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ON SPACE, ON PLACE: A POETIC SELF-STUDY OF THE EMERGING ACADEMIC IDENTITY OF AN INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENT

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Abstract: Using poetic self-study, the author recounted her own lived experiences during the first year as an international doctoral student in New Zealand to explore how her academic identity emerged and (re)constructed. The article draws on theories of space and place, investigating the spatial production and social interactions of the author within spaces that, in turn, influenced her sense of being an academic. While literature has been more concerned with the questions of what activities, relations, and contexts contribute to the academic identity development of doctoral students, the author seeks to forefront the where of academic identity configuration.

Keywords: academic identity; space; place; international doctoral student; poetic inquiry; self-study

Introduction

Academic identity, defined by Clegg (2008), is “part of the lived complexity of a person’s project and their ways of being in those sites which are constituted as being part of the academic” (p. 329). McAlpine and Asghar (2010) suggest that the notion can be generally understood as the sense of being and becoming academic that one feels when one participates in collective academic practices. Pursuing the same line of reasoning, Mahlomaholo (2009) agrees that the term indicates values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and other responsibilities required by the role of an academic who presumably works in higher education and carries out duties including research, teaching, and community service.

Academic identity is central to doctoral education as “defining academic identity is at the heart of doctoral pursuit” (Jazvac-Martek, 2009, p. 253). In the doctorate, identity formation is as important as producing knowledge (Green, 2005). While it is often assumed that doctoral students experience a number of identity transitions as they study, first becoming a doctoral student, then a doctoral candidate, an emerging scholar, and finally a faculty member (Austin, 2002), the process is not always linear and unidirectional. There are cases in which doctoral students who have an established professional profile before embarking on their candidature may stumble upon a state in which they transit from being known and recognised by many others to “being no one and [being] known by nobody” (Dang & Tran, 2017, p. 80).

In higher education in general, and doctoral education in particular, space matters in the construction of academic identity (Madikizela-Madiya & Le Roux, 2017). Yet, while prior literature on the construction of academic identity among doctoral students tends to focus on the what and the how, and employs sociocultural, social network, socialization, or identities theories to investigate the issue, space, or the where, seems to be less problematised. In other words, not much prior literature has considered the significance of space and place, I would argue, in shaping international students’ identity, despite the fact that identities are formed and “continually reworked, contested and reproduced” in and through space (Shome, 2003, p. 43). Space is even more important to international doctoral students because increasing student mobility has turned universities into transnational spaces that host diverse student populations of multiple cultural and ethnic backgrounds. As Puwar (2004, p. 40) emphasizes, the bodies that are not “somatic norm” in a particular place are considered “space invaders,” marked as Other, and are subject to surveillance and informal regulations. Doctoral study, therefore, entails a transnational spatial experience that not only

signifies remarkable changes in the personal identity of students but also interrupts their established senses of who they are and where they belong as emerging academics. In this sense, while sojourning for their academic pursuit, international doctoral students "continue to be involved in national and global discourses of power and class, systems of history and social interactions, all of which are embedded in transnational social spaces that fabricate the students' being, belonging and becoming" (Bilecen, 2013, p. 670).

I left Vietnam for New Zealand in early 2019 to start my doctoral studies. Pursuing doctoral studies in New Zealand means that I am not only a transmigrant who physically, socially, and culturally emigrated out of my home country in the East, but also an academic transmigrant who immigrated into a Western social and academic society. This self-study article is my attempt to explore the reconfiguration of my academic identity and the interwoven relationship between my emerging academic identity and the sense of space and place. As argued by Foot et al. (2014), doctoral students' undertaking of self-study may assist them "in uncovering local cultural contexts that influence daily practice and identity development" (p. 104). I used poetic self-study as the methodology to unravel how different spaces and places were experienced by me as an international doctoral student in relation to the academic practices through which my academic and doctoral student identities were reconstructed. In that sense, space and place are less the backdrop that the academic identity formation and sense of belonging are measured against than a factor of the ongoing identity construction process.

Space and Place as Theoretical Framework

Space is perceived as dynamic, relational, and agentive, which shapes humans' ideas, beliefs, and identity (Lefebrve, 1991; Massey, 1994, 2005; Soja, 1996). In *The Production of Place*, Lefebvre (1991) declares "where there is space, there is being" (p. 22) to emphasize that human beings' existence is spatial existence. He further argues that "social space is a social product" (1991, p. 26). Space has the power to shape the identity and freedom of people living in it and is argued to be socially produced.

The concept of place is closely related to space. As Tuan (2001) asserts, "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with values" (p. 6). According to Relph (1976), place plays a complex role in human beings' experiences since their attachment to place(s) is the root of their identity and sense of belonging. Grange (1985) posits that our being is mingled with place, so much that "place and human beings are enmeshed, forming a fabric that is particular, concrete

and dense" (as cited in May, 2013, p. 141). The lived experiences in place(s), therefore, trigger issues of identity, belonging, attachment, and nostalgia.

Lefebvre (1991) identifies three aspects of space, or the spatial triads, including the perceived space (spatial practices), the conceived space (representations of space), and the lived space (representational space). The perceived space "embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial characteristic of each social formation," which ultimately "ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). The conceived space, the representations of space, is the space as imagined and constructed through symbols and abstract representations such as policies, discourses, and maps (Lefebvre, 1991). The third space, spaces of representation or the "spatial imaginary," is "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of inhabitants and users" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). This is the space as experienced or lived by its users, referring to what is actually felt, and what is really experienced by the body as it moves through the material enactments of space.

In the context of doctoral education, the perceived space includes "infrastructures and networks that move and guide people through space" (Ford, 2016, p. 182) that can be named as offices, seminar rooms, buildings, libraries, and other physical areas used by academics and doctoral students for their daily teaching, research, and other academic practices. The conceived space is imagined or conceived (Lefebvre, 1991) through spatial designs, plans, and policies that regulate the use of the physical space. In other words, the conceived space tells us what, and what not to do in certain spaces. For instance, the parking area that has a "Staff" sign means that students are not allowed to park their cars there. The lived space indicates what is "lived, felt, and experienced as students negotiate their way through the contingencies of everyday life" (Singh et al., 2007, p. 198). It includes aspects such as opportunities for growth and development in academe, freedom to explore ideas, desire to learn and unlearn, and individual curiosities and research interests.

Poetic Self-Study: Studying the Self Poetically

Self-study researchers focus their practice by examining their personal values and their professional work (Hamilton et al., 2008). Self-study research considers how "the context shapes and constrains [their] practice," and how through their own "actions [they] shape and change the context in which [they] act" (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 81).

In a self-study, life story and voice are two powerful aspects (Goodson & Walker, 1991). In this article, life story is my own story of the reconstruction of my academic identity through the spaces and places I interacted with. I chose poems as the voice to tell, analyse, and present my story because "we will sorely need the poetics of the heart" (Dobson, 2010, p. 133) to get to the knowledge of the self, the hardest knowledge to get at.

Poetry has secured a place in academic research as a method, as a way of writing, as a technique, and as a means to present research findings (Fitzpatrick & Farquhar, 2019; Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick, 2020; Schoone, 2015). As explained by McCulliss (2013), the incorporation of poetic inquiry in research "in some way as an analytical device, whether in data collection, as a tool to view data in unique ways that can help yield new insight, or as a way of representing findings to peers and the general public" (p. 88). In so doing, poetic inquiry seeks "metaphoric generalisability" (Furman, 2007) to connect author and audience by moving beyond "the study of one person to the study of many." It helps to "stimulate an empathetic understanding in the reader" (McCulliss, 2013, p. 89).

As Collins (2004) takes poetry as "an interruption of silence" (as cited in Leavy, 2009, p. 63), I regarded a poetic self-study as an act of my intervening silence to put forward a point of discussion, to engage with the ongoing academic conversations of similar inquiries. While the combination of self-study and poetic inquiry creates a wonderful space for the self to emerge academically, it does not neglect emotions, evocations, pleasures, and idiosyncrasies that poems bring about. The imaginary image of myself floating in space for education triggered a poetic flow of thinking, and I started to note down my thoughts poetically. Although I am not a poem person, I do not deny my poetic being, which generally lies deep down in my nature and is often instigated by my own experiences of moving here and there.

Poetry as Data and Analysis

The poems in this study are found poetry (Butler-Kisber, 2012; Richardson, 1994). They are also known as poetic transcriptions or data poems. Composing such poems involves transforming the interview transcriptions into poetry, by using the exact words of the participant(s), with possible rearrangement or juxtaposition in order to "highlight themes, or to convey complex or conflicting ideas" (Furman, 2015, p. 105). For this study, I translated my research journal entries into found poems. The process involved selecting key words from my notes and research entries, weaving these words together, and rearranging their order to craft poems.

I had certain language barriers in using English as a foreign language and there were multiple occasions when I clumsily attempted to give words to or translate the nuances of my emotions from Vietnamese into English. I was reassured by Cahnmann-Taylor et al. (2015), however, who propose that second-language poetry-writing provides additional opportunities for "self-expression and hybridised identity, for cultivating a critical, post-colonial voice, and for reflecting on one's home language and culture in newly critical and complex ways" (p. 22). Besides, as "our existence is fundamentally poetic" (Crotty, 1998, p. 99), we all are "poetic beings" (Schoone, 2015, p. 45). The stories in the poems were what I experienced in reality. But what I thought through my experiences and how I crafted the poems came from my inter-dialogues with people around me and intra-dialogues with myself to critically examine my own thinking and perception of life. That is to say, that my poems are not just about my voice. They also have other people's voices in every fibre of words and every cell of rhymes in them. In what follows, the poems are presented with relevant discussion to shed light on the configuration of my emerging academic identity against my sense of space and place in New Zealand.

Emerging Academic Identity in Spaces and Places

The poems in this section feature the spatial production which charts how I understood and represented the spaces I occupied as a novice academic and how I negotiated and navigated these spaces as I developed new social networks, relations, and emotions during the first year of my doctoral programme.

My journey started with:

Departure: Awakening sense of space

I am
at Changi airport,
wondering…
Where am I?
Not in Vietnam, I just *flew out*.
Not in Singapore, I *haven't entered*…
I am
in *some* place
in between countries
in *transit*,
the feeling of in *transit*
entails

s p a c e c o n f u s i o n

and

p l a c e l o s s

This poem was written to capture my feelings when I was waiting for my connecting flight to New Zealand at Changi airport in Singapore. It was not the feeling I had only at this specific time and in this specific place. It is the feeling I experience every time I am at any transit area of an airport. I frequently ask myself about the exact place I am in. At that moment, I was not in my home country, and I had not yet reached the country of my destination. I was in a country, but not really so because I did not get the entry stamp of an immigration officer at the border. I was just in a transit area, not totally in, not yet out. I was between borders. In a similar vein, I thought of the academic identity I aimed to form as one of the goals of my doctoral studies.

As an Eastern train running on a Western railway track, what could possibly happen? The transit, disconnection, and connectivity became threads of my experiences.

As if I am walking on thin ice

While talking to professors, I feel humbled, even scared.
“Did I say something wrong?
Did they understand what I really meant?”
I wondered, reflecting…
“*Was it the right choice of words?*
Did I make myself clear enough?
Did I address them right?
Should I call them Doctor or Professor?”
I know it’s normal to call them by their first name
but my cultural instinct
told me not to: *“It’s impolite to address your teachers without their title!”*

I still wonder --
“Will they find my emails too polite, lengthy, awkward?”
In every email I write them, I start with
“Dear Professor and Dr.”
I can’t help myself as that’s what I’m used to my whole life.
“Should I ask my professors for approval before doing this?
Or should I take initiative to go ahead?

What is more like the decision of a doctoral student?
How independent is…not dependent?"
I feel as if I'm always a student who needs to be taught…

But *here*
they don't see me as somebody who needs or waits to be told.
They believe I'm capable.

I believe that, too.

I'm not letting my old self go;
but I'm fitting in!
I'm operating in the third space—
not totally here, nor entirely there.
It takes time…
but I'm *here*
being and *becoming* a part of the whole picture.

My worries and confusion regarding my academic encounters with my professors at the university stemmed from my self-awareness of being a novice, a protégé in academia, and my self-doubts of not performing well enough. I was afraid this could cause negative impressions about me. Self-doubt is argued to be an inherent part of a doctoral study, and researchers have framed it as an asset of novice researchers like PhD students (Bell, 1998; McAlpine et al., 2009). But self-doubt in previous research mostly refers to the doubts doctoral students have regarding their research capacity (Kennedy, 2020). In this study, my self-doubt refers to behaviour, attitudes, and independence that a PhD student, particularly an international doctoral student, is expected to exhibit. Such experience of "uncertainty about the identity of self and purpose" (Meyer & Land, 2006, p. 22), or "liminality" in van Gennep's (1960) terms, is a threshold to new understandings and contributes to a developmental phase of becoming an academic, more so when it comes to international doctoral students.

Doctoral education can be conceptualised as a borderland, and doctoral students as its inhabitants. They are not yet academics. They are learning in the process of becoming academics and are considered to be emerging academics, or staff in universities. Andzaldúa (1987) proposes that those who inhabit borderlands and build a borderland identity must develop "a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity," learn "to juggle cultures," have "a plural personality" and operate "in a pluralistic mode" (p. 79). Entering a new academic space or, in my case, a Western

environment, I had confusions about the learning culture, as manifested in the poem above, particularly about questions regarding how to address professors, how to engage in social discussions with other academics, and how to learn to acquire expected skills and independence as a doctoral student in New Zealand. This confusion stemmed from disparities in cultures. The education system I come from inherits the Confucius legacy which proffers a clear division in power between teachers and learners (Truong, 2013). Although I was aware that the power hierarchy in an educational setting may be flattened in a Western context, my cultural instinct kept putting me in states of hesitation and confusion about issues of (in)dependence and (in)formality in professional and social conversations with academics. The first few months of my candidature were exactly the time when I was in transit, learning to acquire competence to navigate and develop connectivity to the new spaces.

As a development process, academic identity formation in doctoral students is argued to be oriented towards becoming accepted and appreciated. While previous studies tend to focus more on the disciplinary enculturation of doctoral students and the acceptance of members of the students' academic communities (Jawitz, 2009; Shin et al., 2018), this article follows Aarnikoivu's (2021) argument that the developmental process happens in multiple spaces during the doctoral education stage. In this paper, the spaces include my own office, the kitchen area, the parking space, the academic conferences, and my supervisors' offices.

I have my own office

Now I have my own office;
I share a space with other professors
and
we share a kitchen, a coffee machine, an oven
"*Wow*," I whispered to myself.

I even took my parents to my office
and I remembered I said,
"Look, here is my office!"
I didn't have an office before.
"*Truly impressive!"*
My father said.
And I have a card
which I swipe, and the door opens for me.

Like I own this space,
like it belongs to me!
Whenever I step in,
I feel like I'm breathing in
academic oxygen.

As an apprentice in the field, having an office was important for me to feel I belonged to a community of researchers. The feeling of both independence and dependence in the doctoral student hub taught me lessons about respecting others' workspace while having my own space to think and work. The physical settings and spaces in New Zealand, compared to that of my home country, required new understanding of spatial practices in order to own the space. Activities such as disabling or enabling the building alarm, setting the private code, or learning what to do as the first or the last to leave the building were indicative of how I became part of the space. The space also gave a sense of equal positioning of doctoral students and their supervisors by spatial practices such as having access to the same buildings.

As an international PhD student, the new landscapes, such as offices, private computers provided by the university, and exclusive access to staff areas, particularly the office kitchen, meeting rooms, and parking lots, still required relational and contextual adaptations. The following two poems about the office kitchen and the parking area illustrate this point.

Office kitchen

The office kitchen is intercultural
where we smell all kinds of food,
where we learn about various culinary skills.
We are similar and equal:
The door sign says:
"For staff and doctoral students"

This is the space where
we stop and have small talks,
where we meet and discuss,
where our personal lives and academic lives align,
where I have a quick chat with my professors,
where I learn what others are doing,
where I witness people's habits,

success stories and fallouts,
where I learn about the culture of a tea break
and what is in a tea break,
where we have a simple joy
of having free food as students,
where we have a big joy
of being in a community as researchers.

Parking space

We greeted, smiled
and waved through the car windows
"She is in the same building as me."
I told my parents in the back seats.

"*Morning!"* grinned a male,
A professor, I guessed.
"Morning!" I smiled.
"Hey, how are you?" a voice from behind
inquired.
I turned around, and said:
"Oh, hi, I'm good. How are you?"

She is a fellow doctoral student.
Her second child is in the same class as my kids.
In her hands is her lunch box, as in mine.

"Aw, it's cold today, isn't it?
"Oh, yeah."
By the way, how's your study going on?"

We talked along the way to our building
about struggles
about meetings
about goals
about deadlines
about plans,
like colleagues.

The office kitchen and parking area were casual spaces where unplanned academic ideas could be hatched from daily interactions and communications among doctoral students and between doctoral students and professors, thus influencing the sense of being an academic. This sense is evident in the two poems above. The kitchen and parking areas are spaces that effect the day-to-day practices of academics and also open up a place of quick exchange among students and staff. While Madikizela-Madiya and Le Roux (2017) observe that prior literature "does not mention parking space as a significant factor in academe" (p. 198), my account challenges the idea that casual spaces have little or no role in doctoral students' academic life. Irrelevant as it seems, however, the everydayness and ordinariness happening in these spaces contribute to the process of academics-in-the-making (Archer, 2008; Gill, 2014) because they open up chances to meet, communicate, and have exchanges, which in turn can help form a community and a sense of belonging to the community.

On the contrary, there were times when I was more inclined towards my identity as a PhD student rather than oriented towards being an academic in these casual spaces. Whenever I stepped into the kitchen and saw professors and students talking, I did not know if I should join them, or how I could join them in their ongoing discussion. I was hesitant, shy, and puzzled. I would get lost in thinking about what I should do, so I started re-examining my cultural knowledge and background. Was it because I was shy, or because I did not know that, in such situations, I could apply my presumed knowledge of Western values of privacy, such as not interfering and minding my own business? Did I read the situation wrong? Again, I was afraid of making mistakes. What if I did not join the conversation gracefully enough, and caused embarrassment for myself and awkwardness for others? These internal conversations, as my reflective practice in specific social spaces and places, were an attempt to seek, not only adaptation to new practices, but also cultivation of a sense of belonging. Common spaces, like a shared kitchen, foreground and make explicit cultural differences between international doctoral students, like myself, and the host academic environment at a university. That said, spaces are not just "inert backdrops against which struggles of identity occur," but actively constitute "unequal and heterogeneous production" of identities (Shome, 2003, p. 43).

Another social space that has had a significant impact on my emerging academic identity is conferences. Conference participation involves the induction of students into the role of academic researchers (Kuzhabekova & Temerbayeva, 2018). Conferences offer doctoral students opportunities to learn about future research roles and activities, and to start to integrate into scholarly communities. Despite feeling engaged with a

wider academic community, however, they may feel out of their depth, which resonates with my own experience.

At conferences

I felt small
in a big world.
How should I start?
Should I compliment their presentations?
Should I ask questions?
Is there a guideline on how to network?
How should I approach 'big names'?
By saying 'Hello'?
How should I introduce myself?
I haven't prepared for a short introduction.
How can I make myself memorable?

I ended up sitting alone in a corner
sipping coffee
observing
or hiding!
"Take it slow," I told myself.
"It's a big world and I am small.
Let the wind blow;
Like pollen I will go."

While graduate students generally benefit from presenting their work and increasing their visibility in their research communities, not all of them are prepared or mentored to network at conferences. Conferences, in my argument, are "contradictory spaces" (Harwood et al., 2008, p. 1250) where the academic identity development of doctoral students can both be reinforced and challenged. As illustrated in the above poem, on the one hand, I started my socialization into the wider scholarly community and, on the other, my sense of being an academic was challenged by "'the tyranny of the clock', academic hierarchies and dominance of academic 'stars'" (Kuzhabekova & Temerbayeva, 2018, p. 194). Although PhD students, as early career researchers, often feel that they need to "shine on all fronts of the profession" (Heijstra et al., 2017, p. 770) and want to grab opportunities for future employment possibilities on occasions like conferences, it takes time for them to fit the robe of an academic. Kuzhabekova and Temerbayeva (2018) explain that students at the later stages of their candidature might

feel more comfortable, confident, and selective in building and expanding valuable networks for themselves than those in the earlier stages. In that sense, the academic identity of doctoral students is always in flux, always evolving in irregular directions within certain spaces.

As another space to navigate, the supervisory relationship is compared to "a 'black box', a privatised space" (Goode, 2010, p. 39). In my supervisors' offices, there was a sense of freedom about being a student who could ask questions without fear of being judged.

In my supervisors' offices

In my supervisors' offices,
I see myself as a student
who comes from a Confucian education background,
who sees teachers as masters,
who assumes an inferior role,
who knows less,
who is learning.

In their offices
they ask me about my culture,
the history of my country.
They Google the name of my country
and read the historical twists and turns

"Interesting!" my supervisor exclaimed,
"I haven't had any Vietnamese doctoral students;
You are my first."

There was a mixture of pride and fear in me.
Proud to let them know about my home values
and afraid that I would not live up to the standards.

But in their offices
I feel safe
to ask silly questions
to discuss and debate
to confess my confusion.

Interestingly, knowing that I was not expected to know everything, I rarely had a feeling of being inadequate and, therefore, was confident in my academic identity construction. The reliance on my supervisors as the gatekeepers of academia and my independence as a researcher allowed me to oscillate swiftly and smoothly between the roles of student and academic. My supervisors trusted and nurtured my curiosities; they did not disrupt my sense of being an academic. My ideas were heard and appreciated, and my cultural identity and existing knowledge were not marginalised and ignored in our academic discussions. My experience confirms the findings in Ching's (2021) study that the guidance and opportunities provided by supervisors paved the way to the realisation of doctoral students' present academic career identities.

Reflective Notes

My experience of space as an international doctoral student aligns with concepts of transit space and connectivity space, spaces that, according to Kesselring (2006), describe two contradictory mobile mindsets. Transit space refers to moving through space with the least interaction and fuss, as a fixed destination is already decided (Kesselring, 2006). Connectivity space, on the other hand, indicates the interacting, experiencing, and living in intense relationships with others (Kesselring, 2006). In other words, "transit space is a means-to-an-ends approach whereas connectivity space is less structured and comfortable with contingency" (McGloin, 2021, p. 374). During my doctoral journey, these transit and connectivity spaces may alternate at times. For instance, casual spaces such as the office kitchen and parking area were often transit spaces, where interactions were short and irrelevant to academic concerns. The kitchen became a connectivity space for me, however, when my supervisor hosted a poetry lunch and a group of her students gathered, shared lunch, and recited their research poems. My supervisors' offices, where mostly supervision meetings and academic exchanges occurred, were also connectivity spaces in which we all invested professionally, culturally, and socially. This is how I could achieve the equilibrium of the two identities, or the hybridity of the two identities, as student and academic.

Material features and physical layouts, along with situated practices in specific spaces, shape identity constitution (Cresswell, 2004). Identity construction can be regarded, therefore, as a "spatially situated process" (Hetherington, 1998, p. 17). By foregrounding and arguing for the significance of spaces, this article fills the gap in the literature on the academic identity development of international doctoral students, which has, until now, been concentrated on the socialization process of students and their interactions in academic contexts and communities. Since the social is manifested

"in and through space" (Malpas, 1999, p. 36), engaging with social-spatial interactions (Massey, 1985) offers us a theoretical tool to investigate the process of academics-in-the-making (Archer, 2008; Gill, 2014). In this sense, the article provides insight into one international doctoral student's experience of fitting into a new academic environment, with different values and rules, as it also unravels the vulnerabilities, self-doubts, and negotiations experienced in the processes of operating in such spaces. The article, in other words, offers alternative conceptions of doctoral students' academic identity development to re-invigorate our understanding and to provide a more nuanced reading of the experience of international doctoral study. In tracing the shifts in my own academic identity reformation relative to the changes in my sense of space, I suggest that this particular theoretical lens is useful for universities, graduate programmes, and supervisors in their attempts to enhance the quality of doctoral education. Additionally, the article suggests that emotion-provoking encounters that occur in specific places and spaces are important in a doctoral learning journey. In Cotterall's (2013, 2015) argument, developing academic identity in doctoral students has emotional dimensions that often go unacknowledged. Interactions, emotions, and language can penetrate and unsettle the emerging academic identity of doctoral students, even at the level of the tenuous space of everydayness, extending the depth and breadth of their emerging academic identity.

Conclusion

My aim in this article is to understand how spaces interact with various aspects of my academic identity construction as an international doctoral student. I suggest that academic identity is spatially situated and negotiated. The findings in my study indicate that policies (conceived space), practices (spatial practices), and experiences (lived space) are realised as comprehensive components of space (Lefebvre, 1991). Emerging academic identity is produced and reinforced in certain spaces where the sense of belonging to the academic community is felt evidently. Interactions and communication exchanges in these spaces also contribute to the doctoral student acculturation process and help to develop academic discourse practices of doctoral students in general, and international doctoral students in particular.

As a researcher, poetic self-study is my attempt to "imagine and accomplish an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently" (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 653). The use of poetic self-study has helped me to "explore some of my hidden feelings, forgotten motivations and suppressed emotions" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 261). My poetic shades of emotions, while configuring/reconfiguring my identity as an early-career researcher, during the first year of my

doctoral programme, offer “unique sources of insight to be valued and examined” (Tillmann-Healy & Kiesinger, 2001, p. 82). The pride, vulnerabilities, confusion, and hesitation presented through the poems reflect my efforts to break out of the traditional moulds of academic writing to convey “the invisible, the immeasurable, the intrinsic as essential elements of education” (Dobson, 2010, p. 141). That said, this poetic self-study crystallises the complex and contradictory feelings, emotions, wishes, and anxieties that I experienced when I entered doctoral studies and learned to navigate diverse social and academic spaces as both an international doctoral student and a novice academic. Further, it involves a dynamic relation among the self, the human, and the non-human, which gives shapes and forms to the formless and ambiguous processes of becoming an academic.

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