Grounding globalities in the cosmopolitan practices of youth

By

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I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis is my own work, conducted under normal supervision.

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Abstract

This thesis moves beyond abstract approaches to cosmopolitanism by showing how young people’s relationships with mobility and the Other are enacted in emplaced material-discursive practices. Cosmopolitanism has emerged as a significant feature of contemporary education in addressing the ways global mobilities are transforming the social spaces in which youth learn and live. For example, the Australian government discusses the Australian education system in terms of meeting the needs of the country’s ‘global future’, aspirations commonly captured in policy documents under the banner of ‘global citizenry’ (Rizvi, 2006). This is also reaffirmed in educational policy that regularly believes that youth need to be educated to develop cosmopolitan skills and practices to engage with an abstract ‘global’ space through political and prescriptive frameworks that outline what it means to be a ‘moral’ and ‘good’ global citizen. This understanding of youth regularly silences alternative ways of being and of becoming cosmopolitan in favour of universalist conceptions of cosmopolitanism prescribed by hierarchical knowledge systems and forces. These competency-based frameworks also divide youth into social categories, such as those who are cosmopolitan and those who are not.

Extending in a new direction, my thesis proposes an emergent place-based approach that understands cosmopolitanism as a situated material-discursive practice. By employing non-representational and new materialist perspectives, or what has been referred to as a ‘more-than’ approach, I show how bodies and ‘everyday’ body–place relations are implicated in youth’s cosmopolitan ‘becomings’ (Barad, 2003; Harrison, 2000; Thrift, 1999). A major focus in my thesis is thus to render visible the ways youth form relations to globalised matter and the Other through their embodied or ‘lived’ place-making practices and the affective intensities produced through such body–place relations. Moreover, I address the ways such practices are entangled in broader material-discursive assemblages that constitute their social imaginaries of self, Other and world. Researching with 20 youth from a co-educational performing arts high school in a major city of New South Wales, Australia, my mobile ethnographic study employed an analysis inspired by the work of Karen Barad (2003) and her theory of a ‘performative metaphysics’. By attending to the material-discursive practices that constitute youth’s place-making projects, I
hope to interrupt normalised views in education about the ways youth’s cosmopolitan practices are produced and practised. Moreover, I wish to forward the utility of research based on the interrogation of matter (including bodily matter) in the analysis of youth’s cosmopolitan practices.