

REPORT

PROBLEMATISING RESEARCH IN/FOR THE GLOBAL SOUTH: THE POWER/KNOWLEDGE NEXUS

A GLOBED SUMMER SCHOOL REPORT

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The GLOBED Summer School marks every year the halfway of the 2-year journey of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree in Education Policies for Global Development (GLOBED). Developed by the consortium of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, University of Malta, and University of Oslo, with the participation of the University of Amsterdam, this itinerant European Master degree focuses on issues of education and development through the lens of globalisation and from a sociological perspective. The Summer School, organised by the University of Malta, this year took place on the island of Gozo (the second most inhabited island in the archipelago that constitutes the Republic of Malta) over the third week of June. With a different theme as its focus every year, this edition's Summer School was dedicated to problematising research in and for the Global South by focusing on the nexus between knowledge and power. With the objective of equipping students with appropriate tools for undertaking their Master thesis fieldwork in the Global South, but also in the South of the Global North, the Summer School brought together internal and external professors to speak with and of their own expertise, previous cohorts' students sharing their fieldwork and thesis experiences and challenges, and current students as active discussants and not just as receivers of knowledge. Cultural and recreational activities such as visits to museums, walks

around the island's villages and in nature, and film forums formed integral part of the week and were designed to be shared by all participants.

The Summer School rationale was characterised by a focus on raising questions about ways of conducting research in the presence of, within, and dialectically against historically and geographically located power imbalances, finding their roots in colonialism. The discussion followed a downward movement that started with an exquisitely theoretical handling of the topic that progressively acquired substance and ended with an examination of the concept of banking education and a call for socially-relevant research. The de-colonial challenges within the Politics of Knowledge in research were introduced by Arathi Sriprakash from the University of Cambridge. Using the metaphors of 'shine' and 'shadow' (Rudolph, Sriprakash, Gerrard, 2018) she opened the discussion to the duality of research in its possibilities on the one hand, and its foundation in and capacities for epistemic and racial violence on the other.

Through the concepts of ruination (Stoler, 2008), carceral imaginaries (Benjamin, 2016) and domestication (Hage, 2017), she materialised the 'shadow' and this led to interrogatives of action, suggesting Tuck and Yang's (2014) politics of refusal as a possible tool. The 'shadow' was more openly framed within postcolonialism and postcolonial theory by Peter Mayo from the University of Malta. Introducing education as a site of struggle and as a key vehicle for the 'colonisation of the mind', he focused on the importance of understanding education not only as something colonial to undo, but also as a tool of positive transformation through its different omissions within the postcolonial paradigm. Indigenous Knowledge Systems as a realm upon which the 'shadow' of colonialism has been cast was explored by Catherine Odora Hoppers from the University of South Africa (UNISA). She delved into how indigenous holistic ethical, social, religious and philosophical sub-systems were ruined, fixated and domesticated and into how they now require archaeology, re-appropriation, development and protection. This endeavour not only can challenge existing procedures for legitimisation and accreditation of scientific knowledge and enable economic and socio-cultural empowerment of communities, but should be aimed at integrating knowledge systems in an effort of reciprocal valorisation.

More substance was given to the concept of Indigenous Knowledge by Censu Caruana from the University of Malta. In his session he explored how the monolithic Western notion of development dictates theory and practice of it and on how Indigenous notions of development can be theorised and practiced by Indigenous people and not. The question of how to conduct research about, with and for the oppressed without inadvertently silencing them was then raised by Simone Galea from the University of Malta. Using women as an example of a category whose ways of knowing are ignored and colonised, she explored how ever present is the risk of epistemic violence. She specifically warned against assimilation and overly simplistic representation of the experience of the subalterns as narrated by them.

Deconstruction (Spivak, 1994) and epistemological border-crossing, achieved through the continuous self-questioning of the researcher herself, are presented as strategies for minimising these risks. The role of alternative epistemologies as more active and less in need of archaeological and protective efforts was opened for examination to the class by Aziz Choudry from McGill University. By directly engaging with the students, he generated a discussion about the role of social movements in producing legitimate knowledge outside of universities and about the role of public intellectuals. The discussion was brought to a close by Xavier Bonal from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, who tackled the concepts of banking education and banking education policy. Building on what had been previously discussed, he presented a critical way of learning and advocated for socially relevant research and for research with a social impact.

Every day, after the speakers' presentations, students from the current edition of the Master presented the topic at hand with the aid of a poster based on a set of assigned readings, with the objective of starting off a discussion within the class and between the class and the professors. The presentations started as very theoretically focused, but students quickly adapted them in response to the format of the preceding professors' speeches, transforming their presentation time into a place for challenging and questioning critical points and concepts and presenting practical examples. The effort to come up with practical applications based on personal experience, be that professional or research, was encouraged

by the work done by some students of the previous cohort of the Master degree programme. These students, about to graduate, conducted, during this year, Summer School sessions involving detailed reports and reflections on their fieldwork and thesis development experiences.

Finally, the daily workshop sessions provided students with moments for more hands-on work on ideas in connection with their thesis. In these spaces, students could present in detail their thesis proposals, ideas and fieldwork plans in smaller groups to professors, peers and previous cohort students, obtaining feedback and engaging in discussions which led to changes in their thesis projects.

The design of the 2018 GLOBED Summer School encouraged horizontal and mutual learning and sharing of both theoretical and experiential knowledge. While taking a clear normative stance with respect to the ethical use of power of the Global-North in research, the week was characterised by an inquisitive rather than a specifically prescriptive flavour. This week of collective retreat managed to bring together, in a productive way, experienced academics and professionals, young researchers, and students challenging themselves together in the search of a truly democratic research.

References

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