

# Global Mechanisms and Higher Education.

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### Abstract:

In a complex, fast changing global environment the very nature and definition of education is under contestation. The key issues coming to the fore appear to be *who will be allowed to learn what, and under which circumstances?* (Dale, 2000). This is a question close to the hearts of all those currently teaching in higher education and hence concerned with developing pedagogy at this level.

Drawing upon a morphogenetic approach to structure and agency interaction (Archer, 2000; Archer, 1995), this paper is an attempt to outline some of the key agents at the global and national levels, the structures that exist, form and collapse, and their possible interactions together with the implications for various national and institutional policy developments.

Two key concepts are useful in exploring the situation. The first of these is the relationship between structures, including discursive and legal structures (Kelsey, 2003), and the agency of various players such as transnational organisations, national bodies and individual higher education institutions. One developing structure in today's international arena is the GATS framework of the World Trade Organisation, which is currently a space where events have far reaching implications for some of the current struggles over what education means for different nations and various groups of people within them (Verger, 2008). A second key concept developed, is the question of how phenomena at one level, such as the global level may affect what goes on at another level, national or institutional levels for example, where the question of privatisation of higher education is coming to the fore in some countries (Kelsey, 2003), while education systems are considered as goods for barter in return for favourable conditions in other spheres of the global economy (Verger, 2009). This is consistent with a critical realist approach which takes an ontological position that the physical and social world is stratified, with emergent features at various levels (Bhaskar, 2009 (in press)).

Some possible implications for the future development of pedagogy in higher education are drawn out through a process of abstraction followed by retroduction (Sayer, 2000).

### Introduction:

Higher Education, on a global scale, is emerging as a transnational process through the cross-border provision of university services. According to Verger (2010), economic globalisation is intensifying and is driving these changes while universities act under pressure to play an increasing role in the economic competitiveness of nations as well as to create the conditions for the global economy to function. In order to do this universities are redefining their nature and their aims, becoming economic objects and processes. They are expanding their branch campuses across the globe and exporting their activities to other

countries. University staff and students operate across state borders, at times transcending national rules.

Powerful international organisations on a global level such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank, The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or, on a regional level organisation such as the European Union (EU), are starting to emphasise aspects of higher education within their discussion of political and economic agendas. In such discussions higher education is often used as a bargaining tool in dealing with issues of economic competitiveness or the opening up of international trade deals. In this way Verger (ibid) claims that international and multinational organisations with a primarily economic interest are playing an increasing role in Higher Education affairs and influencing national policies pertaining to it. As a result of the developments mentioned above, the operation of a number of mechanisms on Higher Education is causing it to emerge as a commodity on an international scale. Hand in hand with this process, new definitions of what education itself means are also emerging.

Initially four underpinning premises are laid out and explained in some detail in this paper. These serve as analytical tools to consider the issue under discussion. A critical realist approach is taken to examine the various agents on a global scale and then the structures that can be seen to be developing together with the mechanisms arising from them. The changing nature of education is discussed and then finally some conclusions are drawn as to the kind of world it must be in which such structures, agential action and mechanisms could be emerging in the field of higher education. It is hoped that this paper will serve as an introduction to a complex but very important area of study: that of the interplay of structure and agency in higher education, under to influences of a changing global environment.

### **Underpinning premises:**

Within an overall critical realist approach (Bhaskar, 1979; Collier, 1994; Sayer, 1984; Sayer, 1992), four key positions underpin this paper. These will be elaborated as needed in the context of the analysis that follows.

First of all, a morphogenetic approach to the interaction between structure and agency is taken in this paper. This approach allows an analysis of the interactions between structures

and the activities of agents working within and changing or reinforcing them, rather than attributing primacy to either structure or agency, or conflating the two together.

Secondly, within this paper, discourses are considered as structures with the potential to influence what individuals and groups of people think about the world. In this way discourses can affect what people go on to do or fail to do in the world and hence not just the social realm, but also the physical material realm is potentially affected by discourses.

Thirdly, a stratified ontology, or a multi-levelled consideration of global, regional, national and institutional issues is used.

Fourthly, an interdisciplinary approach spanning not only education, but also economics, politics, law and social semiotics is necessary to unravel relevant developments which span these various fields.

Equipped with these conceptual tools we can begin to consider the agents, structures and mechanisms emerging in the area of higher education on a global level.

## **Agents**

**Structure – Agent** interactions at the global level are growing in complexity. The most influential are considered here, but the list is not comprehensive. The governments of nations (both rich and poor), Private education companies and multinational corporations (Ball, 2009), The World Bank (Jones, 1992; WorldBank, 2002), IMF, OECD (Henry et al., 2001), UNESCO, different national governments, The EU and various trade blocks such as the NAFTA or ASEAN are already shaping the economics of the global landscape (Verger, 2010). At the same time higher education institutions in Europe are fast becoming or trying to become transnational players. Many multinational corporations are setting up universities to train their own personnel (Tuchman, 2009). The relationship between all these agents involves collusion and contention, often reflecting deeper economic interests which are much wider than educational preoccupations, but which affect what goes on in the global education arena. Verger(2009) points out that in spite of the fact that, for some nations, opening their higher education markets would lead to the erosion of their state education systems; this might be rewarded by giving access to export markets for their economies allowing them to sell textiles or agricultural products. Agents can act individually or as conglomerates by sharing primary agency (Archer, 2000). They can build structures

which extend their ability to impose their particular interests upon others; they can also resist such structures through building structures of their own. This brings us to the first premise mentioned at the outset of this paper, a morphogenetic approach is taken towards structure-agency interactions (Archer, 1998; Archer, 2000). Agents find themselves within structures which constrain or enhance their activity. Possible agential action is dependent upon the structures that exist, however agents can then change, destroy or reshape these structures in the course of the agents' activities and in line with their goals. The changing of the structures gives rise to new possibilities for agential action. New agents coming into the arena or replacing existing ones now find altered structures and different possibilities which they in their turn can change or reinforce. It is the interaction between the agents and the structures in this process of morphogenesis which is of interest. Thus the global educational environment is constantly changing as a consequence of the activities of the agents and the structure/agency interactions at this level. A closer look at the aims of some of the agents mentioned in this section is in order.

Education like other services has traditionally been considered to be within the domain of national states. One reason for this is that services such as education, healthcare and so on are deeply bound up with human needs and human rights and hence too precious to be bought and sold to the highest bidder. Kelsey (2003) points out that whereas the efficiency of the state's role and its lack of equity in delivering services has long been contested, it is since the 1970s that there has been a growth of transnational service companies entering this contestation. Organised within bodies such as the United States Coalition of Service Industries and the European Services Forum, such companies have the potential to act as powerful agents with a specific aim of privatising services within the countries in which they operate while insisting that private companies should not be restricted, in their profit making, by what they call too much regulation by the state. Ball (2009) analyses the activities of a number of such education companies, both in the UK and internationally. In the international arena such companies have been developing structures in the form of binding rules and agreements which give them access to the services of other countries to be opened up as markets. Kelsey (2003, p. 268) sums up their demands as:

- Weaker or no restrictions on foreign direct investment (FDI)

- Guarantees that central and local governments will not discriminate in favour of local service firms and employees.
- Guaranteed access to countries' service markets, with no requirements to operate through joint ventures and no numerical limits on the size to which any services market could grow.
- No favouritism of one country's service firms over another.
- Dismantling of public monopolies that lock up potential services markets.
- Light handed regulation.
- Free movement of capital.
- Immigration rules that allow short term entry for key personnel for services firms
- Enforcement of these rules with sanctions that bite.

Kelsey goes on to point out that within the realm of the World Trade Organisation, the General Agreement on Tariffs in Services (GATS) and the various related regional and bilateral arrangements between nations have worked together to develop a global framework to facilitate this agenda. These principles are all in keeping with what is sometimes called neo-liberalism defined by Harvey (2005, p. 2) as *'...in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.'*

### **Structures and the mechanisms they give rise to:**

Structures developed by such agents, as listed above, currently range from soft discursive structures, such as the development of epistemic categories and definitions as to what education is or should be, through to voluntary associations such as conferences, courses and seminars which influence those who attend; through to organisational fields (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Jakobi, 2007) where a flurry of activity around certain aims pulls in large numbers of people and thus influences them around practices which share particular ways of doing things. Harder structures such as Regulatory frameworks (Jayasuriya and Robertson, 2010) begin to solidify practices and tie agents, often on a voluntary basis into them, the Bologna process could be considered to be an example of such a structure. Even harder structures are tied loans and other forms of foreign direct investment in education

infrastructure through to very hard restructuring packages backed by legislation thus acting to develop and consolidate certain activities such as privatisation onto national educational systems. Examples of such structures would be the Structural Adjustment Processes (SAPs) of the International Monetary Fund.

The development of all of these structures is accompanied by a large number of discourses each of which contains its own ideological complex (Hodge and Kress, 1988) carrying particular stories about what the world is like and how people should act within it. An ideological complex according to Hodge and Kress is a set of versions of the world which are functionally related to one another. False consciousness can be developed through one or more of such complexes, even when they are at variance with the experience of those who accept them. Characteristic of such ideological complexes is that they tend to further the interests of one group over another and are usually imposed in the pursuance of such interests.

Thus we can see that discursive structures can exert an influence on agents (Ball, 1998). This brings us to the second premise underpinning this work, the definition of discourses as structures. Discursive structures can set up a distinct ideological mechanism affecting the ideas that people hold, the way they think about the world, the way in which they categorise what they find around themselves. This is done via the system of rules telling reader, or the consumer of the text, how the text should be read. They are the generic rules or etiquette needed to make sense of it. They have to be accepted, even momentarily, in order that the reader can interpret the text. They always carry assumptions. For example a World Bank report on a country is assumed to be a disinterested, depoliticised document, or education is assumed to automatically increase the economic competitiveness of a nation. Discourses are, in ontological terms, social structures which do things to people's way of organising their knowledge in line with the agenda of the creators of the discourse. Various epistemic categories are put forward by discourses and these can be uncovered by a careful analysis of the texts produced within them. These might be definitions, classifications, links between concepts and assumptions which perpetuate selective definitions and forms of analysis which can make the vested interests behind what is suggested more palatable to the public. Jakobi (2007) discusses the question of the concept of 'the knowledge society' in these terms. He goes on to discuss the idea of an organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) being developed around this concept. You could say that an organisational field can

develop when you have an increase in the extent of interaction between various organisations in the field. This could involve exchanging information, advising and seeking advice; the emergence of structures of domination and coalition patterns between these agents; an increase in the information load on the agents in the field; the development of a common enterprise between different actors. Thus a social structure emerges and agents are caught up in a common goal. Jakobi traces the development of just such an organisational field around the common goals of turning education into a means of developing 'the knowledge society'. Once established then such an organisational field creates a rationale for a country to develop policy which is in line with the premises of the field accelerating the process of policy diffusion into the education policies of a nation. Through the structures mentioned so far, a large number of changes are being made to the way people think about education and the process of developing education systems, particularly when these systems are being sold often 'readymade' to a 'developing nation' regardless of the actual needs of the individuals in receipt of such education. These changes are being made to the transitive realm, or what is in people's heads, but they occur as a result of what might be considered to be innocuous technical texts, and they result in whole scale physical restructuring of educational systems.

It is possible to unravel the way in which discourses work. For some detailed use of discourse analysis in order to do this, using global texts relevant to higher education see (Ball, 2009; Walker, 2009). One of the consequences of the production and circulation of these discursive structures is the emergence of various new ways of conceptualising education in the world; a point which will be elaborated later in this paper.

Harder structures such as regulatory frameworks can build upon the ideas developed by discourses, fixing and consolidating more binding structures and agreements. Regional spaces can be created, existing beyond the territory of any one nation. These are made up of a large number of people working towards a certain regulatory end across a number of nations. Thus transnational networks grow up around such regulation and these act as further structures putting in place discursive as well as regulatory mechanism which may influence policy. Jayasuriya and Robertson (2010) make a detailed analysis of the Bologna process as an example of such a phenomenon. Note the way in which such regulatory spaces can work beyond and through national borders.

Under the GATS harder forms of agreement develop into international legislation which can override national legislation and may not be undone on a national level. The stalling of the GATS under the Doha round has not prevented its execution by the WTO secretariat and bilateral agreements under it continue to grow, while liberalisation agreements which were agreed under the previous Uruguay (1986 to 1994) still have to be adhered to (Verger, 2010, p. 6). According to Jayasuriya and Robertson (2010) Bologna is one of a number of regulatory standards which are developing as part of global competition between the US and the EU over markets in higher education. Thus it would appear that there is a level of contestation occurring at all levels as to which structures should be formed and which not. Whether such competition opens the way for contestation at a more basic level such as a deeper debate on the nature of education itself, whose interests it should meet and organised opposition to the privatisation of education systems remains to be seen.

In addition to the above, mechanisms such as foreign direct investment in the education sectors debt financing and interest repayments come into play and can be used to force nations to develop certain types of education as opposed to others. Thus IMF loans are accompanied by restructuring packages including demands to cut public spending on education amongst other forms of public spending.

Legislation or Law can usefully be considered as a 'politico-ideological phenomenon' which is produced within a political practice aimed at developing, defining and perpetuating relations of power between agents (Sumner, 1979, p. 268). In the context of transnational education deals, this allows us to see that the phenomenon of legislation can act as a structure which opens the way for the use of military force, economic coercion, or the punishment by marginalisation or isolation of nations.

All these emerging structures, whether soft or hard, give rise to various mechanisms which act to open up markets for the privatisation or 'liberalisation' of education services. These mechanisms have different effects in different contexts, depending upon which other mechanisms exist to work with or against them.

### **Interaction between the global, national and institutional levels: Similar mechanisms - different outcomes.**

To consider the effect of various mechanisms that stem from the different emerging structures, on higher education we need to consider the third of the premises underpinning

this paper. This is recognition of what critical realists call the stratified ontology of the world. Structures affecting higher education exist at global, national and institutional levels (Ball, 2009). At the global level structures can create mechanisms or possible drivers which may have effects at regional, national and institutional levels. Thus for example activities of a global nature such as the strong neo-liberal stance taken by the WTO, or in a position paper by the OECD, can have a number of effects upon national policies (Dale, 1999; Henry et al., 2001). The activities of nations are complicit in sculpting global structures. Thus mechanisms are acting both ways. According to Verger it is necessary to look at 'who controls what and on what scale'. Verger advocates what he calls a 'pluri-scaler conception of education' thus going beyond 'methodological nationalism' i.e. studying phenomena only at the national scale, and at the same time avoiding a 'globalist bias' i.e. considering the global scale alone (Verger, 2010, p. 13). In critical realist terms this is also called ontological depth (Bhaskar, 1979). At the same time all nations are not the same. Power relations between the global and the national scale are not always 'top down' and states can also be promoters of global initiatives and processes as well as being affected by their consequences. All global processes rely upon the activities of nations in order to operate, there need to be tax agreements, exchange rates, borders have to be opened or closed to selective individuals, imports and exports and so on. Different nations are in different positions depending upon whether they are developing or losing their industrial base; the extent of their debts and the degree to which they are dependent upon other nations or whether they are the lenders. The natures of nations' economies, the extent to which they need markets and so on all affect their relationship to global structures. In addition to this there is also the growth of spaces where regulatory frameworks and common aims cause agents to work together. Such spaces can exist within and without the realm of individual nations. The Bologna process in Europe and beyond and MERCOSUR-Educativo in Latin America could be considered to be creating and operating in such spaces (Jayasuriya and Robertson, 2010; Verger and Hermo, 2010).

The discussion so far already shows the need for the fourth premise underpinning this paper, that of interdisciplinarity in the approach taken to investigate the phenomena emerging in the field of higher education in the global arena. This is important because education is not isolated from developments in other areas. As has already been mentioned in the last paragraph, the economic realm and the social political history of a nation have a

bearing upon the way in which global mechanisms might impact upon education within that nation as well as upon the extent to which the nation can set up or influence mechanisms in the global arena. The fact that a mechanism might be caused by a structure at another level means that in order to analyse what is going on we need to bring to bear the conceptual tools developed for different scales. This often needs to call on the resources of different disciplines. The historical development of the current structures at the global level takes us into the realm of political history. A study of the ontology of wealth and the flow of money takes us into the realm of economics. The particular development of discourses and the texts that make them up take us into the realm of social semiotics, the analysis of the practices that lead to particular epistemic formulations into the realm of philosophy and the morphology of discourses into agreements into legislation into the area of Law. With a clear focus on what is going on in higher education this analysis draws on these various disciplines to understand influences on higher education.

Within Europe the problems of any one country has the potential to affect others (Gros and Mayer, 2010). The recent economic crises faced by European nations, where the time of easy credit worldwide is now resulting in financial crisis, is leading to the use of public finances to overcome the problems of the financial sector by rescuing the banks and reclaiming the money by cutting public spending. Insistence on cuts in public sector spending is a requirement of borrowing either from the IMF or from more regionally based monetary sources such as European based funding such as from the European Development Bank. The loans to financial institutions are paid back by nations backed by their tax payers (Sibert, 2009). These mechanisms were evident in the case of Greece in the first half of 2010 and can impact adversely on public spending including spending in the Higher Education sector. Once again the winners are those that can afford to travel across the globe and pay high fees for privately funded higher education, while the losers are those who cannot.

Similar mechanisms are evident all over the world. The increasing indebtedness of many nations have led to demands for 'restructuring' or privatisation as part of the conditions attached to rescheduling of loans or Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) for more details see (Carnoy, 2000; Tikly et al., 2004) and (Kamat, 2004). According to Hickling-Hudson (2004) many of the problems that ex colonial countries faced when developing their education systems were caused by western models of education imposed, which tended to suffer from favouring the elite. Such types of education system would appear to be in the

process of being re-imposed through the privatisation of state education systems and the creation of education markets.

In line with dominant global mechanisms towards liberalisation the UK government, which has committed to opening its education markets to private providers, announced a cut of £449 million in state funding for universities in February 2010 to be spread over one year. This is predicted to leave up to 250 thousand students without a place at university in 2010. It is also expected to result in a loss of 15,000 posts in universities. At the same time student applications have risen by 12% when compared to the same time last year (Independent, 08/02/2010). Withdrawal of government funding is acting as a national mechanism which is causing these institutions to seek to survive without it. This mechanism operates on all publically funded universities but it has different effects on each of them due to the differences in the institutions. This is a further example of the stratified ontology we are dealing with, at the national level the mechanism exists, at the institutional level it has to contend with other mechanisms which ameliorate or enhance its effects giving rise to different actual situations in each institution. This has led to various reactions by UK universities ranging from the case of one notorious university which resorted to deception, by misreporting student drop out figures (Brown, 2010); to drastic measures by others where it has led to a severe cut backs on certain courses such as one university's controversial decision to cut its philosophy faculty in an attempt to concentrate on more lucrative courses (Segal, 2010). Increased stratification or the development of different tiers within the HE sector is being accelerated by this mechanism of withdrawal of public funds as different universities react in different ways, searching for ways in which they can continue to be viable. For other universities it has led to a search for alternative funding and the development of particular relationships with corporations evident in many university websites' 'services for business'. It has also led to a greater recruitment of higher paying overseas students. Yet other universities are moving into providing education overseas through lucrative franchises with overseas governments as well as with private providers. Thus the same mechanism has different effects on institutions within the same country. The net result is that education becomes more accessible to those who can pay for it and less possible for those who cannot, both on a national and on a global scale.

### **The changing definitions of education itself:**

The word 'education' can be said to be a nominalisation (Butt et al., 2000) which means that though it is a complex process, it acts as a simple noun in a sentence. This makes it possible to treat education as an object rather than a complicated process. Nominalising it allows us to define education to be a commodity and talk about buying or selling it as a service under the GATS agreement. It can be a "public good" or a panacea for an ailing national economy. At the same time we can discuss education as a human right and an aid to the development of individual human potential. The nominalisation of education avoids any discussion about all the complexity involved in learning, in pedagogical work, different cultural perspectives, vested interests, historical developments or potentials within the process of education. Education can simultaneously be taken to mean: the process of acquiring knowledge, the transmission of knowledge, the construction of concepts, the curriculum; various ways of considering pedagogy; the acquisition of skills; the theory and practice of didactics and so on. Added to this there is the question of cognition in all its variants; the question of cultural capital which can be passed on or absorbed; the results of banking models of education; education for liberation; education as a commodity; education as workforce development to make the economy more competitive to name but a few. Which of these has currency depends on which discourses are dominant and powerful interests can be influential.

Thus in looking at how the word education appears in various discursive structures both global and national, we can consider what use is being made of it, and to what purpose and in whose interests it is being used. What is the nature of what is called education? Who is it affecting? Who is not included? What is taught? Which models of pedagogy are involved and why? Certainly some types of education may well make the economy of a nation more competitive in a world which is dominated by the maximisation of profit, but is it going to be the same types that benefit the students or the development of critical minds in a nation what embraces it?

The OECD strongly reflects a notion of education as a commodity, tradable on the international markets, which will benefit all who invest in it by making them more competitive in the world economy, while working to alleviate social discontent. The model is a form of social capital theory on a micro level. This is in keeping with the fact that all member countries of the OECD are committed formally to notions of a free market, a

particular form of pluralism in governance that facilitates the operations of such a market and various other aspects of neo-liberalism (Henry et al., 2001).

According to Henry et al (2001) the OECD has been one of the important ways in which the articulation of a neo-liberal slant on globalisation has taken place. These discursive structures set up mechanisms which are present at national levels, however as we have already seen in our discussion of mechanisms, they will not necessarily have the same effect on all nations. For some nations the power of these mechanisms will be actualised and national policy may well reflect a similar conceptualisation of education. In others the powers will remain potential while other mechanisms stemming from economic, social and political structures within current or historical developments of the nation will work against them although they remain very real and continue to exert a potential influence should circumstances change. In the case of the UK however the same discourse was vividly evident in Gordon Brown's speech at the Lord Mayor's banquet for Bankers and Merchants of the City of London where he explicitly linked education and the free market 'Only with investment in education can open markets, free trade and flexibility succeed. And the prize is enormous. If we can show people that by equipping themselves for the future they can be the winners not losers in globalisation, beneficiaries of this era of fast moving change, then people will welcome open, flexible, free trade and pro-competition economies as an emancipating force' Brown (2007) cited in (Grant, 2009, p. xv)

The incessant discursive and other interventions from intra-national organisations, such as the WTO or the OECD, based on the assumptions that education is crucial to the economic competitiveness of a nation, are exerting pressures which opens the way for variants of micro human capital theories of education to be adopted by nations as they develop education policy. Barnett(1999) claims that the 1997 Dearing report attempts to reposition universities as forces to facilitate economic regeneration. The Dearing report (Dearing, 1997), in the UK, while still mentioning the need for education to be 'life enriching and desirable in its own right' links it to economic growth, international competitiveness, new technology, standards and accountability on the basis of value for money. The report follows the assumptions of human capital theories that increasing the number of educated people in society will automatically increase the competitive advantage of the economy (Shelley, 2005, p. 40). Ball (1998) had already pointed out that the trend was to tie

education more closely to the national economy while at the same time decoupling it from state control.

In the European nations and the USA, education is also a commodity which could be exported to other lands or simply sold to the highest international bidders and hence bring in valuable revenue to a national economy. Universities have long looked at the lucrative market where overseas students bring in high fees, but there is now also the movement of universities to take their courses and staff abroad and run courses in other countries corresponding to phase II of the Prime Minister's Initiative in International Education (DSCF, 2010). The need for curricular development that lends itself easily and cheaply to such export is a further driver for change in the curriculum within the UK as universities look towards this market. The effect of global drivers to open markets in education can thus be seen in considering the priorities of the British government after 2006. The high fees charged by universities in the UK is making European universities, with their low or nonexistent fees, look more attractive for UK students (Clark, 24/10/2006). The press release announcing the Prime Minister's Initiative shows that the expressed aim of the initiative, together with the UK-India education research initiative, is to: 'Maintain the UK's position in major education markets' and to 'position the UK as a leader in international education' (DSCF, 2010). According to the DSCF, these initiatives are heavily supported by industry and sponsored by BP, BAE Systems, GlaxoSmithKline and Shell on board as Corporate Champions who are each prepared to give a million pounds each to the initiatives. Overall £27 million, sourced from the education sector and business, the British Council and the UK government, were committed to the projects. £2 million of this money was to develop the UK's education markets in Russia, £4 million in China, £3 million for Africa and £7.5 million for the research initiative in India backed by the powerful Indian Tata group. Hence the opening up of education markets in the interests of private profit is an important agenda of the UK government.

Henry et al (2001) claim that the last 25 years have seen changes in the complexity of, the direction of, and in discourses about, higher education systems. They point out that overarching organisations such as the Institutes of the European Union e.g. European Parliament or the European Court of Justice are not held accountable to any particular nation and yet are influencing national states, leaving them less room to manoeuvre in

formulating policies. Monopolies and multinational corporations act across borders in their own interests, the actions of one entity across the globe can affect the local situation thousands of miles away, there is increased movement of people as well as money, technology means that information can flow instantaneously and as a result of these processes there is a disjunction between the economy, politics and culture which would seem to challenge the authority of the nation state (Appadurai, 1996). At the same time agency is exerted strongly at national level. Verger and Hervo (2010) have compared the unfolding of the Bologna process in Europe with the MERCUSUR-Educativo process in Latin America to find that similar structures, setting in motion similar mechanisms, have very different effects in the two regions as a result of the different political and economic preoccupations, histories, resources and the interacting mechanisms from other structures in the regions.

The question of globalisation itself can act as a discourse in the political arena. Dale (2000) considers two contrasting ways in which the nature of globalisation, the nature of education and the relationship between education and globalisation are conceptualised:

The first and dominant perspective he calls the Common World Educational Culture (CWEC) According to this, notions of education, state and society are universal models as opposed to distinct national factors. These universal models are used to explain the development of national educational systems and curricular categories. Under this perspective, education is considered, rather un-problematically to be a resource, without the need to discuss the nature of education in any detail. In this view the nation states exist within a world international community. Culture is something that draws upon a range of shared and equally available highly generalised resources and is generally an asset to be shared. If nations have problems this must be due to a lack of subjective understanding to be fixed by educating social agents about tried and tested ways to develop their nation in line with the dominant values in a globalised community. This perspective is emerging as dominant and it acts as a discursive structure with the epistemic categories outlined here.

The other perspective, favoured by Dale, he calls the Globally Structured Agenda for Education (GSAE). Here, globalisation is driven by the changing nature of the world capitalist economy and consequent effects on educational systems. The effects are mediated at a local level. Education is itself a topic for inquiry into how the various activities called 'education' are situated, formulated and how the posing of questions itself can play a part

in deciding which answers are allowed and which excluded. On this view, social and economic forces act trans-nationally to reshape international relations, while eluding national boundaries. A “Structured Agenda” is drawn upon, under which a ‘systematic set of unavoidable issues’ arise for nation states according to their position relative to globalisation (Dale, 2000, p. 428). Thus the key points to consider about education are who gets taught what, using what resources, by whom and for what purpose? What are the implications for the institutions and structures involved and what are the consequences for individuals and social groups? Who provides the structures to facilitate this education and how are they funded? What forms of regulation are used and what is the relationship between them and the way societies are governed? What are the relationships between such education systems and the social institutions and groups they affect? (Dale, 2000, p. 439).

### **Conclusions and implications:**

What must the world be like for all this to be happening in the realm of higher education? Currently powerful transnational players with substantial interests in making profit out of the sale of education systems, products and processes are operating across the globe. As part of preparing the way for the realisation of such interests, a large number of discourses are developing. Each realised through many texts which create epistemic categories redefining the very nature of education in such a way as to facilitate its treatment as a commodity to be bought and sold privately for profit and as a form of ‘human capital’. This process is continuing with the active compliance of some nations, it is being developed and promoted by others and it is being sold to others as the only way to enter global markets in other areas (Verger, 2009). The education systems of entire nations are conceptualised in such discourses as crucial to the economic wellbeing of such nations yet paradoxically private multinational providers are being promoted as the best providers. The conditions for such providers to operate with minimum or no regulation by nation states are created in discursive structures. The epistemic categories which serve such interests are instrumental in the acceptance of these interests, and the material structures that develop and perpetuate them, by the vast majority of the world’s governments and people. If we ask ourselves what the world must be like for such a plethora of discourses to be found in it we

might answer that it is a world in which control of the transitive realm (Bhaskar, 1979), i.e. that of ideas and the models people adopt, would appear to be of great importance to the most powerful transnational agents. The importance of whether people accept particular dominant models of the nature of education, is connected with the effect such acceptance might have on the potential for agential action on the part of the citizens of the various nations affected. It is a world in which at the same time as the development of such discursive structures and seemingly in contradiction to the call for deregulation, in fact regulatory frameworks are being developed to consolidate free global market access for private providers of education. It is a world in which legislation entered into at a global level can override national parliaments. It is also a world where agential action is possible at all levels and the development of structures at all levels is being contested albeit slowly as citizens become aware of the implications of the drives to liberalise public education.

What we are seeing is morphogenesis in education systems at all the different levels, global, national and institutional, with agents and conglomerates of agents working to shape or destroy structures in higher education in their interests. The part to be played by the citizens of different nations in the world in this morphogenesis is not yet clear although large protests at the various meetings of the G8 where issues like the GATS were discussed would appear to imply levels of dissatisfaction and non compliance to date. Is it possible that new structures, in the future, can focus, develop and enhance the agency of the people themselves in their attempts to save public higher education systems, or to develop the kinds of education that can meet their own needs?

In her work on the education systems of England and France, Margaret Archer claims that in the development of the education systems of those two countries education takes the particular form it does because that is what the interests of the owners of education dictate (Archer, 1984). The world is entering a stage where the very ownership of education systems is being contested at all levels. If the education system is owned by agents whose primary interest is the free flow of profits as opposed to the development of human beings in the enhancement of their own agency, then these are the interests which will be served by pedagogy in higher education. If however, other conceptualisations of education, its aims and purposes are developed in the interests of human rights and needs then pedagogy will be put to those uses. The contestation, the key issue to be resolved, remains at the level of ownership of education systems, private and 'liberalised' or public and available to all. As

developers of pedagogy in higher education, this is not an issue that staff in universities can be indifferent to. Any attempt to consider what higher education systems in the world will look like in the future will need to take this question into account.

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