Fostering Criticality within Neoliberal Higher Education: A Critical Action Research Study with First Year Students in Kazakhstan

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not, and will not be, submitted in whole or part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Signature...
(Sara Maria Camacho Felix)

Acknowledgements

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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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Summary

This dissertation considers how I, as a practitioner in international higher education (HE), can engage students in criticality, as defined by critical pedagogy (CP), despite a global trend towards the neoliberalisation of HE policy. I examine alternative purposes to neoliberal HE that consider the importance of developing criticality and the role of context and identity in its development. I conduct a piece of critical action research (CAR) at a state university in Kazakhstan, a unique context due to its recent independence in 1991, its multi-ethnic population, and its current formation of a national identity. My central research question is: how do students voice their criticality through engagement in writing narrative reflective essays?

I begin by questioning the neoliberal conception of HE and, in particular, its claim that HE is a private good. I argue that the neoliberal conception of HE is failing by its own standards as socio-political and ethnic / gender inequities remain regardless of access to HE. Therefore, I consider HE through the perspective of CP to understand *additional* purposes of HE beyond neoliberal values.

Drawing from Allman, Barnett, Freire, and Kincheloe, I argue that HE should *also* foster critical beings who question the structures and tacit assumptions of socio-political contexts while *imagining* alternatives. I suggest criticality is central to fostering critical beings – where the thinker questions themselves and who they are as well as the socio-political context in which they are framed.

I conducted a CAR to engage with how I encourage students' journeys towards developing criticality in their context: Kazakhstan. I asked thirteen students to write student self-evaluations (SSEs), which are narrative essays written and re-written four times within a three-term module. In the SSEs, students are invited to tell the story of themselves and their learning throughout the year. For this research, I analysed the first

and the final drafts of the SSEs using thematic analysis. I also conducted interviews with the thirteen students at the beginning of the second term to explore ideas in their SSEs.

This dissertation's originality is its contextualization within Kazakhstan's HE system. Because my theorization of criticality focuses on the engagement with the students' selves within their context, I question Kazakhstan as a socio-political place in terms of the performance of identity, drawing on Foucault's theory of performativity. I attempt to understand the complexity of identities that students may bring into the classroom, such as a complex national identity in a multi-ethnic state, a historical context where ethnic minorities arrived into the geographic region as political and ethnic exiles, and a continual struggle around gender equality since independence. The theorization of how this Kazakhstani socio-political context may impact on my students allows me to better engage with the criticality they share through their SSEs.

The CAR documents a significant development. Students who initially determined the value of their learning through marks/ grades (a hallmark of neoliberal performativity) began to reflect on their learning beyond marks through the SSE process. Students expressed an engagement with their own tacit assumptions about their contexts in their final SSEs in a way that they did not verbalize in the classroom. More individual voices developed, with some starting to imagine alternatives, while others questioned the feasibility of such alternatives within the context of Kazakhstan.

I conclude with some reservations regarding those findings. It is delicate to consider what the students' development might have been without the SSEs. One also needs to consider whether students were simply replacing one form of teacher pleasing performance (getting good grades) with another (being self critical). However, this thesis argues that spaces can be created for practitioners that help foster student criticality within a neoliberal HE system.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Overview of My Argument and Research Questions

In this dissertation, I argue that one of the purposes of higher education is to foster critical beings who question the structures and tacit assumptions of socio-political contexts while they *imagine* alternatives in which inequity *might* be minimized. Then, in light of this theorization of higher education, I engage in critical action research (CAR) of my own practice – at a state university in Kazakhstan, teaching on a programme developed by a British university. The aim of this programme is to introduce first year social science and humanities students to the expectations of undergraduate academic research at Anglo-American universities. This CAR attempts to create space for students to engage with criticality and express themselves and their understandings of the world as critical beings.

This research contributes to an existing theory of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Brookfield, 2005) and critically complex epistemology (Kincheloe, 2008) by reconsidering critical thinking to include student identity as well as imagined action from said thought. In other words, I am reframing critical thinking to be subjectively framed instead of objectively framed (Brookfield & Holst, 2011). In doing so, I advocate a move from conceptualizing criticality as a thinking/ cognitive skill to one that is more socially and politically contextualized. Criticality, in my analysis, is framed by the subject that is thinking, and the thinker is engaged with their context as they think critically. Therefore, this research attempts to engage with the context of Kazakhstan as it aims to encourage students to be critical beings.

Below are my main research questions – most of them are formulated using 'I', drawing attention to my dual role as practitioner and researcher, along with my attempt to remain reflexive and aware that this is my interpretation. Specifically, this research focuses on answering the following questions within the context of my practice in Kazakhstan:

1. *What is criticality and its role in higher education?* In answering this question, I attempt to engage with the limitations of neoliberal dominance in higher education and engage with a wider purpose framed within ideas of questioning

tacit assumptions and engaging in critical praxis. I also question the role of context in how criticality is engaged.

2. *What role does the use of a progressive narrative essay play in developing and/or voicing criticality?* I consider how, in understanding criticality as contextually framed, I, as a practitioner, can use a progressive narrative essay that I name a student self-evaluation (SSE) to become aware of my students' criticality and how they frame that criticality.

3. *How do I see criticality being voiced within the SSE?* Using thematic analysis and theories around gender, ethnicity, and identity performativity, I attempt to understand how students are choosing to voice and engage with criticality – in other words, if the SSE does play a role in allowing students to voice their criticality, how can I see it?

4. *How do I emphasize elements of criticality developing in the SSEs (especially in earlier drafts) a) without objectifying my students and b) while respecting my students?* As a practitioner who draws on Freire (1970), this is my attempt to ensure that I respect my students and their identities as I engage with their voices.

5. *What are the implications for my professional practice?*

Why Me and Why this Research?

Much of this dissertation is about both a critical view of oneself in the world as well as one's own identity, using Bauman (2004) and Foucault (1980, 1997, 2000) to understand identity's construction, its relation to power, and its performativity. It is a dissertation about criticality – a view of critical thinking that moves from being objectively framed to being subjectively framed (Brookfield & Holst, 2011). These subjects think about the world in their own complex socio-political and economic contexts, and the relationship that context has with their criticality in the world. Criticality also reshapes the concept of thinking as being linked to the concept of action – that thinking informs action (be it speaking, writing, or another form of action) rather than be separated from action (Freire, 1970). That action too will be directly informed by the actors' identities and understandings of themselves within the world.

A subjectively framed criticality that is intertwined with the concept of action becomes central to higher education when higher education is viewed as a place of developing critical beings. This is my central argument – that one of higher education's purposes is to foster critical beings that question the structures and tacit assumptions of socio-political contexts while they *imagine* alternatives in which inequities *might* be minimized. From there I conduct a piece of critical action research to attempt to improve my practice at a state university in Kazakhstan by encouraging first year social science students to become critical beings. I do not necessarily assume these students start from a point of non-criticality; rather, my practice aims to encourage it further.

This dissertation is my own act of criticality as a practitioner. It is a subjectively framed critical thought, informed by who I am in the world and how I see myself within my own complex context. As criticality, this dissertation is also an action – a verbalisation of my critical thinking that hopes (yes, 'hopes' which is framed by Freire's and hooks' pedagogy of hope (Freire, 1992; hooks, 2003)) to impact on how other practitioners in higher education, especially international higher education, engage their students and give space to hear those students within their contexts. It is implicitly framed by how I have come to see the world and engage in the world. However, in this introduction I would like to take a moment to make that implicit framing explicit. My own identities both impact on why I am a practitioner, and my identity as a practitioner impacts how I engage students in my teaching and engage in academic research with and about my students. By identity, I mean the relationship between how individuals view themselves and how society constructs them (Hall, 1996). These identities are fluid and are constantly being renegotiated within a historical context (Hall, 1996; Bauman, 2005). Therefore, in this chapter, before I introduce the structure of the dissertation, I am going to introduce who I am as a practitioner, in light of my own multiple identities and personal history.

In one sentence: I am a mixed-race woman in my mid 30s with dual nationality who has lived in sixteen countries, where, in most, I have been an ethnic and/or religious minority. To break that down a little bit more, I have only lived one year in Portugal, my country of birth and primary nationality, and ten years in the United States, my country of naturalized nationality and the nationality most people associate to me, regardless of my own proclamations. Until I began secondary school at an American

boarding school, I had lived primarily in the Global South, though, to be clear, I lived in the Global South from the privileged position of 'expat' rather than the potentially less privileged 'immigrant'. It was only once at this boarding school that I came to the realization that a) I was of mixed race, b) officially I was considered 'black' even though three of my four grandparents were white, and therefore, c) I was seen to be 'passing' if I did not express my black identity explicitly while calling out white classmates on racist attitudes. It was there that I went from witnessing the racism of fellow expats towards local populations to experiencing racism directed at me. However, it was also there that I discovered my voice as a woman – that my voice could be strong, valid, and accepted even as a voice that went against the majority views of my classmates – that space was given for me to be openly critical in the classroom, and that counter-hegemonic voices could be valued, at least by my teachers. And, it would be a few years later, at university that I would discover the affective economy of higher education (Ahmed, 2004) i.e. the validity and power of emotions, passion and care in the classroom – where a leading professor in history and head of the department openly cried in front of her students as she engaged with the history of the civil rights movement and Malcolm X. One could be academically rigorous and yet still feel passion for humanity to the point of tears – where the act of teaching at higher education was an act of love.

And it is these experiences, as well as these confused identities, perceived and/or actual, that have led me to my own practice in higher education as well as my interest and focus on practicing higher education internationally. Education to me was a place of enlightenment – not that of the universalist understanding of the world, but that of a contextual, complex world where I gained enlightenment into my own privileges in comparison to the world I knew, and yet discovered the structures that might have (and maybe continue to) limit my place in the world. Education, especially higher education, became a place where I began to question the world and the tacit assumptions of the socio-political settings I found myself in, especially as an inside-outsider – as someone who passed as white and passed as American even though officially, I was neither of those things. I began to search for voices outside of dominant discourses and in doing so, began to try to find my own voice. Higher education was where I began my on-going journey – halted and difficult – towards becoming a critical being, and my practice is my reflective action in this critical self-work. Though filled with the concern

of employability, especially as a graduate entering a post-9/11 world as a non-US national, the primary purpose higher education provided was to allow me to engage with the world as it is, developing my understanding and critique of it, and then encouraging me to imagine alternatives. It helped me to become an active citizen, not of a state, but of society. And this is how I engage higher education as a practitioner, as one who values higher education as a place to develop criticality in complex contexts, where students are given space to reflect, question, and engage in dialogue in order to begin (or continue) becoming critical beings in their own contexts, however that may be understood. This also forms the foundation of this argument that I make here, in this dissertation, as a piece of critical action in hope of informing how we, as academic practitioners in international higher education, engage our students and their contexts.

My Practice within this Study

While in Kazakhstan, from 2010 to 2012, I taught first year undergraduate humanities and social science students at an English medium university. This university had several strategic partners with universities across the United States and the United Kingdom tasked with developing and importing programmes for the university. The British university that I was employed by had been asked by the Kazakhstani university to develop their first year of study for all students entering their undergraduate studies. The Kazakhstani university system undergraduate programmes take place over four years yet their school system is one year shorter than the British system. So, the British and Kazakhstani university decided that the first year programme of this university would be the equivalent to a British international foundation programme (set at Level 4 according to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) standards). The students were divided into three disciplinary strands – life sciences, physics based sciences, and social science & humanities.

The programme was designed before the British university entered into its partnership with the Kazakhstani university, and it was designed for international students coming to the UK to study at that British university. These students were usually a diverse group from multiple countries and educational systems, and the programme provided both academic language modules and subject knowledge modules. These modules, for the social science and humanities strand students included *English for Academic*

Purposes, Culture and Society, International Relations, and *Economics*. In the first year that the programme was run in Kazakhstan, the year before this study takes place, the lecturers on this programme (employed by the British university but working on the ground at the Kazakhstani university) quickly discovered that the students in social sciences and the humanities were struggling with their 'critical thinking' skills. Therefore, in the second year, the year this study takes place, the *Culture and Society* module was replaced with an *Academic Research and Methods* module, which I co-designed and coordinated. The module aimed explicitly to develop critical thinking, research and learning autonomy, and subject and academic skills.

The principles and values regarding the purpose of higher education and understandings of critical thinking or criticality (Barnett & Coate, 2005; Brookfield & Holst, 2010; Kincheloe, 2008), which I explain below as well as in Chapter Three, underpinning this research are those that underpinned the design of the *Academic Research and Methods* module. Both the management of the overall first year programme as well as the team of teaching fellows working on the module agreed to these principles and values and the syllabus, assessments (both assessed and not), and materials were designed to engage with them. The next section provides an overview of my main argument and introduces both the purpose of higher education and definition of critical thinking used in the study and the module.

Organization of the Thesis

Kazakhstan seems to be modeling its higher education within the expectations outlined by international organizations that use neoliberal discourse as noted from speeches given by President Nazarbayev on his visions for Kazakhstani higher education (Nazarbayev, 2010; 2012a; 2012b). In Chapter Two, I question this view of higher education (higher education as private good and that multiple private goods creates a public good) using Marginson (2007, 2011), Brown & Lauder (2010), Brown, Lauder, & Ashton (2011) and Naidoo (2003, 2005, 2007). When considering neo-liberalism in higher education, the argument does not seem to work in practice, as disparities continue between social classes, gender, the Global South versus Global North, and 'races' or ethnicities. By private good, I mean that higher education exists in order to benefit individual private individuals by, for example, allowing them to gain better

employment opportunities. However, despite neoliberal arguments, multiple private goods do not seem to serve the public good, as socio-political and racial / gender inequities remain regardless of access to higher education to get jobs training.

In Chapter Three, I argue that higher education, reconsidered through critical pedagogy (CP), should *also* have the public good of encouraging critical beings that question the structures and tacit assumptions of their socio-political contexts while they imagine alternatives in which inequity might be minimized. I develop this argument through theorists such as Allman (2010), Barnett (1997), Barnett & Coate (2005), Brookfield (2005), Brookfield & Holst (2011), Freire (1970, 1992), hooks (1994, 2003, 2010), Kincheloe (2008), and Torres (1998). I suggest that it is through criticality that critical beings can be fostered. Key to criticality are the identities of the individual thinker and how they engage with their socio-political contexts. In Chapter Four, I consider how identities are formed (Bauman, 2005) and performed (Foucault, 1990; Butler, 1997) within historical socio-political contexts – specifically Kazakhstan. However, in Chapter Three, I focus on defining criticality to bring in the thinker. The thinker questions themselves and who they are as well as the social contexts in which they are placed.

I consider three main critiques of critical pedagogy from feminist and post-modernist (specifically Lather (1998), Ellsworth (1992), and Gore (1993). First, silence does not mean a student is uncritical. This assumption within CP is not necessary. Alternative places can be created to speak outside of the classroom, and participation and engagement are not just about performance. Second, despite claims of decentering or recentering authority, the teacher still has considerable control in critical pedagogy, and continues to act as gatekeeper to knowledge. This can be dealt with by keeping dialogue (rather than discussion) at the centre of learning as theorized by Allman (2010). Content knowledge is the starting point, not end point. Therefore the teacher needs reflexivity towards self and students to be open to the students' thoughts. Finally, CP might create a system where it is the teacher who is telling the students what they should want – therefore having a positivistic view of a 'universal' truth where the teacher continues to act as of gatekeeper, and the students are 'objects to be worked on' (Morley, 1998, p. 19). I agree with this critique: CP needs to reject this purpose of prescribing specific action for emancipation. Instead, CP should focus on questioning

contexts and assumptions, imagining alternatives, and recognize students may not agree. In other words, it is a place to explore views. CP does *not* need to be about dictating right versus wrong nor about *demanding* action, but rather it is about *imagining* action.

Since criticality in this research is framed as being contextually dependent, in Chapter Four, I attempt to engage with Kazakhstan as a socio-political context that may be shaping the students' identities. This is part of the research's originality. Kazakhstan as a context has unique challenges that inform how students engage with criticality, in terms of identity (Bauman, 2004) and the performance of identity (Foucault, 1980; Butler, 1990, 1997). Specifically, this includes the creation of a 'national' identity in an ethnically diverse newly independent state, where the name of the nation is shared with one of several ethnicities within the state (Dave, 2007). The research also considers how ethnic diversity in Kazakhstan exists within a historical context originating from being a periphery state of the USSR where political prisoners and ethnic minorities were sent in order to be silenced in the official discourse of the state (Rossi, 1989; Naimark, 2001; Solzhenitsyn, 2002a; 2002b; Applebaum, 2003; Lantz, 2010; Gheith & Jolluck, 2011). The context also has implications regarding gender identity performance because indicators of gender equity, such as the annual Global Gender Gap Report (2012), show a struggle to maintain opportunities since independence from the Soviet Union. I look specifically at the 2012 report rather than the 2015 report because this research took place during the 2011-2012 academic year, though I do consider the drop in rank from 2012 to 2015. This research questions whether these contextual areas may not have implications regarding the *performance* of strategic silence by students as part of their identities, both ethnic and gender.

In Chapter Five, I explore the methodology of this research. With criticality focused on individual thinkers and their socio-political contexts, in this case Kazakhstan, I conducted CAR in a module called *Academic Research and Methods*, attempting to encourage criticality among these students. This was done by having students engage in a student self evaluation (SSE) – a narrative essay that was written and re-written four times throughout the three term module, and supported through several personal tutorial sessions. These SSEs are based on the idea of creating a personal dialogue with the self to develop criticality, drawing from theories and research by Barnett (1997), Clegg,

Hudson & Mitchell (2005), Pryor & Crossouard (2008), Kincheloe (2008), and Allman (2010).

The merit of CAR is that it provides a way to consider and reflect on my practice. While McNiff & Whitehead (2006) state action research is done to encourage personal professional development, CAR, based on different works by Kincheloe (2008), Schon (1987), and Kemmis (1997), goes beyond that to encourage a broader move for educational change for societal change. In the case of my research, this would be a change towards imagining possibilities. However, there are critiques of CAR. First, it can be a linear and prescriptive which does not link one stage of the research process with other stages. I will expand on these critiques in Chapter Five. This critique is valid for action research, which is simply about following the process first, and reflexivity, second. However, CAR should not have definitive stages that cleanly end or start, and it places reflexivity at the centre of the entire process. This means in CAR I need to constantly be reflexive and this reflexivity drives the movement of the research, not the prescribed stages. Second, CAR has the potential for a disassociation between theory and practice. Therefore, it is necessary to continually return to theory – for theory to be part of the same whole as the practice. Theory and practice in CAR should be inherently connected parts of the same whole that must be discussed at the same time.

In Chapter Six, I engage with the findings of my CAR. I found that at first, students' identities were reduced to, and dictated by, assessments and the results. They gauged their own value as students based on marks, with prescribed solutions to perceived performative failures to be simply to do more studying. However, as students were given the space to reflect beyond their marks and encouraged to do so, they began to see their learning as being guided not by marks, but by how the content and ideas they were encountering in their courses were changing their understandings of themselves and their contexts. They began to express in writing an engagement with their own tacit assumptions about their contexts in a way that they did not verbalize in the classroom. Students seem to have begun to engage with criticality as theorized in this dissertation.

In conclusion, in Chapter Seven, I consider specifically the findings from the final SSEs. In these SSEs, students were identifying and questioning the influence of different areas of their own lives on their own thinking, while considering how else they

might think of themselves within their everyday lives. This included the influence of family, culture, and the socio-political contexts. Some students began to imagine alternatives, while others questioned the feasibility of such alternatives within the context of Kazakhstan.

While the SSE may not be solely responsible for these changes (students may have gone through these changes without its existence), it is through the SSE process that awareness of these changes can be monitored and made explicit. However, there are questions as to whether students were simply replacing one form of teacher pleasing performance (doing well on exams) with another (being self critical).

Chapter 2 Kazakhstan's Discourse on Higher Education: Neoliberalism and its Limits

Introduction

In March 2006 President Nazarbayev announced the target that by 2015, Kazakhstan would enter the top 50 most economically competitive states globally (Kalanova 2008, 2011). As part of this new goal, he stated that Kazakhstan would completely restructure and revitalize its higher education system, believing higher education would allow Kazakhstan to increase its human capital. Since then, several policies have taken effect. First, a university ranking system was created between 2006 and 2008 with the help of UNESCO (Kalanova, 2008; 2011). Then, Kazakhstan invited the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to evaluate the state of its higher education in 2008 (OECD & World Bank, 2008). And in 2010, Kazakhstan invited international partner universities, mainly American and British, to develop different faculties in Kazakhstani universities as a means of bringing international standards and western models of education. The faculty in which this study takes place is designed and run by one of these British partner universities.

This economic view of higher education as a means of developing human capital is laden with neoliberal values e.g. promoting markets and competition. In this chapter, I analyze the theoretical underpinning of neoliberal thought and demonstrate how President Nazarbayev subscribes to this perspective by analyzing the discourse in some of his speeches on higher education. Then, I consider how this discourse is actually imported from a larger international discourse by analyzing global policy documents from the three organizations involved in Kazakhstan's restructuring of higher education – UNESCO, OECD, and the World Bank. Finally, I question whether neoliberalism is able to fulfill its own promises due to enduring socio-political inequities based on gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic backgrounds inherent in capitalist societies. In questioning the values of neoliberalism, I leave open room for the possibility of an alternative purpose of higher education that attempts to address these inequities.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Neoliberal Perspectives

In this section, I define neoliberalism using Harvey's (2005) interpretation of the theory as well as Milton Friedman (1962) and Friedman & Friedman (1990) writings. From there, I consider how this theory understands the purpose of higher education by considering both an individual perspective – why the student goes to university – and a state perspective – why the state invests in higher education.

Harvey (2005) provides a concise definition of neoliberalism when he writes that it is:

> A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skill within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade (p.2).

Built on economic theories proposed by Hayek (1948) and Friedman (1962), proponents of this theory argue that freedom of markets and individuals to pursue economic gains will create better societies. As individual entrepreneurs compete, innovations, technologies and services improve while driving down costs. This improvement at lower costs would cause an increase in the overall economic strength of states, which would in turn create more equitable societies. Friedman & Friedman (1990) state:

> The great achievements of western capitalism have rebound primarily to the benefit of the ordinary person. These achievements have made available to the masses conveniences and amenities that were previously the exclusive prerogative of the right and powerful (p. 137).

In other words, by focusing on capitalist, free market forces, societies become freer, the logic behind this being that competition for more clients or customers causes 'conveniences and amenities' to become affordable to all.

Neoliberalism also claims that markets have the ability to self-regulate – that the act of competition will cause businesses and entrepreneurs to meet the demands of its consumers in order to gain profits (Friedman & Friedman, 1990). Through this constant competition and market focus, it is believed that the entire society progresses/is elevated (Hayek, 1974). Private enterprise is the centre of economic growth and societal improvement.

However, under neoliberalism, the state does not disappear. Rather, it is tasked with the specific purpose of creating markets where they have not existed before (Harvey, 2005).

And the institutions of government exist in order to preserve the free market economy at all costs. Not only does it create and maintain a monetary system, but provides the 'functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee… the proper functioning of markets' (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). In this, all circles of life become dictated by markets – public services, medicine and education – including higher education (Brown, 2015). However, the state does not intervene in the markets beyond creating them and ensuring that they function. In other words, institutions within the state, such as the military and universities, exist in order to create, maintain and encourage unregulated free markets and free trade. Brown (2003) explains this well when she writes 'the market *is* the organizing and regulative principle of the state and society' (p. 11). Therefore, under neoliberalism, higher education and universities are provided with a central focus on labour markets and competition.

Higher education under neoliberalism has three possible ways of framing students. First, it becomes a market where institutions compete for students by providing them with the services that students desire, described in the 'student-as-consumer' discourse (Naidoo, Shankar, & Ekant, 2011; Woodall, Hiller & Resnick, 2014). Two, it creates individuals that are 'neoliberal subjects', meaning they can compete in the market – giving them the employability skills and knowledge necessary to gain better jobs and have an advantage in earning more money (Allen, Quinn, Hollingworth, & Rose, 2013). This is based on the idea of 'merit selection' – that higher education provides graduates with the skills needed for better employment, allowing them to be hired based on merit (Brown, 2013). And finally, higher education helps states have stronger economies by creating human capital that will make nation-state economies more competitive globally (Collins & Rhoads, 2010). These three areas intertwine to create 'a culture of performativity and an institutional obsession with … rankings in international league tables of excellence' (Shore, 2010, p.27). And, while notions of competition within higher education under neoliberalism may differ from more traditional understandings of higher education (Grant & Elizabeth, 2015), the mechanisms behind it – of markets, students-as-consumers, and employability, are distinctly neoliberal. Therefore, all three of these areas are deeply intertwined in how they function and the overall outcome of higher education.

I would like to pause for a moment to consider Shore's (2010) reference to 'a culture of performativity' that is created through a neoliberal discourse in higher education. This neoliberal performativity (not to be confused with the Foucauldian performativity of identity which I discuss in Chapter Four) can be seen not just in ranking systems, but in a discourse within educational policy that 'the knowledge work of educational institutions is rendered into 'outputs', 'levels of performance,' and forms of 'quality'' (Ball, 2007, p.28). In other words, the worth of an educational system, whether compared globally, nationally or locally, is determined by the quality of its output. This can be seen in both policy reports by the World Bank, the OECD, and UNESCO (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbly, 2009; Nusche, 2008; Salmi, 2009) as well as in the language of quality assurance for curriculum design and assessment creation (QAA, 2008; 2014, ENQA, 2009). For students, this means that they are 'evaluated on the basis of how they perform at university' (MacFarlane, 2015, p. 338). Therefore, it should not be surprising to see this trickle down into students' own understandings of their education – their success being determined not by a change in thinking or awareness of themselves, but rather by the results in performance indicators. I see this within the work of this dissertation, and discuss it at length in the findings chapter (Chapter Six).

This performativity is part of neoliberal discourse that states institutions of higher education compete in a global market. However, not only does higher education become a competitive market, where institutions compete to be the best at the top of the international league tables, but also they prepare graduates to enter their own markets to be competitive individuals. This is a discourse of employability that Lauder, Brown, and Aston (2010) critique (which I address later in this chapter). The logic of employability argues that the more graduates are desired from specific higher education institutions, the more competitive and higher ranked said institutions will be. Therefore, under neoliberalism, the market of higher education focuses on two things: student employability, which is the production of highly desired employees, and providing students with a service. As Nordensvard (2011) states, students are both the consumer of higher education as well as the commodity produced by these institutions.

Students, as consumers, buy a service from universities – where they learn about what they are interested in (or what will better suit them economically). This service,

provided to these students-as-consumers is based on a language of 'customer care' that emphasises 'product specifications, entitlements, and consumer rights' (Morley, 2003, p. 79). Morley notes this market-oriented language which positions students as consumers of higher education is new, and it is a change from the language of 'change agents, radicals, and transgressives' that positioned students in the 1960s. This change signals a view that students purchase a service in higher education that is made material through the awarding of a degree and diploma. These degrees and diplomas allow the market to recognize the skills purchased by the student- they encode the complex higher education experiences. The student is recognized / credentialised as a skilled worker. The student has gained a private good from higher education (Marginson, 2007, 2011). Private good means that the individual who has obtained a degree from a university is the one to benefit (as opposed to the general public) from this service. Neoliberalism is not necessarily arguing that higher education could or could not benefit the general public. However, that it is *primarily* a private good designed to benefit the student-as-consumer. In this case, graduates gain the possibility for a higher income and higher purchasing power through obtaining the diploma.

Obtaining the skills that are recognized through a university diploma now makes the student a commodity on the labour market. This is the second aspect of higher education under a neoliberal perspective. Heyneman (2004) writes that universities focus on teaching students to adapt to 'flexibility in the labour' while 'emphazing those skills that maximize adaptability' (p. 447). In other words, universities are expected to alter students and train them to be employees that would suit companies involved in a dynamic market. Graduates have been shaped and moulded into becoming human capital that is consumed by the market, to make the state more competitive globally.

The graduate as human capital connects to the third purpose of higher education under a neoliberal perspective. Higher education as institutions of the state further the markets of these states by managing the creation of high skilled human capital. The state 'ensures that education is wisely invested into human capital and that the educational outputs produce real economic growth' (Nordensvard, 2011, p. 159). In other words, the collection of private goods (a society with more people able to have higher economic means) creates a public good (a state that is more competitive on the global markets and therefore wealthier) (Marginson, 2011). Naidoo & Jamieson (2005)

describe this neoliberal view of the public good of higher education as 'enhancing national competitiveness' (p. 38). As the nation becomes more competitive in its higher education, it can now sell this service to others on the international market.

This neoliberal view of higher education makes higher education part of the global market, and universities across Asia aim to compete with the 'world class universities' based in the USA and UK (Deem, Mok, & Lucas, 2008). Naidoo (2011) warns that this could create a possible 'global template' (p.47) where 'it is not clear to what extent the interests of developing countries are served by an uncritical acceptance of the prescriptions encapsulated within this discourse' (p.50). In other words, the desire to imitate university systems that are already deemed successful, based on the frame of neoliberalism, may not be in the interests of the countries that are quickly attempting to adopt those systems of higher education. Later in this chapter, when I look at President Nazarbayev's speeches along with policy documents, this question is worth returning to. Not only could this importing of competitive education systems 'begin to eliminate cultural difference and lead to erosions of indigenous values and culture' (Naidoo, 2011, p. 52), it could also not serve the socio-political and public needs of those particular societies.

A state that views higher education through a neoliberal perspective will concentrate on these three elements of higher education – higher education as a market, higher education as providing students with the means to be competitive on the labour market, and higher education as providing the state with human capital to be more competitive in the global market. Kazakhstan's policies and discourse regarding higher education demonstrate a focus in these three areas. I will specifically analyse President Nazarbayev's three most recent speeches on education in Kazakhstan as well as the implementation of a university ranking system to demonstrate this focus on neoliberal values.

Kazakhstan's Discourse on Higher Education

Since 2006, President Nazarbayev has been the leading voice of the discourse on higher education in Kazakhstan. Therefore, when considering the perspectives of Kazakhstan on the purpose of higher education, his speeches are a vital source in understanding the

direction that the state is taking. Also, in 2006, when creating a national ranking system, the justifications used and the decisions as to how to implement it further demonstrate the values Kazakhstan has regarding its education system. In this section, I analyse them both to attempt to understand the depth of neoliberal influences on guiding policy towards higher education.

President Nazarbayev's Vision of Higher Education

President Nazarbayev has been the main voice in Kazakhstan for the development of education reform in Kazakhstan, and since the opening of a new university designed to make Kazakhstan's higher education system internationally competitive in 2010, he has given three hour-long lectures on the purpose and value of higher education in Kazakhstan (2010, 2012a, 2012b). I analysed his speeches, using thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Braun & Clark, 2006), to identify the key themes he draws upon to justify investing in the Kazakhstani higher education system. The predominant justifications used consistently throughout his three speeches seem to follow the justifications used in neoliberal discourse for the purpose of higher education. I identified these themes through his use of economic justifications and the language of global competition, which echoes the wider neoliberal understanding of creating markets, investing in jobs, and developing human capital through higher education.

Ball (2007, 2012) suggests that neoliberal discourse can be seen through the expression of key ideas around markets, competition, knowledge economy, and commodification. I have to consider ideas rather than exact words, as I am working from translations of his speeches from Russian into English. These are official translations offered by the Kazakhstani government, as government officials at the Office of the President of Kazakhstan provided these translated speeches. In analysing the speeches with special attention to how higher education is conceived and what is emphasised within higher education, President Nazarbayev's neoliberal perspective becomes apparent. He values higher education through an understanding of market competitiveness as well as human capital and economic growth.

President Nazabayev states that he views higher education as creating the employees and human capital needed to meet international market demands. Specifically he states:

It is predicted that by 2020 the global labor market will need additional 40 million workers with higher education and 45 million specialists with vocational education. There is currently a deficit now of engineers, doctors, chemists, biologists, and other representatives of exact and natural professions (Nazarbayev, 2012b).

Nazarbayev openly refers to the global labour market and explicitly states that higher education's purpose is to fill the needs of this labour market. This reflects both neoliberal views that higher education develops the employability skills that students need to compete in the labour market as well as the view that higher education ensures that states remain competitive in a global market.

Nazarbayev then links the need to be competitive with specific types of labour and markets that are growing. In the quote above, he refers to engineers, doctors, chemists and biologists. His previous speeches also refer to such specialists – in 2010 he stated 'We need specialists in the field of high technologies, science absorbing industry and advanced materials. It is impossible to survive without this competition in the world.' This focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects is indicative of a neoliberal focus in higher education. Naidoo (2003) states that global economic competition forces states to focus on developing parts of their economy that create the highest valued markets such as applied sciences and engineering, which means incentivising higher educational institutes to focus on STEM subjects. The emphasis on STEM also de-emphasises social sciences and humanities which are disciplinary areas where criticality has traditionally been developed (Nussbaum, 2010). This is exactly what Nazarbayev is doing in both these speeches as well as his 2012a speech when he praises the amount of faculties of sciences (he claims there are more faculties than actually exist) at the university where this study takes place. He (2012a) directly links these faculties of sciences to feeding into technological parks and businesses that will boost the Kazakhstani economy.

Finally, Nazarbayev repeatedly refers to international standards and international competition in all three speeches. He openly compares Kazakhstan to economies in South East and East Asia: Japan, China, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia (2012b), a trend also seen in the Global North e.g. in relation to the PISA scores, suggesting that these states' success is one that Kazakhstan should follow in order to become an economic power house. He then states: 'We are consistently upgrading the national

education system, bringing it closer to international standards.' By mimicking successful economies and having international standards of education, Kazakhstan hopes to begin to compete economically with these states. This follows neoliberal logic that business models that work will gain financially and grow, whereas those that do not will lose market share (Harvey, 2005). President Nazarbayev also demonstrates neoliberal logic that suggests that successes can be transferred across states, regardless of the national and socio-political contexts that shape each state – an issue that Ball (1998) problematizes well in his work. According to this neoliberal logic, or what Ball calls 'magic solutions' (1998, p. 121), since these states are deemed economic 'power houses' (Marginson, 2011; Healey, 2012; Collins & Chong, 2014) and have economic and international educational standards reflecting a business model that works, Kazakhstan should follow those in order to become more competitive. This echoes the assumptions made in the World Bank report *Putting Higher Education to Work* (diGropetto, Tandon & Yusuf, 2011) that states 'no country in East Asia has reached high-income status without a strong higher education system' (p. 6). While they admit that they cannot demonstrate causality, they go on to recommend that for countries that wish to compete economically on a global scale, investment in higher education to develop skills is key, using high income East Asian countries like Singapore and South Korea as examples. It is this kind of discourse that Nazarbayev is echoing in this speech.

In his speeches, Nazarbayev focuses on creating individuals that can enter the labour market, universities specializing in STEM subjects, and Kazakhstan's university system needs to follow the examples of economic power houses in order to compete internationally. These areas of focus display his attention to the neoliberal understanding of economies and international politics. By using terms such as 'competition', 'innovation' and focusing on technology as a marker of advancing Kazakhstan's economy, he is echoing the discourse of neoliberalism, as defined by Ball (2007). This is further reflected in Kazakhstan's decision to invite Anglo-American universities to act as partners to new universities opened by Nazarbayev. At the university where this study takes place, there are two British universities and three American universities (set to increase as new faculties open) currently creating different faculties within the university. One of the original British Universities, which was the provider examined in this study, pulled out of the project in 2014 at the end of their

initial 5-year contract. However, within months, it was replaced by a new partner university from the United Kingdom. Naidoo (2007) reports on this trend, stating that it is common for developing states to rely on foreign universities (as well a corporate partners) as a solution to commodifying higher education, while Ball (2012) sees these 'partnership' trends as a policy-for-profit, especially these Anglo-American institutions. In this, both institutions obtain neoliberal gains, one selling their expertise that allow them to be competitive globally, and the other bringing those expertise to their own countries. This focus on mutual global competitiveness also explains the fluidity of change – that as one British partner university no longer obtained market gains from the collaboration with the Kazakhstani university, another entered the market to replace it, in hopes of gaining market value and recognition.

In the next section, I will look at the recent implementation of a university ranking system in Kazakhstan. This decision, and how it was executed, reflects Kazakhstan's decision to treat higher education through the lens of global neoliberalism.

Ranking Higher Education in Kazakhstan

From 2006 to 2008, Kazakhstan began implementing a higher education ranking system encouraged and supported through the direction of UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education (Kalanova, 2011). After its evaluation (Kalanova, 2008), the methodology of the ranking system was permanently adopted with the creation of the Independent Kazakhstan Quality Assurance Agency for Education (IQAA) in 2008 (IQAA, 2012). The justification for the ranking system as well as the outside influences on the choices regarding the methodology used demonstrate a neoliberal perspective driving the desire for a university ranking system in Kazakhstan.

According to IQAA (2012), the justification for developing a ranking system in Kazakhstan was to raise 'the competitiveness of higher education institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan on national and international levels' (para. 1). Kalanova (2008) adds that 'one of the ways of advancing quality in higher education is the ranking of higher education institutions' (p. 303). In other words, Kazakhstan's Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) assumes that by ranking universities, competition is created between these institutions, which leads them to improve programmes with a new motivation that did not exist before. This motivation and competition would lead

institutions to continually improve to become the best and remain the best. Deem, Mok, & Lucas (2008) analyse this drive towards developing 'world class universities' (p. 21) in Asia more broadly by engaging directly with league tables to demonstrate that they can compete with other institutions in the United States (and the UK). It also echoes a broader belief that by ranking universities, nation-states can gain a better understanding of their economic strengths compared to others (Blackmore, 2016). League tables allow for the evaluation marketable knowledge gained, which is 'key to gaining advantage over other nations' (Blackmore, 2016, p. 84). By launching their own league tables, Kazakhstan is following in the steps of China and Taiwan who have done the same as a means of increasing focus towards being competitive nationally and internationally. This is the very foundation of neoliberal arguments. This was the basis of Friedman's (1962) argument – through free-market competition, the quality of goods and services produced continually improve in a continual drive to be on top. Therefore, Kazakhstan created a competition among higher education institutions by publishing ranking systems with the belief that this would allow the quality of Kazakhstani universities to improve overall.

In creating the methodology for ranking universities, MOES chose to follow the Berlin Principles of Ranking Higher Education Institutions. This was a set of 16 principles for ranking universities created by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP, 2006). However, IQAA (2012) and Kalanova's (2008, 2011) reviews of the ranking methodologies provide no justification for using these principles. Rather, they seem to assume this is self-evident. It may have been driven by a neoliberal assumption that by imitating what the best claim is quality, Kazakhstan would be measuring for internationally tested quality. These are American standards – the IHEP is an American non-profit policy-oriented research institute. However, this is never made clear. What is clearly stated (Kalanova, 2008) however is that in determining which principles were more important and should be more heavily weighted in the ranking system, MOES looked to the United States, Britain, Germany and Japan as guides. The justification is simply stated that these states offer the most 'recent developments in quality assurance of higher education' (Kalanova, 2008, p. 303). This reflects a desire to imitate those states that Kazakhstan views as having competitive higher education to develop its own institutions – a growing trend in developing states that Naidoo (2007) discusses at length in this international market and commodification of higher education.

By justifying the need to rank universities based on neoliberal principles of competition driving quality and by imitating systems deemed to have internationally competitive higher education, Kazakhstan's new system of ranking universities demonstrates the dominance of neoliberalism in dictating not only discourse but also policy. However, this discourse and policy do not necessarily originate from within Kazakhstan. Rather, neoliberal views of higher education seem to be imported from the international nongovernmental organizations such as the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank. In the next section I look at sources of this policy transfer, a joint report on the state of Kazakhstani higher education by the World Bank and the OECD (2008). I also analyse the discourse of these organizations' views on higher education in general to show a wider global dominance of neoliberal values.

Policy Transfer from International Organisations

In *Theorising Quality in Higher Education*, Morley (2004) discusses how international organisations such as UNESCO, OECD and the World Bank influence policy by creating global consensus. This is the case with Kazakhstan. These organisations' discourses regarding higher education, both in Kazakhstan as well as globally, are filled with neoliberal values. In this section, I analyse their policy documents for Kazakhstan and for international higher education to demonstrate the extent of their commitment to markets and the development of human capital.

The World Bank and OECD (2008), on request of the Kazakhstan Government, submitted a 226-page report on the state of higher education in Kazakhstan. The language of the report along with the recommendations throughout is all based on a discourse favouring neoliberal values in regards to the role, purpose and value of higher education. This is not the Kazakhstan Government, but rather two non-governmental international organizations recommending that Kazakhstan act on this view of the role of universities. In this report, outside international actors are encouraging Kazakhstan to take a neoliberal stance on higher education as being beneficial to the state. Blackmore (2016) notes this trend of the World Bank compiling reports on the state of higher education in each state. He suggests this is because reporting on higher

education acts as a measure for the economic health of any given state, which both organizations view as part of their remit within analysing economic policy.

The report (OECD & World Bank, 2008) states that Kazakhstan needs to improve its higher education system if it hopes to be competitive in the international market, and in order to achieve this improvement, Kazakhstan's higher education system needs to focus on employer needs. For example, the report explicitly recommends a labour market training focus for higher education by stating:

> In general, compared to best international practice, **relationships between higher education and employers** are very limited, with adverse consequences for the economy. Employers in Kazakhstan are not routinely involved in identifying needs for skilled manpower that the universities might meet, or in standard setting, curriculum design and quality assurance. The result is that the output of the tertiary education system is unlikely to meet the needs of industry; and Kazakhstan employers do very little training at tertiary level themselves. Statistics suggesting that graduates almost all find suitable employment are unreliable. (p. 204 – emphasis in the original text.)

The OECD and World Bank state that in order to be internationally competitive and to meet general international standards, Kazakhstan's higher education system should be focusing on providing the manpower needs for employers in all aspects of course design – they are explicitly engaging in the employability discourse. This is reminiscent of Harvey's (2005) analysis of the role of state institutions within neoliberal theory – these institutions exist for creating, maintaining and expanding of free-markets. According to this report, Kazakhstan's higher education should be dedicated to producing human capital for the labour market. For students, this means Kazakhstan's higher education should have a direct link to employability.

Overall, this report (2008) mentions 'employability' or 'employers' 156 times and has two chapters dedicated to discussing the labour market relevance of higher education. It also mentions 'labour market' or 'market economy' 109 times. The purpose of higher education in this report is clearly to funnel human capital into the labour market, and that supporting a competitive market economy should be the focus of the Kazakhstan government's investments in higher education. However, this focus is not there because the World Bank and the OECD are adopting the view of Kazakhstan's Government to analyse this higher education system. Rather, these two influential organizations along

with UNESCO (which was involved in creating Kazakhstan's ranking system) view higher education as serving the needs of global markets.

UNESCO's (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbly, 2009) executive summary from the World Conference on Higher Education focuses on 'consumers' of higher education (students) as the driving force behind higher education. It states that higher education is a 'private good, largely benefitting individuals' (p.13). This language mirrors Marginson's (2007, 2011) analysis of a neoliberal focus of higher education. It mainly benefits the student (consumer) who gains the ability to be more marketable in the job market. And neoliberalism elevates private goods as the means to create wealthier and more equitable societies (Harvey, 2005).

The OECD's (Nusche, 2008) *Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes* looks to employers and students' needs to succeed. Specifically, it states that the success of higher education should be determined by student completion, success rates of recent graduates finding jobs, and its ability to meet the career expectations of students. Nusche's (2008) focus is equally neoliberal; however the OECD chose to focus on the specific private goods that students receive from higher education. Students should gain the ability to find work and to successfully fulfil their career objectives. And finally, students (consumers) should be able to complete – otherwise the private good is not gained.

While the OECD and UNESCO focus on the students as consumers, benefitting privately from higher education, the World Bank (Salmi, 2009) focuses more on the multiple private goods that states receive by having an increase in human capital to increase their economic competitiveness in a globalized market. Under this aspect of higher education (Marginson, 2011, Nordensvard, 2011), the student moves from consumers to commodities. In *The Challenges of Establishing World-Class Universities* (Salmi, 2009), the World Bank writes 'world-class universities are recognized in part for their superior outputs. They produce well-qualified graduate who are in demand on the labour market' (p.23). Students are reduced to an output – a product to be used on the labour market to make that state's economy more competitive and successful.

Therefore, these three organizations with influence in Kazakhstan's higher education restructuring are concerned with neoliberal values, and they are transferring these values in their recommendations to Kazakhstan. These priorities for higher education may have influenced Kazakhstan's decisions to invite international partners into their universities as well as Nazarbayev's constant focus on markets and economic competitive when discussing higher education. The logic in neoliberal theory (Harvey, 2005) is that through free-markets and market competitions, society improves as more technologies and better goods are offered and individuals are free to pursue economic interests. And higher education helps graduates be able to have more opportunities in this free-market – they become highly valued and high-waged labour.

However, Kazakhstan does not seem, in any translated documents from MOES or speeches from Nazarbayev made available, to have questioned whether there is evidence to support the neoliberal argument that the OECD, World Bank, and UNESCO offer. In the next section, I consider the question: does higher education actually lead to better jobs and higher wages? And in considering this, I look at inequalities in states that are viewed to have competitive higher education systems and economies to show that higher education cannot achieve a solely neoliberal purpose.

Limitations and Critiques of Neoliberalism

As I state in the introduction to this chapter, Kazakhstan has justified its restructuring of higher education based on a desire to become one of the top fifty economic powers globally by 2015. The World Bank (2015) ranked Kazakhstan as forty-seventh based on GDP, which might suggest that the state is achieving this goal. However, with the recent devaluing of the Russian ruble, Kazakhstan's link to the Russian economy through the Eurasian Economic Union, and the drop in global oil prices (Schenkkan, 2016), it is unclear if this goal can be maintained (further demonstrating the fluidity of a global market focus). Regardless of Kazakhstan's ability to remain in the top 50, Kazakhstan assumes that higher education has the means to do this by increasing the quantity and quality of its human capital, which is a neoliberal view of the purpose of higher education. This, along with policy transfer from international organisations such as the World Bank, OECD, and UNESCO, furthers Kazakhstan's neoliberal focus. However, higher education does not necessarily provide a private good of better jobs

and higher wages to all who attain degrees. And it does not necessarily create an overall economic growth for the population as a whole. Because of this, neoliberalism, and a higher education system built on neoliberal values, fails to address socio-economic inequities within these capitalist societies.

Inequity in employment opportunities and continual job stratification continues for university graduates in countries such as the USA and the UK, which are involved in partnerships with Kazakhstani universities. This occurs despite students having obtained degrees from higher education. Extensive research in the USA and UK shows that graduates' socio-economic background as well as gender play a bigger factor in employment after graduation than completion of the degree or high marks (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003). An example of this is in twenty-seven EU states, there is a gender pay gap (GPG) of 26.1% for university graduates, which is actually higher than the GPG for non-university graduates (European Commission, 2010). I would also add that ethnicity or race also plays a larger role in success – for example, in the USA (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011) university graduates unemployment rates for white graduates was at 2.8%, whereas black university graduate unemployment rates were at 7.2%. Despite being equally trained for a particular job by attending university, minorities and women face more difficulty in finding jobs after graduation compare to non-minority men of the same social class.

However, I would argue that the greatest factor that leads to better jobs and higher wages – to university fulfilling its private good purpose – is the socio-economic background of the student. Brown, Lauder & Ashton (2011) found that the only university graduates to have seen significant increases in wages since 1973 were graduates who came from the top 10% of wage earners. Research from the Economic Policy Institute (2011) confirmed these numbers as well. Clearly higher education is of more value to those from higher socio-economic classes than those from lower socio-economic classes. Brown (2013) argues that rather than finding social mobility, graduates from lower socio-economic classes were confronted with what he labels 'social congestion'. This shows a problem with the neoliberal paradigm – free-markets prefer to offer high paying jobs to those with more social capital. The power elite remains the same across generations by earning higher amounts as middle and lower classes maintain the same financial restrictions on social mobility.

A possible explanation for discrepancy in wages between graduates is due to the elitism of the university attended. In other words, it is graduates from world leading universities, such as Oxbridge and the Ivy League, who earn higher wages (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2011). This is echoes Morley & Aynsley's study (2007) which found that employers in the hospitality industry aimed to hire graduates from top ranked universities, preferably Oxford and Cambridge. This would follow neoliberal theory that it is the best quality product, created through competition, which has a higher value. However, when analysing who attends those elite universities, Brown & Lauder (2010) found that 90.2% of graduates from Oxford and 88.5% of graduates from Cambridge came from the top three socio-economic bands, meaning their family income was above 100,000 GBP per annum. Therefore, the problem is the same – it is wealth and social capital that determines the ability for students to enter into the elite universities that offer a real possibility for higher wages and opportunities on the jobs market.

Interestingly, elite universities do not market themselves based on neoliberal values (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2006; Brown & Lauder, 2010; Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2011). Rather they focus on the value of the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge. And there appears to be a clear difference in the education style offered at these elite universities compared to those that openly market themselves in terms of future employment opportunities and jobs skills. Jobs' training and employer-focused universities are:

> more likely to engage in pre-packaged learning materials… and forms of assessment and pedagogy that narrow the tasks that students need to accomplish. In turn the knowledge that is 'transmitted' will be pre-packaged and divided into modular curriculum that lower-ranked universities (Brown & Lauder, 2010, p. 236).

Morley (2007) also found that while education was becoming more modularised, it was actually viewed by employers as resulting in graduates with less sound subject knowledge. Meanwhile, Oxbridge and Ivy League universities continue to focus on knowledge creation and interdisciplinary learning. In other words, the universities that cater to the elite classes that do well in a capitalist free-market based societies offer different styles of learning than those universities that cater to the lower classes. It seems that the wealthiest classes are 'trained' to value knowledge whereas the lower and middle classes are 'trained' for modular work of middle management and below.

This structural divide in how students are educated at different universities helps ensure that the wealthiest classes remain unchallenged as the power elite.

In summary, there are three areas that show that the neoliberal value system does not create a system of equal opportunity and cannot allow universities to fulfil the private good of better jobs (which in turn means it cannot fill the public good of increasing human capital for the state). Firstly, gender disparity causes a gap in opportunities for women regardless of equal university attainment to men. Secondly, ethnic minorities also do worse than their counterparts in regards to career advancement. However, the biggest factor of inequality between university graduates is due to socio-economic class. Those that belong to elite classes are granted the ability to remain in elite economic positions. This means that the neoliberal perspective that values free-markets and competition that allow for meritocracies to be created is failing. Neoliberalism fails to deliver on its promises. For Kazakhstan, this could have serious implications as it chooses to follow neoliberal models of higher education.

Currently, Kazakhstan itself has its own socio-political inequalities imbedded in its social structures. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap that was released the year after this study (Hausman, Tyson & Zahidi, 2012), Kazakhstan has an educational attainment gender gap of .992 (where 1.00 means complete equality), with a 1.00 higher education attainment. However, the estimated earned income gap is .66, and the political empowerment gap is .146 (Hausman, Tyson & Zahidi, 2012). So, despite gaining educational equality, men earn almost twice as much as women, and women are virtually unrepresented in the highest levels of government. Numbers on ethnic inequities are harder to find. However, at the university where this study took place, a university that was created and is governmentally funded to become the most elite university in Kazakhstan (having 100% scholarships for students), over 90% of the students are ethnic Kazakhs. This is despite the fact that ethnic Russians are over 35% of the Kazakhstani population. This implies that some structural barriers might exist for ethnic minorities. Finally, there are socio-economic inequities in Kazakhstan as well – according to Damitov et al (2006) 59.8% of secondary school graduates with the scores and UNT marks to go to university cannot go, citing financial inability. Kazakhstan, like other capitalist states, has inequalities that affect access to higher education as well as higher education's ability to provide more opportunities for economic and social

mobility. A neoliberal focus on higher education is unlikely to improve these socio-political inequities in light of its inability to do so in other, more developed states.

Conclusion

Neoliberalism, in its 'diverse shapes' and 'diverse content' (Brown, 2015, p. 21), argues for freedom as a central value – specifically of entrepreneurs and markets (Hayek, 1965; Friedman & Friedman, 1990; Harvey, 2005). It claims that through the creation of markets and competition, the overall quality of a society improves because of increases in innovation, technologies and opportunities to invest in such areas. The state exists to create, maintain and encourage free markets and market competition. For higher education, this means focusing on preparing students to enter these markets and to be able to compete effectively in these markets. Kazakhstan, in the restructuring of its higher education system that began in 2006 with President Nazarbayev's call to become a top 50 economic power, has adopted the neoliberal view of higher education (Kalanova 2008, 2011). International organisations involved providing assistance in restructuring Kazakhstan's higher education system also favour neoliberal perspectives. This means a wider global neoliberal higher education perspective exists. However, higher education is not capable of filling the promise of graduates becoming more competitive in a global labour market because there are inequalities that exist in these capitalist states. Kazakhstan also has such inequities, and if neoliberalism fails to address these inequities in other developed states, it is unlikely to be able to address them in Kazakhstan.

Instead, higher education needs to have a second and equally important purpose that is not considered within the neoliberal framework. I suggest universities should have the purpose of creating critical beings that attempt to address the inequities that exist in capitalist societies. In the next chapter, I develop this purpose further by using critical pedagogy as a theoretical framework. I also focus specifically on redefining critical thinking as criticality in order to imagine a means in which universities could achieve this alternative purpose.

Chapter 3 Reconsidering the Purpose of Higher Education: Criticality and Critical Beings

Introduction

In this chapter, I present critical theory and critical pedagogy (CP) as means of understanding the purpose of higher education as a public good that aims to foster critical beings (Barnett, 1997; Barnett & Coate, 2005). CP also questions hegemonic discourses and considers the possibilities of addressing issues of socio-political inequalities (Freire, 1970, 1998; Kincheloe, 2008; Allman, 2010; Brookfield, 2005; Brookfield & Holst, 2011). I argue that only when those are addressed can higher education actually provide economic opportunities. Then, I consider critical thinking as a means of creating critical beings in higher education. However, I move away from depoliticized and decontextualized definitions of critical thinking into 'criticality', which is both politicized and deeply rooted in an understanding of specific socio-political contexts (Brookfield & Holst, 2011). Finally, I consider possible issues that criticality may encouraged as a pedagogy and return to the ongoing need for practitioner reflexivity.

Hegemony and Critical Theory

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how currently, university graduates who come from socio-economically privileged backgrounds are able to earn higher wages and have more economic flexibility. This implies that higher education, under neoliberal discourse, maintains and perpetuates current hegemonic power. By hegemony, I mean 'a social condition in which all aspects of social reality are dominated by or supportive of a single class' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10). This means that the structures of society are constructed to ensure that one group of individuals, one socio-economic class, is able to maintain its dominance and power. Therefore, in this context, neo-liberal discourse in higher education is a discourse that allows capitalist classes to have and maintain dominant power through hegemony. An example of this is how Oxbridge in the UK and Ivy League graduates in the USA have the highest opportunities upon graduation compared to other university graduates, and yet it is mainly students from families earning more than 100,000 GBP annually who are admitted into these universities (Brown, Lauder, Ashton, 2011). Regardless if it is the quality of the education or

simply that these graduates have more opportunities because of their families' wealth, the university system currently ensures that those that already have opportunities and power maintain it social reproduction. This allows hegemony of these classes to be maintained and for social inequality to continue.

Some theorists of CP take a Marxism approach as a means of critiquing hegemony (Allman, 2010). Marxism is appropriate to use here because it is about the conflict between social classes and how these classes are maintained until there is a transformation in society. By Marxism, I mean that it 'does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx's investigations. It is not the 'belief' in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a 'sacred' book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to method' (Lukacs, 1923, p. 28). This means that Marxism critiques hegemony based on a method of approaching knowledge – it questions and deconstructs. As Horkheimer (1937) writes, it is critical because 'every part of the theory presupposed the critique of the existing order and the struggle against it along the lines determined by the theory itself' (p. 229). Therefore, rather than accepting hegemony as simply the way things are, Marxism, and more specifically critical theory, set out to question it – why it exists, how, where it originated from, and more importantly, how it can be reconsidered and altered. However, critical theory is not necessarily a strictly normative theory, as it does not define how things should be, only that the current order needs to be questioned in order to change it.

In the case of higher education, critical theory, reimagined through critical pedagogy to include 'feminist, antiracist, and postcolonial education projects' (Breuing, 2011, p. 16), provides a theoretical framework and method for questioning higher education's role in maintaining hegemonic power as well as considering how higher education could act as a counter to hegemony rather than maintain the current existing order. In the next section, I consider how this counter to hegemony could be fostered in higher education.

Critical Pedagogy in Higher Education

Under critical pedagogy, where attention is drawn to the struggle against an existing order, higher education has an alternative purpose to employability and developing human capital, where an individual's labour is bought based on its perceived value

(Nordensvard, 2011). It is no longer only tasked with the purpose of creating higher chances of employability or providing the state with higher human capital, which will increase its economic competitiveness. Higher education would be responsible for creating critical beings, alongside of employability. By beings, I mean a person (Barnett & Coate, 2005). In other words, higher education should engage with each student as a person, with their own sense of how they see themselves at a given context. While neoliberal market notions of higher education see students and learning as instrumental, learning is *also* about becoming, and has an ontological nature. And these beings are situated within contexts. As Freire (1970) writes, 'People as beings "in a situation," find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark' (p. 90). Therefore, higher education that is focused on beings needs to offer a way in which these beings engage with their contexts. This is where the modifier, 'critical', is added. By critical, I mean that these persons that engage and question themselves and their contexts in order to understand and create meanings (Barnett, 1997). While Barnett uses the term 'world', I prefer considering 'contexts' as there are multiple unique contexts that the concept of world might not address. Higher education that creates critical beings aims to graduate individuals who might attempt to engage with ethnic, gender and economic inequalities within their own socio-economic contexts and question themselves within these contexts. This should be a goal of higher education, but I would like to note that it is not necessarily an easy or unproblematic goal, as Coate (2010) notes in her introduction to the *Critical Thinking: Symposium on the Future of Universities*.

In order to engage critical beings, there are three things that higher education should do, as argued by Barnett & Coate (2005). First, universities must help students 'acquire a deep understanding and commitment to the tacit norms of a discipline' (Barnett & Coate, 2005, p. 43). By learning the tacit assumptions hidden in a discipline of study, students learn to question dominant discourses, such as neoliberalism, and how these dominant discourses maintain hegemony by silencing other perspectives. Allman (2010) states that students should learn: 'to treat knowledge as an object that can be subjected to collective, critical scrutiny and, when necessary, rejected or transformed' (p. 160). This means that the knowledge that students encounter in their studies is not simply to be learned or transmitted, but to be questioned and developed. Hidden underneath knowledge claims are assumptions that students can explicate, challenge,

and potentially reject. Higher education should encourage students to explore histories of current views and challenge these assumptions in order to see what has been ignored or disqualified, such as women's contributions or Southern Theory.

Secondly, universities should allow students to gain 'an immediate sense of what citizenship might mean' (Barnett & Coate, 2005, p. 43). There are competing definitions of the term citizenship, and its uses are problematic (Aleinikoff & Klusmeyer, 2001; Baubock, 1994; Okin, 1992). Therefore, I would argue that rather than 'gain an immediate sense of what citizenship might mean', higher education should allow students to 'gain an immediate sense of what' critical beings might mean. The use of 'might' in this quote is important. It allows space for the individual student to begin to imagine based on their own experiences and critiques of their particular socio-political context, and then imagine alternative forms of action that might not have been previously considered. Both the student and the specific context could change how critical beings are envisioned. Also, it is important to note, that an imaged meaning of either terms 'citizenship' or critical beings could still feed into hegemonic systems. For example, Gramsci (1971) argues that civil society, through education, could act as maintaining hegemonic power by acting in ways that ensure that the class structures remained. Therefore, while students may imagine different meanings of critical beings depending on personal experience or socio-political context, this imagining would be the result of critical engagement and deconstruction of concepts, histories, and specifically hegemony. This is why I focus on higher education as a place of developing critical beings that question the hegemonic systems.

Finally, universities should aid students in 'developing the powers of self-critique' (Barnett & Coate, 2005, p. 43). Students, as they move to becoming critical beings, need to apply this method to themselves. They question and examine their own thoughts and actions to understand how their own assumptions and previously unquestioned behaviours further hegemonic power and maintain the current socio-political inequalities in their contexts. This is asking students to be reflexive, and expecting critical beings to be reflexive. Habermas (1975) states that reflexive learning is when individuals question their own practices and daily actions to see how much they contribute to unequal social structures and if these practices and daily actions survive critical scrutiny. In doing this, critical beings become able to recognize their own role

in maintaining or countering hegemony which can allow them to imagine possibilities for change more directly relevant to their own contexts and lives.

Having reconsidered neoliberal discourses in higher education as a means of maintaining hegemonic power, I am proposing, using Freire (1970), a second additional purpose for higher education based on critical pedagogy – higher education should create critical beings that try to break down inequitable socio-political structures that exist in their specific contexts by assuming collective social responsibility. Specifically, universities should have students engage, recognize and challenge tacit norms that exist in their specific areas of study, imagine potential meaning of what is a critical being specific to their socio-political contexts through critical scrutiny of tacit assumptions, and develop reflexive learning. By encouraging students to apply criticality to themselves, and their wider contexts, to uncover tacit assumptions, universities help encourage graduates to imagine ways in which they can help identify and alter the inequities pervasive in societies. In the next section, I theorize how, from a practitioner perspective, these goals can be achieve – specifically by fostering critical thought.

From Critical Thinking to Criticality

In order to allow students to engage with and critique hegemonic discourses as well as encourage them to imagine alternatives, I argue that practitioners should encourage and foster critical thinking in classes. However, 'critical thinking' is a disputed term (Benesch, 1999; Brookfield, 1987, 2005; Riddell, 2007; Mulnix, 2012; Burbules & Berk, 2013; Felix, 2013; Felix & Smart, *in press*) with wide spread definitions that do not necessarily fall into the critical method as questioning hegemony, explicating tacit assumptions, or encouraging reflexive learning. Therefore, I would first state what I do *not* mean by 'critical thinking' – a term that some have removed from the contextual relevance of the thinker and the thinker's socio-political context. Then, I will provide a different definition that does indeed consider the thinker and context. I refer to my definition of 'critical thinking' as 'criticality' in order to minimize confusion between the competing understandings of the concept. I present my definition of criticality as the questioning of the structures and tacit assumptions of thinkers' socio-political contexts that creates an awareness of self and how the thinkers' actions maintain or counter these assumptions. Criticality's purpose is to imagine alternatives to this

context in which inequity might be minimized. I will also contemplate how criticality can be fostered and encouraged in classroom settings.

For many researchers (Glaser, 1941; McPeck, 1981; Ennis, 1962, 1992, 2003; Facione, 2011), critical thinking is defined as using evidence to reason for possible solutions to a problem. Ennis (1962) provided a detailed list of how this reasoning can be achieved through judgement of the validity of a given statement. However, this definition of critical thinking is both decontextualized and depoliticized. It suggests universal truths that ignore complexities of context and do not recognize hegemony, which might reason for particular truths that maintain said hegemony over others that would counter hegemony. As a result, critical thinking here, one could argue, can serve the neoliberal and hegemonic discourse. In not understanding the existence of hegemony, this definition of critical thinking does not explicit hegemonic power and could be used to maintain it tacitly. Hegemony is embedded in all aspects of society, and without being explicit, it is able to continue to exist. Therefore, critical thinking as such is insufficient if higher education is meant to create critical beings as I defined and argue for. This is why I propose an alternative definition of critical thinking, which I call 'criticality.'

 One of the limits in the definition of critical thinking is that it is a series of skills or competencies that students are expected to master (Brookfield, 2005; Burbules & Berk, 2013). However, criticality should be a consciousness -raising attitude towards knowledge. Through criticality, students or critical beings become aware of social structures and forms of inequality within those structures. Freire (1970) offers an explanation of this consciousness in this concept of *conscientização*. He defined a person having achieved *conscientização* when they had developed an awareness of themselves and their own actions together with an awareness of the socio-political and economic context in which they have found themselves with a desire to change that context to become more equal and less oppressive. In other words, *conscientização,* and criticality, are now about the individual and not about the skill. It is an awareness and a consciousness of oneself and how the socio-political shapes them, rather than going through pre-set decontextualized steps.

Criticality is also a form of praxis in that it is not simply about thinking, but about how thinking changes an individual and their understanding of their own actions. Praxis is

'action and reflection upon the world in order to change it' (hooks, 1994, p. 14). In other words – thought is no longer separated from action and viewed as two different worlds of the private (thought) and the public (action). Rather, the two are inherently intertwined and feed into each other. And, it has a purpose – the purpose being an attempt to change a socio-political context. However, it is important to note that not all praxis comes from criticality – criticality is *critical* praxis. As Allman (2010) states:

> If we simply partake in the relations and conditions that we find already existing in the world and assume that they are natural and inevitable—that this is the way things are, always, or at least for a considerable time, have been, and always will be—then our praxis is uncritical and simply reproduces the existing relations. (p. 154)

Criticality therefore needs to question the existing relations and not accept the assumption that such relationships are inevitable or natural. Rather, criticality attempts to break down these assumptions by 'critically question[ing] the existing relations and conditions and actively seek[ing] to transform or abolish them' (Allman, 2010, p. 155). However, I would like to edit Allman – criticality actively seeks to transform hegemonic power and inequality. I would like the emphasis on a need to *imagine* this transformation. Sartre (2004) views the imaginary as a means of producing an alternative to reality. Through that, alternatives that do not exist can be seen as possibilities. In the case of criticality, sometimes, the active seeking of transformation may not be possible in the given context that individuals find themselves in – however when an individual engages with criticality – they begin the process of change by imagining. Through the imagination, possibilities for change arise while recognizing that it may not be immediate – the individual has envisioned the possibility, which could lead to creating that possibility when opportunity arises. Until then, it lives in the imagination.

Criticality, as a means of making hegemonic power explicit while allowing for an imagined alternative, works from a critical complex epistemology (Kincheloe, 2008). Critical complex epistemology recognizes that individual contexts are complex with multiple understandings of reality, and in engaging with criticality, these complexities of specific contexts must be taken into account. As Kincheloe (2008) writes:

> Individuals who employ a critical complex epistemology in their work in the world are not isolated individuals but people who understand the nature of their socio-cultural context and their overt and their occluded relationships with others. Without such understandings of their own contextual embeddedness,

> individuals are not capable of understanding from where the prejudices and
> predispositions they bring to the act of meaning making originate. (p. 42)

Like Freire (1970), Kincheloe is motivated by a desire to uncover modes of oppression. However, his additional criticality requires thinkers to be continually reflexive of their own contexts and the different ways in which that context impacts them and they impact it. Only through an understanding and awareness of the socio-political context can an honest critical examination of hegemonic power take place, and only when considering the different influences in that specific context can an imagined alternative be of possible transformative action. Without an understanding of the chaos of different realities, origins of inequality cannot be truly considered and questioned. This attention to context is vital in fostering criticality.

Considering Allman (2010), Kincheloe (2008), hooks (1994), and Freire (1970), I would restate my own definition of criticality. Criticality is the questioning of the structures and tacit assumptions of socio-political contexts while creating an awareness of self and how one's own actions maintain or counter these assumptions in order to imagine alternatives to this context in which inequity might be minimized. This definition of criticality is what my research is attempting to encourage among students.

In order to create an environment where my definition of criticality can be encouraged and fostered in higher education, practitioners like myself should ensure education becomes dialogical. It is through dialogue with others *and* oneself that questioning of anything, much less hegemony, can occur. However, I would like to return to Allman (2010) once again to ensure that dialogue is not confused with discussion. Discussion has a leader who ensures each member of the discussion states an opinion or thought about the topic and shares questions they may have. However, dialogue is not 'a matter of each person or several people simply stating what they think' (Allman, 2010, p.162); it is critical engagement and reflection on why 'each person thinks as he or she does and where this thinking has come from' (p. 162). Dialogical education returns to the critical method. And it asks students (and teachers) to be self-critical – to be reflexive. Criticality is encouraged by all members of a classroom through constant attention to dialogical learners, be it in dialogues between members of a class or through self-reflection, where individuals enter into dialogue with themselves to understand the origins of their own thinking and actions in order to imagine that change.

Criticality redefines critical thinking into thinking that not only aims to solve decontextualized abstract problems, but rather focuses on thinkers and their socio-political contexts. It invites thinkers to question their contexts to find tacit assumptions about social structures and to reflect on if how they personally act or think is in line with or contrary to these assumptions in order to imagine alternatives to their contexts that are more socially equitable. In this light, criticality recognizes hegemony as well as individual socio-political contexts. Criticality also reintegrates thought and action while recognizing the need for the intermediate step of imagining an alternative reality before being able to create it. Criticality also puts the individual, the thinker or the citizen, at the centre of thinking. Finally, as practitioners, criticality can be encouraged by engaging in dialogical learning where knowledge is not only discussed, but also questioned in order to understand where thinking originates from in terms of history, socio-political influences, and hegemony.

In the next section, I attempt to address critiques made of criticality and critical pedagogy. As a part of my own reflexive learning, these critiques offer me a place to attempt to remain critical in my own discourse. Critical pedagogy derived from critical theory is more about a method and approach rather than an unquestioned ideology.

Engaging with Critiques of Critical Pedagogy

Feminist scholars (Ellsworth, 1992; Gore, 1993; Lather, 1998) offer critiques and potential limits to critical pedagogy regarding assumptions of silence, teachers remaining the gate-keepers of knowledge, and the theory proposing a messianic and positivistic view of the world. Because critical pedagogy originates from the critical method proposed by Lukacs (1923) and Horkheimer (1937), it would only seem fitting that I, as a critical pedagogue, engage with these critiques to change and grow to incorporate them as part of my own understanding of myself as a practitioner

One critique of critical pedagogy is that it potentially assumes that student silence means that they are not politically conscious or educationally confident. Ellsworth (1992) retorts this potential assumption by stating that student silence can actually be a political choice and therefore the student may still be critical. However, critical

pedagogy does not need to make the assumption that silence means a lack of criticality. Lewis (1993), in her work towards a feminist critical pedagogy, notes that there are multiple meanings to silence and warns against simply ascribing silence to a lack of anything. She states that as educators, 'we need, as well, to hear both the voices *and* the silence through which women engage our social world' (p. 41). One possible reason, among many including boredom, subversion, or lack of engagement, is discomfort with the power relations in the classroom, where students may choose to perform silence. hooks (1989) demonstrated this in her own practice by creating alternative spaces for her students to speak outside the classroom. By doing this, students felt less fearful due to power dynamics that exist in the classroom setting. Therefore, critical students who are silent in class as a political choice could now feel more comfortable to speak in settings that gave them more power. It allowed for a more democratic setting. In this sense, when I discuss critical pedagogy, like Lewis (1993) and hooks (1989, 1994, 2003, 2010), I am advocating for a critical pedagogy that engages feminist concerns and understandings of power.

Gore (1993) questions whether critical pedagogy does not simply recreate the power dynamics of teachers and students. She argues that the teacher remains a gatekeeper of knowledge in the classroom – this time offering emancipation to students that students must receive. This is true if dialogue does not remain at the centre of learning within critical pedagogy. However, as Freire (1970) states, the knowledge that a teacher brings to the classroom is simply the starting point of dialogue, not the end point. From there, the dynamics change from Teacher and Learners as separate entities into Teacher-Learners and Learner-Teachers.

A better way to explain this may be to return to Allman's (2010) point regarding the difference between discussion and dialogue. What Gore (1993) warns about in terms of teachers being the gate-keepers of emancipation assumes discussion is the centre of learning – not dialogue. In discussion, teachers lead. In dialogue, teachers are participants of a collective group that is involved in the learning process as well. The teacher is responsible for bringing in the knowledge object, but the exploration of thought and criticality is derived from the students and teacher as a collective and developed and questioned by the collective. As Allman (2010) states:

> Transformation can only be realized jointly with others in the process of learning… Teachers must undergo a certain degree of transformation in their thinking about, or their philosophy of learning. (p. 160)

Therefore, yes, the teacher brings in specific content knowledge that gives them the power and makes them seem like a gatekeeper of knowledge. However, in critical pedagogy, learning must remain dialogical and reflexive with the teacher as a participant, not a leader. Teachers are expected to remain open and gain critical consciousness from students as well as vice versa. Brookfield & Holst (2011) makes it clear – teachers must remain reflexive in their classes to ensure that they continue to engage in dialogue and be open to transformation alongside of their students rather than lead discussions.

Lather's (1998) critique follows the same line as Gore's, but goes deeper into the fundamental core of critical pedagogy. She questions the idea of education for emancipation as creating a teacher who is telling the students what they should want and what must be done to achieve it. Critical pedagogy, in her critique, has a positivistic view of 'universal' truth. This makes it 'messianic' in nature, including those theorists that view critical pedagogy more as self-realization rather than actual action. She continues by stating that this creates 'a praxis of stuck places' because 'implementing critical pedagogy in the field of schooling *is* impossible' (p. 495). This is because critical pedagogy uses power to ensure that a specific desired result occurs.

If critical pedagogy tells what action specifically must happen in order to emancipate, then I would agree with her – critical pedagogy would become prescriptive in nature. However, I argue that critical pedagogy needs to reject a prescriptive purpose. Rather, it should focus on method – questioning. Critical pedagogy and criticality is about looking at socio-political contexts and questioning the historical assumptions that underpin those contexts. Criticality asks students and teachers to imagine possible alternatives that could exist and possible action that could put these alternatives into existence in that particular socio-political context. Criticality must also recognize that students may not agree on how things need to change or if they need to change at all. Critical pedagogy in those circumstances becomes about exploring where those views come from and why they are held. Also, by considering criticality, and reimagining critical pedagogy through a critically complex epistemology, Kincheloe (2008)

purposely engages with the concepts of contexts as deeply context and, in those complexities, to be examined in light of those complexities. Therefore, the idea of emancipation as prescriptive act is not possible – rather, engagement of questioning the contexts may bring unique insights and understandings of how alternatives are imagined. Therefore, critical pedagogy aims to move away from prescriptive acts into deeply contextualized understandings and potential acts.

Critical pedagogy should *not* be about dictating right and wrong. It is *not* about *demanding* action to change those contexts. For example, action may not be possible. It may not be safe or wise. Also, the imagining of specific action is determined by the thinkers and the questioning is done by the collective class. It should not lead or determined by the teacher. It is the thinkers and the class as a collective that have imagined the alternative to current realities in a particular context. Therefore, it is up to them to act and, if they do act, how to act. Action is not dictated by the teacher as a universal path to emancipation. It is even possible that emancipation itself might not be thought of as desirable by students – if this is the case, criticality offers a chance for the collective to reflect on why emancipation is undesirable and where that view comes from.

All of these areas of critical pedagogy – avoiding assumptions regarding students' silences, focusing on dialogue over discussion, and ensuring that change and action are not dictated and prescribed – revolves around a practitioner that remains engaged in criticality and reflexivity herself. It is not something that a teacher demands of students and awaits to determine the level objectively as an outsider of the learning process. Rather, I, and practitioners such as myself, must reflect on my own tacit assumptions and the power relations I bring into the classroom and critically question whether I continue to lead in those through discussion or if I am partaking in dialogue by becoming a teacher-learner – open to transformation and criticality. Without constant reflexive questioning, each of these critiques of critical pedagogy is fair and likely to occur.

Conclusion

Higher education reconceived under critical theory and critical pedagogy becomes about making hegemony explicit and developing critical beings in order to imagine alternative realities that lessen socio-political inequities. This is done by focusing on criticality as envisioned through Freire's theories of *conscientização* and attention to dialogical learning. Students question their own complex contexts and develop their own critical voices. Reflexivity is vital on the part of the teacher – they need to question their own power and influences in the classroom and ask if other forms of interaction outside the classroom may be more democratic. And teachers need to remain dedicated to their own criticality and transformation as they engage as partners in dialogue rather than leading discussions. Through this reflexivity, criticality can be engaged and all members of the class imagine meanings and variants of critical beings.

Throughout this chapter, I have continually referred to the importance to specific socio-political contexts. I have also discussed Kincheloe's (2008) concept of critical complex epistemology that both acknowledges the complexities of specific socio-political contexts and demands that the complexities not be minimized, but be directly engaged with to allow for individuals to question historical origins and to be able to imagine alternatives. In the next section, I attempt to engage with some of the complexities of the Kazakhstani context regarding ethnicity, gender, class and authority. Through this, I attempt to better understand how my own students might engage with criticality as they examine themselves.

Chapter 4 Engaging Kazakhstan as a Critically Complex Context

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that part of the role of higher education is to develop critical consciousness where students engage with knowledge as part of a critically complex epistemology (Kincheloe, 2008). As part of this, as a practitioner, I ask students to reflect on critically complex contexts as they question themselves, their contexts, and the structures of inequities to imagine alternatives. In order to ask this of students, I too must engage in critically unpacking the complex context of Kazakhstan in order to understand how it *might* impact on students and how they view themselves within their contexts. As I developed with the concept of critically complex epistemology, socio-political context impacts teaching and learning more widely, and alters how students might envision criticality. However, there are many socio-political aspects to examine within Kazakhstan, and therefore I have attempted to make some choices as to where to focus within this chapter – many of the decisions being dictated by questions I had while in dialogue with students. In this chapter, I examine how Kazkhstan's particular socio-political context might have an impact on the potential for critical pedagogy – however, this entire chapter is hedged, that it is my own interpretation as an outsider trying to understand the context in which my students' live. In this chapter, I have chosen to focus on issues surrounding identity, specifically national identity and gender identity, because of the relationship between perceptions of identity (and self-identification) on performative acts (Butler, 1990, 1997). I attempt to analyse the development and complexity of national identity and gender identity in Kazakhstan through these theoretical positions.

I draw primarily from the work of Bauman (2004), Hobsbawm (1992), Foucault (1980), and Butler (1990, 1997) to develop my theory of identity. In *Identity*, Bauman (2004) explores notions of identities through the concept of a hierarchy. He argues that those at the top of the identities hierarchies are able to choose different identities, and shed them while being recognized by peers within those communities. However, at the bottom of the hierarchy are those that cannot choose – whose identities are imposed on them. These identities are not identities of choice, but rather labels assigned to them. And, below that, are those whose identities have been denied – who are denied the right

to existence. This last group provides a useful way of understanding the cultural experiences of ethnic minorities that first arrived Kazakhstan during a particular part of the Soviet history (which I analyze in further depth below). This has implications for the formation of a national identity in post-soviet independent Kazakhstan. It is at this point that I draw on Hobsbawm (1992), who theorizes the complexity of factors that construct national identity. These include concepts of language and ethnicity – which have implications on these ethnic minorities as they find themselves caught somewhere on the border of being accepted within the Kazakhstani identity. This has implications for how they may view themselves and be viewed by their Kazakh colleagues, because as Bauman (2004) explains, national identity, unlike other identities, requires complete loyalty and therefore, those that are perceived to possibly prioritize other (competing) identities over national identity become suspect. It is at this point that I begin to draw on Foucault (1980) and Butler (1990, 1997) to understand the performance of identity. Foucault (1980) offers a deeper understanding about the internalization, negotiation and performativity of identity – how it becomes part of the body. In light of the complexities and points of conflict that can arise in concepts of ethnic and national identity in Kazakhstan, Foucault's theory of performativity (which I explore in more detail throughout this chapter) offers a deeper understanding of the negotiations of power that may occur in the classroom. And Butler's (1990, 1997) application of performativity toward gender allows for further consideration of how gender identity may intersect with ethnic and national identity.

Within the concept of national identity within Kazakhstan, this chapter will look at three areas that might complicate how students engage and 'perform' in the class when asked to be critical. The first examines the legacy of the Gulag – labour camps and exile villages where political prisoners and ethnic minorities were send under Lenin and Stalin's rule of the Soviet Union from about 1918 to 1953 (Applebaum, 2003). This legacy has potential implications in the self-identity formation of minorities (who find themselves as Kazakhstanis because their ancestors were deported to Kazakhstan) – this is particularly important because seven of thirteen students in the study were ethnic minorities, specifically Korean, Volga German, Russian, Tatar, and Chechen. It also has implications for how these seven students may be viewed by their Kazakh classmates, all of which could impact on the performance of their identities in the

classroom. This last statement is more of a question; however it is asked in light of separate discussions with a Chechen student and Kazakh student (see Chapter Six).

The second area that this chapter examines is the rise of ethnic nationalism since Kazakhstan's independence in 1991. This is directly tied to the history of Kazakhstan under the Soviet Union from 1918 to independence in 1991, as well as the large presence of ethnic minorities within the new state's borders. This could have implications in notions of 'us' and 'them' and the nature of nationalism (Feirman, 2000; Surucu, 2002; Dave, 2007). Ethnic Kazakh students may have a tacit discourse about the state, the nation, and their non-Kazakh classmates (see Chapter Six). It might also have implications for non-Kazakh students and their willingness to engage in countering that discourse, depending on the power relations that might exist. Finally, the chapter considers the role of state legitimacy and national identity personified in a strong charismatic leader (Weber, 1947; Isaac, 2010) – President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who is the first and only president of Kazakhstan. This could have implications for students' willingness to critique a socio-political context if they view that critique as drawing into question Nazarbayev as a symbol of Kazakhstan's national strength. As before, with regard to views of national/ethnic identity, I bring this up based on engagement with students' discourse on Nazarbayev during this research (see Chapter Six). This in turn may result in self-policing in the classroom.

This chapter also considers some potential issues of gender identity in Kazakhstan. It attempts to look at how gender roles are perceived in Kazakhstan and the expectations of the performance of women (and men) within this context. Low (2006) interviewed recent university graduates in Kazakhstan, for example, and found that while women were well educated in Kazakhstan, they were less valued in the work place where business was often conducted in men-only spaces such as bath houses. He also found that attitudes still placed women in traditional roles, with deep skepticism towards the idea of women being 'successful', and that domestic violence is an endemic problem. This is echoed in Nazarbayev's 'Kazakhstan 2050' speech (2012b) where he made reducing this violence again women a priority, though Shadinova & Ontuganova (2014) note that Kazakhstan is still lacking a national law against domestic violence. This could have implications for how women engage in the classroom and how they respond to other women and men, as well as how they might see their own future within

Kazakhstan. The gender identity of women and their performance of this identity (Butler, 1990, 1997) is particularly important as the class consists of nine (of thirteen) women. However, this expectation of the performance of gender also has implications on how men speak whether there are tacit assumptions regarding their own voices in relation to the voice of women. This links to Lewis's (1993) and hooks' (1989) work on engaging women to create spaces for them to explore their voices (or recognize the multiple meanings of silence).

Before continuing with the chapter, I would like to add my own precaution regarding my exploration of the Kazakhstani socio-political context and the performance of identity. The exploration of these identities represents only one moment in time, while identity and understandings of the self (and one's context) is dynamic and changing. This chapter explores how the context inter-relates with how students *might* have seen themselves at one moment in time, and it is filtered through my own subjective lenses. When discussing identities broadly, Bauman (2004) states that identity is made from a defective jigsaw where the pieces not only do not match, but also may be in conflict with each other – and this jigsaw is put together without a completion image to offer direction. Hence, when interpreting through the issues around identity in Kazakhstan through my own lenses, the puzzle becomes even more unclear and defective. Therefore this chapter explores incomplete elements of the puzzle at a single moment of time as seen by an outsider, rather than the puzzle maker (the students).

National Identity – Gulags and Exile Settlements

There are two ways in which exploring the role of the Gulags in the development of identity relates to the study and my practice in Kazakhstan. First, by examining the history of the Gulags and exile, it is possible to gain a fuller picture as to why there are so many ethnic minorities found within Kazakhstan (a state named after a single ethnic group – the Kazakhs). Within my own practice, I taught two Koreans, two ethnic Russians, one Tartar, one Volga German, and one Chechen. Secondly, the Gulag, as arguably a cultural genocide (Applebaum, 2003), acted as a direct force of power against large groups of people, both ethnic nations as well as political dissidents. This would have an impact on identity as these ethnic nations were denied identities and forced to recreate their identities in the face of this denial. In turn, the Gulag would

influence how these people viewed themselves and how they behaved within the new identity. In this section, I attempt to explore the complexities of this identity denial and recreation with a consideration on performance using Bauman (2004) as well as Foucault (1980) and Butler (1990, 1997).

I would begin by analysing the 'zeks' (political prisoners in the Gulags) as an imposed identity. Bauman (2004) details a social hierarchy of identities. At the bottom of this hierarchy are 'those whose access to identity choice has been barred' (p. 38). These people are 'burdened' with an identity they did not choose. I would argue that the 'zeks' were such a group. These political prisoners were first expelled to Kazakhstan by Lenin as 'anti-bolshevik sympathizers' in 1918. Stalin continued the practice until 1953. These 'zeks' were known as 'enemies of the state' (Rossi, 1989, p.82) in official Soviet documentation, while their families (spouses and children) also carried this designation. By being denied equal status as citizens of the Soviet Union and relocated to the peripheries of the state, the new designation of 'zek' was assigned to these prisoners and their families. Solzhenitsyn (2002a) argued that the 'zek' identity therefore became dominant. He claimed that once an individual became a 'zek', they stopped being everything else including 'homo sapiens' (p. 503). Lantz (2010) echoed this sentiment when he called 'zeks' 'a distinct nation' (p. viii). These predominantly Russian exiles had been barred from identity choice and assigned a new dominant identity of 'zek', thereby becoming the bottom of the social hierarchy of Soviet society.

Along with the political prisoners, ethnic groups were also exiled to the Gulag and settlements within Kazakhstan. Bauman's (2004) analysis of the social hierarchy of identities is useful once again in understanding the implications of these exiled minorities. He claims that *below* the hierarchy of identity is an underclass that is 'denied the right to *claim* an identity as distinct from an ascribed and enforced classification' (p. 39). This underclass is viewed by society as 'human waste' (p.40). Bauman also makes a point of recognizing national identity as a special type of identity. He claims that it does not tolerate identities that are 'suspected of colliding with the unqualified priority of national loyalty' (p. 22). In other words, national identity demands to be the most valued identity. This helps understand why these ethnic groups were exiled as well as the potential impacts on their own identities.

Several ethnic minorities throughout the Soviet Union were exiled to the Gulag prior and during World War II. The first group exiled were the Koreans in 1937 for fear of potential collaboration with the Japanese (Pohl, 1999). This was followed by the Volga Germans in 1941 for fear of collaboration with Nazi forces (Conquest, 1970). Finally, later in 1941, other groups including Chechens, Ingush, Kurds, Tartars and others were also exiled (Applebaum, 2003). These groups were sent to the Gulag because Russian Soviets did not know if their loyalty was to the state or their ethnic nation. It did not matter that there was no evidence (Applebaum, 2003), the treason was *perceived to be true*, and therefore these ethnic nations were suspected and exiled. The mere possibility for national conflicts of ethnic versus civic national identity was enough.

Once exiled, these ethnic groups were denied recognition as a separate ethnic identity. They were denied the right to take anything into exile with them that might be viewed as representing this ethnic heritage (Gheith & Jolluck, 2011). They were denied the right to speak ethnic languages, and their villages and homelands were renamed (Naimark, 2001). Their cemeteries were destroyed (Naimark, 2001), and their ethnic designations were 'eliminated from official documents' (Applebaum, 2003, p. 388). In short, they had become part of the identity underclass described by Bauman (2004).

It is this history that accounts for the modern day multi-ethnic population of Kazakhstan – both Russians as political exiles and other minorities that were sent as ethnic exiles. These groups are the first and second-generation descendants of the bottom of Soviet society's social hierarchy. This is particularly important because 36.4% of the current population is non-Kazakh (ASRK, 2010). Also, as I have stated before, more than half of the class in this study is also non-Kazakh. However, more than simply explaining how the class is ethnically diverse, this history of exile has potential implications for current identity and the performance of this identity.

Foucault (1980) and Butler (1990, 1997) offer a means of understanding how identities formed in the Gulag may have been expected to be performed – the inter-relations between a perception of identities and the self-policing of them. This perception and self-policing is embedded in the expectations of performance of identity. With this comes the question – did these perceptions continue after the collapse of the Soviet Union or have they become part of the social structure of Kazakhstani society?

Foucault (1980) was concerned with a) the moment power 'becomes embodied in techniques, and equips itself with instruments and even violent means of material intervention' (p. 97) and b) 'how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted' (p. 97). In other words, according to Foucault, power shapes and changes those that are subject to it while maintaining itself through the acts and thoughts of those same people. Therefore, power perpetuates itself – it does not need to be enforced as it is integrated into the lives of those that are subjugated. Butler (1990) builds on this by stating 'identity is a performance constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (p. 25). Identity is a construction based on expectations of oneself and others. Butler (1997) continues by claiming that the subject can only be created under subjugation of power. The subject finds and defines itself under social categories that already exist – categories that have expected behaviours (performances). Therefore the subject becomes subordinate to these expected performances. While Butler is referring specifically to gender identity (which I will discuss later in this chapter), I argue that this can be applied to national and ethnic identities as well.

These theories can be used in relation to the Gulag and identities today in Kazakhstan. The Gulag was an initial point where power was used to subjugate individuals. Under subjugation (and barring of identity choice or existence) identities were recreated, and with them came expectations of performance and norms of behaviour, which were internalized and negotiated in a way that would allow power structures to remain. These identities *may* be expected to perform as subordinate depending on the social structures of the Kazakhstani context, including a performance of silences, though as Butler (1990) states, 'to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of dominance' (p. 21). Therefore, 'Korean' or 'Chechen' may be associated with particular performances by those in Kazakhstan that would not be considered unique to those identities within the borders of the Caucasus or Korea. Also, the ethnic Kazakh population might expect these minorities to act in specific ways and unconsciously view these identities as subordinate to the Kazakh identity (I explore this further in the next section).

An example of this is how the Chechen identity was formed in the Gulag and the question of what this might mean for the Chechen student in the classroom. Applebaum

(2003) describes Chechen exiles as: 'disoriented, removed from their tribal and village societies, many failed to adjust' and were 'usually despised by the local [Kazakh] population' (p. 388). She also states that they had a reputation as 'criminals' (p. 389) which echoes Solzenitsyn's (2002b) description of Chechens in exile being 'haughty and indeed openly hostile' (p. 402). Solzenitsyn (2002b) claimed that Chechens introduced 'honest' Kazakhs to concepts of robbery and theft. These were the views of Chechens in Kazakhstan when first exiled. The question arises – did expectations of such behaviour become part of Kazakhstani society? What are the implications for self-identity and performance of identity? How might other students view the Chechen student in my class? How might he perform himself, and how might he operate within the matrix of power to critically engage with dominance? These questions do not just apply to the Chechen student, but all the non-Kazakh students. If Butler (1990, 1997) and Foucault's (1980) theories are maintained, the impacts of these perceptions of identity would be deeply inter-related with the performance of these students in the classroom today.

National Identity – Rise of Ethnic Nationalism

While the history of the Gulag offers an understanding of the origins of Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic state as well as the status of those exiles, the rise of ethnic nationalism (as opposed to civic nationalism) further complicates the issue of identity and the performance of those identities. This has potential implications for how ethnic minorities may view their own place in the current socio-political context of Kazakhstan – are they equal partners in creating a state or 'guests' welcome to remain in the nation of Kazakhs? It also has implications for how Kazakhs maintain and perpetuate the stereotypes of these minorities as well as how the discourse of 'us' and 'them' (Dave, 2007) may alienate or divide students. I bring this up because during my interviews with students, I witnessed 'us' and 'them' used by one student suggesting 'they' were 'welcome to stay' (see Chapter Six). All of these implications could result in tacit assumptions and/or performances of silence among students.

According to Hobsbawm (1992), national identity is a complex amalgamation of four elements: common language, common ethnicity, common religion, and 'the consciousness of belonging and of having belonged to a lasting political identity' (p.

73). Poole (2003) includes a similar list, but he replaces common ethnicity and religion with culture. This implies that culture can be made communal on multiple factors that may or may not include religion or ethnicity. This opens up the concept of a 'civic' nation that does not need to be a homogeneous ethnic nation. It is a shift between the civic and the ethnic understandings of nation that is currently occurring in Kazakhstan – Kazakh is the ethnic identity and Kazakhstani as the civic national identity.

The initial governmental policy in the first years of Kazakhstan's independence (December 1991 through 1995) seemed to advocate a civic understanding of nationalism. In February 1992, Kazakh nationalists, who supported the concept of ethnic nationalism, led demonstrations pushing for the phrase 'Kazakhstan for the Kazakhs' to be included in the constitution and for Kazakh to be the sole language of the republic (Hiro, 1995). However, President Nazarbayev and the Nur Otan party insisted that the 1993 constitution include Russian as a *lingua franca* (Hiro, 1995) and in 1995 succeeded in removing 'Kazakhstan for the Kazakhs' from the initial constitution (Dave, 2007). Also, in 1995, Nazarbayev created the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan to promote unity among the different ethnic groups of Kazakhstan. This made sense as it reflected the demographics of the new state. The year before independence, Kazakhstan was 36.8% ethnic Russian and 39.7% ethnic Kazakh (ASRK, 1990). The government policies were clearly trying to create a civic, multi-ethnic Kazakhstani identity.

However, government policy since 1995 has been more conflicted and seemingly less interested in civic national identity. From 1995 to 1997, the government ordered the redistricting of the northern oblasts, which resulted in districts that had previously been majority Russian now becoming majority Kazakh, as revealed in the 1999 census (ASRK, 1999). Bremmer (1994) warned that Nazarbayev's intent in proposing the redistricting was to create a strong Kazakh state by removing control of the northern oblasts from ethnic Russians. This seems possible as evidenced in the parliamentary elections after redistricting – Kazakh interests were central in the elections while ethnic Russian interests were not discussed (Dave, 2007). According to Dave (2007), redistricting contributed to a larger perception of disempowerment and encouraged massive emigrations of Russian speaking ethnicities from 1995 to 1999. These emigrations and feelings of disempowerment by non-Kazakh nationals reached such

heights in 1999 that Sarsembayev (1999) claims that that year marked the end of the possibilities to create a Kazakhstani nation.

It was not solely government policy that seems in favour of ethnic nationalism. Feirman (2000) noted that migration to cities of rural Kazakhs increased the discourse of ethnicity as a marker of the nation during the late 1990s. Surucu (2002) agrees, noting that ideas of multi-ethnic nationality and 'cosmopolitanism' became more associated with opposition parties and therefore less popular. (I explore Nazarbayev's leadership as a symbol for national coherence and strength further in the next section). Finally, Dave's (2007) ethnographic study revealed that Kazakhs seem to reflect a more ethnic view of their own national identity. She conducted interviews with academics in 2005 and noted constant separation of 'us' as ethnic Kazakhs and 'them' as non-Kazakh nationals, something I also witnessed in my students during one-to-one interviews. Dave quotes one physicist stating that Kazakhs need to 'preserve our genetic pool' (p. 93). The implications are clear – the priority is towards a strong ethnic nation-state.

This conflicting understanding of national identity suggests there is the potential to question or distrust other ethnicities that do not belong to the national identity (even though they are citizens of the state). Groups that were initially exiled to Kazakhstan under the Gulag system and who remained in Kazakhstan through independence may now have the chance to be (re)considered as equal partners in creating the civic nation. However, they may still be viewed as subordinate by Kazakhs if the nation is the same as the ethnicity – ethnic minorities, in that case, would not be part of Kazakhstani identity. This is reminiscent of Bauman's (2004) writings on the social hierarchy of identity. Non-Kazakhs would be barred from a national identity – the identity that demands supremacy over other identities. There are also implications in relation to a classroom with seven of thirteen students who are from ethnic minority groups. Will these students be willing to engage with views critical of Kazakh priorities? And what are the possibilities of the tacit discourse of 'us' and 'them' from Kazakh students?

National Identity – Charismatic Leadership

This section attempts to explore the implications of President Nazarbayev as charismatic authority, as described by Weber (1947) and a symbol of national identity

(and therefore the sole legitimate voice for the country) in a classroom that focuses on criticality. Nazarbayev, as a figure of authority that legitimizes the sovereign state and national identity of Kazakhstan, may have implications for how students view criticality – it could be interpreted as an insult to authority. This in turn may have implications for performative acts in the class – who does a citizen of Kazakhstan speak about with authority in their socio-political context. Silence could be expected as an act – recognizing that silence is not indicative of unquestioned replication of power dynamics. Or, voiced uncritical loyalty may also be expected and performed. In one case, a student used Nazabayez as his voice of critique against his curriculum of learning (see Chapter Six). In a different context, where the authority of the nation and state was not bound up in the current president, that might be viewed as taking an uncritical stand. However, within this context, where the leader represents the legitimacy of the sovereign state, it is worth considering if using Nazarbayev as the filter of critique is a 'safe' way to engage with criticality.

Nursultan Nazarbayev is referred to as 'Leader of the Nation' in the Kazakhstani constitution (added in 2010). He is credited with creating stability and maintaining authority through a strong singular voice in Kazakhstan's government and politics. This role he fills in Kazakhstan can be understood as 'charismatic' authority and leadership as detailed in Weber (1947). This theory claims that a 'leader's exceptional personal qualities or the demonstration of extraordinary insight and accomplishment… inspire loyalty and obedience from followers' (Kendall, Murray, & Linden, 2000, p. 438). Hence, this leader becomes the basis of power and political authority and stability. Usually this charisma is based on any series of traits including rhetoric, missionary zeal, divinity, the supernatural, exceptional powers and abilities, and emotional appeal (Willner, 1984). In other words, these traits are unique to the leader and are not held by other citizens, which allows this charismatic leader to gain and maintain authority.

This theory of charismatic authority applies to how Nazarbayev has used himself as a means of nation-building in Kazakhstan as an emerging state in the post-soviet era. Isaac (2010) states Nazarbayev has used himself as a means of legitimizing the Kazakhstani state in multiple ways. First, Nazarbayev promoted political discourse that equates him directly to a unified Kazakhstan and its stability. In other words,

Nazarbayev is the state and the state is Nazarbayev. An example of this is when Suleev (2009) states 'he [Nazarbayev] is a kind of guarantor of the inviolability of Kazakhstan's special path of development' (qtd in Isaac, 2010, p. 441). Secondly, according to Isaac (2010), Nazarbayev has promoted discourse that he is a symbolic father figure of the nation, comparing himself to other such figures from other countries, such as Ataturk in Turkey. While these views are promoted through political discourse, they are also held by citizens. In other words, the discourse is internalized. This is exemplified in a poll conductioned in 2009 (qtd in Isaac, 2010) where 94% of those polled referred to Nazarbayev as either 'leader of the nation', 'founder of the state' or 'leader of international scale.' In other words, political discourse in this case is echoed in the discourse of Kazakhstani citizens.

This reverence due to Nazarbayev's charismatic leadership is manifested in several ways. In 1993, a constitutional ban on 'insulting the president' was added. This links to charismatic authority because, as Weber (1947) states, it rests 'on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him' (p. 132). To insult the president would be to insult his sanctity, as well as the state and current prosperity of the state. Election results also reinforce this view of Nazarbayev. For example, in the presidential elections in 2011, Nazarbayev won by 95.55% of the vote (APK, 2011). And, while he had opposition in these elections, in 2011, one of those candidates, Mels Yeleusizov, stated that he had voted for Nazarbayev (Aljazeera, 2011). Since Nazarbayev represents the stability, cohesion, and identity of the country, he is likely to continue to maintain high levels of popular support and remain the only viable option for president of the state.

This has direct implications on students and their performance in a class engaged in criticality. As Weber (1947) notes and Isaac (2010) concurs in the case of Kazakhstan, charismatic authority can lead to an unwillingness of citizens to question authority in general. This means that critique may be viewed as unwelcome in the classroom. This does not mean that critique does not occur or students are unable to do so – however, public displays of critique could be seen as unpatriotic or anti-Kazakhstani. Therefore, students may be expected (of other students and of themselves) to publically perform supportively of authority. This also means that there may be no legitimate place for

critique as it may be equated with 'insult'. While students may or may not uncritically accept the fusion of an identity with a figure of authority, they will be operating within that power matrix (as described by Butler, 1990). And this may lead to possible 'clashes' with expectations to exhibit critical engagement with their socio-political context. If this is the case, the question is how does the practitioner, in this context, navigate her way through this complexity?

Gender Identity in Kazakhstan

The final area of the Kazakhstani socio-political context explored is gender. While I can only offer a superficial exploration, it is an important area to consider for this study because it has implications for the performative acts of both men and women in the classroom. Butler (1990, 1997) argues that identity is formed through subjugation and differentiation and perpetuated through a performance that becomes the resulting identity, specifically in the construction of gender and the expectations of performance of men and women. Therefore there will be expectations of behaviour deeply rooted in the power matrix of the Kazakhstani context. This means that it could impact a willingness to publically engage in criticality and to question power. It may influence women in the classroom in remaining silent even as they are critical. And it may influence men in the classroom to accept tacit assumptions regarding the authority of their own voice.

There is little research done on the gender equity (much less gender identity) focusing on Kazakhstan specifically. However, the World Economic Forum's annual report on the Global Gender Gap (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2012) offers a starting point. I focus on 2012 rather than the recent 2015 report because the 2012 report reflected the state of Kazakhstan in 2011, the year of this study. The gender gap in Kazakhstan in 2012 was .721 (where 1.0 is complete equity). This is comparable to western Europe and the United States, and ranks Kazakhstan as 31 among 136 countries. It has nearly complete parity in education and health and is ranked first globally in enrolment in tertiary education. However, the picture shifts with regards to political empowerment. The gender gap there is .142. This is an increase from 2011 (which this study was conducted), where it was .080, and Kazakhstan ranked 98 out of 135 countries. Also, 2012 marked the first year since 2006, when the World Economic Forum began

tracking the Global Gender Gap, that Kazakhstan improved its overall gender gap and political empowerment gender gap. Previously, every year Kazakhstan's rank had decreased. However, regardless of Kazakhstan increase in standing in 2012, women are still not represented in national government. There are neither female representatives of oblasts in parliament nor any women in higher offices.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2004) chronicles a widening economic gap between men and women in Kazakhstan. In 1999, the gender gap in GDP per capita was $2,369. By 2003 the gap had risen to $4,785. While women were earning $923 per capita per annum more in 2003 compared to 1999, men were earning $3,465 more per capita. So, while 50% of the workforce in Kazakhstan is female, the earning gap reflects a continuing disparity.

These figures add resonance to Bekturganova's (1998) account of the sociology of women in Kazakhstan. She writes, 'the scale of female interests in most cases is narrowed to the world of a home kitchen, which removes women from the public sphere. Therefore, women more often appear in the role of indirect observers indifferently contemplating the events of political life from the windows of their kitchens' (cited in Khassanova, 2000). This offers a glimpse into how the numbers on growing inequity might reflect the possibilities of performance of gender identity. Women are to be focused on the private sphere, not the public. Bekturganova (1998) and Khassanova (2000) imply that this focus on the private is both externally expected as well as internally performed. This resonates with Butler's (1990, 1997) discussion of the construction of gender performance as both originating from the performance as well as the performance being a result of an identity.

Another area of research regarding women in Kazakhstan that has received more attention is that of domestic violence. Shadinova & Ontuganova (2014) reports that 'almost one in three people' (p.43) suffer from violence from family members, while pointing out that the country does not have a national law against domestic violence. They directly relate this issue to an inequality between men and women both legally and socially, where men are still expected to be the unquestioned dominant heads of family. This echoes Low's (2006) work that found in interviews, that domestic violence was attributed, in part, to men wishing to maintain dominance and control within their

homes. Both Shadinova and Ontuganova (2014) and Snajdr (2007) further complicate the understanding of the socio-political implications domestic violence by considering how this affects both ethnic Russian and Kazakh families. For Kazakh families, according to Snajdr (2007):

> Kalym, or bride-price, paid to the bride's parents by the groom, may encourage the justification of battering. A man is expected to control his wife, who is considered to be essentially his family's property. Thus, beating, inasmuch as it is construed as discipline, may be condoned by the husband's kin group. (p. 607)

In other words, the dowry system practice among Kazakh families may provide the framework for domestic violence against women to be accepted. Meanwhile, Russian women account for only 20% of women in shelters, but make up 42% of all anonymous callers to domestic violence hotlines (Snajdr, 2007). Snajdr suggests this means domestic violence is as common among that ethnicity, but that Russian women may feel less empowered to take action to remove themselves from their families.

None of my students reported any form of domestic violence. This is not to say that none of them experienced domestic or gender-based violence; rather it was not reported to me. Domestic violence globally (Ellsberg, 2001) and in Kazakhstan (Snajdr, 2007) is underreported, and in light of earlier discussions about of silences in Chapter Three (Lewis, 1993; hooks, 1989, 1994), it is difficult to be conclusive regarding these students' exposure to violence. However, looking at domestic violence against women in Kazakhstan does begin to offer an idea about the place of women in Kazakhstan as a socio-political context. When women in the classroom chose to speak or not speak, remaining silent becomes a more conscious act (Butler, 1997) that should not be assumed as being uncritical. It also helps contextualize two students' interest in feminism, as well as one student's plea for 'at least rights' for women (see Chapter Six). To perform their gender could mean performative acts that place pleasing others above themselves as women may be seen (and see themselves) as more nurturing and people-pleasing based on how they are constructed socio-politically in Kazakhstan.

Therefore, students in the classroom will be operating within the power matrix that welcomes women into tertiary education and yet expects them to be politically disengaged, as evidenced by Bekturganova (1998) and the political empowerment gender gap (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2011, 2012), as well as socially disempowered

based on the potential role of women as subordinate to men within Kazakhstani families (Low, 2006; Snajdr, 2007; Shadinova & Ontuganova, 2014). What does this mean for how women in the classroom engage within this context? How do they engage with the public critical consideration of a socio-political context? From there, how might that disturb (or perpetuate) expectations of performance that they or male students may have? Most importantly, how do I as a practitioner create space to allow for the voicing of criticality without requiring a confrontation of the power dynamic?

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at some of the contextual issues that I cautiously suggest might influence students' view of themselves and their willingness to engage in the classroom. It considers a history of the Gulag in identity formation for ethnic minorities, examines national identity as conflicted in modern Kazakhstan, and explores a context that seems to offer educational opportunity while limiting political engagement for women. It also raises questions – questions as to how this may impact students' performative acts in the classroom. It asks how these factors influence students' willingness to openly engage with criticality and voice controversial views. In this, it forces me, the practitioner, to not assume that silence or hostility to critical engagement is a sign of not being critical in private. And, most importantly, it asks how I ensure that I am creating safe spaces for criticality without requiring a confrontation with the power matrices, with which students may not be ready or willing to engage. These are all questions that need to be raised in order to address a sound ethical and methodological study that keeps students at the centre. In the next chapter, I explore these issues in detail.

Chapter 5 Methodology and Ethics

Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce my practice where this study took place – the programme, the specific module, and the narrative assignment that acted as the data and the material setting for the study. The students in the section of the module I taught constituted my sample – all thirteen students in the section chose to be involved in the study. These students were also demographically diverse, coming from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, detailed in the chapter (and referenced in previous chapters).

The study is a piece of critical action research (Schon 1987, Kemmis 1997, Kincheloe 2008) that uses thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, Namey, 2012) to analyse students' reflections on themselves as learners. Specifically, the data consists of two drafts of a narrative reflective writing, described and theorised in the chapter, as well as a one-to-one interview with the students. In light of my dual role of researcher and practitioner, and of my use of critical action research, I consider the complex ethical issues arising from conducting research as a practitioner, focusing on issues of power and interpretations of 'truth'. I also consider the complex ethics of researching the 'other', where I might become the Western academic imposing an imperial knowledge (Bhattacharya, 2009). While this section comes near the end of the chapter, it is not an afterthought. Rather, I wish consider the ethical complexities of the research methodologies – both in terms of collecting data as well as methodologies of analysis – holistically.

Context of My Practice

This study was embedded in a compulsory module of an international foundation programme (IFP) administered and quality assured by a British university. It was located in an English-medium Kazakhstani state university studying within the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The programme was initially designed by the British university for international students planning to study at the undergraduate level in the United Kingdom. However, as part of a university partnership, it was imported to Kazakhstan as part of the first year of university study for these Kazakhstani students. The aim of bringing the IFP to Kazakhstan was to prepare secondary school graduates

for university study at this university, where the curriculum for the different faculties was developed by a variety of American and British universities. Because the secondary school system in Kazakhstan is only eleven years (as opposed to the twelve years in the USA and UK), a year was added to university study in hopes of bridging the gap in the subject knowledge of students. Therefore, the IFP became the first year of this university.

The aim of the IFP was not only to bridge the subject knowledge gap between the eleventh year of secondary school and university study at a UK or USA programme. It also aimed to improve students' English in the context of academic study – focusing on academic research and writing in English. It aimed to introduce students to the academic conventions and styles used in Anglo-American academia that may be different from the Kazakhstani experience.

During the second year of the IFP programme, the curriculum was revised for two reasons: 1) no students were able to achieve a first from School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS), and 2) there seemed to be a disconnect between the research needs in the subject modules (*Introduction to Economics* and *Introduction to International Relations*) and the module that aimed to introduce students to research skills (*Culture and Society).* Therefore, the *Culture and Society* module was removed from the curriculum, and I was asked to develop a new module *Academic Research and Methods* (ARM). The study took place in this compulsory module, ARM. It was co-designed by the Academic Coordinator and myself, the research/practitioner. Five tutors, including the two designers, were involved in the teaching. The module was year-long, taught three hours a week during term one (October-December), and became four hours a week in term two (January-March) and three (April-June). Its primary focus was on academic research skills needed for undergraduate study at the SHSS as well as introducing students to the breadth of possibilities of study within the humanities and social sciences.

Specifically, the aims and objectives of the course were detailed as follows in the student handbook:

Subject and Academic Skills: Intensive, in-depth and rigorous study of academic subjects which provides excellent preparation for successful undergraduate study in humanities & social sciences.

Critical Thinking Skills: Analysing concepts, assessing and interpreting evidence, examining connections between ideas, asking critical questions, forming opinions and developing arguments in a range of academic subject areas in the humanities and social sciences.

Research and Learning Autonomy: Developing learning autonomy and independent research skills through in-depth study of topical issues related to sciences and social sciences. Students need to complete at least one independent research project as part of the course.

The tutors and designers of the course agreed that 'critical thinking' followed the definition developed in Chapter Three – as developing criticality (Freire 1974, hooks 1997 & 2002, Kincheloe 2008, Brookfield & Holst, 2011, Allman, 2011). In all later course documents, critical thinking was replaced with 'criticality' to reflect this agreement.

In order to meet the aims listed above, the course set out to introduce students to different fields offered at the SHSS – that would act as 'knowledge objects' (Allman, 2010) for dialogue to begin. Specifically, ARM exposed students to introductory debates in philosophy, anthropology, history, comparative religion, literature and political science in lectures & texts in the form of live lectures, videos, readings, and podcasts. ARM also integrated dialogue debated from two other compulsory modules – *International Relations* and *Economics*.

The course included a piece of narrative reflective writing where students explored themselves as learners – this writing was called a Student Self Evaluation (SSE). ARM did not dictate the format, nor style, of the SSE other than that it had to be in written form. A series of questions were offered to students as a starting point to help them with their reflections. The SSE was viewed as a process rather than a single stand-alone writing. It was written, rewritten, and revised – never to be viewed as completed. The first time the SSE was written was as an in-class, two-hour writing during reading week, in mid-November, of term one. It was then edited or re-written (students' choice) three more times throughout the three terms, followed by 20 minute personal tutorials to discuss the writing in further detail. While the SSE was a 'required' component of the

class, there was no penalty if it was not completed, and it was un-assessed. The other assessments in the ARM consisted of the following:

1. A note-taking exam where students attended a lecture, took notes, and then used the notes to answer questions about the overall content and purpose of the lecture.

2. A textual analysis exam, where students were given four different texts on a similar topic one week before the exam. They were expected to read them, take notes, and research the authors. Then, during the exam, they were asked questions about how they might use the sources to make different arguments and their validity within those arguments.

3. A data analysis exam, where students were given four different graphs on a similar topic – they were asked questions that demonstrated their ability to both read the data and interpret it in light of the data in all four charts.

4. A research proposal on their chosen topic related to concepts, theories and ideas that were introduced in the module.

5. A research essay derived from the proposal.

6. A *viva voce* on the researched essay and their experiences in the ARM module in general.

ARM and the SSE are at the centre of my research with my class of thirteen students. This was a discursive space within a module focused on dialogical learning that students were given to openly engage with their own thinking and develop their own self-questioning within their socio-political context. This relates back to Brookfield (2010), Barnett (1997), and Barnett & Coate's, (2005) understanding of critical reflection as a part of developing criticality. Both a syllabus of the course and the assignment for the SSE are available in the appendices.

Participants

Before I analyse my use of the SSE as a measure of criticality, I would like to introduce the participants in the study. There were thirteen students in the study – the entire cohort of one section of the ARM module. The students were divided into each class section based on conscious mixed groups in terms of level of their entrance exam results. All groups had a mix of IELTS (International English Language Testing System – a test used by most universities in the UK to determine students' English

language level) from 6.5 to 8 overall scores. A band six score means the speaker 'has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.' (IELTS, 2014, p.12) while a band eight score means the speaker 'has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.' (p.12). These IELTS scores are important to keep in mind when reading students SSEs and transcripts of the interviews – these students were engaging in the learning process in their second, or many times third, language. The students were also mixed level on their entrance 'critical thinking' entrance test from 50% to 73% final score.

The students in this particular section that I taught were unusually diverse – where only half of them were Kazakh. The other students were Volga German, Russian, Korean, Tatar, and Chechen. There is one student whose ethnicity I do not know. In class she regularly identified as Kazakh. However, during a one-to-one meeting on the last day of classes, she revealed that she was not Kazakh; I did not ask further questions because I did not want her to feel like she needed to divulge more information than she already had. The class was made up of nine female students and four males. This make up was representative of the SHSS, which seemed to recruit more female students. This trend is similar to gender imbalances within fields of study here in the UK as well (HESA, 2015).

Table 1, below, details students by their pseudonyms used in this dissertation, their self-identified gender identity and ethnicity, and their IELTS and 'critical thinking' entrance test. The university in the UK designed the critical thinking entrance test, and the test is aimed at assessing students' abilities to read two biased passages and identify gaps in the argument that the passages made. Then, based on those gaps, students, in the test, are asked to consider alternative arguments or ways of strengthening the original passages' arguments. These passages are short, about three hundred words maximum, and do not require high IELTS scores. I include these scores (along with the IELTS scores) to show the level of English language competency of the students, since the SSEs and interviews were all in English, and to show the level of awareness towards basic argumentation.

Table 1 Description of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	IELTS	Entrance Test
Aigirim	Female	Kazakh	7	53%
Aigul	Female	Kazakh	6.5	50%
Alibek	Male	Kazakh	7	70%
Askhat	Male	Chechen	7.5	63%
Bota	Female	Unknown	6.5	60%
Elmira	Female	Tatar	7	57%
Katya	Female	Russian	7.5	73%
Moldir	Female	Volga German	7	63%
Natalya	Female	Korean	6.5	63%
Nurlan	Male	Kazakh	6.5	57%
Raushan	Female	Kazakh	7	67%
Serik	Male	Korean	7	50%
Sholpan	Female	Kazakh	7	50%

The Student Self-Evaluation

The focus of the SSE is on the critical self as a measure of criticality. In other words, the SSE is a personal dialogue in developing criticality, drawing from Barnett (1997), Clegg, Hudson & Mitchell (2005), Pryor & Crossouard (2008), Kincheloe (2008), and Allman (2010). Students write and re-write the same piece four times over the course of the year – and in these they see themselves changing. It becomes a conscious, documented change. The intermittent tutorials between drafts acted as a place to further consider themselves, where the tutor (me) simply asks questions that allow them to go deeper into *why* or *how* they came to these thoughts about themselves. This draws on Clegg, Hudson & Mitchell (2005), when they write:

> Dialogue should not be seen in contra-distinction to 'personal' knowledge and narratives. New knowledge of the personal, which comes about through reflection on the process of learning, does not occur in isolation but through the engagement with new frames of reference. (p. 5)

In other words, the SSE provides a mode for such dialogue and reflection on the process of learning with students' new frames within the context of the course and being in

university. It gives students a chance to explore their own thinking through writing, and then re-reading and re-writing ideas as they change throughout the course.

The SSE also links to Barnett's (1997) eight forms of self-reflection, which includes critical reflections. He writes 'through self-reflection, we can free ourselves from ideological delusion. Or, at least, begin the process. The full process points to social action…' (p. 97). The SSE attempts to be a starting point where students can reflect on tacit assumptions becoming explicit and how that process impacts the understanding of themselves within their context. It is the start of becoming critically conscious. Along this thread, then, the term 'evaluation' in the SSE comes to be the students evaluating themselves and their change as individuals with multiple identities – primarily as learners, but with social, personal, and political issues bound up in their individual. It is not an evaluation based on external objective markers, but rather an evaluation based on internal understandings of them.

In this sense, the SSE is a divergent assessment (though not scored) as detailed by Pryor & Crossouard (2008). It is not testing if the students know a predetermined piece of knowledge. Rather, it is a conversation (or dialogue) to gather their understanding of their own learning and determine who they are (identity) and how they are doing. It involves reflection on learning throughout the entire course (not solely on the module). It attempts to create discursive space that allows students to explore themselves and their own contexts. In this sense, the SSE is place for students to engage 'honesty, openness, and rigorous critical thinking' (Ashwin et al, 2015, p. 29) that is based on what they are comfortable sharing in terms of how they see themselves, their identity, and their contexts throughout the academic year. This dialogue is held through the year through the tutorials and re-writing process. It is an assessment that allows for a self-critical dialogic process to occur, drawing on both Kincheloe's (2008) critically complex epistemology and Allman's (2010) dialogical learning. This is also why it is the centre of the data collected, analysed and interpreted to begin to answer my research questions.

Research Questions and Data Collection

In this research, I used the data from two drafts of the SSEs, the end of term one in December 2011 and the end of term three in June 2012 , plus the tutorial interview in the middle of term two in February 2012 to understand student development and answer my research questions. These were one-to-one interviews with the students, and while I originally intended for them to be relatively short, every single one ran long. During the interviews, I revisited the first drafts of their SSEs, asking them questions such as 'what is the story behind …' and 'what were you thinking about when you wrote…'. I would note, part way through each of these interviews, it changed into more of a conversation, as I would ask for further clarifications, and students began to discuss ideas outside of their initial SSEs.

While in my ethics section in this chapter I consider this more, I must note that I had intended to use an interview – the tutorial from the last week of term three – however all the students bar one requested not to be recorded during this tutorial (despite agreeing to be recorded in the first tutorial). The tutorial did take place, and students continued to share with me – however they no longer wished for those conversations to be 'on the record'. I did not explore why because I did not want students to feel challenged in their decisions. However, I suspect that this may have been due to what students chose to share. Several students, both in class and out of class, expressed concerns of not knowing who was 'listening' to our lessons. Therefore, as students became more explicit in their engagement with the assumptions of the Kazakhstani context, they may have preferred not to have records of those thoughts. This also leads me to believe that students did feel they had the option to say no, and decline to participate. Table 2 details the final points of data collection:

Table 2 Points of Data Collection

Item	Date	Form of analysis – see section 5.5 for details
First Draft of the SSE	7 December 2011	Thematic analysis – neoliberal performativity
Interview – asking 'what is the story behind…' / using the SSE to gain deeper understanding of students' thinking (aimed for 20 min – all were at least 30 min. One was 41 min long)	11 & 12 February 2012	Comparative analysis to SSE – look for change in how students frame of themselves as beings
Final Draft of SSE	16 June 2012	Comparative analysis to first SSE – look for change in discourse and expression of themselves. Cross-sectional analysis in order to analyse potential development of criticality around key themes

The following research questions were the focus of this study, and I used my research design and data analysis to attempt to answer them:

1. What is criticality and its role in higher education? (I have attempted to answer this question in Chapter Three).
2. What role does the use of a progressive narrative essay play in developing and/or voicing criticality?
3. How do I see criticality being voiced within the SSE?
4. How do I emphasise elements of criticality developing in the SSEs (especially in earlier drafts) a) without objectifying my students and b) while respecting my students?
5. What are the implications for my professional practice?

Critical Action Research

Generally, this study fits within an action research methodology. It is practitioner based and attempts to focus on how practice is acted on. McNiff & Whitehead (2006) state that, in action research, the practitioners':

> … accounts of practice show how they are trying to improve their own learning, and influence the learning of others. These accounts come to stand as their own practical theories of practice from which others can learn if they wish. (p.7)

It is a method of research that focuses on questions around the practitioner, with focus on 'how do I'. Because of this process of considering *how* practitioners improve and influence learning, action research tends to have a cyclical process of reflection, plan, action, analysis, reflection, re-plan, action, etc. (see Figure 1). This study follows this cyclical process loosely – using my theoretical understandings of the purpose of higher education (explored in chapter three), I developed a module and a practice within the module (the SSE), and from this I attempt to analyse the results of that practice at different points throughout the course. I collect data during two phases in order to understand how students' have changed over the course of the module (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Cycles of Action Research
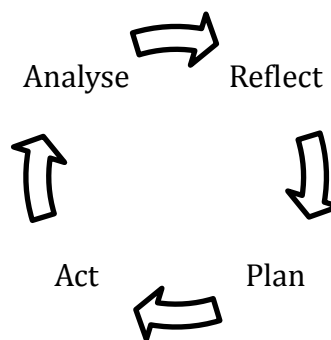
However, there are some limitations and critiques to action research as a methodology. First of all – action research can be prescriptive and mechanised. It focuses on the idea that a process can be repeated regardless of context to produce the same results. This is implied in McNiff & Whitehead's (2006) notion of a practical theory that others can learn from. This goes against the concept of 'criticality' as contextually focused and

therefore could cause my study to clash with the very concept I claim to value. This prescriptiveness links directly to my second critique, which is that action research can be detached from theory – it focuses on practical 'how do I' statements which could lead to little theoretical development that comes from questions like 'why do I' and/or 'should I'. In this sense, action research runs the risk of becoming a doxa of 'practical' action – not a critical praxis.

My interest is in developing critical praxis as defined by Allman (2010), a praxis that explores and questions tacit assumption built within a socio-political context, both in my students as well as in my study. Therefore, I focus on *critical* action research. Critical action research (CAR) moves away from promoting 'professionalism' (Grundy, 1987) into 'reflection in action' (Schon, 1987; Ashwin et al, 2015). It is theoretically placed within Habermas's (1984) communicative action (see Chapter Three) and therefore becomes a means of changing education and therefore, potentially, society (Kemmis, 1997). This fits within my own paradigm better than professionalized, decontextualized, and potentially un-theorized notions of action research as described by McNiff & Whitehead (2006). CAR allows for me to both consider fostering critically complex epistemology in students as well as myself as the practitioner-researcher. This is why my research design (see Figure 2) begins with my theorisation, which was detailed in Chapter Three.

Figure 3 Design of my Study as CAR
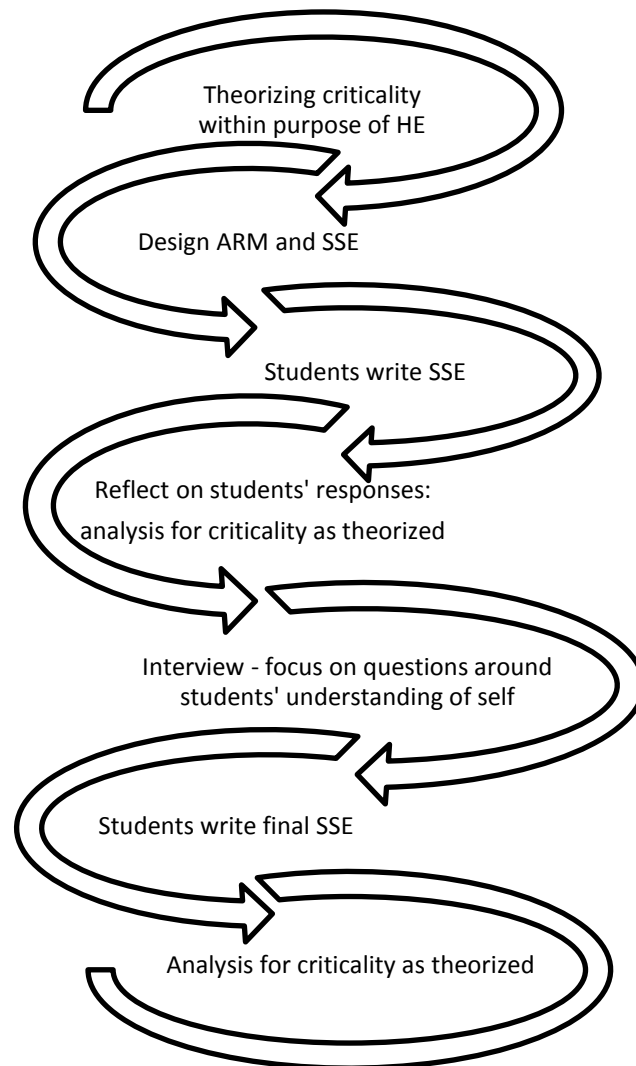
There are criticisms of CAR as well – primarily that it results in form of colonialism by privileging one knowledge over another (Melrose, 1996; Webb, 1996). However, with Kincheloe's (2008) critically complex epistemology at the centre – where socio-political and economic contexts are viewed as part of critically complex contexts that create different understandings when engaged in radical questioning, the 'outcomes' continually change. In other words, it is up to students to engage with their contexts to come up with their own interpretations and creations of knowledge. This CAR focuses on the process of radical questioning, not on imposing answers to those questions. It allows students to answer these questions as they understand the answers to be. In doing this, the study attempts *not* to impose one answer, or knowledge, over another.

This is why CAR, as a form of critical praxis, allows for me to develop a study to understand how I see my students voicing their own criticality.

Thematic Analysis and Reading the Data

Because of the nature of the data, narratives and interviews within a qualitative study, I rely on thematic analysis (Mason, 2002; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Braun & Clark, 2006) in my CAR. Action research usually focuses on questions starting with 'How do I?' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006). If I were to do this, my research questions might be 'How do I foster / create/ encourage students' criticality?' However, I do not think I can truly know if I, as the practitioner, am solely responsible for this, much less how. There is no way for me to know if students were uncritical or simply silent in performing their criticality. Rather, the difference is my witnessing of students' criticality. Therefore, my questions, once I defined criticality, are 'Does my use of a progressive narrative essay, like the SSE, create a space for voicing criticality?' and, if yes, 'How is criticality being voiced within the SSE?' To answer these questions, by engage with students' narratives to understand their own engagement with themselves and their place in Kazakhstan as a socio-political and economic context, I can use thematic analysis as a methodology for reading their narratives.

Guest, MacQueen & Namey (2012) state that 'thematic analyses move beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes' (p. 13). In other words, the qualitative data is read looking for different ideas that are expressed throughout the text. In the case of this study, I read the data looking for particular themes around how the students understood themselves in relation to learning as well as in relations to their complex socio-political contexts in Kazakhstan. Specifically, I looked for themes around questioning the context and themselves, making explicit tacit assumptions, and imagining alternative realities, as all parts of my definition of criticality and how critical beings engage with the world (Barnett, 1997, Freire, 1970, Kincheloe, 2008). While this may appear to be a deductive approach, as it is driven from my theorization of criticality, it was actually inductive as I was not sure how students' engagement with criticality might be voiced within the narrative self-evaluations, and therefore did not being reading the data with pre-formed themes (Braun & Clark, 2006).

According to Braun & Clark (2006), there are six phases to thematic analysis: 1) becoming familiar with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) combining codes into overarching themes, 4) analysing the themes in light of the overarching theory, 5) defining each theme, and 6) deciding which themes offering meaningful contributions. I did not follow these phases as distinctive steps where, when one was completed, I would begin the next. This is because such a method seems to recreate some of the same critiques of Action Research that I mentioned earlier – specifically that it becomes prescriptive and mechanical. While reading my data, I attempted to remember that any coding or themes emerging from that process reflected a situated meaning created within the context of the students writing these narratives within their first year of study to their teacher. Voices do not simply speak for themselves, and the narratives the students offered in their SSEs and interviews are done within a location and socio-political context, at the University in Kazakhstan, and to someone, me, their teacher, with all the complexities of those power structures and relationships (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012). I explore these issues in the following section on ethical considerations.

However, while I did not follow these six phases as distinctive steps, I did engage with them all. Initially, I familiarized myself with each SSE and interview, reading them during the research process, both to become familiar with the data as well as to guide me in the follow stages of my CAR. Then, I did two different types of readings of the two SSEs and the interview transcripts that allowed me to generate the initial codes, create themes and define the themes, and analyse the themes in light of overarching theories. These were 1) a holistic reading and 2) a cross-sectional reading.

The first reading was a holistic organization of data. I read each SSE in its entirety and compared my reflective interpretation of the first term SSE to the interview analysis and then to the analysis of the final SSE. In the analysis, I was specifically looking for how their narratives over the year evolved. I was trying to discover if there was either a change in focus or a change in discourse (Gee, 2011). This means that I considered the language used to see if they framed their narratives under specific terms, and if those terms changed. It also meant analysing the narratives to understand their changing narratives, from first draft to last draft as a means of understanding their story in their

own words at different snapshots in time. I focused on this holistic method because I 'wish to understand… complex narratives… and [I] believe that these are too complicated or elaborate to be amendable to categorical indexing' (Mason, 2002, p. 116). Therefore a holistic reading allowed me to engage with the entirety of the complex narrative students are trying to express. However, as I did this, I tried to remember that each one of these narratives is simply a version – even the third term SSE is not the final 'object.' Students are still evolving and more versions of their selves are still to come. This activity is based on students as learners, and they may not reveal other identities that they may view as more important.

From this holistic read, I identified that students used a discourse of neoliberal performativity to describe their learning and who they were in their learning (Ball, 2007; MacFarlane, 2016). In Chapter Six, I refer to this as 'The Good Student as Determined by Marks'. To do this holistic read, I worked from paper rather than using the computer. This allowed me to lay the narratives side-by-side across a large space to literally see how often the theme of neoliberal performativity appeared in the text. From this, what I clearly saw was that frequency of the neoliberal performativity discourse was high in the first draft of the SSE, but it lost dominance in the interviews and almost disappeared in the final SSEs.

This led me to a cross-sectional analysis of the final SSEs and the interviews. These interviews were conducted in order to ask students to tell me the story behind particular parts of their SSEs, be it around a potential neoliberal identity of themselves as students or a reflection that might indicate an engagement with criticality. By doing a cross-sessional analysis of the February interviews and the term three SSEs, I was able to look for themes in the data 'that do not appear in an orderly or sequential manner' (Mason, 2002, p. 153). Specifically, I was looking at where students described themselves as having a (growing) awareness of influences on who they are and their assumptions while questioning those influences and assumptions. In other words, I searched for the beginning of criticality. The themes that emerged from this analysis were then group into three overlapping areas. These themes that engaged with this concept of criticality were:

1. *Familial influences:* I looked at where students detailed perspectives that they learned from family and the students' growing awareness of this. By

questioning the familial, students could be showing the beginnings of questioning norms and tacit assumptions, but do not feel comfortable enough questioning it as societal or political. This could do with perceptions of difference or with power dynamics of what it means to question the social or political.

2. *Socio-cultural influences:* I looked for places where students raised socio-cultural norms and questioned what they accepted as 'true'. The reason I looked for cultural and political as separate was based on students' own labelling. In some cases, the students viewed these issues as cultural whereas with others, there seemed to be an implicit understanding that these issues might also be political. This choice of language could lead to an understanding of their discourse and power dynamics.

3. *Political influences:* I looked for where students identified and questioned political structures and practices within their contexts along with the underlying assumptions of these. I paid attention to how these political structures of power may have influenced students and where students appear to be identifying them and where students questioned them. Here especially, students began explicitly imagine alternative possibilities to the political status quo.

These different readings, both the holistic and cross-sectional focused on a thematic analysis, described above.

Ethical Considerations

I was granted ethical clearance through the University of Sussex for my research involving human participants, and I asked students for approval to participate in my study (see Appendix 3). I informed the students verbally about the research, the purpose and their ability to withdraw at any time in class three times – the third time, in mid-November, I presented the consent form to them. I hosted a question and answer session about the process, and encouraged them to take the consent form home to read it further or translate it if need be. All the consent forms were collected in class in the first week of December. This provided procedural notions of 'ethics', thereby satisfying institutional norms; however, these procedures work from assumptions that

may not reflect how the participants see themselves in the research, nor the wider issues of power that exist and are created during the process of research (Turner & Webb, 2014). Therefore, beyond ethical clearance, there are still further ethical considerations and dilemmas surrounding this study, most of which revolve around issues of power between the students and me, the practitioner/researcher.

Power exists in all interactions and is embedded into the social fabric (Foucault, 1991). Hence all research involving social interactions has power embedded in it. For my study, this means the students' view of power is there – regardless of their consciousness. And because of this, these power relations are accepted – specifically the relation of teacher-student. However, through discourse, there is room for resistance – to 'evade, subvert, or contest strategies of power' (Gaventa, 2002, p. 3). This is where a dialogical learning *can* aid in resisting the power dynamics in the classroom. Students may still see me as having power over them, but the act of how I teach – with the focus on dialogue as theorized by Allman (2010) – could mean that students may view me as not *imposing* my power. This is complex though. For, while I may attempt in the classroom to remain dialogic and subvert the power relations, it does not change that students will not have 'equal knowledge' (Letherby, 2003, p. 114). Students may expect me to bring in the knowledge objects and have prior experience with those objects.

This means I need to remain conscious of these power dynamics throughout my interpretations of students as they share their narratives to ensure that I am not imposing my story onto them. I need to reflexively question whether students are reproducing what they expect power (me) to want. This constant questioning is a part of each stage of reading the texts – both in the holistic reading and the cross-sectional reading. This does not mean that the students' narratives are invalid – rather it reflects an identity at the moment of writing/speaking that is under a particular power structure – that of student-teacher. Students may well be expressing critique and resistance as part of the power structure. However, it could be because I, the teacher, want resistance. My reading of their texts must become situated within this power dynamic. Having said this – I do not think it is fair for me to assume that a student is 'potential victim' (Letherby, 2003, p. 116). They have the agency to 'refuse to answer, take part, tell the

truth even' (p.116). It is more about my awareness of the power as I read their narratives, but not to project it on each word they share.

Another area of power issues is that of 'north/south' or 'west/east'. I am a teacher from the west, or the Global North – working for a British university, with an American accent, and dual citizenship from Portugal and the USA. Students may consider themselves from the Global South, with Kazakhstan being a country that is economically growing but newly independent. Therefore, Kazakhstan is in transition – politically, economically, and socially. Students may want access to the same knowledge and goods as in the UK (hence attending this university). This *may* mean along with the power relation of teacher –student, the power deepens as I become not only the gatekeeper to university learning, but also to gaining western knowledge – this is speculations as to where the levels of power may be between the students and I, the practitioner/researcher. I cannot change my accent nor ensure that discussion of my experiences living in the Global South (I have lived more years in the Global South than I have in the Global North) reduces the view that I might represent hegemonic power. In other words, I may end up representing a discourse 'knowledge imperialism' (Naidoo, 2011, p. 50), though in many ways, that is what I am trying to mitigate. Therefore, as with the teacher-student power relations, dialogical learning may minimize this, but I continue to consider it as I read and interpret the narratives – keeping them situated within the context of who they have been written by and for.

A way of considering this tension without either reproducing 'knowledge imperialism' nor creating a dichotomy between Global North and Global South is to reflect on my role of negotiating between the two, as considered by Bhattacharya (2009). She suggests that voices 'can never be heard in their entirety' (p. 109) due to the 'situational and contextual nature of experiences, and the reflexivity that is embedded in multiple power relations' (p.109). This means that the voices that I encounter in the SSEs and interviews never represent the full individual. These voiced moments remain situated in that place and in that context. Related to this are the moments of silence – these students chose to become silent at the end of the study by requesting that I not record them. As their teacher, in this role, they continued to share their voices, engaging in that dialogue. But as researcher, they chose to become symbolically silent, in their near-uniform refusal. This is not a silence demonstrating a lack of criticality – rather it

is a silence that might 'become a moment of critical agency' (Bhattacharya, 2009, p. 114). I am not sure that I ever resolve the complexity of researching the 'other' while respecting their voices and silences, but I attempt to remain reflective of my own negation, as I aim to engage students' criticality and understand their own placement of selves within that.

This relates closely to my second area of ethical concern which revolves around notions of truth and student voices. In the SSEs, students are self-reporting. They are expressing their own growth as well as, potentially, what they believe I want to hear. However, this does not necessarily make what they are writing at that moment any less true. By questioning the 'truth' of what students chose to write in the SSEs, there is an assumption that somehow, the knowledge that they create in their reflections might have an objective sense of truth that is not situated within the context that they write. However, I would argue that the context that places students writing these texts for me, the teacher, to read is part of the situatedness of the knowledge students are creating (and exploring). By situated, I refer to the space in which knowledge is created (Foucault, 1972; Haraway, 1988). Just as ethnicity, national identity, political context, and gender identity situate students' knowledge, so do the power dynamics of reflecting as part of their learning for me. This creates a knowledge that is self-monitored (Foucault, 1997). Therefore, as Escobar (2011) writes, 'narratives are neither fictions nor opposed to "facts"' (p. 19). This holds true for the SSEs, which are very much the narratives of students at the time of taking the ARM module. I reiterate what I stated at the start of the previous section – the SSEs are true at the moment they were written for the audience in which they were intended. The project of becoming a full self is never final. As Bauman (2004) revisits constantly, identities are liquid and fluid. Therefore, for that situated moment, the SSEs offer an understanding of students' thinking at that moment in time. This means in my interpretation and analysis, my focus must remain on students as they seem themselves at that time when writing for me. It is within that situated-ness that the SSE has value.

Conclusion

This piece of research, based on a redefining of criticality to be framed around the public good of higher education, to question tacit assumptions in order to consider

socio-political inequalities within the complexity of specific contexts (Kincheloe, 2008; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Brookfield & Holst, 2011; Brookfield 2005), aims to see how I as a practitioner can engage and foster it within these students in Kazakhstan. While higher education policy moves towards a (I argue failing) neoliberal perspective, this research acts as a means of seeing if practitioners can engage with critical pedagogy and the public good of higher education regardless of the policy. I attempt this by having thirteen students continually reflect on themselves, their learning, and how that learning engages with their everyday lives outside of class, in a narrative writing assignment called the SSE.

This study, as my own critical praxis to engage with students' criticality – a critical praxis where writing is the mode of action, is designed based on CAR while using thematic analysis to analyse students' narratives. Specifically, I look at two versions of their SSEs – the draft written in December and the 'final' draft submitted the first week of June. I also recorded and analysed 30-41 minute with these thirteen students at the end of February. These interviews focused on questions around, 'tell me the story behind ___' specific parts of the first draft of the SSE.

I read all the texts holistically, attempting to understand the students' complex story as a whole – to understand their evolution between three different snap shots. I then did a cross-sectional reading of the final SSE to begin to understand how students' understandings of themselves became intertwined with their own understandings of their contexts. As I discussed in the ethics section, while readings these texts and transcripts, I have continually tried reflecting on issues of power that make the relationship between the students and I as their non-Kazakhstani teacher – how that may be intertwined with how students chose to share their narrative. This relates back to thematic analysis – that each text is situated in the context – not just that socio-political context of Kazakhstan, but also the context of the classroom and I as teacher. This means that the texts represent a moment of situated truth that is fluid. In the next chapter, I attempt to present my analysis of these texts, considering these ethical entanglements as I examine students' voicing of their own critical consciousness.

Chapter 6 Findings & Discussion – Engagement with Criticality

Introduction

This chapter analyses the SSEs and interviews to understand if, and how, students engaged with criticality by reflecting on themselves and their place within their contexts. I have two key findings – first I found that the discourse students used to understand themselves and reflect on their learning changed significantly when comparing the first draft of the SSEs in December 2011 to the final drafts submitted in June 2012. The first draft focused almost exclusively on measured indicators of learning as means of determining their success as students. This echoes MacFarlane's (2015) and Ball's (2007, 2012) concepts of neoliberal performativity that were discussed in Chapter Two. However, when analysing the final drafts of the SSEs, the students rarely used this discourse and only spoke of assessments (such as research essays) in terms of how their understandings of theoretical concepts changed how they understood their own contexts. This was true of twelve of the thirteen participants.

My second major finding came out of deeper analysis of the interviews conducted in February 2012 and final drafts of the SSEs submitted in June. Here, I analysed how students discuss their socio-political contexts, their understanding of themselves in the context of Kazakhstan, and how they might imagine alternatives (and assess those alternatives). In other words, I analysed their discourse to understand if and how they were expressing criticality as critical beings, as I defined in Chapter Three. Theoretically, I focused on Barnett & Coate (2005), Brookfield (2005), and Kincheloe (2008). I did this while taking into consideration power and identity as constructed within Kazakhstan, that I explore in Chapter Four. I focused on Bauman (2004) to understand the conflicts of defining national identity, Foucault (1997) to understand how identity is performed and the role of power within the creation of these identities, and Butler (1991, 1997) to understand how that performativity relates to gender identity. My findings in this second section of this chapter are that, through engagement with the SSEs and tutorials, ten of the twelve students began to engage with a contextualised criticality at different levels by identifying and questioning influences of family, socio-cultural, and political norms in Kazakhstan.

Because my findings, especially where I consider students' individual engagements within their socio-political contexts as they begin to recognize wider influences and question tacit assumptions, I present the data from the SSEs and interviews in detail, choosing to present extended quotes from each of the students. This is because the growing criticality of students is related to an awareness of what Foucault calls an 'economy of power relations' (Foucault, 2000, p. 328). Power and identity as formed through subjugation (Foucault, 2000; Butler, 1997) is about 'relationships between partners' (Foucault, 2000, p. 337) that are diverse. Therefore it is in the way students choose to communicate their awareness of different aspects of their contexts that they begin to make visible their criticality of their complex contexts (Kincheloe, 2008) when engaging with gender, national identity, and other aspects of Kazakhstan's socio-political context.

From Neoliberal Performativity to Critical Self-Reflection

The 'Good' Student as Determined by Marks

When reading the final SSEs submitted at the end of the academic year compared to the first drafts, I realized that the students showed a change in how they understood their identities as students. I had not explicitly expected to discover this change in students' expressions of themselves, but in light of the definition of criticality used in this research, which is focused on a subjectively framed critical reflection (Brookfield & Holst, 2011), the change is understandable. Specifically, in the first set of SSEs, students determined if they were 'good' or bad' students based on external markers – the critiques of others on their works. However, by the end of the academic year, marks on assessments did not feature in their reflections of themselves, with one exception. Instead, their determinations about their success in studies focused how they engaged knowledge, how it changed how they thought about themselves and their fields, and what that might mean going forward. In other words, they were beginning to engage with critical reflection (Brookfield & Holst, 2011). They considered the whys behind their engagement rather than unquestioningly accepting a number as an objective assessment of their quality as a student.

In the first SSEs submitted in December 2011, students focused on preparation for assessments, both at the end of the term and others scattered throughout the term. For

example, Aigirim discusses disappointment with her first assessment results in the ARM module and goes on to hope that if she tries her best 'then probably I will get high mark'. From there she moves on to think about assessments that have yet to come, and provides a sense of what she views as 'success' as a student. Specifically, she writes:

> *...success comes with lots of practice and hard work, so I want to achieve high score on second term exams and of course, FINAL EXAMS [emphasis in the original], too.* (Aigirim, First SSE – December 2011)

Aigirim's hard work and lots of practice is understood as success only if she is able to achieve a high mark on her exams.

This notion of worth as a student as determined by external assessments is echoed by all thirteen students. Askhat's first SSE focused completely on assessments and how his scores on those assessments made him realize that he did not know what he thought he knew. He then labels himself as a bad student based on these results. Askhat writes:

> *My exam result on IR completely devastated me. I didn't expect that I might be so bad at it. Especially low graded questions were awarded for almost a full mark when more valuable ones marked as a failure.* (Askhat, First SSE – December)

In his view, it is his marks that make him a bad student, and his exams were a failure, even though he did not actually fail his IR exam. He goes on, 'Luckily others started to look at me at the different angle so I am not an ultimate all-knowing person anymore which makes it much easier for me.' Here, he seems to be trying to have a positive attitude towards his perceived failure, seeing the pressure to perform having been lifted from his shoulders by this supposed failure. But, he continues, 'It looks like my failures and loses are greater than my victories and gains. And it is kind of depressing me.' In the end, because he was not given a mark of a certain level, he can only be the opposite – a failure. And it is the lowness of this mark that determines him a failure, not the amount that he learned or how he engaged with that knowledge. This is the hallmark of neoliberal thinking in education. Because performance is managed as a means of quality assurance (Ball, 2007, 2012), Ashkat, like the other students, is left to believe that his quality as a student is evidenced through his mark, rather than by any other awareness of his own changes in thinking.

Natalya attempts to engage with what theoretically makes a good student. She begins her SSE by describing the end of term tests for the International Relations and Economics modules. Then, she moves on to describe, in an objective framing, how to study for each subject and why it is different for each subject – the focus in the SSE is not on herself, but rather on how a theoretical 'good' student would prepare for each test. Then, she states:

> *I can estimate my preparation for exams as satisfactory. I could have done better but I didn't. Why? Because I realized the coming of exams a little bit late and for some things I had to do in a hurry. And everybody knows that what is done in a hurry can't be done enough good. I realize it and now I try to do better next time in spring.* (Natalya, First SSE – December 2011)

From there she continues to consider those exams in spring. She states that she expects to work more and to be willing 'to study in order not to have difficulties on the next exam.' With this she returns to a disembodied analysis of how one might study more.

Typical for the majority of students, nowhere in Natalya's self evaluation does she consider herself within the process of her learning. She does not place herself within her learning in class, nor does she consider knowledge gained/created from her courses beyond knowledge for an exam. And, she does not consider how this knowledge is engaging with her own sense of how she thinks of her world. It is quite simply a 972 word SSE about exams – what it means to study for them, and a promise to somehow implement it for the spring exams. Like Askhat and Aigirim, Natalya has framed her worth as a student based on a neoliberal understanding of higher education.

These students seem to be displaying a neoliberal understanding of their student selves – by gauging themselves within the frame of a neoliberal performative being, as described by Ball (2007), Shore (2010), and MacFarlane (2015). Higher education, framed by a neoliberal perspectives demands that academics and students alike be assessed to determine quality. It is from here that quality assurance measures are put in place. Ashkat, Aigirim and Natalya come across as near textbook examples of how a 'culture of performativity' (Shore, 2010, p. 27) in a neoliberal university might be expressed from a student perspective. Using Ball's (2007, p. 28) terminology, all three see themselves in light of their 'level of performance' by determining the 'quality' of their learning in light of the 'outputs' in the form of exam results. Or, to put it more succinctly, these students are evaluating themselves 'on the basis of how they perform'

(MacFarlane, 2015, p. 28). Their evaluations are not based on a change in their own understandings of either the subject compared to when they began nor on an understanding of how what they are learning engages with their own contexts. Instead, they seem to see themselves as the World Bank (Salmi, 2009) does, as material being molded into the university's 'superior outputs' (p. 23), with their marks acting as quality assurance.

Moving Beyond Marks to see Ideas and Changes in Thinking

However, in the final version of the SSE, the tone and discourse of the SSEs changed. The majority of the students no longer focused on exam results as a measure of their worth as students. Rarely were assessments discussed at all, and their learning seemed to be viewed as a process to be reflected upon. By focusing on the same three examples, the change in expression and awareness of themselves becomes quite clear; these students are not using the same language nor concepts to understand themselves.

Aigirim does discuss exams twice in her SSE, which is a considerable decrease in comparison to her first one where the entire document focused on exams. And when she does mention those exams, it is not in order to assess herself as a student in light of exams. The first time she mentions exams, she writes:

> *In school sometimes I studied hard only when teacher asked me to do so, and in preparation to examinations I tried to learn everything just only to achieve high score and do not disappoint my mother. Now I see how ridiculous I was by thinking so, it is not my teacher who needs all knowledge as well as my mother (they already passed this learning process), and learning for the sake of not make people upset to get high mark is not learning at all. Seems like I was doing a favour. Marks are still important in University but what is more significant is your understanding and ability to analyze. (Aigirim, Final SSE – June 2012)*

First of all, she is aware of why she perceived learning as a success or failure due to exam results – a view that comes from a desire to please others. However, now she has come to realize that, while her results do matter, it is not the purpose of her learning. Rather, her learning is about analysis and understanding. She has moved beyond a neoliberal view that the performance and output dictate all, and into a view that the exams are merely a single part of the larger purpose of learning to think. Her SSE reflects a change in voice and learner identity: assessments are rarely discussed and learning is viewed as a process to be reflected upon. This relates directly to the second

time that exams are mentioned, where she states that she knows her areas of weakness in her exams, as being to factual while her tutors 'really wanted is critical engagement not descriptive answers'. Even here, she is demonstrating understanding that is not about 'studying more' or 'doing better' but about how she engaged with knowledge. Meanwhile, the rest of her SSE discusses the knowledge she engaged with throughout the three terms of study. She sees her learning as a process of how she understands, analyses, and questions the 'knowledge objects' (Allman, 2010, p. 161) brought into the class by her lecturers rather than simply something to be learned for an exam.

I would like to pause here to consider another possible reading of this section of Aigirim's SSE. In this moment of reflection about why she focused on getting good marks, she realises that her motivation to do this was based on her desire to please both her mother and her teachers. This behaviour and desire, that she is critiquing herself for engaging in, could be part of her gender performativity (Butler, 1991; Butler, 1997) as discussed in Chapter Four. Therefore, while she seems to becoming aware that her learning was based on one form of managerial performance (or neoliberal performance), I cannot help but wonder if it is also a repeated continual performance of her gender. This is where Aigirim's SSE becomes complex, as her identities intersect in a way that it is difficult to say what kind of change in narrative is occurring. Nevertheless, there is an awareness that was not present in the first SSE that is brought forward in the final version.

Meanwhile, Askhat only mentions assessments in a single sentence of his SSE, when he writes:

> *My results on exams and other assessed works mostly in the average area compared to the whole IR/Econ range of results and thus I am an average person in a, what most consider, top university.* (Askhat, Final SSE – June 2012)

He no longer labels himself a failure, though he does still seem to be upset that he has not done better in his courses. This may have something to do with background as a mature student (22 years old compared to the other students who were all 17 and 18 years old) who had done an international baccalaureate in the UK before having to return to Kazakhstan to help his family through financial difficulties. It is difficult to gauge.

However, the rest of his SSE did not look at assessments nor their results, which is in direct contrast with his first one. Instead, he focuses on his personal development. He discusses the social norms and practices he has accepted as the oldest student, which he finds tiring. He also states that he has discovered an awareness of how he behaves towards his friends and classmates – that he is commonly argumentative, but that he does not want to be. As he writes, he no longer wants to 'crush people'. He has moved away from a desire to compete and show dominance, as a neoliberal and competition-focused discourse demands, but instead wants to engage with his friends and see them as people worth listening to and engaging with. He is demonstrating a desire to engage in dialogue as described by Allman (2010) rather than competition for the strongest argument regardless of what the argument is about. Allman (2010) defines dialogue as critical engagement with how each other thinks about the world and where that thinking comes from. It is an act of listening and respect. This is what Askhat seems to be striving towards in his realization that he had, to that point, not done so.

This change from exam focused SSEs to a more reflective sense of self is most notable with Natalya. While her first SSE was exclusively about exams and what determines success in exams, her final SSE of 1437 words does not mention results of assessments once. Instead she focuses on her own development and learning as guided by her own curiosity. She writes:

> *I feel that since so active presence of critical thinking in my life, I start questioning, anything what I meet every day. I feel that I'm not satisfied sometimes with what is happening and I feel the need to find answers to resolve my concern.* (Natalya, Final SSE – June 2012)

She sees her learning driven by questions – and it is not questions about exams, what will be on them nor how to study best for them. Rather, these are questions about what she has encountered in the every day, and a desire to 'resolve' her 'concern'. The use of the word concern implies that it is a desire to understand why the world is a particular way that may not have been how she would imagine it to be. This is a very different way to approach study than that of exam preparation.

The one time Natalya mentions assessments is to state her choice of focus for an essay title in IR. She states, 'in IR I really liked studying human security and its implications with reference to current events in the world that is why I have chosen this topic for IR

folio 3.' Her learning here is driven by her own interest in a particular concept of the world, through the theory of human security, and how to use it to understand the world.

With all three students, there is a clear shift from a discourse of neoliberal performativity (Ball, 2007; Shore, 2010; MacFarlane, 2015) to a discourse focusing on the self as a critical being (Barnett, 1997; Barnett & Coate, 2005; Davies & Barnett, 2015). The students are focused on self-understandings and reflexivity – the first step towards becoming critical beings. Davies and Barnett (2015) name critical self-reflection and critical beings as two of the three areas that must be met in order to engage with criticality. By the end of the process of engaging, questioning and re-engaging with the SSE, these students have moved into critical self-reflection and beginning to see themselves as beings (rather than producers of outputs). All three, Aigirim, Askhat, and Natalya (as examples of the class trend where twelve of the thirteen engaged in similar changes) in their final SSEs began to write about their learning as part of understanding themselves. Aigirim began to see that she was focusing on exams and performance in order to please others, Askhat began to question his focus on constantly competing with classmates as he realized he did not want to act that way and that he valued coming into dialogue with them, and Natalya saw her own interests, passions, and curiosity as the driving force to her learning – who she was, what she wished to understand, and how she used that to guide her choice of studies. 'Success' at university was no longer about a number on an exam, but rather the process of engaging with themselves. This change in the SSEs sees students moving away from neoliberalized selves towards a critical awareness of themselves.

Questioning Tacit Assumptions & Engaging with Context

While examining the change of discourse between the first and final SSEs seems to show a change in how students speak about themselves within their university experience, close analysis of the final SSEs and interviews show signs of engagement with a critically complex epistemology (Kincheloe, 2008). His definition of critically complex epistemology, which recognizes the complex interplay of gender, ethnicity, and class within unique contexts, means that students' criticality involves engagement and questioning of tacit assumptions about these different theoretical concepts within the frame of Kazakhstan. Students draw links between their learning and their contexts,

question the influences of those on their own thinking, how they engage the world, and how that has changed. Specifically, three themes enter into their reflections on themselves and their previously tacit assumptions – family, wider social, and political contexts.

Reflecting on Family

The first place that students begin to question themselves and consider how they have engaged with their worlds is in family, and what they label as 'culture'. They recognize the importance of these two concepts on how they see themselves, and why they carry certain assumptions – these are not universal assumptions, but rather relate to familial and cultural values. The analysis of family begins in most of the SSEs first as an acknowledgement of their initial understandings of the world. Sholpan, a Kazakh student, writes:

> *A reason I mention my family is because I believe strongly that the type of background a person has really influences and shapes who they are. It doesn't only mean their family background but also the people they hang out with, the books they read, the country, culture, religion and all that from where they come, and the education background they have as well... So a lot of areas seem to overlap when shaping the person that I am.* (Sholpan, Final SSE – June 2012)

Here, family is discussed first as shaping her. However, she quickly moves on to discuss other types 'of background' that also impact people. Here, she engages with large areas, not necessarily unpacking what they mean to herself, but they fall widely within the social. She is beginning to express awareness that there is a complex combination of difficult to define influences that intersect into how she engages the world.

Katya, an ethnic Russian student from the south of Kazakhstan who describes her family as conservative orthodox Christians, is living far from home for the first time. In her SSE she considers how this time away from home has begun to change her views. She is beginning to see herself on her own, yet she is not quite sure if she is considered an adult. She states:

> *It has been more than 6 months since we came to [University Name] to become something more than we are. To learn to live quite a different life without parents to helps and adults telling us what to do.*
>
> *Living here for these 6 months was not a fairy-tale at all. We had to do a lot of hard work, overcome laziness and temptations, give up some of our beliefs and*

sacrifice a lot of things from our previous life-styles. We had to learn to live without our families, with people that we barely knew when coming here. All of us had to stop being babies, because there was no one to listen to our whining and dry our tears. (Katya, Final SSE – June 2012)

There seems to be pain in her time on her 'own' without her parents. When she states that she is 'giving up some of our beliefs', there is nostalgia in it. Somehow, the experience of being away from family seems to echo a sense of forced and unwelcome change. On one side, she is still a member and product of her family, feeling pain of not being close. Yet, on the other, she is beginning to change. This sense of change is also traumatic as she writes:

the dilemma is that when I am here I miss home and my family, but when I go home I begin to miss my friends. It almost seems like two parallel lives, that won't cross. I can only balance and switch between the two, but I cannot live both simultaneously. (Katya, Final SSE – June 2012)

She is beginning to understand herself within a complex context (Kincheloe, 2008). Within a context where multiple identities overlap, power relations and understandings of her change in order to reflect those moments of interaction. This is express here, not in a critical way that questions why, but rather emotionally, as a sense of living two lives.

This new identity, way of seeing the world, and of engaging with new power dynamics is beginning to cause conflict with her own view of her family. As Katya questions the tacit assumptions that she previously held to be true, she finds that it creates difficulties and barriers with her family because she no longer conforms to those views from before. This becomes clear in the following vignette from her SSE:

Once I talked to my father about politics and I fundamentally disagreed with him on a certain point, which never happened before. He asked where me where did I get that opinion. I said: "In one of my classes". Then he told me: "I thought you went there to study sciences, not to advance in demagogy". It was then that I understood how differently people look at the world and what they consider important. It is becoming increasingly hard to find common understanding with parents, needless to talk about people in the big world. (Katya, Final SSE – June 2012)

Katya found herself in a unique situation with her father – for the first time, as she states, she was in disagreement with him. During the interview she initially revealed that the disagreement revolved around women, though she did not divulge more. Clearly, for her, the principle where they disagreed was less significant for her than the

realization that she and her father were beginning to engage with the world in different ways. She had begun to question her way of viewing the world, and this questioning, and change, began to impact her life, in a very real way. Her basic act – speech acts with family – were no longer the same.

While Sholpan and Katya's reflections on the influences of (and conflicts with) their families do not yet engage with questioning previously tacit assumptions about their socio-political contexts, they do begin to see a complexity that influences their thinking. They are not bound by a de-contextualized, universalistic notion of critical thinking (see McPeck, 1981; Ennis, 2003; Facione, 2011). They do not consider hegemony either explicitly or implicitly, but they both consider that how they think is more than an individualistic choice. Sholpan's comment about family, education, reading, and friends' impact on who she is tacitly begins to encounter how she is 'gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted' (Foucault, 1980, p. 97). Katya's own discomfort concerning the separation from her family and new conflict with her father both brings her face-to-face with the assumptions that she has begun to question, and how she begins to create meaning in the world differently that she had before leaving home to go to university. This is very much a part (though not all) of engaging the world from a critically complex epistemology (Kincheloe, 2008).

Recognizing the influence of family and wider culture is evident and explored in other SSEs in the group: Elmira and Bota do as well. Bota writes about struggling with needing to think differently than she did when she was at home with her family. She states she sees the world to be 'so different, everything was so ideal', and now she struggles to break with that ideal view, though she recognizes that some of the assumptions she 'inherits' from her parents may not be right. She feels she 'needs to develop reality in myself'. This very much echoes Katya's own struggles with her father. However, rather than it being a confrontation with her family leading to her changing, it is a confrontation with herself – a consideration that maybe there is more.

In this theme of engaging with the role of family seems to be a first step of engaging with context and how context intertwines with their thinking and their assumptions. By looking at the familial, students express an understanding that they are being shaped by something beyond themselves, and that who they are is a direct influence of that which

has surrounded them. In the case of Bota and Katya, family is also the place where they begin to see how their own assumptions, once tacit but now explicit, have come from, and question whether these assumptions reflect their own understandings of the world. So, while this theme within the SSEs do not explicitly consider the complexity socio-political or economic contexts as a part of engaging with assumptions, students are indeed becoming aware of the implicit influences on themselves. And they are expressing their own thinking as they come to terms with this. In many ways, this suggests a safer place to begin to consider assumption – within the small confines of those people that they know bests. Having said that, many of the SSEs do begin to go beyond the familial into considerations of more societal influences to question those assumptions as well as engage with the influence of Kazakhstan as context on them as members of that context.

Engaging with Socio-cultural Contexts

Several students – specifically Elmira, Askhat, Aigul, and Alibek – consider the socio-cultural make up of Kazakhstan as they engage with their own learning and how they see themselves. Specifically, they begin to consider themselves as a product of their socio-cultural contexts – drawing to light the assumptions and world-view they maintain because they belong to Kazakhstan as a country. In this broad theme, students consider history, ethnicity, social norms, and gender as expressions of the socio-cultural (rather than an expression of the socio-political).

Elmira writes:

> *My study at [name of university] has changed me. Not too much, not fully, but it has changed my thoughts and the direction of their flow. It came to me firstly when I was on my way home during winter break. I met a lot of new people, and realized the difference between mine ideas and theirs. Looking at the steppe, I was thinking about my huge country, its history, its people. I was thinking about how to make a difference to it, what policies should be applied and how did it happen that Kazakhstan has recovered from its past easier than other post – Soviet countries… Everything I hear and see is followed by many questions, such as "How? Where? When?" and of course, "Why?".* (Elmira, Final SSE – June 2012)

Here Elmira, in narrative prose, is describing quite clearly an engagement with her context and allowing her thinking to be centered on her place within Kazakhstan. Her learning and thinking has moved beyond the classroom to consider, to question, and to

critically engage with what is it that has both influenced Kazakhstan as a country as well as what is it about Kazakhstan that makes it unique compared to its central Asian neighbors. She sees the place of history, people and policies as creating a unique context, and she is curious to why. She aims to find understandings, not as a student engaging with decontextualized correct answers but rather as a citizen engaging with her own context in order to consider change. She is trying to understand Kazakhstan in order to begin imagining change. This is the expression of criticality as I defined in chapter three. I wrote that criticality 'asks thinkers to question their contexts to find tacit assumptions about social structures and to reflect on if how they personally act or think is in line with or contrary to these assumptions in order to imagine alternatives to their contexts that are more socially equitable.' Elmira is beginning to do this. While she is not questioning social structures, she is questioning Kazakhstan – and what makes Kazakhstan the society it is today. And with that, she is considering 'how to make a difference to it, what policies should be applied'. She does not say for what purpose she is asking these questions, but there is an implicit desire to imagine a better place.

In contrast, Askhat takes a very different look – he explicitly engages with the complexity of ethnic inequality within Kazakhstan, and seems unwilling to imagine the possibility for change. As an ethnic minority himself, Chechen, he draws on his own feelings of being distrusted by society and the government of Kazakhstan. During his interview, he said:

> *I know that I'm being watched by the Government. I and my family. It's because I'm from the Caucasus. The Government thinks because I'm from that place I may like try to cause some trouble. But I was born in Kazakhstan. My family is from here from many generations. So, like, I don't care. I don't need independences. I'm independent in my state. [pause] But here, they look at me and I don't look like them. And I'm from a place that is trouble for Russia. So maybe I am trouble too. It's just the way things are here. It's not fair, but hey, life's not fair. I don't have power to change.* (Askhat, Interview – February 2012)

This echoes the history and identity formation ideas I attempted to unknot in Chapter Four. He expresses feeling as though, because he has two identities that are perceived to be in conflict, he cannot be fully trusted. This is result of a definition of national identity, which does not include space for competing ethnicities (Bauman, 2004). Though this interview takes place in 2012, he describes distrust towards his ethnicity

that very much echoes the distrust the Soviet government had towards Chechens during WWII described by Applebaum (2003) and Solzenitsyn (2002b). He draws a caricature of himself based how he feels he is perceived, and seems acutely aware of why he is viewed that way in Kazakhstan. And, while he claims to not care, he does seem to express concern that he is viewed this way. His own identity, as Chechen and Kazakhstani are in conflict, not because he chooses to be in conflict, but because others view it as conflicting. And with this comes something different – not an imagining of how that could be different; but rather a sense of resignation. There is no power for him, in his context, to either consider or imagine change.

Alibek, an ethnic Kazakh student who began the year wanting to act as ambassador to show the 'magnificence of Nazarbayev' to the United States, offers a different (possibly less critical perspective) on the same issue of ethnic and national identity in Kazakhstan in his SSE and interview. He writes:

> *In Kazakhstan it is usual to say "Kazakh nation" and most citizens of Kazakhstan do not consider "Kazakhstani nation". Since [lecturer name] is from USA he thinks nation is different from ethnicity because USA does not have own ethnic whereas in Kazakhstan "ethnic" and "nation" are almost the same. (Maybe my nationalistic views inside me did not let me agree with him.)* (Alibek, Final SSE – June 2012)

It is worth noting, before going into how he develops this idea in his interview, that he follows this paragraph up with the following reflection:

> *Would our president be happy with all the things we are being taught? [...]I still did not answer this question to myself.* (Alibek, Final SSE – June 2012)

During the interview, when I asked him if other ethnicities in Kazakhstan were also Kazakh, Alibek answered:

> *We say Kazakh or Russian. We are ethnicities. It is like this in our country…. But Russians, they can stay. We invite them. They are part of our country now. Because Soviet history, they like they came here. So now they stay.* (Alibek, Interview – February 2012)

In his SSE and interview, Alibek becomes a foil to Askhat's own understandings of Kazakhstan, not just in terms of ethnicity, but also in terms of authority and government. While Askhat describes a context in which he is forever questioned and distrusted for being ethnically different, Alibek directly ties the nation of Kazakhstan to the Kazakh ethnicity – in that, Kazakhstan sounds like an ethnically homogenous state

(despite the demographics from the government census). This echoes much of Dave's (2007) findings in her ethnographic study of Kazakhstan. According to Dave (2007), the state, for ethnic Kazakhs, is deeply rooted in the interested of their ethnicity as the nation, and the use of 'us' and 'them' is a means of distinguishing levels of inclusion and exclusion. Therefore, the state serves the ethnically defined nation. By claiming 'Russians' (Alibek does not distinguish beyond that to other ethnic groups) are welcome to remain in Kazakhstan, he implicitly states an invitation that could, in theory, be rescinded at any time. By framing ethnicity and nationality in these terms, Alibek adds validity to Askhat's own feelings of being distrusted by the state for his ethnic background. And, by calling on President Nazarbayev as a means of questioning what he is being taught regarding the difference between ethnicity and the nation, Alibek also justifies Askhat's belief that government authority is indeed watching him. For Alibek, Nazarbayev represents charismatic authority (Isaac, 2010) that is both good and unquestionable – therefore, anything that might contradict views that Nazarbayev holds, is to be questioned. However, for Askhat, the government (and by extension, Nazarbayev) represents structural power (Foucault, 1980) where he is constructed as being Chechen first and Kazakhstani second. By reading Askhat's interview in light of Alibek's SSE and interview, a structural system of ethnicity and power becomes evident, and Askhat's assessment of it seems to engage with the complex context of Kazakhstan well. However, with it, the final area of criticality, imagining possible action, disappears.

Ethnicity is not the only area of the socio-cultural context that the students questioned and placed themselves within in their SSEs and interviews. Several students, all women, questioned the social norms of discrimination towards women. While some considered legal rights, others engaged with social expectations towards women. For example, Elmira, who wrote in her first SSE that she was not a feminist because 'I like men to do things for me', states in her final one:

> *I see how males dominate the world. You can see it everywhere. In America, in different democratic states. Maybe it is in women's nature to sit at home but somehow I want women to have same rights. At least rights. The usage is not important for me. Their own deal what to do with that.* (Elmira, Final SSE – June 2012)

By writing this as she does, within the frame of 'rights', she is implicitly suggesting that these rights do not currently exist, even outside of Kazakhstan. And by stating 'at least

rights', she recognizes there are more ways in which women can be equal to men. However, she does not let go of the framework that there may be something 'natural' in the dominance of men and the subservience of women. In this, she is making explicit the assumption – but not quite questioning it. She voices uncertainty over gender performativity, unclear if it is performativity or indeed something present in nature. I am not sure if this is because 1) she does not know, 2) she thinks it is performative based on socio-cultural power, or 3) she is assumes it is biological, but does not want to say it definitely. However, regardless of this uncertainty of the underlying thoughts behind why women might have less power than men in Kazakhstan, she is engaging with the hope of a change – where women do have equal rights. She is imagining alternative realities, even while remaining reluctant to directly question the assumption on which her current contextual reality rests.

Aigul also reflected on being a woman, and used it to challenge a social norm – marriage. During our interview, I asked Aigul about her comment in her first SSE about being quiet in seminars to listen to the boys' ideas. Her response was not an answer to my question, but instead a tangential consideration of marriage. She said, 'you know, I think you're right. I don't need to get married. Why should I do this? I want to be my own and do what it is I want.' Let me pause for a moment to make clear that, while students did know I am unmarried, I never (neither in class nor outside of class) shared why, nor discussed my marital status more generally. So Aigul's proclamation of 'you're right' in regards to not needing to get married is an assumption on her own part as to the reasons behind my marital status. In the interview, when I asked her to explain her statement, she said:

> *If I get married, I have to stop, to give up me. I live for a man, for my husband. I must listen to him. But I don't need to get married. I can live and listen only to me.* (Aigul, Interview – February 2012)

Implicitly, Aigul is questioning the role of marriage and what it means for her as a woman in Kazakhstan. She states quite clearly that marriage represents a loss of her own voice, to be replaced with the voice of her husband. By realizing that she does not need to be married suggests both a realization of what the socio-cultural norm of marriage might mean within Kazakhstan's context and an imagining of an alternative future where marriage can become a choice that she can decline to take part in. Like Elmira, she begins to consider the place of change – while Elmira imagines a change in

the rights of women more generally, Aigul begins to imagine a social act in which she chooses not to engage with a cultural norm that might reduce her own voice as a woman.

From these places of consideration – of how the socio-cultural context (deeply intertwined with an implicit political context that the students do not necessarily name) – comes a consideration of critical being and acting. Even Askhat's feeling of powerlessness to change his situation in framed within the notion of being a critical being: he imagines alternatives and decides the power is not there to act. Natalya best summarizes this notion of criticality, imagining alternative realities, and what she calls 'active citizenship' when she stated the following in her interview:

> *Critical thinking is necessary for active citizenship. Active citizen is I don't accept everything that is given. Media is in different hands. You cannot trust it. So, you should be yourself and thinking for yourself. I have to think about my perspectives. Don't react to other peoples sayings. Don't accept everything that is given. I want more people to realize it. If more people think like this. Not in huge sphere. Just safety and comfort of their family and make it better for them. Then we all make it better for whole country.* (Natalya, Interview – February 2012)

Here, Natalya is setting a frame for active citizenship that is not around large changes to societal norms or political inequalities. Rather, she is imagining small changes –within the unit of her family. But in that, she begins to imagine that if this were taken on systematically, by sharing the idea with others, that it could lead to larger change. In doing this, she is envisioning a safe place that ideas can be explored and criticality can be engaged. In her vision, it is not in the political sphere or in the classroom. Rather, criticality belongs in the familial. And from there, cultural change can happen within a political climate where change may not be possible in the same ways as it is elsewhere. This kind of criticality might not be recognized in the dominant definition of critical thinking as it asks not to be manifest openly in the classroom. However, it is a criticality that exists and is safe to express within the construct Natalya offers. In many ways, this is what Elmira, Askhat, and Aigul are doing – expressing criticality in a frame that they feel safe to do in their contexts. And this may explain Alibek's use of Nazarbayev to question his own learning – because that offers a frame where critique in the classroom is safe.

Engaging with the Political Context

In this section, I consider the final SSEs and the student interviews within the broad theme of the political. While many ideas in the previous section are definitely connected to a political context, students never used those terms to describe them. Therefore, I have chosen to separate this section from the previous. In this section, students explicitly name these areas where they are questioning their own contexts as political. I think this is an important distinction for the students, and in separating them, I can explore what it is about these specific areas of reflexive thinking that allows students to explicitly label them as such.

Several students questioned their political context and contemplated change. This came in the frame of questioning the practice of democracy, both in Kazakhstan and surrounding countries, and imagining change to become a 'true democracy'. Elmira is a good place to begin, where in her interview, she explores the limits of speech and the limits of critical thinking. She says:

> *I don't know what to think of freedom of speech in Kazakhstan. Even critical thinking has its frontiers. There are some things that will never be said or done. Same with freedom of speech also has borders. I don't know yet the borders of freedom of speech yet, but there are borders. But it is ok that I don't know it. Every sphere demands a different believe. Even critical thinking has sphere. It first seemed endless, but now I see there is a border. I don't know this border, but it is somewhere there. It is politics border. Somewhere.* (Elmira, Interview – February 2012)

Elmira is trying to explore an idea by imagining limits to the concept of free speech and critical thinking. She seems uncertain about the reality of it, and she is trying to tease out the concept of a border, a frontier, or a place where there might be limits. And, while she is not sure what those borders are, she sees them as political. It is in the political sphere where critical thinking and freedom of speech may reach their limits, though she is uncertain of how to consider it specifically within the frame of Kazakhstan. While this could be either an unwillingness to explicitly state the borders of thought and speech or an uncertainty, she is beginning to frame the concepts within her own context – this is not a universal understanding of the terms, but rather a recognition that these concepts may change meaning as she considered Kazakhstan specifically.

Katya also looks at democracy and its limits in her SSE. And, in considering it, she draws reflects on the role of an active (rather than passive) citizenship to understand the role individuals play within society. She links her own research for the ARM module, about the role of television in reporting on wars, to events happening in Russia. She writes:

> *When I worked on this project, presidential elections in Russia were going on. The problems of television broadcasting, propaganda and equal distribution of media usage were of current interest. After all I have only been convinced that democracy is a system that does not tolerate passive citizenship and disinformation of the general public. Otherwise the system fails to provide basic necessities for the society and may serve other goals, rather than a well-being of the entire nation.* (Katya, Final SSE – June 2012)

Here, Katya is beginning to reflect on the role of action within a critical praxis (Allman, 2010; hooks 1994, 2003, 2010; Freire, 1970) by trying to understand her own definition of the concept of citizenship. It is important to note here that Katya is ethnically Russian, so her view of nation is most-likely (though not necessarily) civic and not ethnic as it might be by Kazakh students, based on the research conducted by Dave (2007) presented in Chapter Four.

Askhat and Moldir, also consider the role of critical beings as a means of creating political change. Askhat, in his SSE, discusses the need for power in being able to imagine political change, which is an idea that he seems to be developing since the interview where he stated that he did not have the power to change how he was viewed as an ethnic Chechen. He writes that before he can enact the change he imagines for himself and others in Kazakhstan, he needs to 'find my power.' He goes on to write:

> *If I try change before I find my power, power will destroy me. […] If I find power, I want things to change. Many things need change. People need to feel trust. And people need to trust politics will trust them. This is what I want to change.* (Askhat, Final SSE – June 2012)

He has moved a little since the interview – while before, in considering his ethnicity within Kazakhstan, he displayed complete resignation, now he consciously considered the possibility of imagining an alternative reality, even while he still remains critical about acting on it. He can see the possibility of critical action, but only if critical beings are given the power to act. Askhat is engaging with a central part of Barnett's (1997) and Barnett & Coate's (2005) concept of criticality in higher education, which asks that students imagine what is possible. Askhat is imagining what is might take to be a

critical being who is trying to 'ameliorate the social differences, inequalities and inequities pervasive in capitalist societies' (Torres, 1998, p. 9).

Meanwhile, Moldir looks at Germany for a model of critical beings during her interview. For her own research project in the class, she researched concepts of environmental security. In the interview, she discusses what she learned about Germany's response to the Fukuyama disaster in order to understand this notion of critical beings. She stated:

> *It was because of the public awareness. The how many, so many people over Germany start to think about the nuclear power and I think the government was forced to close these seven nuclear plants [...] Mrs. Merkle had an election so maybe it is more about politics. If she wants to win, she must listen to people. It is like a great power.* (Moldir, Interview – February 2012)

She is impressed with the awareness that the German people had regarding their own reliance on nuclear energy, and how they used that awareness to demand, and enact, change. However, like Askhat, she recognizes this ability to enact change comes from a system where people feel empowered. And like Askhat, it is unclear whether she thinks Kazakhstan is a socio-political context where people might have that kind of awareness and power. Both are playing with the idea of action, and its possibilities. Both are not yet comfortable with the idea that action might apply to them within their own contexts.

However, some students do begin to imagine what kind of action would be possible within Kazakhstan. Specifically, Serik and Raushan both consider 'corruption' in Kazakhstan along with how that might change. Serik, in his interview states:

> *We have the new anti-corruption campaign. We have the new law and stuff like that. And we still find ways to be corrupted. To hide taxes and profits and revenues and the things like that. Because the system is so corrupted that in order to change it you need to change 90% of the people and bring up the fresh guys who are not yet corrupted. To do this, our educational system has to stop being corrupted, it would be very very difficult to do. You end up you need a whole new generation. Newly born, newly up with a certain idea in their head that haven't been influenced by the older generational ideas in order to change something. This means we need to be education to teach us to be free from the ideas of our politics now. This is very difficult. But maybe we can do it. Because we want to do it. But only if we work and want.* (Serik, Interview – February 2012)

Serik offers some doubts in what it would take to change what he labels as corruption – tax evasion. However, as he speaks he seems to imagine what it would take, and begin

to weigh the possibility. And, his use of 'we' indicates his own understanding that this is something that would take a collective to enact and not just a government policy nor the work of a single individual.

Raushan also imagines action in Kazakhstan. She begins her final SSE with this imagining how she would like to change Kazakhstan. Like Moldir, she is interested in the concept of environmental consciousness; however, unlike Moldir, she is able to imagine what that might be like for Kazakhstan, especially in light of what she labels 'corruption'. She explains it in aspirational prose within her SSE. She writes:

> *What I still have a dream about is the riddance of corruption and environmental insecurity in our country. As a great believer in sincerity, I am really passionate about the reduction of corruption (or the open acceptance of it being "okay") within Kazakhstan, and that corruption is against such sincerity. [...] My belief is that if corruption were to be reduced in our country, Kazakhstan could develop much faster and REALLY develop (without cheating itself, which I think is silly). [...] I wish (and I know wishing is not enough) that citizens could become more responsible for their daily actions and not drop their garbage everywhere on the streets. [...] I hope that we could discover realistic possibilities for such alterations, and I believe that we may begin with ourselves and hold ourselves as role-models in order to influence the actions of others (but of course policies and awareness are also needed). Slowly, but surely, more and more people should begin to understand and really try to change their actions supporting corruption or environmental insecurity, thus possibly achieving a path towards true development (in my eyes).* (Raushan, Final SSE – June 2012)

Raushan is describing her own aspirations for the future, and how 'citizens' act to ensure that kind of future. In this she includes concepts of 'role-models' and uses the word 'our' to signal both herself as a citizen as well as others joining her. Her discourse is one of action coming from thought and motivated by changing her socio-political discourse based on an imagined alternative that might be better. She sees corruption as the same obstacle that Serik does, but sees the possibility for change more sincerely. She is beginning to imagine what her own critical praxis (hooks, 1994, Allman, 2010) might look like, even as she implies that it would be part of a wider collective act among other more responsible beings.

While Raushan and Serik begin to imagine possibilities, one student, Katya, begins to actively engage with her own critical praxis. Katya reports on her decision to volunteer with the International Organization on Migration to organize fundraising events to help

women rescued from human trafficking while reporting on it in the university newspaper. This decision came after a representative from the UN delivered a lecture on Kazakhstan's location as a crossroads for trafficking from Central Asian states into Russia. She is the only one who reports on her own reflections leading her to action. She has moved into the concept of praxis, motivated by her learning and thinking to engage and participate.

Askhat, Elmira, Moldir, Raushan, Serik, and Katya all engage with the concept of critical beings and political action within their SSEs and/or interviews. This is an important part of defining criticality as engaging with tacit assumptions, and a place of reflective dialogue that leads to imagining alternatives for potential action. By engaging with a criticality that places themselves in the thinking, and creates alternative spaces for expression outside of classroom seminars or specific performative assessments, these students began to voice their own thinking in ways that demonstrate several levels of criticality, including the imagining of action.

Questioning the Limits of Criticality within the SSEs

By engaging in processes based writing that had students reconsider their own reflections, these thirteen students seem to move from a discourse of neoliberal performativity (Ball, 2007, 2012; MacFarlane, 2015) to seeing their learning as part of an evolution of their sense of being (Barnett, 1997; Barnett & Coate, 2005). And, in examining their writing, and the interviews about their writing, students clearly voiced engagement with different parts of criticality – questioning of tacit assumptions (Kincheloe, 2008; Brookfield, 2005) of their everyday lives placed within a critical complex context (Kincheloe, 2008) in order to imagine how critical beings might engage (Barnett & Coate, 2005). Each student engaged with these in a unique way, and paused at different points of the process. This is not to say that they did not think critically beyond that point, but that they did not voice that thinking. Similarly, I cannot claim that the act of engaging in a dialogue with themselves through the writing of these SSEs 'created' this awareness and development of criticality. Rather, what the SSE did was create a discursive space in which this awareness could be voiced, as an alternative place for self-dialogue that could be recorded outside the classroom, where students

might feel more comfortable sharing, depending on their own expectations of classroom performance.

There is one student I have not mentioned yet: Nurlan, and a second student that I mentioned, but as a way of understanding Askhat's own reflections on how he is viewed as an ethnic minority in Kazakhstan: Alibek. Nurlan's SSEs and interview were always focused on assessments, and he never discussed his learning beyond assessment – the evolution that other students demonstrated by moving away from identifying themselves as successful students in terms of marks never occurred with him. The entire academic year, his marks remained on the borderline between pass and fail. At the end of term one and two, his marks were at 39 (with 40 representing a pass mark). At the end of the year, he did manage to pass his final research papers and exams, but it was never clear until the end if he would succeed. Considering the stress that this must have caused him, especially in light of him being a scholarship student who, if he did not pass, would not only be potentially dismissed from the university, but would also have to pay back the tuition for the year, I do not think it is surprising that his focus was so centred around his assessments. However, this does bring light to a new question that I cannot answer within the parameters of this research: is it possible to move beyond a discourse and identity shaped by neoliberal performativity when one may not meet the benchmarks set by that focus on performativity? In other words, is engaging with criticality beyond marks and assessments a 'luxury' that Nurlan's classmates could afford, but he could not because of the real consequences he would face? I am not sure of the answer, but I think the question is valid and worth further investigation.

Alibek did move beyond an identity of himself shaped by external performative indicators. He did consider his learning in context, and even used President Nazarbayev as a means of critiquing the knowledge he was engaging with, as well as his own definition of national identity as ethnic identity to challenge the definition offered by his American lecturer. However, there was a different change I noted in Alibek's SSEs. In his first SSE, Alibek's writing was highly nationalistic, proud, and eager to serve the state. He wrote about wanting to graduate from this university and then attend Harvard University to earn a masters degree in economics. He wanted to do this to show people of the United States the greatness of Kazakhstan, and more importantly, he wanted to do this to 'make President Nazarbayev proud of me'. Alibek clearly views Nazarbayev as

a charismatic leader (Isaac, 2010) whom he has fashioned his views and plans around in order to emulate. However, in the last SSE, this has changed. He writes that he has begun to question what he watches on 'Khubar' – the official news channel of Kazakhstan, but that his questioning should not 'lead to disturbance of peace and chaos in society.' But more strikingly, he writes that he no longer wants to go to Harvard University nor to lead a life that will make Nazarbayev proud. Instead, he says:

> *I have found very interesting course for the future. This course is MBA in football industries at the University of Liverpool. It would be fascinating to study this course after my bachelor's degree and join my hobby with my job (not coach, but for example financial manager of a football club). If to consider that football is undeveloped in Kazakhstan it would be great to monopolize this sphere.* (Alibek, Final SSE – June 2012)

On the surface, he seems to have moved away from the concept of critical being, as he discussing his context - Kazakhstan. However, in the course of the year, he has moved. He is not quite questioning his context (though his example of his questioning of the official news agency is a move in that direction), nor using other contexts as a means of imagining alternative realities and their feasibility. What he is doing, though, is imagining an alternative reality for himself that is no longer defined by his context. In that academic year, he has seen himself living a life that he wants rather than one he feels his president would want of him. And, in his SSE, he sees this discovery as a part of his own learning and reflection. This raises a different question. Is there space in understanding criticality and self-reflection as a means of breaking free from contextual expectations, even if it does not directly lead to questioning tacit assumptions and imagining alternative realities that address socio-political inequalities? As with Nurlan, I do not have an answer to this question. However, I would say, in order for Alibek to reach this imagining of studying the football industry, he had to consider himself, how he saw himself, and whether he wanted to play the role his context suggested he should play. Therefore, there are elements there related to criticality, but I am not sure if it is the same thing.

Conclusion

Through the use of the SSEs, students, bar one, had a space to express their own engagement with criticality, reflecting on themselves, their tacit assumptions, and how they placed themselves within their own socio-political contexts. In other words, they began to voice their own criticality (Barnett, 1997; Barnett & Coate, 2005; Kincheloe,

2008; Brookfield, 2005; Brookfield & Holst, 2011). Their thinking and developing consciousness was expressed in a way that students had not done in the classroom setting. By working through the SSE as a narrative form of writing, where students continually rewrote it, it was possible to track a change in discourse, moving from a student identity shaped by neoliberal performativity (Ball, 2007; 2012; MacFarlane, 2015) to students who engaged with their learning form a holistic perspective, considering how they engaged with and created knowledge, rather than meeting those performative markers. The narrative nature of the SSE also allowed me, as a practitioner, to begin to understand the students and how they developed their own criticality and engaged with the context through their own identities to create their own situated knowledge.

I would return to some of my initial research questions that motivated this dissertation. While Chapters Two and Three answered my first research question on defining criticality and its role in higher education, it is the next three questions that the findings in this chapter answer. These three questions are specifically:

1. What role does the use of a progressive narrative essay play in developing and/or voicing criticality?
2. How do I see criticality being voiced within the SSE?
3. How do I emphasise elements of criticality developing in the SSEs (especially in earlier drafts) a) without objectifying my students and b) while respecting my students?

1. As I have stated before, I cannot say with certainty whether or not the involvement in the progressive narrative essay, the SSE, played a role in *developing* criticality. Considering the change in discourse between the first SSEs submitted in December and the final ones submitted in June, there is room to make that argument. However, I cannot say definitively whether it was the active engagement with the SSE that helped develop the criticality or if it would have still developed, but only in silence. It is difficult, if nearly impossible to show what might have happened without the use of the SSE. However, what I can say based on the findings in this chapter with some certainty is that the SSE provided a central role in *voicing* criticality. The SSEs captured a development of thought and critical consciousness from students that would not have been

visible had they not been a part of the module. The use of the SSE allowed me, as a practitioner, to see what students chose share in that format that they chose not to share in a classroom setting. This meant that, as a practitioner who values criticality, a space could be made in order to 'hear' students' critical voices that went beyond critical thinking as decontextualized skill into contextually and reflectively framed criticality.

2. This chapter also addresses *how* I saw students' criticality voiced through the SSE process – and I include the interview in this process, because it acted as a place to reflect in dialogue before revisiting and rewriting their narratives. Specifically, I saw it voiced through the exploration of their own thinking on different areas of their 'everyday' lives outside of the classroom. By considering, and occasionally questioning the influence of their family, the influence of the socio-cultural, and the influence of the political, they began to see themselves within a complex web of power that they were both shaped by, and imagined being able to reshape. As I stated earlier, they explored their own assumptions and the assumptions of those around them in order to better understand their own stance. This was displayed in a range of questioning including (but not limited to): what shaped Kazakhstan and what could help it develop, if equal rights could happen, what are the problems of passive citizenship, how perceptions of ethnicity or nationality are framed in Kazakhstan, and if corruption can be addressed on a country-wide scale. However, these questions were not asked outside of themselves, in an objective way – rather these students developed their criticality by being subjectively-framed (Kincheloe, 2008), placing themselves within the thoughts, and questioning from a place of self-reflection.

3. The last of the three questions that could be answered in this chapter, is less based on what the students wrote and voiced, and more about how I have chosen to write about them. I have attempted as best I can, throughout this chapter, to report on students' thinking and ideas in their own words by focusing on how they framed their own criticality before engaging in an analysis of their writing. And, where possible, I have attempted to engage with this framed from their perspective, without imposing my own readings, which has required continual readings. For example, while I might be inclined to frame the role of Nazarbayev as the tool of critique as a sign of repressive power, I recognize that

this is based on my own contextual experience of democracy and critical thinking being educated in the United States and Western Europe. However, by considering Nazarbayev as charismatic authority (Weber, 1947; Isaac, 2010), trying to understand the contextual value placed on him as having legitimized Kazakhstan as a state, this view changed. It allows me to respect this choice made by Alibek to use Nazarbayev as a tool of critique. However, I would like to hedge here as well to say that the situated knowledge within the SSEs (both the situated knowledge the students create as well as my situated knowledge I create as I read them), are not always transparent (Haraway, 1988), and my own reflexivity may be blind to some of the places in which power is being engaged.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Introduction

This research has been about disrupting the neoliberal identities and performances (MacFarlane, 2015) of students in higher education in order to create discursive spaces where students can begin to explore their own criticality, as they question their own tacit assumptions about their socio-political contexts, with a possibility of imagining alternative realities (Kincheloe, 2008; Brookfield & Holst 2011). These neoliberal identities and performances are shaped by a notion of quality assurance to ensure market value (Ball, 2007; 2012). Students imagine their worth as 'student' based on how well they measure up in performance indicators, which would be their marks on assessments. This allows them to both assess their learning as a commodity they have purchased as well as gauge their value as a commodity to be purchased by the labour market. The first section of the last chapter demonstrated how this was manifested within these thirteen Kazakhstani students.

However, I propose that, as critical practitioners, this neoliberal discourse can be challenged, and discursive spaces can be created to allow students to voice more than these neoliberal identities. Higher education can and should be about more than its market value, and practitioners can engage with a higher education that develops contextually-shaped criticality that susceptible of critical beings (Barnett, 1997). This has been the role of the SSEs. Through continued, revisited engagement with a writing that focused on themselves, how they question their own assumptions and their own places within their socio-political contexts, and how they understand these contexts, students found space to move beyond their neoliberal performances. This does not mean that they did not continue to perform 'the good student' outside of their engagement with the SSEs. Rather, it means that alongside that performance, they were given space to explore themselves and other discourses that allowed them to see more than their own market value. In the SSEs, the students in this study could connect their understandings of themselves to their contexts – so while focused on the self, the SSE breaks the neoliberal notion of the individual gaining private goods. Instead, students begin to explore their own relationships with a wider complex context.

Therefore, this dissertation has been about how, as a practitioner, I create that discursive space, and have explore the student voices that emerged from that space. This is why my research questions focused on understanding how I created the space for criticality (through the SSE) as well as how I observed this criticality in the students. It is has *not* been about dictating to students *how* they should see themselves in their contexts, nor about *how* they should imagine alternative, less unequal societies. It has been about giving students the space and the encouragement to find their own answers, to question their own assumptions and to create and investigate their own imaginations so as to engage the world as they understand it.

In the next section, I give a more detailed account of how I make my argument throughout this dissertation, revisiting key concepts and how they connect. Then, I consider how this research continues to influence my practice. Finally, I return to my reflections on myself, and consider myself under the identity of 'migrant' academic who both benefits from, yet is critical of, global neoliberalism in higher education.

Revisiting my Argument – Criticality in Neoliberal Universities

The current discourse in policy documents around higher education revolves around the principles of neoliberalism. This is true here in the UK, as is exampled through strict QAA guidelines (QAA, 2008; 2014), the rising student fees, and even the new green paper released by the government around the possible introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (BIS, 2015). However, this hegemony exists on a global scale, as this neoliberal discourse is evident in policy documents released by the World Bank, UNESCO, and the OECD (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbly, 2009; Nusche, 2008; Salmi, 2009). Kazakhstan's higher education system is no exception. The introduction of a new ranking system for universities in Kazakhstan (Kalanova, 2008; 2011), along with President Nazarbayev's speeches (2010; 2012a; 2012b) on the future of Kazakhani higher education all adopt the values and assumptions of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism assumes that the purpose of higher education revolves around market competition (Harvey, 2005). For the state, the university serves the purpose of creating human capital that can both grow its economy and make it more competitive on the global market (Nordensvard, 2011; Marginson, 2011). Under neoliberalism, higher

education is constructed as a product that students might 'buy' or invest in, expecting returns of better employment. Meanwhile, students become products that universities produce in order to sell on the global employment market. As products/commodities to be sold, students are to be assessed objectively on their value as a product to determine its worth to potential employers who will buy or invest in that product. This not only creates a neoliberal performativity that has students meet quality standards as measured in assessments, but it also creates the assumption that world-class universities create better products than others. This explains the institutional context of this study, where I worked for a British university at a Kazakhstani university to set up and deliver the first year programme to students in the social sciences and humanities.

However, I argue that neoliberalism is failing by its own standards. Higher education alone does not lead to better employability for students. Social class, ethnicity, and gender account for differences in employability after higher education (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2003). Students from wealthier classes and with more social capital are more likely to be accepted to 'world class' universities than those from lower social classes, meaning that those who already have higher social capital are the ones who benefit from higher education (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011). Rates of unemployment comparing different ethnic and racial groups also show that higher education increases the employability and social capital of those already favoured under current socio-political contexts (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2011). Finally, gender also seems to create a stratification regarding the value of higher education in creating more and higher employment opportunities based on the gender pay gap that exists among university graduates (European Commission, 2010). By this logic, universities that wish to be competitive by having high employability percentages and higher wages of graduates should only recruit students with already high social capital, because they will be moulded into the most marketable product.

In order for higher education to truly offer equal opportunity for all graduates of the system, it needs to move beyond neoliberal discourses and engage with an alternative purpose to create critical beings (Barnett, 1997; Barnett & Coate, 2005) that will be more likely to work to ameliorate the inherent inequities in society (Torres, 1998). To do this, higher education needs to engage with critical pedagogy. Under this purpose, critical thinking is redefined – it is no longer a decontextualized skill aimed at problem

solving. Critical thinking becomes criticality: it questions tacit assumptions within socio-political contexts, while helping students to become aware of how those socio-political contexts shape individuals in order for them imagine alternatives and possible actions to challenge hegemonic power. This definition draws on *conscientização* (Freire, 1970) and (critical) praxis (Allman, 2010; hooks, 1994, 2003, 2010; Freire, 1970; 1998).

This definition of criticality works from a critically complex epistemology (Kincheloe, 2008). Knowledge is created by engaging critically with contexts that are highly complex. This involves a need to understand socio-political contexts and the embeddedness of the thinker (student or citizen) within their context. In order to do this, students must enter into dialogue with themselves, their context and knowledge objects brought into the classroom (Allman, 2010). It requires a focus on the critical self by asking about how this learning and the students themselves engage and understand their own contexts (Brookfields & Holst, 2011). By using this critically context epistemology to underpin the definition of criticality, feminist and postmodernist critiques of critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1992; Gore, 1993; Lather, 1998; Lewis, 1993) are taken into account. Action cannot be prescribed as individuals are embedded within contexts in unique ways that cannot be mirrored across different contexts, and therefore any action or alternatives imagined would be situated within those contexts.

In order to create spaces for students to develop their criticality, I needed to engage with the critically complex context of Kazakhstan to attempt to imagine how different elements of the context might be understood by the students – how they might see themselves situated within the socio-political. This involved considering how ethnic minorities' identities were constructed in the gulag as enemies of the state (Soviet Union) that could not be trusted (Applebaum, 2003; Solzhenitsyn, 2002a, 2002b; Lantz, 2010; Gheith & Jolluck, 2011). I also considered the discourse around national identity in Kazakhstan post-independence in 1991. National identity and ethnic identity are commonly interchanged in Kazakhstan as it attempts to create a strong nation to legitimize the state (Dave, 2007; Feirman, 2000; Surucu, 2002). While focused on post-independent Kazakhstan, I also consider the role that President Nazarbayev, first and sole president of Kazakhstan, plays in this socio-political context (Isaac, 2010).

Finally, I attempt to engage with the complexity of gender identity and how that might be shaped and situated in the Kazakhstani context. This is difficult to do as research into gender in Kazakhstan is limited, and the performativity of gender can also be bound up in the performativity of ethnicity and national identity as well. However, based on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report of 2012 (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2012), it is clear that there are areas of gender disparity, especially in terms of political empowerment. Also, research into domestic violence against women in Kazakhstan shows potential areas where the performative acts of women may be bound up in being domestic, subordinate and nurturing. However, Snajdr (2007) and Shadinova & Ontuganova's (2014) findings regarding the difference in reporting domestic abuse between ethnic groups show that this may be a more complex picture for non-Kazakh women because performance of their ethnicity intersects with their gender performativity.

Having attempted to engage Kazakhstan's socio-political context in terms of ethnicity, national identity and gender, I developed my CAR (Schon, 1987; Kemmis, 1997; Kincheloe, 2008) to best understand how criticality might be fostered in my practice. I developed the use of the student self-evaluation, a narrative essay written and re-written throughout a year-long module where students continually reflect on their learning, themselves, and their contexts. I also conducted an interview in February between drafts submitted in December and June so that I might develop a deeper understanding of some of the references students made in their first SSEs. This also acted as a way to go break away from the neoliberalising of their identities as students.

I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012) to analyse their SSEs and interviews, paying attention to the discourse and changes in discourse that students used to write about themselves. By doing this, I was able to see a change in how they framed themselves as students. In the first SSEs students measured their worth as students based on the outcomes of assessments – they were framing themselves within a neoliberal performativity (MacFarlane, 2015) that required means of quality checks in order to determine their worth as a product, the student. How they engaged with learning, how their thinking changed, or even how much they studied did not enter into their evaluations of themselves as students. Instead, what determined their worth as they saw it was simply their marks. However, in the last

SSE, there was clear change with twelve of the thirteen students. Students now framed what they learned and how they learned within their own understanding of themselves and their contexts. They were consciously engaged with the knowledge objects and questioned what that meant for themselves and how they understood Kazakhstan.

In the interviews in February and the final SSEs in June, students were recognizing, questioning and reimagining different elements of their contexts. These could be broken into three different thematic areas – family, socio-cultural context, and political context with a focus on imagining alternatives. Within these, students began to recognize how each of these areas influenced them, to question where they were within these areas and if they were in agreement with that, and to imagine alternatives. This last one, imagining alternatives, was particularly evident in the last theme as several students began to engage openly with the concept of how critical beings might create changes and what it might mean for them.

Two students' SSEs raised two potential questions for this research – in my understanding of criticality as well as its place in higher education (especially a higher education that is framed in neoliberalism). Alibek moved from framing himself as a proud Kazakh who planned to live a life that would make President Nazarbayev proud to beginning to imagine a life where he studied and worked in a field of his own desire, not framed within serving Kazakhstan. On the surface, this might seem to be a move away from the concept of critical beings. However, this move may indeed be an alternative way of understanding criticality. Contextually he had placed himself as a follower of the charismatic leader, Nazarbayev, and had uncritically dedicated a future that seemed deserving of Nazarbayev. By moving his focus to himself and away from Nazarbayev as his hero, Alibek moved away from this frame to see an alternative future. However, I am not sure the extent of the consciousness of Alibek's move.

The other student, Nurlan, never moved beyond his focus on assessment results. As a student struggling to perform well on exams in order to pass (and not lose his scholarship), did he have the opportunity to focus on developing criticality? Or, because in the end the university is a place of performance, he had to ensure that he met that performance before he could try to engage with criticality as an alternative understanding of his learning? This is something that would require further research to

answer the following question: at what point, operating within a neoliberal higher education system, is it possible to engage with criticality while mitigating against risk for students who struggle to meet performative indicators set within the university? While I am still uncertain of the answers to these questions, there are implications here for what it means to be a critical practitioner working in higher education dominated by neoliberal policy and discourse.

The SSE as a pedagogical tool and a process to engage with criticality and dialogue with the self seems to have created space for students to explore and consider their learning within the frame of questioning themselves, their assumptions and their contexts. This thinking and critical engagement may have occurred regardless of the SSEs; however, the SSEs enabled it to be captured. I would have been unsure if my students were engaging or developing criticality without the SSE. I also recognize that students may have been engaging with criticality for the SSE as power (i.e. me the teacher) dictated they do. However, it is a single moment (or rather, several single moments over the course of a year long module), where this engagement did occur and I could witness it as a practitioner. This alternative space, beyond assessments, essays, and classroom participation allowed students to voice ideas that they might have otherwise been silent on. As a practitioner that values higher education beyond neoliberal market forces, that values the creation of critical beings that question and engage with contexts to imagine alternative futures, the SSE allowed me to engage with these students criticality for the most part. Once again, Nurlan brings questions to the extent at which criticality can be fostered when there are other dominant priorities that might not be met.

What Does This Mean for Practice

At the beginning of the research process, when I first began to imagine how I would engage my practice, I had a hunch that there were alternative spaces that would allow students to express criticality beyond the model of higher education that this programme operated on. I wondered if the definition of critical thinking used by this programme was lacking somehow by focusing on a notion of critique that assumed it to be a decontextualized skill, and therefore easily measureable. Based on this, the programme could reach easy conclusions on whether students were critical or not, based on their

active participation in seminars. This assumption could lead to those teaching on the progamme believing that silent students were therefore uncritical students. This seemed at odds with my own experiences and assumptions of higher education, and it seemed at odds with my own understandings of my students. Often they were silent, struggling, but under that silence it did not seem accurate to assume critical thinking was lacking. My concern was either the programme did not recognised the students' criticality because the definition was wrong or/and the programme was not creating spaces for it to be expressed. It was this hunch that brought me to this piece of practitioner research, to redefine critical thinking into criticality, and to focus on the development of the SSE.

The results of this study informed me more than I expected. These students shared their thoughts and reflections with me, demonstrating a level of trust and openness that went beyond what I had hoped when first envisioning the project. Their willingness to share their understandings of families, of Kazakhstan, of their ethnicity, and of political possibilities, shows a level of criticality far beyond what the exam and essay results might have indicated. Even Nurlan, who focused so intently on trying to survive his studies and pass his exams, opened up to me regarding his fears and his attempts to try new ways to succeed in his studies. These critical thoughts shared in quiet reflection and dialogue never entered the classroom in discussions and seminars to the level that they did in those SSEs and the interview with me. By being asked to reflect, and given a place where they could, these students shared insights that clearly demonstrated they were definitely developing themselves as critical beings. Space was now made for them to voice it.

For me, as a practitioner who designs programmes of study, this has changed how I look at programme design. Not only do I consider the QAA benchmarks and the subject knowledge that students need to engage with, but I also consider how and where I can build spaces for critical self-reflection. While working in Qatar at another branch campus with masters' students, I embedded an edited version of the SSE (renamed Narrative Self Evaluation). The results were quite different in terms of what students reflected on and how they imagined their alternative realities, reflecting the change of context and the complexities there as well as the change in subject matter (a cohort of mature women of Middle Eastern origin studying cultural heritage). The tutorials between drafts (rather than formal interviews) took on different shapes reflecting these

same things. And yet, what arose from these self-reflections demonstrated clear engagement with criticality – so much so that the external examiner remarked on these, expressing praise at creating the space for students to see themselves as 'global citizens'.

In light of the results, this research is about encouraging practitioners who value critical pedagogy and the public good of higher education to reconceive criticality and to create discursive space for it in their programmes and/or modules through alternative means. It is not about changing policy, though I would argue that a change in policy discourse moving away from neoliberalism is needed. It is about demonstrating that even within neoliberal higher education, there is room for practitioners to act and engage with one's own critical praxis. While this research focuses on Kazakhstan and its critically complex context, the methodology and theoretical perspectives are transferable beyond that context. It offers a way of looking at students and their own critically complex socio-political contexts as a means of seeing them as holistic beings while giving them a space to voice their criticality as they see it in their own situated lives. While this research raises questions as to the limits of criticality and where it might need to be viewed as secondary to formal assessments in higher education, criticality does have a place within higher education practice to be valued. There is a balance possible, and more importantly, practitioners do have space to act within their universities.

Reflecting on a Reshaping Identity within a Complex Context

At the beginning of this dissertation, I discussed my own complex identities and my own experiences within education and higher education. However, throughout this doctoral process, a new identity has come to the fore, and with it a new set of complexities for what this new identity means for myself as practitioner within internationalising, neoliberalising universities. This identity might be understood as a 'migrant' academic (Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2013). Even before becoming an academic, I have been a migrant; as I stated in the introduction, I have lived in sixteen countries. However, five of my most recent residences, including Kazakhstan, have been because of my own role within international higher education.

In many ways, the idea that academics are migrants makes sense within the larger context of a globalised, market-focused higher education system. As international partnerships and branch campuses, like the one that this study is based on, increase, it stands to reason that academics move across these nation-state boundaries, becoming part of the human capital that is highly desired within the global higher education labour market. This has been the case in other aspects of the labour market; my own father was a part of this mobile human capital, being transferred to whatever location his expertise as an oil engineer (and later oil salesman) was in most demand. Therefore, higher education is following the same model with its own interpretations – academics moving to where the market is willing to pay more or offer opportunities for their labour specialisations. A higher education system that seeks to act like an international market would require a mobile labour force to ensure that these higher educational institutions remain competitive.

Therefore, though this research study acts as my own critical praxis (Allman, 2010) to challenge the hegemony of neoliberal discourse in higher education, it also tacitly represents my own complacency within the system. I am operating and benefitting from within the power structures that neoliberal higher education represents. It is because of the expansion of branch campuses and international partnerships that I have been able to find my own expertise within this academic field. This is the contradictory nature of neoliberal discourses; it has both repressive and creative potential. This partnership between a Kazakhstani university and a British university created the opportunity for me to move to Kazakhstan, co-design this curriculum, meet these Kazakhstani students, and conduct this research study. Therefore, even as I critique Nazarbayev's neoliberal outlook in justifying investing in higher education, I am benefiting from it. Even as I question the uncritical use of neoliberal logic to explain both the purpose of higher education as well as how to engage with it from policy documents from the World Bank, the OECD, and UNESCO, I am in my current position, and able to conduct this research, because of it.

Additionally, in the background, there is a potential, further level of neoliberal complacency. I am a student at the University of Sussex, conducting this research as a fee paying doctoral student to gain an International Doctorate of Education. This too might demonstrate my own possible 'benefiting' from higher education market,

allowing me to pay for access to become my own version of a neoliberal subject. The very process of being involved in the practice that I am in, as a fee paying doctoral student, has brought me face-to-face with this identity. I am operating within neoliberal higher education, benefiting from it, and helping institutions within it become more competitive.

However, while operating within these power structures, I am also operating against it. The process of engaging with this study has been an act of resistance to monolithic notions of neoliberalism. I have tried to re-embody the disembodied aspects of academic mobility. I have attempted to transform a skills-based approach to critical thinking into one of criticality, and I have tried to imagine how to create discursive spaces for students to explore their own criticality within the context of Kazakhstan. And I advocate that other academics, whether migrant or not, imagine how seeing students as beings who are shaped and shaping their own complex contexts changes both the academics' understandings of criticality and their engagement with students. This research has allowed me to express my critiques of what a neoliberal higher education assumes about students and learning, and what it fails to address because of those assumptions. Students are more than just a market.

This means that I am struggling within my own critically complex (professional) context, and while this research has allowed me to become more aware of it, I do not necessarily have a clear answer about how to solve the seeming contradictions. But this does lead me back to Butler (1990). In Chapter Four, I quote Butler, and I would like to return to that quote. She writes, 'to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of dominance' (p. 21). I wonder, and tentatively assert that maybe this is where I have found myself at the end of this study, in my own examination of myself as a migrant academic within neoliberal higher education. I am indeed operating within this matrix of power. I cannot escape it, and in many ways have chosen to continue to be a migrant academic based on neoliberal principles (it is a good job within a knowledge-based economy). However, this does not mean I am uncritically replicating 'relations of dominance' that are a part neoliberal discourses. This work, this piece of writing, and the research and conceptual arguments that construct it, have become my act of critiquing it, and attempting to unpack and make explicit what might have been its tacit replication. There are further areas that could

have been engaged further – including how neoliberalism might co-opt other discourses (such as a soviet discourse) to create new ways of maintaining hegemonic power. I recognize this. Nevertheless, the doctoral research process has offered me a space to voice my critiques, imagine alternative practices, engage students in a new way, and invite other practitioners to do the same. Therefore, this is my act against, even while operating within, neoliberal higher education.

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Appendix 1: Academic Research and Methods Syllabus

Term One

Term 1 03/10 – 9/12	Objectives	Classes	Personal Tutorials
Week 2 03/10-07/10	**Gal focus**: Introduction to Critical Thinking: its purpose in HE and university style education. **Methods**: Why sources matter (intro) Intro to reading strategies **Content**: the different types of thought (Dewey)	**1. Intro class** Intro to course What is critical thinking? **2. Seminar** -John Dewey, "What is thought?" -The Critical Thinker Podcasts Episode 2, (Why critical thinking matters: Self-Defense) **HW** Reading for next week (Kant). Writing about self: 21 October	-How do the students' organize themselves? -Gage level of autonomy -Begin developing strategies for students to organize work on their own. -ACTION? Have students get an agenda and begin writing down assignments and to-do lists. Journal / Glossary?
Week 3 10/10-14/10	**Gal Focus**: Critical Thinking (continu'ed): skepticism and healthy doubt. Facts vs opinions; knowledge vs belief. **Methods**: -Contextualise and question sources to better understand a document and (practice). -Connect ideas from different texts on a common theme. -Lecture note-taking **Content**: the aim of the Enlightenment (Kant) ☐ What sort of learners students need to be(come).	**1. Lecture** What is the point of philosophy?" **2. Seminar** Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" **HW** Writing a report on Kant and Dewey's contributions to Education / synthesis of W2 and 3. Prepa: A Casebook on Examining Assumptions" + Nussbaum, "The Value of the Humanities"	**Tutorial 1a** -How are students keeping track of courses? Are they attending / reviewing lectures? Are they doing the readings? Time management? Use of agendas? To-do lists? -Emphasis need for planning ahead and autonomy. **Follow up on self study:** Ask students to consider the role of doubt and belief. Write a piece about what students "believe" and where they got their own belief systems from? (Why do they believe what they believe?)
Week 4 17/10-21/10	**Gal Focus**: CT in practice: questioning sources. **Methods**: -Types of sources (not all are equal) -Questioning the text; identifying and working with the author's assumptions. The notion of bias. Objectivity/subjectivity. **Content:** the role of the humanities in education.	**1. Lecture** "The Purpose of Higher Education and the Role of Critical Thinking" (live lecture), Sara Felix **2. Seminar** -Students submit report on Kant and Dewey -Students submit essay on self -Working with biases and assumptions -"A Casebook on Examining Assumptions" p. 15-21 in *Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing* -Martha Nussbaum on "The Value of the Humanities" (question the pt of view and the speaker: bias and assumptions). **HW**	**Tutorial 1b** -How are students keeping track of courses? Are they attending / reviewing lectures? Are they doing the readings? Time management? Use of agendas? To-do lists? -Emphasis need for planning ahead and autonomy. **Follow up on self study:** Ask students to consider the role of doubt and

		Research Martin Luther King Jr / context Critical Summary of Martha Nussbaum's Philosophy Bites interview.	belief? Write a piece about what students "believe" and where they got their own belief systems from? (Why do they believe what they believe?)
Week 5 24/10-28/10	**Gal Focus:** Continuation with questioning of sources and texts: reading biases and contrasting perspectives **Acad. Skills:** -Referencing System (Harvard) -Note taking and outline -Questioning of perspective. Texts are written for a reason-purpose—to convince or persuade... Author comes with baggage. -Continue looking at the context of the text and why it is being written / spoken. -What might alternative perspectives be? **Content**: anthropological persectives?	**1. Lecture** -Martin Luther King Jr. "I have a dream speech". Note taking and analysis (look at text too). **2. Seminar** -Analysis of MLK Jr regarding use of language, references to other texts, and influences on MLK Jr. -Analysis of Reviews of books about MLK Jr. Look at language of critique and language of reporting. **HW:** Text analysis of MLK Jr's "I Have a Dream Speech"	**Tutorial 2a** -Review time management. -Study strategies. Study environment. Problems with staying focused? -Develop strategies to manage time and further self study. **Follow up on self study** See Self study week 5
Week 6 31/10-04/11	**Gal focus**: Student Self Evaluations **Acad. Skills:** Learners' self-evaluation, awareness. **Content: N/A**	**1. Lecture** SSE handout. Treat as an in class reading. **2. Seminar** In class writing of first SSE **HW** -Type up and edit in class written SSE and turn in the first draft.	**Tutorial 2b** -Review time management. -Study strategies. Study environment. Problems with staying focused? -Develop strategies to manage time and further self study. **Follow up on self study** See Self study week 5
Week 7 07/11-11/11	READING WEEK		
Week 8 14/11-18/11	**Gal focus**: Consolidation and clarification Ethics in Academia **Methods:** -Consolidation Plagiarism **Content**: Criticality in higher	**1. Lecture** "Ethics in academia", **2. Seminar** -Outline of Lecture. Review notes for content and understandability. What is his argument? How does he make it? -Plagiarism and ethics of research (reading "Ethics of Research" by Booth et al) -Harvard Referencing System	**Tutorial 3a** -Discuss SSEs. -Probe further; ask questions to demand further reflection on themselves and their studies. -Ask students to explain why? And so what?

	education	**HW** -Rewrite MLK Jr and use Harvard System -Answer questions using notes / outline from Josh's lecture (practice for Assessment) -Read Body Rituals	
Week 9 21/11-25/11	**Gal focus**: arguments **Methods:** -Introduction to Arguments -What are arguments? Why arguments? -Arguments as the expression of critical thought. -Basic structures of arguments	**1. Lecture** -As a class, review answers to questions re: lecture on ethics. Issues with notes? -Review test taking strategies (reading questions, et al) **ASSESSMENT. Lecture note-taking: "Real politik in India"** **2. Seminar** -Body Rituals of the Nacirema and the role of perspective Also, learning to question the text-- critical engagement. Not to be taken at face value. Why? **HW**. Text Analysis of Body Rituals	**Tutorial 3b** -Discuss SSEs. -Probe further; ask questions to demand further reflection on themselves and their studies. -Ask students to explain why? And so what?
Week 10 28/11-02/12	**Gal focus:** Arguments continued **Methods:** -Continue with introduction to arguments -Use of Support to make arguments (not opinions) -Use of fact, data, and evidence to support arguments -Texts as sources of evidence -Role of referencing to show validity of evidence	**1. Lecture** Locke and Property **2. Seminar** -Look at lecture as an example of a text analysis. How did he do it? -Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" -Structure of a Classical Argumentation based on Aristotlean Arguments (handout) -Organization of arguments (handout) -Aristotlean Argument Format: http://bleckblog.org/comp/node/266 **HW**: preparation for assessment W11	**Tutorial 4a** -Post sample SSE to Moodle Review of term one. Problems faced? Unexpected issues. Plan for term two? Areas of focus to improve self study and learning in general. -Studying for subject exams: study plan? Schedule? Location? Study groups? Problem areas to address in studies?
Week 11 05/12-09/12	**Gal focus**: Recap and consolidation **Methods:** - Review how to use the Harvard Ref system / types of sources -Review how sources help strengthen arguments -Review how all relates back to criticality	**1. Lecture** "Study Hall" -Reread texts on their own in class. Answer NO QUESTIONS unless about procedures. -Remind students to bring their Harvard Referencing Manual to the exam **ASSESSMENT Text Analysis Sources and Academic Referencing** **2. Seminar** -Review the term -Guidelines for the Research Projects -10 guiding questions to choosing a topic to research -Prep for research: What is a good research topic. Research questions. **HW**. -Start thinking of a research topic.	**Tutorial 4b** -Review of term one. Problems faced? Unexpected issues. Plan for term two? Areas of focus to improve self study and learning in general. -Studying for subject exams: study plan? Schedule? Location? Study groups? Problem areas to address in studies?

		-Rewrite and update SSEs due in first week back.	

Term Two

Term 2	Objectives	Classes	Personal Tutorials & self study
Week 1 10-13 Jan	**Gal focus** To learn from test 2 + Intro to research. **Methods** Intro to SAC Feedback on Test 2 and recap on how to use sources. Students to analyse the remaining difficulties and **Content / key concepts** NA	**1. Wednesday** Intro to T2 / priorities Feedback on Tests 2 / how to select and use sources. What does relevance mean. How to make this explicit Compare results with IR Folio 1 → Research project central to T2 **2. Friday** -HW due: 1. Submission of SSE 2 2. Research steps: 1 to 6 **HW** Students who failed Q 7: redo it	***No tutorial this week*** **To help**
Week 2 (16-20 Jan)	**Gal Focus** Defining research questions **Content** Human trafficking	**1. Wednesday** -Lecture: Human trafficking in Kz -Follow-up seminar: defining seminar questions points of discussion. **2. Friday** Research Workshop 2 **HW** Team to finalise Research Prop Paper	**Tutorial 1** SSE 2 and review T1 Research Project
Week 3 (23-27 Jan)	**Gal Focus** What is a research proposal – how is it informed by argument? **Content** Anthropology and IR	**1. Wednesday** Lecture: The Origins of War. Follow-up seminar: Lecture outline and points of discussion – what questions to raise for discussion / how to lead a seminar. **2. Friday** RP Workshop 3: - The Research Proposal assessment: what to do? - Review of the assessment strategy to meet the dealine of W7: students to design a week by week plan. - Working on argument (1) what is an argument? - Working on sources: what do they bring to the argument? . Students to submit their working titles **HW** Prepare Said, The Clash of Ignorance + Huntington "The Clash of civilisations?" Team to finalise Research Prop Paper	**Tutorial 2**
Week 4	**Gal Focus**	**1. Wednesday**	**Tutorial 3**

(30 Jan – 3 Feb)	Use of sources in research – different sources for different parts of the argument. Thesis statements
	
	Content
	Clash of civilizations – argument and counter arguments
		• Calendar – students planning RP + UPC work
		• Research: / recap
		o What is the argument? What is your thesis?
		o What are the sources at this stage?
		   o How did you do the research?
		   o What sort of sources (factual? Argumentative? Academic?)
		   o How to use them. How do they help the argument (not replace it)
		o Review of RP guidelines
		o Finalise research questions and title (by Friday next week)
		o Writing up (RW)
		• RP Workshop 4: Argument and thesis statement
		• More on assumptions (optional)
		
		2. Friday
		Research Workshop 4
		Is there a Clash of civilisations?
		   o Reading strategy with long texts: find key ideas and arguments / outline
		   o Contextualise a debate: Said responding to Hutington – When? Why?
		   o Said, The Clash of Ignorance: analysis of a counter argument: Structure and language.
		Workshop W4 (continued): group work on writing up argument
		
		HW	

Week 5 (6-10 Feb)	**Gal focus** Academic voice and outlining **Methods** **Content** Religion as academic study	**1. Wednesday** Lecture: World Religion Post lecture seminar (teaching rooms): student-led discussion **2. Friday** Research Workshop 5: recap on what to submit in week 7 → Review of guidelines and checklist → How to plan for reading week Research Workshop: → Outline → Use of sources: How to integrate sources into an argument without losing authorship (1). **HW** **Write up the Research Proposal** **Team to finalise Research Paper Handout (Tuesday)**	**Tutorial 4**
Week 6 (13-17 Feb)		**READING WEEK** Office hours, Thursday 1:00-3:30	
Week 7	**Gal focus**	**1. Wednesday**	**Tutorial 5**

(20-24 Feb)	Proposal **Methods** Description of charts Approaches to literature **Content** Literature / post-colonial theory	Research Proposal – last minute reminder and Q/A Intro to Data: description. **2. Friday** Intro to Data: description of graphs Approaches to literature + Intro to Post-colonial literature. **RESEARCH PROPOSAL (15%) - DEADLINE Friday 11am (Turnitin and hard copy)** **HW** Read Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, Chap 4. **Research Prop marking criteria**	
Week 8 (27 Feb – 2 March)	**Gal focus** Data analiysis **Content** Fanon to analyse literature	**1. Wednesday** Data continued Analysis of Fanon's critique **2. Friday** Apply Fanon to literature Data Continued **HW** Prep presentation on Wide Sargasso Sea (advanced) or Small Island **Team to mark Research Prop**	**Tutorial 6**
Week 9 (5-9 March)	**Gal focus** Guidelines for research paper **Content** Post-colonial Literature continued	**1. Wednesday** NO CLASS **ASSESSMENT 3 Data Commentary (5%)** **2. Friday** Follow up on literature: group presentation on post-colonial literature Intro to Research Paper: see guidelines and criteria **HW** Essay on Post-colonial literature **Team to finalise Research Prop marks**	**Tutorial 7**
Week 10 (12-16 March)	**Gal focus** Review essay writing, in light of proposals.	**1. Wednesday** Feedback on Research Prop Essay writing **2. Friday** Office hour / workshop of Research Proposal→ Paper **HW**. **Team to mark Data commentary**	**Tutorial 8** Individual feedback on RP
Week 11 (19-23 March)		**Nauryz: 21-23 March – No classes** **Team to moderate and finalise Data Commentary tests**	**RP Office Hour??**
Week 12 26-30 March)	**Subject end of term tests – no classes**		**RP Office Hour??**

Term Three

Term 3	Objectives	Classes	Personal Tutorials & self study
Week 1 16/4-20/4	**Methods – consolidation:** Data integration Argumentation **Content / key concepts** Clash of civilization revisited.	**1. Wednesday** Presentation of term 3 / review of the year's objectives. Data Commentary Tests returned – feedback RPs: Q&A + checklist re RPs. Argumentation revisited (2) → what is a viva? **HW** Revise Huntington and look at data. **2. Friday** Huntington revisited – more data (2) – prepare an argument that connect data to Huntington: support or disprove? Argumentation revisited (2): what is the viva? Start working on the reflective component. Look back at the evolution of the research. **HW** Students to start preparing viva – mini pst in PT in W3 or 4 – one aspect of their research + reflection on research process. Reminder: SSE due end of W2 Read Manufacturing consent. Research Chomsky. **Friday 20/4 (10am): Students submit Research Papers (40%)** **ARM team to give feedback on Viva student guideline document by Thursday 19/4.** **AS/SF to plan vivas slots week 6.** **Fri 20/4: 1st markers collect all RPs and start marking.**	*No tutorial this week (EAP tutorials)*
Week 2 (23-27/4)	**Methods** Summarising / synthesise and report on a difficult argument with precision and nuance Synthesis on a concept (propaganda) **Content** Introduction to dominant discourse and propaganda. Chomsky	**1. Wednesday** Study skills: planning revision and work (calendar) Content: Manufacturing consent. Identify the different filters and bring them together to sum up what makes propaganda according to Chomsky. Eg of integration of data!! HW: find modern example. Bring laptop. **2. Friday** Introduce students to viva marking grid / see marking criteria. Eg of good and bad vivas: analysis. Students to assess them. Chomsky concluded. What makes and define propaganda? Is this still applicable today. Counter argument to Chomsky? Modern-day examples. Question each other on the use / choice of example. **HW** Sunday: Students RETURN SSEs 3 Watch blue eyes vs brown eyes video	**Tutorial 1** Overall performance (term tests). Research Project: reflective component and choice of focus point for viva. Reminder: SEE (talk about stdt)

		Fri 27/4: 1st markers pass RPs to 2nd markers. Team to agree on marking grid for viva	
Week 3 (30/4-4/5)	**Methods** Discussion and debate **Content** Submission to authority	**1. Wednesday** Class cancelled (EAP mock) **2. Friday** Submission to peers and authority: blue eyes vs brown eye. Milgram. What would you do? How do you know? Results of the study. How to connect the two videos/experiments? What are the ethical questions one can draw? What conclusions do you draw? **HW** Students to prep 10 min presentation on research and research process for last PT. Bring a clean copy of RP to last class *NOTE: no class on Tuesday 1 May (so no tutorials that day)*	**Tutorial 2** Overall performance (term tests) Research Project: reflective component and choice of focus point for viva
Week 4 (7-11/5)	**Methods** Prep viva, reflective component on research + focus point of presentation. Reflection on ARM course overall.	**1. Wednesday** No class (Victory Day) **2. Friday – last class** Schedule last tutorials Feedback on Research Papers. Students to individually review their feedback, make notes for the viva. Revisit the CT entrance test. Recap on ARM: Forum and stdt feedback – questionnaires. **HW** Last preparation for vivas. **Mon 7/5: moderation RPs** **Enter marks and double check**	**Tutorial 3** Viva: 10 min presentation / feedback
Week 5 (14-18/5)		**NO CLASS** **Start course review plan**	**Tutorial 4** Individual feedback on Research Papers Feedback on SSE3
Week 6 (21-25/5)	**Vivas** 22/5 EAP Unseen essay		
Week 7 (28/5-1/6)	**NO CLASS** Friday 1 June holiday ARM Review Meeting: ARM rational, course and assessments 29/5, EAP marking note-taking exam 31/5, EAP marking EAP reading exam		
Week 8 (28/5-1/6)	**NO CLASS** **Final draft of SSE due** ARM Review Meeting. ARM rational course and assessments		

Appendix 2: Student Self Evaluation Handout
Writing a Self-Evaluation

You are asked to become more actively involved in your evaluation or grading process by writing Student Self-Evaluations ("SSE's") about your learning at the ███. In your ARM class you will be expected to develop and refine your SSE in collaborative groups at least twice, at the end in the first term, and at the end of the second term; and perhaps more. The SSE is the means by which you, your peers and your teacher or guide can best evaluate your progress.

Self evaluations require time. If you do not take adequate time to prepare them and to turn them in promptly, I may not have adequate time to read them or give you proper assistance. I will try to give you feedback by regularly scheduled tutorial times.

Try to think about and answer these kinds of general questions:
☐ What did you learn?
☐ How well did you learn it?
☐ So what now? What do you see as the next steps in your learning?

There is no single way to write a good evaluation. That will depend upon the course, your goals, your style, and your needs. To be able to evaluate yourself fairly, candidly, and helpfully is a valuable life skill which will be an asset to you long after you leave the university. This is perhaps the most important reason why you will prepare a self-evaluation instead of BEING GIVEN a letter grade. The other reasons are that letter grades are often too limited, too inaccurate or too inflated. If you evaluate yourself honestly, your SSE "grade" might possibly be the most honest one you receive.

The advice below is only that--advice.
It is not necessary to follow it exactly nor to treat it as if it were an outline to be followed. Do not assume that you must touch on all of the points mentioned. A good evaluation selects the most important results of the learning process, and from this selection much else is evident.

Give time and thought to what you write and how you write it.
A sloppy, careless self-evaluation filled with misspellings, incomplete sentences, and half-thoughts leaves a poor impression even if you did well in your course work.

Try to evaluate yourself in the following ways, BE SPECIFIC:

Cognitive. What are your new understandings and knowledge? What is the most important single piece of knowledge gained? What will you remember in a year or five years? How do you know? How has your knowledge grown or changed? Describe this process of knowledge growth.

Skills. What new skills, if any, have you gained? What old skills have you improved? Did you increase your ability to solve problems, think, reason, or research? If so how, if not, why? Did you actually use these skills? In what way did you use them? What skills do you need to develop better? Why do you believe this?

Judgment. What do you understand about the difference between the writing process and how it affects the content of what you write? Can you apply this learning to other classes or life situations? How can you apply this learning? If you took the class again, what would you do differently? Has your way of thinking changed? How and why?

Affective. (emotions and feelings) Did you change anything about your beliefs or values? What were these changes? Was the class worth your time? Why or why not? Do you feel good about it? What was the single most important thing you learned about you?

Groups and Discussions: Evaluate your participation in discussions. Did you cooperate, discuss and learn with other students? What did you learn if yes, and why not if no? Has the course altered your behavior? How? In what way? Did you grow in your knowledge or stay the

same? Did you work to become a better learner or did you just waste your time? Please explain.

Be Specific and Communicate
Try to write in a way which communicates information about the content of your course. Do not just speak in abstractions and personal feelings, such as:
"This class was extremely important to me because through discussion and the readings my thinking developed immensely."

What subject? **Which** discussions? **What** did you read? **What** were you thinking about? Developed from **where** to **where**??

A reader who has not taken your classes should be able to understand what the class was about from reading your self-evaluation.

A reader should be able to form some judgment about how well you understand a subject **from what you say about it**, not merely by claiming that you understand, but telling your reader **WHAT** you understand.

In other words, BE SPECIFIC in telling about what you understand or know!!

One of the important skills in a good education is being able to ask the right questions.
Writing a good evaluation depends upon good questions. You might begin an evaluation by deciding upon which are the important questions about this subject, listing several, and then discussing some good answers. There are many problems and issues which you might ask yourself in order to trigger a good evaluation. Here are some **suggestions only.**

Things to Keep in Mind
Tell things you are proud of. If you cannot think of any, think again. They are there. But also try to describe those parts of your performance that you are **NOT** satisfied with; or things you need to work on in the future; or things you would have done differently if you knew then what you know now. You are likely to sound dumb or dishonest if you cannot think of some things you could do better after your classroom experiences.

Don't complain about how terrible the class or the instructor was. It will make your readers think you blame things on others and don't accept responsibility for your own learning. **Save those complaints for evaluations of program and faculty**. If the complaints keep sneaking into your self-evaluation, stop and do a draft of your program and faculty evaluations. **Get the complaints out of your system** so you can focus your energies on what counts here: your learning.

Remember:
Writing is a process which really never ends, it is NOT just a paper to hand into a teacher nor is it just a task to get out of the way; rather, it IS telling someone what you think, what you know, what you understand and how you feel about these things.

Questions to Answer in Your Final Self-Evaluation

What did you do?
Write using brief descriptive sentences using examples. ("For example... OR such as when I…").
☐ What were the core activities of the class and what did you do concerning them?
☐ Did you do the core activities? Did you do things that weren't part of the required core?
You can cover this part in a few sentences unless there is some complicating factor or a special reason to go
into more detail.

What did you learn?
☐ You may find that you know more than your teacher about things you learned. This is **excellent!!**
☐ What skills and ideas did you learn throughout the course? What was the most important

thing?
☐ What idea or skill was most difficult to understand?
☐ What crucial idea or skill was easy or just came naturally?
☐ What knowledge and skills will you need in five years? Did you learn any?
☐ What was the learning process like for you?

Detailed Questions you should think about for your Self-Evaluation
Please explain in some detail your answers. If you just write Yes or No, you do not tell us much about you and what you learned or did not learn; what you did or did not do or how you worked or did not work.

☐ What readings, research or classroom discussions do you remember best?

☐ Did you do more or less than was expected by the instructor, your peers and by you?
   Why, or why not?
☐ How do you feel now at the end of this period?
   ● How accurate are those feelings, are you being honest with yourself?

☐ What are you proud of and NOT proud of? Please explain BOTH!

☐ Compare what you accomplished with what you hoped to accomplish at the start of the period.
   ● Did you give your classes much study or preparation time? Please state WHY or WHY NOT?
   ● Did you work hard or not? Please state WHY or WHY NOT?
   ● Did you get a lot done or not? Please state WHY or WHY NOT?

☐ What do you now understand:
   • best about your classes?
   • least about your classes?

☐ What are your strongest and weakest points as a new learner?
   • What did (or can) you do to improve your weak points?
   • What can you do to strengthen your strong points?
   • What can you do to improve?

☐ What was:
   • the most important thing or activity you did or moment you had?
   • most satisfying about the class?
   • your best moment? Was it easy or a lot of fun?
   • the most difficult?
   • your worst moment? Was it the most frustrating?
   • YOUR responsibility for each?

☐ Write about some ways you could have done a better job.

☐ Put each of these things in a sentence or two and tell us what you learned about them.

☐ Has your classes:
   • irritated you?
   • stimulated you?
   • affected you personally?
   • made you uncomfortable about yourself, society, your future or learning?
   • Are you the same person who began the class at the start of the semester? If not, what's different?

☐ What did you:
   • expect to learn?

- actually learn? Why?

☐ What advice might someone in the same program give YOU if they spoke with 100 % honesty?

☐ What advice might YOU give YOURSELF if you speak with 100 % honesty?

☐ What do you think you might need to learn next?

Suggestions for writing your self-evaluation
It helps to write evaluations in several drafts. The first draft is really for yourself. The key to understanding the writing process is word processing, writing many drafts saved over time and rereading for the best content.

For the first stage, write quickly, loosely, and as much as possible without stopping. Quickly write a whole bunch of things briefly-perhaps just a list of bare phrases. But then zero in on at least one or two important ideas, content or skills you learned and tell about them in some detail. Try to write a paragraph or two that explains and SHOWS something you know to your readers and thereby proving it.

Do NOT worry about spelling, grammar, punctuation, organization, or whether it makes sense. Don't even worry about whether it is true: sometimes your ability to write freely without thinking can give you insight. The idea is to get your thoughts and feelings down on paper where you can see them and learn from them.

Wait until AFTER you get that interesting mess written before going back over it to decide which things are true and which of those true things you want to share with your readers. It will be easier to write well when you get the false and private things down on paper so they don't confuse and slow you down.

Save your first-draft, it will have lots of important information that will make your later evaluations easier to write and enable you to make them more interesting.

The Process
Now put your first draft away and do something else for at least a day, longer if you have time. Then come back to it and rewrite it on the computer, this will save you work and time later. Save this original free writing document as "filename."

Now you are ready for your first revision or second draft, start by naming this file "filename_rev01" or something which marks this revision from your first draft. Begin by reading it ALOUD!! When you read silently, your eyes start to tell you there are words in your document which you did not write. Take out anything private or not true. Print "filename_rev01" and this time, carry it around with you, read it whenever you can make time. Make sure you look for private and not true statements and mark them out. If something does not make sense, make a note and come back to it later so you can make it clearer.

Now is time to create "filename_rev02". Keep it short. Cut out what isn't needed. Tell the readers that if they want to know more, you have a portfolio to show them with longer descriptions of your learning and examples of your actual work. (And make sure you have one.) But don't be afraid to let them get a feel for who you are. You will come across strongest if you come across real. Your reader should trust you.

In this draft try to make all your deletions, additions and revisions and clarify things which do not make sense. Save "filename_rev02" and print and again, carry it around with you, read it ALOUD when possible and whenever you can make time. Now you can start reading for content, does it make sense? Is it organized in a logical order? Mark the sentences and paragraphs which need to be reordered or deleted.

Look for topic sentences and your main supporting arguments, do they still make sense to you? If not, rewrite them to be more clear. After you have marked this draft, create "filename_rev03"

and repeat the process again and again until you believe you are finally writing what you mean.

Now, ask someone to read it for content and understanding. Tell them NOT to worry about grammar, spelling or other mistakes unless these mistakes keep them from understanding your content. Ask your reader, what seems right or wrong? What is confusing? How does the writing affect them? WHAT do THEY understand about YOU and the course from what you wrote? If they do not understand, try to clarify verbally to them and as soon as they understand immediately write down what you told them!! **The best way to get feedback is to get them to describe the person they find in the self-evaluation.**

Repeat with a revised "filename_revXX" and this time ask someone different to read your paper. Don't write your final evaluation without getting another opinion of your revised draft from a teacher, friend or another student. Once someone can read it and understand what you mean by telling you correctly your meaning, in their own words, **then** you can concentrate on the FINAL paper. Ask them to also help you with awkward writing and grammatical mistakes or typing errors.

When you finally type it, be sure to **proofread it carefully.** READ IT ALOUD!! Check for spelling, typing errors or grammar. You should proofread as many times as necessary to make sure you understand it. You should ask someone else who is a good proofreader. You don't want your readers to be more influenced by mistakes and typing errors than by your message.

The best way is to try hard for the real truth and let yourself sound like a real person...

Appendix 3: Consent Form
CONSENT FORM FOR PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT TITLE: **Action Research to Foster Criticality Among First Year Students at a State University in Kazakhstan**

Researcher: **Sara Maria Camacho Felix**

I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. I have had the project explained to me and I have read and understood the Information Sheet, which I may keep for records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to*:*

- Allow the researcher to use my critical thinking entry test and IELTS test score in her research project
- Be interviewed by the researcher
- Provisionally allow the interview to be audio taped
- Allow the researcher to use my student self-evaluation that I wrote for this class in her research project.

I understand that my name will be not be used as well as the institute I attend in order to prevent my identity from being made public.

I understand that I will be given a transcript of the interviews with me for my approval before being included in the write up of the research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the Laws of Kazakhstan regarding Data Protection.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____