The Routledge International Handbook of Autoethnography in Educational Research

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Looking beyond the gaze

Publication details
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Published online on: 10 Nov 2022

How to cite :- Devi Akella. 10 Nov 2022, Looking beyond the gaze from: The Routledge International Handbook of Autoethnography in Educational Research Routledge
Accessed on: 15 Aug 2023
LOOKING BEYOND THE GAZE
A reflective faculty learning experience

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Introduction
Numerous articles emphasising the need for international cultural immersion and community engagement experiences which encourage students to be active participants in the learning process leading to advanced critical thinking and global competency skills have been published in the last few years (Lessor, Reeves & Andrade, 1997; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton & Paige, 2009). However, less attention has been focused on the faculty members who take the lead by internationalising their curriculum and exposing their students to global exploration through travel expeditions, where they too might face similar learning situations as their own students (Akella, 2016; Coryell, 2016; Fischer, 2008; Hall, 2007; Mohamed, 2016; Todd, 2016).

However, faculty just like their student counterparts, acquire intercultural expertise through “teaching and research opportunities abroad and by building relationships with peers in other countries” (ACE, 2012, p. 4). An understanding of international settings and respect for cultural differences would place faculty members in an advantage in classrooms and when interacting with their students. It would allow faculty members to teach students cultural sensitivity and equip them with multicultural competencies. For faculty members these travel experiences can be “transformative” (Fischer, 2008, p. 2), resulting in “intellectual dynamism” (Hall, 2007, p. 54) and “academic refueling” (Festervand & Tillery, 2001, p. 110) forcing them to “rethink [about their] professional self-definitions and boundaries” (Hall, 2007, p. 54). In fact, traveling abroad for faculty members could involve painful moments, of moving beyond their comfort zone, challenging their mental schemas, acknowledging past misconceptions and prejudices, trying to deconstruct happenings, and rebuilding one’s external picture of the world. A process of going beyond one’s professional gaze, of evolving into a new person outside the disciplinary gaze of one’s own political system and country. A process of self-transformation gradually resulting in the creation of a more knowledgeable teacher, broad-minded academic, intellectually stimulated researcher, and a more open-minded person (Eddy, 2014; Festervand & Tillery, 2001; Fischer, 2008; Hall, 2007; Keese & O’Brien, 2011).

Integrating Foucault’s (1997) philosophies of disciplinary gaze and the model of situated learning, along with the research method of autoethnography, this chapter endeavors to capture my transformation process. My frame of mind before and after travel, of how I went beyond my narrow preconceived notions about Palestine, and how this helped me as a teacher and
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researcher. To quote Foucault I write about my history – “what are we and what are we today? In order, to be free, one needs to continually expose what remains alive of the past in the present and relegate it to the past” (O’Farrell, 2005, p. 72). This chapter contributes towards the literature on short-term study abroad programs in the neglected area of lack of personalised empirical faculty accounts and experiences on various short-term study abroad programs. It also highlights the necessity of experimenting with different types of theoretical frameworks (in this case poststructural analysis) and qualitative methodologies such as autoethnography to confront distorted impressions and conceptions of reality. Thereby transforming individuals, empowering educators, and the education system, to promote equity and social justice within societies.

Background

There is a lot of information on “how to get students … involved in education abroad. There’s much less talk about how to get faculty involved…” (Hulstrad, 2009, p. 48). However, if faculty just made the effort to travel abroad, they would have so many new experiences and perspectives to share with their students, they would be equipped with a myriad of views and perceptions, “pedagogical, research-related and life lessons” (Al-Dahir, 2012; Hall, 2007, p. 54), which would make their students more aware of differences across the world. Travel abroad for faculty would also translate into intellectual growth of the faculty members, academic validation, cognitive repositioning and acculturation” with “grounding of concept and theory in reality … an outcome directly transferable to both teaching and research activities” (Festervand & Tillery, 2001, p. 106). It would generate “well-traveled, knowledgeable professors who can grab students … and turn them … into global citizens of an ever-changing world” (Hulstrad, 2009, p. 49). The instructor would be able to “talk the talk and make the walk real” (Al-Dahir, 2012, p. 1). For one can only teach what one is aware of and has seen and experienced in person.

International travel possesses the capacity to transform an educator, by allowing faculty members opportunities to reflect on their perceptual blocks and mindsets and liberate themselves of their earlier preconceived and restricted notions to grow and develop into more broad-minded and empathetic educators. To understand this transformation process of the educator, one needs to clarify how an individual becomes a subject of study, who can both exercise and be subjected to power mechanisms. Individuals can be “constituted as moral subjects of [their] actions” possessed with knowledge which makes them powerful and responsible, yet simultaneously also subjects them to power mechanisms. Individuals within a society especially educators possess specialised knowledge which is used to influence and inform students and their mindsets within classrooms. At the same time, these educators themselves are subject to power and discipline to ensure they teach within the guidelines and norms of the society and political forces, through program curriculum, employee codes of conduct and other similar guidelines, “…subjects us to discipline to ensure that we do not deviate from the normal curve, and subjects us to sanction, treatment, or punishment when we depart from it…” (Foucault, 1997, p. 130).

According to Foucault (1997), during different periods of history, formal systems and institutions are organised around different sets of principles. And all individuals subject to these principles inculcate certain ‘pre-conceived notions and philosophies’ known as episteme (O’Farrell, 2005). Episteme defines individuals’ reactions, thought processes and mental models. To transform individuals or change their thought process, science and research needs to deconstruct their episteme and then modify it (O’Farrell, 2005). In this context, Foucault, a
prominent French historian, and philosopher introduced the concept of a “gaze” which means a “glance … look” or creating the impression of being under scrutiny all the time. A powerful look which subjugates individuals, exercises control over them, objectifies, subordinates, and threatens them to compliance. The gaze thus can be conceptualised as a tool to govern and control individuals within a society (O’Farrell, 1997), i.e., a “society centered around surveillance” (O’Farrell, 2005, p. 39).

The gaze is a derivative of bio-power, which is a “technology which appeared in the late eighteenth century for managing populations…” (O’Farrell, 2005, p. 130). During this time, the government was held responsible not only for collecting the taxes but to also oversee public health, public education, control large urban populations and regulate the daily behavior of individuals (Foucault, 1997). Individuals were taught appropriate morals, values, philosophies, and then various disciplinary measures were used to ensure obedience to these new bodies of knowledge. The function of the government was to “train, educate and guide masses to conform” (Foucault, 1988, p. 80).

Individuals within a society were organised into political and civic groups. The government was responsible for overseeing the lives of its citizens from birth to death. Knowledge about citizens was collected through different forms of confession techniques at religious places, workplaces, and medical practices. The data compiled from these confessions were used by social sciences to construct mechanisms of social control (O’Farrell, 1997). Different forms of disciplinary techniques were designed using Bentham’s Panopticon, an architectural structure which enabled the creation of a 360-degree examining gaze, which placed everyone in the building under the visibility of a panoptic eye. The panoptic eye was subsequently modernised and improvised into different forms, such as classrooms, factories, prison cells, hospitals, and surveillance cameras. The independent individual was intimidated to passivity, a repressed body externalising behavior code formulated by the government for different sections of the society. Normal behavior as defined by the society was thus achieved through the daily practices of self-surveillance controls (Foucault, 1997). Individuals within the society ended up becoming artificial extensions of machines, like robots operating as per the norms of the society (Foucault, 1997). The examining gaze became the political tool to control masses, their mindsets, mental models, and mental perceptions and those who rebelled were termed as deviant, extremists, and out casted by the society. The basic message was either you conformed or else your life became difficult (O’Farrell, 2005).

Study abroad programs provide a means to break free from this gaze. Far away from the gaze of the political system and its surveillance mechanisms, an individual facing new situations, new culture and new people is forced to reflect, unlearn, and learn new concepts, ideologies and interpret the society wearing new lenses. “The time away [can] provide a space for reflection and put in stark relief assumptions … formerly held” (Eddy, 2014, p. 21).

Situated learning is a technique through which adults can learn from real life experiences of daily living (Stein, 1998). Individuals learn by participating and becoming a part of the entire learning process. Individuals rebuild their perspectives and knowledge based on their learning experiences. Learning here takes place through informal interactions, relationships with people and other unintended contextual learning. New knowledge is assimilated while confronting real-life situations, via social processes involving thinking, perceiving, problem solving and interaction. Individual enters the external reality, engages in its various activities and situations, and learns while reflecting and solving problems (Stein, 1998). Learning is thus stimulated and “grounded in the actions of everyday situations” (Stein, 1998, para. 3).

The next section examines the methodological considerations surrounding the research method of autoethnography, and looks at the sojourn to the Holy Land, a narrative account
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Looking beyond the gaze of myself as a Fulbright specialist – of what I did, whom I met and what happened over the course of 42 days, with pre-departure experiences included as well.

Sojourn to the Holy Land: an autoethnographic narration

All individuals are important objects in need of analysis, and we, therefore, need to reflect on our own actions, behavior, and reactions. “It takes courage to interrogate yourself. It takes courage to look in the mirror and see part of your reflection [as] to who you really are when you take off the mask, when you are not performing the same old routines and social roles” (West, 2009, p. 8). One needs to start with “remembering or recognizing one’s original truth (self-discovery)” (Foucault, 1984, pp. 441–442) and then self-transformation takes place (Foucault, 1984). Individuals become independent by resisting current practices, ideologies, beliefs and knowledge about facts and society. Individuals become conscious of the fact that they are being subjected to power and control and then they resist the domination to become more self-aware. Thus, the entire transformation process involves self-awareness, self-analysis, and self-reflection.

Anderson’s (2006) autoethnography allows illumination of a personal experience by “describing a story of experience – how it is used, understood and responded to for and by us and others” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 282). Autoethnography is an unorthodox approach which opens new avenues of research. One steps into the shoes of the researcher and experiences the phenomenon under consideration (Ellis et al., 2011). One lives through another person’s experience, enters their world and context, and accompanies them on their research journey. Autoethnography makes it possible to examine and interpret the social phenomena in totality. The focal point of autoethnography revolves around the researcher i.e., “just me … writing my story in my particular complex everyday” (Gannon, 2006, p. 475). This single account of the social reality provides a complete picture “about the world and about the results of our actions which are actually realized” (Sayer, 1992, p. 69). Different mechanisms are exposed: the context, structure–agency interplay, and the role of the individual in this entire environment (Archer, 1995, 2000). The autoethnographic writer creates new knowledge, by reflecting on his/her bodily experiences, all subjective in nature such as feelings, emotions, and history, and then connecting these introspections to theoretical and philosophical aspects (Gannon, 2006). The autoethnographic narratives enable releasing an individual from oneself, or rather “disassembling the self, oneself” (Rabinow, 1997, p. xxxviii). The purpose of an autoethnographic narrative is to shape oneself and transform oneself into a better individual more attune with the new contexts (Foucault, 1997). The researcher is required to look within, understand “the self”, acknowledge one’s faults and weaknesses or rather put one’s inner self to intense scrutiny, and critical examination. The objective is to critique “repressive structures in everyday lives”, with which one interacts, influences and is in turn influenced by (Denzin, 2003, p. 142).

This section reproduces, deconstructs, and reflects upon my travel abroad experience to reveal the intricate social forces at play, the learning experiences at work and the gradual transformation of my personality. The reflective and exploratory process is highlighted through a truthful and introspective account of the entire study abroad trip – through a dialogue with myself about what seemed significant in the trip to the Holy Land and how it impacted me as a person. My reflective autoethnographic narrative will allow the readers to gain insights into my mindset – my fears, my anxieties, my social and learning process, and my gradual transformation process. My autoethnography of my travels to Palestine started with a “post-mortem” self-reflection on what happened, identifying significant events and experiences and then writing...
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everything down in a narrative format according to three guiding principles derived from the theoretical philosophies of Foucault’s gaze and situated learning – self-discovery (becoming aware of the gaze), self-transformation as a result of the learning process (going beyond the gaze), and finally resistance to domination (becoming independent).

Self-discovery: becoming aware of the gaze

I traveled to Palestine in Fall 2016 for a duration of 42 days on a Fulbright Specialist’s Grant. After applying, I was placed on the Fulbright Faculty Roster. Soon after, I received an email from Birzeit University informing me that I had been shortlisted for a project at their university “Would I be interested in coming?” I replied in the affirmative. A few weeks later, I received the offer.

I remember myself, then researching Birzeit University and the location and getting the biggest shock of my life. Birzeit University is situated in the Occupied Territories of Palestine (OPT), the conflicted region of West Bank, a landlocked territory near Jordan and Israel. The Palestinian region is a part of the Arab world and consists of two separated territories: the West Bank and Gaza. Also known as the “Holy Land”, the language spoken there is Arabic with majority of its population being Muslims.

I am not an adventurous person, nor overly brave or a person who likes to take risks. And, based on my knowledge of political facts globally, I have a healthy fear of the Middle East, fundamental Islamists and all regions denoted in red as unsafe countries to travel. However, I had already accepted the offer and informed everyone around me that I would be traveling abroad as a Fulbright Specialist. Therefore, regardless of my mental schemas and well-entrenched beliefs I decided to go ahead with the visit, taking all necessary precautions as needed.

Fear of Palestine: pre-departure feelings

I applied for permission to travel from the Dean, Provost, and the President of the university where I worked. All of them commended me on my achievement. However, colleagues back at my office, friends, and relatives with the exception of a few, further increased my fear. But then a Fulbright Scholar already in that unsafe territory informed me the situation was not so bad. One just had to trust the local Palestinians to guide and assist one during the duration of the stay. This got me thinking maybe it was just my mental outlook and ingrained beliefs indoctrinated and manipulated by the media, prior exposure, and societal norms, which were stopping me as an individual from traveling to unknown destinations.

The US Embassy in Jerusalem informed me an official would pick me from the airport on arrival and drop me off at the hotel in Taybeh. But then, a few days before the travel, they emailed me stating this would not be possible because I would be reaching Tel Aviv during the festival of Rosh Hashanah. I would need to make my own arrangements to the hotel. I found myself in real jeopardy. I got in touch with the Dean of the Faculty of Business and Economics (FBE), and she offered to get me picked up by their university car at the airport and get me into the Palestinian region. I realised then I would need to trust and depend on Palestinians to see me through this trip.

Self-transformation: learning and going beyond the gaze

Arrival into Palestine

My flight into Israel, Tel Aviv was fine, security arrangements at the New York airport were highly stringent and all passengers were either of Jewish origin or Americans traveling to the Holy Land. US citizens had to get a visa at Tel Aviv airport itself. I had heard stories of people being refused visas and
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deported back. This caused me a few anxious moments. However, I had no problem getting a visa allowing me entry into Israel. The airport was little deserted being the time of Rosh Hashanah. The entire scene was ordinary: taxis, luggage, people, nothing unsafe. All my pre-departure fears seemed to be unfounded. The taxi driver was a friendly person who spoke English. The outside landscape was sandy and rocky slopes, dry land, with lots of sunshine, the road stretched and stretched, with chartered buses moving back and forth. The driver informed me all the buses were for Israelis to travel to their settlements which were being built more and more inside the Palestinian region.

We passed a security checkpoint which symbolised entry into Palestine. Huge signs in red, in English, Arabic and Hebrew read that individuals entering this region were entering at their own risk. The roads became smaller, dirty with garbage dumps and were crowded with people. The difference was apparent. But it was still a hilly region as the road swerved into a neighborhood, the small village of Taybeh where my hotel was located, nestled amongst the steep rocky sandy slopes, littered with donkeys and street dogs and houses and shops in between. I felt at home immediately and that feeling remained throughout my stay at Palestine.

Birzeit University at Ramallah

The grant duration was 42 days, and I had a lot to accomplish. So the dean and I traveled next day to the university. To avoid checkpoints between Taybeh and Ramallah, the local Palestinians use the smaller roads which are not properly built and are very steep and narrow. I suffered from travel sickness each day on these roads.

Birzeit University was different from Taybeh, a Christian village where I was currently staying; at the university Islam was more clearly apparent. The majority of the students and faculty, the females especially, have their hair covered and dress in a conservative manner and everything is in Arabic. Birzeit University has agreements with universities in the United Kingdom and Europe for research purposes, student, and faculty exchange programs. Faculty from FBE traveled abroad to different European countries at regular intervals on these various mini grants. Nearly all the FBE faculty had completed their masters and doctoral degrees from British institutions, especially the younger faculty. FBE comprised of older and younger faculty. The majority of the faculty members are female, some still in traditional Muslim attire, while the younger ones are without the veil. I was able to talk with them, interact with them and share views and opinions. However, I did undergo moments of anxiety, when people spoke in Arabic because I was unsure of what was being said.

The Palestinian universities are isolated from the rest of the world due to checkpoints and other security measures. But these universities are fully committed to providing quality education to the younger population, for instance, FBE had managed to get financial aid from their student alumni and advisory board members in the form of donations, grants, and scholarships.

Most of the instruction at Birzeit University took place in Arabic and English. All faculty members knew English language but preferred Arabic. Manuals and booklets were in English and Arabic. With increasing emphasis laid on the internationalisation of the curriculum and their students leaving for abroad for studies and jobs, the university was changing over to English as a medium of instruction. Textbooks and all teaching now took place in the English language. Students had to complete their high school diploma in Arabic, and then take a common entrance test known as Tawjihi. The scores on this exam were used for admission purposes into different colleges. Before starting their college-level courses, all students in Palestine completed an English-level mastery test and, based on their test scores, enrolled for different levels of English remedial courses. Thus, starting college at an elementary level of English these students covered all courses in the English medium by the end of their final year of the degree program.
Excursions in Palestine

I visited Bethlehem – The Church of Nativity and the Chapel of the Milk of Grotto; both these religious places made me appreciate the divine power of God. I could imagine Lord Jesus being born here. I felt a calming presence within me when I bent down to take my blessings at both the churches. At that time, I understood why people took so many risks to travel to this part of the world – it is to feel the presence of God and seek his blessings. However, I also found it ironical that there was the birthplace of Jesus and right outside was a mosque with prayer calls being made in Arabic. It was as if Christianity nestled deep within the confinements of an Islamic world.

I also got to visit Mount Temptation at Jericho, which is simply beautiful and a tourist place which attracts hordes of tourists in chartered buses. I entered into a conversation with a tourist guide, and he invited me to join their group on learning I was from the USA. But afterwards realising I was with a friend from the Taybeh region he distanced himself at once and ignored me from then onwards. I was already aware of these divisions within the society but now faced the discrimination as well. I also visited Hisham’s palace and then my travel partner drove us down to the border leading into Jordan, but we were unable to go forward because the checkpoint was closed. I heard of how local Palestinians crossed the border into Jordan to travel internationally from Queen Alia International Airport to avoid Tel Aviv airport. These snippets of conversations provided me with insights about the life of Palestinians.

A visit to the West side of Jerusalem further enlightened me to issues which Palestinians face daily. I saw the dividing wall of Jerusalem and then visited the Church of the Sepulcher – this church which happens to be the final resting place of Jesus Christ, possesses a sort of agonising beauty and I will always remember myself as unable to tear myself away from there. I met a religious priest, visited the old city of Jerusalem – Jaffa Gate and shops along the way. It was then my travel partner received a phone call from Taybeh, asking us to come back as soon as possible, some trouble had taken place at Jaffa Gate. We tried the Qalandia checkpoint which was crowded with traffic. We turned and tried another route which also had a traffic jam, and on that way encountered tear gas and some police. Nothing happened to us, but I was a little shaken up by this incident. I constantly heard a lot about checkpoints being closed, reaching home late and some trouble on the road and so on. People used to mention this casually as if it was a daily occurrence.

My snapshot of this region consisted of steep hilly slopes, donkeys and dogs on the road, checkpoints at every corner, with security personnel on the road walking with guns, people in modern and traditional attire, Arabic and Hebrew signs everywhere, Christianity and Islam juxtaposed together everywhere.

United States Embassy in Palestine

Being a Fulbright Specialist on a grant-funded visit, I had to maintain close connections with the US Embassy officials throughout my stay in Palestine. I used to receive daily texts of conflicts taking place within the country. I also talked with US embassy officials a few times on the phone and was asked to come down in person at least once during my stay to sign official documents. This became a major issue – how to reach Israeli side of Jerusalem? People in Palestine had permit cards (like identity cards) which had to be shown at various checkpoints to cross into different parts of the region. So even though the faculty members of FBE traveled from Nablus, Jerusalem, Ramallah and Taybeh, their movements inside Palestine were restricted. I felt uneasy traveling alone because I lacked knowledge of the language and security procedures within the region. So, the planning of this visit continued throughout my visit. In the end 2–3 days before my departure, the US Embassy sent over a vehicle with appropriate legal papers to Taybeh to pick me up and get me over to the Embassy in Jerusalem.

Some incidents had taken place the day before, and when I informed the hotel staff about my impending visit to the US Embassy; they advised me against it. I, however, decided to go ahead.
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There was a lot of security on the road to Jerusalem and we passed the famous Qalandiya checkpoint – it was my second time through this security point. This time it was smoother than the last time. The Israeli-controlled Jerusalem (West side) is completely modernised; the majority of the population dresses in the traditional Jewish attire. I had to hand over my passport and all my documents at the embassy gate and was escorted to the office of the embassy officials. Once inside it was more informal – we talked about my stay so far, work accomplished and what I had seen in that region. I was informed someone would meet me at the airport next week and see me through the security at Tel Aviv airport. I was relieved I had been informed by FBE faculty that departure from Tel-Aviv was not easy – all faculty members flew from Jordan’s international airport. I was advised to do the same. Some also told me not to mention that I had stayed for 42 days in the West Bank region – Ramallah and Taybeh.

Departure from Tel Aviv

I would describe the departure from Tel-Aviv airport as one of the worst experiences in my life so far. The dean arranged for the same taxi which had picked me up from the airport on my arrival. The taxi was stopped even before entering the airport, I was asked probing questions, my airline ticket and papers were examined, the luggage was checked (not opened though) and the taxi driver’s papers scrutinised. This was just the beginning.

I was met at Ben Gurion airport by the US Embassy official (Post Expediter) to speed up the security check, issuance of boarding pass and my departure from Israel. Unfortunately, it did not work out that way at all. I faced a grueling questioning session. Despite me showing my documents and explaining my movements and whereabouts the mere mention of “Ramallah and Taybeh” triggered all sorts of tensions amongst the airport staff. My hand baggage and my computer were checked innumerable times. I was given a thorough check-up by the airport security guard. I really thought I would not be able to get up on the flight, and the Post Expediter was not much help either.

Ultimately, I was allowed to proceed and was thankful to see the boarding gates. The passengers on the flight were nice, nearly all were Jews who had witnessed the lengthy security check I had faced. However, it was pleasant flight back home with me promising myself never to fly from Tel Aviv again.

The transformation: resisting the gaze

Back home: a new person

This short trip to Palestine made me appreciate my life back at home. I also realised that sometimes one needs to trust strangers in a foreign land to take care of you, especially more if you do not know the language nor the culture. I also learned a lot about the political, social, and economic condition of Palestine. I became aware of the discrimination meted on Palestinians in their own country. This influenced my research topics and areas. My last few academic papers have been on social enterprises, servant leadership in Palestine and sense-making academic institutions in Palestine. I have certainly grown as a researcher. I find myself speaking of these experiences when giving examples pertaining to cross-cultural communications, trust, perceptual errors, and stress in my classes. I have rich in-depth personal insights to share with my graduate students in my Organisational Development (OD) class—especially on internal and external consultants, issues which OD consultants face and organisational resistance. To mention a few:

Perceptual Errors: can share real-life examples pertaining to stereotyping, impression management and perceptual defense. My students are fascinated by my travels and enjoy these lectures.

Cross-Cultural Communications: have real-life examples to share on chromatics, chronemics, high- and low-context cultures, and ethnocentrism.

Trust: how trust can see you through numerous first-time experiences in a foreign land.
Stress: fight or flight scenarios and techniques to overcome stress.

Organisational Development: I had completed a consultancy project in Palestine and had worked with faculty resistance during the entire change process. This experience allows me to explain in detail the entire process of organisation development and the work of a consultant to my students.

As an individual I feel more confident about myself and my ability to handle different situations. I have become more open-minded about different situations and environments. Despite the daily risks which an individual might face in Palestine I would not classify Palestine as an unsafe place. My preconceived notions have certainly changed. I tend not to blindly believe whatever I read and hear, instead preferring to first research the facts and remain a little cynical about what is portrayed. For there is always more to what meets the open eyes. And the reality could be a lot more different.

Empirical analysis and discussion

The above autoethnographic narrative traces my Palestine trip under three guiding themes: self-awareness and reflection; learning and transformation; and resistance and independence. I had a preconceived notion about the conflicted region based on what I had heard, read and from my interactions with my colleagues and others. Information circulated on media – the internet, newspapers, television etc. – further supported my perceptions of Palestine, thereby supporting the argument of the “gaze” and the panoptic eye revolving on the entire society. However, my trip to Palestine despite the conflicts existing within that region did not expose me to any untoward harm. I did incur several anxious moments, stress and uneasiness but managed to return home safe. I was forced “to contemplate and compare what [I] had learned from published sources and prior experiences” with my own personal observations in Palestine (Festervand & Tillery, 2001, p. 111).

I returned home a more informed individual, politically, economically, and culturally, and a more experienced academic and educator. As an educator I learned about the education system in Palestine, their global initiatives and partnerships and their fund-raising efforts. While as a researcher I made new friends with whom I collaborated on various research projects which helped me professionally in the long run.

I learned valuable lessons from each experience and incident which took place throughout my entire trip in Palestine. My exposure to a new geographic region, a new language, culture, food, customs, and religious practices – Jewish, Christianity and Islam – all changed my personality and outlook. All this evidence supports situated learning, of how by participating in field trips in an unfamiliar environment, and by immersing in an actual learning environment people can not only learn but also address real-world problems more critically. Individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences while performing work, interacting, observing, and resolving problems. I learned how to handle a consultancy project while undergoing high levels of stress and anxiety. I learned to trust foreigners, my own intuitions and make decisions. For instance, even after being advised not to visit the US Embassy in Jerusalem by the hotel staff in Taybeh I decided to go ahead. I decided to trust the embassy people and their judgement. At the campus, I made a few friends and learned to trust them to ensure my entire job was completed. From a beginner who had absolutely no information about Palestine, I gradually evolved into an expert on that region. However, all my learning was “unintentional rather than deliberate” (Oregon Technology in Education Council, 2007, para 14, citing Lave & Wenger). I did not make any deliberate efforts to learn, the learning happened automatically. The sights, sounds, smells, physical sensations, cultural practices, and foreign people and languages and the foreign city become my classroom and my coursework (Coryell, 2016).
This learning I later transferred to my own classrooms, curriculum, my research papers and towards my own judgements and decision-making processes. I learned through critical reflection, in all situations where I was unable to comprehend or understand reality. In the beginning I was apprehensive of Palestine and Palestinians but by the end I had learned to trust them. I managed to feel comfortable with them and was also a trifle ashamed of my own behavior and reactions. I now feel empathetic to the Palestinian cause, admire them in their efforts both in their daily lives and at work.

*I have certainly changed.* Earlier I blindly believed what I read and saw; now I am more careful in my reasoning. I have managed to move outside of the gaze back at home. I think critically, tend to reflect more, analyze situations before moving forward. In other words, I am aware of the domination being exerted by the gaze and resist its control by exerting my independence through usage of my analytical and critical abilities.

**Conclusion**

This chapter emphasises the role of autoethnography in higher education, especially in the context of study abroad programs, its effectiveness in tracing the learning processes of faculty members, their feelings and fears in foreign locations and their transformations into more broad-minded, sensitive, and culturally competent educators. Furthermore, this chapter integrates the philosophical ideologies of Foucault’s disciplinary discourses to demonstrate how adopting new types of theoretical frameworks can expose incorrect perspectives, biases, prejudices, and outlooks pertaining to foreign countries and their communities to further broaden the parameters of international education. In this study, the combination of autoethnography and the poststructuralism lens enabled deconstruction of the preconceived notions pertaining to the Palestinian region. Thereby allowing one to go beyond the information circulated by the media and political government at the domestic front.

However, to further understand this transformative, learning process, more personalised faculty study abroad accounts which experiment with new theoretical and methodological frameworks are needed. For instance, critical theory, a neoliberalism philosophy, could enable critical analysis of empirical data, questioning the validity of existing views and perspectives about various practices, cultures, and societies, and deconstructing them to reveal the actual “truth” to reconstruct knowledge which is “real, a venacious account” complete with facts, candid and realistic. Or autoethnography can be further strengthened by triangulating it quantitatively or even qualitatively, by considering the approach of analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006). The essence of reality as captured in autoethnography could be further tested, probed and cross-examined to increase their generalisability and plausibility. Finally, the role of situated learning in a study abroad program can be further clarified by explicitly portraying the learning process using the different stages of knowledge management.

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