

Narrating Cosmopolis: 'In Another Place, Not Here'

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Context and aims

A great deal of research has theorised migrants and members of transnational working communities as 'cosmopolitans' discussing cosmopolitanism as an ethico-political project that underpins new institutional as well as political arrangements worldwide (Nowicka and Rovisco, 2009). Yet, despite a rather large breadth of research, cosmopolitanism still remains largely a prescriptive concept concerning the development of a new world order or a descriptive concept that enables one to differentiate among social and cultural groups. Here we try to adopt a more practice-based approach and see how some aspects of the cosmopolis are enacted 'in the making', as a process of (self) transformation.

Literature

The paper critically discusses the concept of cosmopolitanism and expatriation in the area of IHRM, suggesting that the terms ought to be reconceptualised in the light of recent studies of the 'global' and identity. In 1959, Goffman suggested that identities are constructed for the purpose of managing impressions during everyday life, a performance of identity that is shaped via interaction. Stone (1962) later on suggested that identities are indeed situated, flexibly cast as fluid social objects, constantly redefined as part of social interaction. Based on this work and more recent application of it, identities are mobile and temporary constructs (see for example, Sarup 1996; Hall, 1996; 1997); hence, managing the cosmopolis of contemporary organisational context and translocated employees ought to reflect these 'disjunctured flows' (Appadurai 1990).

Methods

The paper is a methodological innovation as it is based on a collection of personal narratives of authors' own stories as 'strangers'/ expatriate employees whose narrativist vignettes guide the reader through the construction of several cosmopolitan identities, another unique cosmopolis. We present our stories as academics who find themselves working for a university outside our country of origin. We consider these stories to be discourses that have framed and continue to frame our ways of relating within our contexts of work.

Analysis and Discussion

In these stories, we want to explore the construction of our identities in relation to trans-location and place as well as national identity and mobilities within a constantly negotiated space of (non)belonging, somewhere in-between; mobility here, we have to note, is seen as a form of contemporary cosmopolitanism. In 'Another Place, Not Here', Brand (1996) portrays the diasporic experience for the women characters and indicate that their consequent feeling of not belonging 'emerges symbolically from their spatial dislocation - a displacement that mirrors their inability to fit in or to become part of a world from which they are alienated' (Almeida, 16).

Implications and Impact

This invariably displaced alterity is explored through our stories which we hope comes to re-define for contemporary HRM practice the concepts of globalisation, expatriation and (professional) identity. That is, we explore how our personal narrations contribute to the development of new understandings in the fields of Organisation Theory and Identity, as well as International Human Resource Management.