

2022

## Crisis, Rupture and Structural Change: Re-imagining Global Learning and Engagement While Staying in Place During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Online ISSN: 2643-7759

### Recommended Citation

Shruti Rana & Hamid R. Ekbia, *Crisis, Rupture and Structural Change: Re-imagining Global Learning and Engagement While Staying in Place During the Covid-19 Pandemic*, 16 FIU L. Rev. 133 (2021).  
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.25148/lawrev.16.1.11>

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# CRISIS, RUPTURE AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE: RE-IMAGINING GLOBAL LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT WHILE STAYING IN PLACE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented closures of national borders and the withdrawal of much of the social and cultural activities of society into the walls of the home. For us, educators focused on global engagement and analyzing international law and society, the abrupt retreat into the shelter of domestic walls disrupted the very subjects we were studying—inside and outside the classroom. In the pandemic’s first wave, most study abroad and international experiential programs were cancelled indefinitely, and the programs that continued had to operate in an environment of social distancing and uncertainty. We were forced to scramble to accommodate the needs of our students who were suddenly sent home or had travel plans cancelled. At the same time, the global nature of this and other ongoing crises (from humanitarian emergencies that spill*

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*across borders to the global impacts of climate change) underscored the need to prepare students for a future where both cross-border crises and the need for international collaboration and education will be heightened. These developments also highlighted the need for a variety of meaningful virtual alternatives for students to acquire the critical skills and knowledge needed to succeed in global and cross-cultural environments.*

*Against this backdrop, in late spring 2020 we turned our focus to developing a course to turn the COVID-19 crisis itself into a virtual international learning opportunity. We aimed to utilize the shared experience of living through a pandemic that was now a global crisis as a starting point for the exploration of global perspectives and responses to crisis, and as a vantage point to help students link their current challenges and experiences to the impact of pandemic in the societies where they had planned to travel for work or study. Isolated in our homes with our own public and domestic lives collapsing and colliding, we aimed to create global connections by creating a space where we and our students could connect the ruptures created by the current crisis to the ruptures and reshaping of perspectives, world views, and personal trajectories that is the hallmark of a transformative global or intercultural encounter. Our goal was to deepen students' empathetic, contemplative, and communication skills—critical components of global experiential education—while drawing upon literature and pedagogy in these areas and employing experiential learning techniques. The rise of protests related to the Black Lives Matter movement in the middle of the course added a new dimension to our plan and served as a catalyst for both ourselves and our students to move beyond the original course goals and metrics, and to utilize our experiences living through a crisis as to explore how individuals and societies create and grapple with structural change. Similarly, the clashes and re-drawing of lines between our homes, workplaces and classrooms created additional opportunities for connection and to replace reimagining our individual and collective futures. This reflective essay interrogates and records our goals, methods and experiences in creating this classroom space and pedagogical experience during a period of crisis. Ultimately, it memorializes how the experience of developing and teaching this course during the COVID-19 pandemic itself also served as a crucible that reflected the pressures of the pandemic experience, and how our attempts to catalyze change and global engagement for our students were transformative for our own professional and personal trajectories.*

“Americans have long believed themselves a special people,” suggests the historian Thomas Borstelmann, and with each encounter with the world

beyond its shores, “they considered anew whether other peoples were fundamentally similar to or different from them.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet this exceptionalism cannot exist without erasure. While viewing themselves as exceptional,<sup>2</sup> argues Borstelmann, many Americans also hold a universalist view that sees everyone as American—a view that was given voice perhaps most vividly by the colonel in Stanley Kubrick’s 1987 film *Full Metal Jacket*: “We are here to help the Vietnamese, because inside every ‘foreigner’ there is an American trying to get out.”<sup>3</sup> In real life, this view was expressed two decades later by John Prior, a U.S. Army sergeant fighting in Iraq: “In my heart, I believe everybody’s American—that is, everybody seeks to express and claim their freedom, autonomy, and individuality.”<sup>4</sup>

It is this tension between the inward-looking exceptionalism and outward-looking universalism that one has to navigate in encounters between “Americans” and “outsiders.” This tension plays itself out in different ways, depending on the specific historical and political moment. Peace and prosperity tend to bring out universalism, for instance, while racial or economic strife tends to amplify exceptionalism.<sup>5</sup> These tensions can play out not only in policymaking and cultural clashes but also in the work of theorists attempting to bridge these divides and conduct cross-border inquiries. Within feminist international legal theory, for example, “‘feminist analyses which attempt to cross, national, racial and ethnic boundaries’” can “‘produce and reproduce difference’ and essentialize and elide differences through the ‘naturalization of analytic categories which are supposed to have cross-cultural validity.’”<sup>6</sup>

The stakes are high, as the fate of many, both inside and outside the territorial boundaries of the United States, hinges on whether they are

<sup>1</sup> THOMAS BORSTELMANN, *JUST LIKE US: THE AMERICAN STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND FOREIGNERS X* (2020).

<sup>2</sup> See Harold Hongju Koh, *On American Exceptionalism*, 55 *STAN L. REV.* 1479, 1481 n.4 (2003) (explaining that “American Exceptionalism” has “historically referred to the perception that the United States differs qualitatively from other developed nations, because of its unique origins, national credo, historical evolution, and distinctive political and religious institutions” as well as that it “sometimes also connotes that America’s canonical commitments to liberty, equality, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire somehow exempt it from the historical forces that have led to the corruption of other societies.”).

<sup>3</sup> See *FULL METAL JACKET* (Warner Bros. 1987).

<sup>4</sup> See George Packer, *War After the War*, *THE NEW YORKER*, (Nov. 16, 2003), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/11/24/war-after-the-war>.

<sup>5</sup> See Douglas S. Massey, *Globalization and Inequality: Explaining American Exceptionalism*, 25 *EUR. SOCIO. REV.*, 9 (2008).

<sup>6</sup> Doris Elisabeth Buss, *Going Global: Feminist Theory, International Law, and the Public/Private Divide*, in *CHALLENGING THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DIVIDE: FEMINISM, LAW AND PUBLIC POLICY* (1997) (quoting Chandra Mohanty’s critique of feminist international legal theory).

included or excluded from the American project.<sup>7</sup> In the current moment, when multiple crises—the pandemic, the economic, and the racial—have coalesced together, one would expect the rise of inward-looking attitudes, irritated by xenophobic and nationalist rhetoric and protectionist policies. That expectation was fully realized in the early months of 2020, not only at the level of policy and politics but also in the realm of social life when domestic violence, the sales of firearms, and the number of homicides showed noticeable rises across the U.S. The crises layered on top of one another were also accompanied by the literal closure of international borders and the hardening of walls between domestic and external spaces where just weeks before human and social connections had flowed.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the public/private divide—long a central inquiry of feminist legal theorists—was solidifying and evolving before us as people sought sanctuary and connection in different ways,<sup>9</sup> but also presenting new challenges as we sought to pierce the walls rising without simultaneously essentializing others or further “reifying” the public/private divide<sup>10</sup> and the exceptionalist/universalist dialectic described above.

It was within such an environment that we wanted to bring our students into contact with the “outside” world. And our challenge was to bring these interlocking phenomena into light as they were manifested in different parts of the globe. Our hope was to turn the crisis itself into an opportunity; to utilize the moment we all found ourselves in—where the world seemed to be simultaneously imploding and exploding—to catalyze the tension between

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<sup>7</sup> GARY GERSTLE, INCLUSION, EXCLUSION AND THE MAKING OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY, OXFORD HANDBOOK OF AMERICAN IMMIGRATION & ETHNICITY (Ronald H. Bayor ed., 2014); Buss, *supra* note 6, at 361–62 (discussing how non-Western women have been included and excluded from Western paradigms and international law).

<sup>8</sup> Shruti Rana, *Covid-19's Gendered Fault Lines and Their Implications for International Law*, AUSTL. Y.B. INT'L L. 91 (2021) (“One of the most striking initial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic was the speed with which it pushed nearly all public life into the private realm, fracturing both. Seemingly overnight, in the spring 2020 much of the world entered quarantine and shuttered economic and social activity. Work, school, and what was left of social life swiftly entered the walls of the home, colliding with private lives and reshaping the boundaries between public and private”).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> See Buss, *supra* note 6, at 370–71 (noting that the public/private divide can be a useful analytical tool to critique the “ideological construct rationalizing the exclusion of women from the sources of power” in international law, but can be problematic and overly static and essentializing when “the public and private spheres are reified.”) (quoting Charlesworth, Chinkin, and Writing 1991 at 629). See also *id.* at 362–64 (explaining the idea of the public/private divide the idea that at a fundamental level international law rests on and reproduces distinctions between public and private spheres which are gendered, and separate the realm of state sovereignty and action from largely unregulated domestic spheres, and how feminist international legal theorists use this term as a way to address and inform the exclusion of women in international law and practice).

exceptionalism and universalism into a liminal space where boundaries, preconceptions, and perspectives could be re-navigated and re-imagined.<sup>11</sup>

## II. THE PEDAGOGICAL SETTING

A critical component of this course was the creation of a sense of place, one that could serve as a vantage point for the explorations we intended to undertake and boundaries within which we would operate. Our classroom was initially simply a virtual reflection of a traditional classroom, bringing together by necessity students whose summer and other travel plans had been suddenly disrupted. The program within which this course took place is an undergraduate degree in international studies, with various tracks and concentrations, including a major in International Studies and a major in International Law and Institutions, at a large R1 Institution in the midwestern United States.<sup>12</sup> A key component of these degree programs is an overseas experience, which requires students to spend at least six weeks in a country or region of the world as their geographical focus, engaging in either a study abroad or international internship program.

The course in question involved forty-seven undergraduate students approaching their graduation (primarily rising seniors) who were not able to complete the overseas requirement because of the pandemic. The course was introduced and developed as a surrogate for the overseas experience, which if completed with a satisfactory grade, would allow students to fulfill the international experience requirement for graduation “virtually” without leaving their homes.

The course was offered in the summer of 2020 for a period of eight weeks in a synchronous, online format. The students were expected to conduct a study of the coronavirus response in the country or region of their focus, using the Community Toolbox, a web-based model for “community change and improvement,”<sup>13</sup> as their guiding document. Students were asked to submit weekly research reports on specific aspects of the COVID-19

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<sup>11</sup> HOMI K. BHABHA, *THE LOCATION OF CULTURE 2* (1994) (in this piece, Bhabha describes third spaces, including the moments or processes catalyzed from the articulation of cultural differences, describing them as “‘in between’ spaces [that] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.”).

<sup>12</sup> The programs and requirements are set forth here: INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, <https://intlstudies.indiana.edu/> (last visited June 13, 2021). We also obtained IRB approval to anonymously use the data and pedagogical outputs from the course in our research and scholarship.

<sup>13</sup> *The Community Toolbox*, UNIV. OF KAN. CTR. FOR CMTY. HEALTH AND DEV., (last visited Sept. 14, 2020), <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents>.

response in the applicable country, as well as periodic reflection papers where they were asked to engage with theories, concepts, and personal stories relating to global civic leadership and engagement presented in reading assignments or during lectures.<sup>14</sup>

Each synchronous session of the course was organized around a main theme, the purpose of which was to help students reflect on their findings and observations, and which they would record and further engage with in their reflections. These reflections were then used during class as discussion prompts, supported by an image that each student was asked to submit. To guide students in their reflections, we provided questions every week that ranged from personal reflections on their work or current experiences to questions asking students to apply various concepts and theories. We also hoped to use the reflections as an experiential learning tool that would encourage student exploration and engagement while also providing students with a sense of agency.<sup>15</sup>

The course themes were initially focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and on how it was handled in different parts of the world. Our initial aim was to replicate, to the extent possible, the challenges of living in an unfamiliar or “foreign” land as a pedagogical tool to help students gain new perspectives, re-think their usual ways of approaching problems as well as others, and ideally, help students find ways to transcend the boundaries of “exceptionalism” and “universalism” as they engaged more deeply with the meaning of civic leadership and international engagement. In this, our task aligned with the pedagogical goals of most study abroad programs—that is, to utilize the experience of living abroad as a springboard to help students “acquire new mindsets . . . that will affect how they related to cultural Others . . . .” as well as the “development of tolerance and respect for difference . . . .”<sup>16</sup> Specifically, we hoped to draw upon the strangeness and newness of living through a crisis to create (carefully managed) opportunities for students to reflect upon how these changes were changing their perspectives on global or domestic issues, as well as to think about how experiencing a shared global crisis could provide an empathetic bridge to another country and the experiences of its people.

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<sup>14</sup> We drew upon literature linking study abroad experiences to the fostering of values and experiences that can serve as the foundation for civic leadership. See, e.g., Karen Rodriguez, *Cultivating Empathy and Empowerment Among Cultural Others: Values Education and Study Abroad*, 4 J. OF COLL. AND CHARACTER (2003).

<sup>15</sup> Cathy Davidson, *The Single Most Essential Requirement in Designing a Fall Online Course*, HASTAC (May 11, 2020), <https://www.hastac.org/blogs/cathy-davidson/2020/05/11/single-most-essential-requirement-designing-fall-online-course> (the author discusses “meta reflection” as the “single best way to ensure retention and applicability apart from applying, experientially, what we learn” and as a tool to empower students during the pandemic and spring 2020 transition to remote education).

<sup>16</sup> See Rodriguez, *supra* note 14, at 4.

Students self-assigned themselves to a particular country or region, ideally the one where they had planned to study abroad, and were asked to analyze that region's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, using the Community Toolbox as a template for building an analysis of how a community creates or contends with change. Students were also asked to research their region's health and economic systems, their system of government, and asked to briefly investigate language and culture. They were asked to focus in particular on the laws and norms in the country that governed pandemic response or that were emerging as themes in the society's approach to life in the pandemic. Overall, more than forty different countries and regions on the five continents were represented by student choices.

However, as we detail below, as the pandemic continued and related crises multiplied and layered on top of one another, the course itself evolved past the initial outlines we had demarcated. Like our students, we found ourselves simultaneously experiencing and drawing from our lived experiences to grapple with the crises stemming from the pandemic, and these experiences in turn pushed us to look more deeply at the pre-existing fault lines underlying and deepening the impact of the pandemic. The course itself became a catalyst for thinking about how societies could move beyond these ruptures and understand and facilitate structural change in a moment of global peril.

### III. CRISIS AS BORDER-PIERCING

When we began the course in May 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had led to unprecedented closures of national borders and the withdrawal of much of the social and cultural aspects of society into the walls of the home.<sup>17</sup> Classrooms and workplaces remained virtually "open" while childcare, eldercare, and the support and safety nets we relied on to perform our responsibilities as professors simultaneously became inaccessible or crumbled.<sup>18</sup> Most study abroad and international experiential programs had

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<sup>17</sup> See Rana, *supra* note 8 ("One of the most striking consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the speed with which it pushed nearly all public life into the private realm. Seemingly overnight, much of the world entered quarantine and shuttered economic and social activity. Work, school, and what was left of social life swiftly entered the walls of the home, colliding with private lives and reshaping the boundaries between public and private.").

<sup>18</sup> Shruti Rana & Cyra Akila Choudhury, *America's Care Crisis Is Exploding and Women Lawyers Are Being Forced to Pick Up the Pieces*, ABOVE THE LAW (Aug. 6, 2020, 11:13 AM), <https://abovethelaw.com/2020/08/americas-care-crisis-is-exploding-and-women-lawyers-are-being-forced-to-pick-up-the-pieces/> (noting that as the "COVID-19 care crisis" exploded in the spring and summer of 2020, for law professors, "as workplaces reopen while schools, childcare, and elder care remain dangerous or inaccessible, the safety net beneath us is crumbling at the very time we need it most").

been cancelled indefinitely (and remain so at the time of this writing).<sup>19</sup> Hopes for a return to normalcy in study abroad programs were (and remain), dim as college students in the U.S. suffered from the one-two punch of cancellations abroad at the same time that Americans or travelers from the U.S. were simply banned from entry in a majority of countries.<sup>20 21</sup>

At the same time, the global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and other ongoing crises and those to come (from humanitarian emergencies that spill across borders to the global impacts of climate change) underscored the need to prepare students for a future where both cross-border crises and the need for international collaboration and education will be heightened. These developments, as well as more localized crises such as Pacific wildfires that have and continue to shut down college campuses,<sup>22</sup> or personal circumstances that might prevent students from traveling abroad, also highlight the continuing need for colleges to develop a variety of meaningful virtual alternatives for students to acquire the critical skills and knowledge needed to succeed in global and cross-cultural environments.

In this light, as noted in detail above, we initially designed the class as a way to turn the experience of living through a crisis—here, a pandemic—itsself into a virtual international learning opportunity. We initially aimed to deepen students’ empathetic, contemplative, and communication skills—critical components of global experiential education<sup>23</sup>—while drawing upon literature and pedagogy in these areas. We designed course exercises and assignments, such as reflections, to help students link their current challenges and experiences to the impact of a pandemic in the societies where they had planned to study abroad. We also had some practical goals in mind, namely that we thought intensive research with a reflective component would enable our students to be as prepared as possible to travel or live in those societies when and if borders re-opened. We further wanted students to gain a deeper understanding of global civic engagement and leadership while replicating as

<sup>19</sup> Casey Leins, *Coronavirus Reroutes Students as Study Abroad Programs Shut Down*, U.S. NEWS (Mar. 12, 2020), <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2020-03-12/coronavirus-reroutes-international-students-as-study-abroad-programs-shut-down>.

<sup>20</sup> Paige McClanahan, *What Americans Need to Know About Europe’s Travel Ban*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 5, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/article/eu-travel-ban-explained-usa.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Karen Schwartz, *I’m a U.S. Citizen. Where in the World Can I Go?*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 14, 2020, 4:27 PM), <https://www.nytimes.com/article/coronavirus-travel-restrictions.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Felicia Mello and Charlotte West, *Disasters Have Shut Down California Colleges in the Past: Here’s How They Fared*, CAPRADIO (May 4, 2020), <https://www.capradio.org/articles/2020/05/04/disasters-have-shut-down-california-colleges-in-the-past-heres-how-they-fared/>.

<sup>23</sup> Debra Suarez, *The Development of Empathetic Dispositions Through Global Experiences*, 81 EDUCATIONAL HORIZONS 180, 180–182 (2003).

closely as we could the dynamics of transition, challenge, and exploration of the unfamiliar that marks most study or work abroad experiences.<sup>24</sup>

In these ways, we aimed to combine practical goals (fulfilling a graduation requirement, research, and preparation for a trip abroad) with as much replication of the global learning process as we could deliver while staying in place. More broadly, we hoped to contribute to the development of pedagogy and practical toolkits to provide virtual or stay-at-home alternatives for global learning outcomes for students unable to travel in the future. As we discuss below, along the way we encountered examples not only of the catalyzing and boundary-blurring impact on students we had hoped to achieve, but also found that this experience pushed us, as instructors and individuals who had ourselves experienced “othering” and being viewed as “foreign” in our own homes, to move beyond our own initial course metrics and outcomes and utilize empathy as a pedagogical tool in new ways.<sup>25</sup> We discuss this process below.

#### A. Immersion: Crisis as a Cultural Window

In 1945, in the midst of the Japanese surrender and the growing presence of American troops in the country, the anthropologist Ruth Benedict was recruited by the U.S. government to open a window into the cultural life of the Japanese society.<sup>26</sup> Like us in the spring and summer of 2020, Benedict was unable to travel to the country she was charged with understanding; her task was also complicated by war, a compressed several-month long timeframe, and surrounding dynamics of race and xenophobia. The outcome of this project was the 300-page book *Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, which inspired great enthusiasm in some circles and animus in others—a controversy that has continued to provoke discussions and debates well into our own times.<sup>27</sup> (Despite its critical reception by those who viewed the book as inaccurately essentializing Japanese culture and people, in an ironic twist, Benedict’s book was later used by some in Japan as guide to Japanese culture for foreign visitors to

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<sup>24</sup> See Rodriguez, *supra* note 14, at 4.

<sup>25</sup> Our experience echoed that of a study detailed in Suarez, *supra* note 23, of “eighty exemplary teacher educators who promote multiculturalism and global education” which found “that their most influential experiences were encounters with discrimination and outsider status.” See *id.* at 180.

<sup>26</sup> Pauline Kent, *Japanese Perceptions of “The Chrysanthemum and the Sword”*, 24 DIALECTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY 181, 191 (1999).

<sup>27</sup> See *id.* at 181–84; Elson Boles, *Ruth Benedict’s Japan: The Benedictions of Imperialism*, 30 DIALECTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY 27 (2006).

Japan, and also sparked introspection and debate in Japan and about how outsiders might view the Japanese).<sup>28</sup>

To balance Benedict's view, therefore, we also discussed a countervailing example. As recounted in a popular press book, this story involves another American anthropologist, Allan Holmberg, who traveled to and lived immersed among the Sironó of Brazil, also during the 1940s.<sup>29</sup> Despite the advantages of actual presence among those he was studying, Holmberg could not see past his prejudices and produced a mistaken yet influential book, the evocatively named *Nomads of the Longbow*, which was both predicated upon and further fostered false and bigoted stereotypes of the Sironó as primitive, "uncivilized" people.<sup>30</sup> Among his mistakes, Holmberg failed to realize he was living among the last survivors of decimating disease and violence and misperceived a once-sophisticated but now nearly destroyed culture as one that had always been "primitive" and never "developed."<sup>31</sup>

We drew upon Benedict's book in order to open students up to the possibility of learning about other cultures from a distance. Through comparison with Holmberg's story of mistaken assumptions and others that the students came up with, we asked students to think about the qualities and circumstances that enabled people to "see" and connect across cultural, linguistic, and social boundaries while avoiding essentializing.<sup>32</sup> In this manner, we sought to echo one of the primary educational goals of study abroad programs—namely, to provide opportunities for students to re-evaluate their ideas about effective or global citizenship, social relationships, and leadership as they attempt to "see" and empathize across cultures.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, cultural immersion in an unfamiliar culture offers people an opportunity to re-evaluate their values, look at ethical issues in a different light, and think about mundane or "normal" activities differently.<sup>34</sup> We discussed how living through a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic

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<sup>28</sup> See Kent, *supra* note 26, at 181–84.

<sup>29</sup> CHARLES C. MANN, 1491: NEW REVELATIONS OF THE AMERICAS BEFORE COLUMBUS 3 (Vintage Books 1st ed. 2005).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> Buss, *supra* note 6, at 370–71.

<sup>33</sup> See Rodriguez, *supra* note 14 (considering how study abroad programs can but do not always ask students to "use these experiences to re-evaluate ideas about effective local or global citizenship social commitments and leadership. Do they reconsider their convictions once having been exposed to Other values, look at ethical issues in a new light, or think about dealing with changing technology and society differently?").

<sup>34</sup> *The Irish Times View on Emerging from Lockdown: Normal People and a Bygone Era*, THE IRISH TIMES (May 16, 2020, 6:00 AM), <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/the-irish-times-view-on-emerging-from-lockdown-normal-people-and-a-bygone-era-1.4254610>.

might offer similar opportunities to re-evaluate both large and small aspects of our daily lives. We utilized our own experiences as outsiders within America, and as professors experiencing the impacts of the COVID care crisis, to employ empathy as a pedagogical tool and as a critical experiential learning technique to help us bring “‘depth and substance, meaning and complexity, value and beauty beyond what we had seen previously and beyond what we had projected onto them’” in the past.<sup>35</sup>

We also discussed two techniques for thinking about how the pandemic might be changing how one views and thinks about the world(s) around us. The first technique, drawing upon feminist theory, was to engage with art or media and to reflect upon what we see, hear, or read, and how it makes one think or feel.<sup>36</sup> As an example, we discussed an opinion article from Ireland where the author described how watching the TV series *Normal People* helped her reflect on how the pandemic had flipped the normal and the strange, so that what was normal in the early weeks of 2020 was now strange (gathering in groups) and what was strange before is now normal (wearing masks and social distancing)—somewhat similar to traveling to a foreign land. She further reflected on how this experience of overturning assumptions had heightened awareness and given her new eyes to re-evaluate whether things that were “‘normal’” and “‘the way it is’” before the pandemic should remain the same once we awaken from the crisis.<sup>37</sup>

We followed by discussing a personal reflection technique we utilized often over the course of the semester, to journal about one’s experiences during a critical moment (whether that moment is personal or global). Historians rely on journals of daily life from ordinary people to understand how societies work at specific moments in time, as they provide “‘insight into how society and culture worked at a time of tragedy, or crisis, or just chaos . . .’” and also “‘remind us of our common humanity across time and space,’” providing glimpses “‘into the human mind and the human heart.’”<sup>38</sup> Journaling also provides an opportunity to reflect on and record how one’s perspectives are changing during such moments, and has played a critical role in feminist discourse and history, enabling women to participate in the recording of history and to shape narratives from within their homes, drawing

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<sup>35</sup> See Suarez, *supra* note 23, at 180 (discussing empathy as a pedagogical tool).

<sup>36</sup> CREATING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH CREATIVITY: ANTI-OPPRESSIVE ARTS-BASED RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES (Moshoula Capous-Desyllas & Karen Morgaine eds., 2018).

<sup>37</sup> *The Irish Times View on Emerging from Lockdown*, *supra* note 34.

<sup>38</sup> Matt Berg, *Journaling During the Pandemic, for Yourself and the Historians*, THE BOSTON GLOBE (Mar. 22, 2020, 5:11 PM), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/03/22/metro/journaling-during-pandemic-yourself-historians/>.

upon personal experiences.<sup>39</sup> We utilized these two pedagogical and experiential techniques, with changing prompts, throughout the course.

In response to these prompts, students discussed their feelings of loss and “strangeness” as they saw famous landmarks nearly universally emptied worldwide. Some discussed their changing perspectives, linked to new ideas of global citizenship, as wearing masks forced them to re-navigate what was once familiar, inducing some vacillation between universalism and exceptionalism. “Before the COVID-19 outbreak, I never thought about the person in the aisle across from me at the grocery store, but now, I think if I am not wearing a mask, as I feel most people should, I am putting those people at a preventable risk” (Student 2). “In the ultimate public health crisis, a pandemic, citizenship is far more than being a member of a nation (or the world), but it is also about how you are contributing to your nation and the world when it is at its weakest. Effective citizenship is about doing the right thing, and in this case, it’s missing out on traveling, avoiding group activities, not going to restaurants and bars, wearing a face covering around others, etc.” (Student 4).

Students also began to twist American exceptionalism upon itself as they began to view the outlines of the U.S. government’s failure to act. One student noted, “Personally, I feel as though the American government has failed its people. In [the] past, when facing tragedy, we have had swift responses and change, such as the case with 9/11. However, as I’ve gotten older, I have noticed inaction by the American government in the face of tragedies. Now, with the COVID crisis, I feel like the government has completely failed to protect its people. Along with this, I feel that there has been little international collaboration to curb the crisis. In America, there seems to be [a] lack of national collaboration to halt the spread. Each state has different standards in place, and it has broken down my trust in a strong national system” (Student 6). Another noted that what had been strange in the U.S but commonplace in Asia (mask-wearing in public) was now common in the U.S. (Student 19).

These reflections clearly indicate the chasm between individual perspectives, but also the inner struggle to come to terms with an unexpected reality and an even more unexpected response from people, the government, and the global community. The students began to intuitively grasp an insight

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<sup>39</sup> Bonnie J. Dow & Celeste M. Condit, *The State of the Art in Feminist Scholarship in Communication*, 55 J. COMMUN 448, 448–68 (2005).

from feminist legal theory, that state inaction is not a neutral act, but sharpens both public and private divides as well as marginalization and inequality.<sup>40</sup>

*B. Personal Experience: Crisis as an Opportunity for Reflection*

One of the similarities between both the experience of cultural immersion in an unfamiliar culture and the experience of living through crisis is that the people in these situations gain new perspectives on their lives and the world around them.<sup>41</sup> To drive this point home, one of us shared a recent writing about his experiences in solitary confinement in Iran and the perspectives he gained during that experience on ways to connect across barriers that can help others handle social isolation during the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>42</sup> The piece introduces the notion of “anchoring” as a means to connect to the outside world in situations of isolation and solitude, piercing literal walls through mental discipline and imagination.

After reading this piece, students were asked to reflect on the techniques, perspectives, art, or people that have provided them with solace or connection to other people or communities during the social isolation period of the current crisis. In response, students shared their stories of loss, of hope, and of the strangeness of living in uncertainty. They found solace in the author’s memoir of solitary confinement and the utility of anchoring. Students shared some of their own individual ways of dealing with the current crisis, of traversing geographic, temporal, or social boundaries (“Going outdoors and feeling the warm sun, smelling a blossoming flower, and hearing birds chirp serve as a reminder that earth continues to spring, even when it has all come to a halt” (Student 4); “What stood out to me most was when he talked about anchoring, and how tying these times of confinement to memories or things we will do taking place outside of this time of confinement can help us feel more connected to the outside world. This is something I personally have been trying to continue doing, by thinking about what I might be doing this time next year, or in the next few months” (Student 21); “We have to keep being curious because I’ve found (even though this seems obvious) that crude and malicious behavior doesn’t stop for a global pandemic. Human rights violations and domestic abuse don’t all of a sudden vanish because we have to stay distanced. We have to keep ourselves

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<sup>40</sup> Hilary Charlesworth, *The Public/Private Distinction and the Right to Development in International Law*, 12 AUSTL. Y.B. INT’L L. 190, 190–92 (1988–89) (“[I]t is important to note that a deliberate policy of non-intervention by the state does not signify non-control or neutrality.”).

<sup>41</sup> See Rodriguez, *supra* note 14.

<sup>42</sup> Hamid Ekbia, *Solace in Solitude*, LOS ANGELES REVIEW OF BOOKS (May 8, 2020), <https://lareviewofbooks.org/short-takes/solace-in-solitude>.

grounded for those that can't - that[']s what has been on my mind on repeat lately" (Student 24)).

Anchoring and sharing our own experiences within this and other crises thus allowed us to employ "empathy [as] the nexus for teaching culturally diverse students,"<sup>43</sup> and enabled us to flatten the "respective power relations of superior and inferior"<sup>44</sup> both within the classroom space and in piercing the veil of "foreignness" when looking at others' experiences from afar.

### C. *Laws and Norms: Crisis as a Watershed Moment*

Not only are crises moments of personal reflection and opportunities for empathy, they are also occasions for change—for instance, social change is both reflected in and stymied by laws and norms of the land. To elaborate on this, we discussed the differences between laws and norms, drawing upon Kaplow's analysis of laws as rules and standards<sup>45</sup> and Posner's analysis of social norms and their relationship to laws<sup>46</sup> defining "laws" as the framework of principles, created by a society, within which to develop, which may be enforced through penalties or punishment, usually by a government or other authority. These laws could be formal or informal and could take the form of specified rules or broader, more flexible standards. We defined norms as rules or standards or expectations of behavior that are socially enforced and regularly complied with, and emphasized that, both laws and norms help bind members of a community together in adherence to recognized values and standards.<sup>47</sup>

The laws and norms of social distancing and mask wearing provided a unique opportunity for students to reflect on how norms are shaped and laws enforced. They were struck by the role of social relationships and leadership in building and enforcing laws and norms as opposed to prosecution and policing, themes which grew in importance over time. In the process, they were also surprised by the level of resistance in the U.S. to mask-wearing in comparison to the countries they were studying, and seemed puzzled by what appeared to be universal within and across many other nations to be simply exceptional in the U.S. "If this was a few weeks ago, I would have said that laws would be much more effective in getting this pandemic shut down. However, I can no longer say that laws barring social gatherings would not

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<sup>43</sup> See Suarez, *supra* note 23, at 180.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.*

<sup>45</sup> Louis Kaplow, *Rules Versus Standards: An Economic Analysis*, 42 DUKE L.J. 557, 557–629 (1992); Richard A. Posner, *Social Norms and the Law: An Economic Approach*, 87 AM. ECON. REV. 365, 365–69 (1997).

<sup>46</sup> See Posner, *supra* note 45, at 365–66.

<sup>47</sup> See Kaplow, *supra* note 45.

be abused by police officers and politicians looking to escape from accountability. While relying on norms to create the proper precautions are indeed less effective, the government has shown that they cannot be trusted with legislative measures. Some ways we can normalize mask-wearing would be to incorporate fashion with safety, as they have done in China. For example, fashion magazines could start publishing the “fall outfits” with aesthetically pleasing masks front and center . . .” (Student 5). Another noted, “I believe that many Americans value personal freedoms regarding facemasks and social distancing, and it would be extremely difficult to codify these practices into law. However, there are also many Americans that willingly choose to wear a facemask or to social distance effectively. I would feel safer if these practices were written into law, but I believe enough Americans are adhering to the practices to solidify them into norms in America. One way we can encourage compliance with these norms is to have private businesses enforce the practices. If a customer refuses to wear a face mask or to socially distance within the store, then they should be refused service because they are directly endangering other Americans’ lives” (Student 18).

Student reflections on laws and norms demonstrate their shifting perspective on the efficacy of laws and norms, as well as the underlying values that drive them.

#### IV. ENCOUNTERING STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Our course and exploration of methods to foster international engagement during a pandemic then encountered a further unexpected twist, one that ironically mimicked the “double pandemic” effect we discussed almost every week as the impact of the pandemic began to accumulate along the lines of pre-existing inequalities.<sup>48</sup> Seemingly overnight, the eruption of protests against police brutality triggered by the death of George Floyd in the hands of the police in Minneapolis injected a new component into the situation, shaping student experiences in deep ways and inspiring us to introduce new themes: systems and structural change, cultural models and cultural shadows, and public trust. It also helped us place “American exceptionalism” within a new personal and professional context.

##### *A. Systems and Structural Change*

The concepts of “system” and “structure” are frequently used in discussions of race, social equity, law, and so forth. The common

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<sup>48</sup> See Rana, *supra* note 8, at 2.

understanding of these terms, however, are often based on old notions of systemic hierarchies developed by writers such as von Bertalanffy.<sup>49</sup> A different notion emerged in the second half of twentieth century with the rise of cybernetics, which introduced systems as self-organizing and autopoietic entities that reproduce and regenerate themselves in the face of external disturbance.<sup>50</sup> Later in the century, the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann built a whole social theory on the basis of this notion.<sup>51</sup>

We introduced this new understanding of systems to students in order to discuss topics such as “systemic bias” and “structural change,” helping students understand how racial discrimination and bias have reproduced themselves throughout history. We grounded these conceptual discussions in commentaries that suggested that the current moment is the outcome of a long history of racial injustice, starting with slavery—for instance, comments by then Vice President Joe Biden who described slavery as the American “original sin,” and by the director Spike Lee who described this history in vivid and graphic terms on the PBS News Hour on June 2, 2020. Students were asked to reflect on these topics through the following questions: How do the people in your country/region of study perceive this history? How have they reacted to the current crisis in the United States? What kinds of values and views drive these responses?

This cursory introduction to “systems” allowed us to compare and contrast structural and holistic thinking with other common approaches that students are often exposed to through media discourse—in particular, the “bad apple” discourse and “funding-defunding” discourse. Calling these, respectively, “psychologizing” and “financializing” approaches, we tried to show the flaws and inadequacies of both in dealing with social issues such as gun violence, police brutality, and, of course, pandemics. In their place, we introduced the approach of “historicizing” that is germane to systems thinking, opening up inquiry to the historical origins of contemporary phenomena.

Our aim was to utilize these methods as pedagogical strategies intended to cultivate sensitivity and empathy, and to encourage students to engage with the process of “experiential learning of cultural otherness and empathy.” We saw empathy as a “nexus for teaching culturally diverse students” particularly when travel and immersion were not possible, focusing on the idea that

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<sup>49</sup> See LUDWIG VON BERTALANFFY, *GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY: FOUNDATIONS, DEVELOPMENT, APPLICATIONS* (1968).

<sup>50</sup> See W. ROSS ASHBY, *AN INTRODUCTION TO CYBERNETICS* (1956).

<sup>51</sup> See NIKLAS LUHMANN, *INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMS THEORY* (Dirk Baecker ed., Peter Gilgen trans., 2013).

“[w]hen we empathize with another human being, the other person takes on depth and substance, meaning and complexity, value and beauty beyond what we had seen previously and beyond what we had projected onto them.”<sup>52</sup> We viewed this as a hallmark of global education and civic leadership.

Students responded by attempting to universalize or exceptionalize police brutality in the United States as we asked them to consider how the conflagration in the U.S. might be perceived abroad. One student noted, “German’s [sic] have reacted to the current crisis in the United States by protesting in front of the U.S. Embassy. They all held up signs such as “Black Lives Matter,” “Justice for George Floyd,” and “I can’t breathe.” The values and views that drives these responses are similar to those found in the United States; that no person should be treated like that in police custody” (Student 2). Another student wrote “The protesters in the UK have torn down statues of figures that bring back memories of racial injustice such as Robert Milligan, a wealthy slave trader from London. This solidarity that started as a movement in the US has now been transferred to the UK and all around the world. Because the UK also experiences racism they also are grappling with their past and future as the protestors fight for a better world” (Student 3). On the other hand, “being a homogenous society has helped Japan tackle the coronavirus pandemic well, it has also left ill equipped to handle the BLM concerns as well. There were marches in Japan to decry the race problems they have in the country [but] it does little to change the systemic issues” (Student 11).

As we asked them to look deeper into the discourses surrounding police brutality in the U.S., students also began to react with a sense of discomfort, as they began to relate how they themselves, along with media and society around them, started to seem inadequate in their abilities to grapple with the extent of the changes enveloping American society. “Many people are stating that this economic crisis is even greater than the Great Depression and that this generation is at a greater disadvantage. Not only is this generation fighting an economic crisis but as well as a pandemic, compared to the Spanish flu, as well as another virus that is racisms [sic]. With racism, many are split with this, some believe that it is not real and that we are all created equally but that some people just do not act as diligently. Though if these people were to actually look at the outside world and see how the system is made, the education, police, living, government system is made and favors those who built it—white, heterosexual, males” (Student 10). “Economic recession is something that they [sic] US media does a bad job of covering because they are so busy trying to pinpoint a bad guy or bad actor that they miss the forest for the trees. They are doing a very divided job on the

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<sup>52</sup> See Suarez, *supra* note 23, at 180.

pandemic. They are focusing so much on how the pandemic is affecting us that they are forgetting to ask how we are dealing with it. Those two might seem similar in nature but they are very different. We are focusing on the closing of malls and how empty New York seems and we are not focusing on the important things like who we are leaving one of the world's leading health organizations because of political infighting. As far as the BLM protests it is a complete and utter sh\*\*tshow" (Student 11). "I would believe they would perceive America's history and our current affairs with horror. Generally, the police are regarded as polite and helpful in European countries, and as with much of the developed world, they are watching America unfold with wide eyes" (Student 23).

As these responses demonstrate, students initially approached these issues by applying the lenses of universalism and exceptionalism; upon deeper analysis, however, they began to waver in their application of these familiar perspectives. Gradually, we saw them start to reach beyond these markers and question and bring additional nuance into their perceptions of both America's place in the world as well as how others abroad might perceive the U.S. at this moment of multiple crises.

### *B. Norms, Laws, and Values*

We further built on these evolving perspectives in order to discuss the mechanisms of change in laws and norms, which, in turn, rely on social values that underlie the establishment and cohesion of the social fabric. We discussed the idea that catalyzing social change often occurs during "watershed" moments, where social pressure rises to a point where it boils over and spills past pre-existing barriers to create change that can transcend the boundaries of prior norms, of what was previously believed to be possible. We drew upon Finnemore and Sikkink's theories of the role of norms in creating change or "justice cascades" as well as the processes of change themselves.<sup>53</sup> We also discussed recent transformative social changes such as the "#MeToo" movement, where evolution of norms sparked legal and social change seemingly overnight, although they were actually built upon years-long efforts.<sup>54</sup>

The purpose was to show how a legal and political crisis has put into question many of the values and institutions that were considered the pillars of American democracy. To put these in perspective, students were asked to read two contrastive views on American values, one titled *Values Americans*

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<sup>53</sup> Martha Finnemore & Kathryn Sikkink, *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, 52 INT'L ORG. 887, 887-917 (1998).

<sup>54</sup> Catharine A. MacKinnon, *#MeToo Has Done What the Law Could Not*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 4, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/04/opinion/metoo-law-legal-system.html?>

*Live By*, by L. Robert Kohls (1984), and the other by Eula Biss in the piece titled *Is This Kansas*, which makes sharp observations about the Midwest and Iowa City in the aftermath of a tornado, comparing them to the media coverage of New Orleans in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina.

In order to develop a global perspective, we asked students to compare and contrast these values and responses to those that they were seeing play out in the U.S. at the moment: How do these reports compare to the reporting that you see about the current situation in the U.S. in the media of the country/region you are studying? What perceptions of the black community are provided in these reports? What perceptions of whites are provided? How do these compare to each other and to what Biss recounts from local and national media back in 2006?

Students' responses varied widely; some clung more strongly to their previous perceptions of the U.S. and its values, while others sought to transcend their previous conceptions. Student 2 reported, "after reading the excerpts on American values, I had the strongest feeling of love for this country I have had since the beginning of 2020. It made me feel proud to know we are trailblazers and these values, which I found to be extremely accurate American values, helped me realize how as Americans have accomplished so much as the heroic fighting seen in World War II, becoming a world superpower, and placing men on the moon. However, it also made me reflect on the current protests. These recent protests, and their responses, have displayed most, if not all of the values mentioned in the article. To narrow it down, I believe the U.S. values of change and equality have truly shown with the protestors, as well as the value of personal control over the environment, and openness. This is due to the protestors demanding changes to the police forces and wanting to be equal to their white counterparts. Those who have responded in opposition to the protest have also displayed several U.S. values through citing self-help, competition, and directness, openness, and honesty." Student 5 responded, "One value that I think has been exemplified by the response to the BLM protests is that of individualism. The American focus on individuals and their actions as theirs and theirs alone has hindered any meaningful discussion on systemic racism and systemic violence by police officers. Many Americans will condemn the actions of Derek Chauvin, or the hundreds of other officers brutalizing innocent civilians in the past few weeks. But, when discussing proposed solutions, many fall back on proposals that don't root out the systematic component. Banning chokeholds or requiring an officer announce they're going to shoot you merely seeks to correct individuals' behavior, and not the power structure behind the police." Student 11 stated, "when the author wrote that he could sum up most Americans with the values I felt insulted, as an American, because I thought of how unique we all were, but after reading them they all

felt very on the nose. When I watch these protests, I see the inherent hypocrisy in the United States how we love things like equality, action, change and self-help but when our fellow Americans are acting on these same values they are shunned and disrespected by the rest of the country.”

Students began questioning the universalism/exceptionalism binary and discussed how their thinking was evolving. Student 5 noted in comparing coverage of Katrina to the Floyd protests, “I think the most pertinent thing here is how when black people got food out of abandoned stores and homes during Katrina, they were seen as ‘looters and criminals.’ When whites did it, they were seen as “scavengers” who were merely trying to survive. When news casts these past few weeks showed riots, they’ve shown only blacks, who are “tearing down their own community.” When the news has shown peaceful protests, they make sure to show both blacks and whites together, to show the country what “unity can bring.” It seems pretty clear to me that what they’re showing is that they think blacks are dangerous unless there are white people around. Just as in New Orleans, many people are up in arms about the destruction of property, and they feel as if the loss of property is more immoral than the preventable loss of life.” Student 7 found similarities in the post-Katrina media narrative to the present day, noting the “reports documented ‘Is This Kansas’ tell a strikingly similar narrative to what I am currently seeing in America . . . the provided reading draws on the power of media and falsified information to demonstrate that the American people are quick to generalize and jump to incorrect conclusions in the wake of a disaster or tragedy.”

Students in the classroom and in their reflections began discussing both how their perceptions of the U.S. and the countries they were studying had become more nuanced and had begun reconsidering the narratives they were presented with from multiple directions. In these ways, we felt they were moving away from binaries and actively searching for deeper and dynamic insights, while also demonstrating greater comfort with the idea of moving away from clear-cut answers or perspectives. That is, they were moving closer to the “catalyz[ing] transformation at the personal, interpersonal, and action level”<sup>55</sup> of the study abroad experience that we were trying to replicate virtually.

### C. *Cultural Models and Cultural Shadows*

Social norms and values are also shaped and regenerated through *cultural models*, broadly defined as “structures of knowledge consisting of a

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<sup>55</sup> See Rodriguez, *supra* note 14, at 7.

core component and peripheral nodes.”<sup>56</sup> To bring this abstract notion home, we discussed a number of such models from different cultures around the globe: the samurai cultural model of honor, self-discipline, and sacrifice in Japan; the good soldier Švejk model of passive resistance and dumb insolence in the Bohemian culture, and, more relevantly, the Jim Crow model of African-Americans as “lazy, untrustworthy, dumb, and unworthy of integration,” as portrayed by Thomas Rice (1828) and others of his ilk. Our purpose in introducing these various cultural models was to show how they transcend their origins, shaping individual behaviors in contemporary societies—for instance, the commonly reported phenomena of suicide among politicians, businesspeople, and public figures in Japan and East Asia, or the revival of Jim Crow in Walt Disney productions such as *Dumbo* (dating to 1941).

Related to this is the notion of “cultural shadow,” defined by Rachel Remen in the following way:

Shadow is the wound that a culture inflicts on its people: a diminishing of the innate wholeness through a collective judgment or disapproval. Every culture diminishes wholeness in its own way. All people born into a culture find approval for certain aspects of their wholeness and suffer judgment for certain other aspects. It is only human to trade our wholeness for approval, and share in the collective wound. Some of us are more deeply wounded than others, but no one escapes.

Karen Rodriguez has identified the cultural shadow or flip side of the core American values of mastery, self-sufficiency and independence as isolation and alienation. She argues that the cultural shadow results from a devaluing of interdependence, and a distrust of things that cannot be controlled.<sup>57</sup>

To provide students with a comparative perspective, we asked them to identify a cultural model in the United States and one in the country/region they were studying, and to reflect on what these cultural models tell us about the values and potential responses to crisis in these countries. In particular, we asked them to reflect on how the values of mastery, self-sufficiency, and independence, which are considered to be key values of the American culture, were playing out in the U.S. response to the pandemic, how the

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<sup>56</sup> GIOVANNI BENNARDO & VICTOR C. DE MUNCK, *CULTURAL MODELS: GENESIS, METHODS, AND EXPERIENCES* (Oxford University Press 2013).

<sup>57</sup> Rodriguez, *supra* note 14, at 5.

cultural shadow of isolation and alienation was playing out, and if they could identify any additional values and cultural shadows that might be at work or changing during the pandemic.

In response, students came up with a variety of examples of what they considered to be cultural models in the U.S., some of them in an approving way: “An example of a cultural model in the United States is that of the blue-collared workers, such as construction laborers. In my mind, it is the men who helped build America in the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as they represent the hard-working classes of Americans who worked to achieve the American Dream, to provide for their families, and make the United States stand out against the rest of the world” (Student 2). The same student went on to say, “I see the values of mastery, self-sufficiency, and independence playing out in the United States’ response to the pandemic. In regard to mastery, I feel the United States is attempting to be in control of the testing and manufacturing for a vaccine for COVID-19, and ultimately wants to lead the way on research.” Another student highlighted “American patriotism” as a model, “most notably in recent years following 9/11. With American patriotism comes the values of pride, liberty, and togetherness. What I find unique about the enactment of American patriotism during COVID-19 is the complete breakdown in some of the values associated with American patriotism. On one hand, you have those who are putting forth unity and caring for one another first, whereas others are invoking some of those other values such as pride and freedom, which creates a large cleavage in how this crisis is being approached by Americans” (Student 4). And yet another student went all the way back to the American revolution in search of a model: “One cultural model in the United States that has been the American revolution. We pride ourselves on our federal system, contrary to the unitary system of many European countries. We pride ourselves on the ‘checks and balances’ we’ve created. This, of course, has influenced how our government could respond to the outbreak. I don’t think the U.S. *could* have responded any differently than making our pandemic plan state-by-state. If they had tried anything else, there would be more political turmoil than there is now” (Student 5).

Some other students held a more critical perspective. “The United States is an isolationist nation full of isolationist people. They are independent and proud people who are almost defiant to the idea of being pulled into a group or working collectively. This also shows in the way it has been reacting to the pandemic.” (Student 11). “I believe that values of independence, mastery, and self-sufficiency are very toxic things in terms of the US response to the pandemic. From them I believe that complacency and egoism also form, which lead people to be very confident, even if it’s in the wrong mindset or approach. Specifically for independence, a lot of people have been

valuing their own independence and freedom over the health of the collective, and believe that they shouldn't have to be required to practice good hygiene "because it's not in the constitution." This in turn places a whole new demographic of people in danger of falling in and increases the hostility between those practicing our states recommendation and the people who do not want to because of their values of independence. I think a lot of these values can be positive if practiced right, however, I believe a lot of them have been taken to the extreme during these trying times." (Student 44).

As is evident from these responses, different students came up with different types of cultural models, depending on which side of the universalist-exceptionalist spectrum appealed to them. Again, however, they demonstrated both a desire and ability to begin interrogating their preconceptions as well as the narratives they encountered in their research, again moving closer to the experience of catalyzing change we aimed to create.

## V. CONCLUSION

The need for pedagogically sound and innovative global education that draws upon, and prepares students for, addressing global crises in remote settings is only increasing. We sought to meet this need in a rather experimental fashion, inventing our way forward as the situation developed in real time. In the process, we were also coping with the situation ourselves, learning from it at the same time. We would like here to summarize the "lessons" that we learned throughout the process.

First, we saw the depth and ubiquity of the tension between universalism and exceptionalism in the American psyche, noting that it is very much at play among our students and even in individual student minds. The majority of students in our program can be safely described as culturally sensitive and racially aware, but this doesn't inoculate them against the tension that they experience everyday as members of the American society. Having been raised in a social system and a cultural environment that reproduces this tension, our students, like any other American, find themselves torn apart in dealing with it.

Second, and at a more abstract level, this very fact speaks to the enduring influence of cultural models in human societies. The influence manifests itself in commonplace perceptions, biases, and stereotypes such as we have seen in the case of the "'new' Jim Crow"<sup>58</sup> but it also appears as a second-order phenomenon in how people seek to encounter those biases and

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<sup>58</sup> See MICHELLE ALEXANDER, *THE NEW JIM CROW: MASS INCARCERATION IN THE AGE OF COLORBLINDNESS* (2010).

perceptions, once they have discovered them. That is how a large number of people might feel helpless in removing themselves from the context of their social life.

Third, these second-order effects might be even further amplified in our encounters with other peoples and cultures. The veils of “foreignness” and “otherness” add an extra layer of abstraction that cannot be easily removed despite our best intentions and efforts. This is the essence of Holmberg’s fallacy, as well as the substance of the critiques of Ruth Benedict, and the insights of critical perspectives on feminist legal theory. In facing these barriers, however, our best bet is to draw on our own experiences, cultivate empathy, and to put our analogical capacities to work in understanding the predicaments of others. As instructors who had ourselves experienced “othering” while in our American homes due to race, religion and other factors, we count ourselves as among the “teacher educators who promote multiculturalism and global education” in part due to the fact that our “most influential experiences were encounters with discrimination and outsider status.”<sup>59</sup> While our students came from a range of backgrounds, some had direct experience of discrimination while many others did not. The pandemic prevented our students from experiencing “living outside one’s country . . . ‘the lived experience that middle-class white teacher educators cite as turning points towards multicultural and global education,’”<sup>60</sup> but we sought to seize the moment of transformation we all found ourselves in to attempt to create an experiential learning environment that would enable students to engage in a similar process of empathetic awareness. As the students’ responses show, they were able to increasingly empathize both with the people of the countries they studied while also exhibiting greater empathy towards their neighbors and communities, at least during this moment of crisis and transformation.

This approach of analogizing and seeking greater empathy was the experiential approach to travel while staying in place that we adopted in teaching this course. While experimental and even *ad hoc* at some points—what else could it have been?—our methods and practices have the potential to contribute to pedagogy in a variety of situations, from increasing educational opportunities for students unable to travel to increasing the range of international experiential education tools students and educators can draw upon in times of crisis. Adding the layer of sharing our experiences of the COVID-19 care crisis also helped us bridge the gulfs created by virtual learning and technology and, we hope, helped humanize the experience for all of us. We hope to expand and develop these methods in future iterations of the same course or in developing other similar courses. In fact, we found

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<sup>59</sup> See Suarez, *supra* note 23, at 180.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*

this experience useful in creating and teaching another course on Black Lives Matter as a Global Movement, where we sought to introduce the global and historical origins of racism. We intend to share our findings from that course in future writing.

Analogizing can be also done more systematically—for instance, in comparing structural change and deep-rooted social issues across cultures and societies. Racism, for instance, can manifest itself differently in different places. In the U.S., where the historical origins of racism go back to slavery and plantations, racism manifests itself in the form of discriminatory practices such as housing, policing, education, lending, social benefits, and so forth. By the same token, structural change in the U.S. should take forms that resist and replace such practices—as we have seen in the case of the civil rights and Black Lives Matter movements. Racism, however, can take different other forms in other societies, sometimes more subtle and sometimes less so. A case in point is the implementation of COVID-driven travel restrictions by various governments. The Australian government, for instance, recently banned certain groups of its own citizens with origins in India and China from returning home, while allowing those with European origins to travel back through a process of enforced quarantine<sup>61</sup>—an explicit act of discrimination in the wake of a global pandemic. Structural change and resistance against this kind of behavior, should it take place, would likely take a different form from what we have seen in the U.S.

Lastly, our own experience of “otherness” might have facilitated our conversations on these topics for some students, but certainly not for all of them. In fact, in certain cases it might have created a barrier. Empathy can serve as a mechanism for getting attention, and it can go only that far. The real challenge is to go beyond attention to persuasion and action, and for that we need vehicles beyond empathy.

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<sup>61</sup> Damien Cave & Livia Albeck-Ripka, ‘Do Not Come Home,’ *Australia Tells its Citizens in India*, N.Y. TIMES (May 3, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/03/world/australia/covid-india-travel-ban.html>.