that they understood tensions, the way that they are positioned by others, and the power relations across narrative dimensions.

The findings demonstrated some explicit examples of such identity work across different narrative levels. First, in terms of STORY level implications of identity work, it can be observed that transnational teachers and mobilities have become normal in a globalized world. Institutions tend to foreground their international profile; accordingly, they host international students (Barkhuizen, 2017) and staff (Hall Haley & Ferro, 2011; Kahraman & Pipes, 2018). My findings showed that both teachers, Michelle and Ahmed, wanted to become a part of professional transnationalism (Jeon, 2020) due to different biographical factors. Michelle participated in the teacher mobility program as she wanted to get out of the monotony of her previous academic context, and she wanted to reach challenging platforms on which she could experiment with her previous understanding of "best practices". Moreover, she also claimed that such experiences are valuable resumé builders, which aligns with former research (Savva, 2015). Similarly, Ahmed also thought that teaching at MWU would be a great opportunity for him. As a teacher who is invested in teaching abroad throughout his career, he thought teaching abroad within the framework of a prolific mobility program would make his claim stronger for further endeavors.

Secondly, at the institutional Story level, we saw that Michelle's and Ahmed's initial thoughts turned out to be unexpectedly distorted by the dynamics of a new academic context. Contextual factors (i.e., institutional and national contexts) forced them to adjust and resettle their previous positions as teachers; thus, it influenced the dialogic nature of the teacher socialization. For example, Michelle found out that institutional expectations at BU may vary as administrators would converge to the broader landscape (e.g., corruption). Similarly, Michelle decided to acquiesce to these expectations and thus positioned herself as an outsider; furthermore, she foregrounded her other institutional affiliations (e.g., Embassy, mobility program, etc.) as impactful while explaining her self-positioning at BU.

On the other hand, Ahmed got immersed in the necessities of the new academic culture such as syllabi-driven instruction and learner-centeredness. Similar to Hall Haley and Ferro's (2011) study, both teachers narrated the critical realization of the different paradigms of academic culture in terms of pedagogy and presented the landscape both at national and institutional scales. In this study, the short story analysis provided rich data to see this realization in terms of the dimensions regarding content (*who, where, when*) and context (*story, Story, STORY*). For example, Ahmed's interview story demonstrated that academic teaching cultures are highly context-dependent, and existing biographical *capital* (Norton & De Costa, 2018) (e.g. professional background) may not always be suited to expectations of different actors or expectations at different institutional settings. The

multidimensional analytic approach afforded rich detail in the narrative spaces in Michelle's and Ahmed's stories.

## Conclusion and Implications

Michelle's and Ahmed's experiences of teaching abroad showed that the new academic teaching culture creates opportunities to negotiate and reposition teacher roles and identities as transnational teachers. This influence is driven by parameters that are related to the content and context of teachers' experiences. On the content level, the relationship among the agents (*who*) identifies the social boundaries in specific places (*where*) with regards to the actions unfolding at a specific time (*when*). At the context level, my analysis demonstrated that the content of the experiences is closely connected to the contextual realities at micro, meso, and macro-level structures of the new academic teaching culture.

As a teacher and teacher-educator myself, who has also worked with many transnational teachers, I find the findings of the current study critical especially for transnational language teachers and school/program administrators. For teachers who participate in teacher mobility programs as Michelle and Ahmed did, I suggest there is much value in acknowledging that local academic teaching culture influences teaching practices, and they may potentially be mismatched with mobile teachers' existing practices and beliefs. Positive or negative, this influence may create identity tensions for transnational language teachers.

The two cases in the current paper showed that despite the so-called global teaching trends, any teaching practice that is valued in one academic teaching culture (such as learner-centeredness, autonomy, best practices) is not necessarily valued in another in the same way. Accordingly, policy-makers (e.g., school leaders and administrators) need to be mindful of this cultural mismatch, which might result in professional tensions as in Michelle and Ahmed's cases, so that policy-makers can take necessary precautions to increase the effectiveness and productivity of transnational teachers. Even though both of the participants in the current study benefitted from established teacher mobility programs, the administrators of these programs are also responsible for building awareness of such potential mismatch. It is important to build a global network that enables teachers to become transnational practitioners, but it is also important, in order to be efficient, to recognize that teaching practices need to be contextually informed.

This study was limited to two comparative cases demonstrating examples of teacher identity work. These cases were examples of how teacher identity work could inform us about the influence of academic teaching cultures on teaching practices when transnationalism has become a professional norm. Thus, future studies of more cases may bring further perspectives regarding how professional capital is culturally perceived and received in particular academic teaching contexts.

## About the Author

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## To cite this article

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