

Globalization and Me: Finding Connection

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Introduction

As I sat next to a young girl of about eight, the same age as my middle child, she turned to me and said in a quiet voice, that she was afraid her family would be sent back to Mexico. It was the day after the 2016 presidential elections. I did not know this girl, and just happened to randomly sit next to her during a visit to an art class she was taking with her elementary school in Los Angeles. We had said no more than our hellos before she had whispered her fears to me; maybe looking for guidance from me, or just support for her worry. I don't know which family members she was concerned for, maybe her father, or an uncle, maybe her mother; I don't know, but I understood her apprehension of being separated from those she loved and her anxiety for the future, as a shared human experience. As brief as it was, that interaction has deeply affected me.

I live in my culturally diverse hometown of Los Angeles, and although I have traveled extensively within the United States, and Europe, I have never had to acclimatize to a new culture, have never left my home country for another for any extensive amount of time, either to better my life or because of fear. I have never been separated from my family or my deeply rooted culture, but many are, and finding ways of connecting harmoniously and respectfully to others is paramount.

Human Migration

Human migration is the shifting of people from their original place of origin, and because of an increase in awareness, opportunity, and transportation technology, people are able to move about the world in search of a new home, a new job, or to flee a place of danger more easily than ever, even if it might be treacherous. Migration is a social, cultural, and environmental change

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brought on by push factors, such as war and conflict, natural disasters, economic strife, repression, or food shortages, or pull factors, such as a want for nicer climate or more job opportunities, among other things (Lee, 1966). Factors that push people from their homes or homeland or pull them to a new area or situation can leave a complex shift on one's personal and deeply rooted identity and cultural boundaries, and leave them searching for new connections to a people or place (Becker & Bhugra, 2005).

Because of these push and pull factors today's world is an intertwined network of divergent cultures and various diverse cultural displays and traditions, each with its own power to change local communities and have a profound affect on an individual's personal narrative. Cultural heritage is a source for identity, community connection, and stability; it is traditions and living communication passed down from our ancestors and passed on to our heirs; it is our rituals, our knowledge, customs, and skills (Becker & Bhugra, 2005). To encourage respect for other ways of life in our interconnected world we must form an understanding of the personally abstract cultural heritages that surrounds us. Like building blocks or a complex geometric pattern or design, we have to find a way to connect and fit together in an intricate and delicate balance.

How do Artists Respond to Migration and Globalization?

In the 1970's Dia Al-Azzawi left his homeland in Iraq for London, and has spent over half of his lifetime in his new European homeland creating abstract works dealing with the theme of identity, and his Arab culture (Al-Azawi, 2012). Azzawi explains, he left because of what he felt was an artistically stifling atmosphere and a profound pressure for his art to conform to tradition. He says he refused to return because of the pain he felt toward what happened to his

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homeland; that viewing Iraq from afar has given him a better understanding of his culture, and a way in which to share it and connect with his new culture.

In a way, the whole world is very small...a small village. That means if I can give you some influence from my culture and you give me yours, this is what we are supposed to have, now. This is human creativity, which can belong to anybody. (Al-Azawi, 2012)

Saloua Raouda Choucair, an artist active in both Beirut and Paris throughout most of the 20th century, was a rare female working through the western idea of abstraction and Islamic cultural inspirations of art and poetry (Choucair, 2013). Her work utilizes sectioned forms, influenced by her fascination with Sufism, Sufi poetry, and Islamic design. Her highly tactile, delicate, and sculptural work, often made of interlocking forms suggest a balance of unique individualism purposefully submitting to the whole, something we all share in our globalized world.

Conclusion and Human Connection

Knowing whom I am and where I come from is important to me, as it is for most. For better or worse, we are our ancestors and our cultural heritage, but we are also connected to every other human, not only biologically and chemically, but through our communities. Just as, when I look at myself in the mirror, I first see my outline, the shape; then the details, the toes, the fingers; then I see the veins and the hint of bones. Then I look to the earth, the soil beneath my feet, the roots of the tree sprawling beneath and through the dirt. Then I think about the earth's connections beneath the ocean to Norway, Pakistan, China, Beirut, and Los Angeles. Then I picture the network of cells that make up the world beneath the ocean, the plants that grow within the soil, and then our bodies connected to that earth. It's an unseen network of organisms

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and life. We are all invisibly connected, regardless of where we come from, how we came to be, where we have migrated to; instinct, environment, culture, biology, it's all a part of us, even if that connection is invisible or intangible.

When I think about that eight-year-old girl with her whispered fears, I realize my human connection to her, I think about my travels to her home country, and then I realize the beginnings of my understanding of her worries. I think about my travels to Dachau in Germany, just as the author Knight (2009) did, and I then I think about the story of the Holocaust survivor and artist I met years ago and I begin to realize my own personal narrative and connection I form as an artist and art educator in relation to people I've met or places I've been; the connections I make in my own mind about individuals, cultures, our shared human story, and how I wish to tell that tale.

Every human's story is not a single story (Adichie, 2009). We are all much more than the place we live at any given moment, or what we wear, or how we look. As art educators we must fill our understanding to that point; travel, teach the biographies and narratives of other artists; teach students the value of other's visual and material culture, as well as our own (Shin, 2009); work to banish stereotypes through the celebration of cultural pluralism (Wang, 2009); seek justice, and reorient ourselves to the purpose and multiple stories of all individuals in this global world.

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