International education and the production of cosmopolitan identities

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Abstract.   Over the past decade, the number of students studying for higher education has grown rapidly, to around two million. Based on an interview-based research project, this paper examines how international student identities and cultural affiliations are transformed by their experiences in Australia; the challenges they confront upon graduation in reinserting themselves in to their own national communities; and the ways in which they seek to use their education to build their social lives and professional careers. The paper shows how the students develop, over the course of their higher education abroad, a range of cosmopolitan sensibilities that are systematically contradictory, concerned more with their strategic positioning within the global labor market than with building a moral sense of global solidarity.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, globalization, cultural identity, student mobility, internationalization of higher education

Introduction

Much has been written over the past decade about international student experiences in Australian higher education. This burgeoning literature has grown partially out of genuine concern about their welfare and transition into new academic environments, but it has also been based upon an institutional anxiety about the need to meet client needs in order to ensure a continuing supply of international students who have become a major source of revenue for Australian universities. A huge amount of industry-related research is now presented at the annual meetings of national associations of international education, such as IDP and ISANA. Much of this research concerns aspects of enculturation, cultural adaptation, social adjustment, inter-cultural communication, racism and learning difficulties encountered by international students. Suggestions about how best to cater for student needs within the context of cross-cultural sensitivity and quality assurance directives are widely debated (see for example, Hellstein 2003).

A major stream of this research relates to issues of cultural differences and learning styles; highlighting differences between 'Asian' and 'Western' learning-styles. Asian students, it is argued, for example, are more inclined to use rote-memorization and formal approaches to learning than Western students. This is assumed, following Geert Hofstede (1984), to be due to different cultural traditions between East and West, between the so-called Confucius-heritage cultures and cultures espousing western rationality. This 'culturalist' assumption is not only common among many Australian academics, hegemonically, it can also be found among some Asian students. Indeed, this ideological assertion, together with English language difficulties, is often put forward as an explanation for the underachievement of some international students in Australia.

However, as John Biggs (2001) and a number of other researchers (for example, Volet and Renshaw 1996) have pointed out, this binary framework overlooks the huge differences that exist with the community of Asian students in Australia. Based on a considerable amount of empirical evidence, they have argued that these cultural explanations mistakenly rest upon a range of generalizations about the ways in which culture impacts on the processes of learning. On the contrary, Volet and Renshaw (1996) suggest that Asian students employ a vast array of learning strategies that sometimes involve rote learning while, on other occasions, they rely on critical engagement with learning tasks. Similarly, they reject the notion that Australian students do not also learn by rote and formal

procedures. Now, while this research represents an important antidote to some of the myths about the differences between Australian and Asian students, it does not reveal the complexities of the issues relating to the ways in which students' identity is reconstituted as a result of their mobility across national boundaries.

Part of the problem with much of this research on international student experiences lies in the fact that it is located within a narrow social psychological framework that focuses largely on learning processes within formal settings, which effectively sidelines broader political and historical issues concerned with the contemporary consumerist production of mobile identities in and through international education. Also missing in this research is any notion of how student cultures are dynamic, and how their identities are subject to change as a result of their transnational experiences. The question we need to ask then is how do international students view their Australian experiences; and how do their experiences of mobility, transition and travel, as well as formal learning, shift their perceptions of their identity, and of their own cultures, on the one hand, and the emergent global culture on the other.

In this paper, I want to discuss some of the findings of a research project Michael Singh and I have been working on over the past four years, exploring shifts in identity of international students in Australia. Funded by the Australian Research Council, this project differs from much of the social psychological research that seeks to identify patterns in international student experiences in Australia as an aggregate of individual accounts. Our project, in contrast, focuses on relational matters, and is concerned with identifying historical patterns of transnationality, of which international education is clearly an expression. We seek students' reflections upon their experiences of international education after, or towards the end of, the completion of their programs, in order to develop broader pictures of cultural change within the global era. We explore the various ways in which international students use their experiences in Australia to develop views of their identity and cultural affiliations by investigating the challenges they face, and the opportunities they have, in (re)inserting themselves into their own communities and in using their education to build their social lives and professional careers. In this way, we are interested in developing a better understanding of the broader values, perceptions and aspirations of the students, and how these change as a result of their experiences in Australia.

Methodology

To investigate these issues, we have utilized a research approach that is both empirical and theoretical. The empirical component of our research has involved extensive interviews with students from India and China, both before they completed their programs in Australia and also upon their return. We chose students from these two countries deliberately because their numbers in Australian universities are rapidly rising, and because we expected them to provide contrasting profiles due to their academic and cultural backgrounds. Indian students in Australia are mostly enrolled in Engineering and Information Technology programs, while a majority of Chinese students undertake Business and Management programs. While Indian students have a good command of English, Chinese students have traditionally experienced difficulties. While Indian and Australian universities share common colonial origins and are organizationally similar; the Chinese higher education system is marked by a number of significant differences. We chose to study students from two countries, rather than just one, because we felt that this would enable us to locate our investigation within the tradition of what James Clifford (1997, p. 36) calls 'comparative cultural studies', an approach that seeks to identify "specific histories, tactics and everyday practices of dwelling and traveling …".

In all, we interviewed 41 students in their senior year in Melbourne, Australia and another 38 in India and China after their graduation. Our initial plan was to interview the students during their final year of studies in Australia and then interview the *same* students again once they had returned home. But this plan turned out to be flawed, for there was a general global 'scattering' of the students after graduation. It soon became clear that our plan was based on a linear view of their mobility, to Australia and then back home. It was evident that the students represented a highly heterogeneous and mobile group, with extensive diasporic links across the globe, with aspirations of mobility and cosmopolitanism that we had clearly under-estimated. We found that only a minority of students returned home to their own countries; and even those who did, gravitated towards large metropolitan cities, rather than going back to their own communities. Others stayed on in Australia, got jobs in

transnational corporations in global cities around the world, went to another country for further studies or joined their extended families in the United States or Europe. Indeed, it is this 'diasporization' (Hall 1996) that partly explains the lack of reliable graduate destination data on international students. Since we cannot identify any determinate pattern to their graduate destinations, for us, the phenomenon of their global dispersal has itself become a significant object of theorization.

Given their mobility, we found it difficult to track down interviewees whose names were suggested to us by the international offices at various universities and IDP offices in India and China. In Australia, most of the interviews were held in our offices, but in China and India they had to be conducted under a variety of conditions and in a range of locations from offices, homes, and cafés to parks. Most of the recorded interviews lasted some 50 minutes, but we often had an opportunity to talk informally both before and after the interview, sometimes for hours. In some cases, we continued to discuss issues relevant to our research on e-mail, enabling us to clarify points and to obtain further and subsequent details. In terms of their demographic distribution, our interviewees were evenly divided by gender, and represented a whole range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. We now have a bewildering array of recorded data, together with a large body of notes, from interviewees who were remarkably open about their experiences in Australia, as well as their career aspirations and life plans, providing us with incredibly rich narratives of return.

However, the interviews also represent a highly diverse and confusing set of qualitative data. Collectively, the narratives of student experiences, of their lives in India and China and of their identity shifts, do not point to any clearly identifiable pattern. They tell of stories as varied as the students themselves. Theoretically, they posed for us the dilemma of deciding how to make some generalized sense of the wealth of data collected. After much reflection, we have sought to resolve this dilemma by drawing heavily on recent theoretical works in critical and comparative cultural studies that seek to understand identity and cultural formations in transnational contexts as historically structured but contingent, culturally patterned but dynamic, and always politically contested.

In analyzing the interviews, we have used a number of influential metaphors in comparative cultural studies that serve to elucidate the logic of identity shifts, forms of global mobility and cultural globalization. We use these metaphors as analytical tools to understand the data concerning the various uses which students make of their international education; and in turn, use the interview data to determine how far these metaphors can be taken before they become exhausted; before they cease to help us to understand the links between the cultural logic of human action and the broader social and economic processes of globalization. So, for example, the metaphors of 'travelling cultures' (Clifford 1997) and 'flexible identities' (Ong 1999) are useful but do not entirely capture the complexities that are to be found in the interviews. In this paper, we focus on metaphors surrounding the idea of cosmopolitanism but in a way that is necessarily partial and contested. We argue that international education is indeed a site where cosmopolitan identities are produced, but that the meaning that the students attach to cosmopolitanism is highly contradictory and is linked more to their strategic interests within the emergent global economy and culture than to any broader moral conception.

Theorizing identities

In framing issues in this way, we clearly reject the widely assumed view of identity as something fixed, stable and unchanging, located within a cultural tradition, reflecting common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, providing continuous frames of reference and meaning. Instead, we work from an alternative perspective, which, while it recognizes that identities come from somewhere and have histories, nevertheless maintains that they are under constant transformation. As Stuart Hall (1996, p. 225) argues, "far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to continuous 'play' of history, culture and power". This perspective on identity highlights active processes of meaning-making – of new cultural formations, of engagement in the dynamics of mobility, transculturalisms and diasporisation.

Identities can never be treated as self-evident: They are saturated with imprints of colonial histories, local cultural diversity and political complexity on the one hand, and with the contemporary homogenizing experiences of global 'scapes' (Appadurai 1996) on the other. But they are also located in aspirations that people have, and in the imagination with which they engage with the world. As Craig Calhoun (1995) puts it, "identities are always rooted in part in ideals and moral aspirations that

we cannot fully realise". And so it is with international students. Their identities are clearly shaped not only by their personal histories, cultural traditions and professional aspirations but are also continually reshaped by new cultural experiences, but in ways that that are neither uniform nor predictable. The students interpret new experiences moreover in a variety of ways, and their imagination is always a product of a range of factors, some of which are known to them, while others are not.

With this emphasis on agency, we prefer the term 'uses' of international education to the notion of 'outcomes', which is employed widely to explore graduate destinations and career trajectories of international students. The term 'uses' is designed to mark a clear philosophical and methodological departure from the functionalist idea of 'outcomes'. Based loosely on Richard Hoggart's (1958) notion of 'the uses of literacy' and Cameron McCarthy's (1998) idea of 'the uses of culture', we have adopted the term 'uses' to explore the processes of cultural production, through which international students struggle to make sense of their experiences in Australia; the ways in which they assess their past and imagine and anticipate their future; and the ways in which they feel they are positioned by and actively seek to locate themselves within the dominant corporate narratives of globalization and international education.

These narratives highlight the benefits which international education has in providing students with an understanding of global inter-connectedness and in developing transnational friendship networks that could help them imagine, create and sustain more productive professional and cultural lives, assisting them to become savvier players in a globally networked economy and society. It could help them to be 'on the move', so to speak, in the multiple senses of that expression. How do the students relate to these narratives under the conditions of mobility and travel, which are themselves structured around the homogenizing discourses of global capitalism? If identities are "irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures" (Hall 1996), then how does international education contribute to the production of "new identities", those that speak from in-between different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another?

Mobility and privilege

In Australia, international students inevitably develop their identity within the context of mobility. It is important to note however that they neither view themselves as immigrants to Australia, nor as tourists. They consider themselves to occupy an entirely different space. Unlike tourists, they are not in Australia for a short period, interested only in a cursory look at its various physical and cultural objects and institutions. Nor do they regard themselves as immigrants, even if many harbor an intention to settle in Australia permanently. Both the concepts of tourism and immigration represent border-maintaining distinctions exerted around and by the nation state. However, as many recent cultural theorists (for example, Cohen 1997) have pointed out, in the age of globalization, these distinctions are becoming overwhelmed by cultural and technological innovations that have swept across frontiers, with the declining capacity of the nation states to maintain these borders. So while it might be possible for states to maintain physical borders, cultural borders have become increasingly porous. James Clifford's idea of 'travelling cultures' (1997) is designed to capture the fuzzy logic of this consequence of mobility and cultural interpenetration.

Clifford prefers the word 'travel' to such terms as 'tourism', 'displacement', 'nomadism', 'pilgrimage' and 'migration' because the notion of 'travelling cultures' implies a two-way process, consisting of interactive dynamic relations. Terms such as 'displacement' indicate a situation of "bi-focality where an emerging syncretic culture is temporarily separated by erratically enforced frontier controls" (Cohen 1997, p. 135). The notion of 'travelling cultures', on the other hand, suggests that cultural forms of travel can never be bound exclusively by national boundaries. Imagined constructions of nation states tie locals to a *single* place, gathering people and integrating ethnic minorities. Globalization disrupts this logic of national 'belonging', as people are able to imagine themselves as belonging to several places at once.

If this is so, then the national ties that the students might have are likely to be rendered unstable by their experiences of international education. Their 'cultures' can be expected to 'travel', developing multiple attachments, accommodating but also resisting some of the norms and claims of nation states (both of Australia and the countries from which they come). Clifford uses the term 'dwelling in

travel' to refer to the experiences of mobility and movement, through which people develop a range of new material, spatial practices, that produce knowledge, stories, traditions, comportments, music, books, diaries and other cultural expressions.

In terms of Clifford's theoretical framework, we can thus expect international students to be exemplary carriers of 'travelling cultures', for after all, they bring a great deal of cultural information to Australia, couched of course in particular forms of representation. But they also take impressions, images and information back to their own countries. In this sense, they are cultural mediators. They are in touch almost daily with friends and families through telephone and e-mail. As a student we interviewed remarked, somewhat cheekily, "Without us, Telstra (Australia's national telecommunication company) would have gone broke long ago!" "What do you talk about when you ring home?" we asked. "Oh well, we discuss the weather, what we did that day, and sometimes my family wants my opinion about something or another".

This regular contact with 'home' while in Australia suggests that the dislocation and displacement faced by international students has a particularly benign form, mediated not only by the compression of time and space but also, to an extent, by their class position. They remain engaged with developments at 'home', and continue to participate in the decision-making processes relevant to family matters. This indicates that Clifford's phrase 'dwelling in travel' is indeed apt to describe the experiences of these students. We should however be cautious about generalizing from this post-modern valorization of mobility and transnational dwelling. Travelling cultures are not available equally to everyone, and are certainly inflected by gender and class considerations. As Avtar Brah (1995) has remarked, mobility can often be unsafe and insecure for many women. Women experience it differently, and its social consequences are unevenly distributed.

Under the conditions of globalization, according to Bauman (1998), mobility is available largely to the elite. He calls them 'tourists', people who are able to contribute in one way or another to the consumer economy. In a post-modern globalized society, the mobile tourists are the increasingly cosmopolitan, the global businessmen, the global culture managers and global academics. For them, "state borders are levelled down, as they are dismantled for the world's commodities, capital and finances" (Bauman 1998, p. 89). In a significant way, international education is an expression of this consumerist logic, which views education as a commodity, available internationally only to those who have aligned themselves already to the emerging economic and cultural contours of corporate globalization.

Our interviews indicate that international students from China and India come to Australian universities with a global cosmopolitan imaginary already developed. While not all students we interviewed had travelled overseas before, many had. Certainly, most had close relatives and friends who had either studied, or were currently living overseas. They had thus greater familiarity with Australian cultural practices than many in Australia recognize. Their exposure to the global media culture had already contributed to their global imaginary. Also significant was their education, which, in the case of India more so than China, had a distinctively British colonial imprint. Indeed, a majority of Indian students had attended Church-run elite private schools, where the medium of instruction was English. Many Chinese students too had attended elite schools, which are now cropping up throughout China.

Two points might be usefully made here. Firstly, most, though certainly not all, international students we interviewed, had enjoyed considerable class privileges, with their experiences of class increasingly articulated according to the degree of their engagement with global economy and culture. Indeed, in both India and China, international education has become a major object of desire and a class marker, to which we need to draw attention when considering how the benefits of international education are socially distributed. Secondly, unlike the experiences of poor migrants and refugees, for whom there is major cultural disjuncture between their experiences at home and their life in a new country, for international students, cultural interactions in Australia are more continuous with their experiences at home. The materiality of their class privilege defines the 'scape', to use Appudarai's (1996) term, within which international students' transcultural contacts in Australia are thus embedded. This is not to say that the students do not experience marginality in Australia but that their marginality has a particular form. This implies a need to resist the tendency in recent literature in cultural politics to define marginality in a relatively homogenous way.

Our interviews would thus appear to support Clifford's notions of 'travelling cultures', and 'dwelling in travel'. But these metaphors are helpful only to a certain extent. Clifford insists that it is not only goods, people and ideas that travel but cultures as well. But if they do, they do so, as we have noted, in a particular 'classed' form, already impregnated by the cultural economies of globalization. In contrast with the recent tendency in cultural analysis to avoid discussions of class, I argue instead that we cannot understand the everyday experiences of international students in Australia and the uses they make of their education upon graduation, without also looking at how global conditions of mobility are both affected by, and are instrumental in producing and reproducing class formations.

In the processes of global class formations, the idea of cosmopolitanism occupies a highly significant place, as students struggle to make sense of their contradictory relationship with both Australia and home, and of their experiences of being both insiders and outsiders in both places. Reflecting on their experiences in Australia, the students talk about how they have changed in ways more significant than they had anticipated, and how they find settling back at home more difficult than they had expected; indeed how their very notion of 'home' has become transformed. Upon their return, they are more at 'home' in another space that is neither Australia nor their country of origin; a place which they find difficult to name. Their approach to thinking about identity in this space is both indeterminate and dynamic. In order to see how they struggle to think about this space and how they construct an identity with which they affirm their experiences of transnationality, as well as their normative imaginaries of belonging, it might be useful to consider three narratives of return. These narratives are from Indian students, who upon their return, struggle to define the space they occupy as they seek to make strategic use of their international education.

Narratives of return

Manoj, a student we interviewed in Mumbai, thought about his international education in more explicit instrumental terms than most others. He maintained that, "My parents and I have invested a large amount of money on the assumption that the returns will be considerable. They now want me to take advantage of the globalization in which they have invested. And if this means leaving India they would support me again". Manoj completed his MBA from the Gold Coast campus of Griffith University in Queensland in 2000, and was now back in India looking at the possibilities of establishing an export business, while he worked for the CitiBank. "What kind of export business?" we asked. "It has to be something in the cultural products area", he said, "I am looking at products like Indian fashion products that young people in Australia like".

For his major research project at the University, Manoj had interviewed a large number of young people on the Gold Coast to determine their emerging cultural tastes, especially about things considered Indian. Manoj viewed himself as an inter-cultural inter-locuter between India and Australia, and in the longer term, Europe and America. He said that he wanted to help make some distinctively Indian product, such as "an Indian equivalent of Pepsi", into a global product. This aspiration was located in Manoj's clearly implied conception of a cultural cosmopolitanism, through which global commerce is not so much about creating a world culture, as about adding a Western varnish to traditionally Indian cultural commodities. If Australia had taught him anything, he maintained, it was "how to become a cosmopolitan person", who recognized the power of cultural markets in the West, to the development of which, he believed, countries like India now had an opportunity to contribute.

If Manoj aspired to bring Indian cultural products to Australia, two young women, Biranda and Goldie, had already begun to bring Australian food tastes to metropolitan Bangalore. Both had graduated in 1999 with a bachelor's degree in Tourism and Hospitality from the Southern Cross University in Lismore, New South Wales. They first met in Australia, and developed a strong friendship. Both had applied unsuccessfully to become permanent residents in Australia and had to return to Bangalore. After doing jobs that proved entirely unsatisfactory and frustrating, largely through the lack of opportunities to use the skills they had learnt in Australia, they decided to open a coffee shop that specialized in Australian pastries, like pies and pasties and sausage rolls. The shop in the heart of the business district of Bangalore proved to be enormously successful, attracting not only Western expatriate clients but also Indians with a Western imaginary. Both Biranda and Goldie returned to Australia twice for holidays, and saw themselves as eventually settling there.

"Why had their business venture been so successful?" we asked. Goldie's reply was immediate and instinctive: "Because we are selling something that is global " … " to young people who see themselves as citizens of the world". Note here the assumption that only western products can be global, not the other way round; and that in India, to consume Western goods is to be a 'citizen of the world', to have a cosmopolitan outlook. More significantly, Biranda and Goldie viewed their little enterprise as having a moral purpose, of "bringing the world to India". As Goldie said proudly: "One of the good things about the coffee shop is that it brings people from different cultures and traditions together. Here, expats have an opportunity to mingle with the locals. We are encouraging young kids to think beyond their narrow little national box, through food …". The underlying logic of Biranda and Goldie's thinking thus speaks of a space that is beyond national and local traditions. It is located within the dominant cultural logic of global capitalism that it does not question. It seeks to introduce new cultural tastes to a new community, previously unconquered by the stretch of global markets. It is based on an assumption that this insertion will produce within that community a cosmopolitan sensibility, and that that is necessarily a good thing.

Ibrahim, a graduate of the University of Melbourne, is similarly inclined towards 'thinking and feeling beyond the nation' (Cheah and Robbins 1998). Having graduated in 1997, Ibrahim now works out of three different locations – Melbourne, Singapore and Chennai. He works for a Singaporean company specializing in agribusiness, with extensive interests in Australia. Articulate and transculturally confident, he is effectively a development manager who is helping the company expand its Australian operations. However, because he is from Chennai, the company has also asked him to bring market intelligence back to Singapore for possible entry into the Indian market. Ibrahim is constantly traveling, and cannot imagine a better job. It allows him to remain connected to his family in India, his friends in Australia and his colleagues in Singapore. "Where is home?" we asked. His response was strained. "…when I first moved to Australia I knew my home was India, but when I began working from Singapore and had no intention of working from India ever again, I was troubled by this question. But now, two years later, I am perfectly happy to say that it is a meaningless question, because why do you have to have a home? Why can't it everywhere? Or I can always say I have three homes. After all, my lifestyle is the same in all three places. I am the same person, who is privileged [to be able] to enjoy what the world has to offer … I feel I might be doing more for India from abroad than if I had stayed".

This is an incredibly complex response, which speaks to the issues of both what James Clifford refers to as 'dwelling in travel' and what Ulrich Beck (2000) calls the "globalization of biography". Beck argues that if we are to understand globalization of biography then "we must focus on the oppositions involved in stretching between different places. This requires, among other things, that mobility should be understood in a new way". Mobility in terms of a single place, or acting unit between two places in the social landscape, is changing under the conditions of globalization, powered by the new information and communication technologies. "What is coming to the fore is the inner mobility of an individual's own life, for which coming and going, being both here and there, across frontiers at the same time, has become the normal thing". Ibrahim's biography has captured something of this logic, but not entirely. He still remains troubled by the question of where, in his transnational existence, his loyalties should lie, and what his particular responsibilities to India might be. He clearly celebrates what Beck calls transnational 'place polygomy' but remains unclear about its psychological, moral and political consequences.

Contrasting conceptions of cosmopolitanism

These narratives of return suggest that the international students we interviewed have developed a particular way of looking at their identity that is defined, both in terms of their own cultural traditions and in terms of their experiences of mobility and education abroad and their professional and cultural experiences, linked to their perceptions about the opportunities provided in the global economy and culture. In this sense, they have developed an outlook on the world that can aptly be described as 'cosmopolitan'. However, the idea of cosmopolitism has been defined in a number of different ways, so we need to understand the particular form that is produced by international education.

Contemporary normative debates concerning cosmopolitanism have their roots in ancient Greek philosophy, where the term stood for 'citizens of the world', those who considered humankind as more

important than their own state or native land. A cosmopolitan was someone who was sophisticated, knew the ways of the world, and was open to other cultures, customs and ideas, and was not tied down to the traditions of his or her own nation or community. A cosmopolitan in this sense was someone who regarded the whole world as his or her polity, who did not have any specific national prejudices. Against this positive perspective, the idea of cosmopolitan has also been viewed negatively, as implying treachery to one's country, disloyalty to one's nation; someone who is rootless and does not take seriously the more fundamental duties to one's own community, tribe or nation. As the post-colonial theorist, Josna Rege (2001) has suggested, the "term has long contained contradictory connotations, and has also long been used in opposition to nationalism. A cosmopolitan is someone who, depending on one's perspective, is either valorized or reviled as a citizen of the world, free from any national restrictions or allegiances".

In moral and political terms, the issue is how we should define the main location of our civic or public concern. In discussions of distributive justice, for example, the claims of justice have traditionally been addressed to the nation state. But in a globalizing world, in which our problems and the solutions to those problems are inter-connected and transcend national boundaries, what is the nature of the polity within which moral and political claims are best addressed? Some theorists like Stuart McIntyre (1985) regard the most local of attachments, neighborhoods and cultures involving face-to-face communication as fundamental. They argue that the specific moral traditions grounded in a particular community, matter much more than any universal principles or generalized spheres. But others, like Richard Rorty (1999), look to the national context where the ideals of moral life are to be found.

In contrast, the proponents of the cosmopolitan ideal argue that we should be citizens of the world. The most articulate among these proponents is the philosopher, Martha Nussbaum (1999), who has sought to recover some of the arguments of the Greeks to warn against the kind of patriotism that grips many nations from time to time. She suggests that to give the nation "special salience in moral and political deliberations is both morally dangerous and, ultimately subversive of some of the worthy goals patriotism sets out to serve". It is morally dangerous because it reinforces the unexamined feelings that one's own preferences and ways are natural and normal. And it is subversive because it overlooks the fact that, in the longer term, our local interests are tied to the facts of global inter-connectivity and interdependence.

According to Nussbaum, this does not mean that one has to give up local affiliations in order to be citizens of the world. Indeed, the Greeks found local traditions to be a source of great richness in the world. But they insisted that uncritical partisanship is politically unjustifiable in the long run. Nussbaum imagines local affiliations to be 'surrounded by a series of concentric circles. The first one is drawn around the self, the next takes in one's immediate family, then, in order, one's neighbors and local group, one's fellow city-dwellers, one's fellow countrymen – and we can easily add to the list groupings based on ethnic, linguistic, historical, professional, gender and sexual identities. "Outside all of these circles is the largest one, that of a humanity as a whole. Our task as citizens of the world will be to draw the circle somehow towards the center making all citizens somehow as fellow city dwellers …".

In the global era, these philosophical debates have taken on greater significance than ever before, as people increasingly seek to make sense of the contemporary processes of global integration, partly through increasing economic inter-dependencies and partly through the recognition that many of our problems, such as our environmental problems, need to be considered from a global or world perspective. The recognition of the increasing global movement of finances, people and technologies has raised concerns about how the problems arising out of global inter-connectivity should be interpreted and addressed. Many of these discussions about the international political arrangements best able to deal with global problems are taking place at the broadest levels of world institutions. But they are also taking place at the everyday level, in the lived experiences of what Cheah and Robbins (1998) have called 'actual existing cosmopolitanisms', that are now steered by the imperatives of the global economy and a culture of consumption upon which they are both based and which they, in turn, promote.

This form of cosmopolitanism rests on the assumption that the world consists of a single economic market with free trade and minimal political involvement. Contemporary practices of international education occur within this ideological framework. Any discussion of identity issues in relation to

international students cannot escape the considerations of the economic aspects of their education, as they articulate with their experiences of transnationality and global consumer culture. We cannot ignore the fact that international students participate in an economic exchange, and are likely to be concerned less with moral and political dimensions of global inter-connectivity than with its strategic economic possibilities. As a result, their cosmopolitan outlook is likely to be framed by their strategic interests. The interviews we have conducted suggest as much. They indicate that, ultimately, international education is used by international students to better position themselves within the changing structures of the global economy, which increasingly prizes the skills of inter-culturality and a cosmopolitan outlook.

Cosmopolitanism: Consumerist or critical?

Yet the corporate narratives of international education are inherently contradictory, since on the one hand, they open up the possibilities of genuine interaction among people from different cultural traditions, giving those students who can afford it the opportunity to travel and learn the knowledge and skills required to work more effectively in an increasingly global society, to become cosmopolitan. On the other hand, they fail to problematize their bases in economistic modernizing imaginaries, within which subject positions are formed. No doubt international education encourages cultural interaction and exchange, as its rhetoric suggests, but this occurs within the logic of consumption, under the new global economic conditions.

Aihwa Ong (1999) has sought to understand the nature of these global conditions. She argues that, in the era of globalization, mobile individuals develop a flexible notion of citizenship as strategies to accumulate capital and power. The logic of capital accumulation is to "induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions". In the global arena, powerful incentives exist for individuals to emphasize practices that favor "flexibility, mobility and repositioning in relation to markets, governments and cultural regimes". She illustrates her general thesis by referring to Hong Kong Chinese immigrants to the United States, who "seem to display an élan for thriving in conditions of political insecurity, as well as in the turbulence of global trade". The diasporic Chinese, she suggests, have been the forerunners of the mobile people, who are always "on the move" both culturally and physically.

This mobility generates a set of transnational practices and imaginings, resulting in a re-alignment of political, ethnic and personal identities more conducive to "navigating the disjunctures between political landscapes and the shifting opportunities of global trade". This is not to suggest arbitrary geographical and social positionings, but rather more creative articulations between subject positions and the regimes of localities, the extended family, the nation state and global capital. Ong's work places transcultural practices at the center of discussions of globalization, in the production and negotiations of cultural meanings within the normative framework of late capitalism. But such negotiations of meaning are accompanied by dilemmas for mobile people who are pulled in the direction of cultural flexibility on the one hand and cultural uncertainty and confusion on the other.

This analysis is particularly helpful in understanding Ibrahim's dilemma, in that, while he embraces place polygamy as a manifestation of the consumerist economic globalization, he cannot ignore the issues of history, ethics and politics in his globally dispersed life. He celebrates, even valorizes, cultural diversity and interaction, transnational mobility, commodity hybridization and flexible citizenship but is troubled by the resources he does not have, to identify any one place as his home, for which he has particular moral responsibilities. Nor is he able to investigate the possibilities of a genuine moral and political cosmopolitanism.

Consumerist cosmopolitanism thus has two contradictory faces. On the one hand, it represents a celebratory universalism that is arguably a mask for the dominant Western economic interests in the new world order. On the other hand, it involves a genuinely decentering move that recognizes multiple cosmopolitanisms working themselves out at multiple sites, that works to understand the complex tensions and interactions between nationalisms and global forces in the contemporary period, and that continues to seek new forms of transnational solidarity. This approach holds on to an ideal of global justice in the face of persistent, even growing inequities, and tries to find, but not exaggerate, the emancipatory possibilities opened up by globalization. Its tolerance of other cultures often gives way to an uncritical boosterism of them. As Craig Colhoun (2002) puts it, this new cosmopolitanism -

the cosmopolitanism of the 'frequent travelers pays inadequate attention to the formation of solidarity and the conditions that enable collective choices about the nature of society.

In his book, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (1997), Tim Brennan argues that in the contemporary period, with the ground shifting continuously under our feet, we all want to work out what our stance ought to be vis-à-vis this global restructuring of the world. At a time when identity politics and the discourse of difference have seemingly put an end to the possibility for genuine international solidarity, the idea of a new cosmopolitanism is very attractive. But if this new cosmopolitanism is to be self-aware, critical of its own positioning, of its own potential collusion with global capitalism, as well as of the dangers of imposing a new self-interested nationalism in the name of universal good, then it has to begin a new critical conversation about its own definitions and its own intellectual work. Higher education has an important role to play in this task. If universities are to profit from international education in ways that are not merely commercial, then they have a major responsibility to initiate and sustain this conversation.

Conclusion

That they need to develop a cosmopolitan outlook among all students can now be found in the corporate literature of most, if not all, Australian universities. Sometimes, it is articulated in an explicit way, while, in other instances, it is simply presupposed behind the rhetoric of cultural diversity and inter-cultural exchange. This corporate narrative recognizes that the changing student demography on campuses, globalization and the growing interdependence among nations is changing the social context within which universities must now operate. This changing context demands significant reforms to the institutional character of universities, including changes to what is taught and how it is taught. If they are to be serious about preparing their students for the new world, then they need to teach them not only how to build effective professional careers within the global economy, but also how to lead productive moral lives, in which global interdependence is not simply a slogan but a way of helping students expand their moral universe in cosmopolitan terms.

Our interviews have shown that not only do international students invest in their higher education with a strategic cosmopolitan imaginary already in mind but that their education abroad perpetuates this instrumentalist view of the world. The cosmopolitan identities produced by Australian universities thus tend to be narrowly framed, overlooking the responsibilities education has for producing critically and morally informed graduates able to recognize the importance of issues relating to the ethics and politics of global interdependence, of the changing nations of social identities across local, national and global spaces, and of the possibilities of cosmopolitan solidarity. To produce morally cosmopolitan identities, universities need to provide forms of education, through which students learn about themselves in relation to others, so that mobility and cultural exchange do not contribute to economic exploitation of others but open up instead genuine possibilities of cosmopolitan solidarity.

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