Rhythms of Academic Mobility (0103)

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In its boundary work, this paper does two things: first, it explores the productive rhythms of academic life and its ordering (convergence, specific to me) of time-space through mobile, regulated, bounded processes; and second, how such orderings (eurhythmia) are always partial and susceptible to disordering (divergence) by counter-rhythms and collateral realities. 'Collateral realities are realities that get done incidentally, and along the way' (Law, 2013, p. 156), and for the most part, they are done unintentionally. Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis can help explore collateral realities of academic mobility, particularly the doings of the body. The body perceives movement and experiences places in all sorts of ways. The senses used in the process of place making (placing me, that is) as well as the way social characteristics are 'written' on the body, such as, skin colour, disability, being young or old, race, gender and ethnicity, affect mobile (bounded) practices.The task of this paper is to extend rhythmanalysis into my life-paths as an academic migrant becoming a migrant academic. Constraints, absences or absent relations, such as border crossing, residence/visa restriction, loss of daily co-presence with family and friends, are all rhythms of alienation and the collateral realities of academic mobility.

As my own mobility and identity as an academic is complicated, a close analysis of how the term 'mobility' is actually used is a pressing consideration. For border-crossers, who move across state borders, it becomes a mechanism for the (re)production of inequalities in 'timespace'. Hence, as Faist (2013) argues, it is fruitful to analyse how it is used and 'what kind of boundary work it is actually doing' (p. 1640). Mobility is circulated as a resource of lifelong learning, knowledge transfer and employability. More important, it is channelled and political. It is constituted by socio-technical relations that involve the production and distribution of power. Social relations form various group identities, defining and regulating borders and boundaries of belonging, isolation, alienation, inclusion or exclusion. Alienation, Pred (1977) points out, could be partly or fully attributed to some permutation of the following interrelated circumstances: on an individual level, rhythmic clash between biological rhythms and emotional and psychological needs of the individual; and on a relational level, the sense of uprooted-ness of one's presence and identity in both personal and professional encounters and engagements. Consequently, one's identity becomes a 'matter of what one is rather than who one is, and one can become "thingified," not only in a Marxian sense by becoming an extension of the machinery of production, but also by becoming an extension of the over-all societal machine' (pp. 217-218).

My mobile subjectivity does not conform and is blatantly, at times, a 'non-sense'. The following common sense assumptions simply do not apply. First, it assumes that my identity is inscribed in my skin colour and place of origin. Second, it emphasises 'there', an absent place, rather than 'here', where I am. Third, it assumes that my identity is a definite form, singular and coherent. To appreciate the rhythms of

academic mobility, these assumptions or seemingly common sense realities must be undone or done differently. And in its making and undoing, there are collateral realities of movement that must be closely considered. Collateral realities would reveal that identity is not independent, given, definite or stable. Relations are rhythmic and they are specific. For this reason, my interest is in how mobility shapes identity through its rhythms and counter-rhythms.

My identity as a migrant academic is not a singular or stable category but a repertoire of multiple identities, both acquired and ascribed, that are organised unequally in relation to the access of identity-building resources – with the spectrum of possible categories that have been produced – name, accent, physical appearance, PhD degree from Aberdeen, my identity/identities are also stratified. Identity in one space may not be readily converted into its counterpart in another space. Evidence of differentiation is captured in the UK compatibility measure of my 4-year undergraduate degree, an honours degree from Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines, which was 'valued' as an 'ordinary degree' in the UK.

In 2005, I requested a 'Statement of Comparability' for my undergraduate degree from UK NARIC (National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom), a national agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills. The assessment letter states that my four-year full-time honours degree from Ateneo de Manila University 'is considered comparable to British Bachelor (Ordinary) degree standard'. The letter further states that the assessment 'although based on informed opinion, should be treated only as guidance'. The academic standing and value of my undergraduate degree in Computer Science was devalued. It was assessed to be of lesser value than an honours degree obtained in the UK. I would like to quickly point out how a similar honours degree in the UK does not necessarily meet the set NARIC criteria. I feel that it is a collateral reality of my migrant status. It is contested but something I have to accept and to which I submitted knowingly to obtain my further academic qualifications, an MA and a PhD, both from UK universities and where NARIC's role did not matter anymore as I crossed the boundary of UK comparability measure. My academic identity or knowledge status is defined according to measures and conditions I did not know or intend.

To conclude, identity is the boundary line of otherness. It is contingent and variable, never fully determined by myself or the transnational arrangements and requirements of institutions or nations or cultural and individual expectations. My place is ultimately not *somewhere.* It is (t)here – both here and there. My migrant/alien status keeps me in liminal and alien places (always plural), even in those most familiar and fixed in my encounters and experiences. Spatial and temporal movements have beat, pace and frequency that are sensed but not necessarily seen as you look at me and its politics would always place me away from here.

References

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