Grounded Identities, Transient Lives: The Emergence of International Student Voices in an Era of Cosmopolitan Learning

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the identity negotiations of two international undergraduate students at a public research university in the United States. Studying abroad constitutes a culturally contested space for educational sojourners, with ruptures that require constant sense-making and negotiations of identities as students attempt to combine the foreign and the familiar. Situational contexts, interpersonal interactions, and the imagination all determine what students learn and how that learning occurs. However, the influence of cosmopolitan learning on the identity negotiations of students is little understood. The experiences of foreign students in many ways challenge the traditional understanding of an international education and the categorization of a traditional international student. Focusing almost exclusively on nationality as an organizing agent and bereft of significant and robust concepts that bring into view the content of international student sense-making, international education discourses neglect to explore the complexity and range of meanings students ascribe to educational sojourns, thereby resulting in a series of undocumented generalizations about students.

Keywords: International Students, Identity Negotiations, Cosmopolitan Learning

Globalization and its influence on identities is a highly debated topic. On the one hand, perspectives of globalization include Americanization and Westernization, highlighting the homogenizing effects of global flows and processes on nations, cultures, and identities. A westernized view conceives of globalization as a uniform and linear process of cultural homogenization achieved through cultural imperialism and domination, ultimately leading to an impending westernization that forces individuals to assimilate. On the other hand, perspectives of globalization include creolization, hybridization, and fragmentation, illuminating the heterogeneity of nations, cultures, and identities. A fragmented view conveys globalization as emphasizing diversity and complex conditions where the forces of ruptures, the juxtaposition of the foreign and the familiar, affect individuals in different ways. Between these two views of globalization is a plethora of metaphoric language to describe the processes, influences, and factors associated with identity negotiations.

Scholars have attempted to conceptualize and define globalization in simple, sweeping metaphors, as well as through intricate, lengthy descriptions (Appadurai, 1996; Featherstone, 1995; Hannerz, 1996). Yet, the impact of globalization is not experienced equally or identically. Globalization is not a homogenous, equitable, or uniform phenomenon. Global processes are multifaceted and influence cultural identities in a myriad of ways. More and more students are living their lives out across a myriad of borders and transnational social fields (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Today, the rigid notions of nationality, citizenship, and cultural identities are challenged by global flows and processes, resulting in an imperative for cosmopolitan learning.

Cosmopolitan Learning

Generally speaking, cosmopolitan learning is "a mode of learning about and ethically engaging with, new social transformations" (Rizvi, 2009, p. 254). Globalization theorists argue that new communication technologies and the ease of travel are creating cosmopolitans or individuals who have acquired openness toward peoples, places, and experiences. Essentially, the goal of cosmopolitan learning is to help students critically examine their relationships to evolving social transformations and to help students situate themselves in an increasingly interconnected and socially constructed world. Cosmopolitan learning involves student construction of knowledge and

"…with helping students examine the ways in which global processes are creating conditions of economic and cultural exchange that are transforming our identities and communities" (Rizvi, 2009, p. 266). This conceptualization of cosmopolitan learning appears to challenge the existing discourse on cross-cultural exchanges and intercultural learning outcomes.

A major assumption throughout the international education literature is that cross-cultural encounters manifest value, perception, and attitudinal changes. For example, the most frequently cited, yet illusive assumptions of studying abroad are "that study in a foreign country for an extended period of time will bring about enhanced levels of international understanding and concern" (Carlson & Widaman, 1988, p. 2) or that students will accumulate a level of worldliness through the development and enactment of a cosmopolitan identity. A trend within international education stresses competency-based evaluations to measure outcomes or degree of worldliness as a result of cross-cultural encounters and cosmopolitanism in areas such as cultural competencies and global literacies (Guan & Dodder, 2001; Williams, 2005). Researchers demonstrate a continuing trend to identify, assess, and categorize cultural competencies and the often cited benefits of educational sojourns such as flexibility, open-mindedness, cultural empathy, non-judgmental perceptiveness, personal strength and stability, resourcefulness, and ability to deal with stress (Deardorff, 2006; Hunter, White, & Godbey, 2006; Williams , 2005).

Tools such as the *Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory* (Kelley & Meyers, 2007), the *Intercultural Development Inventory* (Hammer, 2003), and the I*ntercultural Sensitivity Inventory* (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992), among many others, are often used to predict student outcomes and statistically determine how students self-report changes in attitudes, perceptions, and values as a result of an educational sojourn. The research literature on the outcomes of studying overseas, offers a limited number of research designs, which overwhelming include quantitative studies that examine the effects and impacts of studying abroad using independent and dependent variables, pretests and post-tests, frequencies, means, Likert scales, nested hierarchical data structures, chi-square analysis, and other statistical processes (Guan & Dodder, 2001; Hadis, 2005; Hanassab, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Williams, 2005; Ye, 2006).

Yet, the existing literature does not conclusively substantiate the assumption that increased cultural awareness of one's or other's cultural identity or the development of a cosmopolitan identity is a given by-product of an educational sojourn. The majority of study abroad assessments seek to address cosmopolitan outcomes and are concerned with changing international perceptions (Bochner, et al., 1979) and the development of global-mindedness (Kalunian, 1997), global competencies (Hunter et al., 2006), international understanding (Carlson & Widaman, 1988), intercultural competencies (Deardorff, 2006), or intercultural communication skills (Williams, 2005). Research generally concludes that international students experience positive cultural and attitudinal changes, accumulate international understanding, increase cross-cultural and political interests, and develop heightened cosmopolitan sensibilities (Bochner et al., 1979; Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Guan & Dodder, 2001; Kalunian, 1997; Williams, 2005). Yet, an in-depth understanding of the content of this learning is lacking in the literature. Throughout recent decades scholars generated a plethora of outcomes based research, yet a consensus regarding the definition or deeper understanding of global competencies, a curriculum designed to foster "global-ready graduates" (Hunter et al., 2006) or the knowledge and skills necessary to foster cosmopolitans or cosmopolitan identities has not been reached (Deardorff, 2006). Rather than asking students to check a box, perhaps a deeper understanding could be gleamed by more importantly listening to their stories and how they construct meaning from crossing borders.

Yet in the instances when student voices are privileged, nationality often overshadows what students have to say. Throughout the literature, nationality is presented as an organizing agent for understanding how students create meaning from their educational sojourns. The literature on international higher education simplifies a very complex experience by relying on nationality alone to define students and their sense-making. It is often assumed that students holding membership in the same nationality will have similar needs, experiences, and understandings of an educational sojourn, sidelining both individual histories and identities, and the broader historical, political, cultural, and social contexts associated with the inherent mobility of crossing borders.

Historically, membership or citizenship in one country was the one student descriptor employed to uncover changes in student learning, attitudes, and personalities. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, researchers used nationality as an organizing agent and springboard to generate articles

such as "An Analysis of Change Among German Exchangees" (Bureau of Social Science Research, 1951), "Italian Exchanges: A Study in Attitude Change and Diffusion" (International Research Associates, Inc., 1955), "The American Experience of Swedish Students: Retrospect and Aftermath" (Scott, 1956), "No Frontier to Learning: The Mexican Student in the United States" (Beals & Humphrey, 1957), "The Impact of Foreign Study: The Indian Experience" (Singh, 1962), "The Effect of a Year's Experience in America on the Self-Image of Scandinavians" (Bailyn & Kelman, 1962), and "The Effects of Cross-Cultural Education on Attitudes and Personality of Japanese Students" (Kumagai, 1977). Today not much has changed.

The durability of nationality as a sense-making category for contextualizing student voices continues to be the most prolific and consistent way of describing international students as the generalized other in the twenty-first century. Nationality continues to trump other aspects of international student identities, as demonstrated by more recent titles such as "Academic Expectation and Adjustment of Russian Students," (Efimova & Gillis, 2000), "Adjustment of Turkish College Students Studying in the United States" (Poyrazli, et al., 2001), "Extracurricular Activities and the Adjustment of Asian International Students: A Study of Japanese Students" (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002), "Dreams on Distant Shores: Understanding Indian Students and Their Flow to the United States" (Khandavilli, 2003), "Turkish Student Attitudes about the United States" (Kelleher et al., 2003), "Taiwanese Students' Perspectives on Their Educational Experiences in the United States" (Yen & Stevens, 2004), and "Variation in Acculturative stressors Over Time: A study of Taiwanese Students in the United States" (Ying, 2005). These articles are indicative of the approach throughout the literature to generalize experiences and tie sense-making solely to nationality. However, focusing on nationality renders the intersectionality of gendered, class, family, ethnic, age, regional, and existing cosmopolitan identities invisible. Focusing on nationality also neglects to acknowledge the fluidity of contexts that students find themselves in and the daily identity negotiations that students engage in on campus and across transnational social fields. A substantial gap in the literature with regards to the multifaceted and dynamic identities of international students exists.

As students cross borders and conceive of selves, they are not exempt from experiencing the ambiguous spaces that influence the geography of the mind. Studying abroad constitutes a culturally contested space for educational sojourners, with ruptures that require constant sense-making and negotiation of identities as students attempt to combine the foreign and the familiar. Situational contexts, interpersonal interactions, and the imagination all determine which selves surface at any point in time. Yet, the influence of cosmopolitan learning on the identity negotiations of students is little understood. What follows are portraits of two students who shed light on how they constructed meaning and identities as international students as a result of cosmopolitan learning experiences.

Methodology-Sample and Data Collection

Research for this paper was a part of a large qualitative study conducted in spring 2007 at a public research university in the United States which aimed to uncover the histories, range of affiliations, and perspectives that informed the identities and construction of meaning for six international undergraduate students (Gargano, 2008). The experiences of two students from the original research are the focus of this article due to several factors. They were both born in India, but moved to the Middle East with their families before their second birthday. Both Zara and Roohi attended international schools and spent their youth as members of an expatriate community.

While they were both born in India, shared the same nationality, and followed a similar life trajectory, it is evident that they conceive of themselves and their experiences quite differently. The descriptions of their identities and sense-making clearly demonstrate that relying on nationality to understand the experiences and learning of international students is not possible in an era of globalization. As a methodology, portraiture is utilized for recovering and privileging student voices, "capturing-from an outsider's purview-an insider's understanding of the scene" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 25). Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot developed portraiture as a method of inquiry and documentation that includes context, voice, relationships, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole as its five essential features, each relevant to this study. Portraiture allows student voices to be at the center of research to understand how international students craft identities within transnational social fields, focuses on student voices in an organic way, and provides a foundation to share stories as they experience it.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were (1) How have students made sense of their experience in the United States? (2) What kinds of transnational spaces do international students create and imagine? (3) What do these spaces reveal about how international students position themselves and negotiate boundaries of geography and mind? (4) How, if at all, have global cultural flows and processes influenced international student imagination and sense-making? (5) How do international students reflect on the past, engage in the present, and craft aspirations for the future? and (6) What lessons, if any, can the experiences of these students convey to those in charge of international education programs and policies?

The recovery of student voices included individual semi-structured interviews and a group interview. Students were asked questions that were designed to learn more about (1) defined community; (2) negotiated an affiliation of loyalties and associations; (3) developed aspirations; (4) decided what is thinkable of themselves and the world; (5) constructed an international student identity; (6) defined linguistic, cultural, geographical, social, and educational spaces; (7) sensed ways of being and ways of belonging; (8) interacted with technology; (9) engaged and created tradition; (10) viewed time and space; and (11) valued education.

This article examines how international student learning is understood, thereby requiring a reexamination of how higher education institutions provide services, organize programs, and create learning environments that recognize the dimensions of difference and human diversity in student perceptions and construction of cosmopolitan identities.

Cultural Narrators

This article proceeds on an assumption that international students are important cultural narrators who have much to tell us about how their transnational networks of affiliation influence their constructions of cultural identities and citizenship. Zara and Roohi, two degree-seeking undergraduate students at the public university located in the State of Maryland, conceived of themselves as experienced, culturally knowledgeable, flexible border crossers. Roohi grew up as an expatriate in Saudi Arabia where she attended American, British, and International Schools. Zara also spent her youth abroad in Dubai, where it is estimated that approximately 80% of the population are expatriates, and attended international schools as well. Their Indian nationality and growing up in the Middle East as expatriates is what unites them. Although their pasts were grounded in diversity, there were differences in how they sought to create a place for themselves on a campus dedicated to internationalization, negotiate their identities as international students, and face the obstacles and challenges before them.

The University was a shifting context. The composition of the student body changes from semester to semester as students enroll, transfer, drop-out, or graduate. The ever changing, evolving student body creates a portrait of fluidity and provides only a snapshot in time of the diversity these students came upon during the spring 2007 semester.

It's no surprise that in encountering this magnitude of diversity students rejected, accepted, or constructed images of selves by juxtaposing self-perceptions with perceived understandings of what it meant to be an international student. The University appeared to foster a context for students to reflect on their identities as just another student and as an international student. Toggling between the two presented a space of constant negotiation infused with dimensions of difference and comparisons of themselves with perceived expectations and images others had of international students as a group.

Students actively engaged the campus community to construct a sense of being and belonging. Within this large culturally congested and complex university, students held membership in multiple communities and made sense of their positions in the campus community in different ways. These students were situated at a university where although they recognized the montage of contexts of origin, traditions, and languages among the student community, they had a difficult time describing the international student community on campus. They questioned the existence of and their participation in an authentic bounded international student community, choosing instead to describe a community that was fragmented and self-segregated by nationality. Yet as participating and nonparticipating members, neither of them thought about themselves as international students in precisely the same way. Their connections to the international student community reveal something about the ways they positioned themselves on campus and provide a context for how they negotiated their international student identities. In fact, these two students believed they were not always perceived by others as traditional international students and therefore were able to continually engage in

the negotiation of their identities by making the decision to pass for domestic students or to enact aspects of their international student identity. What Zara considered her convoluted pathway to the university give her the option of temporarily assuming an identity as a domestic student. "Amongst Indian students, when I tell them I'm not from here, they're like did you just come from India? And I'm like no, I just came from Dubai. And they're like, so you're a F-O-B, fresh off the boat. I guess people don't really think I'm from anywhere else until I tell them." Roohi actually considered herself "more American" than some of her counterparts, a characteristic that she admitted to invoking on a whim. The perceptions and representations students encountered of themselves certainly played an integral role in how they positioned themselves on campus and when they each invoked international aspects of their identities.

Through their stories students shared their interpretations of what it meant to be an international student and brought forth realities that add depth to an understanding of border crossings, traversing physical boundaries and the geography of the mind. Since they actively sought to participate in this study, these students perceived themselves as international students to some degree based on particular characteristics. An international student identity was not a new identity for these students, which influenced the variations in the extent that they saw themselves as international students, the images they encountered, and how they perceived others defined them. These two students came to the university with an understanding of diversity, yet faced the challenge of negotiating new configurations of diversity and their evolving multiple identities in shifting transnational spaces. These students stepped outside of the boxes assigned to them, refuted the labels they were tagged with, and challenged the understanding of what it means to be an international student. So just how did each student go about creating an international student identity?

Identity Negotiations

It is possible to explore the range of meanings students ascribed to educational border crossings and how they negotiated and constructed their identities by situating student educational experiences within larger historical, social, and cultural contexts. Portraits of student border crossings provide a rare opportunity to explore student sense-making and the ways they position themselves to construct a sense of being and belonging. Although students engaged a virtual version of campus completely accessible online as they registered for classes, completed course evaluations, paid tuition, conducted research, ordered textbooks, applied for campus jobs, registered for campus housing, read the university newspaper, and communicated with professors and classmates, it was their daily interpersonal interactions within the larger campus community that provided a contested space for how students framed their evolving international student identities.

Zara: "I have a new term for myself. I call myself a city slut."

Zara considered herself a "city slut," or "someone who can't be in one city for too long." She was no stranger to cross-cultural interactions and thrived on these exchanges. Zara arrived in Dubai from India on her first birthday, where she lived until traveling to the U.S. for college, and then studying abroad in Copenhagen, a catalyst for dramatic changes in how she viewed her identities and her ideas on culture.

Zara acknowledged that while she grew up in Dubai, at the same time she didn't really grow up in the Middle East, and realized it wasn't until she left Dubai that she began to develop a consciousness about the diversity within cultures and national borders:

> I mean eighteen years of living in the Middle East. I haven't lived in the Middle East. I've lived in Dubai, which is even completely different from other parts of the UAE…Dubai is such a small place. It's like a cocoon. You know how they say that people in New York don't see anything beyond New York. That's exactly what people in Dubai think. They don't think there is anything beyond Dubai. In fact, when I was living in Dubai I was so ignorant of the whole Middle East thing, but when I went to Denmark I saw there were poor Arabs and I'd never seen that in my entire life. And this is a girl who has lived eighteen years in the Middle East. But the part of the Middle East that I was exposed to was completely different.

Zara found that being situated in a locality remains an important aspect of how she positioned herself in the world and how she envisioned or understood the people around her. Dubai is focused on becoming the Knowledge Village for the Arab world. Over a dozen institutions of higher education have opened there in the last ten years, with Harvard University,

Michigan State University, and American University offering courses there. Yet, Zara did not avail herself of these higher education opportunities, but upon graduating from high school did what most children of expatriates in Dubai did. Due to what she considered the poor higher educational system in the country, she left to study abroad.

Zara learned more about her contexts of origin by studying in the US. As a result of pursuing her business degree she saw herself and her national identity reflected in the curriculum. In fact, she believed the business program needed to widen its purview of what it considered to be important beyond that of India and China, although she acknowledged these two countries are "spearheading change in the world right now." Zara saw her "Indianness" reflected as part of a growing trend in the business world, as she learned how interconnected individuals and societies have become. Yet, she continued to emphasize how locality played a pivotal role in the formation of her perspectives based on the information she had access to and contexts she was immersed in:

> There was so much about India that I didn't know until I came here. Because you are completely on the other end of the world, so the information that you get is completely different. Because you see when you are on the eastern side, you are always looking up to America. But now when you are in America you are kind of looking that way. So it's a different perspective both ways. Different eyeglasses.

Her eyeglasses were windows not only on India, Dubai, and the U.S., but forays into worlds that Zara didn't realize the opportunity to explore until she became conscious of how connected she was to the rest of the world:

> I was unaware of the edge that we [Indians] have now and the opportunity that awaits. It's kind of like a rush. When I go back to India I can see it and I can feel it. It's kind of like everyone is talking, in the middle class or the class that I'm associate with or in. I mean there is a huge eighty percent of the population that I don't know about and I don't know what the effect is on them. But among the middle class there is a drum beat and they are all looking around and it's crazy. Honestly speaking, I didn't know how connected we are. Like in America I didn't know how connected you can be to every other part of the world because before I never really needed to. Before I was in Dubai and it was like two hours by plane, just as far as Chicago, and it was good enough. And there are so many Indians around me. I didn't realize how connected I am because of the Internet. I'm pretty connected.

The way Zara understood the images and information dispersed by technology changed the way she saw herself connected to and engaged in a myriad of social networks that fueled her imagination.

Zara was one of two from her groups of friends that decided to study in the U.S. Most of her friends returned to their contexts of origin or traveled to other English speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, or England to pursue their studies. Through her travels, communications, and relationships, Zara realized that her "network is so huge." After a recent trip to Toronto over the winter break, Zara reiterated how pleased she was that she chose to study at the University in the U.S. verses a university in Toronto, a large destination among her friends. For her, Toronto was too comfortable and was not a place that challenged her to journey into those cavernous corners of the world that still await her discovery. "It [Toronto] is a very comfortable, convenient environment for me to settle down into because I'm used to it. I wouldn't see myself leaving that place. Who knows I might. But I wouldn't see myself leaving, which is why I am kind of glad I'm here. So I can be here, but still in a way move," which is exactly what Zara did when she decided to spend a semester in Copenhagen.

Zara saw studying in Copenhagen as a turning point for in the ways she understood and valued the dynamic nature of her identities:

> I always thought, no, I can never go study abroad because my family won't allow it or there was always some excuse. But then I realized that these things, these multiple identities, these multiple places that we come from, the fact that your family is so strong, they don't have to be a hindrance. They can be your own strengths and you can use them to leverage yourself. Copenhagen definitely made me more comfortable being myself.

Zara's experience in Copenhagen was a catalyst for a dramatic change in how she viewed the fluidity of her identities. She came to value her international background and felt it gave her an edge. "Before it used to annoy me because I never really thought I had an identity. But now, since coming here I've become a

lot more comfortable with that because that's what begin international is, going beyond your boundaries. It gives me a lot more flavor. It gives me an edge."

The fluidity or portability of cultures is a common thread throughout Zara's story. She avows that "there is so much mobility in culture now. It can be taken anywhere." While in Copenhagen Zara had an experience that spanned cultures, languages, literatures, and geographical boundaries that demonstrated to her just how translatable an idea can be and the inherent value in understanding an idea from multiple perspectives:

> And to talk about portability of cultures, books are a great insight. While I was abroad, there was an Italian girl…and I was in her room and I saw her book and the cover looked familiar. I picked it up and it was Isabel Allende, in Italian. How cool is that! So that's what I mean. It's a Chilean writer, she writes in Spanish, it got translated into English and Italian and we both had a conversation about it in Denmark. We said names of the characters and we understood each other. I read it four times, she read it twice. That was the beginning of our relationship right there.

Zara's account of her conversation with a fellow student abroad demonstrated her strong belief that ideas, images, and symbols are crossing borders as a result of travel, translation, and mediation.

Zara recognized the portability of cultures in herself as well. She considered herself a second culture kid and a global citizen. "Being born somewhere, being brought up somewhere, studying somewhere else. Being exposed to so much stuff. I'm a second culture kid as you know…definitely a global citizen because I don't necessarily associate myself with one place, but kind of all of them." Zara allowed the physical and cultural mobility in her life to define her. She acknowledged that the mobility she encountered in all its forms was an aspect of her life that continued to positively challenge her to make sense of her multiple identities:

> I think every place comes into your identity to an extent. It has somewhat of an impact. So my identity, and don't really know it is kind of complicated. But yeah, I definitely feel like there's the Indian in me, the whole culture and the values, the way things are done. That's the Indian in me. And then from the Middle East, it's like my knowledge of the culture itself over there in Dubai. And then America. Maryland because it's my school…I think we have to go beyond these definitions. I think that because everything is a part of us.

Zara saw each of these locales as contributing in some way to her identity, yet she clearly saw herself on the margins, a space that although it posed challenges she came to own:

> I'm kind of like on the margin of everything. Like the whole Muslim community. I'm kind of in and I'm kind of out. Indian community, kind of in, kind of out. The Arab community, definitely not in. But they're never going to consider me in, although I think I've probably lived in the Arab world more than they will ever have, but I'm not in it. The country doesn't consider me so, so they probably don't consider me so, whatever. I don't care. So, it's kind of like half in and half out everywhere…In Dubai I'm looked at like, oh you stupid Indian. And in India I'm looked at as a stupid Muslim.

The fluidity of her ideas about her experiences transversing educational, national, and cultural boundaries seemed to be a constant throughout Zara's story, something she admitted she became more aware of as she critically reflected on her life, which often surprised her as she shared her story. Clearly Zara thought of herself as part city slut, part second culture kid, and part cosmopolitan. She welcomed the fact that her mother, who recognized her efforts to bring people together, bestowed upon her the nickname "Little Gandhi." Her family would often say "bring out the Little Gandhi," as Zara again attempted to reconcile the adversity that emerged from the diversity around her. Little Gandhi, clearly passionate about crossing borders, was still seeking out the diversity in the world, not in an attempt to change it, but in an attempt to experience it, understand it, and make it her own.

Roohi: "I'm not the Indian who lives in India. I'm the other."

Roohi described herself as a global nomad. She was born in India but lived there for no more than eighteen months of her life, spending the rest of her adolescence shuttling between Saudi Arabia where she resided with her immediate family and the US for the purpose of establishing residency. Yet Roohi came to the university with an identity very much grounded in her Indian heritage and not the physical localities where she grew up. While Roohi believed people put her

aside in India due to her status as a NRI (Non-Resident Indian) and in Riyadh because of her status as an expatriate, she found her experience at the University to be quite different. "Here it is different because there are so many different people. It is more accepting." Roohi found the campus community to be more open to differences due to its size and the diversity of the student population.

Roohi's educational experiences before coming to the University were varied, as she moved from school to school in Riyadh, experiencing a range of cross-cultural encounters along the way. She attended the British School for kindergarten through second grade and was a member of the very diverse study body at the American School for grades three through nine, educational experiences that Roohi said helped her learn to adapt to new situations. She attended high school at the International School and began to negotiate her identity as an international student long before setting foot on campus.

Roohi applied and was accepted to Global Communities, a global living and learning program where she lived in a dormitory with international and domestic students for two years, and continued searching for ways to engage in transcultural learning spaces. During her freshman orientation to Global Communities and through conversations with others, Roohi began to clarify her thoughts about her cultural identity. When asked what she considered the most troubling question, "where are you from," she would jokingly question how long they had. However, Roohi located a label through one conversation that she felt completely comfortable with and provided a way of describing herself that illuminated aspects of her cultural identity she had tried to rectify for years:

> They were like where are you from and stuff like that. I was born and brought up in Saudi Arabia and my parents are Indian, so I'm living in the US. And the director [of Global Communities] was like, wow, that's how I was brought up, because she lived in Kuwait. She said yeah, so you're a global nomad. And I t hought wow. That is the first time someone has told me I am from somewhere or given me a name, because I don't know where I'm from.

Before that conversation Roohi told people she was from three different places or just made something up, admitting that she was just bewildered about what to call herself and described herself as a "confused person." Giving herself a name or owning the label of a global nomad was an empowering act that provided a pathway towards understanding her positionality in the world and on campus.

Roohi's experience as a member of a global living and learning program was a catalyst for how she understood and described her identities and culture, and the ways in which these cultures intersected. She never spent more than 18 months of her life in India, yet maintained her Indian citizenship as a matter of necessity since the government of Saudi Arabia did not grant citizenship to expatriates regardless of how long they lived in the country. Roohi considered herself "Saudi Arabian-Indian," a distinction she made based on her birth to Indian parents and her upbringing in Saudi Arabia.

> "I mean I wouldn't consider myself Indian because I've never lived in India. I'm not the Indian who lives in India. I'm the other. I would be a different kind of Indian."

Roohi determined which identities she enacted based on the context of her interactions and how she believed she was perceived by others at that moment in time. "The foreign exchange students just think I am American. The American students think I am some sort of international person and they can't define it. And my Indian friends pretty much think I'm very Indian. So when I'm with different people, a different side of me comes out." While Roohi recognized the various ways people saw her, she also acknowledged the misperceptions people had about her. She often felt as if she was an unofficial ambassador for the cultural contexts in which she grew up. She believed some students on campus had a negative perception of her as someone who grew up as a Muslim in the Middle East:

> I think it is a very feared perception, like terrorists or Muslims and stuff like that. Or maybe it's not safe to live there or that there are camels there and that people still go to school on camels. In one of my freshman classes I was talking with one of the girls in my class and when I told her I was from Saudi Arabia, she asked me if we had camels around. I said, yeah in the desert. Then she asked if I lived in the desert. We were in the computer lab and so I showed her on the computer how Saudi Arabia was. And trust me it is much more beautiful than most cities in the U.S. They work on their greenery, they have trees. I mean who has trees in a desert. People still have this perception that it is a desert and people still wear the gown.

Roohi, once she arrived on campus, witnessed the diversity around her and started to interact with other

students who often asked questions about her background, felt a desire to learn more about her culture and a heavy responsibility as an incarnation or representative of where she came from. She stated,

> I think you represent your culture. That's what I think. And I don't know if that is just because I am in Global Communities or if that is prevalent everywhere. Because in Global you have to look at your culture and you are representative of your culture because there are people from different cultures. More broadly it would be that you represent your own culture when you are with different people, especially if they don't know anything about India or Saudi Arabia. So they would look through my eyes into those cultures. So you kind of get more responsible about speaking about your culture.

Roohi admitted that she was engaged in an ongoing struggle and at times "totally clueless" when it came to explaining or defining aspects of her Saudi Arabian-Indian identity. Roohi spent most of her life in Saudi Arabia, yet she consistently framed her narrative from a cultural lens grounded in her "Indianness." Her identity was not tied to a place as much as it was tied to her family:

> It all goes back to my mom because she knew that we were never going to stay in India. We were never going to learn about how Indians are or how our roots were connected to us or whatever. Because she knew we were going to live in Saudi Arabia and we were going to move to the US. So we were just going to be moving away from her, away from the country that she is from and that we are from. And she didn't want to hear from her in-laws or from her family that her children didn't have all that culture in them and that they should be respectful and stuff like that. She always stood her ground and she said, I am going to teach you Hindi and I am going to teach you Urdu and you will be very Indian. You will never live with me again and you will never live in India so you are never going to learn it. So we could have been just like any other people. We could have talked English in the house, but she made sure we knew.

Roohi was confused when asked to write about her culture in Global Communities and didn't know how to tackle what seemed like a daunting task dominated by a convergence of cultures and traditions. "Was I supposed to write the Saudi culture, the Indian culture? So that's when I came to realize that my culture was about the Indian people living in Saudi Arabia. It was not very Indian at all. Indian people are very different. Like their thinking is very different. There's a whole gap between the NRIs, the Non Residential Indians, and the Indians." While Roohi was knowledgeable of her Indian heritage, she realized that her "Indianness" materialized in her differently from someone who grew up in her birth country. Roohi viewed this exercise, her orientation, and participation in Global Communities as a pathway to understanding her cultural makeup and the transnational spaces in her life:

> Before joining Global I didn't actually realize that I had three different cultures in me. I always thought it was the Indian culture I guess or maybe the Indian-Saudi Arabian culture. But at that point I didn't realize that it was a different thing. I just thought it was the normal thing. But then I did Global Communities and they were asking us to define cultures. Before I never thought about what a culture is or how you have culture and how you deal with it and how it is different from other people. It never came to my mind. But when they asked us to write what our cultural habits are, like while eating, drinking, sleeping, shaking hands, talking to people, facial expressions, movements. I went to write about that. How you would greet someone in Saudi Arabia is like you would kiss the person on the right cheek, left cheek, right cheek. You don't kiss them, but you have your cheek right there. And in India it would just be a formal greeting, like a handshake or something, or just verbal, so that's different. But I would always greet verbally and then do the kiss thing. I am like, wow that is different. That is Saudi and that is Indian, in between. So they would ask, what do you say. We always said hi. Even in school we would do that. So, wow that's American.

Roohi continued to negotiate her cultural identity and came to realize throughout the semester instances where she was actively negotiating transnational spaces. Students often navigated the foreign and the familiar at the university's international coffee hour which is held in the Global Communities dormitory and is attended by students from across campus. Roohi often participated and recognized the juxtapositions of cultures at coffee hour and shared one particular story that further illustrated how her personal history and cultural identity influenced how she positioned herself on campus and her interactions with other students:

> I was down there with my friend getting coffee and there were three Arab people there and I could understand most of what they were saying and I was going to ask them where they were from. It's like you go and approach a guy from different parts of the world, but you wouldn't go and approach a Saudi Arabian guy because you don't do it in their country and you know about their country. I know how they would feel. I guess I am more conscious because I know they don't do that there and they would be really either overwhelmed or confused or whatever when I talk to them. They might just not talk or talk very weirdly…If this was happening in Riyadh, I wouldn't even be looking at them. But since it is happening here I could have actually gone and approached them and we could have had a conversation and they would have had a conversation with me. But if this whole thing was moved to Saudi Arabia, this would not have taken place. There would have been walls and everything.

Roohi described living as an Indian in a largely expatriate community of Indians, Pakistanis, and Americans in Saudi Arabia; attending an international high school; rooming with foreign exchange students in Global Communities; and interacting with other students at international coffee hours as third spaces and third cultures. "Even though I am a part of it, I didn't realize it then but if I think about it now, I've always seen that whole third culture in between." Roohi described her negotiations in transnational spaces with her family, roommates, and friends as always occurring in a third space or a third culture:

> If there is more globalization there is more diversity in culture…Culture is a sense of rules and norms or things that people do. If there are more different kinds of people I guess there would be more different things that you would do, different ways that you would talk, ways of sitting and standing and stuff. That would make it more diverse, more heterogeneous. It reminds me of genetics. And since you have reminded me of genetics, there would be more mutations. There would be more people interacting with each other, my culture and your culture, and then there would be a different culture in between us. Because if I am adjusting to your culture and you are adjusting to my culture, we might end up having a different culture that is not your culture or my culture, but a third culture. A culture that involves everyone in it. So I guess globalization is directly proportional to culture.

Roohi used her academic grounding in bioengineering to provide a useful analogy for how she envisioned the relationship of globalization to her culture. She welcomed these third spaces or transnational mutations, and enthusiastically described how the ambiguity she encountered as a result helped her discover a way to describe her culture. She envisioned globalization contributing to the creation of heterogeneous cultures or spaces, not a homogenous culture, where she could explore individual configurations of diversity. In fact, she admitted "not having problems with culture shock or problems interacting with people" as she continued transversing cultural, national, linguistic, and educational boundaries.

The Global Communities Handbook states that program participants join a "community of the University students committed to exploring diversity, developing intercultural understanding, and broadening their world perspective." Roohi was a model student for the program and elaborated on how living in Global Communities helped her address questions about her evolving identities and cultures in the third spaces she created through her interactions.

Cosmopolitan Student Identities

These students were experienced border crossers who came to the university with an understanding of diversity and what it meant to be an international student, yet still encountered challenges along the way. Each found different levels of comfort in the labels ascribed to them and the ambiguous spaces they inhabited. The meanings students ascribed to their educational sojourns and their socially constructed identities emerged in a range of ways that, while not solely of their own making, were actively conceived by students and informed by the images and ideas that circulated throughout their transnational networks of affiliation and the campus.

Yet these students were still searching out a space where their backgrounds, identities, and diversity of experiences were recognized. Through their narratives, these students created cultural portraits of what it was like to negotiate an international student identity, even if selves of momentary completion, and demonstrated the ways in which their narratives were influenced by the work of their imaginations (Appadurai, 1996).

Roohi and Zara inhabited transnational spaces but did not find that all the labels or identities within these

cultural contexts crossed borders with them. These students described occupying transitional spaces where they reconstructed and reenacted positions of dynamic in-betweenness. They enacted different ways of being and belonging that were constructed outside the realm of nationality and illuminated aspects of their identities that did not commonly rely on citizenship. Each of the students expressed different levels of comfort with labels. For Zara, the concept or notion of "home" was difficult to define. For Roohi, adopting the label of a "global nomad" felt as if she had found a space for herself and a way of expressing her identities. Even the label of "international student" required some sorting out. These students were not stumbling on a sense of belonging but were actively constructing a space of acceptance. The perceptions and interactions that students acknowledged differentiated them as international students, also influenced when, where, and how students did or did not enact an international student identity.

These students engaged in processes of cultural transmission and cultural transformation through the creation and exchange of identity capital in these ambiguously defined spaces. Through successful identity exchanges students gained identity capital or exhibited an "increase in some aspect of who they are" (Cote & Levine, 2002, p. 123). Students navigated transnational spaces and nurtured cosmopolitan identities. Students authored their own biographies, assumed responsibility for their decisions, and generated meanings from their experiences that allowed them to create narratives grounded in the past and linked to the present, all the while anticipating the future.

Roohi and Zara enacted cosmopolitan identities that were not fixed or mutually exclusive and differed in saliency and intensity depending on contexts. The relationship between cultures and identities was not so much about stagnant cultural values and ideals as much as it was about understanding contexts and student resources and how adept they were in leveraging these resources to accumulate identity capital. These students were not reliant on others to define them, but were reliant on interactions with others to make sense of their evolving and alternating salient identities. These students were aware of differences between themselves and others, although they allowed these differences to influence their identities and interactions to varying degrees and in various ways.

Roohi and Zara were actively engaged in the work of the imagination. Characterized by an inherent movement of information, ideas, images, and people, global cultural flows served as the bedrock for student's work of the imagination and influenced how students constructed identities and positioned themselves on campus. The mobile and transient nature of these students' lives emphasized the opportunities for each to be exposed to a plethora of images and ideas. As Roohi and Zara engaged in their efforts at cosmopolitan learning, the conceptualizations of themselves as international students relied upon changing interpersonal dynamics to challenge the rigid notion of cultural identities, citizenship, and nationality.

Implications and Suggestions

It is important to get a sense of who students are and how they construct meaning in an era of globalization. Roohi and Zara demonstrate that nationality alone is not enough to understand how they cross borders, make sense of their time abroad, or construct identities. Understanding who students are, where they come from, what cosmopolitan experiences they bring to campus, and what capabilities they employ for crossing a myriad of borders, is paramount for creating successful programs, implementing meaningful policies, and adopting practices that successfully serve an entire student body.

As a result of the transnational flow of people and ideas, a new kind of student already in possession of a range of global sensibilities is arriving on campus. These students, who study abroad for extended periods of time, are required to occupy multiple linguistic, geographical, contemporaneous, historical, and academic spaces. No matter what their labels, they are twenty-first century border crossers who enter universities in possession of a dazzling multiplicity of communicative modes unknown and even unimagined by their predecessors.

As a result, the focus on the construction of cultural identities and global competencies needs to shift from measuring the development of cosmopolitan learning with surveys, detailed quantitative inventories, or statistical regressions, to listening to student accounts of how they engage in cosmopolitan learning and are impacted by the crossing of borders. What Roohi and Zara shared could not be gleamed from a simple questionnaire. Student voices need to influence programs and policies or the opportunity to provide students with instances to critically reflect and situate themselves in the world will be lost.

Perhaps the question is not how to impart

cosmopolitan knowledge upon students, but rather how to expand upon the global sensibilities many students are in possession of when they first set foot on college and university campuses across the country. Perhaps the practice of assuming that a student's nationality is a tell tale sign for how a student will construct meaning or identities from their time abroad, it is more important to look beyond nationality and explore how students themselves create cultural identities and engage in cosmopolitan learning, inside and outside of classrooms. Perhaps rather than asserting that developing global sensibilities means the same thing for all students, it is important to look beyond the one-size-fits-all conceptualization of what cosmopolitan learning or global-mindedness really entails, allowing students to define these very expressions. Perhaps rather than teaching students what to expect in an intercultural encounter, we teach students how to critically analyze and dwell in the experience, a potentially empowering awareness for students. Perhaps relying upon traditional and stagnant conceptualizations of the anticipated outcomes of intercultural exchanges, it is important to conceive of cosmopolitan learning as a fluid and evolving experience that requires situating learners within broader historical, cultural, social, economic, and political contexts. An approach to cosmopolitan learning that focuses on the processes of learning rather than the outcomes, provides an opportunity to critically reevaluate the justifications for the ongoing engagement in cosmopolitan learning. Rather than asking students to select a category or check a box, we should give students to opportunity to organically explain how cosmopolitan learning impacts their lives and the cultural identities they construct for themselves. As exemplified through the range of literature on international education outcomes, researchers and educators have spent a great deal of time trying to come to a consensus or develop a single framework of what cosmopolitan learning entails. However, it is possible that a rigid notion of cosmopolitan learning, just as with the effects of globalization, are experienced very differently among individuals and student populations.

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