This week’s readings (Mathew’s ethnography and Harvey’s chapter in particular) prompted me to think about two separate but in some ways interlinked phenomena that I’ve repeatedly encountered – what I find to be the problematic category of ‘third culture kids’, and the labelling of certain ‘new’ cities of the Arabian Gulf such as Dubai or Doha as *non-places* by their denizens.

As someone that tends to get stuck with the label ‘third culture kid’ (for lack of a better category to be placed under), I’ve always found the tendency to celebrate this ‘identity’ perplexing and frustrating. This modern habit of congratulating one on having achieved *rootlessness*, or having successfully detached oneself from the nation-state’s umbilical chord, belies the fact that the lives we are able to live are still very much determined by our nationality, ethnicity, race, religious affiliation, etc., even if we don’t (or can’t) identify with these various categories.

I was struck by Mathew’s discussion of ‘forced rootlessness’ and cosmopolitanism as something that isn’t ‘necessarily a choice’ in part five of his ethnography (p. 213). There is, I think, a violence in being denied a locale with which to associate, in finding it impossible to feel at home in a particular space. The romantic notion that a de-rootedness allows one to ‘dwell’ equally in all spaces, to feel ‘at home in the world’ through a kind of ‘floating’, is, to me, a myth – the very notion of floating implies a superficial relationship with space, one that doesn’t allow for the kind of *investment* that Harvey discusses in his chapter. The falsity of this myth is felt, for example, at passport controls or visa centres.

For me, cosmopolitanism has always been little more than an empty signifier. I was raised in a Middle Eastern country speaking English as a first language, where I spent most of my formative years inside American – or pseudo-American – educational and cultural enclaves in which I was forced to detach from the surrounding Lebanese context, prohibited from speaking Arabic and made to engage only with Western intellectual and cultural discourses. As a result, I was prevented from fully *inhabiting* Beirut or Lebanon.

But, I also wasn’t American – a reality I was made acutely aware of by my passport but also experientially, on the ground in the US, when I came face to face with the differences between my sensibilities and dispositions and those of the Americans I met – differences that resulted from lived experiences which, having never been territorially grounded in America, I could not have shared. I found myself in a permanent relation of *discomfort* towards all spaces I occupied, which also made it difficult to *act upon* them, because I didn’t feel like I was really a part of them – that I belonged to them or they to me. In Lebanon, for example, this manifested most recently in my reluctance to join the anti-trash protests that took place over the summer.

I’ve noticed this apathy (for lack of a better word), as well, amongst Lebanese economic migrants living in cities of the Arabian Gulf like Doha and Dubai. These cities are often described as non-places not only because, to many of their residents, they feel materially inauthentic or fake, but because, I think, of the impossibility of settling in them.

The constant possibility of arbitrary deportation, for example, is one of the factors contributing to a state of permanent unease or anxiety, to the feeling that one is only temporarily occupying what ends up framed as a terminal, rather than a home. For Lebanese, however, the comfort and luxury of life in Dubai or Doha also makes the return to Lebanon an impossibility over time. Many say they would be unable to cope with the difficulties of day-to-day life in Lebanon after having become habituated to other standards of living. But, they also claim to feel socio-politically detached from the country after having become accustomed to occupying a space that can never be theirs and, therefore, towards which they do not possess any kind of affective attachment.

For many, that apathy has shaped their relationship with Lebanon, an investment in which they can no longer desire or see the point of. Many end up resigned to living in that liminal space, in that terminal, between a Dubai or Doha that can never be home and a Lebanon that is no longer home, and become concerned with their own survival, detached from any sense of or even yearning for social, cultural or political community.

To sum up my thoughts, this week I found myself trying to think critically about the supposed rootlessness that the contemporary moment allows some to live, and the consequences it can have for identity and, as a result, socio-political mobilisation.