

Constructing Globalisation in International Higher Education

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The discourse of internationalization is well established but it appears that globalisation has crept 'by stealth' (Currie, 1998) into our international programs resulting in an apparent domination by a neoliberal economic discourse. Clyne, Marginson and Woock (2001), drawing on research regarding globalisation and internationalization in Australian universities, suggest that this domination is so pervasive that the term is "irretrievably lost" to cultural usages of globalisation. This paper arises from a case study of the understandings of globalisation within an international higher education program. Understandings of globalisation were sought from both Australian and Thai policymakers and participants in an international higher education program. It is argued that domination by the neoliberal discourse is evident and predominant but that, in the use of metaphors of globalisation by these educators, a repositioned understanding from lived experience exists alongside the economically dominated experience of international higher education. It is here that divergent understandings of globalisation are constructed. These findings are of value to those involved in the internationalization of higher education.

keywords: globalisation, international higher education, metaphors

In this paper it is argued that within the lived experience of globalisation in universities the neo-liberal discourse works alongside and against other discourses. The domination by one discourse or another is disrupted by bringing to light deliberately articulated metaphors. Concurrent and oppositional definitions offered in 'realist' (Lather, 1991) forms and in metaphorical forms expose the complexity of the sense making process for those involved in international higher education. I have not intended to argue the realist / literal against the metaphorical in some step by step process of establishing fact as opposed to fiction. Rather, in the analysis of participant definitions of globalisation I intended to use the metaphorical texts to disrupt the 'facts' that tend to dominate realist analysis.

The paper is in four parts. First, I present the research project which has given rise to this paper. Then I identify some of the ways globalisation has been defined in the literature of higher education and bring to the fore the use of metaphors in those discourses. I then outline the definitions, both realist and metaphorical, articulated by the participants in the study. I conclude with an argument for attention to the analysis of metaphors in understanding and retheorising globalisation.

The Case Study

The paper draws on the case study research of a doctoral program offered by an Australian university to higher education staff in Thailand. In this program, Australian lecturers traveled to Thailand to deliver the course work. Following this, Thai candidates spent several 3-month stays at the Australian university whilst doing their doctoral research. The larger part of the research was concerned with reasons for involvement in the course by the Thai and Australian participants. Data was produced from the work of university and Thai policymakers, Australian lecturers and Thai candidates. Participants were interviewed regarding their understandings of globalisation. They were asked to define globalisation and to suggest metaphors of globalisation. The researcher also sought out the metaphors which were embedded in the conversation as 'talk', during her participation in the program.

Metaphors of Globalisation in the Literature

Definitions of globalisation cross the discourses of politics, economics, sociology and education. It is not within the scope of this paper to provide an exhaustive review of the definitions given in the literature. A realist (Lather, 1991) representation of globalisation is found in both the literature and in recent research on globalisation and higher education. The commodification of knowledge within a neo-liberal discourse is seen to permeate the internationalisation of universities and is seen to be driven by globalisation. This 'regime of truth' (Currie, 1998) has gained a momentum which permits little possibility for disruption. From their research on understandings of globalisation in International Higher Education, Clyne, Marginson and Woock (2001) argue the domination of the neo-liberal discourse in defining globalisation in universities.

Diverse definitions of globalisation are apparent in the literature. Buenfil- Burgos (2000, p.9) argues that globalisation acts as a floating signifier as:

we have seen how the meaning of globalisation lows, hovers or floats in different directions depending on who is speaking about it and in what contexts, because there is no way in which one single meaning could exhaust all the possible uses this expression has.

Metaphors construct understanding (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and are significant as they allow multilayered ways of understanding. In metaphors we use that which we know in a concrete way to understand and explain that which is more abstract. They are powerful in the links they make and those which they hide. Metaphors are of particular significance in the way in which they can convey understandings of world views (Radman, 1997). Metaphorical understandings inform our understanding without a necessary awareness on our part of their constructive nature.

The literature abounds with such metaphors. Metaphors are used to locate globalisation temporally and provide an historical tracing. Desai (1999) speaks of the 'arrival of globalisation'. It came as 'a stage of imperialism' (Sivanandan, 1998). Much of the globalism debate of the 80's and early 90's centred on the very existence of globalisation. As an entity Globalisation has 'roots' ('economic' – Rothkopf, 1997; 'rooted cosmopolitanism' - Beck 2001). It has 'emerged' (Petras, 1999; Dale, 1999).

The powerful and mechanical nature of globalisation is most often heard in arguments drawing on the neo-liberal discourse. Here, globalisation is felt as it is 'driven' by markets and technologies (Marginson, 1998; Comeliau, 1997) and itself 'drives' (Gray, 2002). It 'has no brakes' (Comeliau, 1997). Its power is evident as a 'force' (Jones, 1998). For some, it is seen to operate as an 'integrative force' (Welch, 2001). For others, its force has military understandings with battles being waged and the making of victims and victories. The 'onslaught of globalisation' (Sklair, 2001) 'vanquishes resistance' (Lowe, 1997). It is 'predatory' (Falk, 1999). It has caused the 'erasure of national boundaries' (Daly, 1999). It needs to be 'tamed' (Kaldor, 2000). 'The victory of globalisation' is felt by 'the invaded' (Beck, 2001). Generally, these force metaphors hide the positive aspects of globalisation. In particular, they deny the place and power of the individual.

There are present in the literature several main ontological metaphors which are often used. The world is seen to have undergone a 'world transformation' (Gray, 2002) through globalisation. Globalisation is for some as the creation or emergence of a 'global village'. This metaphor is directly linked to argument regarding globalisation as bringing together the global and the local – the local in the presence of the village. It positions relationships as foremost – global to local and local to global. These relationships gain from being 'global' the attributes of being universal, worldwide, total and inclusive. From being a village, the relationships gain the attributes of belonging to the bounded group of a rural community, and interdependence. The metaphor hides that there are those inside a village and those outside a village. It hides the force metaphors apparent in so much of the literature.

In a similar way the metaphor of 'one world' or 'a borderless world' (Held and Mc Grew, 2000; Ohmae, 1990) speaks to relationships. In particular, these refer to relationships between nation states. The word border is linked to the separation between nation states. As a borderless world there is increased freedom to trade and to move. The metaphor hides the lack of security of a borderless world and the loss of local or national identity which comes from free movement of people.

The more recent metaphors which have gained momentum are those spatial metaphors, particularly those used by Castells (1999) and also those used by Edwards and Usher (1997). For Castells globalisation is the creation of a society of flows: 'By flows I mean purposeful repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in organisations and institutions of society' (1999, p.57). Power is related to access to flows. For Edwards and Usher globalisation is constructed from /by/on participants who are (dis)located. In this (dis)location we experience globalisation as 'the feeling of being neither here nor there yet also of being here and there' (1997, p.259). These metaphors highlight the change in communication and location of the individual. These metaphors are newly layered with the more embedded metaphors of one world, borderless world and global village. Usher argues that spatial metaphors 'provide a 'space' for new modes of action and identity formation by foregrounding dimensions such as relationality, virtuality and reflexivity' (2002, p.53). Usher's optimistic readings of globalisation metaphors stand in sharp contrast to the restricted readings of globalisation found by Clyne, Marginson and Woock (2001).

'Globalisation' from study participants

The participants in this research, both Thai and Australian, were asked for definitions and for metaphors of globalisation. In this way, there were two direct pathways for seeking understandings of globalisation. This process uncovered the complex and multiple understandings held by individual participants. Throughout the responses from both Thai and Australian participants the understandings of globalisation were described in terms of force. The participants used imperatives – 'we have to' 'we need to' - and these were often repeated giving emphasis. The powerful presence of 'force' was felt as a Thai candidate argued: 'We cannot run away from that (globalisation) so we have to face it.' and as an Australian Lecturer stated: 'It's a force that is hard to combat.' An even stronger understanding was articulated by another lecturer when he said the world is 'assailed by globalisation.' This force was also linked to speed as participants regularly mentioned the rapid nature of globalisation. The ability to make contact quickly was seen to facilitate relationships both personal and professional. The force of globalisation was linked to economic imperatives and to increased technological changes both of which were given as major defining characteristics of globalisation

The definitions provided by the Australian participants centred on the economic definitions operating within a neo-liberal discourse: 'So at one level you see that

economics is driving it' (Australian Policy-maker). The importance of transnational companies as a crucial component of globalisation was also recognized, as were the specific links between globalisation, economic imperatives and strategic planning. The positive effects from this economic perspective were identified as increased standards of living, access to education and better health. For others, however, negative effects from globalisation were identified. One Australia Lecturer asserted: 'It's going to benefit some people a lot more than others...It will discriminate against those who are already discriminated against.'

A definition of globalisation as technology was common to all participants and was linked to particular attributes of pervasiveness and the increasing closeness of relationships between people. In this closeness there were elements of co-operation and togetherness. This closeness involved communication with people from all over the world. An Australian policymaker described the way he was personally affected by globalisation in the daily contact he had with people from all over the world. Thai participants linked this communication to the imperative of English as a global language.

The discourse of westernisation was raised by Thai participants. They spoke of westernisation of their children through the media and western products and of the determined ways the parents and the education system worked against this process. This has meant in some ways a strengthening of the Thai identity, as they have had to increase the emphasis on the teaching of Thai culture in their schools and in the homes. For some of the Thai participants this concern for maintaining identity/culture came as a result of a perceived threat directly linked to globalisation wherein identity is taken by others: 'Globalisation makes the world smaller and the powerful countries can take advantage... So this way will force people to have the same way' (Thai candidate). Many of the Thai participants referred to the importance of awareness of the local and the global as dual perspectives which they must have in order to protect their identity. Australian participants had little to say in this regard. One Australian policymaker identified globalisation not as creating sameness but as increasing our awareness of similarity: 'It makes you realize that, 'yes we are all very similar, we've all similar problems and they are just contextually different.' For several Australian policy makers the possibility of the Thais being westernised through this program was remote given the strength of Thai culture.

In the definition responses, globalisation was spoken about as a current phenomenon, a found world, which they were experiencing. The participants mainly drew on the neo-liberal discourse and also on the discourse of westernisation and that of technology. The metaphorical definitions were qualitatively different emphasizing relationships and equality. This paper now shifts to consider the metaphors suggested by interviewees.

Globalisation: nations or people 'hand in hand'

For many of the Thai participants globalisation was nations 'holding hands' or 'working hand in hand'. One of the Australian policymakers referred to the UNICEF picture of the

children holding hands. Each use of the metaphor identified nations and people as units who hold hands. This attention to the separateness of those holding hands reflects the issue of national identity. The parties may have the same goals in that they are facing the same direction and are united through linkages. It also may support an equality of the nations in the handholding. This metaphor hides the loss of national identity and the unequal power distribution. It hides issues of domination or force which are present in other metaphors.

This metaphor was explicitly drawn, as purposes for the linking of hands were identified - peace, education, common good, and growth. Holding hands requires co-operation. The metaphor positions the nations or people side by side in the holding of hands thus minimizing domination or force. This is a positioning, which speaks to equality (Harre and van Langenhove, 1999).

Globalisation: one world

As one Thai policymaker stated: 'Globalisation is like being one country in the world.' This metaphor revealed a strong sense of unity. Here, the people of the world are united in purpose, in economic and political structures. It emphasized a sharing of resources and problems. It also pointed to the commonality of peoples and their experiences. It highlighted the joint purposes of peace and world survival. It hid the loss of national identity and international competitiveness.

The metaphor of one world was explicitly drawn as the participants explained that 'one world' permits interaction, communication and meaningful action and as one nation will no longer seek to overcome another nation and that there will be joint ownership. The embedded nature of this metaphor was tentative for some Thais as they qualified its use by a desire to maintain their Thai identity: 'In my dream still Thai people should be Thai' (Thai candidate). In this way this metaphor linked to the issues of westernization and national identity found in the literal definitions.

Globalisation: a borderless world

As stated by a Thai policymaker globalisation is 'the world without the lines, without the borders.' Those who used this metaphor often used the well-known phrase 'a borderless world.' This metaphor reveals and highlights an understanding of the free interaction between peoples. It has economic implications as it suggests the ability to trade without impediment. It has social implications, as people are able to move freely between nations and problematises maintenance of language and cultural. It hides loss of national identity and national protection. It even suggests a loss of nations. It is closely linked in this way to the one world metaphor.

The explicitness of this metaphor is revealed in the accompanying words of freedom of movement and shared language and understanding. The participants speak of the ways technological advances already allow them to communicate across borders. The intensity

of the borderless world metaphor is evident as participants speak of sharing of knowledge, freedom to move and communicate and peace as a purpose of globalisation. The shared understanding of the pervasiveness of globalisation supports this intensity. A world without borders may permit unimpeded interaction between people which may lead to a heightening of cultural sameness and more particularly the possibility of a western sameness. In a borderless world the western story may well be the world story.

Globalisation: a family

An Australian Policymaker explained globalisation means: “That we live in a family, a globalised family.” This metaphor was only given by Australian participants. In this metaphor the social relationships between people are stressed. It encompasses economic understandings, as the family is an economic self-supporting group. It is also one which commonly involves adults and children. This highlights a unit in which there are those who care for others and those who are cared for. It also suggests a unit in which there are those in power and those who are not. This metaphor supports the commonality of goals. Further, it highlights the sharing and contributory attributes of globalisation. It also may allow for the maintenance of cultural identities. This metaphor hides the understandings of competitiveness and also political governance.

Globalisation: a community

This metaphor, too, was only offered by Australian participants. A community suggests a group of people who have attributes, whether they are goals or activities, in common. It reflects an understanding of relationships in which there are elements of support. Members of a community have rights and responsibilities within the community. In this context, the global community may have shared goals and shared concerns. For one Australian Policy maker this community exists in a particular global way- in ‘the invisible continent. In this sense there is a community above and beyond the world in a supranational sense. For some, it highlights a unity and hides the national perspective. For others, it is a community of nations. Explicitly, this metaphor is supported by its links to interaction. These interactions are said to happen regularly or on a daily basis. The global community may reflect a commonality of people. Within a metaphor of a global community the positionings apparent in any community may be present. There may be a hierarchy as experienced in any community – dependent on resources, power, and education. The disparate positioning which accompanies national competitiveness may not be evidenced in the same way. Positioning (Harre, 1999) would not come from national concerns but may be present from hierarchical positioning within the community.

Globalisation: a journey

This metaphor was given by some Australian participants. The journey metaphor suggests that travel and movement are involved in globalisation. Direction is suggested

including a beginning point and an end point. Thus, the metaphor supports the understandings of purposes and of speed or movement that were suggested in the definitions of globalisation. The journey was spoken of as people traveling in the same direction. For others, it was seen as a march in terms of the advance of capitalism and democracy. This suggests a more formal advance and has military overtones not associated with a journey. The march echoes the understanding of globalisation as a force. The journey, too, was qualified as it was argued by one Australian lecturer that only those who are able to make the journey would be involved.

Globalisation: a factor on a space – time continuum

This metaphor was only directly addressed by one Australian participant but was indirectly addressed by others. It allows for understanding of a new dimension of the world. In this way it supports the understanding of globalisation as a new phenomenon. It highlights the focus being on the physical and the temporal rather than on people or the relationships between them. It echoes the invisible continent concept. The words around this metaphor are sparse. The dimensions of globalisation as a space-time grid were further explained as an “ether” around the world. This metaphor is not strongly embedded in the definitions. It does link to force and to pervasiveness. It does not link to the interaction between people.

Combining understandings of globalisation

In interpreting the definitions that I have termed ‘realist’ (Lather, 1991) and metaphorical I have argued that the realist definitions emphasize the economic imperative of globalisation. Here, both Thais and Australians are positioned hierarchically. Globalisation as westernisation positions the Thais in a struggle to maintain identity. Globalisation as technology emphasizes communication and relationships. The metaphors, however, turn our focus more forcefully to relationships between people and nations. These metaphors draw very little from the neo-liberal discourse which was dominant in the ‘realist’ definitions. The metaphors of ‘hand in hand’, ‘one world’, ‘borderless world’, ‘family’ and ‘community’ position relationships as central. The relationships within these metaphors involve some sense of freedom and support and contribution to others. In this way, they underscore and highlight that which was already present in the definitions. However, a consideration of the enunciators reveals significant differences in understandings of the relationships. The Thai participants offered metaphors which spoke to and emphasized equality of people in relationships. In this way the Thais are perhaps repositioning themselves from the dominated positioning evident in the economic definition of globalisation. The Australian participants in using relationship metaphors were also repositioning themselves and others. However, the Australian participants generally offered metaphors of family and community both of which involve hierarchical relationships.

The participants offered both metaphors and realist definitions. Each participant offered multiple metaphors. This multiplicity was evident as each participant was asked for a realist definition and a metaphorical definition. In their responses, participants used multiple definitions. In the interviews understandings of globalisation were also evident as they talked of the international program. At times these understandings clashed and grated. It is within these oppositions that the participants live within globalisation. Within the definitions, both realist and metaphorical, the participants were variously positioned and repositioned. This paper has supported the findings of previous research wherein the economic imperatives of globalisation were the major constructive frame. The attention here to metaphors has brought into play other ways of understanding the lived experience of globalisation. The paper has explored the juxtaposition of Thai and Australian understandings of globalisation through the site of International Higher Education. It has highlighted the complex interaction of positioning and sense making within that lived experience. These findings are of value to those involved in the internationalization of higher education.

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