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Space, Time and Study Abroad, Doerr


Neriko Doerr explores ways in which students frame space and time during study abroad, and demonstrates the limitations of these framings. Showing that the ways the students’ understandings of space and time inform their narratives about their experiences, she suggests that shifting these understandings will deepen the complexity with which they view both themselves and their host community.

Doerr’s interviews reveal that students understand space and time in bounded ways while abroad. Their ‘experience’ begins when they arrive and ends when they leave their new surroundings. They view the space that surrounds them as having identifiable borders: the space of the "locals" (which they are visiting) and the space of the "Other" which they, along with their co-nationals and tourists, inhabit. Doerr explores these ideas through the concept chronotopes, a concept that arose in Bakhtin’s literary analysis and defined as space-time relationships. She identifies two chronotopes among her students which inform their reflections of their study abroad. In one chronotope, the local environment is viewed as homogenous with the students describing the local space as uniform: her students describe the "French" or the "Spanish" as if those are singular categories occupying a singular, uniform space. In the second chronotope, the local space is differentiated from the outsider space in a hierarchical way: local space is deemed superior, and the students explain their conscious decisions to inhabit one space over the other. The students might scorn tourists or students who don’t interact with the locals and rate their own interactions with host families as more significant.
Both of these chronotopes -- either viewing the local space as uniform or viewing the local space as superior to the outsider space -- neglect the diversity and constructivist nature of both space and time. Thus, Doerr argues that a third chronotope of study abroad should be encouraged: one which understands that space, as something dynamic, shifts as different individuals occupy it. In addition through this new chronotope students understand that time is not bounded -- the study abroad is not 'frozen' by the dates of the study abroad trip. Instead, time in this study abroad chronotope refers to memories, effects, and reflections on the study abroad that may occur much after the event. She calls this an ‘expanded’ view of time.

Students who think about space and time through this study abroad chronotope, Doerr suggests, might be more able to narrate the diversity of their individual experiences. In addition, by viewing the study abroad as an event not frozen in a particular time or space, students are more likely to think about both their location and themselves in multiple contexts, be those contexts historical, social, or political. Questions about why they seek out particular experiences, why they respond in a certain way to particular interactions, how their presence changes dynamics of a household or classroom, and other reflective questions become more relevant when an experience is seen through a constructivist vision of space and time.

"Personal" Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and the Anchor of Mobility, Erkmen


T. Deniz Erkmen explores arguments that suggest either that mobility creates global citizens who prioritize a global identity over a national one or that mobility leads to un-anchored individuals who lack a clear sense of belonging. Through interviews with transnational professionals living in New York City and Istanbul, she seeks to understand how these globally interconnected locals and expatriates construct their "cosmopolitan" identity. How do they view themselves within their world? How do they view themselves in relation to their home country? How do they describe their sense of ‘belonging’ to different spaces they have occupied or currently occupy?

Her content analyses of these interviews suggest a definition of cosmopolitanism that focuses on the attributes of individuals in contrast to definitions of cosmopolitanism that focus on an ideological sense of obligation and belonging to the human race. Rather than nurturing a cosmopolitanism that enables her interviewees to position themselves as one among ‘humans’, the transnational professionals Erkmen interviews construct their ideas about cosmopolitanism on a personal and individual level: cosmopolitanism means skills that enable them to adjust to new places, find networks of friends of many nationalities, and create a ‘home’ anywhere. The process of “cosmopolitanization” is the process through which they gain these skills. As cosmopolitans, her interviewees see value in their ability to identify friends who live all over the world and in their ability to create a home for themselves in any country they live. Cosmopolitanism affords them a kind of 'capital.'
In this construction of cosmopolitanism, Erkman identifies the act of mobility itself as an anchor in the creation of identity. She writes that, “The feeling of being ‘global’ is anchored in people and places and in experience, not in abstract principles” (p.41). The act of gaining experience moving around reinforces the cosmopolitan identity of her interviewees. Rather than mobility offering a disruptive experience, the narrative as told in the voices of these transnational professionals is that their mobility reaffirms, and renews, their identity as cosmopolitan/national/mobile individuals.

But this cosmopolitanism relies not only on the act of moving but also, Erkman argues, in the existence of a national identity. While all of her interviewees deny that they are ‘nationalistic’, they all describe the place where their parents live as "home" as well. They deny that they are "nationalists" because they do not view their country of origin as superior to any other. Nevertheless, they read their national newspapers, connect with co-nationals, want their children to visit their country of origin etc. Thus they identify with a national home while simultaneously identifying their current country as 'home' as well.

Thus the identities of these transnational professionals are constructed through particular (individual) conceptions of the 'global' as well as particular (individual) conceptions of the 'national' in the context of the particular (individual) experiences of mobility itself. Thinking about identity in this way -- as something individual and experiential rather than something communal and ideological -- suggests multiple ways of considering the unintended, or under-acknowledged, consequences of a mobile, globalized world.

Education Deserts: The Continued Significance of "Place" in the 21st Century, Hillman and Weichman


This report examines how where a person lives affects educational opportunities, even in a world that we think of as being highly mobile. It identifies educational 'deserts' which have limited educational options and discusses the responsibility of higher education to address these inequities.

The "Refugee" "Crisis": Considering voice, privilege, and the context of urgency, Kallius, Monterescu and Rajaram

Hans de Wit has noted that one of the most pressing issues facing international higher education in 2016 is the refugee crisis.

But who is a refugee? What is a crisis? What kinds of help, from institutions like the State or humanitarian agencies, promote or suppress the voices of those in need?

In an ethnographic study of the Syrian, Bangladeshi, Iraqis and Kurds in Budapest during the summer of 2015, anthropologists Annastiina Kallius, Daniel Monterescu and Prem Kumar Rajaram consider the experiences of those seeking transit to Western Europe in the context of who – and where -- they are, the way a crisis is defined, and the nature of the assistance they receive.

The individuals whose stories they discuss in their research occupy two public spaces – the train station and a park, officially named the park of John Paul II but unofficially identified as the “Afghan Park”. While safe houses have been set up outside of these locations and officials try to move migrants to ‘relocation camps’ outside of the city, the train station and park offer the promise of transit out of Budapest. Although the trains refuse to board those seeking to relocate to Germany and the park is a haven for smugglers who may or may not offer means of leaving Budapest, to abandon these locations would, at the very least symbolically, move the migrants farther from their goal.

Their occupation in these locations, inside of the city, raises other questions about the space the migrants occupy in relationship to others in society. Like the Roma and those who are homeless, the migrants have need of food and shelter. Yet, for the humanitarian agencies offering assistance, the "refugees" are viewed as different from these other groups. The fact that the individuals waiting come from different countries and that these individuals co-exist with those who are local make the term "refugee" itself problematic. In fact, the researchers relate that the Hungarian humanitarian agency, Migration Aid, refuses to give blankets to Roma or those who are Hungarian but homeless, claiming the resources are limited to those who are in transit. Thus the ‘refugee’ is given a status as different than other needy parties.

This binary of the migrants who are outsiders by virtue of being in transit vs. the Roma or homeless who are outsiders within a society, represent what the authors term a “vertical” logic: a logic in which there are clear binaries between who deserves help and who doesn’t, between who is an outsider and who is a citizen; between who has a voice and who does not.

This lack of voice leads the authors to examine as well what they term as “horizontal” organizations. Unlike the vertical organizations, the horizontal organizations protest with refugees, do not distinguish among those who are in need, and respond to the suggestions and demands of those needing help. While at times the horizontal and vertical organizations worked together, at other times they themselves were at odds with each other – either in objective or in action. The crisis revealed tensions not only due to the presence of the refugees but also due to pre-existing divisions in the society (between those who saw themselves as the official voice and those who saw themselves as second-class).
As the “crisis” passed, and the migrants did leave both the train station and the park, the authors reflect on the value of using the term ‘crisis’ at all. Using the phrase “crisis” takes an event outside of an historical, social and political context. It removes the actors and the victims from a larger system. Yet, as their examination of this ‘crisis’ demonstrates, the relationships of power and voice are not new to these environments. Does framing a problem as a ‘crisis’ help or hurt thinking through both causes as well as solutions? Does suggesting that “refugees” should be the object of a research question also subject them to being seen as voiceless?

I am reminded in reading this piece of a recent article by Elizabeth Olson on the difference in the scholarship of “urgency” and the scholarship of “waiting.” “Urgency” is framed as describing problems that are systemic – climate change, political unrest, economic failures; “waiting” however is framed by focusing on individual needs – the need for bathrooms or the need for visa. These latter needs of “waiting” are not prioritized or understood in relationship to the systemic, ‘urgent’ issue.

Likewise, in this piece on refugees, the individual struggles at the train station and the park are not acknowledged by the state or the vertical humanitarian aid organizations. Yet, it is the pain of their individual experiences that is consistently acknowledged and addressed by these anthropologists in their ethnography.

As we think about ways for higher education to address the “refugee crisis”, how can we make sure that both the issues that are urgent and the voices that are waiting can be heard?


The Making (and Breaking) of the Concept of Global Citizenship, Vora


University leaders often proclaim that one of their strategic goals is to graduate “global citizens.” Implicit in this goal is the belief that students, upon graduation, will feel more deeply connected with their world. This assumption is challenged when the second-class status of native-born, noncitizen students is reinforced, rather than mitigated, at an American branch campus. What is gained when local interpretations of the presence of an American branch campus and an “American” curriculum are explored rather than assumed?

Based on her ethnographic work in Dubai and Doha, Neha Vora, in the article “Is the University Universal? Mobile (Re)Constitutions of American Academia in the Gulf States,” exposes a surprising paradox. On the one hand, American universities assign specific missions, values, and curricula to their
international branch campuses. On the other hand, students often interpret and respond to these missions, values, and curricula in unanticipated ways.

The students that Vora interviews understand concepts of citizenship, identity, and sense of place by drawing on their own experiences as non-Emiratis living in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). By focusing on context, Vora raises complex discussions about what the terms “global” and “universal” signify in higher education settings that are both familiar and foreign. Vora explains that the UAE limits citizenship to children of Emirati fathers. Thus, those born in the UAE to an Indian father are considered Indian, not Emirati—even if the Indian family has resided in the UAE for more than one generation. All of the benefits of citizenship, including admission to public schools, are restricted to Emiratis. Given the high percentage of non-Emirati workers in the UAE, specifically from South Asia, a large percentage of university-age students have grown up in the UAE without access to public education. Up until the introduction of international and private universities, only Emirati citizens had access to the universities, as all of the local universities were public.

The presence of local international and private universities awarded locally-born Emirati children and locally-born, non-Emirati children their first opportunity to go to school together. However, this interaction has led the students in Vora’s story to think quite critically about their place in the UAE. Vora shares that local, non-Emirati students must deal with constant perceptions that they are second-class immigrants by their Emirati neighbors on these American branch campuses. For example, the Gulf Arab students push ahead in line and insist that the non-Arab students hand over their lecture notes. Vora notes that, “ironically, then, it was the supposedly egalitarian platform of the university, and not the segregated environment of their childhoods, that showed South Asian youth the realities of social hierarchies in the UAE” (Vora 2015, 26). While the university has provided a space for these two populations to connect, in actuality, that intersection has created a deeper sense of division that students, especially the South Asian students, have not had to previously address. While many U.S. universities introduce and explore issues of global citizenship on their campuses—even including “global citizenship” in their mission statements—it is the concept of national citizenship that continues to be the most salient and critical, especially with regard to the South Asian students at these branch campuses in the UAE.

Through this and other examples, Vora offers ideas of citizenship and identity in a rich and multifaceted way, and suggests that the “learning” taking place on these campuses may be as diverse as the students they attract. Vora concludes with a provocative question: “what exactly are we losing through internationalization of our universities, and which actors are centered and which marginalized in the language of loss and gain?” (Vora 2015, 33). It is a question worth considering, even though the answer will likely require a tapestry rather than a single thread.