

“Other ways of knowing and doing”: Globalizing social science knowledge in higher education

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This special issue is the outcome of an international research symposium with the same title, “Other ways of knowing and doing”: Globalizing social science knowledge in higher education”, organized by the Centre for Comparative and Global Education at the International Institute for Higher Education Research and Capacity Building, O.P. Jindal Global University, India, during December 2017, in collaboration with the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society, Indian Ocean Comparative Education Society, World Council of Comparative Education Societies and the UNESCO-Chairs in Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education.

Keywords: decolonizing research; participatory methodology; southern theory; decolonial thinking; Indigenous intellectuals; global intellectual history; India

INTRODUCTION¹

The concept note of the international research symposium, “Other ways of knowing and doing”: Globalizing social science knowledge in higher education², was inspired by the *Comparative Education Review* special issue “Toward a postcolonial comparative and international education” co-edited by Keita Takayama, Arathi Sriprakash, and Raewyn Connell (2015). The symposium was also inspired by the work of contemporary Indian historian of science and philosopher Dhruv Raina (2016). He argued for engaging in “other ways of knowing and doing” that may “raise new problems and suggest new methods and topics of inquiry” because of the limitations of the institutionalized modern Western science, and for “mainstreaming indigenous knowledge” systems with an “ideological commitment to sustainable development” (p. 267). The symposium, therefore, aimed to bring together scholars and intellectuals from India in conversation with other scholars in the world also working in the field of comparative and international

¹ **Acknowledgements:** We are deeply grateful to all the sponsors of the international research symposium for their support, particularly to the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society for the Fellowship and Networking Grant. We are thankful to all the valuable contributions for this special issue. We are also grateful to the past and the present editorial team of the *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* for continuing their commitment to publish this special issue in the middle of changes to their editorial team and a global pandemic.

² See: <https://www.worldcces.org/international-research-symposium-sonapat-india-11-12-dec-2017.html>

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education, who are seeking to globalize social science knowledge creation in higher education.

HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

As defined by an expert in the field of comparative and international education, Erwin Epstein (2008), comparative education is “the application of the intellectual tools of history and social sciences to understanding international issues of education” (p. 373). However, though the scholars in the field have been mindful of contextual differences, the field’s knowledge base has been highly unequal, as argued by Philip Altbach (1991), Past-President of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES). Likewise, Mukherjee (2019) notes that the “application of the intellectual tools of history and social sciences” referred to by Epstein has been a mostly Euro-American-centric understanding and knowledge of history and social sciences. However, the understanding of such history and social sciences have been evolving in recent years with the advent of critical bi-lingual and bi-cultural scholars in the field of comparative education. Therefore, in 2019, Regina Cortina, in her Presidential address at the CIES annual conference in San Francisco, argued for “decolonial thinking and research paradigms that contest North-South hierarchies in knowledge in order to promote equality and justice in local and global communities” (p. 463).

Much like Darder (2015, 2018) and Cortina (2019), as a “critical bicultural educational researcher” drawing on insights from her own empirical field research in India, Mukherjee (2017, 2019) argued how her “double consciousness” as a transnational “bi-cultural” researcher was useful in establishing intercultural dialogue and a relational participatory approach in conducting institutional ethnography and knowledge creation. This subjective identity as an “embodied knower” was methodologically powerful “in establishing intercultural dialogue in research and in seeking out subaltern voices during fieldwork” (Mukherjee, 2019, p. 10). Further, it proved to be useful in “doing Southern theory” (Takayama, Heimans, Amazan, & Maniam, 2016) by engaging with the critical writings of 19th century Bengali intellectual and education reformer, Rabindranath Tagore, for both analytic (ideological) and hermeneutic (affective historical) engagement with data gathered from the field.

The above discussion emphasizes that the “knowing” and “doing” of comparative education as a field of research has been changing in recent years with the faster processes of globalization and the increasing mobility of scholars around the globe and concurrent scholarly engagement of bi-lingual and bi-cultural academics in the field of comparative education. This is occurring even though the flagship journals in the field of comparative education continue to be published from the “English speaking” world, the academics from the global South, educated in the Universities of the global North, and those academics belonging to the marginalized population of the global North, carry with them a “subaltern sensibility” (Darder, 2018) for “knowing and doing” (Hall & Tandon, 2017; Park, 2017; Raina, 2016) research incorporating “local histories”, “indigenous languages and cultures” (Cortina, 2010) and “subaltern knowledges” (Mignolo, 2000). This rich resource has the potential to actually enrich knowledge creation in the field of comparative education by expanding the “intellectual tools of history and social sciences to understanding international issues of education” (Epstein, 2008, p. 373).

“OTHER WAYS OF KNOWING AND DOING”

For this special issue, five papers by six scholars,³ out of the 20 presented at the international research symposium in India, were selected for publication. These papers conceptually engaged with the writings and work of Indian social thinkers. The papers draw on the theoretical and pedagogical work of Tagore regarding “decolonization of the mind”, on the work of Gandhi regarding “decolonization of the heart”, on the work of B.R. Ambedkar regarding “decolonization from social inequality”, on the work of Savitribai Phule on “decolonizing care and gender” in education, and on the work of Rajesh Tandon regarding “decolonization of the political process and knowledge creation”. Unfortunately, the paper analysing Savitribai Phule’s work in India with regards to the spread of public education for girls, expanding the concept of care from home to school, had to be withdrawn by the author from this special issue due to the very serious caring challenges many women academics are facing now in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and global lockdowns. We look forward to publishing and reading her paper in some future issue of the journal.

The four papers published in this special issue efficaciously engage with the philosophies of Indigenous intellectuals from India, decolonizing epistemologies and methodologies for participatory knowledge creation. The papers suggest alternative possibilities of knowledge creation and decolonizing pedagogies for social change through the critical theoretical lenses and methodological approaches of intellectual thinkers and educational reformers from India, who were themselves products of the education of the “global North” and “Southern sensibilities” as colonial and postcolonial subjects.

Sanjukta Dasgupta, in her paper on Rabindranath Tagore, explores how Tagore repudiated the British school curriculum and education in India during his contemporary times. He believed that it colonized the human mind and suppressed its ability to question and think critically. Tagore’s reforms in the education system primarily focussed on “decolonizing the mind”. His emphasis on the Socratic mode of instruction that triggered intellectual curiosity and his criticism of rote-learning and conventional modes of teaching paved the way for the evolution of a cosmopolitan citizen, who was truly international but at the same time embedded in the local context. While for Tagore the pedagogic focus was centred on decolonizing the mind and, thereafter, coordination of the heart and the hand, for Gandhi, reform stemmed from “decolonization of the heart”.

As Ratna Ghosh explains in her paper, Gandhi, who was equally influenced by both Western and Indian philosophies, had an educational approach, *Nai Talim* (literally meaning New Education), that focussed on reformation of “heart, head and hand” (3Hs) through “learning by doing” and “cognitive, spiritual and moral” development. Gandhi saw education as a means to unshackle social prejudices and mind-sets that stemmed from deep-rooted religious beliefs and social conventions. This was reflected in his encouragement of women’s participation, his promotion of gender diversity and equality, and uplift of lower castes and outcaste *Dalits* (oppressed), whom he called *Harijans*.

Ironically, while Gandhi himself advocated for “decolonization of the heart”, he could not unshackle his own mind from certain restrictive thoughts and belief systems and he was often accused of this by his fellow countrymen, lawyer, and chief architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr B.R. Ambedkar. For Ambedkar, educational reforms and knowledge

³ One of the papers is co-authored by two scholars

production involved renouncing the feeling of “otherness” that was often directed at the students and children of lower castes in India. Ambedkar advocated for “decolonization from social inequality” and a move towards social democracy through imbibing the principles of “equality, liberty and fraternity”. The Civic-Learning approach of education that he advocated had “social justice and social diversity” as its cornerstones. He firmly believed that this new approach was crucial for a newly independent country, which was becoming politically and economically democratic, but remained socially undemocratic. The paper by Nidhi S. Sabharwal informs more about this approach as implemented in schools and how it has played a crucial role in bringing an element of social justice in the education system.

Even on the concept and question of democracy, Gandhi and Ambedkar had different views. While Ambedkar proposed a more centralized planned structure of political economy, which is the current structure of the Indian nation state, Gandhi favoured a more decentralized approach embedded in the belief that power and democracy should follow a bottom-up approach, believing that only then would it be more participatory. The paper by Sukrit and Kaustuv is a testament to how involving Indigenous communities, learning from them, and making them part of the governance allows for the “decolonization of the political process and knowledge creation”, thereby moving away from a process that is heavily borrowed and influenced by Western nation-states. The methodology for research literature on community development and adult education has evolved since 1975, with Bud Hall and Fals Borda’s work (Hall & Tandon, 2017). Since 1982, this decolonizing community-based participatory research methodology has also been practised and promoted widely by the New Delhi-based civil society organization, Participatory Research in Asia, founded by Rajesh Tandon, who is the UNESCO Co-chair in CBR and social responsibility in higher education along with Bud Hall (Labigne, 2010).

DECOLONIZING VERSUS GLOBALIZING SOCIAL SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE

In an interview given to the *Journal of South Asian Studies*, postcolonial Indian social theorist, Ashis Nandy called for a need to “start afresh in vernacular languages, in vernacular theoretical formations and formulations,” while highlighting the limitation of his own “writings because [his] work, to a large extent, is related to the colonial experience. [His] writings, partly, are a reaction to it” and postcolonial studies is a “by-product of Western intellectual effort” (Bilal, 2014, p. 726). Scholars across various disciplines and fields of research are increasingly arguing for “decolonizing the academy” both in the Global North and the Global South.

However, as the above quote from Ashis Nandy’s interview highlights, this process will not be easy. We cannot deconstruct/decolonize our own hybrid postcolonial subjectivities. Even leading postcolonial thinker, Spivak (1999) acknowledged the fact that major works of European philosophy and social theory are useful intellectual tools, even as they tend to exclude the subaltern voices and thought processes of intellectuals of the Global South from their discussions. Moreover, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (first published in 1989) demonstrated, through their theoretical account of a wide range of postcolonial texts in English, that these texts were a radical critique of Eurocentric notion of language and literature as the “empire writes back”! (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002).

The four articles in this special issue demonstrate that, even if we engage with the theoretical and methodological work of Indigenous intellectuals in English translation, it can still open-up a rich repertoire of knowledge for all of us. Hence, rather than deconstruction and decolonization, we argue for “globalizing social knowledge in higher education” by learning about “other ways of knowing and doing”. We concur with the methodological draft for a global intellectual history and reconstruction of a global comparative perspective as a way forward in the twenty-first century, as proposed by Herbjørnsrud (2019). We hope that you enjoy reading these four papers and expand your epistemological horizon of “knowing and doing” from a global comparative perspective with a situated understanding of local histories and by engaging with the critical work of Indigenous intellectuals from India and countries around the world.

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