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# Promotion of Study Abroad at a Global South University: A Case Study of The University of the West Indies

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## Abstract

This article critically examines how study abroad (SA) is framed and promoted on the website of The University of the West Indies. Drawing on multimodal critical discourse analysis, the study finds that the case institution sometimes reproduces a heavily commodified neo-liberal script of SA previously observed in the case of Global North contexts such as the United States, but also offers alternative discursive framings that assert the potential of SA to contest geopolitical hierarchies and promote Global South solidarity. The study also finds evidence of a self-conscious harnessing of an externally articulated discourse, in the form of tourist evocations of the island of Barbados, but that these are also ironically subverted by their juxtaposition with other discourses of self-empowerment.

## Abstract in Spanish

Este artículo analiza de manera crítica cómo se enmarca y promueve el estudio en el extranjero (SA, por sus siglas en inglés) en el sitio web de la Universidad de las Indias Occidentales. Basándose en un análisis crítico multimodal del discurso, el estudio concluye que la institución en cuestión reproduce en ocasiones un guion neoliberal mercantilizado de SA, al igual que se ha observado anteriormente en contextos del Norte Global como Estados Unidos, pero también ofrece marcos discursivos alternativos que afirman el potencial de SA para

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cuestionar las jerarquías geopolíticas y promover la solidaridad del Sur Global. El artículo también encuentra evidencia de un aprovechamiento intencionado de un discurso generado externamente, en forma de evocaciones turísticas de la isla de Barbados, pero que estas también se subvierten irónicamente por su yuxtaposición con otros discursos de empoderamiento.

## **Keywords**

Caribbean; Global South; multimodal discourse analysis; marketing; promotion of study abroad; The University of the West Indies

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## **1. Introduction**

This article analyses discourse and images used for promotion of study abroad (SA) by The University of the West Indies (The UWI), the public university of the CARICOM region. Attention to promotional SA discourses in Global South (GS) locales such as the Anglophone Caribbean is important to our understanding of SA itself and to the framings that surround it (such as internationalization discourses), because SA is the educational activity that most commonly and obviously promises meaningful engagement with cultural Others. Given the power of discourse to shape understandings that become naturalized and in turn affect social practices (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), exploring how a GS locale attempts to negotiate the pitfalls of self-induced “intellectual captivity” (Lee & Naidoo, 2020), that is, local complicity with (neo)-colonially imposed tropes in SA discourse, can help us to better understand the reach and nature of these dominant tropes, on the one hand, and on the other, to notice what else is present, including potential subversions and redeployments that might suggest ways of “telling a different story” about SA. I thus argue below that whilst the case institution exhibits justifiably critiqued features of SA promotional discourse in Global North (GN) contexts, close attention reveals discursive choices that arguably construct a less dependent or “captive” narrative, one that might usefully be harnessed in orientation scenarios for incoming students.

The article thus contributes to newer work in the field that seeks to redress the imbalance regarding the way in which education abroad is framed and researched depending on whether the context is Global North (GN) or Global South (GS) (CAPA, 2021, 2022; Contreras et al., 2020; Glass & Gesing, 2022; Kommers & Bista, 2021). Where GS participants are present in the research, they are still most often designated as “international students” studying full degree

programs in GN institutions, in contrast to the trend in United States SA, particularly, in favor of much shorter, often faculty-led overseas mobility experiences. A broad dichotomy is thus implicitly established, positioning GS citizens engaging in education abroad as long-term “international students” in a global marketplace in which macro-level effects such as international student flows, migration patterns, national development agendas and brain drain are at stake, whereas GN short-term SA students circulate in a highly commodified market of institutional competition in which student satisfaction as consumers, individually acquired “global citizenship” and preparation for employment constitute the primary currency. As a result, research on the problematic intersection of SA as both a (trans)formative experience and as a consumable, commercial one has focused largely on GN contexts.

The present study thus seeks to explore less well-known terrain in two areas: promotional discourse and imagery aimed at outbound, relatively short-term SA students enrolled in a GS home institution; the same institution’s discourse and imagery designed to attract inbound SA students.

## **2. Background**

Though the evidence on how GS institutions discuss and promote SA is scant, existing studies tend to suggest that such institutions often reproduce tropes inscribed by the dominant discourse of the GN. Fahmi and Liska (2024), for example, in their study of online promotional materials for Arabic language and culture programs in the Middle East and North Africa conclude that “the host-grounded discourses rely on a self-orientalist gaze, which, for promotional purposes, equates immersion to exotic exploration and celebrated consumerism of historicity” (p.408). Nonetheless, they find discursive strands that do not solely play into these problematic framings, specifically in the way in which volunteering opportunities are included and discussed, offering “a discursive compensation for the structural inequalities inherent in globalization” (p.410). As we shall see below, the current case generates similar discursive variegation, at times seeming to play into an externally generated fantasy of the destination, whilst elsewhere asserting greater indigenous agency. I also wish to suggest that The UWI on occasion both resists and defers to the stereotype at the same time, generating discourse and imagery that simultaneously harnesses and subverts (neo-)colonial tropes that cast the Caribbean in the role of a paradisaal zone of leisure to be consumed by privileged visitors inhabiting Ogden’s “colonial veranda”, a mode of SA built around “infrastructure which supports the

privileged position of the student over the local” (Ogden, 2007, p. 40). This potentially ironic deployment of (neo-)colonial framings of the destination is a novel feature of the findings that might offer an alternative reading when assessing the SA discourse of other GS institutions in further research.

I also look to build on Rhoades et al.’s (2019) analysis of GS universities and their discursive self-positioning in the context of student mobility, which also reveals a marked tendency towards ambivalence, generating often contradictory institutional rhetorics. On the one hand, the post-colonial status of many GS institutions—particularly public ones—requires them to speak in terms of collective benefit within a narrative of broader societal development and solidary action, mostly on a national level. On the other, they also feel impelled to acquire fluency in the language of “academic capitalism”, locating themselves in often consumer-oriented terms within a system of global prestige that finds its starkest expression in university world ranking systems. The rise of neoliberal logics and marketisation in HE in the form of academic capitalism “deepens the tension between treating knowledge, education, and research as public goods or, alternatively, as private or club goods whose restricted circulation excludes many from their potential benefits” (Jessop, 2018, p. 104). In the context of a public university in a developing postcolonial locale, “residing at the centre of all efforts to improve the well-being of people across the region” (The UWI, n.d.), the global pressure to adopt academic capitalist discourse in university self-presentation thus generates inevitable discursive incongruities.

The resulting “bifurcated marketing”—sometimes reproducing, sometimes confounding the prestige-based neoliberal logics of the North—is particularly evident in the case of universities seeking to position themselves as regional hubs, thereby attracting two types of mobile students: firstly, those from the surrounding GS region who either lack sufficient capital to contemplate study in the GN, or who by conviction are skeptical of the “dominant global imaginary” of “the West [as] at the top of a global hierarchy of humanity with the rest trailing behind” (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016, p. 226); secondly, short-term SA students from the GN seeking a reputable GS institution in which to have an “alternative” SA experience.

The UWI is a regional hub, as defined by Rhoades et al., serving a federation of independent nations in a specific region and having “landed” or physical campuses in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Antigua and

Barbuda, as well as an online campus. We might therefore expect the case institution to exhibit the dual discursive patterning identified by Rhoades et al., though we might also parse out a distinction here: no doubt logically, their study finds the consumerist discourse of “academic capitalism” most prevalent in the private universities in their case study, which tend to stress prestigious connections with GN partners and to exhibit “considerable focus on social matters of lifestyle”, whilst in the public universities “the focus was far more and almost exclusively academic” (Rhoades et al., 2019, pp. 535–536).

However, the situation of The UWI, a public institution, is perhaps symptomatic of an ever-narrowing divide between these categories of private and public, in real terms, likely accelerated even in the relatively short interval since Rhoades et al.’s study, given the highly eventful and volatile nature of that period, in which there has been a global pandemic, significant resurgence of conflict, a marked continuation of the Right-wing nationalist populism identified as a threat by Rhoades et al, together with an ever more urgent sense of impending global environmental crisis. Against this background, in 2022 The UWI transitioned from phase one of a ten-year strategic planning cycle, focused on entry into and ascent up international rankings, into a second phase in which it is “to focus exclusively on the financial affairs of the institution” (The UWI Office of Planning, n.d.). It would not therefore be surprising to find that The UWI increasingly borrows from an “academic capitalist” discourse that tends towards commodification, at least when addressing potential inbound SA students, whilst continuing to tout its contribution to the public good as a public institution with an explicit remit of development, when addressing its regional constituency.

Ficarra (2017) offers a useful GN benchmark through her analysis of the “hidden curriculum” underlying the “institutional study abroad portfolios” (ISAPs) or “the compilation of study abroad programs that a university promotes to its students that take place in particular locations focusing on specific academic disciplines” (p.1) at three representative U.S. institutions, finding a number of troubling patterns in the “cartographies of knowledge” (p.2) configured by their SA promotional materials. Europe is overwhelmingly favored as a SA destination and the programs available there implicitly perpetuate its status atop a hierarchy of civilizations; Africa and Latin America are almost exclusively categorized as “service-learning” destinations, with none of the internship opportunities available in Australasia; the Middle East continues to be distinctive largely by dint of its oil wealth. Similarly, the

overarching statements around internationalization of her case universities reflect previous critiques by conforming to consumerist and individualistic imperatives: the speed and convenience of SA as a pathway to “true global citizenship”, its promise of “personally transformative experiences” and its status as a “hands-on” experience in implicit contrast to the home classroom, tending to perpetuate a “larger institutional fantasy of the joys and benefits of setting off to study abroad” (Gardner & Krabill, 2024, para. 9).

In analyzing the SA promotional strategies of universities in the Global South such as The UWI, then, several salient research questions arise. First, for the case institution, given its GS location, public status and developmental mission, what similarities or differences will such promotion exhibit relative to the observed tendencies of SA promotion in the U.S. context analyzed by Ficarra? More specifically, Will an implicit hierarchy or typology of destinations emerge and how will this measure up to GN examples? What claims will such promotion make about the benefits of SA or the nature of it as an experience and can any inferences be drawn from divergences relative to GN contexts in this regard?

Second, on the inbound side, and following Rhoades et al.’s (2019) research question three: “In presenting themselves to international students, do [these] universities present themselves in historical and current geopolitical space that at least in part is on a stage that is local, national, or regional, and is attentive to considerations of these realms, or are they more exclusively attuned to rankings and partnerships with the Global North and shaped by dominant Anglo-American narratives of that realm?” (p.526). Or rather, as found in the case institutions analyzed by Fahmi and Liska (2024), does The UWI “rely on a self-orientalist gaze, which, for promotional purposes, equates immersion to exotic exploration and celebrated consumerism of historicity” (p.408)?

In answering these questions for The UWI, I thus seek to draw out characteristics that follow a meta-script of internationalization in the globalized space of academic capitalism, but also features that might be designated “ecological” or situated, in that they adhere to a localized frame of understanding and assert the institution’s mission in terms of public good in the regional space.

In the analysis below, significant differences in SA promotional discourse are noted across the three campuses under analysis, namely those in Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados (the other two principal UWI campuses, the online Global Campus and the newer Five Islands Campus in

Antigua and Barbuda, are excluded from this analysis, since their websites returned only a single hit each for the search term “study abroad” and they lack International Offices). It should thus be clarified that although The UWI is a single institutional entity governed from UWI Centre in Jamaica, its federal structure means that each campus in practice has considerable leeway to implement its own promotional strategies for a function such as study abroad, explaining the existence of a separate International Office for each campus. Given the situated, location-specific character of study abroad, this is understandable in the case of culturally distinct island nations with travel distances between them of over two hundred miles (Barbados to Trinidad and Tobago) and over one thousand miles (Barbados or Trinidad and Tobago to Jamaica).

### **3. Methodology**

This study also builds on a number of existing analyses that have focused on both the texts and the images used to elicit student interest in SA, critiquing the distortions and simplifications generated by the application of commercial advertising practices and the perpetuation of uncritical constructions of cultural others (Bishop, 2013; Caton & Santos, 2009; Michelson & Álvarez Valencia, 2016; Miller-Idriss et al., 2019; Onyenekwu et al., 2017; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). In addressing visual, non-verbal data, as well as textual material, my analysis thus draws on multimodal critical discourse analysis, (MCDA) which seeks both to integrate analysis of text and other modes of meaning generation (sound, images, typography, layout) and to draw out the ideological implications of the complex orchestrations that result from the interplay of these various modes.

In order to compile a representative data set for mobility-related discourse on the website of The UWI, the terms “study abroad”, “student mobility” and “international students” were searched from the home pages of the three campuses under analysis. For each campus, this established considerable overlap of the resulting hits for each term. The first thirty hits for “study abroad” for each campus were thus examined and classified. This constitutes three-pages’ worth of results on the Google-driven website search engines; it is highly unlikely that students searching information on the website would go beyond three pages of results. This confirmed the intuition that the pages of the International Office (IO; called “International Students Office” in the case of the Jamaica campus) are the primary site of discourse for both inbound and outbound prospective students:

**TABLE (1)**  
UWI CAMPUS WEBSITE SEARCHES FOR “STUDY ABROAD”

Type of Hit	Jamaica	Trinidad and Tobago	Barbados
Direct hits to IO, top 10 (first page)	4	7	6
Direct hits, top 30	9	14	8
Indirect hits, top 30	9	4	3
Total direct and indirect, top 30	18	18	11
Hits outside IO, top thirty	12	12	19

Here, an “indirect hit” takes users elsewhere on the website to text whose main purpose is nonetheless to refer students to IO pages for further, more substantive information. The remainder comprising the category “Hits outside IO, top thirty”, included: descriptions of specific institutional partnerships that include SA, on Faculty websites (5 in the case of Trinidad and Tobago); references to these as news or blog items; identical “boilerplate” SA promotional texts attached to academic program descriptions (12 for the Barbados campus); internal Faculty information on how to study abroad, such as regulations and application processes (12 from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Jamaica campus). Overall, these data confirm the expectation that the IO of each campus acts as its primary site of information on SA as an experience in itself, including its benefits, and on the services and support it offers to mobile students.

In seeking to describe the ISAP of The UWI, I follow Ficarra in analyzing the way particular nations and regions are framed for outbound SA students on the IO websites, as a means of further locating The UWI in “geopolitical space”, in Rhoades et al.’s (2019) formulation. I also focus on more transparently persuasive marketing discourse for both inbound and outbound students, both on the websites of the International Offices and elsewhere, such as discourse aimed at potential English-language learners (generated outside the IOs, in the case of The UWI). The focus on this particular mode of discourse is intentional, because it turns out to be the location of the hybrid, potentially subversive patterning that is a key finding of the analysis, given that “[e]ven forms of resistance may take on forms prescribed by the prevailing social formation” (Machin & Mayr, 2023, p. 307). Accordingly, language and imagery that tends to posit student addressees as “‘competitive’ and taking responsibility for their ‘success’” and “where their lives and their selves are a kind of ‘project’” (Machin & Mayr, 2023, p. 215), according to a neoliberal script of “academic capitalism”, is intertwined with discourse that asserts the collective value of the institution as “associated with humanistic aims, with raising the bar in civil society,

perhaps creating more thoughtful, educated citizens”, often towards regional developmental goals, thereby implicitly locating the potential sojourner as an ally in a collective project of GS solidarity (Machin & Mayr, 2023, p. 183). As we shall see, this intertwining occurs in both verbal and visual domains.

In order to disentangle these discourses, attention was paid to features such as pronouns, given that a direct personal address to an individualized “you” is a common feature of neoliberal scripts in advertising discourse, especially when accompanied by verbs such as “pursue” or “seek”, and nouns such as “goals”, “dreams” or “horizons”, that imply self-realization and enhancement through sustained effort (Machin & Mayr, 2023). Similarly, the absence of such “synthetic personalization” (Fairclough, 1996) and its substitution simply by pluralized categories that might include the implied primary addressee (“participants”, “students”) would tend to connote a less individualistic and neoliberal appeal, particularly if collocated with references to collective categories such as “society”, “the nation/region”, “the people”, etc. It was also important in the context of SA in a GS locale to pay attention to the choice of human subjects in photographs, their juxtaposition and “transitivity” or implied role in the activity of SA (Machin & Mayr, 2023, pp. 165–166), given a number of relevant tendencies in visual representation: in the United States SA context, crudely racialized sojourner-host distinctions (Zemach-Bersin, 2009) and idealized experiences of “fun, friendships, self-reflection, and exotic encounters” (Miller-Idriss et al., 2019, p. 1104); in the Caribbean context, the “deserted beach” and compliant colonial subject as perennial tropes of tourism discourse (Thompson, 2007).

As discussed below in the Findings section, in one instance I was able to complement my own initial analysis of tourism-inspired discourse from the Barbados site through direct discussion with the administrative officer in charge of that campus’s IO at the time, providing useful counterpoint to my initial critical judgements.

The major limitation of the present study is of course its focus on a single institution with a specific post-colonial trajectory, limiting the generalizability of findings. Nonetheless, as noted above, the chosen institutional case offers productive complexity through its status as a regional institution with separate campuses in four separate small island states and online, generating sometimes markedly divergent discourses around SA at the campus level. As the public university of CARICOM, popularly touted as its “flagship university” to potential

SA sojourners (Brown, 2025), The UWI can also claim a significant degree of representativity for that region, so that the specific contours of SA marketing in this particular, strategically positioned region begin to emerge from the present analysis. It is also plausible that at least some of the strategic goals of GS institutions in other regions align with those of the case institution, given the co-option of the vast majority of tertiary institutions globally, via international rankings, to a system that promotes “world-class universities and the encroaching institutional isomorphism in higher education” and in which “institutions in the Global South with shorter histories and smaller international footprints are more susceptible to this global pressure of mimicry for the sake of legitimacy and visibility” (Lee & Naidoo, 2020, p. 77,87; The UWI Marketing and Communications Office, 2022).

The single-case study approach can also be useful in analyzing in some detail how a particular phenomenon, in this case SA promotion, plays out in a specific scenario, a productive approach when assessing a necessarily situated phenomenon – such as SA – in which participant motivation is under analysis, given that “context and judgment are irreducibly central to human action” (Mariotto et al., 2014, p. 363). Here my own positionality is also relevant. This positionality can be described as insider-outsider. My status as a long-standing employee of The UWI entails the habitual pros and cons of an insider perspective, most notably conversance with the institutional culture, on the one hand, and possible bias, on the other. Offsetting possible bias is the fact that I am not originally from the Caribbean region: the case institution is not “my” university in this deeper sense. Regarding conversance with and proximity to the institutional culture, in the case of the Cave Hill (Barbados) Campus my partial insider position allowed me to ask frank questions of the office that produced the SA discourse regarding some of its choices, discussed below, and to understand the answers empathetically in context, based on a relationship of professional trust built over years, a not insignificant consideration in a context in which in-group bonds and personal rapport are highly valued, and the scrutiny of outsiders is often not benign (Stewart, 2019). Given the dearth of studies on the promotion of SA in GS institutions, this single-case example seeks to serve the exploratory goals often associated with this method, namely the formulation of research questions to guide broader future studies (Exploratory Case Study, 2010).

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Outbound: The UWI as a Sending Institution

This section analyses the outbound component of The UWI's promotion of SA, aimed at students who are considering studying elsewhere temporarily as part of their degree program.

Unlike the U.S. universities surveyed by Ficarra (2017), on the three UWI-campus exchange partner institutions are not grouped into continental or regional categories that tend to be paired with specific disciplines or areas of study, configuring tendentious "cartographies of knowledge". Rather, the partner institutions appear as "card" entries in a sortable mini-database, (Trinidad and Jamaica) or as a simple list in alphabetical order by country (Barbados). However, enumeration of destination regions in descriptive messaging on the sites of the Trinidad and Jamaica campuses, for example, evinces revealing patterns:

- Jamaica: "any of our partner universities in the *USA, Canada, Asia, Europe, South Pacific or South America*" (The UWI Mona International Students Office, 2017, emphasis added).
- Trinidad: "Options include *North America, Europe, South America, Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean*"; "Options include *North America, Europe, South and Central America, Africa, Asia, the Pacific region and the Caribbean*"; "*UK, France, Spain, Germany, Canada, USA, Brazil, and Japan* among others" (The UWI St. Augustine International Office, n.d.-a, emphasis added).

North America and Europe thus tend to top such lists, though the Jamaica site disaggregates the former region as "USA, Canada", thereby excluding Mexico. Interestingly, Asia figures after North America in the Jamaica list, ahead of Europe, which is highest after North America on the others. This likely reflects recent consolidation of both Jamaica–China and UWI–China linkages (Fan, 2022; The UWI Marketing and Communications Office, 2016b). South America's more prominent position in the Trinidad list perhaps reflects its geographical proximity to that continent, which lies a mere seven miles away at the closest point. Though Barbados and Jamaica may be further away from South America, however, the pre-eminence of North America, Europe and other locales in their listing doubtless also reflects historic patterns of mobility and cultural affinities, and thus a perceived hierarchy of interest in, and likelihood of, actual mobility

taking place, notwithstanding The UWI's more recent attempts to establish closer links with South America and Latin America.

Statistics supplied by the International Offices of the Barbados and Trinidad campuses endorse this inferred hierarchy and provide some sense of the overall scale of mobility, for an institution with almost 50,000 total students (including fully online): for the peak outbound year for both campuses in the period 2017-2022, 2017-18, Canada tops the list of outbound destinations for both campuses, with 19 sojourning there from the Barbados campus, 28 from Trinidad. For inbound in the same year, Barbados recorded 33 students from the U.S., 26 from Canada, together comprising almost 80% of the total of 74 inbound students (with Finland the next highest at 6); Trinidad recorded 10 from the U.S., though only one from Canada, with Germany the second highest at 10, of a total of 36 inbound students. As is common, disaggregation by type of mobility hides larger numbers: the above figures are for semester or year-long "exchange" only and thus exclude, for example, inbound faculty-led groups (the Trinidad campus registered 81 faculty and students in this category in 2015-16, though only 9 in 2017-18). The total number sojourning for a semester or a year on exchange from another UWI campus never exceeds 5 in any year across the five-year period for which statistics were provided, though the much higher number of students from the Anglophone region enrolled for their whole degree as "regional students" outside their territory of origin is not included in this figure. Latin American countries barely register in these official statistics, though, again, these figures exclude other known mobilities such as UWI language graduates sojourning in France or Colombia as teachers (no longer enrolled as students, but governed by an institutional agreement) or inbound English-language learners undertaking customized short programs.

The Barbados site eschews listings of regional and national destinations altogether for outbound students. It does use them, however, when referencing sources of inbound SA participants, with the ordering broadly reproducing that of the other campuses' inbound lists: "The University of the West Indies at Cave Hill Barbados is proud to welcome international students from many countries in North, South and Central America; the United Kingdom; Europe; Africa; Asia; and across the Caribbean!" (The UWI Cave Hill International Office, n.d.-b).

The UWI also promotes shorter-term, faculty-led packages of the kind normally studied in the context of GN institutions and often adduced as evidence of commodification of SA, especially likely to conjure forth Ogden's

“colonial veranda”. For example, the UWI Discover Series tours were offered from 2012 and conceived of as study tours to the BRICS countries of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (The UWI Cave Hill International Office, n.d.-b). At first glance, the Discover Tours undoubtedly do reproduce, at least to some extent, the discursive tropes evident in short-term SA promotion in the U.S. as noted by Ficarra (2017) and others: undefined reference to “global citizenship”, critiqued as a commonly touted but often vaguely defined SA aspiration (Zemach-Bersin, 2009), or more directly as “neoliberal propaganda” (Chapman et al., 2018), or the self-congratulatory proclamation of the Tours as a contribution to the university’s internationalization mission and therefore implicitly to its prestige in the cosmos of “academic capitalism”: “UWI’s Trinidad campus, the leader of the region’s internationalization strategies, must facilitate [...]”. The very title of the Discover Tours might also be questioned in light of Zemach-Bersin’s (2009) critique of the colonial resonances underlying the common invocation of the term “discovery” in United States-based SA promotional materials, a practice which “grants the experience a status of mythlike proportion and glory with roots in frequently violent and destructive histories” (p.308).

I would argue, however, that the repurposing of the trope of discovery in this context can plausibly generate an alternative reading and that there are other features of the Discover Tours texts that set this kind of “discovery” apart from the colonially inspired orientations commonly observed in short-term SA promotional material in U.S. and other GN contexts. Firstly, the South-South orientation of the home-destination pairings in itself radically alters the fraught dynamics that structure GN-to-GS mobility, implicitly facilitating a framework of solidarity and collective resistance to an inequitable world order that tends to move the promotional discourse away from the individualistic and implicitly salvationist equivalents to be found in many GN contexts. This is reflected in a marked attention to collective benefit and national/regional as well as personal development. Thus, whilst students will “develop important life skills”, the experience will also “propel them to become invested members of society”. The reference to “global citizenship” itself, questionable as it may be per se, is at least couched in terms of collective rather than individual gain, as an overall objective: “To foster a spirit of global citizenship among the university population through exposure to, and immersion in, all aspects of a foreign culture”. The same objective continues “[T]his will cultivate respect and appreciation for diversity”, suggesting a note of cultural humility, whilst the

objective regarding language learning again expresses itself collectively: “[T]o introduce and enhance basic language acquisition skills and cultural competence in the local population”. Finally, the selection of the BRICS countries as destinations is couched in terms that align the Caribbean region with the emergent nations in question, conveying a message of “lessons to be learned” from GS partners who are “large, fast-developing economies” and “the most dynamic and increasingly influential countries in the world”:

International study tours are integral to educating the local population about, and sensitizing key persons to, emerging economies and cultures. They enhance students’ theories and research; improve business persons’ creativity and strategies; and increase the Caribbean citizen’s awareness and appreciation of the interconnectedness of societies and economies. UWI’s Trinidad campus, the leader of the region’s internationalization strategies, must facilitate this vital development in the social conscience with its outgoing study tours to several countries around the world including the BRICS (Brazil, India, China, South Africa). (The UWI St. Augustine International Office, n.d.-b)

It can thus be argued that there is a discursive ambivalence beneath deceptively conventional language. Accordingly, we might initially read the phrase “the interconnectedness of societies and economies” as a commonplace, bland invocation of neoliberal globalization; however, in juxtaposition with the desire for these experiences to impart “vital development in the social conscience”, and given the source-destination pairings here, this “interconnectedness” might also plausibly be read as part of a project of GS solidarity intended to counter dependency on the neocolonial structures created and maintained by GN hegemony. Similarly, the Discover Tours are not aimed solely at a student consumer in a framework of individual self-development, but rather at “a cross-section of the local society that UWI believes can stand to not only gain significantly from the experience, but also to extend that knowledge gained to local benefit” (The UWI St. Augustine International Office, n.d.-b). Similarly, the forced familiarity of “synthetic personalization”—the repeated direct invocation of “you” as the text’s addressee—commonly associated with neoliberal advertising discourse, is entirely absent from this promotional text. Overall, then, the selection of destinations and often collectively-oriented rhetoric of the Discover Tours strongly suggest that it is underpinned by a conviction that SA in the Caribbean context can contribute to regional development by exposing participants not to the dubiously relevant

“wisdom” of the former colonial metropoli, as in the traditional northward flows of “international students”, but to the burgeoning influence of the emergent powerhouses of the developing world.

**FIGURES (1 & 2)**

THE UWI DISCOVER SERIES



The photographic imagery used to promote and report on the Discover study tours can be read as offering a similar double valency: whilst conventional tropes of SA visual representation, such as Miller-Idriss et al.’s (2019) “jumping, horizon-gazing, and arms wide”, are present (see Figures 1 and 2, above), there is nonetheless a crucial observable distance from the “scenes showing cross-cultural friendships between a happy White student and exotic non-White locals” identified as “ubiquitous in visual advertisements for study abroad” (at least at the time) by Zemach-Bersin (2009, p. 308), for the obvious reason that the SA participants in this case are, by and large, not White.

As a result, an outsider viewing a group photo of “UWI delegates with members of the Caribbean Association of Cuba” (The UWI Marketing and Communications Office, 2016a; see Figure 3, below) would not readily be able to distinguish which subjects belong to the respective home-host groups, thereby troubling the problematic conventional visual dynamics of that dyad in a manner that coheres with the intertwining histories that underlie the encounter itself: the Caribbean Association of Cuba, dating from 1928, brings together Cubans descended from migrants of other Caribbean nations with contemporary citizens of those countries in a network of solidarity that seeks to rebuild kinships sundered by colonial displacement (UNESCO, 2019).

**FIGURE (3)**

UWI DELEGATES WITH MEMBERS OF THE CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATION OF CUBA



#### 4.2. Inbound: Walking the Edge of Paradise and the Post-Colony

This section specifically analyses discourse and imagery aimed at mobile students who might wish to study temporarily at The UWI. A marked distinction is immediately apparent between the Barbados site, on the one hand, and the other two. The Barbados campus exhibits an unabashed tendency to promote the island itself using the commodified discourse of tourism: “We are located in PARADISE! - beautiful Barbados - sunny, safe, stable and sophisticated; easily accessible from all major cities; culturally rich; well-developed economy and infrastructure; the “Gem of the Caribbean”, and beloved home of Rihanna, international super star!” (The UWI Cave Hill International Office, n.d.-b). The campus’s English Language School waxes lyrical in similar terms, deploying synthetic personalization in a transparent appeal to a tourism-inspired fantasy: “When you hear about Barbados, certain images usually come to mind—sandy white beaches, palm trees blowing in the breeze, and a cocktail in hand as you laze on the beach. You will NOT be disappointed” (The UWI Cave Hill Centre for English Language Learning, n.d.-b). The trope of Caribbean locales as paradisaical zones of leisure is reinforced on the IO site by a video testimonial by John from California: “it’s a little bit out of the ordinary... most people go to Europe or East Asia or somewhere like that, I decided it would be pretty sick to go to the

Caribbean and have a vacation... every day is a vacation, it's living in paradise... remember to go to school, that can be really difficult!" (SERUCavehill, 2019a). An in-house promotional video on the site shows international students on a catamaran cruise, with to-camera testimonials by students from Jamaica, California, Ottawa and England ("It's Barbados, man, look at me, I'm sunburnt!") (SERUCavehill, 2020). Elsewhere on the site, key tourism locations and activities are enthusiastically referenced. These features reflect back, from a GS perspective, the reality that "many students initially think of a semester abroad as a vacation and as a break from academic responsibilities" (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p.310).

It is important to note, however, that this heavily tourism-inflected approach accompanies, rather than replaces, an at least equal amount of more informative discourse and imagery that validates both the nation and particularly The UWI as a worthwhile SA destination:

We are an EXCEPTIONAL Campus!! – Globally connected, with over 60 partner institutions in more than 25 major countries – from Brazil and Ghana to Sweden and the UK, from Canada and USA to China, South Korea and Japan. We are part of a world-renowned, highly ranked and highly respected regional University. (The UWI Cave Hill International Office, n.d.-a)

Student-centeredness, teaching and academic quality are similarly emphasized, even as the capitalizations, exclamations and vaunting of the "truth of emotion" seemingly continue to address a neoliberal consumer through the conventional stratagems of commercial advertising: "Our STUDENTS drive our PASSION!! – We provide a holistic, student-centered, intellectually challenging and supportive learning environment. Our curriculum is delivered by world-class faculty and practitioners who are trained to teach, is technology-enhanced, grounded in theory, practical in application and life-changing!" (Machin & Mayr, 2023, p. 217; The UWI Cave Hill International Office, n.d.-c).

Just as the content of these descriptions seeks to move beyond the study-abroad-as-vacation trope invoked elsewhere, the testimonial videos page also includes students with quite different motivations from those of John from California, in turn moving the discourse beyond the language of academic capitalistic prestige into a sphere of socially engaged relevance. Two North American students of African descent, for example, report that "studying in a predominantly Black and African Diasporic country was also very important to

me” (SERUCavehill, 2023) and “I really wanted to go to a university that was a part of... or immersed in the African Diaspora, so that was really important to me, and to have that... that change from what I have at home” (SERUCavehill, 2019b).

The sense of the Barbados campus as a destination that might offer special benefits to students of color is reinforced by the image choices in the pdf flyer “Study Abroad in Barbados: A Special Place!” (The UWI Cave Hill International Office, 2021). The front cover shows, in the background, an apparently stereotypical tourist-style beach shot: palm fronds, azure seashore, love-heart-with-an-arrow drawn in pristine golden sand. Though clearly tourism-inspired, this composition in fact simultaneously subverts the standard tropical tourism tropes in important ways: the beach is occupied rather than empty; the visitors shown are not White; they are fully dressed, standing and, by inference, have not come to this national destination primarily for the beach at all, but as visitors of a quite different kind signaled by the image above the beach shot, which is of the Ashanti-inspired main administration building of this campus of The UWI (see Figure 4, below).

**FIGURE (4)**

STUDY ABROAD IN BARBADOS (THE UWI CAVE HILL INTERNATIONAL OFFICE, 2021)

**WHAT CAN YOU STUDY WITH US?**  
The UWI Cave Hill Campus offers you an intellectually stimulating academic community in which to pursue your dreams and broaden your cultural horizons as you experience the vibrancy and beauty of Caribbean life and living

**Depending on your goals, you may pursue:**

- A full undergraduate or postgraduate degree, diploma or certificate programme in one of our seven Faculties
  - Culture, Creative and Performing Arts
  - Humanities and education
  - Law
  - Medical Sciences
  - Pure and Applied Sciences
  - Social Sciences
  - Sport
- A semester or a year as Independent Study Abroad Student or Exchange
- Your own tailor-made programme comprising your choice of courses
- A Medical Elective
- A Caribbean Summer or Winter Institute in a range of disciplines
- Short courses and programmes specially designed for International Students
- Research opportunities

**TESTIMONIALS**

*"The marketing was actually the best marketing course that I have ever done... This is the kind of experience where you learn the most, not even only about the studying but about life. This has been a wonderful experience."* Emilia, Finland

*"Everything about the study abroad has been a total surprise. The experience, the university, people and the programmes... I did not expect to be so good. I would tell everyone to come to Cave Hill and Barbados."* Antonia, The Netherlands

*"The biggest positive surprise was the friendly people, the culture - that everyone is accepting. The teachers they are great teachers. They really care about what they are doing."* Kather, Kurdistan & Poland

*"Doing the ESL Programme in Barbados has been a wonderful experience. I really loved this beautiful country and its friendly people. I am still impressed by the blue of the sea - I will really miss waking up every day and seeing the sea from my window. I feel very proud of myself and the improvement I made."* Dally, ESL student

**How do you get to the UWI**

**English Language Requirement:** International students coming to The UWI Cave Hill are required to have a sufficient command of the English language. Typically, an official TOEFL or IELTS score is required.

**Application Procedures & Deadlines:** For application forms and deadlines visit the Campus' International Students webpage at <http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/international-international-students/show-to-apply.aspx>

**Immigration Requirements:** International students are required to obtain a Student's Visa. The university provides assistance in the submission of student visa applications. Some international students will also require a Visitor's Visa to enter the country.

**GET MORE INFO & APPLICATION FORMS**  
The UWI Cave Hill Campus Website - <http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/>  
International Office Website - <http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/international/home.aspx>  
or email: [international@uwi.edu](mailto:international@uwi.edu) • [seru@cavehill.uwi.edu](mailto:seru@cavehill.uwi.edu)  
Tel: 1(246)417-4972 • 1(246)417-4656

*We look forward to welcoming you!*

**Study Abroad in BARBADOS**  
*A Special Place!*

The University of the West Indies  
Cave Hill Campus  
**A SMART CAMPUS**  
for the 21st Century

The rest of the brochure reinforces the sense of a space in which White visitors are a minority, with testimonials from non-White students from the

Netherlands and Finland, so that the images of Black students wielding a film camera or working on science experiments leave unclear whether these are visitors or locals.

These images thus represent a choice in favor of portraying the reality of a diverse and predominantly Black space of intellectual endeavor, over possible alternatives such as images of mostly or significantly White groups of international students or the “deserted” or semi-deserted beaches and coastlines that recur in externally produced materials, as illustrated by these examples:

**FIGURE (5)**

BARBADOS DESTINATION PAGE, USA STUDY ABROAD (UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2019)



**FIGURE (6)**

O'NEILL IN BARBADOS (O'NEILL INTERNATIONAL, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, N.D.)

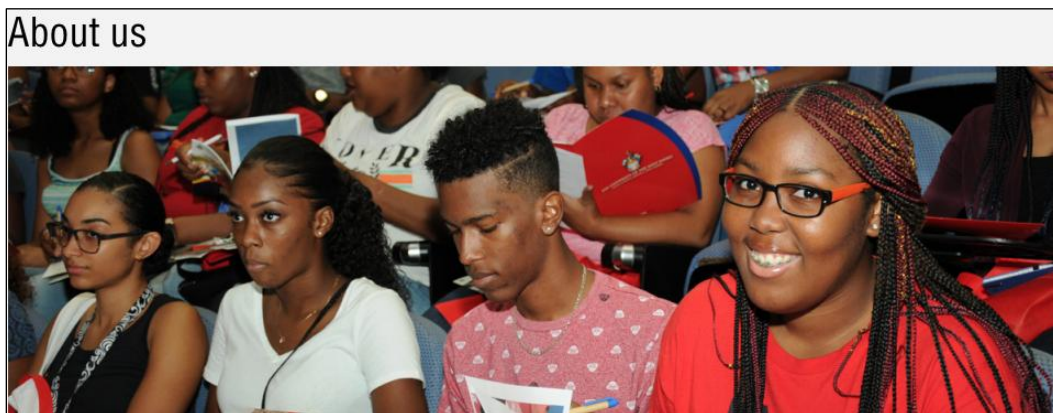


It is important to note that the textual elements of this brochure reflect the ethos of academic capitalism unabashedly, with at least ten references to a synthetically personalized “you” and “your”, individually aspirational lexicon such as “goals”, “pursue”, “your own tailor-made program” and references to appealing lifestyle factors: “world-class sporting facilities with indoor gym [...]”

variety of student clubs and associations – we know how to party!” Nonetheless, although the brochure thus superficially invokes the discourse and iconography of both commodified SA and of Caribbean tourism, these images of self-confident, autonomous, Black and brown students, who are at home and represent the norm in the institutional space they occupy, in fact carefully separate the SA experience from the tourist one, in which Black and local participation often continues to be based on an underlying, colonially-inspired assumption of servility and deference, historically portrayed as such in discourse and imagery (Bandyopadhyay, 2011; Thompson, 2007). For potential SA students with little or no knowledge of the destination, these images also supply important information that the educational and social space they are considering entering is racially configured in a way that may be quite different from their home milieu. These images (see also Figure 7, below) also tend to suggest that the “campus whitening” hypothesis observed in other contexts is not inferable from the SA promotion materials of The UWI (Yanagiura et al., 2025).

**FIGURE (7)**

ABOUT US: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OFFICE, JAMAICA CAMP US (INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OFFICE, N.D.)



If we take it as read that conventional tourism iconography is colonially inspired and that the contemporary tourism industry that perpetuates it is in many ways a neo-colonial enterprise (Gmelch, 2012; Pattullo, 2005), we might read the image of the non-White students on the archetypal, conventionally deserted tourism beach as an example of the ambivalence of colonial discourse when reproduced through mimicry, as theorized by Homi Bhabha. In Bhabha’s (2012) analysis, “[t]he success of colonial appropriation depends on a proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (p.123). Accordingly, such

mimicry “reveals the limitation in the authority of colonial discourse, almost as though colonial authority inevitably embodies the seeds of its own destruction” (Mambrol, 2016, para. 3). Intentionally or not, then, this image arguably lays bare the contradictions of the (neo-)colonial endeavor—in this case the absurd persistence of a “deserted” beach as the most prevalent graphic shorthand for the tenth most densely populated nation on earth—by reproducing or “mimicking” its conventional content whilst inserting “inappropriate” objects in the form of studious, fully-clothed Black and brown bodies, books and a cellphone. This places us in “the ambivalent world of the ‘not quite/not white’, on the margins of metropolitan desire” (Bhabha, 2012, p. 129) in a manner that provocatively encapsulates the manifold contradictions of the term “academic tourism”, particularly when applied to a postcolonial locale.

Turning to the other two campuses under study, both almost entirely eschew any of the borrowing of tourist tropes and stylistic conventions evident on the Barbados site. Of the three countries, Barbados is the most tourist-dependent, as measured by proportion of GDP (Acevedo et al., 2017). Its diminutive relative size also means that SA participants reasonably develop an expectation of visiting the entire country, rather than simply a campus and its environs, whilst the open invitation to freely explore the country mirrors Barbados’s touting, in tourism contexts, of its perception as a safe destination in which harassment of visitors is minimal.

Small size, reputation for safety and the relative absence of harassment in the Barbados case also generally blur the boundaries between tourism-designated spaces and those not so designated. Barbados as a national destination thus relies less on the all-inclusive resort formula, whilst the Barbados campus offers campus tours to outside visitors, to whom it is easily accessible by dint of its location in the heavily developed high-end tourism zone of the West coast. All of these factors configure a geography in which the Barbados campus is integrated into a freely traversable national tourist space in a manner that is less the case for the Jamaica campus, which resides on the edge of Kingston far from the tourist enclaves of the North Coast, or the Trinidad campus, located in a country where tourism accounts for a mere 8% of GDP (Acevedo et al., 2017).

In the case of Barbados, this commodifying tendency, also may also explain a certain observable coyness around open acknowledgment of the nation’s colonial past and key involvement in slavery. Accordingly, the “About

Barbados” page on the Barbados IO site does not contain the words “colony”, “colonial”, “empire”, or “slavery”, or their cognates (The UWI Cave Hill International Office, n.d.-c). The same tendency is exhibited in the “History” section of the Barbados Campus website overall, where the founding of the institution is recounted without reference to colonial status (The UWI at Cave Hill, Barbados, n.d.), in contrast to the Trinidad Campus’s version of the same history, which freely references “the then British colonies” (The UWI St. Augustine, n.d.) and the Jamaica campus, which heads one sub-section “A Past Steeped in Plantation History” (The UWI Mona, 2020).

It may come as something of a surprise, therefore, to find the following on the Barbados site:

Willingly and unwillingly, Caribbean peoples have come from Europe, Africa and Asia. [...] The Windrush scandal. Black Lives Matter. The blacklisting of Caribbean countries as non-compliant tax havens. There is so much trouble in the world for Caribbean people in the region and diaspora. [In this course, you] will consider the literary insights that could help overcome the déjà vu of colonization, racism, plantation slavery, independence, environmental degradation, racism, and troubled identities and relationships. (The UWI Cave Hill Centre for English Language Learning, n.d.-a)

This description of a course entitled “Anglophone Caribbean Studies for the Non-native English Speaker” raises an obvious question: if “the déjà vu of colonization, racism, plantation slavery, independence, environmental degradation, racism [sic], and troubled identities and relationships” is indeed a verifiable phenomenon, legitimately used to characterize the regional space in an academic context, is it ideologically coherent that the academic institution offering it should elsewhere perpetuate references to a national location within that space, such as Barbados, by alluding to it as “PARADISE!”? Kamugisha’s analysis of the “epistemic (and occasionally physical) violence” visited on citizens of the region through the erasures and falsifications of tourist advertising is pertinent here, just as references to “the friendliness of Barbadians” and their characterization as “courteous, thoughtful and generous” might also be read as an unwitting adherence to a script that configures “a colonial reality for the European imagination, an ‘atmosphere of plantation gentility and charm’” (Kamugisha, 2007, p. 29).

Here, my own partial-insider perspective is useful, as noted above, as it allowed me to discuss these questions with the author of at least some of this discourse, a consultation I undertook in the spirit of increased co-creation of knowledge around SA across roles, in this case myself as an academic researcher and my colleague as a SA administrator. Their response, prefaced by discussion of the intense pressures generated by persistent resource scarcity and by the institutional revenue-generation imperative discussed above, left me feeling less ideologically pious about the contradictions noted in the paragraph above. The following is a summary of their position. Given that the campus occupies a tiny niche in the marketplace of academic tourism, its leveraging of small-island hospitality can be seen as something of an inevitability—and does accurately reflect the repeated testimony of successive cohorts of inbound SA students. The emphasis on courtesy is code for both safety and a space of welcome, both important considerations for prospective students and their parents. The course description referenced above offers a view through an exclusively academic lens, whereas the website of an IO inevitably seeks to offer a sense of the rest of the experience, outside the classroom; as such the descriptions are two facets of the same reality, viewed through different lenses. Thus, whilst there may be no discursive coherence on the face of it between the tourist advertising copy used to assert competitive advantage and the academic course description attesting self-critical capacity, it can be argued that this is less an institutional deficiency than a function of a globalized system that leaves SA providers and programmers in all contexts “often having to straddle a widening divide between critical educator and travel agent” (Ficarra, 2017, p. 1).

## **5. Discussion**

We have seen that the case institution broadly exhibits the “bifurcated marketing” identified by Rhoades et al. (2019) as a feature of regional hubs. Accordingly, its SA-focused discourse at times reproduces the assumptions of “academic capitalism”, offering the promise of accelerated personal self-development toward increased competitiveness in a globalized labor market. However, this discursive thread is interwoven with another of a decidedly more collectivist and socially oriented texture, in consonance with the hub’s responsibility as a catalyst of regional integration and collective developmental endeavor. This raises a series of rather complex questions: is commodification of SA, and the manipulation inherent in its conventional promotional strategies, somehow more benign when aimed at GS students, particularly if the experience they are being offered is intended to counter rather than perpetuate

existing inequities, as with the UWI Discover Series? Might not the implicit goal of promoting mutual awareness among emergent nations, and of developing well-informed leaders and engaged social agents in embattled micro-nations, be considered a broadly decolonial end that, to some extent, justifies the means? Or, on the other hand, do the specious character of the hyperbolic and individualistically oriented claims of the promotional discourse inevitably vitiate any solidary and decolonial intent, predisposing participants to experience these study tours in a selfishly consumerist manner? In the U.S. context, Zemach-Bersin (2009) found that advertisements were “likely at the pinnacle of their influence” when SA students form initial expectations of their experience, and that post-sojourn, “some students felt they had betrayed their own intelligence and ethical instincts when preparing to study abroad” (p.309). Though further research would be required to establish whether and how Caribbean SA students’ advertising-influenced expectations diverged from their lived experiences, it seems likely that any such post hoc cognitive dissonance would be less egregious, given the more equivocal implicit claims of the advertising discourse in the Caribbean context, combining as it does both individual and collective benefit, and not being derived from an underlying script of home-nation global superiority.

The UWI campuses do not divide the world into zones that offer specific modes of engagement in the same explicit and ideologically freighted manner exhibited by Ficarra’s U.S. examples. However, the order in which they list regions of the world does show some patterning, reflective of the ranking by numerical significance of these regions as SA destinations and sources. This patterning, in turn, is of course not free of ideological implications, since these flows in themselves are partly a function of postcolonial legacies of attachment and dependency. In this sense, these flows and their reflection in discourse are a symptom of the Anglophone Caribbean region’s failure to offer a radical alternative to a “cartography of knowledge” inherited from the colonial period, thus arguably contributing to continuing reification of a received “world order” (Hintzen et al., 2022).

The case institution shows internal variation with regard to the co-opting of the discourse of tourism as a tool for attracting inbound mobile students. The campus in the most tourist-dependent of the islands openly borrows from the tropes and stylistic conventions of tourist evocations of the island, even as it also promises critical engagement with its post-colonial challenges as part of its academic portfolio. Just as the outbound material for the Discover Tours

contains a socially conscious and solidary subtext alongside its promise of personal development for leadership, the tourist-inflected imagery of the Barbados campus both harnesses and subverts the iconography of Caribbean and tropical tourist advertising, conjuring forth a space in which “Paradise” is very much inhabited, by both mobile and local students who are Black and brown. Arguably, this “playing up” to an inherited set of conventions initially inscribed by colonial desires can be seen as somewhat ironic, a shrewd deployment of colonial tropes in the service of competitive advantage in a neo-colonial world order.

This reading, based on such limited evidence, must necessarily be tentative in this exploratory context. It also raises an obvious conceptual question, from a radical postcolonial standpoint: “why do we need the beach at all?” Or put another way, why not consign the unhelpful myth of “Paradise” to the epistemological scrapheap once and for all? This is a fair question, given that two of the three campuses with IOs eschew beach imagery almost completely and the campus that most deploys such imagery, as we have seen, also freely offers a contradictory, dystopian vision of the destination when in fully academic discursive mode. On the other hand, recent sojourner testimony gathered as part of the Caribbean Study Abroad Research Project (Craig, 2020), repeatedly refers to the beach in Barbados (where beaches cannot be legally privatized) as a valuable therapeutic location, to be visited alone or in pairs as a respite from academic work and communal living by students increasingly mindful of their mental health, rather than the zone of “consumption, luxury and privilege” that characterizes the regional tourist experience. It is thus possible that SA research may assist in generating new, emergent meanings of the Caribbean beach that, whilst hardly radical, may at least offer an opportunity to move beyond “the endlessly repeated cliché” of tourist iconography (Sheller, 2004, p. 2).

## **6. Conclusion**

Evidently, analysis of other institutions would be required to test the generalizability of these patterns of representation around student mobility in the case GS institution. To do so, the four following questions might guide future research.

First, does the SA promotion of other GS tertiary institutions exhibit the same or similar combinations of “academic capitalist” (individualist, global labor market-oriented) rhetoric and solidary appeals (education as a public

good, motor of development), as correctly predicted by Rhoades et al. in this case study?

Second, what other discourse types are implicated in the promotion of SA and how do they distribute across GS and GN classification (or predominantly sending versus predominantly hosting institutions/locales) or other relevant distinctions? Whilst Ficarra's U.S. institutions exhibit "academic capitalist" tone and features, there is also a sub-discourse of paternalistic development politics in her section on conventional service-learning destinations, entitled "Help!" The mirror image in the case of The UWI, it might be argued, is the tourist-inflected discourse of one of the campuses, which mimics tropes that configure the region in a particular way in the collective imagination of the Global North. Accordingly, do other GS institutions hold up a similar mirror to reflect back the desire of potential GN sojourners, as found by Fahmi and Liska (2024)?

If yes, third, to what extent is this reflection back ironically subverted by the presence of "inappropriate objects" that potentially "pose[s] an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (Bhabha, 2012, p. 121)? This question is an important one, as it addresses the potentially emancipatory uses of SA that lie beneath the conventional tropes of self-gratification and personal gain that have come to dominate SA discourse. Though these dominant tropes are shown herein to be present in a GS context too, there is also an alternative, interwoven script that hints at collective, developmental and solidary benefits of SA undertaken by GS sojourners. In the context of the small-island developing states that comprise The UWI, this script is relatively untainted by any suggestion of salvationist paternalism, a common discursive pitfall in the case of GN service learning (as indicated by Cruz-Feliciano's (2023) suggestion that this SA sub-category be renamed "solidary learning"). If such discourses do turn out to be present, they should be noted and borne in mind, in line with the goal of ethnographic approaches to (M)CDA that seek to uncover "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses", thereby potentially "expand[ing] discursive space" by creating a "subaltern counterpublic" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67), distinct from the neoliberal subject interpellated by dominant SA promotional discourse.

Fourth, if other GS institutions do exhibit the variegated, sometimes contradictory discursive patterning around SA found in the case of The UWI,

what do SA participants make of it? What experience do they expect to have in a locale that describes itself as both a “PARADISE!” and as laboring under the “the déjà vu of colonization, racism, plantation slavery, independence, environmental degradation, and troubled identities and relationships”? Such work would again build on ethnographic approaches to MCDA, in which the interpretation of discourses by their intended primary addressees is examined in order to nuance and inform purely academic analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2023, p. 307,310), as well as building on reception studies in the SA field, such as those by Zemach-Bersin (2009) and Boulden (2022). It would also serve to answer the question of whether academic critics of SA advertising discourse might not be guilty of a degree of paternalism in the form of “a preconception about the identities and values of the receptors of the discourse of advertising (they are easily deluded), as well as a didactic perspective on the part of these critics: it would seem that this specific discursive practice must be handled with care, because of its corrupt seductiveness, although it is possible to decipher it, provided you are in possession of the appropriate hermeneutic tools to do it” (Simões Lucas Freitas, 2013, p. 428). Such work would also be a valuable contribution of SA studies to broader institutional ethnographies, in which the study of the means of textual production and reception is a key component (Tummons, 2017).

Such further research can also provide valuable analysis that might form the basis for two practical interventions in the SA domain. The first is to feed into pre-sojourn learning modules for in-bound students to GS locales, particularly, as part of critical inquiry around the destination and the experience overall, following models that assert critical and self-reflective approaches (Vande Berg et al., 2012). Critical engagement by participants with the advertising that has brought them to the experience in the first place would serve the valuable ends of all such preparatory work: heightened awareness of both the nuances of the destination, including its contradictions, and of “the layers of interaction and representation in which they themselves participate—whether through exchange, emotional investment, or even mere speech” (Reilly & Senders, 2009, p. 255).

The second practical intervention is to inform judgements on how to promote SA more honestly and ethically in future. As Smith (2025) avers, “we are at a critical point in our history in which we must assess whether the benefits of study abroad are being overstated or selectively framed to align with constructed narratives, rather than fully embracing a more nuanced and

evidence-based understanding of its impact” (p.107). Though Smith here refers to the U.S. context specifically, the spirit of equity that ideally underpins SA demands that all contexts be considered and included in the necessary reckoning around how this activity is configured discursively, to the benefit of future sojourners and practitioners in all locales.

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