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Symposium statement: Decolonizing methodology by invoking local voices

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How has the historical context of colonization in South Asia (a shared commonality with that of other regions and countries) muffled the voices of local practitioners and researchers?

In my initial intervention I wish to reflect on some of my experiences working in Bangladesh. This is a very interesting positionality for me because, even though my work was a result of a very authentic and personal relationship, I was—much to my dismay—positioned as a consultant and researcher, and therefore as an expert, from an “American” university. This already foregrounds a North/South dynamic, even though at my home institution I am, as Spivak (1993) would phrase it, the margin in the center, or the South within the North. Of course, being from Mexico, this situation was not entirely surprising. We even have a term for it in Spanish: *Malinchismo*. It refers to *Malitzin/Marina*, or “*la Malinche*” an indigenous princess who served as consort and translator to Spanish conquistadors. The term refers to the general disposition of favoring Northern/Western/European ideas.

So, I would argue that we experience as double fetishism. Not only we fetishize, and subsequently try to demystify local practitioners, but at times they fetishize the Global North experts. This, of course, complicates our engagements a great deal. Here I want to resist determinism, because that’s a danger. Nevertheless, I think it is important to acknowledge that among Global South actors we encounter discourses that are deep-seated. Even when we name them and try to interrupt them, they creep back. Specifically in the Bangladeshi context I am referring to, it is possible to observe the top-down structures and compliance that enabled local peoples survive the ruthless British rule. At the same time, there is subversion, innovation, and radical alterity, in the sense that Baudrillard (and Guillaume, 2008) discusses.

In what ways have these historical experiences of dominance heavily influenced research and methodology and the discourses accompanying them?

In this context, I even feel more constrained—in my methods and theoretical engagements—in Bangladesh than I do at my home university. This could likely be attributable to the fact that I work with people in serious fields, but there seems to be a concern with scientism and with legitimate forms of knowing. Of course we can’t engage in a victim-blaming game. We can’t simply expect that our Global North scholars reach consensus and open up academia and that the world will immediately follow.

At the same time, I suspect that my Bangladeshi colleagues understand much better than I do, much more intuitively, the performativity of research methodology. They seem to be more closely in tune with the realization that all our knowledge is a claim to power. This opens up important possibilities. It also has significant ethical implications.

In what ways can the CIE community foster inclusive and creative methodological spaces for practitioners and researchers that more clearly make meaning of educational contexts than the dominant Western ones?

I think, speaking from an International Higher Education perspective, we can start by learning from the many manifestations of colonialism. Of course the goal is always decolonizing and learning from Southern knowledge. However sometimes we fall in the trap of treating Southern knowledge as fragile, as a threatened species of sort. I recognize the paradox in my argument. I want to be very careful with the language of empowering and giving voice. These approaches are laudable but often lead to undesired outcomes. What I would argue is an ethics of engagement, which is what got me working in Bangladesh in the first place. Something I really value about my engagement in South Asia is that, even though the commensurate and rankings discourses continue to accelerate, pressing issues are still felt. My colleagues' teaching loads is such that—even if they're tempted to fall in the research productivity game—reality imposes itself.

What are some examples of education research practices that promote and enact a socially just and transformative ethos anchored by an ethics of engagement between researcher(s) and the researched?

Maybe what I'm advocating for is really about making space. Here I am encouraged by the power of difference/alterity. It is interesting how European scholars, like the situationists, were so concerned about the disappearance of singularities (Baudrillard, 2001). It seems to me that singularities are still abundant across the Global South. Therefore, we need to be careful about colonizing them. I am convinced that the logic of preservation, as in endangered species, is one of the cruelest forms of colonization because it is dehumanizing. What this means for me personally is embracing being fetishized as a Northern expert if that grants me the opportunity to engage. This also means blurring the lines between researcher and researched (Huckaby, 2011).

What challenges and opportunities are associated with the policy uptake and broader use of findings from non-dominant, innovative and social justice-oriented education research approaches?

It is worthwhile to come back to the idea of subversion. Perhaps the greatest gift from Postcolonial Theory is the realization that once knowledge/research acts are committed, they go out to the world and we have little control over them. We are observing this in misinformation based on solid research. The opposite could be true. Even research acts that are intrinsically violent could be used for emancipatory purposes. I want to be careful about framing policy as a desirable goal. In educational research this discourse has gained a lot of power. Once we make policy the ultimate goal of research, we also place a cap, a limit, to its potential.

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