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Managing the decline of globalized methodology

Anne Ryen ^a & Giampietro Gobo ^b

^a Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway

^b Department of Social and Political Studies, University of Milan, Milan, Italy

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EDITORIAL

Managing the decline of globalized methodology

In his preface to the World Social Science Report (ISSC, 2010) Gudmund Hernes, the President of the International Social Science Council argues that the contemporary confluence of crises generates a demand for more social science. At the same time, he claims that never before have social scientists had such impact on how the world is seen and acted upon though a rather mixed blessing. The problem is that our map no longer offers proper guidance, ‘while we live on one planet, we belong to worlds apart’ (ISSC, 2010, p. viii).

This has instigated a call for developing alternatives to the European scientific legacy that in many ways has both subjugated non-Western social sciences to the Western cultural hegemony as well as reduced academic freedom elsewhere by presenting assumingly universal models or paradigms making their own less relevant. Chinese Deng Zhenglai (2010) calls for academic autonomy by a knowledge transition with ‘authentic participation in intellectual discourse, and academic exchange with social scientists from elsewhere’ (ISSC, 2010, p. 183). This includes developing methods and tools to make local contexts visible and to develop locally embedded responses. But, just as there are no context-free responses, we are also reminded that the social sciences are no power-free zones. The North Atlantic domination in social science journals and in publishing perpetuates a hegemony that tends to marginalize Southern voices. Access to this hegemonic superstructure is crucial to make research count as knowledge though access is systematically skewed in favor of the Anglo-American research communities. This complicates indigenous intellectual authority in the non-Western world and makes international legitimacy problematic as long as knowledge is not ‘global’ until disseminated in the West, and second, published in English. We may use Norwegian Eilert Sundt (1817–1875) (1866/1967) as an illustration; an ‘unknown’ methodological pioneer he walked throughout Norwegian valleys, combined qualitative and quantitative methodology, was well informed about international surveys of the time, and published extensively, but all in a minority language.

Europe and the US have been the cradle of contemporary methodology. Consequently most of the methodological knowledge has been invented by a Western academic culture. Social research methods created by European and American indigenous (or *local*) cultures have throughout the twentieth century become a sort of *general* knowledge: journals, handbooks, and textbooks have slowly transformed a locally based product in general into context-free principles. This made Alatas (2004) refer to an ‘intellectual superstructure’ as a barrier to non-Western researchers as documented in the ISSC report. Due to this subtle transformation social science methodology has become one of the most globalized knowledges.

Though non-Western voices have raised this colonial issue for decades (e.g. the pioneering work of Deloria (1969) and the now classics Asad (1973) and Said (1978), it is no more than about a decade ago since the watershed publication of Tuhiwai Smith (1999) entered the Western agenda. Also her focus was on the question of the contextual/universal Western methodology (Mukherji & Sengupta, 2004; Ryen, 2007). She introduced what she refers to as 'Kaupapa Māori research', an alternative indigenous approach for studies in this particular culture as a reaction to the legacy of Europeanism.

The limits of globalization are evident in many fields, from economy to politics, from marketing to culture (see ISSC, 2010). Methodology is not free from these limits. However while European or US societies are becoming more and more multicultural, many methodologists and researchers still use monocultural methods. Moreover these colonial methods are still applied in non-Western countries with little reflexivity. Consequently these traditional methods do not capture the richness of meanings embedded in opinions, attitudes, and actions of participants under study.

There is an emerging need to find postcolonial methodologies when working with multicultural populations, in order to make culturally flexible contemporary research methods. The attempt to decolonize contemporary methodology requires a reflexive investigation of what are the common-sense assumptions, conceptions or ideologies behind research methods, both quantitative and qualitative. Starting from this reflection methodology and research methods need to be recreated in order to suit the local cultures.

Non-Western researchers concerned with local realities and local knowledge refer to a double bind – the marginalization of Southern realities and the irrelevance of the North Atlantic mainstream production in the social sciences for analyzing the South. Irrelevance is associated with methodology presented as universal and context-free as seen in textbooks uncritically exported around the globe. Research by textbook prescription loses the sensitivity and the reflexivity called for to grasp the local and the contextual aspects of complex cultural settings.

Despite these observations, the Western–non-Western dichotomy may be alluring. This simplification may work well as a device to accentuate the self-perpetuating mechanism of the hegemonic structure in research, but is more problematic as a description of 'there'. The rather extensive migration both South-North as well as South-South makes contexts into more complex and fluid contexts than that captured by simple dichotomies. Local contexts are more than ever both multicultural and multiethnic. Migration and urbanization both within and across continents make people more mobile and new technology dissolves the meaning of the territorial. The son in London may call his grandparents in a local village in Sumbawanga in Tanzania or vice versa. If the grandparents do not have a cellphone, they may borrow airtime via local mobile telephone operators working for international tele-companies.

Fazal Rizvi (Kenway & Fahey, 2009) sees globalization 'in terms of interconnectivities and interdependence that stretch across time and space' and underscores globalization as mobility (p. 102) and accentuates the subnational constitution of global processes or the global scale and calls for a reflexive attitude towards the researcher's position and towards the questions. 'Knowledge claims are, if you like, preceded by questions. I often stop my students in their narratives and ask them: Hang on, where is all this coming from?' (2009, p. 111). Importantly, these processes make the field less stringent than portrayed in the classic criticism of Western

methodology that to a large extent refers to the legacy of the Enlightenment era. This does not rule out the relevance of the criticism, but nuances old maps to invite methodologies that capture complex local pluralities in non-Western contexts and beyond.

In this issue Giampietro Gobo's article begins with a brief historical sketch of the development of contemporary research methods, from Europe to the US and then to the whole world. He shows how many shortcomings, pitfalls, and cultural troubles, contemporary globalized research methods meet when they approach non-Western participants, nonmodern societies, low-educated participants and oral cultures. The author explores the proposal for a *glocal* methodology, the possibility of thinking (methodologically) global and acting (methodologically) local, and its ambiguity; on one side, thinking is always local, embodied in a specific context; on the other side, on the contrary, there is nothing really local or indigenous. Every product that we usually define as local has always come from another place and everything has been imported in a determined historical moment. Consequently global *per se* does not exist because every global has always a local embodied, and vice versa. Perhaps the words 'globalization', 'glocalization', and 'indigeneity' are nonsensical: there is never a get-together between a global and local; there is a get-together among two locals, two indigenous cultures that may understand and accept each other, in an intercultural dialog, or else the former prevails and colonizes one another. However, glocalization and creolization are concepts which can initially help to approximate the idea of a dialog and, sometimes the integration of two locals. Maybe this is what is needed in contemporary methodology. Finally the author questions if *Indigenous Methodologies* and *Participatory Action Research* always are effective ways out of methodological colonialism because their methods often bring about little technical innovation (alternative to traditional methods), and remain at the periphery of methodology.

Based on her many years working in East Africa Anne Ryen is particularly concerned with crosscultural research in complex contexts, the classic target of the criticism of the European legacy of the Enlightenment era as captured by the term Europeanism and reflected in the ISSC report on the Western hegemonic position that perpetuates Southern dependency. With reference to East Africa she examines issues that constitute the complexity of the unfamiliar and non-Western criticism and responses to it. Given the massive criticism Ryen asks if contemporary qualitative research has anything at all to offer in non-Western contexts. The empirical section of her paper shows that poor analytic quality is a general problem, but also that the intellectual debate in recent decades offers more sensitive and reflective alternatives compared to the classic science model. In line with this she welcomes new epistemologies emerging from non-Western philosophies and practices not yet known in the hegemonic West.

Nasir Uddin argues that colonialism does not end with the withdrawal of colonialism from occupied territories, but that it exists in discourses across time. There is constant dialog between colonial domination and postcolonial transformation both in principle and practice. There is a continuing need for reconciliation between the colonial legacy of ethnography and postcolonial reckoning of decolonisation in gathering and interpreting ethnographic data. How does an ethnographer encounter the colonial inheritance of ethnography in the field? What are the debates of contemporary ethnography a researcher faces in making sense of data? How does s/he negotiate between theory and experiences of the field where colonial bequests of

imaging 'others' still dominate? How does s/he position herself/himself in the context of ethnographer's supremacy in the object's world? These are the questions Uddin explores with the personal experience of doing ethnographic fieldwork in the borderland of Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Vivienne Bozalek's article deals with the variety and creativity of participatory action and learning (PLA) techniques, which can contribute to decolonizing methodologies by alerting participants to privilege and marginalization through encounters across difference. Consciousness of privilege is often obscured and naturalized as part of normative expectations of everyday living. This article takes the position that no one is exempt from interrogating their positionality and their beliefs, and that PLA techniques can provide the means by which people can be confronted with privileges and marginality through encountering the 'other'. It concludes that PLA techniques can make a substantial contribution to bringing people together to confront differential privileges, thus giving people the opportunity to become both insiders and committed outsiders in their interactions across differences. The author demonstrates her research experience in applying these techniques in South African contexts.

Shawna N. Smith, Stephen D. Fisher, and Anthony Heath note that, over the past several decades, public opinion research has become an increasingly global product. At the heart of this expansion have been a number of cross-national survey programs that have expanded their coverage beyond the Western world, increasingly fielding surveys in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. This phenomenon leads a number of authors to pose the question of whether the globalization of the survey has led to the dominance of a particular intellectual framework and set of assumptions that may not be quite so appropriate outside their original homes. In other words, the export (for example) of standardized questions largely developed in the West has been accompanied (perhaps as a consequence) by the export of a broader intellectual understanding of public opinion and of the appropriate concepts for describing public opinion. Particular questions also embody particular intellectual traditions and tacitly impose the Western cultural framework.

The article continues this inquiry by examining the progressing spread and evolution of cross-national surveys, and the challenges emergent from this growth, examining changes in the 'product' of comparative survey research. Although in some ways scholarly consensus has been reached in defining what makes a 'quality' survey, cross-national programs do not always adhere to such guidelines of quality. The article concludes by discussing the role of the secondary analyst as an important player in the process of 'globalized' survey research, especially as they play an active role in helping to ensure quality and validity.

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Anne Ryen
*Department of Sociology and Social Work,
University of Agder, Kristiansand, Norway*

Giampietro Gobo
*Department of Social and Political Studies,
University of Milan, Milan, Italy
giampietro.gobo@unimi.it*