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## **Eduscape: Comparative and Ethnographic Education Research**

Styding youth and education across context

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*Publication date:*  
2006

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Madsen, U. A. (2006). *Eduscape: Comparative and Ethnographic Education Research: Styding youth and education across context*. Paper presented at Oxford Ethnography and Education Conference, Oxford, United Kingdom.

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# Eduscape. A challenge for ethnographic and comparative education research?

*A Casestudy across secondary schools in Lusaka, Recife and Hanoi*

ULLA AMBROSIUS MADSEN

## Introduction

Globalisation creates increased interconnectedness across the world - politically, economically and culturally. Building on predominantly cultural theories on globalisation, this article investigates how deterritorialisation and transformation of space and place challenges the way we *understand* and *study* education across national, cultural and social boundaries.<sup>1</sup> How does globalisation and deterritorialisation affect ethnographic, comparative studies of school and education? Taking point of departure in the notion of 'scape' as introduced by Appadurai (1996) I argue for the term eduscape as an analytical concept that transcends the national boundaries for education and connects the studies of schooling across site. Drawing on examples from a cross-disciplinary, cross-national and cross-institutional project entitled Youth and the City – skills, knowledge and social reproduction, which that includes studies of youth in secondary schools in Recife, Lusaka and Hanoi, I am interested in developing a framework that provides an approach to investigating the dialectics between global policies on education and local interpretations of the meanings of school, focusing on youth. The article moves between theoretical and methodological discussions and empirical examples and I begin with a short introduction to the site – education reforms in Brazil, Zambia and Vietnam.

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to my colleague Stephen Carney for our discussions on comparative research, globalization and the idea of eduscape and for his comments on this article.

## **Democratic reforms and education policy across national context**

Brazil, Zambia and Vietnam are nation states that have undergone fundamental processes of social and political transformation over the past twenty years. The military regime fell in the mid 1980' in Brazil; the socialist state of Zambia dissolved after multi-party elections in 1991; and in Vietnam, the economic reforms and the opening up of the market during the 1980s brought about fundamental changes in a hitherto relatively closed society. In all three nations education reforms have been implemented during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in all cases initiatives have been taken to increase enrollment and improve quality of education in the aftermath of the declaration of Education for All in 1991.

*Vietnam* has achieved remarkable results in education in terms of enrolment, dropout rates, and literacy not least due to the socialist policy that has been practiced in the North since the 1950's. (and in the South since the 1970's). Vietnam started the economic reform process known as *doi moi* in the 80's and the nation's reaction to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 was a rejection of pluralism, multiparty system, and opposition parties and hence the country has maintained a communist structure alongside the opening up of the market. Whilst the government still exercises tight control over social and political developments in the country, comprehensive reforms nevertheless have been implemented in the education sector with the support of donors, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. *Doi moi* - described as 'renovation' - is defined as a "... shift from meeting the needs of a subsidized, centrally planned economy to meeting the needs of a multi-sector, state-managed., socialist-oriented market-economy.... (Ministry of Education and Training, 1995:14). In education and schooling the reforms materialize as a shift in pedagogical orientations: "To prepare young people for the "learning society" of tomorrow, education needs to teach them how to learn, how to solve problems and how to unite new knowledge with that passed down from previous generations." (Dieu: 2003). Typical of the rhetoric applied to the Vietnamese

reform is the efforts to balance between the old educational culture with references to ‘previous generations’ and ‘socialist orientations’ and the policy of *doi moi* with a focus on ‘market-economy, learning-society and problem-solving.

The demand for educational reforms in Brazil started in the late 1970s as a critique of the military regime, emphasizing problems of low enrolment, a lack of attendance, inequality, and racism. It has been claimed (Gomes and Capanema 2001) that Brazil has neglected education throughout its history and that schooling reflects an unequal system of social stratification by marginalizing black pupils and students from the lower social classes. (Pare 2004; Sherif 2001). The new school organization is based on democracy and autonomy and that represents a significant break with the highly centralized organization of the education system. Participation is a key word the democratic the reform, and attempts to decentralize education have been followed by new directions for pedagogical innovation and change, with an emphasis on cross-curricular themes, the values inherent in ethics, the environment, cultural pluralism, health and sex education, work, and consumption. The “national parameters” for secondary education further emphasize the need of a shift in the competencies required for democratic citizenship, from “discipline, obedience, strict compliance with rules” to “the development of system-based thinking...creativity, curiosity, the ability to think multiple alternatives to a given problem...the willingness to seek and accept criticism, the willingness to take risks, the development of critical thinking” (Ministry of Education 2000:8). The school reform in Brazil addresses organizational as well as pedagogical dimensions, aiming at developing organizational autonomy and a pedagogy that supports critical thinking.

*Zambia* is the poorest of the nations in this study and a classical example of a 3<sup>rd</sup> World country. Historically, formal education in Zambia has been linked to British colonialism dating from the late 1880s and efforts to control black citizens. At independence in 1964, Zambia had a large illiterate population (Serpell 1993). Kaunda launched the ideas of humanist socialism

and UNIP saw education as the key to social transformation and hence invested rather substantially in the education sector. In 1991, elections led to a multi-party political system and a political realignment to the West after years of one-party rule and a command economy. Structural adjustment, liberalization, and privatization shaped public policy throughout the 1990s. In the wake of the declarations on Education for All from Jomtien, a National Conference of Education for All was held in Zambia in 1991. The result was a new policy focusing on three key areas: quality, access, and management. A fourth concern related to teaching processes, with a shift in pedagogy towards “learning” and the “child” (Carmody 2004, Boesen 2000). At current, school curricula are being re-written to emphasise the learner, and local communities are being encouraged to take over the management of schools to promote a sense of individual responsibility and ownership that might counter the perceived failure of the state.

Despite huge differences in history, cultural background, political and economical conditions the education reforms that are being implemented in the three countries have some significant similarities. First, the rhetoric that relates to values and aims of education draw on concepts and ideas that emphasise ‘the individual’ and pedagogical methods like child-centred teaching, project work and participatory learning. Second, current education reforms equally build on neo-liberal ideologies pointing at strengthening management and leadership on the one hand and decentralizing responsibility to the local communities on the other. This article deals with questions of how to understand and study the educational landscapes that emerge across national contexts through globalization and the spread of democratic education reforms. Below, I present vignettes to support the ethnographic exploration of how young people construct meanings of school and education. First, I turn towards Apparudai’s theory on global flow, since the idea of scapes enables us to understand globalization as the interconnectedness of education across boundaries.

## **Eduscape – understanding educational landscapes across context.**

Appadurai suggests five dimensions of global cultural flows that he terms ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, financescape and ideoscape (Appadurai 1996:33). With the suffix –scape, Appadurai points to the fluid and irregular shapes of these landscapes, as he calls them, which are not objectively given but perspectival constructs that are contextual and inflected by the political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, subnational groupings and movements and with the individual actor “...as the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes...”(op.cit.). Appadurai sees these landscapes as building blocks of imagined worlds that are constituted by imaginations of persons and groups spread around the world. Emphasising that imagination is no longer “fantasy”, “simple escape”, “mere contemplation”, or “elite pastime” (op.cit: 31) but social practice as work and negotiation of meanings and order, Appadurai points to what he sees as something critical and new in the global cultural processes: The new is that an increasing number of people in still more parts of the world have access to considering a wider set of lives. In the study I will refer to below the focus has been on how participation in school influence young people’s views of their current and future lives.

Particularly relevant to the field of education is Appadurai’s notion of ideoscape. Ideoscapes are connected to ideologies and counterideologies of the state and are according to Appadurai constituted by ideas of the Enlightenment i.e. freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation where democracy is the masterterm, “...with powerful echoes from Haiti and Poland to the former Soviet Union and China...” (op.cit: 36-37). Ideoscape is a useful term, since it can be used to trace down how a certain discourse on democracy and education spreads through international declarations and aid programmes. Can we understand contemporary education reforms as scapes, connected to ideoscapes and which expose certain ideas that historically are linked to the Enlightenment? In his analysis of the education reform in Botswana, Tabulawa (2003) argues that education increasingly after the fall of the Berlin Wall has got a central role in democratisation processes and he shows how international political declarations as well as national policies

are marked by a discourse of pedagogy, teaching and learning that can be traced back to Jacque Rousseau and the French Enlightenment: Learner-centred education, child-centred teaching, participatory, democratic, inquiry-based and discovery methods. (op.cit:9). Whilst Tabulawa's focus is on how ideas and values from the Western Enlightenment spread with globalisation, Burbules and Torres (2000) investigate how new policies and steering-strategies with particular demands for evaluation, financing, assessment, standards, teacher training, curriculum, instruction, and testing set a global agenda for schools to respond to and implement neoliberal education reforms (op.cit:15). Hence, we have identified two characteristic features for the current education reforms that spread around the world: One is the enlightenment-concepts and another is the neoliberal policies and management technologies they embark on.

Following Appadurai's emphasis that imaginations are agency-based, ideoscapes can not be understood as made solely of ideologies and political technologies but equally of individual responses and interpretations of these ideas and practices. Drawing on recent contributions in educational anthropology (Levinson 1996, 2001) and in the anthropology of globalisation (Lewellen 2000, Tomlinson) I suggest that the complex connections between globalisation, education and schooling be studied as children's and young people's adaptation to, interpretation of and resistance against the education project as they experience it through everyday schooling at a local level.

Rather than applying the more general concepts of ideoscape to explore the interaction between globalisation and education, I suggest the term *eduscape*, which is directed more specifically towards meanings of school and education. In doing so I maintain the two dimensions – the *structural* with a focus on ideologies and policies and an *experiential, agency-based* with a focus on interpretations, adaptations and resistance: An eduscape is constituted by the ideological visions and political structures that *take place* in local schools as the daily administration of time, activity and place, the practices of teaching and learning in classrooms, the construction of social relations and of agents' (i.e. teachers' parents' children and young people's) imaginations of the optional

worlds that are seen as consequences of schooling. Eduscape is a critical concept since it exposes potential contradictions and conflicts between the modern policies, practices and ideologies of education and local cultural values and norms for how to bring up and teach children and young people in cultural and social contexts different to the ones we find in non-Western settings.

The idea of eduscape provides an understanding of educational phenomena and the increased interconnectedness that follow from globalisation. Below, I shall discuss optional ways of studying and approaching the eduscape.

### **Ethnographic and comparative studies of schooling**

I argue in this section that eduscapes be studied through ethnographic and comparative education research. Referring back to the definition of eduscape above, we need a methodology that explores how ideologies and policies take place in schools through young people's interpretation of the meaning of school - 'meanings in places and meanings of places'. That points towards ethnography and comparison or to put it more adequately: ethnographic comparisons.

There is a long tradition for ethnographic studies in education and for comparative education, but only few contributions cut across ethnography and comparative studies in investigating educational phenomena. (For an exception see Alexander, Anderson-Lewitt). Whilst ethnographic educational studies have roots partly in phenomenological and humanistic orientations (Hammersley & Atkinson, van Maanen), partly in critical theory (Willis, Lather) more recent anthropological studies of education and schooling aim at investigating 'the cultural production of the educated person'.

Comparative education develops originally out of a positivist and functionalist approach to education aiming at understanding factors that determine academic achievement with the purpose of developing models for transfer of educational systems from one context to the other. (Crossley &



Watson). Several contributions have challenged the positivist understanding on research and the belief in value free social enquiry, where fact and knowledge are seen as the basis of progress and social development and separated from values that are not considered important or of any relevance for the researcher: The classical methodological dispute with positivism on assumptions of value free knowledge and objectivity (Brewer 2000, Willis 2000), the post-modern questions of the representativity and legitimacy (Marcus 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997) and postcolonial focus on embedded constructions of dichotomies, hegemony, superiority and “triumph of the West” (Escobar 1995; Welch 1999) in the discourses made of non-western cultures. In line with globalisation theories and Appadurai’s claim that deterritorialisation changes the order of the world and the conditions for studying it scholars from across disciplines and research traditions respond to these new changes. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) analyse the dissolution of the classical ethnographic site. Rather than rejecting ethnography they take the consequences of recent development and claim: “Instead of a royal road to holistic knowledge of “another society”, ethnography is beginning to become recognizable as a flexible and opportunistic strategy for diversifying and making more complex our understanding of various places, people, and predicaments through and attentiveness to the different forms of knowledge available from different social and political locations. “(1997: 37). I am inspired by this endeavour to make understandings of places and people more complex, and that has consequences for comparison. Since nation states do not function independently in decisions made on education and since no stable, fixed places exist for educational institutions, a crucial question for comparative education is then: What to compare? Inspired by scholars who have critiqued comparative education for its functionalist foundation and based on an interest to study ‘context’ I see comparative education as a discipline that is directed towards analysing the dialectic between global policies and local responses and interpretations. In doing so, comparative education perversely focuses on differences rather than on what previously was considered of

importance – similarities. In the present study, I establish what I want to call a triadic site between the three places where data and knowledge is produced in dialectic relations. This triadic site is a consequence of working with edsuscape: Since schools are no longer connected and bounded to nation states but connected across national and cultural boundaries the investigation of eduscape must necessarily transcend ‘the national’. The triadic site is the space that I construct across Brazil, Zambia and Vietnam and it consists of secondary schools in Recife, Lusaka and Hanoi. At core for the comparison is meanings young people construct about going to school - between local realities and global projects. Rather than parallel descriptions from the site, such methodological approach calls for contrasting analysis of the ethnographic school narratives. I claim, that our understaining of the meaning of school as it is constructed by young people in Recife is made more complex and hence rich through studies of how young people construct meanings of school and education in the Lusaka and Hanoi – and vice versa.

Studying differences and context and how that responds to global policies creates heterogeneous data. I have interviewed teachers, parents and students about school and education and asked them about events that I observed in everyday life. My efforts have been to map out what can be considered as essential pieces of the educational landscape that young people visit – in the three cities and as I will show below that differs and takes different forms across context..

### **Site, access and fieldwork**

One month was set aside for fieldwork in each of the sites in Recife, Lusaka and Hanoi where I decided to focus on secondary schools.

*Helena Pugo* is located close to a settlement area in the outskirts of Recife. The school yard is surrounded by walls and students, teachers and visitors will pass a gate where guardians control the people who are entering – for drugs and guns. Killings and violence caused by drugs and

narcotics are a huge problem in Brazil and in particular for young people. Locked gates mark the different sections on the school ground and nobody can pass these gates without calling a person who will unlock the gate – everything for the sake of security. Opposite to the school there is a café where young people who have got nothing else to do hang out listening to music, playing cards drinking and smoking. The place attracts students from Helena Pugo when they feel bored or not able to manage school. I was allowed to do whatever I wanted as long as I just communicated my ideas and my findings to the leadership. During my stay at the school I registered what appears as an immediate relaxed atmosphere between teachers and students. The students walked in and out of the classrooms sometimes without asking for permission and in order to take a break, chat with other students, smoke a cigarette or go to the toilette. Inside the classroom the tone between teachers and students was remarkably informal also when about academic issues. While some students prospered in such environment others found it exclusive and difficult to deal with since only those who were able to master the tone and the informality attracted attention from the teachers and other students.

In Lusaka fieldwork was carried out at *Munali Secondary School* located in the outskirts of the city. Munali Secondary School was first established in 1929. Counting a number of prominent citizens as students at the school including the former president Kenneth Kaunda, Munali is still widely known and respected as an outstanding educational institution in the Zambian society. However, huge cuts in education have marked the school buildings, the teaching equipment and materials available significantly. What previously has been well equipped laboratories and classes now appear in very poor condition and are almost out of function with broken doors and windows, damages blackboards, chairs and tables. Like in Helena Pugo I was also at Munali School allowed access to students, classrooms, teachers etc and no one demanded from me I informed about my whereabouts. This free and open access had, so I felt, a touch of cynicism. I could not escape the

feeling that in this place the situation was so depraved and with only little hope left that almost nothing mattered anymore or that any initiative including my presence only could be for the better. However, it gave me the opportunity of wandering around at random and I could be sure to find groups of students who hang around in the classroom with no teacher.

A big banner marks the entrance to *Mai Ninh Secondary School* in Hanoi with the following statement which exposes the tight connections between the political system and education: Students of Mai Ninh: Be Obedient, Study Well, Behave, Be Civilised, Be Polite. *Follow Uncle Ho's Teaching for DunBien Young Patriots, Study well, train well and together become Youth Union Members.*

Whilst access to classrooms was not a problem neither in Brazil nor in Zambia it turned out to be a major issue in Vietnam – a problem connected to the political character of education and schooling in the country. It was almost impossible for me get inside school and classrooms and with no doubt, this can to a large extend be explained as problems related to language, time management and planning. Comparing issues of access across the three locations and following the constructions and meanings of youth through the different channels that I had to use in order to get the permissions to talk with teachers and student, I argue that there is more to it than just language, planning and time. In Hanoi I found what I call a particular appointment system that mirrors a social hierarchy where youth is defined and controlled by adult people holding key-positions in the society – parents, teachers, politicians. Whilst I faced difficulties accessing young people inside the system I could easily get into contact with them in the community or in the streets. Despite the poor conditions for conducting fieldwork I nevertheless got a chance to observe elements of a school-culture that appears different from the schools in Recife and Lusaka. There were no problems with teachers' attendance and the tone between students and teachers was highly

formal and with strict discipline and clear guidelines for both teachers and students of how to perform in the class. I never saw students on their own – hanging around on the campus.

Working ethnographically with a focus on how subjects construct meaning of school between the local conditions and the global rhetoric implies sensitivity and an interest to grasp what he/she considers at stake in the various places. In the example I have constructed and will present below I illustrate how the meaning of school and education for young people across Recife, Lusaka and Hanoi can be traced through different paths in the educational landscape across site. I pick themes and topics that are unequal and connected to different situations and events in everyday schooling – classroom practices, parents' meeting, breaks - and finally tie the stories together through the interpretations young people make of the meaning of school.

### **Helena Pugo: Pretending education**

I saw Anna hanging out with a group of boys in the café during school hours and that was an almost trivial confirmation of what everybody had thought for a long time - that she would not make it after all. Located opposite to the school the café is a meeting point for local youth, for those who have dropped out of school and for those who leave the classes because they prefer to be together with their friends. Anna is a girl of 17. She is the only black student in grade 10 – a clear sign that the state's policy to include and spread schools to all levels of the society and all ethnic groups has failed. The teachers talk about her as an exceptionally smart student who has always scored good marks in tests and exams. She lives in a favela close to the school and comes from a poor family background. The father is an alcoholic and does not contribute financially to the family. The mother has had a cleaning job in a bar but recently lost her job. Since the two brothers are unemployed, both staying at home and one with his wife who is pregnant, Anna had to look for employment. She got a job in a local shop, which also functions as a bar. I went and saw her at work and she was

clearly popular among the guests - middleaged and unemployed men. "I know it will be difficult to manage, but we need the money at home so I have to, but if I just work hard and so my homework in the night or early morning I will make it. I just will have to make sure I do not get any bad friends." That was how she explained that she would try to do the impossible – manage education and work in a culture where black women face extreme difficulties because of suppression and exclusion. She saw me when I passed by the café and tried to hide behind her friends.

"Children's place is in schools" is a political slogan that has been used to signal the aim of the democratic school reforms in Brazil making efforts to open the school for students from all levels of the society. Both students and teachers mentioned over and again problems related to practicing democracy in schools. Many teachers were educated under the previous regime where there was no room for questioning, criticism or alternative ways of thinking. The culture of bringing up and teaching was highly authoritarian and hence they are insecure of how to teach and establish a learning environment based on democratic values, a term that they find hard to define. In everyday schooling it often became synonymous to liberal orientations and lack of discipline, which made it almost impossible for teachers to teach and students to learn: "It is very difficult to work without having discipline. You do not learn well without discipline. And that was well done by the authoritarian school, they just knew how to do it", a young female teachers told. This uncertainty in how to understand and handle new pedagogical orientations also marked classroom practices. In most of the teaching I observed, students had a rather relaxed attitude towards the teaching and the teacher. It was not unusual to see students sitting on the chairs with their legs on the table, talking to each other and laughing during the teaching and even leaving the room without asking the teacher about permission if they had to go to the toilet or just wanted to get out for a while. When Anna was still at school she always tried hard to concentrate but was at risk for being bullied if she appeared too much interested compared to the rest of the class. Sometimes the teacher objected

against the students' behavior and sometimes they just ignored it, not wanting to fight with the students about their rights. Some teachers told that increasingly over the last years it had become a problem that the students or their friends and relatives would threaten teachers if they had not behaved with what was considered proper respect or given bad marks. Such threats, a teachers told me "...can be deadly if you ignore them." Thus, caught on an edge between professional requirements to their teaching, interests in supporting a democratic development in the society and students claim about their rights a teacher identified the problem for the Brazilian school as problems to finding an identity: "It is a liberal school, but whenever it feels threatened it is highly repressive. The liberal school is also lost because it does not have good results....So the school is looking for its identity. What does it want? What can it be?"

Students equally expressed confusion and insecurity about educational project they participate in. They were fully aware, that the students who come from the private schools and from better off families are favored in education and employment – partly because they have better conditions for studying and working, partly because they have better connections. Hence, questions of legitimacy in the education project spread among the students who struggle to find a meaning in going to school. Marco expressed it the following way "What is the use of going to school? Even if we get better teachers, better materials, better schools, it would not change the living conditions of young people in this country. We are suppressed by powers that we cannot control: unemployment, violence, inequality, poverty. So what is the use of learning? I think students in schools understand the problems better, they can see what is happening today: government pretends it is paying the teachers; teachers pretend they are teaching; students pretend they are learning."

### **Munali Secondary school: Nobody's own one**

A group of boys who were sitting in a classroom waiting for a teacher who did not come returned my question about their opinion of education back to me in the following ways: "Education, ma'm. What are you actually talking about? Look around. Is that how education look like in your country? Can't you see, mam?" They were right. We were in a classroom with no chairs, no textbooks, no teacher. The ceiling was broken, the windows smashed and the door could not close and these students were taught themes that were without any relevance to them. Like lectures about how to invest the money in the bank when planning a private business; fatness and overeating among teenagers in the States in the fifties. In sharp contrast, these young people were given one meal a day – if at all and would never be brought in a situation where they would have to consider what to do with any money.

"To get a job, it takes somebody you know. Otherwise forget about everything. Poverty means that everybody is fighting for their own ones. But me...look at me...I am nobody's one, I don't have a chance...that's life. Too sad ma'm." Like the vast majority of students, Joseph was struggling hard to manage education coming from a poor family with no sources to finance any cost for education, be it books, pens notebooks. He had to walk 1 hour and 30 minutes to the school since the family could not afford a bus ticket and he did not bring money for food or lunch and had not got breakfast before leaving the home in the morning. Nevertheless, these young boys kept on coming to school hoping that one way or the other it would improve the situation for their families and be an alternative to a future that otherwise would look rather dark. Unemployment, nepotism and lack of education opportunities leave these students with few chances and in addition the spread of HIV/AIDS provides life expectancy that has decreased to 32 years.

'Open Day' is held once a year on Munali Secondary School where parents and students are invited to pick up the reports about the students' progress and talk to the teachers. The



attendance of parents, grandparents or guardians on that day provided a clear indication of the living conditions of the young students. In a number of cases, it was not their parents but their brothers, uncles, cousins or even grandparents who picked up their reports. Some students did not have anybody to pick them up either because there was nobody to care about their education, or because their parents did not feel like wasting a whole day and a bus ticket to come to an event they had lost all faith in. Those who came despite their skepticism reacted in anger and frustration at seeing their efforts wasted or at the thought that they had come for nothing, as a number of teachers had not managed to finish their reports in time, instead leaving parents with the message, “You can come on Monday.” During the school year teachers are supposed to keep records of the students noting attendance, academic achievement and progress. Many teachers had however not done their duties in time and I was present in the staff room just before the meeting was to be held and observed how teachers who had not been regular themselves and not checked students’ attendance were busy putting crosses and marks for a whole semester based on pure guesswork. A mother got quite upset with the evaluation of her sons’ performances in English. “I know that he has worked hard and made his homework although we can not do much to help him. These poor children have a right to education. It is their right...and you do not care about that. You only care about yourselves. I will be reporting this to human rights organization.” Then she left, upset and in tears.

Zambian teachers are just like their colleagues in Brazil - equally facing decline in their social status and economical status. And the attitudes that follow are, as we saw it in Helena Pugo, irregular attendance and a lot of other commitments in order for them to make a living. A teacher added that on top of poverty, unemployment and problems related to HIV/AIDS the spread of mass media and the Americanization of young people’s worldviews and values make them run after something that they will never reach, something that will make them just even more homeless. “They are trapped – between the images of America and the realities of Africa, only a drop of

students graduating every year will get a seat in the university and it is very difficult, almost impossible for them to find a job”

### **Mai Ninh: Schooled patriots**

“Maybe you noticed when you watched us exercising in the break but I do not move my body very much. I do not like it. I prefer to talk with my friends and not to do the exercise. But we have to, they control that we follow the instructions. But I do not like it, I just move my body a little.” I had made an appointment to meet Chien at a café one afternoon after school. She referred to the activities that she had seen me observe shortly during the lunch break. The students gather in long rows and move their body following the instructions that a teacher shouts out loudly in a microphone making sure that everybody can hear. I would have liked to watch this exercise throughout the break but was told that it was not important although I insisted on the opposite and hence I was shown into the headmaster’s room where I waited for a teacher to come. Chien was not a member of the Youth Union and the only person we met who was critical of the political realities in the country although she clearly did not say much and I did not want to force questions through that she might not feel comfortable to answer. “School is supposed to help us become good patriots, to serve the country and the communist party. Young people in Vietnam have to work hard, study hard to meet all the expectations. We can see in the internet and in the media that young people are more independent in the world, than we are. We depend on our parents...we have a traditional society. And that is also so in the school. We cannot change that. Maybe those who set up their own business can. In my country you cannot be independent. In my opinion school should give the basic knowledge to enter life and then students should orient themselves. But it does not work in Vietnam. We depend on our family. I would like to study abroad and to learn about the world. Then I would like to come back and help my country to develop”.

There is a close connection between the political leadership in Vietnam, the Communist Party and education. This is visible the school where statues of Ho Chi Minh, the founder of the Communist Party back in 1931, pictures of the history of the Communist Party and scripts expressing political paroles and moral messages mark the educational space. Over the years, the party has recruited new members to the Youth Union especially through school and educational institutions. Whilst the party faces difficulties recruiting new members membership nevertheless still is strictly controlled, based on students' performance in schools, their behaviour and social background. The students we met were appointed by the local leadership and since issues related to the Party can be sensitive to touch in a conversation with a foreigner it was difficult to get any critical reflection on the Youth Union and the political situation in the country in general except .

Over and again students expressed concern about getting good marks, managing the exams well in order to improve their chances in the future. And a good future is depending on success in school – that will strengthens young people's position in the political bodies - Youth Union – and that is necessary for their future. The tight relations between education and the political system manifest in the role and position of the class monitor. The class monitor is a member of the youth union and she is responsible for guiding and checking her class mates are on the right way – acting according to the political rules in terms of behaviour, attitudes, work-ethics etc. Bad behaviour will be reported to the Youth Union and that will affect badly on their future positions in the communist party and thus on their chances to improve their professional career. The socalled social evils are feared among the students we met. They are afraid they will meet young other young people who will bring them on a wrong path. However, according to the classmonitor we met at Mai Ninh school and education will protect children and young people fromn the social evils since the learn how to follow the right path: "School is important for us. We get good education, The teachersteach the topics that we need in our future and also we learn how to behave properly so that we can

support our fatherland and become good patriots. We work hard. But also our parents and grandparents devoted their life to the fatherland and many died in the American so we show respect to the history and all that we learn in the school and in the Youth Union. If you are a good students you can become a member of the Youth Union and then you are on the right path. That is important“

## **Conclusion**

Young people across the three cities participate in an educational project that appears almost similar both in terms of pedagogy, ideologies and policies. Although similar to some extend, the interpretations and responses to the global project also differs across the schools. Shaped by an authoritarian past that not least parents, grandparents and teachers carry along and conditioned by poverty, social segregation and inequality, young people struggle understand the meaning behind the democratic reforms in the Brazilian school, claiming that it all just is pretension. In Helena Pugo schooling is practiced in what appears to be a relatively relaxed and friendly atmosphere where students make use of their rights to education deciding how and if at all they want to participate. In Lusaka students get very little support from both from parents and families and teachers. Extreme poverty, severe cuttings and a subsequent devastation of the school leaves the students at Munali School with no support that can guide them in the education system or on the labour market. Belonging to lower middleclass the vast majority has no connections to people in key-positions and hence they are left with no opportunities. The Hanoian example is different. Here we find an education system that functions, committed teachers and students who can see that education matters and makes a difference for their future careers. Shaped by political ideologies about the Party and the individual people's duties to serve the fatherland, the students find meaning in school since it guides them on the right path towards patriotism and away from social evils, created by the

changes in the society. Across the schools, students claim that education is important for their future a statement that appears somehow paradoxical facing contemporary state of the schooling in Recife and Lusaka (Hanoi is an exception here) and the hardship these young people and their families have to wear in order to manage the various requirements. As suggested elsewhere (Carney and Madsen) I understand this as young people's dependency on what we call the 'promise of schooling'. As long as they go to school they keep a position in which they are not solely subjected poverty and the immediate needs in everyday life.

Another interesting observation is that young people across the sites use the school as a frame for critiquing power, the social reality and their living conditions. Here, the enlightenment-concepts that are introduced by nation states in their efforts to legitimise power and create citizenship are used against the same structures they were supposed to reproduce and develop. In Helena Pugo through the critique that openness and inclusion is an empty concept as long as black students from different ethnic backgrounds can not make it through the education system; in Munali Secondary School through addressing nepotism and poverty as factors that determine young people's future and positions in the society; and in Hanoi through the resistance against a politicised education space doubting that reforms will ever be possible in an authoritarian society.

The study has been physically anchored in local schools that are connected through their participation in the global education reform. At core of the study has been how young people practice, negotiate and construct the meaning of school between local realities and global projects – irrespective of their national citizenship. The question remains whether the concepts of eduscape has created a new way of studying globalisation and education. I argued in a previous section that we study education and schooling in the interconnectedness since that reflects the very nature of globalisation and the cultural flows that I have borrowed from Appadurai and because nation studies providing descriptions of education systems make no sense in a deterritorialised world. As

an alternative, I suggested the triadic site where we follow the flows and how they take place. I connect the study of secondary schools across national boundaries in a dialectical relation, where the case from Brazil is contrasted with the cases from Hanoi and Lusaka and visa versa. Through the triad it has been possible to investigate similarities and differences in young peoples responses to and critique of global ideologies and policies in education and thus to expose how context matters in the construction of the meanings of school.

On that background, is the eduscape one possibility for ethnographic and comparative education research in an age of globalisation? Does this approach respond to the fluidity of postmodernity by anchoring the study in physical places, local schools and focusing on context and young people? Or is this a meaningless attempt in a deterritorialised world where no stable places exists?

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