Global Citizenship: Climbing Out Of The Box[*]

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Abstract

Central to many models of global citizenship as a graduate attribute is the notion of competent cross-cultural exchange. These models often generate what might be termed a market view of culture in which cross-cultural exchange becomes a swop shop of apparently readable differences. Often these differences will concern faith, nation, dress, cuisine, business conventions and manners. There may be truth to the representations of differences of this kind but the danger is in reifying them into a system of classification that cannot handle a more complex understanding of difference. This article offers a contribution to the debate about such complexity.

Keywords: global citizen, graduate attribute, classification, ethnicity, diversity, difference, western, identity.

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1. Global Citizenship: Climbing Out Of The Box

Central to many models of global citizenship as a graduate attribute is the notion of competent cross-cultural exchange. These models often generate what might be termed a market view of culture in which cross-cultural exchange becomes a swop shop of apparently readable differences. Often these differences will concern faith, nation, dress, cuisine, business conventions and manners. There may be truth to the representations of differences of this kind but the danger is in reifying them into a system of classification that cannot handle a more complex understanding of difference.

The emphasis of my discussion is on this question of classification and on how we might conceptualise difference differently.

I have trawled through a number of University internationalisation strategy web pages in the English speaking world. All of them affirm a commitment to valuing diversity as an underpinning to good global citizenship and cross cultural awareness.   This commitment typically reads something like the following statement which I have adapted from a UK university:

> The University provides an inclusive and tolerant learning community based on acceptance, respect, understanding and appreciation of different cultures, and with a curriculum which includes international scholarship and cross-cultural capabilities.

In support of this value position many universities hold annual 'celebrating diversity' events. Here is a selection of activities taken from one UK university programme as a fairly standard example:

> International cuisine tent, Chinese Lion Performance, Tai Chi session, Zumba taster, Aashiyana Arts show, Rumanian folk dancing, and a Chip Pan demonstration from the local fire service.

I am aware that staging these sorts of events is hard work and their overarching aim is to generate a convival and warm space for a diversity of students to enjoy together. It does not much matter that the events are a hotchpotch of what students and societies are happy to organise. Their efforts make a valuable contribution to campus relations but do they also frame our readings of diversity in narrow ways? And do they it obscure from view some of the harder questions associated with diversity? Generally speaking, celebrations of diversity do not include debate about whether diversity is a self-evident good or whether it is an easily discernible dimension of human difference.

We clearly are situated in particular cultural formations that give rise to identifiably diverse customs and experiences at some broad level but I want to suggest that there is a danger of over-investing in these as determining markers of who we are. The notions of diversity

celebration or of 'cross-cultural' capability can be nuanced and subtle but it is often understood through simplistic taxonomies of difference such as those offered by Hofstede's (2001) conception of national difference (for a critique of Hofstede, see McSweeney 2002). There is a seductive attraction to these taxonomies because they give us easily readable ways of making sense of difference but a number of dangers attend belief in them. These dangers have much to do with any attempt to classify humanity.

It was, above all, Foucault who alerted us to the problem of classification systems and to their central place in framing how we come to know. He argues that all forms of classification are unstable and arbitrary because they are constructions that delineate the limits of our thinking at any given time or context.   In his much quoted preface to The Order of Things, (Foucault , 1994: xv) he offers a set of divisions in the animal kingdom claimed by the Spanish writer Jorge Luis Borges to be listed in a Chinese encyclopedia, among which are:

- belonging to the Emperor;

- embalmed;

- tame;

- fabulous;

- frenzied;

- drawn with a very fine camelhair brush;

- having just broken the water pitcher;

- that from a long way off look like flies'.

For Foucault, these animal divisions made sense within a given context even though they seem bizarre and unthinkable for the modern reader used to an alternative taxonomy for the animal kingdom. Yet our own systems of classification are also a form of cognitive and linguistic entrapment. In years to come readers may be shocked by our apparently pigmentocratic imagination in grouping people by skin colour. Foucault's point is that we think within systems of classification as if the categories reflected a clear truth rather than a historically constituted instance of sense-making with a built in shelf life.

While we can heed Foucault's cautions, it would be a mistake to condemn classification as such. Classification is an initial part of sense-making. It is hard to imagine how we can begin to make sense of the world without it. Thus if we want to grasp colours we need to know red from black and which colours are primary. This is an essential first step but it is also true that we will not advance our understanding of colour if we do not learn what happens when we bring colours together and mix them up. The issue is even more complex when it comes to human divisions.

We might want to start by assigning certain people to a category because, for instance, they have a shared vulnerability to racism. However, if we arrest our grasp of people at a point of classification even where the classification is reasonable, the danger is that we do what Hacking (20006) has called 'make up people' . In this making process cultural formation

transmutes into a quasi biological state. This is often done by taking a common set of socio-cultural experiences as a category of difference (say being a French citizen) and then reading that difference as an inherent characteristic of those assigned to this category. So we move from a set of people with a common set of rights in France to the notion of 'Frenchness' as an invariant ontological state.   This can become a conceptual journey from the social to the biological.

Hacking's own interest is in medical classifications which operate their own logic: thus a group of people with a shared experience of diabetes become constructed as 'diabetics' through a set of selective, naming and treatment processes. The point is not that people never bear a relationship with their category. Sometimes there is no relationship at all but often there is some relationship with the category assigned to certain people. There is considerable variation within groups that even sub categories cannot capture entirely. A good example of this is in ethnic monitoring categories. While there are some good reasons for ethnic monitoring, it is a system for shoehorning people into ethnic, national or colour coded boxes. Vertovec's (2007) demographic analysis of patterns of marriage and cohabitation suggests that we are in an age of 'superdiversity' which makes ethnic classification ever more problematic. This may be why increasing numbers of students are uncomfortable with assigning themselves to ethnic monitoring boxes (Cousin, 2002).

Quite apart from the difficulty of clamping moving targets into fixed boxes and the growth in hybrid identities, the effort to do so invites us to ethnicise, nationalise or colour code ourselves and to treat these as natural/essential properties of ourselves. As I discuss below, they can be seen to be the most salient part of who we are and this can set limits on our capacity to self-reinvent.

As Gorz (1989) has argued some sociologists appear to have forgetten that they have made up groups to associate roughly with particular people with a shared aspect and that no-one actually coincides with this aspect. We are bigger than any kind of classification system. By forgetting the roughness of the associations made, the group can get congealed into a firm entity. In this way, the group is made not by the possession of stable common properties but by our treatment of it as if it had stable common properties. It becomes something of a hyperreality. One result is to inhibit an appreciation of internal variation – whether we talk of the category 'diabetic', 'international student' or 'Afro-Caribbean'- and/or to reduce people to one aspect of themselves. While we have group characteristics that may be worth highlighting, we are also formed out of a range of personal characteristics that renders complex who we are. Sociologists are better at making sense of the former than the latter.

Writing of the absurdity and dangers of identity reductionism from racists, the novelist Philip Roth (2005:144) says of Anne Frank's family:

> Once a year the Franks sang a harmless Chanukah song, said some hebrew words, lighted some candles, exchanged some presents – a ceremony lasting about ten minutes – and that was all it took to make them an enemy.

At other times, continues Roth:

> The Franks could gather together by the radio to listen to concerts of Mozart, Brahms and Beethoven; they could entertain themselves with Goethe and Dickens and Schiller

The first set of experiences are represented as the most salient, squeezing out all the other dimensions that make them complicated human beings among other complicated human beings. They also squeeze out what we all share simply by virtue of our humanness. Poignantly, on this very point, Anne Frank (1993:259) writes in her diary:

> The time will come when we'll be people again and not just Jews!

To what extent do our formulations of diversity and cross-cultural awareness fully appreciate the dangers of putting people into cultural boxes?

In Bauman's (1991) view the neurotic endeavour to fit people into boxes is a hopeless quest to repress uncertainty by finding an unambiguous place for everyone. Indeed, some people voluntarily inhabit these boxes as a means by which they can script their lives with apparent certainties. Two particularly large boxes are those of west/non-west. Sen (2006) has argued that this binary is particularly dangerous and silly yet it is treated as a self-evident way of making sense of the world.

Notions of the west and its opposite appear a great deal in sense making about difference in higher education, One of the ironies in the usage of this binary is the inadvertent support it lends to an exaggerated view of western achievement. Much that is claimed as 'western' is often the outcome of erased contributions and inventions from the so-called 'non-west'. As Sen (2006) argues, subscribing to the notion that there is a discrete entity called 'western ideas' takes no account of how knowledge is generated and developed in different regions. Similarly, in her book Rethinking Modernity, Bhambra (2009) evidences global connectivities that undermine the idea of western ideas. These connectivities come from trade, travel, warfare, migration, expulsion and colonialism. The provenance of thought, inventions, discoveries, innovation, etc. can be rarely assigned to one place or tradition though it can often be claimed to be so. Western hegemony is an idea that gains potency if we believe it to be true. The consequences of adhering to sweeping categories can be devastating.

Sen (2006) argues that the bombing of the twin towers in New York can be traced to the representation of the 'west' as a sealed, coherent, omnipotent, and oppressive force. Indeed, the west/non-west binary, Sen suggests, produces a play of reciprocal demonization in which each side condemns the other. Islamophobia is hooked up with notions of the non-west as having values that are incompatible with those of the west. In the internationalisation of the curriculum literature (Caruana and Spalding (2006) there is sometimes a moralist binary in which all things western are felt to be tainted always with imperialism and all things non-western have some kind of victim status. Empire does leave a powerful stamp on regions and people but equally resistances to it leave their own imprint. It is also the case that empire is not limited to what is understood to be the west. Elsewhere I have elaborated on how we might rethink the concept of the west in the light of these kind of qualifications (Cousin,2011) but

raise these again because of the enormous hold the idea of the west/non-west binary has on contemporary thinking about difference. I now to turn to another popular concept through which difference is understood, namely that of identity.

There is a growing chorus of objection to the concept of identity. Badiou (2002) talks about this concept vulgarising sociology; Al-Azmeh (1993) talks of it producing a pseudo sociology and Sen (2006) talks of identity perspectives as creating the 'miniaturisation of people'. For Gilroy (2000) it succumbs to 'race' thinking and for Baudrillard (1993) it swops meaningful, singular differences for banal generalised ones. Here is a caution from a man (Malesevic, 2006:20) who experienced the horrors of ethnic classification in ex Yugoslavia:

> If social actors in their everyday life operate with the terms such as 'identity' 'ethnic identity' or 'national identity' as something self-evident and unproblematic this does not mean that a researcher should treat these categories in the same manner.

Malesevic argues that a mathematical concept (identity) has been thoughtlessly transposed to social science where it has little logical application. If anything, it would express our commonalities within a universalist reasoning rather than our posited differences. That is to say, if we follow the logic of mathematics according to which one quarter is identical to twenty-five percent then one French person is identical to one British person; their underlying properties in common are what is key.

A further thread to the critique of identity theories concerns the limited and reductive scripts they can encourage. There is a television programme in English speaking countries called 'Who do you think you are?'; this programme traces the genealogy of celebrities; it is compelling and often moving viewing. Part of the appeal of the programme is that it keys into a folk wisdom that we are whence we came. Provenance are us. When we meet new people, we are more likely to ask 'where are you from?' than 'where are you going'. People often talk passionately about their roots, forgetting perhaps that this is a metaphor from the plant world with which we have quite a lot of differences. A carrot is pretty much fixed to the place it has been sown; its inherent capability for travel is somewhat limited. Human beings are extremely mobile. I do not want to be too glib here because some people have been brutally uprooted for a variety of reasons such as that of persecution, expulsion, starvation and slavery. These are profoundly formative experiences of displacement that often prompt yearnings for a return to or celebration of 'home'. This is often about the rightful demand for safety. What is important is the degree to which provenance becomes a cover story for our achievements or attitudes.

People often state that they are 'proud to be' whatever nationality, etc. they are as if they had a hand in achieving a status that is assigned to them at birth. This form of identification can detract from a more reflexive construction of self. In their book The Language of Belonging, Meinhof and Galasinski (2005:65) interview those who live either side of German/Polish border; their aim was to understand more about how these people construct their identities out of a troubled past. They conclude that:

> One can speak of a 'grammar of identity' of socially available linguistic resources which, in a given context can be constructive of identity positions.

Families and communities narrativise their experience from a jumble of selective, often embellished memories, wounds, prejudices (e.g. the only good German is a dead one). This selective process is precisely what Fanghanel and myself (2010) found in our evaluation of a reconciliation project involving Israeli and Palestinian students. The aim of this project (based at a UK university) was to attempt to capacity build for peace by working with intelligent and compassionate young people from both sides of the middle east conflict. Here are the testimonies of two students we interviewed:

> If you are educated in the Jewish narrative, you are born in it, and that's what they teach you, you don't have a choice. The programme allows that there are different narratives, and then make up your mind about those different narratives (p.46)

> I never had the confidence to express my views because they were not based on knowledge of the history of the conflict and of the region; and also because of my own my cultural heritage, the things I was born into, that I grew up with but never really analysed academically and spiritually as well (.48)

There is a clear sense of an expanded 'grammar of identity'. The journey to such an expansion was not easy.   However through a process of difficult dialogue, expert lectures, joint social events and friendship formations alternative scripts emerged:

> When I see things, when I hear about things I have lost the ability to think about it only from the Israeli point of view [...] I really believe in humanising the conflict – putting humanistic values back into the system instead of the nationalistic values that control it now on both sides (p.48).

The journeys these students described were supported by skilful facilitation not least because the conflict was a constant live backdrop to the students' lives.   Admittedly, this was an exceptional project but in tempered form, the challenges transfer to more ordinary encounters on campuses.   In a report on 'campus relations: hate crimes and intolerance' the Equality Challenge Unit (2012:9) states:

> As environments of research and learning, HEIs have a special role in promoting and encouraging vigorous debate, free speech and freedom of enquiry within the law. This means HEIs need to be tolerant of a wide range of political, social, economic and scientific views, regardless of how unpopular, controversial or provocative these views are.

This suggests that we need to engage students in some of the more troubling aspects of what is defined as 'cultural difference'. If we fail to confront hard questions such as the point at which human rights issues are at stake (Phillips,2007) or where there is hostility between 'protected groups' then we fail to take advantage of the spaces universities provide to support 'vigorous debate'.

There are complex issues of power that invite respect for the contextual factors informing people's identity. Sometimes an assertive identity posture is a way of addressing prejudice. But we might want also to encourage resistance to what Hill (2000:23) has called a 'static genre of self' in which reflexivity and self-reinvention are squeezed out entirely, leading to the:

> 'posture of a self that convinces itself of its developmental completion, including its moral completion. This self refuses any type of modification, amplification, or meaningful metamorphosis in the face of unfamiliar experiences.

Hill seeks to establish a dynamic between our particular roots and our universal condition as humans.   He calls for a dialectic of participation and distantiation by which he means that students be encouraged to set aside where they come from in order to envision alternative destines. We can be mindful of our formative experiences but we need not be held by them. We carry with us elements of family, faith, place, etc. but, as I next discuss, differences are also singular.

Another theorist who is helpful to an alternative view of difference comes from Baudrillard(1993) who offers us a paradox nicely summarised by Pawlett (2007:152):

> It is upon the loss of difference that the cult of difference is founded.

The 'loss of difference' here concerns our singular differences which get submerged beneath what Baudrillard calls the 'cult of difference' expressed, for instance, in a multi-cultural exchange of food, fashion and folk dancing or simply in a Benetton choice of tee shirts. We consume difference rather than truly experience it.

I think that Baudrillard suggests a more radical view of difference, a difference which mutates through the friction of human encounters. In this way, difference is not an easily readable, static, rooted quality in the self, rather it is an outcome of relationships; it is wrought out of exchanges, not necessarily comfortable but always profound in some way. Ironically, cross-cultural exchanges can discourage depth of exchange if they are within a framework of cultural swopping then there is a kind of indifference at play, to quote Pawlett (2007:152) again:

> The politics of difference….are simultaneously the politics of indifference, of disengagement and the breaking of symbolic relations.

If we limit exchange to polite 'we do this, you do that 'conversations, we refuse more profound encounters for a superficial cultural relativism. And we could end up with what Sen has called mono-multiculturalism. Each of us wrapped in clothes of difference willing only to display them as markers of difference. Is this enough? If universities aspire to produce global citizens, they might want to devise diversity events that respond to the call of the Equality Challenge Unit for 'vigorous debate' as well as for Zumba tasters.

I will now draw my arguments to a close. To summarise, I began by calling attention to the dangers of cross-cultural awareness and diversity celebrations that encourage easy classifications. I have talked about the fact that humans do not sit obligingly in category boxes

and that if we entrap them in classifications that take no account of variation within groups, we end up with a misleading view of difference. I took the binary of west/non-west as an example of classification that calls for critical debate rather than easy acceptance. I raised problems concerning the notion of identity, suggesting that we be wary of the allure of provenance or roots as a form of self-explanation, particularly if this limits the script we write for ourselves. Finally, I offered some ideas inspired by Baudrillard's view that much that passes for 'difference' masks our deeper sources of difference, our singularity.

There is much that I have not discussed such as the insights we might take from postcolonialism, the debates on intersectionality and the problems that can attend universalism. Nonetheless I hope I have offered enough to prompt discussion about how we might conceptualise notions of difference underpinning that of global citizenship so that it exceeds the confines of cultural relativism.

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