

Cite as: Phelps, J. M. (2016). International doctoral students' navigations of identity and belonging in a globalizing university. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 11, 1-14. Retrieved from <http://ijds.org/Volume11/IJDSv11p001-014Phelps1923.pdf>

International Doctoral Students' Navigations of Identity and Belonging in a Globalizing University

Jennifer M. Phelps

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

jenny.phelps@ubc.ca

Abstract

This article draws on findings from a broad study on the influences of globalization on the experiences of international doctoral students at a large, research intensive Canadian university. It focuses specifically on these students' lived experiences of change in their national identities and senses of belonging in a globalizing world. Using a qualitative, multiple case narrative approach, students' experiences were collected via in-depth interview and analyzed through a theoretical lens of transnational social fields. The study found that international doctoral students experienced multiplicity, ambiguity, and flux in their senses of self, belonging, and educational purposes as they engaged in the transnational academic and social spaces of the university. Their narratives are revealing of the ways that international doctoral students consciously construct identities that traverse national affiliations as they engage in higher levels of mobility and interact with highly internationalized environments and networks. The study contributes insight into the transformative nature of international doctoral study and identifies specific ways in which processes of globalization influence the international doctoral student experience.

Keywords: international doctoral students, transnationalism, graduate education, globalization, identity, belonging

Introduction

Individuals pursuing doctoral degrees face a changing landscape in which pathways into and through doctoral education and subsequent career options have become more complex, market-driven, and globally contextual (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007; Nerad, 2010; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Today's doctoral students and new PhD graduates are confronted with negotiating global possibilities, responsibilities, opportunities, and challenges that are fundamentally different from those of a generation ago. This may especially be the case for the thousands of individuals who become international doctoral students.

While universities in the United States and the U.K. have long attracted large numbers of international doctoral students, new and high-quality doctoral programs are now becoming well-established in alternative destinations, such as Australia, Korea, China, the E.U., Canada, and other locales. Travel paths for students across borders to obtain doctoral education have become more diverse, and most large research universities have become more cosmopolitan, globally interlinked, and highly multicultural in their student

Material published as part of this publication, either on-line or in print, is copyrighted by the Informing Science Institute. Permission to make digital or paper copy of part or all of these works for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that the copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage AND that copies 1) bear this notice in full and 2) give the full citation on the first page. It is permissible to abstract these works so long as credit is given. To copy in all other cases or to republish or to post on a server or to redistribute to lists requires specific permission and payment of a fee. Contact Publisher@InformingScience.org to request redistribution permission.

Editor: Ahabab Ahamed Chowdhury

Submitted: May 12, 2015; Revised: October 10, 2015; Accepted: January 19, 2016

populations (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). This trend is indicative of larger processes of globalization, including the vast advances in transportation and communications technology, which have blurred the lines between nation-states and given rise to what has been termed “transnational space” (Jackson, Crang, & Dwyer, 2004).

The prefix *trans-* contains meanings of “across”, “beyond”, “through”, or “so as to change,” giving the word *transnational* the connotation of a space that sits above national localities, that goes beyond linkages of bordered states, and in fact changes the meaning and relevance of national borders. It is not a sum of one place and another, but a dynamic transactional environment. Transnational space evokes a sense of “movement between”. Universities, while obviously grounded in a national locality, increasingly function as such transnational spaces, as they cultivate highly internationalized student enrolments and multi-national research consortia. As cosmopolitan sojourners, international doctoral students occupy this transnational space where their field of activity consists of simultaneous locations—at minimum their home country and the country in which they are studying, and possibly other locales of research, activism and professional work as well (Gargano, 2009; Rizvi, 2010).

Large-scale survey data about student mobility, student satisfaction with their educational experiences, and post-PhD career trajectories has provided broad outlines of how doctoral education is evolving in a global context. Yet the voices of doctoral students, both domestic and international, have been largely absent from attempts to understand the complex influences of globalization on doctoral education. Little is known about how students themselves are constructing and making meaning of their educational purposes, experiences, and identities in a world that is increasingly globally interconnected.

This paper reports a segment of findings from a large research project that sought to understand the experiences of international doctoral students at a major research institution in Canada in relation to broader processes of globalization. In particular, it sought to understand how immersion in the transnational space of a globalized university influenced international doctoral students’ senses of identity and belonging. Doctoral study, especially internationally, is by design, a transitory experience (Kashyap, 2011) during which international doctoral students are in a period of profound transition, maneuvering between “home” and abroad, between novice and expert, between education and career (Szelényi, 2006). It was the interest of this study to explore transitions of identity and belongingness in this context. The site of the study, The University of British Columbia (UBC), served as an exemplar location within the globalized doctoral education field. UBC’s placement in Vancouver, Canada is likewise a cosmopolitan, highly globally interconnected locale and “transnational space,” which influenced the identity renegotiations experienced by doctoral students.

Theorizing a Transnational Student Experience

This work draws upon interrelated theories of globalization, including the “network society” (Castels, 1996), “global social imaginary” (Appadurai, 1996; Taylor, 2004), “transnational space” (Jackson et al., 2004), and “transnational social fields” (Glick Schiller, & Fouron, 1999) to frame the globalizing social and educational contexts in which international doctoral students are navigating their lives and studies. Taken together, these theories help us to conceptualize how, under conditions of the vast social changes of globalization, we experience transformation in both what we imagine to be normal and possible and in our fundamental set of conscious and unconscious responses to life around us. In Arjun Appadurai’s incisive summary, “More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did before” (1996, p. 53). The imaginations of ordinary people are now operating in globalized context.

Theorists working in the area of “space and place” face a fundamental question--in a world now characterized by constant flow of information across space and in which almost any place is available (either in representation or in actuality), what does it mean to “*be somewhere?*” The disembedding of social phenomena that previously tended to be more nation-bound, such as political ideologies, citizenship, and identity, from fixed space and time has meant that “transnational” or “global” space is the new field in which institutions operate, and people must understand their lives and navigate challenges and opportunities.

Transnational space is not only populated by those who move internationally to pursue opportunities, but by almost everyone, as the worldwide transmission of images and ideas reaches into virtually all modern societies, creating an influence of the global even in the local. A fundamental (re)construction of “place” becomes possible, if not inevitable, through the creation of social fields unanchored in specific locality (Vertovec, 2009). Jackson et al., (2004) suggest that attachments to specific locations do remain important, both practically and emotionally, but that still, “to sit in place is also always to be ‘displaced’ in the senses of inhabiting threefold geographies: of immediate contextuality; of flows and circuits, that in turn constitute those contexts; and of imaginative geographies, that characterize those contexts and flows and or relations to them” (p. 7). Social identities and awareness can become detached from a territorial or national space and relocated in trans-national and trans-cultural spaces. Rizvi and Lingard, citing Tomlinson (2000), theorize that globalization encourages “deterritorialized” ways of thinking about identity. That is, “increased global mobilities are deterritorializing forces that have the effect of reshaping both the material conditions of people’s existence and their perspectives on the world” (2009, p. 166).

Inevitably, personal identity becomes fluid in the global flows of information, ideas, and human migration. Living in transnational spaces can also interrupt people’s established senses of who they are and where they belong in the world. This phenomenon has been referred to as the development of “hybrid” or “multi-level” identities (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009) in which individuals embrace multiple discrete dimensions of identity associated with specific locales or develop identity affiliation with a sense of the global or transnational. That internationally mobile academics and others can undergo changes in personal identity and place-affiliations and have associated experiences of “in-betweenness” has been documented by several scholars (e.g., Brown, 2009; Kim, 2010; Tharenou, 2010).

Within these transnational spaces of globalization is the grounded reality of lives. For many individuals (including the graduate student participants in this study), a transnational life includes everyday complexities such as managing a family that is “back home” or raising children in a culturally new environment. Vertovec suggests that those living transnational lives may develop a “*habitus* of dual orientation” through which individuals make sense of their lives based on a “bi-focal” sense of living both “here and there” (2009, p. 68). This may materialize through the development of a repertoire of actions that spans and maximizes the benefits of affiliation with both “home” and “new” locales. This may include engaging in cultural practices that maintain the security of long-held cultural identities, while gaining economic benefit by working (or going to graduate school) in an alternative location with superior opportunities.

Prior Studies on the International Doctoral Student Experience

Theorizations of transnational space help us to understand how and why mobile individuals may begin to experience disruption in their senses of identity and belonging. How has this phenomenon been observed among international students, who are among the globalizing world’s most ambitious and sophisticated travellers? There have been a small number of studies that have ad-

dressed this issue directly, most frequently focussed on undergraduate students (e.g., Koehne, 2006; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009; Van Mol, 2011). A robust body of empirical literature exists on aspects of the international *graduate* student experience that are indirectly related to identity development and sense of belonging. Works from earlier in the era of pervasive global connectivity, on the development of international graduate students' social networks (Mostafa, 2006; Trice, 2004) primarily found an inward tendency among some cultural groups to establish their own insular support networks of other culturally similar students. Such patterns would predict a lesser level of identity re-negotiation for these students. Proficiency in English has also been found to be a significant factor in the ability of international students to form relationships beyond their own cultural group and in their sense of comfort and competency in the academic program (Brown, 2008).

In a more recent study that directly addressed the increasingly technology-driven social experiences of international graduate students, Kashyap (2011) found that many students were using social media and communication technologies at the expense of connecting with "local" people. This pattern was seen to keep international graduate students socially isolated within their current "place" while connecting them across "space", thus inhibiting or even protecting students from experiencing "identity flux".

A few other studies have explored international graduate students' experiences of re-negotiating their sense of *academic* identity as knowledge producers as a result of transitioning into a Western academic environment. Robinson-Pant (2009) found two primary areas of academic "cultural conflict" which concerned students, *criticality* and *research emphasis and approach*. This was particularly the case with students coming from developing (rather than developed) countries. Many students reported that the emphasis on "being critical" in Western academia was a foreign and uncomfortable concept, especially when expected to do it directly and in English. Some reported that "it would not be appropriate to facilitate open critique in a more hierarchical cultures and situation where it might be politically dangerous" (Robinson-Pant, 2009, p. 421). The research intensity of PhD programs also posed a dilemma for some students. They would be returning to a home academic culture in which a greater value is put on teaching than research, and they would be expected to "have returned as a better teacher and not as a better researcher" (p. 418). Writing up research in English, and in the first person, as many students reported their supervisors pressing them to do, left some students feeling either "disempowered" by not being able to use their native tongue, or too "self-centred" by writing in the first person. This study exposes an interesting tension at the intersections of cultural and academic identities, as international doctoral students negotiate the gap between Western academic norms and the cultural habitus of home countries and institutions.

While utilizing the insights on the international graduate student experience provided in these studies, this work drew most significantly from the small but growing body of work that has focused on processes of cultural and identity adaptation when international students are immersed in transnational space. In her application of transnational social field theory to analyze international student experiences, Gargano (2009) found that such students "simultaneously remain family members in contexts of origin, while attending classes, engaging in campus activities, and interacting with local communities abroad, thereby building and maintaining social networks that transcend national boundaries" (p. 336). She argues that her findings "refute(s) the generalization or homogenization of international students and acknowledges simultaneity of locality and multiplicity in identities" (p. 337), and calls for higher education researchers to recognize the transnational construct as one which can "deepen the understanding of international student sense making so that student perceptions and identity reconstructions are placed in the center of a dialogue on international student mobility" (p. 332). Although this work is specifically focussed on undergraduate students, it is equally relevant to doctoral students.

In a study that directly probed meanings of “citizenship” as part of personal identity in global context, Szelényi and Rhoads (2007) found that international doctoral students in the United States experienced varying patterns of change in citizenship affiliation in response to relocating to a new country for study. These changes ranged from becoming more globally-oriented in response to exposure to diverse cultures, to becoming more nationally-oriented in response to viewing (and perhaps defending) one’s own country through the eyes of others abroad. They report findings that international doctoral students experienced both expansion of self-perceived citizenship identities and the imposition of limitations on their ability to claim new dimensions of citizenship due to being seen as “foreign” within the institution.

Kim (2010), speaking primarily about post-PhD academic researchers, argues that, on the far side of the identity flux spectrum, some “mobile academic intellectuals living such transnational lives cannot inhabit an immutable ‘nation-home’ once they become cosmopolitan”. Kim theorizes that they develop “transnational identity capital,” described as an orientation that is “generally expansionist in its management of meaning, and it is not a way of becoming a local, but rather of simulating local knowledge” (pp. 584, 585). This view predicts that mobile international graduate students are in a beginning stage of developing transnational identities that can enable them to effectively integrate socially in a range of global locales.

In a paper with interests quite close to this one, Bilecen (2013) explores “identification” as the “dynamic process through which (international doctoral) students negotiate the meaning of their identities in different societies and communities” (p. 667). In his interview-based study with 35 international doctoral students at two German universities, Bilecen found that students engaged discourses of both “difference” and “other” to apparently enhance their sense of meaning in their educational sojourn. Learning from the differences they perceived between themselves and their home cultures, and the new cultures and practices of their host country, was a strategy for building their own cosmopolitan repertoire. This finding aligns well with Kim’s (2010) theorization of desired “transnational identity capital” which is valuable in globalized contexts. The doctoral students also employed discourses of “other” to differentiate themselves from (and elevate themselves above) fellow-immigrants from their home country, via their superior academic credentials. Bilecen’s fascinating study extends meaningfully Faisal Rizvi’s work (2010) that suggests “the identities of international doctoral students continue to be involved in national and global discourses of power and class, systems of history and social interactions, all of which are embedded in transnational social spaces that fabricate the students’ being belonging and becoming” (Bilecen, 2013, p. 670).

These excellent works provide a nascent foundation for further inquiry on the processes of identity negotiation that international doctoral study can engender. They also leave space for the present study, which focused on how identity fluctuation and re-combinations are experienced and directly articulated by the students themselves, and indeed may be sought out as an explicit purpose of studying abroad. With the balance of this paper I first outline the methodological approach to this study, and then heed Gargano’s call to “illuminate student voices...on student-inhabited transnational spaces, identity negotiations, and networks of association” (2009, p. 332).

Methods

This study pursued the research question “How does immersion in the transnational space of a globalized university influence international doctoral students’ senses of identity and belonging?” The primary objective of the study was to understand these influences as they are perceived and constructed by the students themselves. Given the primary focus on the *meaning-making processes* of the individuals involved, the research approach had to be one that elicits their own perspectives and ways of knowing through qualitative research methodologies.

The approach to inquiry in this study followed Shkedi's "multiple case narrative" methodology. Shkedi (2005) uses this term to describe a qualitative, interview-based methodology that facilitates data collection "from a large number of people as part of the same study" (p. 25), with "large number" further described as "from ten to several tens to hundred and several hundreds" (p. 26). He differentiates between a "collective case study", in which a relatively small number of individual cases are each developed in rich detail and comparisons are developed between them (the focus still being on the individual 'unit' being studied), and "multiple case narrative" which de-emphasizes individual cases in favour of illuminating cross-cutting themes, but still "preserv[ing] its qualitative-narrative nature...and produc(ing) narrative-qualitative findings" (2005, p. 25-27). Shkedi asserts that this approach allows the researcher to see associations between cases, identify broad patterns across a variety of narratives, and potentially make claims to generalization from case to case, and from cases to populations. Each participant is a "case" in and of themselves, but the analytic emphasis of this study is not on the individual case, but a sample of cases that constitute a grouping, "international doctoral students" who are choosing and experiencing doctoral education abroad in a globalizing world.

The site of this study was the University of British Columbia, a large, Canadian, research-intensive public university, which itself was part of the case-study. Using a particular institutional "case" helped to ground an understanding of participant experience in the social and policy context of a "place" that is likewise responding to the flows and pressures of globalization in tangible ways that impact that experience. The institution was selected because it is an exemplar of a contemporary doctoral-granting institution with a large, cosmopolitan, international student population and significant global engagement and aspirations. It "exemplifies a broader category of which it is a member" (Bryman, 2008, p. 56).

A participant sample of 31 students was recruited at the study site that reflected the overall population of international doctoral student candidates at the university with regard to gender, world region of citizenship, and broad disciplinary area. There were eleven women and twenty men in the study. Ten were in Social Sciences/Humanities disciplines, while twenty-one were in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics disciplines. Nine were from Asia (China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka), four from the Middle East (Iran, Egypt, Israel), seven from the European Union (Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, Ireland, Sweden, UK), six from the United States, and three from Central/South America (Chile, Columbia, Mexico). For the purposes of this study, analyses were not made on any of these demographic or academic distinctions, as each student narrative was analyzed as an individual case. The information is included to demonstrate the breadth and representativeness of the study sample.

In depth, semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect narratives from participants. Interview questions were structured to elicit both "stories" of experiences that disrupted their sense of identity and belonging as well as participants' own interpretations of those experiences. Example questions included the following: "What is it like for you, being from <your home country> here in Canada/Vancouver/at UBC?". "How would you say you and your life have changed for you, if at all, since you came from <home country> to UBC?" "Has your experience here changed your sense of where you belong in the world? How? Where is home for you now?"

Shkedi (2005) offers a comprehensive and systematic approach to analyzing multiple case narratives that utilizes thematic coding, while also retaining the narrative flavour of the interview data. His two-stage process was generally followed in this study. An initial phase of thematic identification included determining themes derived from theory that were considered a priori as being potentially relevant to student experience, such as "network society", "global imaginary", and "transnational space". Other themes also began to emerge as close reading of the transcripts continued and included, for example "perceived purpose/value of doctoral education", "sense of belonging"; "influence of family and important others". Both affirmative and negating comments

related each theme were noted. In Shkedi's second stage, one or two "core" categories emerge from the data that anchor the analysis and presentation of the overall project. The core category must be related to as many other categories as possible, be frequent and eminent in the data, and in general "have the potential to produce a coherent narrative" about the primary concerns of the interview participants (p. 122). For the purpose of this paper, the core themes within the dataset that emerged were *discourses of purpose in doctoral education* and *globalizing imaginations and social fields*. Findings from within these thematic areas that address the specific research question related to students' identity shift and sense of belonging are presented next.

Findings

Students constructed and interacted with the notions of social diversity and globalism in many different ways. Themes that emerged from the narratives represented a spectrum of change in students' senses of identity and belonging. These ranged from a largely "untroubled" experience of simply expanding one's repertoire of cross-cultural interactions and reference points, to more profound experiences of identity flux, confusion, and transformation. Each quote presented in this section is accompanied by a participant pseudonym (to protect confidentiality) and the world region that the participant comes from.

Untroubled Diversity

Some students found social diversity to be a sort of uncomplicated "good", providing them with a pleasurable living environment in which they can learn about other cultures. Interestingly, it seemed to be primarily Americans (all White) who expressed their experience in this way:

[This city] is so diverse. Growing up in [U.S. state] it's not completely un-diverse, but there's definitely less ethnic influences...so that's been fun. Just getting to see all the different restaurants and try different things and meet friends from many different places. [This city] is pretty global so it's fun to have friends from all over the world which has been really cool. So I definitely have enjoyed that aspect of things. (Jackie—USA)

I got here, and this is going to sound like such a little southern boy thing to say, but I'd never met so many Iranian students in my whole life! So to see that was just like, 'whoa, this is complete culture shock for me' ... There's just so much diversity period, it's really great to experience all the things that [this city] has to offer as far as culture is concerned. I mean there's all these little communities that have all their own restaurants and shops and I'm a big fan of like any kind of different food I can eat, so I've travelled around the world in [this city] in my stomach, right? (Christopher— USA)

A similar, if slightly more nuanced and purposeful academic viewpoint was offered by another American student:

Where I grew up, it really wasn't very diverse and I didn't have a lot of multi-cultural experience and Canada has a self-conscious multiculturalism which I can be critical of in my own work, but I still find it to be useful being around people who have come from elsewhere...How to be respectful in those situations. I mean I grew up in a place where I don't think it would ever have happened that I would have met a Native American person, for example, and here I know many First Nations people. That's been interesting for me on a research level and a personal level. (Mallory—USA)

These students seemed to have a mainly appreciative but “untroubled” view on life in a culturally diverse transnational social space. Perhaps it is telling that each of the students quoted above cited coming from a relatively small and culturally homogenous home community. Their unorthodox pursuit of doctoral study in another country (few American students do so) may reflect a particular personal purpose for studying abroad of expanding their sociocultural horizons. However, it could be that life in Canada, with its many commonalities with American cultural life, did not present these students with such significant challenges to their basic social habitus as to trigger a felt experience of identity transformation.

As mentioned previously, some studies have found a culturally inward social tendency within communities of international students, and that seeking the company of one’s own country people (and attendant segregation from host and other cultures) is still dominant in international graduate student life in North America (Kashyap, 2011; Mostafa, 2006). In these passages, Farjad acknowledges this phenomenon, but also asserts that many students from his country yearn to expand their sense of connectedness to the world. He explains his choice to engage “otherness” as part of his learning experience and overall purpose for studying abroad:

If I want to give you a percentage, maybe half of [students from my country] come here just to have more fun, that’s it. They even don’t care about degree... they come for experience. I don’t want to say just experience, but 80% experience, 20% of course get a degree...

Some of them, they don’t care, they just spend most of their time with [countrypeople] friends. But I always have tried to make new friends from different countries. I’m really eager to know about other countries’ culture. When I make a friend from, for example Spain, then I know their cultures, their society, their dance... So one reason is improving your English, another reason is that you meet new people from different cultures, different backgrounds, so you learn new stuff beside your research. That’s why I call it experience, not just coming here for a degree. (Farjad—Middle East)

The experiences of these students seemed to expand upon, but not transform, their senses of identity and belonging. They were not drawn by their experiences into a process of deeply questioning their sense of self and belonging in a globalizing context. Rather, they enjoyed developing, and in some cases, purposely sought out a growing understanding of diverse cultures and enlarged sense of the world, without experiencing the unsettling sense of de-territorialization and identity flux expressed in other student narratives.

Transnationalizing Identities

Many students in this study (13 out of 31) articulated in some way that their experience of doctoral study abroad had led them to question or shift their sense of national/cultural identity affiliation and sense of geographic belonging. Even as many students were able to access a valued sense of multicultural community, some found that living in transnational social space left them unsure of where they belong and where is “home”. Permutations of global, national, regional, and even municipal (city-based) identities seemed to shift, persevere, and recombine throughout student experience in transnational space.

The evocative term “liminal world” was used by Shane to describe his experience of living in-between, suspended in transnational space, especially in the highly transitory environment of his current city and institution:

Well the thing is that you’re in this kind of liminal world. Because I left [my country], you don’t fully fit in back there to a certain extent, and also I’m al-

ways the [nationality] guy that you don't fully kind of fit in here...[this] is a weird city. It's full of people who are just kind of passing through...Nobody is kind of staying here, really. That's why I'm saying, you don't belong anywhere. (Shane—European Union)

Li expressed a strong sense of being in between affiliations and social worlds with her home country and with Canada, where she hopes to stay for awhile:

I feel I'm sort of in between [home nationality] and Canadian people. I'm not entirely Canadian but I'm no longer entirely [home nationality] anymore...I don't know if it's just me or it happens to a lot of people...I go back to [home country] every year to visit my family but every time I go back, I feel like I don't belong [there] anymore and when I come here, I don't entirely belong to Canada...I can talk to people in a lab fine but once we have a party when they talk about music, books, I just feel like very not included at all because we don't have the same background... I can tell you I don't belong anywhere anymore. Yeah, I'm just in between somewhere. (Li—Asia)

In addition to revealing her experience of being in-between national affiliation, Li also makes an interesting point when expressing her feeling that she can affiliate within the culture of her research lab (indicating the “global language” of science), but less so in social settings.

A similar point about the durability of home country affiliation is made and very insightfully analyzed by another student. Reza may be taking a longer view on affiliation because he is in the process of immigrating to Canada and reflecting deeply here on what it means to “become Canadian”:

For me it's very complicated how it's possible to feel like as a Canadian. What is this feeling? Because whatever I know are like information, but whatever I have from my country, they are not information, they are like my identity. For example, literature, art, music or stuff like that, they are the thing that I grew up with...I think these are the thing that forms the identity of the people and not just being in a place for a certain time. I have to be going to this society and sort of dissolve in that society. This is a process that, if I want to feel as a Canadian, I think I have to spend at least 10 years here (Reza—Middle East)

Reza provides a compelling argument for the stability and deep entrenchment of identity over time and its representation in the cultural markers of a country or society. He sees the potential for identity and affiliation change over time, but is thinking of it in terms of from one country and culture to another, not in “globalized identity” sense.

A marked finding of this study was the extent to which some students had already begun developing a “global” or “nomadic” sense of self and belonging prior to embarking on being an international doctoral student. A few students cited the notion that their place-based identity was a pastiche of prior locations, leaving them with a multi-layer or deterritorialized sense of home and multiple sources of national/cultural identity.

I've recently thought about how I've lived in Canada five years and it's starting to become like a big percentage of my life, actually, so am I starting to identify with Canada, as well as America, as well as Asia, or? I mean it seems at this moment I have a tri-, I'd say transnational, but almost tri-national identity between Canada, U.S. and Asia. (Jason—USA)

For Suzanne, “home” was ultimately tied to her current location with her spouse and children, not a particular location, a sensibility developed from her extensive prior mobility:

Well, I think I'm a kind of nomad. Culturally confused (laugh), but I guess I've accumulated different cultural bits and pieces from many different places, but obviously my accent is very [tied to where she grew up]. I don't really identify very much with any one country... I mean, home is where I live with my family. (Suzanne—European Union)

Ross expressed a similar experience:

*(interviewer)...Where do you feel you belong in the world?...I belong **in the world** (laugh). Yeah, at this point, I've lived in so many different places. I'm not very fond of this notion of belonging to a nation-state... In any case, I just see myself as a human, you know? I'm part of this human population on the planet. Yes, I have, I can point to [home state], the U.S., [state where he lived for several years], Japan, Taiwan, the PRC, I mean, I have to point to all these places in order to construct an identity for myself. (Ross—USA)*

That each of the highly mobile students cited here was from highly developed countries may be an indication of their relatively greater economic means than many other students, but several others, and even some from developing countries, had fairly extensive mobility prior to becoming doctoral students.

This study found that regardless of whether students are experiencing profound or subtle shifts in their national affiliations and sense of “home”, nearly all of them maintain contact with home countries, cultures, and family members at home through the use of information technologies. Kashyap's (2011) findings that international graduate students were using such communication technologies at the expense of connecting with “local” people, keeping them socially isolated within the host environment, were not strongly supported in the current study. Most students seemed to characterize connecting back “home” using technology as just one dimension of their overall social milieu. Email, cell phones, social networking sites, home country news webpages, satellite and internet-streamed television and, most notably, Skype, were all cited by many students as vehicles for maintaining ties across space.

Despite the wide availability of such technologies, they cannot bridge all distances. Suzanne expresses some of the social losses that can result from extensive mobility:

I think it's inherently very hard to maintain a relationship with friends who you haven't seen for many years and then people scattered all over the place and how do you visit them more?...So inevitably you lose people and that's very sad... Email as a medium, misunderstandings are so easy and then the time delay...I always tell people, 'Watch out, you! I've done it, I did it, I've, you know, lost all my friends'. And you don't even think of that if you're planning on, you know, embarking on becoming a nomad. (long silence) (Suzanne--EU)

Suzanne's statement reveals a dilemma of life in transnational space, and perhaps a painful effect of Kim's (2009) statement that individuals “cannot inhabit an immutable ‘nation-home’ once they become cosmopolitan”.

Student Families in Transnational Space

For students with young children, disruption of one's sense of belonging in place can be even more complex. While these students often sought study abroad as a mechanism to expose their children to benefits of transnationalism, they expressed ambivalence about the impact this had on their imaginations of “home.” Parenthood is an often invisible aspect of doctoral student lives, and parents embarking on international study comprise unique iterations of life in transnational social spaces which serves to expand the global social imaginary for future generations. Stefan, a

father of three from Europe, emphasized how much he valued the opportunity for his children to engage in a multicultural society. He references the established term “third culture kids” to describe the phenomenon of “children who grow up in a culture that is not their parents’ culture so they develop a sort of in-between-the-cultures understanding of culture.” Maya experiences a shift in her sense of where home is, in part due to her daughter’s embrace of her new location:

I had never imagined myself living anywhere else. But now that I’ve been here for so long, especially for my daughter, I mean this is the only home she has known. And that does cause some anxiety sometimes, because when I say home it’s, it’s always [home country], but for her... she always refers to [this city] as home. And regardless of where we live, I think it will be in some ways. (Maya—Asia)

Maya expresses pangs of anxiety as she contemplates where “home” will be for her and her daughter in the future, as does Hoda, a Muslim woman and mother. Hoda relates a story about speaking with a fellow Middle Easterner at a social gathering, who did not know she was not an immigrant to Canada. This excerpt makes it clear that for some students, life in transnational space, being between fully “home” and fully “here” is fraught with ambivalence and threat of identity loss:

I didn’t tell him that I’m not a permanent resident or that I’m just a student...I wear Hijab, of course, so he said that ‘you are not Canadian yet in heart, your heart is not Canadian, your heart are still in [home city] or in [home country] but your children will be Canadian and they will follow the Canadian rules and Canadian living style.’...So there is always like this, I don’t know what they call? Accommodation or adaptation, like they always saying that the newcomers should follow us. If you wear differently or if you behave differently, then you are not one of us. And we are better so you are worse...if I continue here, either I have to completely assimilate with the culture, or I have to be must one of the like, background people. (Hoda—Middle East)

Hoda’s voice in this study is extremely important, as a student who is not experiencing the dominant narrative in the study about a (relatively) happy mutual embrace between students with globalizing identities and a country/city/university with a global self-image. That her children are experiencing a multicultural upbringing is a source of both pride and anxiety for her.

Analysis

The narratives found in this study demonstrate that international doctoral students are profoundly influenced by living and learning in the transnational social fields which are found in the multicultural country, cosmopolitan city, and internationalized university in which they have been immersed. While some students positioned themselves as primarily receptive beneficiaries of an untroubled “exposure” to broader social diversity that had an additive impact on an otherwise relatively stable sense of self, others described deeper experiences of flux and transformation of identity and belonging as an effect of their educational sojourn in the transnational spaces of a globalized university. We see that international doctoral students often seek such experiences of disruption, expansion and integration. Their navigating of life as international graduate students demonstrates immersion and engagement in the attributes of deeply globalized societies, including high levels of geographic mobility, engagement in globalized fields of education, research and work, and the prolific use of networked technologies to achieve simultaneity of presence across locales. For some students, the dimension of raising children in a country different from their self-identified “home” added complexity to notions of belonging and identity. *Transit*, geographically, imaginatively, and in personal identities, was at the heart of international doctoral

students' experiences. At the same time, links to "home" territories and affiliations were meaningful and durable.

The student narratives tell us that international doctoral students are whole, growing, learning individuals in multiple dimensions of their lives, and they negotiate the opportunities and challenges provided through doctoral studies abroad from both unique and shared positionings. Transnational *space* is their shared context in which they question, affirm, and reshape their cultural identities, sense of belonging, and social relationships and reach back home to the familiar and out to the broader world. A particular university is their shared *place* within which they learn, question, exert agency, and accumulate many forms of experience as scholars and globally mobile individuals.

Although this study addresses multiple individual student cases within a single institutional case in Canada, there are reasons to expect that the themes, experiences, and implications discussed here may be generalizable to global institutions in other locales. The globalization of the higher education field has been seen to produce a convergence of major research institutions into an interconnected transnational field which shares many common attributes, including a cosmopolitan student population and globally interconnected research agendas (Marginson, 2008). While each institution clearly also retains unique and place-based characteristics that may limit generalizability of this study, a significant level of transferability can be expected between the experiences of students at one institution in this "global league" to other peer universities. The findings of this study generalize to broader theories of globalization that predict that the rise of transnational spaces (now exemplified in global universities) will lead to disruption of place-based identities for those that have immersive experiences within them.

The findings presented in this article support and extend Gargano's (2009) argument that international students have for too long been seen as a monolithic, undifferentiated population at universities, with their unique trajectories obscured in statistics or simple regional analyses. The narratives presented here embody the critique advanced by Gargano, that "cross-border education literature, specifically the international student mobility discourse, is bereft of significant and robust concepts that bring into view international student experiences and identity reconstructions, thereby homogenizing and generalizing the negotiations of international students when great dimensions of difference actually exist" (2009, p. 331). Her introduction of the "transnational social field" concept to the domain of international student experience helps us to understand these experiences as reflective of the complex influences of globalization on the higher education field. The rich narratives also provide insights that support her argument that scholars should "place student voices at the forefront of a discourse on student mobility" (2009, p. 343).

Concluding Remarks

Perhaps the most fundamental conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that while large scale forces of globalization are profoundly shaping international doctoral student trajectories, these forces are not homogenizing nor fully controlling of student experiences. The uniqueness of paths and multiplicity of narratives provided by students ultimately are a manifestation of the creative potential of globalization—for those who can access and navigate its "spaces of flows" (Castels, 1996).

The study contributes new perspectives in its focus on doctoral students as a uniquely positioned population in the globalized university and knowledge production regime and in its breadth of voices from students across multiple academic disciplines and home countries. The inclusion of individuals from the U.S. who are studying in Canada offers one of the first analyses of Americans as international doctoral students. It also explores the unique location of a Canadian univer-

sity within the globalized higher education field as a particular site within which international doctoral students are negotiating transnational spaces.

These students' stories also require us to reconsider what being an "international student" can mean and the breadth of learning and transformation that is inherent in doctoral study abroad. They are revealing of the ways, in a globalizing world, individuals consciously construct multi-dimensional cultural identities from their mobile experiences. The assumption that international doctoral students are traveling a direct path from their home country to a "host" country without significant periods in other countries while certainly true for many, is denying the complexity and multiplicity of many students' lives and identities in a globalizing world.

There is a persistent belief that the doctoral education experience should be single-minded and focused only on research productivity and knowledge development, and that doctoral students are not "here" to do anything but become experts in their discipline. This mistaken belief ignores the often "hidden" educational purposes, challenges, and transformative personal experiences of international doctoral students that reflect engagement in transnational social fields and affect every aspect of their trajectories through and beyond our universities. If doctoral education is increasingly meant to achieve globalization-inflected goals such as developing the next generation of disciplinary leaders (Golde, 2006) and preparing researchers to engage in team-oriented, interdisciplinary and international projects to solve real-world social problems (Mohrman, Ma, & Baker, 2008) its practitioners would benefit from knowing more about how students come to understand their lives, studies and identities in a globalizing world.

References

- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bilecen, B. (2013). Negotiating differences: Cosmopolitan experiences of international doctoral students. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43(5), 667-688.
- Brown, L. (2008). Language and anxiety: An ethnographic study of international postgraduate students. *Evaluation & Research in Education*, 21(2), 75-95.
- Brown, L. (2009). The transformative power of the international sojourn. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36(3), 502-521.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cohen, R., & Kennedy, P. (2007). *Global sociology* (2nd ed.). New York: New York University Press.
- Gargano, T. (2009). (Re)conceptualizing international student mobility: The potential of transnational social fields. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(3), 331-346.
- Glick Schiller, N., & Fouron, G. E. (1999). Terrains of blood and nation: Haitian transnational fields. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22(2), 340-361.
- Golde, C. (2006). Preparing stewards of the discipline. In C. Golde & G. Walker (Eds.), *Envisioning the future of doctoral education: Preparing stewards of the discipline*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Jackson, P., Crang, P., & Dwyer, C. (Eds.). (2004). *Transnational space*. London: Routledge.
- Kashyap, N. B. (2011). Graduate international students' social experiences examined through their transient lives. *College and University*, 87(1), 18-27.
- Kim, T. (2009). Transnational academic mobility, internationalization and interculturality in higher education. *Intercultural Education*, 20(5), 395-405.
- Kim, T. (2010). Transnational academic mobility, knowledge, and identity capital. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 31(5), 577-591.

Navigations of Identity and Belonging in a Globalizing University

- Koehne, N. (2006). (Be)Coming, (Be)Longing: Ways in which international students talk about themselves. *Discourse: Studies in Cultural Politics of Education*, 27(2), 241–257.
- Marginson, S. (2008). Global field and global imagining: Bourdieu and worldwide higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29(3), 303-315.
- Marginson, S., & van der Wende, M. (2007). *Globalisation and higher education*. OECD Education Working Paper No. 8, Paris: OECD.
- Mohrman, K., Ma, W., & Baker, D. (2008). The research university in transition: The emerging global model. *Higher Education Policy*, 21, 5-27.
- Mostafa, G. (2006). Learning and cultural experiences of Arab Muslim graduate students in a Canadian university. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 1(1), 36-53.
- Nerad, M. (2010). Globalization and the internationalization of graduate education: A macro and micro view. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 40(1), 1-12.
- Rizvi, F. (2010). International students and doctoral studies in transnational spaces. In M. Walker & P. Thomson (Eds.), *The Routledge doctoral supervisor's companion: Supporting effective research in education and the social sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Rizvi, F., & Lingard, R. (2009). *Globalizing education policy*. London: Routledge.
- Robinson-Pant, A. (2009). Changing academies: Exploring international PhD students' perspectives on 'home' and 'host' universities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28(4), 417-429.
- Shkedi, A. (2005). *Multiple case narrative*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Szelényi, K., & Rhoads, R. (2007). Citizenship in a global context: The perspectives of international graduate students in the United States. *Comparative Education Review*, 51(1), 25-47.
- Taylor, C. (2004). *Modern social imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Tharenou, P. (2010). Identity and global mobility. In S. C. Carr (Ed.), *The psychology of global mobility*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media.
- Torres, V., Jones, S., & Renn, K. (2009). Identity development theories in student affairs: Origins, current status, and new approaches. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 577–596.
- Trice, A. (2004). Mixing it up: International graduate students' social interactions with American students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(6), 671-687
- Van Mol, C. (2011). The influence of European student mobility on European identity and subsequent migration behaviour. In F. Dervin (Ed.) *Analysing the consequences of academic mobility and migration*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Biography



Jennifer Phelps, PhD, is currently the Assistant Dean, Student Administration and Strategic Initiatives in the Faculty of Graduate and Post-doctoral Studies at the University of British Columbia.