

Critical Pedagogy Within The Migration/Security Nexus: But Who Gets Through The Door?

Catherine Baker

University of Hull

Area studies centres in the West take up an unusual position in the global politics of education and mobility. On the one hand, they originate in initiatives to improve Western society's knowledge of foreign areas and were sustained during the Cold War because governments and intelligence services believed that an ongoing knowledge base about the opposing bloc served national interests. The School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) in London, where I taught part-time in 2011–12, is no exception, having been formed during the First World War as a centre for “Slavonic studies” at the same time as its founders campaigned for the British government to accept the war aims of the Slavonic and Romanian nationalist movements in eastern Europe (Pearson 1993). In the late 20th century and after, scholars in east European studies have thus had to confront both the “essentializing and exoticizing tendencies” of traditional area studies and the “bounded spatial imaginary” that too narrow a focus on area risks bringing about (Stenning 2005: 381). They have simultaneously become part of the contemporary corporate university, required to contribute

to the income generation of a larger institution (not least at SSEES, which merged with the self-described world-leading University College London in 1999).

On the other hand, however, as centres of expertise about a certain region of the world, area studies departments are also part of academic circuits that flow between their Western locations and their regions of study. (These circuits are not novel to the post-Cold War world; the Czech historian Tomáš Masaryk, later the first president of Czechoslovakia, was among the first lecturers at SSEES.) Both the staff and student communities are a mixture of people from, or with family origins in, the region of interest and thoroughly “outsider” scholars such as myself (some from the country where the department is located, others from various countries in Western Europe or North America). The politics of knowledge in area studies teaching are thus even more complex than they appear at first glance. As an Anglophone and Briton with no family connections to eastern Europe, when teaching at SSEES I faced the paradox that students from the region we studied had effectively travelled away from it in order to learn about it from my colleagues and me.

The challenges for critical pedagogy in this setting – questions of positionality, authority, representation... – are many. Yet before even considering what we do *in* the classroom, we need to acknowledge deep structural constraints that will have affected our teaching before we have even begun to teach – the stratification of who is even able to *enter* the classroom and cross the border of the state where the classroom lies. This stratification takes place in the UK through policies that affect students who are non-UK citizens unequally depending on which state(s) they are citizens of. Since the introduction of tuition fees in 1998, UK universities have charged citizens of the European Economic Area (EEA) the same rate as UK citizens but charged other states’ citizens far more. Though fees have increased dramatically for all students following government-mandated rises in 2006 and 2011, the EEA/non-EEA differential has remained. In 2013–14, undergraduate fees at SSEES were

£9,000 per year at “UK/EU” rate and £14,750 for “overseas,” fees for most postgraduate courses £6,000–£9,750/£13,770–16,250, and research degree fees £4,400/£15,750.

Importantly for east European studies, the enlargement of the European Union has periodically widened the availability of “UK/EU” fees (even as fee rises have increased the financial baseline that these students must attain). The EU accession of eight east European states plus Malta and Cyprus in 2004 opened the “UK/EU” rate for study at SSEES or any other UK university to their citizens and enabled them to work while studying. The same privilege was extended to Romanian and Bulgarian citizens in 2007, though with onerous registration procedures for students who planned to work (Ciobanu 2013), and Croatian citizens from 2013 onwards are likely to face similar measures. These changes are welcome to the citizens of new EU member states and increase the diversity of student populations, but do not benefit students from non-member states, who unlike EEA citizens will also require visas to enter the UK at all. Access to an east European studies education in Britain, then, is differentiated by where the EU boundaries currently lie, just as enlargement has interfered with existing cross-border mobilities across what must now be secured as the EU’s eastern frontier.

This is not to suggest that study in the UK is feasible for all prospective students from the EEA: rises in “home rate” fees compound the high cost of living (particularly in London) and the growing scarcity and precarity of part-time employment. EEA citizenship nonetheless brings formal privileges from which non-EEA citizens are excluded; non-EEA students face not only higher tuition fees but an ever harsher regime of visa applications and fees, checks to establish their “credibility” as a student which verge on the invasive, and requirements to regularly register their whereabouts with the university while in the UK for fear the institution will be sanctioned by the UK Border Authority. To a greater degree than EEA students, they are caught within the “migration–security nexus” (Faist 2004), in which states’

policies and practices of border control are informed by their beliefs about risks to national security and their assessments of prospective entrants as threats. This long pre-dated 9/11 but tightened after it (Adamson 2006). In the UK, the nexus has hardened further since 2010 as a result of the coalition government's explicit intent to reduce net immigration.

The same year that I taught at SSEES saw the beginnings of a free universities movement in the UK intended to counteract the 2011 increase in fees. How, though, would this have benefited potential students unable to even enter the UK, let alone to afford "international" fees at SSEES? While recognising that many other forms of inequality intersect with citizenship, I share Stuart Tannock's concern that "the demand for educational equality [must be extended] beyond national borders" (2013: 450). Part of our critical pedagogy inside and around the classroom must be an awareness of who has been able to get through the door.

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