Writing global education policy research[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article confronts an absence at the centre of education policy studies which often misses the chance to embody global complexity through open-ended, transgressive or, even, ambivalent approaches to enquiry. Methodologically, such work appears to favour a gaze from above and across space, simplifying subaltern experiences of reform. As an alternative, I discuss privatisation efforts in public education in Nepal by linking them to global labour markets and mobility, consumer modernity and state formation processes. I suggest that neoliberal tropes such as 'quality', 'effectiveness', 'commercialisation' and privatisation intersect with and invest other tropes such as freedom and self-determination, happiness, love and belonging. In the particular example provided in the chapter, the capture of public education by business interests may actually be a more chaotic ensemble of reason, desire, fear and seduction. The interconnections between such phenomena have implications for policy studies but also the broader field of comparative education that continues to struggle with a methodological nationalism that limits the study of education to particular cultures, places and contexts and that takes for granted the subjectivities that emerge within globalising reform movements.

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The light

It wasn't the heat that brought Ganesh's thoughts to a standstill, but the light. A white field that blocked the sight of the desert and mirage of the city and dulled the lessor sensations of sound and smell. Taste was a crude proxy of home and what was left of touch was always through leather gloves stiffened by dirt and sweat. The desert and city were things of hardship and separation but the light was extraordinary. It subsumed all else such that form, distance, even time, could not be trusted. Even though the working day came to an end, the sun was a malignant memory as he prepared the evening meal and it returned to fill his thoughts with foreboding as he lay down to sleep. Back in Nepal, summer could be unrelenting for sure but the sun was an ally that would flow with the seasons and the social customs built around them. The light in the Gorkha hills brought the fields alive and gave depth to the jungles that framed his bamboo home on the outskirts of town. Here, the sun offered a light that created not only life, but a life worth living. In the Gulf, the light stole everything and life became a dozen rituals of deference and defeat. To endure its domination was a victory of sorts but one that could only be fully realized at the end of a three-year contract. Then, wages would be counted and debts squared away. The force that enabled him to carry on over there was the dream that one day, the photo of his wife and small child would be exchanged with their touch and gratitude.

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New horizons and hope. Hardship and loss. Desire and seduction. Global flows of ideas and bodies. Changing relations between economies and nations. New policy problems in a world overflowing with solutions. Education and the future of schooling. Research and/ or writing?

This chapter confronts a glaring absence that lies at the centre of global education policy studies, a genre of work that considers education policy reform in an international and comparative context. Whilst such research provides insights into the connectedness and complexity of global reform efforts, it often misses the chance to embody that complexity through open-ended, transgressive or, even, ambivalent approaches to enquiry. Paradoxically, global education policy research *simplifies* the world. Methodologically, it appears to favour a gaze from above and across space, silencing or simplifying subaltern experiences and ex-

pressions of reform in order to trace new formations of power and their effects. Research in the service of others. Its aim is to uncover, expose and lay bare familiar and emerging political and economic interests in education, nourishing a long-running narrative of decline and loss. Such sentiment gives education policy research so much of its life force. It is an old trade, surprisingly resilient to a generation of radical critique that has left notions of reality, truth, subject, author and text in tatters.

I argue that most policy work misses its own mark, trapped in nostalgia for an earlier epoch of reason and meaning. The impulse to explanation of systems, processes, intentions and 'impact' fumbles with and, ultimately, avoids facing important aspects our current 'situation'. The rise of multiple and 'fake' truths, digital selves, virtual realities, cloning and the code are invitations to consider how time, history, place and subject are under erasure with their disappearance into the hyperreal leaving 'room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences' (Baudrillard, 1994: 3). If we can speak of 'ultimate truth' it might be the 'dematerialization of "real life" itself, its reversal into a spectral show' (Žižek, 2012: 16). A system built on indifference but not nihilism, for that would imply some 'imaginary of the end' (Baudrillard, 1994: 161). Where the moderns talked through the industrial metaphor of *production*, where things –places, histories and subjectivities– were created with value(s), we might now consider their transformation by the forces of *consumption*. Here, things are overloaded such that the system of accumulation, meaning and exchange breaks down. The world of production might focus on *subjects* (understood through a range of readings of power and its twin, desire), but a focus on consumption brings *objects* to the fore. The object is not a dormant or silent thing brought to life on demand but, rather, 'fired with passion', with 'autonomy' and, most dangerously, endowed with 'a capacity to avenge itself on a subject over-sure of controlling it' (Baudrillard, 2003: 4). In Baudrillard's (2008) enigmatic terms: 'it's no longer the subject which desires, it's the object which seduces' (141). What might that mean for global education policy research?

I began this chapter by *writing* Ganesh, a Nepali acquaintance who challenged my own preconceptions about exploitation and sorrow, schooling and hope, education reform and futures. I write the journey that Ganesh took from a village in Nepal to the world beyond his homeland and then back to himself. Ultimately, Ganesh's experiences – at

least as they live in this text – are about a different sense of being, belonging and purpose. To unfold my argument, I discuss privatisation efforts in public education in Nepal and link reform processes to Nepal's fraught engagement with global labour markets and mobility (mainly to the Gulf States), distorted consumer modernity and long-term trauma of state formation. That is a rich brew but one aimed at suggesting that neoliberal tropes such as 'quality', 'effectiveness', 'commercialisation', privatisation and, for example, 'entrepreneurship' intersect with and invest other tropes such as freedom and self-determination, fulfilment, happiness, style, love and belonging as well as anger and disillusionment. What looks like the capture of public education by, for example, hard-nosed edu-business and entrepreneurial interests – a key concern within global education policy studies as it looks for the smoking gun of reform – is actually a much more chaotic ensemble of reason, desire, fear and *seduction*. How can we write of such things?

Stylistically, such writing could start by disrupting the 'normativities of practice' (Honan & Bright, 2016: 732) that dictate how one might construct the academic text. Education policy research is intensively invested in interrogating the 'real' and does so by deploying a 'conventional, reductionist and hegemonic' (731) form of writing that limits the possibilities for radical or even alternative thought. That involves framing issues in terms of familiar problematics and structuring the text in ways that guide the reading experience towards certain ends. Another type of writing might challenge the exchange of meaning in educational research work (i.e. 'writing' the poor and disenfranchised within agreed universalist frames; assigning to education its rightful utopian role etc.) thus disrupting knowledge projects that are familiar and totalizing. A 'fatal' approach to writing might try to reflect the overloading of the system itself by undermining certainties, shaking alliances, provoking judgments (even scorn) and impeding our desire for comfort and resolution. It might even reflect a form of magical realism (Bowers, 2005). However one is to think of it, the intention would be to avoid writing that seeks nothing more than to mirror the contours of the 'real' and which, therefore, remains stuck in the 'play of appearances' (Baudrillard, 2003: 21).

To challenge such conventions, the text offered here dances between different 'forms of knowing' (Koro-Ljungberg, 2013: 278): the scientific, meditative and poetic. Enter this text and you will most certainly find a familiar trail of concepts, categories and 'trustworthy' academic sources

aimed to win you over to the seriousness of the subject matter. You will also encounter various meditations where scientific bedrock is reinforced or questioned by subjective musings and authorial sleight of hand. These are occasionally political where cherished notions of social justice, rights or simple compassion for the desperateness of life on the global periphery are offered to bind writer and reader to education's moral project. At other times, my meditations serve to stop us in our tracks. Are things *that* desperate? *Whose* interests are at stake when reporting such desperation? Finally, and disturbing these familiar genres, is the *poetic*, a form of writing unhinged from any notion of objective experience, logic or rationality. Serious and frivolous at once.

The context for my own encounter with Nepal was the 'Education for All' (EFA) movement, the 'governance' imperative that framed attempts to enhance aid effectiveness and issues as diverse as decentralization, democratization, gender equality and poverty reduction (Bista & Carney, 2002; Carney & Bista, 2009). By exploring the dynamic discourse of education reform since the introduction of EFA, it was possible to suggest that policy thinking about education had narrowed from expansive visions of democratization and nation building to one that, only 10 years later, sought to distance schools from state control. Having undermined its own monopoly position as service provider, the Nepali state greedily extended the 'cultural circuit(s) of capital' (Thrift, 2005: 34) by explicitly encouraging the growth of private schooling. This signaled to donor agencies that the state was ideologically open to private solutions in education and pragmatic about its own capacity to reach the EFA and subsequent Millennium Development Goals (MDG) goals alone. In education, we now see huge increases in terms of private enrolments and expenditures in schooling, new actors to the sector, as well as new relations between states, teachers and communities.

Privatization efforts include the 'opening up' of the public system to new providers, especially those seeking profit, as well as a disciplining of the public sector to the assumed efficiencies and mindset of the business world (Ball & Youdell, 2008: 9). Whilst contest and resistance has followed these transformations, states, service providers and consumers have largely agreed upon a new logic in/ for education, one that has connected floating and diffuse terms such as quality, relevance, access, equity and social justice into one meaningful narrative of renewal and progress. With key policy entrepreneurs at the visible sharp end of

this narrative, we see the 'penetration and impact of new programmatic ideas' that are packaged 'in a way that makes them appealing to a range of audiences' and which are then disseminated 'among practice communities' who 'push(ing) for them to be implemented in particular contexts' (Verger, 2012: 111). The processes at play here are complex, multidimensional and embedded. Apparently, we should be very worried by the undermining of a self-evident public good.

Whilst much global education policy research does not intend to exclude the voices of civil society, practitioners, parents and others, it is nonetheless a concerted search for explicit interests, causality and meaning making. What of other actors, experiences and contexts that are separate from but intersect with the educational sphere? Who (and what) disappears, or is silenced, when we restrict our gaze to the most visible and thus, presumably, most significant events and processes? When global education policy scholars talk about flows of *ideas*, how far can we push what counts as an idea?

Some argue that the imagination is not only 'a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity' (Appadurai, 1996: 3) but *the* 'key component of the new global order (p. 31, emphasis added). However, for much of humanity and a good number of the lessor 'stakeholders' in education, the 'lines between the realistic and the fictional' are 'blurred', leading to 'imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic' (1996: 35). How do disparate experiences, unfulfilled dreams and wild associations take form, for example, by investing the new and glittering object of private solutions in education with legitimacy? Is it enough to trace new formations of discourse and interests amongst the policy elite, assuming that they alone create the field of the possible? How do objects – having lives of their own – reach out and communicate with us? What happens when that communication is blocked or distorted by a proliferation of signs that the subject cannot hope to accumulate and exchange?

Globalization has become one popular trope with which to organise such questions. When understood as the 'spatialization of modernity' (Featherstone & Lash: 1995) it connects histories and struggles and provides new imaginary landscapes on which to play them out. In Ferguson's study of life on the Zambian Copperbelt (1999), economic boom and its attendant urbanization creates new cities, connecting them and their inhabitants to the modern grid through displays of cosmopolitan identity and belonging. However, subsequent economic decline – heral-

ded by the collapse of the copper price at a distant futures exchange – shows how promiscuous and transitory global connections can be as workers, made abject by sudden structural changes, must return to the village to renegotiate social roles and futures hemmed in by convention and envy. 'Doing modernity' becomes a precarious business. In Liechty's (2003) study of the emerging middle-class in Kathmandu, we see young people dealing with a central paradox of modernity where a 'Western' model or vision of life becomes both the 'object of intense local desire' but 'seemingly by definition an unachievable condition'. On the 'Third World periphery', 'satellite television, unemployed youth, beauty pageants, mass tourism, and countless other examples link(ing) the city to worldwide trends'(xiii), creating desire, frustration and anxiety but also innovative strategies to live life in the 'consumer present' (239). What 'spaces of imitation and invention' (Thrift, 2008: 254) does our present phase of global cultural *disorganization* throw up?

Urban Nepal is known as a place of material poverty, in part made poor by a politics of representation where a discourse of modernity and/as 'development' creates social difference (Pigg, 1992). In early post-development scholarship, a 'language of categorization' (511) was viewed as connecting the cosmopolitan Nepali to global society; instigating a hierarchy of social worth that further marginalized non-urban compatriots. However, in a world of wildly proliferating signs, the promise of a connected life now seems within reach for all Nepalis. *Cosmopolitanism* for All. Even the most cursory trip around its cities will expose Nepal as a site of simulation and seduction as much as want and despair. In one short ride across any mid-size hill town, it is impossible to ignore the billboards, posters and political slogans that promise if not demand a different mode of living. In Gorkha, across from a small vegetable market, was a clothing store with two prominent t-shirts on display: one brandished the phrase 'LA or bust'; the other: 'London is number 1'. Some meters away, on a telephone post next to a tea-seller was a poster of social entrepreneur Mohammad Yunus. Wrapped around this concrete artifice, accompanied by the smiling face of the global sage were the words: 'If we are not achieving something, it is because we have not put our minds to it. We create what we want!' Five minutes away, in the foyer of a low-fee private school, Bill Gates – in life size cut-out poster form – is waiting to greet parents, teachers, pupils and visitors alike, insisting that: 'If you are born poor, that is not your mistake; but it you die poor that is

your mistake'. Few in Nepal will have read Kant's great call to resist the 'laziness and cowardice' of our 'self-imposed nonage', but the King of the European Enlightenment seems very much alive on its outskirts (Kant, 1954: 1071). Such direct appeals to an assumed will to succeed are interspersed with messages of a more baroque kind. Back in Kathmandu, my bus stopped outside a café called 'Paris'. Here, an enormous billboard met me at eye-height, thrusting forward two well-groomed Indian male models in three-piece tweed suits offering up 'Royal Stag' scotch whiskey alongside the message: 'I have yet to become me'. Cosmopolitan sophistication? Existential fantasy? Fear of failure? The subaltern in ontological trouble or the new man of global neo-liberal ideology? How do subjects embody *all* of this in semiotic terms and exchange it as part of the quest to realize a life worth living? Sapere aude!

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Like some 1,500 young Nepalis who gain work permits to the Gulf States each day, Ganesh saw Dubai as a city of light and hope. Soaring towers, sparkling waters and 'smart' lifestyles set free from the constraints of history and place, this gulf paradise was an obvious culmination to the jumbled imaginaries of Nepal. The recruitment agents told Ganesh that a contract in the Gulf was the ticket to freedom, and end to poverty and the only chance to change a destiny that was otherwise set. 'At home we heard stories of local boys –village boys– who made the journey to the Gulf and returned as successful men. These stories are in the newspapers and magazines and on the TV. One can go away as nothing and come home knowing Dubai style. After that, life is different. You are a big man and people respect you. This was the promise that no one can refuse'.

* * *

At the time he boarded his flight to Dubai, stories of migrant worker entrapment and exploitation were reaching Western breakfast tables. The 2022 football World Cup in Qatar provided a relevant context. In a one-month period in 2013, some 44 Nepali workers, most of whom were under 25 years of age, died whilst building stadiums and hotels in the emirate. More than half of these suffered heart failure, most likely the result of extreme physical hardship. Long days of grueling labor, little food

or water and the threat of physical violence at the first sign of resistance or complaint led to the Nepali ambassador to Qatar calling this paradise in the sun an 'open jail' (The Guardian, 2013). In Dubai, Ganesh had to relinquish his passport and agree to defer receiving wages as an incentive not to flee. The living conditions – 8 men in a metal shipping container with minimal ventilation or lighting – and restricted possibilities for freedom of movement focused his time in the Gulf on work and a new life that lay beyond the daily grind. Eventually, Ganesh was badly injured in a work-accident, being blinded in one eye and losing partial use of his left arm. In 30 months abroad, he earned a little more than 3,600 US dollars but was at least glad to be returning home. Back in Kathmandu, he learnt that his wife had left him for another man, taking his young son and wages. It was a long bus ride to the village.

At present, the only market for unskilled labor in Nepal lies a great distance from 'home'. The relentless flow of optimistic young men to the desert, and their return as broken bodies lumbered with the debt, represents a major social and political challenge. Some returnees question the traditional structures of social organization they attempted to flee. Others find peace with them. All must add these experiences to the whirlpool of hopes, fantasies and fears that frame their sense of 'reality'. In Berlant's (2011) terms, how does one 'live on'?

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Versed in the Maoist political ideology that was the mainstay of the Gorkha region, Ganesh described the Gulf as a form of 'hard capitalism'. This was a place where men were without even the right to withdraw their labor and construction firms, in collaboration with the local authorities, were free to shape the city to the needs of total profit. 'Dubai' was an 'empty promise' but not one without meaning. Without bitterness, Ganesh suggested that it had served to expose the 'lie of Nepal' where a lingering 'feudalism' ensured that rights followed one's social status and livelihoods were always in the hands of others: 'In the Gulf, I finally understood that in Nepal there is no state and no one to help us. We must make our way. Over there we were mistreated, but at least the foreman gave us water once per hour so that we wouldn't die. That wouldn't happen here. When there were abuses, the ambassador from the Philippines would come and help us by complaining to the management. Even though the Nepali officials stayed away because

they were afraid of upsetting the construction firms, we saw that government officials could actually work on behalf of the poor. That would never happen at home. We are a poor country. Nepal has only prepared us to be slaves. In school, we learnt only how to be prisoners. From now on, we must save ourselves. Even though I have lost half my sight I now see much further'.

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That school was identified as a necessary element in a global circuit of hope and exploitation was a serious challenge to my own understanding of the 'development' project in Nepal. For Ganesh, more public schooling would make possible more exploitation and disappointment. Such schooling was not the answer, especially if states and donor agencies were unable or unwilling to fund it properly. Time in exile had also fostered a further iteration of hope and purpose. New objects demanding to be seen. Having experienced a more determined form of capitalism abroad and reflected on the limits of political representation in his homeland, Ganesh was receptive to the messages of heroic individualism that saturated public discourse in Nepal. Now, he planned to join with other local men and create an agricultural collective where they would pool resources to purchase land and equipment and mechanize the traditional farming processes that were etched into his body from childhood. He was also inspired to work with local community leaders to create a non-profit private college that would focus on the types of technical skills needed by Gulf State employers but that were otherwise beyond the reach of untrained villagers in the area. For Ganesh, 'the state was dead' but could be remade by 'new men and new institutions'. Sapere aude!

How does global education policy research deal with objects of (mis) identification that are central to contemporary life but which are, at best, consigned to their margins? How does it respond to the types of cruel attachments (Berlant, 2011) that such (mis)identification engenders? I suggest that the phenomena I weave together here – education reform, development ideology, hard labor and consumerism – constitute an 'imaginative scape' of hope and possibility that is occasionally coherent, always intoxicating and necessarily fraught with risk. This scape invests private solutions in education with a sense of urgency and potential. Rural poverty at the heart of a still-born state project, home and its annexes

in the Gulf hidden by pain and shame, images of western consumer hedonism planted like landmines at every turn, and the glorified image of the rags to riches entrepreneur offering instant self-actualization. Such imaginaries create a frame for thought that is *at least as* productive as the hard-nosed business models and rollout strategies of policy elites and educational entrepreneurs.

It might be convenient for global education policy scholars to restrict their gaze to the workings of a high-profile donor conference, foundation seminar or public-private partnership, but the unmanageable force driving change in public education may well residue in a million fractured moments, emotions and experiences of living that are impossible to gather up as 'data', let alone harness into a renewed program of high quality public education for all. The language of education with its hope and promise of salvation and fulfillment has slipped from the policy paper, school development plan and curriculum document into the t-shirt graphic, consumer billboard, pop song lyric, political pamphlet and, even, the well-ordered slave camp but a short flight away. These are unwieldy flows and circulations that reflect the 'other' of global education policy research, by which I mean the things that can't be processed with reason or science but which speak loudly by their absence in our texts and which thus remain to haunt our analyses.

There are of course many ways to go about exploring education at a time of unheralded connectivity (Carney, 2009; Henry et. al., 2001; Robertson & Dale, 2015; Schriewer, 2012; Takayama, 2015; Verger, 2012). Adhikary and Lingard (2018) note the contemporary focus mobilities – of ideas, policies and peoples – identifying how the governance of education in particular is being rescaled in ways that displace the nation state from its historically privileged position in education. Competing with – often supplementing – states are travelling policies, transnational actors, networked governance and complex circuits of social relations, all of which demand new research methodologies. How should the researcher of global education proceed? One increasingly popular strategy of enquiry, reflecting both the potential and omissions of a global gaze on education, finds form in various approaches to network analysis (e.g. Adhikary and Lingard, 2018; Ball, 2012, Larsen and Beech, 2014). Here, the 'system' or 'culture' becomes the global playing field itself and methodology a sophisticated process of tracing and uncovering the often embedded and opaque forces that shape educational decisions. The

work of Stephen Ball and his colleagues (Ball, Junemann & Santori, 2017) is but one illustrative example of an emerging focus on neoliberalisation as the 'disarticulation and re-articulation of governance, the state, education policy and the delivery of educational services' (1). When conceptualized as *process*, the study of neoliberal networks in education requires a different 'geographical imagination' in order to map the *space* of policy (2). The research gaze here follows ideas, money, events and people as they spread thought and models across the policy network. This is one manifestation of Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) call for 'ethnography without the ethnos' where the gaze is 'up and along rather than down', 'forsaking the perspective of the subaltern' (Marcus, 1995 in Ball et. al., 2017: 15) in order to understand the logic and function of dynamic systems.

For Ball and colleagues, network analysis invites us to interrogate new sources of data. Here, the internet becomes a key tool for 'illuminate(ing) the extent of influence of new kinds of actors, including donors, policy entrepreneurs and various brokers, on processes of policy, and the identification of new spaces of policy and conduits (both virtual and face-to-face) for policy ideas and discourses and crucially relations and interactions between actors' (Ball et. al., 2017: 20). Unsurprisingly, such research yields enormous returns, with recent project work in India and four African countries generating over 1,000 nodal points and a map that is 'partial' and 'difficult to read' visually (7).

Notwithstanding its systemic gaze, this approach identifies the personalized nature of policy networks. The Michael and Susan Dell Foundation has been of recent interest (Ball, 2017). The gaze has also been directed at US philanthropist Irene Pritzker, a key supporter of microfinance strategies in low-fee private schooling. An earlier use of the methodology centered on English professor of education, James Tooley, described by Ball as a 'card-carrying Hayekian' (Ball, 2012: 38) and 'policy entrepreneur par excellence'; a 'policy traveller' who 'animates global circuits of policy knowledge' and 'co-construct(s)' infrastructures that advocate, frame, package and represent policy ideas'. However, such figures are more than energetic and committed individuals. For Ball (2012), such actors are 'inserted into a highly developed, long-standing, dense and effective neo-liberal advocacy network'. Studying the person 'enables us to identity key sites, connections, methods and practices of neo-liberal advocacy and policy mobility' (40). Ultimately, research of this type aims

to 'map and trace…before it is too late and other imaginaries are cast into the "field of memory" or excluded from rational possibility' (145). Our collective 'madness' with method (Stronach, 2010) put in the service of humankind.

As a heuristic device, network ethnography offers us further nodal points, new associations, hunches and the possibility of dwelling in the complexities of a proliferating education project. In that sense, it resonances with my own musings. However, whilst it views the 'neo-liberalising' of people and bodies as occurring 'not primarily through oppressions but through anxieties and opportunities', it limits its gaze to the 'very real', mirroring the neo-liberal fixation with 'measurement and comparison' that it seeks to undermine (Ball, 2012: 145). Exactitude in Science.

The policy network is constructed and read through the language of 'science', and thus invites the reader to critique it through that same language. What other pathways to understanding and knowing are available to us? One of many lines of flight would be to re-read network research – and indeed a good deal of global education policy research – through the lens of myth that, for Levi-Strauss, represents an aesthetic path to knowing 'parallel or analogous' to the more familiar objective form (Kazamias, 2009: 1080). Citing Bowra, Kazamias (2001: 1) considers myth to be 'no less useful when the dramatist is unable to see any solution to a problem and wishes to present it for its own sake, as something which troubles him and of which others should be at least aware'.

If one delves into the Greek tradition, the network becomes the labyrinth, a place of intractability and horror. Home to the monstrous half man, half bull, Minotaur. The god Poseidon had presented a white bull to King Minos of Crete for sacrifice. Having learnt that the King had failed to carry out his will, Poseidon brought forth the Minotaur from a terrible union between man and animal. Raining terror on the people of the city, the beast was contained in a labyrinth built by Daedalus and so artfully contrived that whoever was enclosed in it could by no means find his way (Bulfinch, 1993: 188). To satisfy the beast, the King of Crete sacrificed a number of the youth of Athens each year. However, Theseus, son of the King of Athens would end this 'calamity' by slaying the monster. Arriving on the island as one of the youths to be devoured, Theseus met King Mino's daughter Ariadne who imparted the secret of the labyrinth, offering a sword with which to 'encounter' the beast and a 'clew of thread'

(189) with which to navigate and escape the enclosure. Completing the task, the hero fled the city with Ariadne in hand.

Farfetched? The denial of myth is also a myth, indeed, 'the only true myth' (Bataille, 2006: 48). Myth abounds in our contemporary world as the education researcher, wrapped in modernist certainties, unknowingly fantasizes of a world of promise, fulfillment and, even, domination (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997). Consider these parallels when we do policy work:

Labyrinth = the impossible complexity of human and non-human relations in global education policy spaces?

Minotaur = the 'villain' of global education reform. James Tooley? Irene Pritzker? Bill and Melinda Gates?

Theseus = the hero as theory? Method? Data? The policy scholar? Myself?

The clew of thread = the narrative of meaning, coherence and closure that we put in place *before* setting off on perilous journeys?

Yes, the string is our storyline: from start to finish; from good to bad and back; from reason, through chaos and back to the world of form and substance and 'reality'. Purpose. Justice. Hope. The string ties us to the world, keeps us from getting lost. Narrative has a beginning, a complication and an end. It keeps us tethered to life. Death, of all sorts, kept at bay.

This line of thinking, and the association to this particular Greek myth, is used by Taylor (1984) to introduce his notion of 'erring', a way to think about science and life –including much of what counts as global education policy research– after an age of modernist certainty. Deconstruction, if by that we mean a way of thinking that is seriously troubled by Nietzsche's parable of the madman and the death of a single authoritative source of meaning, or the possibility of shared meaning making projects, has been a central feature of education policy research for at least 30 years. This is most familiar to us through Derrida's challenge to language, Foucault's disruption of the idea of history and celebration of that temporary 'face in the sand' augmented, after a time, by Deleuze-inspired revolutionary notions of intensities and becoming. However, the 'tone' of this work in the hands of policy scholars is 'often at odds with the deliberate "production of estrangement"' (Allen, 2017: 160) intended by such writers.

Whilst post-structuralist policy scholars acknowledge (although usually fail to *embrace*) the death of God and thus the impossibility of singular meaning-making projects, it appears to have been violently resisted by the modernist mainstream. Full of despair but inoculated against resignation, they fight for life through the Text which exposes a lingering attachment to History (and the myth of origins) and thus a belief in Self (as the active and conscious embodiment of God *on earth*). God, Self, History and Book: all 'bound in an intricate relationship in which each mirrors the other' (Taylor, 1984: 7). In the age of modern purpose, these were brought to life in UPPER CASE: authoritative, certain, confident. In our current age of post-deconstruction doubt and loss, they can be usefully embraced in the LOWER form, making possible a new mode of knowing. The call to 'err' is thus an invitation to reflect on our provisional and fragile position as transcendent Author/ Creator/ Master, and how we constantly invent reason through text. Ultimately, what Taylor is talking about here is the possibility and necessity of a writing without authority, books without closure and an invitation to readers to traverse personal path(s) to awareness.

Instead of the labyrinth to be penetrated and conquered, Taylor offers the image of the maze, a heuristic implying multiple possibilities to enter, explore and experience research work as journey and process. To 'maze' is to 'bewilder, perplex, confuse, daze, or stupefy'. To be 'mazed' is to be 'delirious, deluded, or to wander in mind'. A maze can thus be a 'delirium, delusion, vain amusement, dissipation, trick, or deception' (Taylor, 1984: 168). Whilst a maze is still a place of paths and turns and is thus a *type* of labyrinth, *our* labyrinth is 'never-ending'; an 'abyss' with many points of entry and as many points of exit.

The radical message here is that this surface made possible by the death of God is a place where 'no-thing is truly sacred and thus nothing is simply profane'. Here, the 'extraordinary becomes ordinary and the ordinary becomes extraordinary'. Invoking Thomas Altizer (1979), we might think of the maze, and mazing, as 'a way of totally loving the world, and not only a way of loving the world but also a way of (writing) of love in a time and world in which God is dead' (Taylor, 1984: 169). Dionysus dancing.

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The big plans that Ganesh had outlined to me on that hotel terrace in Gorkha were swept away a short time later by the devastating earthquakes of April 2015. With the epicenter in Gorkha itself, little remained. Whilst the hotel itself still stands, much else, including the images of Mohammad Yunus on his telephone post and Bill Gates in his school of the future now rest under millions of tons of rock and top soil. Temporarily silent. Ironically, it was the farming poor, trapped in toil on the open plains, who lived through that day as their 'modern' friends and neighbors disappeared into the ancient darkness. Emergency relief work, hindered by missing roads and bridges and compounded by a formidable bureaucracy in the capital, made a return to normalcy impossible, thrusting much of central Nepal back into an earlier epoch. Funding for new projects was captured by savvy social entrepreneurs with contacts to the urban political elite and their donor partners. Same as it ever was. Ganesh now worked a few hours per week as a porter and maintenance man at the hotel. He had not reunited with his wife but she had returned their child.

A different light

Life begins on the other side of despair.
(Sartre, 1975: 46)

Global education *policy* includes concerned and pragmatic policy makers, bold entrepreneurs and showmen as well as subjects drawn to the allure of irresistible objects. Global education policy *scholars* carry the DNA of each of these. Global education policy *research* is brought to distorted life in a sea of cultural and emotional flows that barely submit to the strictures of science. To place such phenomena in a maze is to acknowledge the productive potential of education discourse, the best intentions of practitioners, actually occurring hardships, dreams of fulfillment and the disappointments and false steps that follow but that are always more than just failures. It is also to acknowledge new insights and the realization that things (objects) have a life of their own. The impulse to migration gives way to return. The dream of education when disavowed, is forged anew through liberal entrepreneurship which itself slips away, literally from under one's feet. And always with something unconsumed and beyond redemption. 'Somewhere there is

a "remainder", which the subject cannot lay hold of, which he believes he can overcome by profusion, by accumulation, and which in the end merely puts more and more obstacles in the way of relating' (Baudrillard, 2003: 5). Without bitterness, open to the world but non-expectant, the Subject/ subject of global policy comes in and out of view. As does the Writer/ writing of global education policy research.

* * *

Ganesh was often drawn to the terrace, not only when foreign scholars and other-tourists held their coffee breaks between 'important' sessions of training workshops or development planning seminars, but whenever his duties made possible a moment in the warm winter sun. Mornings were indescribable with the view into the valley below encompassing multiple geographies and paradigms of living that unfolded slowly as the mist receded. Now it was dusk. The chatter from the bazar below travelled up the steep hills, as did the smoke from the wood fires of a thousand shops, cottages and tin-roofed huts. Planned power cuts would soon send the bustling valley into a darkness that was total. From that original state would come another morning, another mist folding back its protective blanket and another invitation to life.

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Ερευνώντας την παγκόσμια εκπαιδευτική πολιτική

Περιληψη

Το παρόν άρθρο αντιμετωπίζει ένα κενό στο κέντρο ενδιαφέροντος των μελετών εκπαιδευτικής πολιτικής που συχνά χάνει την ευκαιρία να ενσωματώσει την παγκόσμια πολυπλοκότητα μέσω ανοιχτών, υπερβατικών ή, ακόμη και αμφιλεγόμενων προσεγγίσεων στην έρευνα. Μεθοδολογικά, μια τέτοια δουλειά φαίνεται να ευνοεί μια ματιά πάνω και πέρα από το χώρο, απλοποιώντας τις δευτερεύουσες εμπειρίες της μεταρρύθμισης. Εναλλακτικά, συζητώ τις προσπάθειες ιδιωτικοποίησης στη δημόσια εκπαίδευση στο Νεπάλ, συνδέοντάς τες με τις παγκόσμιες αγορές εργασίας και την κινητικότητα, τον καταναλωτικό εκσυγχρονισμό και τις διαδικασίες σχηματισμού των κρατών. Εισηγούμαι ότι οι νεοφιλελεύθεροι τρόποι όπως η «ποιότητα», η «αποτελεσματικότητα», η «εμπορευματοποίηση» και η ιδιωτικοποίηση τέμνονται και επενδύουν άλλους τρόπους όπως η ελευθερία και η αυτοδιάθεση, η ευτυχία, η αγάπη και η ιδιοκτησία. Στο συγκεκριμένο παράδειγμα που παρέχεται στο κεφάλαιο, η κυριαρχία της δημόσιας εκπαίδευσης από επιχειρηματικά συμφέροντα μπορεί στην πραγματικότητα να είναι ένα πιο χαοτικό σύνολο λόγου, επιθυμίας, φόβου και αποπλάνησης. Οι διασυνδέσεις μεταξύ τέτοιων φαινομένων έχουν επιπτώσεις στις μελέτες πολιτικής, αλλά και στο ευρύτερο πεδίο της συγκριτικής εκπαίδευσης που συνεχίζει να αγωνίζεται με έναν μεθοδολογικό εθνικισμό που περιορίζει τη μελέτη της εκπαίδευσης σε συγκεκριμένους πολιτισμούς, μέρη και περιβάλλοντα και που θεωρεί δεδομένες τις υποκειμενικότητες που αναδύονται εντός παγκοσμιοποιημένων μεταρρυθμιστικών κινημάτων.