

Pedagogy and the Other: Discursive Production in Study Abroad

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Abstract

This paper explores the study abroad classroom as a site of discursive production about the non-western world by western educational tourism practitioners, using the American program Semester at Sea as a case study. Through a frame analysis of fieldnotes gathered on Semester at Sea's curricular practices, the study concludes that the program both reinforces and resists colonialist ways of seeing the world through its representations of destination cultures, inside and outside of the formal classroom. It ultimately argues that educational tourism programs like study abroad must be more reflective about the ways they frame destinations for participants, if they wish to truly live up to their noble missions of promoting cross-cultural understanding, respect, and harmony.

Key words: study abroad, educational tourism, discourse, representation, postcolonial theory, frame analysis.

Introduction

Travel is often imagined in romantic terms as a direct visceral experience in which one leaves the comfortable surroundings of home to reach beyond, to engage the senses, to see the world *for oneself* and emerge somehow changed—seasoned from the journey. Such a myth of individual adventure and personal development is appealing to the psyche, but it extracts the traveler from the complex sociospace of which she/he is inevitably a part. Our existence in today's hypermediated world, in which we are constantly bombarded with visual information from every direction, impacts our consciousness, and it ensures that when we visit destinations—even those very remote from our ordinary life spaces—we are never really “seeing them for the first time.” Likewise, we are never truly experiencing toured places in a direct and unmediated way while journeying, for the experience of travel is always in the process of being framed in some way, through the narratives of tour guides who lead us through the destinations we are visiting, the guidebooks we clutch during the journey, or simply the interplay between our tourism encounters and our existing mental frameworks as we try to assimilate what we are experiencing in a way that makes sense vis-à-vis that which we already know.

Exhibiting an increasing recognition of these ideas, the tourism literature has, over the past two decades, frequently taken up concern with issues of representation in travel, often from a postcolonial studies perspective. It has often been noted that tourism contributes to the social construction of non-western people and cultures as exotic, primitive, sensual, servile, and dependent—depictions which buttress a broader western superiority ideology that functions to legitimate power and resource imbalances (e.g., Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Chang & Holt, 1991; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). This outcome occurs through multiple and mutually reinforcing practices, as tourism brokers first employ established representations of destinations for promotion, and then produce sites in accordance, to meet tourists' expectations (Buck, 1977;

Bruner, 2005). Thus, while many scholars hold the hope that tourism can serve as a force for enhancing cross-cultural respect, compassion, and harmony within our broad human family, it is increasingly being recognized that particular contemporary tourism practices may in fact do the opposite, and that such practices need to be identified and overcome in order to successfully turn tourism toward the noble end of contributing to conditions more fertile for peace-building (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010).

The question of tourism's current and potential relationship to peace-building is a complex one, not least of all because peace is itself a loaded term that tends to be interpreted in different ways by different people. Although peace may be associated in the popular imagination with simply an absence of war or political violence, scholars from the domains of peace and conflict studies tend to stress the insufficiency of this definition (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010). Instead, they emphasize the notion of "positive peace" (Salazar, 2006; Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010), which involves not only the absence of war but the presence of positive conditions of social justice that allow for the flourishing of human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011). When people lack the basic resources they need to live healthy and productive lives, and when they lack the opportunity for education, free speech, and meaningful civic involvement, then their capabilities are constrained in such a way that they are not experiencing the essence of peaceful living in all its fullness.

It is a basic contention of postcolonial theory that people's real opportunities to develop and exercise their capabilities often continue to be hampered in the contemporary world because of the ideological baggage of colonialism (Mishra & Hodge, 1991; Thomas, 1994). Although formal political colonialism is today fortunately dead in most of the world, postcolonial scholars argue that the logic used to legitimate imperialist projects in the past is alive and well. Just as in centuries past, non-western people and cultures tend to be constructed in western media products as "exotic Others": primitive, backwards, superstitious, irrational, despotic, hypersexual, childlike—in short, everything that supposedly rational, civilized, democratic, enlightened westerners are not. Such media characterizations militate against creating conditions of "positive peace" because, when people view humanity through "us–them" binaries (and especially when those binaries are loaded to create a superiority complex on one side of the equation), it is harder for them to empathize with people they feel are "not like them," to believe that those people experience suffering in the same way and have the same claim to rights and resources as they themselves do, and to perceive a sense of responsibility regarding how their own behaviors and choices affect those "Others" (Rorty, 1989). Therefore, it is imperative to closely monitor cultural representations circulating in the western media about the rest of the world, as these images and descriptions feed imaginaries that have real consequences for how people make sense of their place in the world and understand their relationships with and responsibilities toward other members of the human family. Given that tourism is a major social context through which postcolonial imaginaries are fed in the contemporary world (Pratt, 1992; Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Hall & Tucker, 2004; Amoamo, 2011), work on peace-building through tourism must take issues of tourism discourse into consideration.¹

Thus far, most empirical work on both tourism media representations and the framing of destinations through management choices has focused on commercial or government tourism brokers and their clients. Commercial travel agencies are profit-driven enterprises, and government tourism bureaus are charged with selling destinations in order to generate economic

¹ Indeed, Moufakkir and Kelly (2010) include the category of "prejudice," which comprises issues of cross-cultural encounters, as one of the seven research directions currently contributing substantially toward understanding the pursuit of peace through tourism.

development (e.g., Bruner, 1991; Cohen, 1995). Such organizations thus have a financial motive to employ dominant representations to sell destinations—to show tourists what they expect to see. However, travel brokers exist in the non-profit sector as well, and some even advance an overt humanitarian agenda. A prime example is university study abroad. University study abroad programs are typically not profit-seeking entities, they strive to situate foreign travel in a critical context, and they often take the dismantling of stereotypes and the promotion of meaningful cross-cultural communication and global citizenship as explicit program objectives (McCabe, 1993; Cohen, 2003; Lewin, 2009). Do such programs differ from other types of travel which have been demonstrated by scholars to perpetuate the western imaginary? In other words, do they open up new discursive possibilities for understanding non-western people and cultures in more socially healthy ways, and thus serve as sites of resistance to current hegemonic ways of seeing the Other, or, conversely, do they merely echo the discourse of mainstream tourism enterprises and therefore serve as another forum for the essentialization of marginalized people and cultures by the West? Do they do both at once?

This paper seeks to explore this question through a critical deconstructive reading of the instructional practices of one popular American study abroad program, Semester at Sea, which is introduced in detail below. In his celebrated radical critique of contemporary education *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (2000) argues that the classroom is never a neutral space, but rather is inherently political, because it is a space where particular ways of seeing the world are advanced, while others are eclipsed, all within the context of power that characterizes the teacher–student relationship. Indeed, many have argued that higher education, contrary to its rhetoric as constituting a space of free and critical thought, often instead serves as merely one more technology of the dominant ideological system, which in the contemporary moment is characterized by an interesting and dangerous mix of materialist, neoliberal, and neocolonialist leanings (Aronowitz, 2000; Giroux, 2007). Thus, the study abroad classroom is a very important space to analyze because it can help us to understand how issues of tourism, education, representation, and power come together to produce or resist particular understandings of the world that have implications for the pursuit of cross-cultural respect, harmony, and peace.

Semester at Sea

Semester at Sea (SAS), the program that was used as a case study in this research, is a comparative global education study abroad program operated by the non-profit Institute for Shipboard Education, which was affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh at the time when this research began, but which is now administered by the University of Virginia. The program was created out of the recognition that we live in an increasingly interdependent world, and it seeks to promote opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and understanding between various cultures. Particularly important to the program is the concept of providing its participants with an international education that is rooted in direct contact with people and their cultures. Consequently, the program's commitment to global education is advanced through a combination of academic and experiential programming which seeks to provide participants with the opportunity to develop their understanding and respect of global commonalities and interdependence and to become more aware, concerned, and committed global citizens.

Participants in the SAS program spend a semester living on a cruise ship, outfitted as a university campus, which travels to approximately ten countries, most of which are located in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East (although approximately two European countries are often included in the itinerary). Students attend classes in a variety of academic disciplines

during days when the ship is traveling (about one-half of the semester) and visit destination countries when the ship is in port, spending approximately one week in each country on the itinerary. Students are required to enroll in a minimum of four courses while traveling with the program—three electives and one class titled Core, an upper-level geography course meant to introduce students to the world as a system and to orient them to key issues of importance to destination countries. Core meets every day the ship is at sea, whereas other courses meet on alternating days, termed “A” and “B” (days of the week lose all meaning while sailing with Semester at Sea).

While in port, the program permits students to travel in a variety of ways. First, package tours are available through the shipboard travel agent. These tours are usually approximately three to four days in length and often involve taking a flight from the port city to another area of the destination country in order to visit a famous landmark, such as the Taj Mahal or the Great Wall of China. While on these tours, students travel in a group, and all transportation, lodging, and meals are provided and included in the price of the tour. In addition to tours to famous monuments, nature trips are also available, such as safaris, desert camel treks, and tours through Amazonian rain forests. Such nature tours also frequently include cultural attractions, such as having tea with Bedouins, watching craft demonstrations, attending artistic performances, or viewing enactments of traditional cultural rituals. In addition to large package tours, the shipboard travel office also offers daytrips and overnights (by charter bus), which again are all-inclusive and typically involve visits to cultural monuments and/or events and performances.

Second, travel options known as “field practica” are available. Field practica are professor-led visits to sites in or near the port city. Most last a few hours (although some multisite practica last a full day) and typically involve visiting institutions in host countries, such as schools and universities; houses of worship; hospitals; orphanages; venues for the arts; and sites of historical, political, or ecological importance. Occasionally, they also include visits to private homes or neighborhoods (including overnight visits). The purpose of these visits is to expose students to particular aspects of life in the host countries in an academic context. Generally, the practica involve SAS professors and experts from the host culture leading students through tours of sites or institutions and providing information to help students interpret what they are seeing. Students are encouraged to ask questions throughout the tours, and they typically participate actively. In some instances, formal discussions are hosted between practica participants and individuals affiliated with the visited institution; for example, I attended one practicum which involved meeting with a group of literature students from an Indian university to discuss postcolonial feminist poetry and fiction and another which involved meeting with women’s rights activists in Morocco. In other instances, students attend practica to engage in aid work; for example, participants in my research reported volunteering at orphanages in India and South Africa and at a school for deaf children in Vietnam. In general, though, practica are developed on the model of the school field trip. They are meant to be overtly educational and to expose students to aspects of destination countries beyond what they would encounter in typical tourist experiences.

Finally, students have the option to travel independently in destination countries. They can access resources from the shipboard travel agency or make plans entirely on their own. The only stipulations are that they can not rent cars or motorcycles, that they can not leave the destination country, and that they must be back on board the ship two hours before it is scheduled to depart. Many students opt to travel independently, typically with friends met on the voyage, and their experiences are too diverse to easily summarize. Broadly speaking, some journey far from the port city and some stay near. Some lodge in hotels or hostels, some stay with friends or relatives living in the host country, and some camp out (either legally or illegally) in parks or on beaches. Some

seek out local cuisine, whereas others dine at McDonald's or the Hard Rock Café or subsist on inexpensive snacks carried in their knapsacks. Some visit famous sites or attend performances, some find willing locals to show them around or pay cab drivers or tour guides to do the same, some engage in physical adventure experiences like skydiving or parasailing, some linger in plazas or at café tables, some simply wander the streets with no agenda, and many go shopping. Thus, while in port, students can purchase travel packages from the program's shipboard travel agent, enroll in field practica, make arrangements to explore the host countries on their own, or create any combination of these options.

As noted, Semester at Sea is operated by the Institute for Shipboard Education (ISE). Founded in 1976 on a grant from international businessman and independent ship owner C.Y. Tung, ISE works in conjunction with a land-based university sponsor in order to coordinate the SAS program. ISE holds financial and administrative responsibility for determining the curriculum, selecting faculty, granting credit, and issuing transcripts, whereas the sponsoring university serves as the entity through which credits are granted and provides the program with an academic dean for each voyage. SAS was originally sponsored by the University of Colorado at Boulder, and then for over two decades by the University of Pittsburgh; in the summer of 2006, it came under the aegis of the University of Virginia. SAS hosts approximately 650 undergraduate students, hailing from about 280 universities, per voyage, and runs three voyages per year. For the most part, the voyages tend to attract white, upper-middle-class, traditionally aged American undergraduates, probably largely because of the program's cost: as of fiscal year 2007–2008, roughly \$19,000 for the fall or spring voyage, and proportionately less for the shorter summer-term trip (financial aid is available for a limited number of students). This figure is certainly not unreasonable in a technical sense, given the program's inclusion of tuition, room and board, and travel to ten countries on four continents, but nevertheless, it is clearly prohibitive to many. SAS also tends to attract participants who are at least reasonably diligent in their studies. Although there are no hard and fast rules for admission to the program, admittance is based on an analysis of academic transcripts and of an essay written by prospective students about an issue of personal interest to them, which they feel to be of global importance.

The Semester at Sea program has received limited attention in the academic literature. Scholarly inquiry into the program has focused primarily on the question of its ability to generate personal growth in participants (Dukes, 1985; Welds & Dukes, 1985; Dukes, et al., 1988; Dukes, et al., 1994) and to encourage their development of a "global perspective" (McCabe, 1993). Modest support has been found for the program's ability to achieve each of these ends, although this conclusion is, of course, dependent on the metric used to gauge such outcomes. To my knowledge, no published studies beyond my own work have yet attempted to explore Semester at Sea, or study abroad in general, as a site of perpetuation of or resistance to colonialist discourse.

Study Abroad and Cultural Production

In this study, I conceptualize the Semester at Sea program as a site of cultural production. I view the program (and tourism, in general) as a discursive and performative space (Bruner, 2005) in which ways of seeing, understanding, and relating to non-western people and cultures are created and buttressed, as well as a space in which hegemonic ideologies and ways of behaving are challenged and resisted. Although, for the purpose of this study, I chose to focus on narratives produced by and through Semester at Sea through its educational content, I also recognize that the program is not the only actor holding sway over cultural production at this site. In facilitating cultural encounters for its students, Semester at Sea cooperates with a large number of agents,

including individuals and organizations, located throughout the world, and each of these agents bears its own ideological agenda and political-economic affiliations. For example, Semester at Sea contracts various individuals in leadership positions (e.g., diplomats, social justice organizers, spiritual leaders) to address the student body while the ship is traveling. As noted, the program also provides professor-led field practica for interested students by coordinating visits to local public and private institutions, such as hospitals, universities, cultural centers, historic sites, houses of worship, and private individuals' homes, as well as to various cultural events and performances. Excursions in which students participate in charity work at local organizations are also offered. Also as noted, SAS hires a travel agent to sail with the program; the agency he/she represents coordinates travel packages with tourism brokers (e.g., airlines, hotels, tour guide services) in destination countries, which students can purchase in advance. The on-board travel agent also provides advice to students who wish to travel on their own, and of course students can also choose to explore host countries independently, without seeking the advice of the travel agent or any other SAS personnel (and many take this option). Thus, in-port student activities range from highly managed to highly spontaneous, and much variation also exists regarding the degree to which the Semester at Sea program has power over the terms of the encounter; however, even the encounters which are most heavily managed and controlled by SAS still involve some degree of negotiation with residents of the host cultures, as such individuals clearly possess agency, even if this agency is sometimes severely constrained by political-economic pressures, such as the need to generate profit or to maintain good relations with SAS, or by ideological hegemony (i.e., local purchase into problematic ways of reasoning about one's own culture and its relationship to other cultures). Clearly, power relations internal to local societies also play a role, as some members of destination communities have more power to represent the host culture to visitors than others (for a theoretical exploration of this issue contextualized in one South Korean community, (see Jeong & Santos, 2004). Thus, in actuality, cultural production at the site of the Semester at Sea program unfolds in various and complex ways, at numerous locations, and through the physical and ideological labor of various agents of action, and the discourse produced in SAS's classrooms and through its other organized educational activities is but one piece of the puzzle.

Methodology

This paper is one product of a much larger project, with which I have been continuously involved for many years—a case study in which I have been seeking to explore SAS broadly as a site of perpetuation of or resistance to colonialist discourse. This larger project involved several sources of data, including SAS's promotional imagery, student photography taken in program destinations, notes gathered from participation in the program, and in-depth interviews conducted with students and former program staff. The data used to explore the curricular representational practices discussed specifically in this paper constituted near-transcript-quality fieldnotes from lectures given in the program's central course ("Core," as discussed above) and from various field practica and guest presentations taken on a voyage near the turn of the millennium, on which I traveled as a student—but it is important to note that my interpretations were obviously influenced by the sum total of all of the data in which I have been immersed throughout the course of the larger project.

I used frame analysis, which has its origins in the work of Goffman (1974), as my approach for analyzing the fieldnotes considered here. According to Goffman, humans do not think in unconstrained ways; rather, we organize our thoughts and interpret our experiences in light of what we already knew previously. Similarly, communication sources, such as the mass media or

educational institutions, tend to present subjects, events, and concerns in patterned ways which are related to broader societal ideologies and material conditions. As Gitlin notes, frames are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7, quoted in Santos, 2004, p. 123). Frame analysis thus involves seeking to identify dominant themes in bodies of discursive output in order to draw conclusions about how particular subject matter is being presented and/or understood.

In investigating the ways that destination countries and their relationship with the West were framed through SAS instructional practices, I began by approaching my set of Core notes, asking myself questions such as “What understandings of each country on the itinerary are being expressed in this material?” “What is emphasized and what is not said?” and “How does this particular way of talking about said destination privilege some framings of this place over others?” Themes quickly began to emerge. I then turned to my notes about other shipboard instructional activities and examined the way they framed destination countries as well.

It was not enough simply to identify which understandings of cultural Others were being produced through SAS instruction, however; I also wanted to analyze how these understandings buttressed or challenged particular ideologies and relations of power. Thus, I turned to critical discourse analysis (Rose, 2001), analyzing each framing with regard to its connections with larger contexts of power. Through an analysis of the literature on study abroad outcomes (not presented here for brevity, but discussed in another manuscript currently in preparation), I determined five concepts—global interconnectedness, skepticism of category thinking, awareness of stereotyping, complexity of perspective, and awareness of western privilege—to be relevant to evaluating educational discourse as challenging the traditional western imaginary, and these notions helped to sketch a rough metric for determining the presence of counter-hegemonic representational practices in SAS’s instructional activities. I concluded, however, that a few modifications would render these five notions even more useful. First, I expanded the idea of global interconnectedness to address the issue of awareness of historical and contemporary power dynamics operating between dominant and marginalized areas of the world. Surely, viewing the world as interconnected is an improvement over viewing it as being composed of relatively isolated nations which have little impact on one another, but the development of this understanding does not imply that one is aware of the various interests that have been served by the last several centuries of cross-cultural relations and the ways that some parties have used military, economic, and cultural power to advantage themselves at the expense of others. Thus, I felt that a better metric than awareness of global interconnectedness was having an understanding of historical and contemporary global power relations. Similarly, although having an awareness of current western privilege is preferable to not having it, this simple awareness does not necessarily imply that one is considering the historical ways in which this privilege came to be constituted or that he or she is particularly troubled by the injustice of it; stated differently, some may attribute western privilege to luck or fate, rather than to a complex interest-laden web of human choices. Thus, I concluded that a better metric would be the development of a global citizenship ethic, which would involve embracing what Shohat and Stam (1994) call the rather radical notion of the intense equality of all people and the recognition that these equally valuable people, who all share the same inherent rights to dignity and life chances, through the mysterious accident of birth, are dropped willy-nilly into a dynamic matrix of power relations, of which they become a part but which transcends their individual wills and lifespans, as well as the even more radical notion that humans have a responsibility to recognize the fundamental equality of all people and to oppose injustice. Thus, the concepts I employed to assess the ways the western imaginary was reinforced and/or

challenged through travel with Semester at Sea included (1) awareness of historical and contemporary global power relations; (2) complexity of perspectives regarding the people and cultures of the world, both in general and with particular regard to expressing skepticism of category thinking; (3) awareness of the stereotyping process; and (4) enrollment in a global citizenship ethic. In examining each theme I identified, regarding the way destinations were framed by the program, I asked myself how the theme functioned with respect to confirming or undermining each of these four notions.

Outcomes

Framing the other for study abroad

If tourism's players are discursive agents vested with interpretive and representational power, then what of the stories that are being spun? What kind of world is being imagined through this instance of educational tourism? A careful consideration of the data gathered regarding imaginative labor about the West, the Rest, and the relationship between them through Semester at Sea makes it possible to come to grips with some of the key storylines, and their attendant ideologies, being built and recirculated at this site of cultural production.

Unlike SAS's promotional materials and the program's student photography, which I had analyzed previously and found to present a rather facile, colonialist fantasy of the world's people and cultures, the program's instructional practices were much more complex. In some ways, the combination of Core, program field practica, and inter-port guest visits served to deconstruct western privilege, to contextualize global problems, to call attention to the stereotyping process and demystify particular cultural practices that lead to stereotyping, to emphasize the complexity of cultures, and to promote an ethic of global citizenship. At the same time, however, SAS instruction was prone to falling into common western discursive traps, which resulted in an emphasis on hosts cultures' exoticism, a romanticization of their histories, and a tendency to present them as problem-riddled and past their prime.

The Good: Contextualization, Demystification, and Complexity

Core lectures began by emphasizing general concepts and frameworks through which students could begin to come to grips with what the Core professors considered to be the course's key subject matter: world concerns and world responsibilities. Once the ship began to draw near to its first port, however, discussion shifted to center around various aspects of the country about to be visited, and then continued in this pattern for the remainder of the voyage, with a few days' lecture being devoted to each stop on the itinerary prior to the ship's arrival there. In establishing theoretical frameworks for the course at its outset, Core's professors began by deconstructing privilege. The class discussed the concept of how rewards, in the form of wealth, power, and prestige, are distributed within societies, calling attention to the mechanics of this practice and therefore moving it from the realm of cultural practices that individuals take for granted into the realm of things that can be questioned—things that are the product of choices societies make. An oft-repeated notion, which was threaded through various Core lectures and which appeared as part of a short essay question on one of the course exams, was the idea of the "accident of birth," which was presented as a counterpoint to traditional metaphysical and modern capitalist views that individuals are born into or out of wealth, power, and prestige because of divine providence, family achievement, or some other reason falling outside the category of dumb luck. Students were encouraged to understand that, although they might have worked hard for the opportunity to

travel around the world with a study abroad program, in most cases, their ability to do so was largely the result of the of privilege of having been born into a wealthy nation and/or a comparatively wealthy family—a privilege which most of the people they would meet in destination countries over the course of their voyage would not share. Core lectures also called attention to a basic consequence of privilege, again with a quotation, this time from John Ruskin, which echoed throughout the course and the voyage more generally: “The dollar in my pocket is not in yours.” Although human inventions can (theoretically) bring greater prosperity and comfort for all, resources that are finite (at least for the moment) and which are being taken up by one person were emphasized as being, by definition, not available for the use of others.

The Core professors also very clearly sought to call attention to the stereotyping process. A lecture early in the voyage presented the idea of race as a social construct rather than a biological reality and explored stereotyping as a basic human information-organizing behavior that combines with historical circumstances to create particular outcomes. Consequently, they strived to present visited countries in contextualized ways, such that information which might otherwise fuel cultural stereotypes could instead be understood with reference to particular historical and present social conditions. For example, China’s turn to an authoritarian style of government in the 1940s was contextualized within its then-recent history of struggle with British trade hegemony—a situation that ultimately culminated in the Opium Wars and the colonization of Hong Kong—as well as within its later political struggles with the USSR over leadership of the global communist movement in a post-Stalin world and its internal pressures related to population size and quality of life. Thus, China was presented not as the mythical land of the iron rice bowl, but simply as a country struggling, like any other, to make choices for the welfare of its people in the face of particular constraints.

Core also drew not only on the expertise of faculty members, but also on the lived experiences of students, in order to complexify the student body’s understandings of the cultures they were encountering. One excellent example can be seen in Core’s lead professors’ request, made to two female American Muslim students in advance of the course session in question, that they address the student body regarding the practice of covering one’s hair as an aspect of the Islamic faith. The women were asked to discuss this topic because one chose unfailingly to cover her hair throughout the voyage, whereas the other chose not to do so. Each of the women briefly addressed the class, explaining how she understood the practice of covering or not covering as an expression of her faith. (The former stated that her choice to cover her hair was undertaken in order to carry on a tradition and to offer an outward symbol of her faith, whereas the latter explained that because she had grown up in the United States, where covering one’s hair is not a dominant cultural practice, she chose not to cover hers because, based on her interpretation of the *Quran*, she viewed the purpose of covering to be to avoid calling attention to oneself and felt that wearing a scarf on her head in a society where few people do so would, in fact, result in the opposite effect.) The different logics expressed by these two students helped to make the point that *all* religions are interpreted in diverse ways, and that individuals differ in the way they understand various aspects of their own cultures.

Although, given my methodological choices for this study, I can only evaluate field practica that I myself attended or whose details were related to me by students I later interviewed, it seems, based on this limited data, that such programming may have been even more effective than Core in engendering counter-hegemonic discourse. This was so because field practica sessions tended to be highly effective at presenting destination countries in light of not only their historical, but also their modern, achievements (something which, as noted below, Core frequently failed to accomplish); at emphasizing their complexity; and at demystifying cultural practices which might

otherwise have appeared exotic or backwards to students. Three instances of such outcomes can be seen in field practica I attended while traveling with SAS in India. The first session involved a visit to a university in Chennai, where I traveled with a group of students, led by the ship's literature professor, to meet with a local professor and her students to discuss postmodern Indian feminist literature. The visit thus framed India as a modern, intellectually and artistically productive nation, which shares similar concerns (in this case, feminist concerns) with the rest of the world, but which approaches them within the context of unique local conditions. The second practicum involved a trip to San Tome Cathedral. The visit, which was led by a professor of religious studies, provided background on the history of Catholicism in India, with reference to its past entanglements with the Portuguese and the British, as well as to its current connections with the modern global Roman Catholic community. India was thus framed as a complex place, characterized not only by Hinduism and Islam, but by mix of religious traditions and their hybrids.

The third practicum had its basis in a trip to a Chennai maternity hospital. Participating students and an SAS women's studies professor were led through the site by a local social worker, who introduced the visitors to its facilities, to one of its doctors, and to a handful of women who had recently given birth at the hospital. As I recall, the students were often surprised by the hospital's technology and practices. For example, upon being informed that, except in cases of medical complications, women typically remain at the hospital for only one day or less after giving birth, one student expressed concern for the new mothers' health. Her comment opened the opportunity for a discussion of the West's medicalization of childbirth as being but one model for understanding this shared human experience; the Indian social worker noted that it was her understanding that hospitals in Europe and North America were also moving toward shorter stays for women following childbirth, and the SAS professor confirmed that this was indeed the case, both for insurance purposes and because of changing discourses about childbirth that were helping to distance it from notions of illness. Similarly, students were distressed to observe some of the hospital's medical equipment—most particularly a chair on which women sit to give birth. The hard metal chair had arms and legs, but resembled a toilet seat, with an open bottom; the baby would pass through the open bottom of the chair to be “caught” by the doctor waiting underneath. Students were surprised that the women didn't give birth in hospital beds, assumed the equipment choice was a function of cost, and expressed sadness for the women who had to face such “uncomfortable conditions.” The SAS professor responded gently to these comments, explaining that the muscles used to give birth can be easier to engage while in a sitting position, and clarified that the apparatus was actually seen by local doctors as an *improvement* over the use of beds for the birth process, thus challenging the students' ethnocentric assumptions which had unthinkingly cast the West in an advanced, modern role, while alternately scripting India as lagging behind the technological development curve.

Much like the field practica, the inter-port guests—students and other community members who would join the ship at the port penultimate to their own countries of origin and then “sail home” with the program—helped to demystify aspects of their home cultures and provided students with more complex representations of their ethnicities and nationalities than are found in general media discourse. This was accomplished in direct ways, through the content of guest lectures delivered by these individuals—who spoke about issues as diverse as collegiate life in China, economic development in Vietnam, and challenges and successes of the women's rights movement in Morocco—but it also occurred in more subtle ways. Inter-port guests would often give presentations on aspects of their heritage, which would involve donning traditional, ethnically distinct attire and engaging in unique cultural activities; for example, a guest might share a traditional dance, play a musical instrument, or demonstrate a way of taking a meal. Thus,

students would observe a guest performing particular aspects of her ethnic heritage, but they would also interact with her during ordinary moments of shipboard life, when they might encounter her padding to the cafeteria in her pajamas for breakfast, discussing the challenges of maintaining a long-distance relationship during college over a round of beers at the evening cocktail hour, or joining the extracurricular evening yoga class on the ship's back deck. Such a contrast effectively allowed for an unmasking of the ethnic performance element of tourism (Bruner, 2005), allowing students to see individual members of host societies as complex, modern individuals whose existences were not reducible to cultural caricatures.

The Bad: Romanticization and Binary-Thinking

Not all of Semester at Sea's instructional practices, however, framed the world in counter-hegemonic ways. Particular aspects of Core's curriculum tended to militate against the larger messages its instructors sought to express. Part of the problem had to do with the course's overarching framework. Broadly, it was charged with accomplishing two rather different feats: (1) providing students with an introduction to the places and cultures they would encounter and (2) discussing global concerns within the context of said destinations. This dual mission tended to lead to a distinct lecture format, in which each destination was presented first in terms of its historical cultural accomplishments, and second in terms of its current social problems. For example, upon approaching India, two Core lectures were devoted to presentations about Indian history—one about the development of the religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism, and the other about India's musical traditions—and two lectures were devoted to discussions of its current social problems, including poverty, pollution, food shortages, overly rapid urbanization, government corruption, and women's rights issues. Similarly, the framing of Egypt began with a discussion of the traditions of arabesque art, architecture, and calligraphy, and then transitioned to a presentation about the country's contemporary problems, including massive trade deficits with the West and a lack of channels for citizen participation in government and diplomatic domestic conflict resolution. A country's cultural heritage is an important part of its identity and is certainly worthy of mention in an educational tourism forum. Similarly, discussions of contemporary social problems in destination countries are clearly an important component of SAS's consciousness-raising agenda. However, Core's dichotomous pattern of representation, emphasizing destination countries' past glories and present tribulations—and its concomitant exclusion of discussion regarding modern accomplishments and strategies for coping with current social challenges—tended to inadvertently construct destinations as corrupt, ineffectual remains of formerly great civilizations now past their prime.

Such constructions were also bolstered theoretically through Core's curriculum. A guiding framework through which social problems in destination countries were articulated was Durkheim's theory of anomie. Briefly, Durkheim argued that as societies shift from an agrarian lifestyle, characterized by strong familial, communal, and religious rules and expectations, to an urban, industrial lifestyle which emphasizes individual choices, interpretations, and achievements, social norms tend to break down; this process leads to deviant behavior and social dysfunction, as people no longer share an overarching moral framework which places limits on individual desire. Anomie was used as an interpretive tool to contextualize social problems destination countries were experiencing in the face of massive changes in social conditions brought about by the entrance and retreat of colonial powers, the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of a global, mass-mediated consumer culture. Although such contextualization is important to prevent social problems such as crime, racism, and violence from being chalked up to mere "cultural

differences,” presenting non-western countries as ensnared in the postlapsarian chaos of almost-modernity, struggling to make it up the other side of the development chasm, tends to romanticize precolonial history and to locate non-western cultural authenticity in a bygone world.

SAS communicates to students not only through its words but also through its actions. This happens in many ways, not the least of which involves its choices regarding program itinerary—decisions which often have to be re-made once a voyage is already under way. For example, in one instance, SAS chose to make an itinerary change and cancel its visit to Turkey, following a terrorist attack that occurred in Luxor, Egypt, while the ship was docked in Port Said. No SAS participants were harmed in the attack, but it had specifically targeted tourists, and several SAS participants were at the site of the attack when it occurred. The decision to reroute was made after numerous families of students called ISE to express concerns about their children remaining in or near the Middle East, and several threatened to immediately pull their children out of the program if itinerary changes were not made. Thus, the program had to navigate the inevitable tension between inadvertently sending a rather racist message by homogenizing the Middle East and framing Turkey as a “politically troubled Arab nation” by canceling it as a port of call, inconveniencing and disrespecting its connections in Turkey, and creating a public relations nightmare by refusing to respect parents’ wishes to have a say in their children’s whereabouts at a time when fears and emotions were running high both at home and on board the ship. In being forced to bow to the pressure of students’ concerned families, SAS lost a valuable teachable moment: although it could, and did, verbally express the idea that the Middle East contains vast cultural and political diversity—that countries like Egypt and Turkey are not interchangeable by virtue of their shared Arab Muslim roots—it could not erase the ship’s westward trajectory, which pointed to rather a different conclusion.

The Ugly: Exoticization

As noted, a central theme of Core was “world concerns and world responsibilities.” Much variation existed, however, regarding how given concerns or responsibilities were tackled in course material. Often, global problems were addressed in a substantive sense, but this was not always the case. Core’s discussion of environmental issues in China provides an informative example. This discussion was anchored with a presentation given by a professor of environmental studies about the demand among affluent Chinese men for products derived from endangered species as remedies for male impotence. The professor explained that, although there is no “scientific basis” for the efficacy of such products, Chinese men will pay upwards of \$12,000 per ounce for rhinoceros horns or bile from the gallbladder of bears because these items carry symbolic connotations of virility.

With a population of over 1 billion and a massive reliance on coal for energy production, China’s environmental impact is clearly among the world’s largest: a problem which it is actively working to solve, through measures including population control and exploitation of alternative energy sources, most notably hydropower—a strategy that comes with its own set of environmental challenges, given the practice in some areas of disposing of sewage directly into rivers which, if dammed, would produce very polluted lakes. Surely, these issues are more germane to a substantive discussion of the environmental situation in China than the rather fringe issue of a handful of wealthy citizens creating homeopathic impotence remedies from products derived from endangered animals, but they were glossed in favor of this latter, more eye-catching topic. The emphasis on Chinese men’s use of such “non-scientifically validated” products framed China as exotic, superstitious, and backwards and failed to address the country’s more widespread

and consequential ecological problems—problems which are very much tied to its race to succeed in a global development game, the rules of which have largely been set by other players with more power.

Similarly, the practices of *sati* (self-immolation by Indian widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands) and female genital mutilation were more heavily emphasized in discussions of global women's rights issues than were the much more widespread problems of women's lack of access to education, health care, wages equal to those of men for the same labor performed, and protection from poor and often highly dangerous working conditions. Thus, social practices that were not very representative of mainstream modern life in destination countries were sometimes emphasized at the expense of a more thoughtful and balanced portrayal of visited cultures, which could have illuminated more widespread, pressing issues and the local responses they are generating.

Conclusion

It's fair to say (if one will pardon the inevitable pun) that it takes a lot to keep a program like Semester at Sea afloat. First, given its dependence on student tuition, the program must attract sufficient numbers of participants in order to sustain itself financially. Second, it is responsible for providing classroom instruction that is on par with what is offered by typical institutions of higher education in order to maintain its academic credibility. Third, it must ensure the safety of its students and staff while in port and at sea, or else its reputation will suffer, and enrollments will decline, as has been the case in the past following a variety of safety-related incidents. The unusual condition of being a university isolated on a ship in the middle of the ocean obviously produces unique safety concerns, such as vessel mechanical problems and limited access to medical care, as does the condition of turning 650 students loose in a multitude of nations, in which language and legal barriers can complicate matters if something happens to go wrong; thus, Semester at Sea bears an extreme version of the responsibility to serve *in loco parentis*. Fourth, the program serves as a mediator between its students and the destinations it visits; its educational and other communicatory content helps to frame destinations for students, and the in-port programs it offers filter the destination experience for those who choose to participate in them. Finally, in keeping with the founding principles of its parent organization, ISE, Semester at Sea aims to lead students to a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of the world and of their responsibilities as global citizens. Thus, the program can be seen as having many roles to fulfill: it must function as a marketer, an educator, a guardian, a curator, and a consciousness raiser. It is easy to imagine that some of these roles may mesh together more easily than others.

The problem, of course, is that consequences flow from SAS's actions on each of these fronts. From a marketing perspective, for instance, it is easy to understand why the program would feel compelled to use images marked by exoticism. Students (and their tuition-paying families) are drawn from a milieu saturated with media images that equate traditional scenes of destinations and cultures in the non-western world with adventure and pleasure. Through tourism, they can live out fantasies of exploration, in a more polite version of conquest that involves claiming these exotic spaces only temporarily and taking from them only the images they record with their cameras. SAS may justifiably feel that it will win few recruits without speaking the language of this fantasy. This kind of reasoning is clearly dangerous. Not only does it frame the trip for students in a way that may be hard to dismantle once the voyage is under way, but it also adds to the broader circulation of troublesome western media images of the Other. Many more individuals are exposed to SAS's promotional imagery than will ever sail with the program. Its advertisements are

commonly featured on placards lining the halls of university buildings, and anyone is free to surf the program's website, regardless of the browser's seriousness about potentially enrolling. SAS's representational choices thus participate in a broader discourse through which the West constructs the rest of the world, and these choices have meaning and consequences outside the context of the program itself.

Similarly, the program's problematic instructional practices explored here also need to be understood in context. Instructors are products of the same discursive milieu as students, and it takes extreme critical reflexivity to avoid perpetuation of stereotypes entirely, especially when one is trying to maintain the attention of an exhausted, homesick, and seasick student body day, after day, after day. The rise of the modern "infotainment culture" and "attention economy" is producing students who increasingly expect course material to be delivered in a format more akin to stand-up comedy than to the traditional academic lecture, and one would have to look hard to find an instructor (myself included!) who has not at some point bowed to this pressure and pitched students a factoid or example meant more to excite, delight, or shock than to convey truly substantive content: after all, part of successfully communicating a message involves acquiring and sustaining the intended recipient's attention. When the subject matter is people—their histories, cultures, and daily realities—however, the situation can become problematic, because the easy grab is often something that can unintentionally lead to exoticization and stereotyping. It is a testament to the program's efforts—and especially to its professors' awareness, creativity, and dedication—that so much of its instructional discourse *does* challenge hegemonic understandings.

What is needed, then, is a sustained effort to deconstruct the messages that are being sent by study abroad curricula, evaluating them continuously over time, in order to ensure that they are in keeping with a program's larger values and goals. Building this kind of reflexivity into curriculum design and deployment can help study abroad practitioners, and educational tourism programs more generally, to avoid undermining their own missions and can help to enhance their role as players in a new kind of global culture that emphasizes respect, compassion, and equity.

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