Mobility Experiences put into Perspective with Cosmopolitan Practice

The Development of Cosmopolitanism

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INTRODUCTION

Like all students who spend time studying or conducting research abroad, Canadian students encounter cultural issues that cut across and impact our local societies. The proliferation of institutional educational programs that prepare students to adapt to foreign cultures and start new careers is currently a key priority in international education. This situation is directly linked to the challenge of providing education that is tailored to the demands of the 21st century (UNESCO, UC, CBIE, MELS, UL).[1] The purpose of this text is to show how anthropology can provide a fresh analysis of the practice of mobility and the critical consciousness sought after in higher education.

From an anthropological standpoint, I am interested in students' lived experiences during periods of study abroad and in the cultural and social benefits these periods have for the students themselves. I witnessed transformations in several individuals during my research and was often surprised and even touched by these life experiences and the learning that took place during consciousness-raising. This led me to a fundamental realization: these periods of study abroad and the representations they generate are worthy of further investigation from the students' perspective. These students do not see the world comprehensively; they see it at a variety of levels and scales. The meaning that emerges from examining their accounts will inevitably contribute to our understanding of the world's issues.

Little research has investigated students' own accounts and almost none has examined the links between cultural skills, which are autonomous reflections, and the practice of cosmopolitanism. Anthropology is well-positioned to study these experiential elements and investigate emerging consciousness-raising in depth. The complexity of the benefits of education raised in students' accounts enabled me to consider the types of autonomy, involvement and intercultural predisposition that should be encouraged during and after periods of study abroad.

To examine students' own accounts, I led a rich ethnological investigation that included over 80 interviews with 53 students who were enrolled in about 40 different programs at the three levels of education available at Université Laval. The cosmopolitanism I refer to in my research is non-political, horizontally structured, cultural in nature and appeals to sensibilities, as theorized in the work of Ulf Hannerz (1996, 2010). I have in mind an emerging cosmopolitanism that is expressed in the places, biographies, families, kinship, life stories and all other components belonging to students' individual

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1 See the list of acronyms on p. 8.

journeys that are observable in the practice of student mobility in higher education. In this text, I will first address the concept of cosmopolitanism by identifying the type of practice and identity it refers to in terms of mobility. This will make it possible to form links between the concept of the global abode and the reflexivity employed during periods of study abroad. Then I will outline how the anthropological methodology I used in my analysis allows for a new and fresh perspective on mobility. Finally, I will present some of my conclusions by identifying three student paths that are marked by reflection and repositioning. These three paths are one of the original contributions of my research, which leads to new ways of thinking about the benefits of mobility for our societies.

Revisiting the concept of cosmopolitanism required a contemporary theoretical framework that was suitable to my line of inquiry. I based my analysis on two important theoretical fields. Firstly, I used Anthony Giddens's (1987) theory of structuration because it facilitates the study of motivation, positioning and reflexive capacity, which are key to the interpretations that structure the practices related to periods of study abroad. Secondly, my research is based on the concept of cosmopolitanism proposed by Ulf Hannerz (2010). This theoretical framework allowed me to identify experiences and educational practices and more concretely expose the nuances of the flux of

intercultural significations and their interrelationships in higher education. As I show in my analysis of the accounts, the flux of global significations exists in a specific way in individuals who participate in intercultural experiences during their education. And, with regard to the flux of cultural significations and their interrelations during education, the perspectives of a cosmopolitan development lead to the acquisition of new sensibilities, which are examined in several important works that are devoted to improving essential markers and to the notion of "actually existing cosmopolitanism."

When it is transposed into the perspective of higher education and the practice of student mobility, the concept of cosmopolitanism becomes a relevant and contemporary tool for analysis that makes it possible to describe and explain the synergy between the cultural phenomena that are actualized during the education of students. It is not sufficient to say that students develop intercultural skills. It is also necessary to understand how aspects of their own culture are actualized through the flux of intercultural significations in interrelation with their own culture (studies, research, work, and social and family life), because that is where the actual benefits of this type of learning reside. The process at work in these periods of study abroad, as they are experienced by students, enabled me to expose the role of social forces at local and global levels, in order to identify the cultural variants that students

discover through what I consider to be cosmopolitan practices. For example, students' accounts reveal that through their contact with people from other cultures, they were required to explain the characteristics of their own culture (values, education, religion, rituals, health, housing, clothing, etc.) and were subsequently more interested in these characteristics upon their return. Based on these lessons, it turns out that in order to understand and appreciate one's own culture, it is necessary to experience other cultures.

By focusing my study on the necessity of analyzing the experiences of these mobilities in forming a more cosmopolitan view of the world and local knowledge, I hoped to show that when education is put into perspective by a reflexive movement that encourages concern about the self and other cultures, the resulting level of sensibility leads to a better understanding of broad social practices, even if it does not always lead to an affinity for the other culture in particular. The students' experiences show that these new skills are manifested in an era that is more open to cultural diversity and better anchored in training that is adapted to 21st century issues. This is also one of UNESCO's goals. It emphasizes the relevance of combining traditional and local knowledge and skills with scientific and technical programs and of taking national cultural values and the situation in each country into account in international activities (UNESCO 1998: articles 1d, 9c, 11b, 15).

As part of my research, I took into account a variety of works in order to situate and shape my interpretation of a cosmopolitan practice that is linked to the process of mobility, which implies a metacultural position for the students. These elements appear in a variety of forms, such as: the desire to engage with people from other cultures (Amit 2010; Amit and Dyck 2010; Appiah 1997; Hannerz 2010); other ways of thinking and being in an intellectual and aesthetic posture of openness to a range of cultural experiences (Gay y Blasco 2010; Molz 2006, 2007, 2008); a personal aptitude for finding one's bearings in other cultures (Noble 2009); or specialized skills such as the ability to expertly use a given system of significations (Cook 2012). They can also be manifested by remaining attached to one's own culture and territory of origin, and fabricating a home based on one of the numerous sources of personal signification encountered abroad (Molz 2008). Other forms include the ability to accept destabilization, even without preparation; or a variety of skills that allow a deep grasp of another structure of signification, which is most often presented as a confident, worry-free attitude in the face of the loss of sense (Nussbaum 2002; Appiah 1997; Cook 2012); the ability to put into practice and share acquired skills (Noble 2013); and the capacity to channel different local perspectives or what is picked up locally (Molz 2007).

In considering these various elements for my analysis of student accounts, I also studied other works that explore cosmopolitan practices. Some of these explain how cultural elements are integrated into travellers' practices. For example, in my own work, I am concerned with daily life as it relates to places of residence, culinary practices, and even some physical aspects of travellers. In her article "Global Abode: Home and Mobility in Narratives of Round-the-World Travel," Molz (2008) explores the notion of the "global abode" by situating her analysis at the intersection of mobility and the traveller's home to understand the traveller's relationship to the world. She proposes the concept of the "global abode" to encapsulate the interaction between mobility and home, and, in particular, the cosmopolitan attitude adopted by some travellers who claim to feel at home all over the world. Her analysis, like several others, indicates that home is materially and emotionally significant to discussions of emerging cosmopolitanism. To this effect, it is interesting to point out that the majority of students' accounts are consistent with the cosmopolitan sensibility of engaging culturally by appropriating home into the world (Ahmed 2000; Brah 1996; Castles and Davidson 2000; Duval 2004; Hage 1997; Rapport and Dawson 1998; White and White 2005). In addition, the overlapping themes of travel and electronic connectivity are another interesting example that emerges in the accounts analyzed in my study and in those analyzed by Molz (2008) when she metaphorizes, like Clifford (1997, 1998), the dwelling-in-travelling, which she calls the "online home." This virtually permanent connection with family and friends by way of electronic networks during mobility allows me to identify most students' concerns in terms of frequent use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, blog, Skype, etc.). More specifically, the students I met with during my research demonstrated that, in addition to being mobile abroad, they weaved their actions with new forms of electronic connectivity into their routines on a variety of levels in order to stay in touch with their place of residence. Moltz (2008) argues that this overlap, mobility and connectivity can facilitate the development of a cosmopolitan sensibility during the negotiation between the place of residence and the new location. This can translate into the ability for students to feel safer and more at ease during the period abroad and the feeling of not being too far away from home, no matter where they are in the world. Home thus becomes an important signifier that can provide not only safety, the development of feelings and control of normative stability, but also the possibility of developing a way of being more sensitive and developing multiple affiliations. The notion of "global abode" is inspired by a growing number of theoretical works that reject the association of mobility with uprooting, instead providing a more nuanced explanation of the gestures of attachment to home during mobilities (Ahmed et al. 2003; Brah 1996; Cresswell

2001; Gilroy 1993; Hannam et al. 2006; Kaplan 1996; Massey 1999; Szerszynski and Urry 2002). In asserting that the "global abode" is a cosmopolitan terrain, Robbins's (1998) analysis of traveller accounts also provides a detailed empirical report about the way that travellers around the world experience what he calls a cosmopolitan orientation. He even suggests that cosmopolitanism is not only an ideal of detachment, but also a way of being (based on "habits"), thinking and feeling emotions that are socially and geographically situated (Robbins 1998: 1–2). This existing cosmopolitanism represents a reality of attachments and detachments that implies the complexity of multiple affiliations (Robbins 1998: 3). The notion of the "global abode" is well-represented in various student accounts, and helps us understand how a majority of them, who are less inclined to leave their comfort zones, progress during mobility experiences. This helps determine the various attachments and detachments required for the emergence of cosmopolitanism.

By examining typical paths and accounts from my research at Université Laval, I was able to establish a connection between the meaning of an experience and the representations it generates in the student and their local community. That is what enabled me to explore the meaning of cultural elements in transformation in depth, and to address cultural dispositions that can foster transnational interconnections by being uniquely adapted and

more sensitive to the plurality of cultures, not as an overall intercultural predisposition, but as an emotional, intellectual and physical orientation toward belonging to a world that is rich and diverse in cultural nuances. The changes brought about in the students led me to identify this reflexive capacity in action and consider the ongoing cultural transformations in their local communities upon their return.

I also noticed that for the majority of the students interviewed, it was by reconfiguring their life path for the period of mobility, striving to find new bearings and adapting to a new daily routine that they were able to confront some of their false beliefs, biases, clichés and stereotypes. They perceived this reality by detaching from certain fixed ideas, like the need to appropriate this new side of themselves and find their place in a new environment abroad, and by learning how to position themselves in their relationships with others, investigating various roles, learning to find their place in different and larger cultural perspectives (friends, studies, career and travel) and learning how to test themselves by confronting some of their values (familial, religious, societal, etc.). For these students, it is the founding event for their own self-knowledge and their understanding of their own culture. Examining their accounts gives us a better understanding of this founding event and the characteristics of students who take this path during their education, where

the main goal is related not only to employment opportunities or travel, but also to the acquisition of autonomous reflection and actions that will make sense for their personal growth. These accounts demonstrate how this experiential process leads them to make good use of institutional tools to find security and position themselves in terms of the logistical aspects of their time abroad (housing, validation of course curriculum, enrolment, insurance, money, etc.). We also understand that for these students, the desire to feel free, independent and open to others spurs them to form links more quickly with students from all cultures. This is also how they learn different ways of seeing and doing things and what initiates the emergence of a self-transformation that reaches deeply held values and can foster openness.

Based on the tendencies I observed, I can show that the students who are most likely to develop what I call a cosmopolitan practice during their time abroad are those who show keen and engaged reflexivity in the organization of their social practices abroad and who get involved in their local communities upon their return. This means reflexivity is not simply self-awareness; it is also the typically human way of controlling the continuous flow of actions and engagements in social life. Being reflexive is [Translation] "the ability to continually employ, in daily life, a series of capacities for action, including the capacity to influence the capacities for action

employed by others" (Giddens 1987: 63). Action thus depends on a student's ability to "make a difference" in the system, to activate their life, to get involved in a sustainable and responsible way and to influence the course of social events. More concretely, reflexivity during mobility is expressed differently depending on the student's path. As shown in my thesis, the three typical student paths are identified based on three main markers: the core (student's characteristics, family and skills acquired), lived experiences and the reflexivity demonstrated before, during and after the mobility project. All these elements should be considered to foster the development of a cosmopolitan practice during periods of study abroad.

From this perspective, existing sensibilities that are specific to various cultural contexts can intensify (value system, new emotions, social involvement, etc.). These elements can be confirmed and encouraged by the intensity of the cultural integration experienced (language, traditions, rituals, values, creations, level of integration, etc.), the flux of communications, activities within transnational initiatives and organizations, local lifestyles and involvement with global issues (political, economic, environmental, etc.). By highlighting these elements and the material and affective elements and consequences of adopting a cosmopolitan perspective, we can foster learning that is more conscious and responsible for

the future. Leveraging student accounts is the best way of appreciating what happens during periods of study abroad. It also helps us understand how students reinvent their personal histories as they acquire reflexivity. Reflexivity may vary depending on the path and is a key that should be fostered in order to lead students to develop a cosmopolitan practice.

During my research, a concern was raised as to whether the phenomenon I was studying was a **cosmopolitan identity** or a cosmopolitan practice. At the end of my project, I can confirm that my study of students shows that it is indeed possible to use the term cosmopolitan identity. More specifically, a limited number of students who I call cosmopolites innately exhibited this identity, which is a matter of personal anchorage that makes considerable space for identity (Hannerz 1990). The student accounts clearly demonstrate this revealing fact. Also, what defines and differentiates cosmopolites from those who are in the process of developing is their profound attachment to their family roots and local culture. This makes them individuals who have both roots and wings, who show a degree of cultural sensitivity that is above the norm and who have the ability to make links with others, no matter their cultural origin. The characteristics that are specific to their path, such as perceptiveness, keen intelligence, strong creativity, social involvement, multilingualism and the traits of an astute globetrotter

or artist, determine their level of cosmopolitanism. It is worth adding that what characterizes these students in a university context is the fact that their desire to study abroad is not motivated by the need to acquire autonomy or travel, as was the case for the majority of students I interviewed. Rather, they are motivated be the idea of investing in a personal social, cultural or artistic educational/research project that could significantly impact their social development.

Cosmopolitanism is thus presented here as a practice that can vary and take on different forms as an adjustable analysis tool for research. The case of students who are mobile during their education is an attractive and underexplored terrain from the perspective of motivations, skills and reflexivity. The goal of these cosmopolitan practices was not to determine whether or not the students were capable of entering into contact with people from other cultures, but rather to grasp the deeper meaning of cultural elements in transformation. This cultural disposition, in addition to embodying the contemporary climate of unfettered mobility, offers a sort of detached urban sophistication that fosters transnational interconnections by being uniquely and sensitively adapted to the appreciation of the plurality of cultures, not just as an intercultural predisposition, but, above all, as a more sensitive orientation toward belonging to a rich and diverse world.

Although there has been a wide range of research on internationalization over the past 20 years that has been actively interested in these topics, this growing phenomenon has not allowed for exploration of the experience and the representations it generates for the student. As argued by Amit (2010: 17), "anthropologists need to investigate, both as engaged participants as well as ethnographers, policies such as internationalisation that are shaping the institutions in which many of us are working." This research project was thus born from the need to make space for student accounts in an attempt to understand the complexity of the experiences that arise and interlock with their developing education practices. My research is located at the intersection of several debates in anthropology about what cosmopolitanism is, the heart of debates that were dominated by categorization and the dichotomy between identity and practice. Despite the proliferation of categories and work, Hannerz recognizes that this concept remains fuzzy (2006: 5). This is where my study makes a contribution, because it is precisely these different forms of cosmopolitanism that make it a variable, open and attractive tool for analysis for researchers. Student accounts could help clarify this concept. But as indicated by Pollock et al. (2000: 577), who are not sure what the concept really signifies, we can conclude that it

is an object for study, a practice and a project that must continue to be enriched.

Student accounts enabled me to undertake a more contemporary reflection about mobility practices and the manner in which the anthropology of reflexivity can theorize a link between the meaning of an experience and the representations it generates for the student. The consideration of the students' point of view seemed essential to properly understand these evolving educational practices. This putting into context has thus become essential for reflecting on the problematization of significations that contribute to the emergence of what I believe is a cosmopolitan practice.

The positive outcomes for institutions, educational programs, teachers, researchers, students and society in general is the reinforcement of perspectives related to more sensitive human development and the development of a more conscious and sustainable social responsibility with respect to global issues, while stimulating the creativity necessary to find solutions that are better adapted to our society. However, without quality pre-departure training for all students who study abroad and the reintegration of these experiences within the community upon their return, the aims of the educational objectives and consciousness-raising are lost. These periods abroad are without a doubt the

advent of autonomous reflection and action which will later take on their full meaning and be supported and fostered by political institutions and authorities. By making good use of institutional tools to secure and position students in diverse cultural contexts, this first educational experience predisposes them to openness and the willingness to recognize the other. Developing strategies, seeing oneself as part of a whole and understanding that individuals navigate in their own ways in a sort of cultural labyrinth by crossing new borders within themselves and into other cultures, represent a practical consciousness and a situational consciousness that are inseparable and that are part of what could be the emergence of the cosmopolitan condition. The fact of living here and now (locally) with the world in mind becomes, for the student, both context and projection. All students who study abroad must understand before they leave that they rebuild themselves to various degrees. Above all, my analysis shows that they are more reflexive and more creative upon their return, regardless of their path. The educational world needs creativity, and these periods of study abroad stimulate it.

Doctoral dissertation in anthropology. Université Laval. Also available on the Université Laval website: www.theses.ulaval.ca

LIST OF ACRONYMS

UC: Universities Canada
(New name)

CBIE: Canadien Bureau for
International Education

MELS: Ministère de l'Éducation, du
Loisir et du Sport du Québec

UL: Université Laval

UNESCO: United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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From 1998 to 2000, Ms. Martin worked with students and the administration at the faculty of political science as an educational programing officer for the graduate and undergraduate levels. Since 2000, she has worked at Université Laval's International Office, where she is responsible for managing mobility programs and developing international partnerships. She also represents the International Office at international conferences and as part of international delegations.

Ms. Martin was key to Université Laval's reception of the 2008 CBIE award for the best mobility program in Canada. Ms. Martin is a member of numerous international educational organizations and was a member of the CBIE board of directors from 2006 to 2009. As a guest speaker for numerous associations and at Canadian universities, she has presented a variety of strategies for developing international partnerships, innovative models for mobility programs, management tools and her doctoral research on the internationalization of education. During this period Ms. Martin also participated in delegations and international conferences in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas.