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## Post 7 of #GPC@25: What's in a name? *A feminist geography critique of study abroad trends*

by Jade Lansing and Rebecca L. Farnum

The seventh post in our series celebrating Gender, Place and Culture turning 25, is by Jade Lansing and Rebecca L. Farnum. Jade is a freelance researcher, and former manager of the Moroccan field school discussed in this blog post. Rebecca is a doctoral candidate at King's College London, where she examines environmental peacebuilding in the Middle East and North Africa. She worked with the field school as a case study in her dissertation. Blog 7 is based on a co-authored [article on statecentricism and inequity in study abroad in the \*International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning\*](#) and explores how understandings of trends in study abroad schemes can be enhanced by the theories and values underpinning feminist geography.

*To find out more about how the journal is marking it's 25th year, you can read Editor Pamela Moss's post [here](#). Please also follow us on Twitter and Facebook and include the hashtag #GPC@25. If you'd like to contribute to the series, please contact us at [gpcat25@gmail.com](mailto:gpcat25@gmail.com).*

Study abroad has become a fundamental rite-of-passage in forming conscientious, globally-aware citizens. Stakeholders posit that learning outside of one's homeland challenges students to think critically, adapt to new environments, and develop vital intercultural communication skills.<sup>[1]</sup> Embedded within this pitch is the idea that foreign spaces inherently facilitate a new and beneficial way of learning. In [a recent article in the \*International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning\*](#), we question this assumption, with particular attention to how the naming and narration of study locales undermines the stated goals of equitable, nuanced intercultural exchange.<sup>[2]</sup> A central narrative of feminist geographies calls attention to how the naming of spaces reflects elite, colonial, male, and heteronormative values and boundaries. Katherine McKittrick decries these categorizations as "social landscapes that presume subaltern populations have no relationship to the production of space."<sup>[3]</sup> The uncritical use of terminology created by Western hegemonic discourses of 'the other' can reify and legitimise imperialist frameworks, further enabling political, social, and economic inequalities. Ideological regimes limit the very possibilities of ideas, categories, and identities, silencing less powerful voices by forcing them into narratives that speak for them without reflecting their realities.<sup>[4]</sup>

Unfortunately, these namings are the foundation of many study abroad programmes. Most are explicitly advertised as an educational experience of a state – especially in ‘developing’ states. Courses deal broadly with “development in India”, “healthcare in Brazil”, and “tropical agriculture in Sri Lanka”.<sup>[5]</sup> Students are invited to “study Morocco” rather than discover Marrakech or explore Mediterranean continuities and divergences. The global study abroad sector thus has a dominant discourse that frames overseas learning in the clear-cut ‘packaging’ of country-based spaces. In the absence of critical reflection on how borders, institutions, and ideas come to be packaged together, this framing reproduces real and imagined realities of the nation-state, presented as externally distinct and internally homogeneous. Building educational curricula around these constructions of space reifies colonial dynamics that undermine local communities’ voices, reinforcing global inequalities and strengthening hegemonic centres of knowledge production.<sup>[6]</sup> Within programme structures and curricula that narrate their lives and livelihoods for them, host communities are asked to provide the experience of an ‘authentic’ other – becoming caricatures for a narrative drawn by the Oriental fantasies of sending universities.

Amy Allen’s feminist theory of power identifies three forms of relations: power over (domination and control), power to (capacity to cause an outcome), and power with (collective action and solidarity).<sup>[7]</sup> Applied to study abroad discourse: we can speak over (about ‘the other’), speak to (unilaterally address), or speak with (engage in equitable exchange and honest conversation) people. If study abroad aims to form conscientious global citizens, practitioners should consider planned interactions of ‘speaking with’ (rather than about or to) local communities as critical pedagogical tools. Locally led sessions, facilitated dialogues, and communal meals give stronger voices to host communities and leave lasting impacts on visiting students. Reshaping programme schedules and aims in these ways helps reframe the underlying value systems that define educational experiences abroad.

Like gender theory, education should seek “not the study of what is evident” but “an analysis of how what is evident came to be”.<sup>[8]</sup> Critical approaches to global education should encourage students to deconstruct narratives of how states and spaces are formed, as well as their own experiences, to examine a dynamic – rather than self-evident – world.

<https://genderplaceandculture.wordpress.com/2018/04/25/post-7-of-gpc25-whats-in-a-name-a-feminist-geography-critique-of-study-abroad-trends-by-jade-lansing-and-rebecca-l-farnum/>

For insight on how a local [Ethnographic Field School in Morocco](#) has challenged and engaged with these dynamics, see [the aforementioned article](#). We invite comments and critiques.

## Endnotes

[1] See, for example: Association of American Colleges and Universities (2017) 'Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility'.

Online. <http://www.aacu.org/SharedFutures/index.cfm> (accessed 8 March 2017);

Lewin, R., ed. (2009) *The Handbook of Practice and Research in Study Abroad: Higher Education and the Quest for Global Citizenship*. New York: Routledge.

[2] Lansing, J. and Farnum, R.L. (2017) 'Statecraft and study abroad: Imagining, narrating and reproducing the state'. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 9 (1): 3–17. DOI 10.18546/IJDEGL9.1.02.

[3] McKittrick, K. (2006), *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. p. 92.

[4] Spivak, G.C. (1988) 'Can the subaltern speak?'. In Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (eds) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan, 271–313.

[5] Michigan State University (2016). 'Program Search'.

Online. [studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/programs/](http://studyabroad.isp.msu.edu/programs/) (accessed 17 November 2016).

[6] Hangen, S. and Sen, R. (2016) 'Negotiating Time and Space on a Study Abroad Program in South India'. *Journal of Cultural Geography* 33:1.

[7] Allen, Amy (1998) 'Rethinking Power'. *Hypatia* 13 (1): 20-41.

[8] Mikdashi, M. (2012) 'How Not to Study Gender in the Middle East'. *Jadaliyya* 21 March. Online. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4775/how-not-to-study-gender-in-the-middle-east> (accessed 8 February 2017).

## Author Biographies

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*Jade Lansing* is a freelance researcher, translator, and teacher. She served as Dar Si Hmad's Ethnographic Field School Manager for two years, helping groups of students and visiting researchers learn about Southwest Morocco's diversity and environment. She has an MA in Middle East Studies, with concentrations in anthropology and education, from the American University in Cairo and a BA in International Relations from Lewis & Clark College.