

An other self?: Education, foreignness, reflexive comparison and capability as connectionⁱ

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Abstract

The article is an attempt to explore through the lens of my identification as a foreigner, a number of different themes around work in comparative education, particularly aspects of the question of method, and some reflections on the relationship with education and international development. The discussion begins with some reflection on internal or external foreignness, and the ways in which these identifications within my autobiography are heterodox, not singular and co-constructed with many relationships, changing over time. Some different formulations of pluralism and engagements with the capability approach are discussed drawing out some of the resources they provide for exploring approaches in comparative education. In the final section some features of the idea of reflexive comparison as a methodological resource are sketched.

An other self: Internal of external foreignness?

From a certain viewpoint I can position my work as marked by particular forms of personally claimed or socially ascribed foreign-ness. I can note I am a woman, from a particular location, class and race inflected background, working on gender in comparative and international education. These are disciplinary areas where key works have largely been written by men. Women's rights and gender analysis are areas of specialist, not mainstream, concern. Here I am foreign by what I am *not*. This has internal effects on some of what I write, how I write, and external effects on the political dynamics of how this writing is viewed. These two processes, which are both heterodox, and not simply one thing for all time, are also interconnected. This has implications for thinking about method, as I discuss below.

In other ways, I am foreign because I carry many identities and experiences, which mark me in particular ways and distinguish me from others researching and teaching in this area. In this process I am foreign because of what I *am*. Few of my colleagues share my particular mix of identifications. I was born in South Africa, but now live in London. My school and university education, and my first experiences of work in research and teaching, were marked by the race, class and gender hierarchies of South Africa under apartheid. I come from groups that were, and, regrettably, remain, dominant in that society. These groups have been privileged by laws, by wealth, educational opportunities, and health provision. While some of the culture in my own family was critical of these structures, we have also, because of race and class formations, been complicit with grave inequalities, from which I have benefitted, and against which I have tried to act. From a very young age I have felt a sense of estrangement and critique of these processes, and continue to worry at failures to do enough to try to effect change. When I was 15 I wrote a poem for a collection of teenage writing, that found its way many years later onto the syllabus for the school leaving examination (Unterhalter, 2016). This poem distils something of the sense of perplexity, I felt growing up

in a city so marked by inequality and not knowing how to make sense for myself or anyone else of what I saw.

My family background, student experiences, and political affiliations immersed me in an anti-apartheid milieu, initially in South Africa, and later in the UK, where initially I came to study. I was foreign in the UK because of my citizenship and history, particularly some of my experiences of student politics in South Africa, and my witness to the acute suffering and dispossession of people in the Nqutu district of Zululand, where I had worked after I finished my first degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. In the UK probably what was most notable to an outside observer, was my accent, and sometimes my gender. I shared race and class similarities with the majority of others studying and working in higher education in the 1970s. There were a small number of women research students when I was working on my PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London in the late 1970s. We were a restive group, grappling with how to understand the politics of gender, class and race inequalities, decode institutional politics, and situate ourselves within or outside our disciplines of history, sociology and literature, which did not yet have a clear space for the ideas around gender that engaged us. Some of this has been written in a handful of histories of these fields (Hetherington, 1993;Friedman, 2015; Morrell and Clowes, 2016). In my first jobs in adult education and as a researcher, women were a minority. Feminist struggles to establish gender, education and development as areas of scholarship, professional and political work were fraught with anxiety, and marked by fragile initiatives outside institutional frameworks, which were hard to sustain. This mix of foreign identities, which I feel is woven in with my autobiography, is so familiar that I have barely scrutinised some of its assumptions, even though the location of my work has now shifted from a position of marginality to quite mainstream. This then raises questions regarding method in the work I have done and connectivity in some of the collaborations I consider important. Part of this links with which identity of foreignness I do and do not use, when, how and why I make use of intersectionality and particular forms of affiliation, and the changing configurations of time and place I give to these relationships. I acknowledge that having freedoms to choose identifications is associated with privilege, so this process itself needs critical scrutiny. If I review the many forms my writings have taken there is not a single method, but there is an underscoring of some of these issues of critique, concern with gender in its changing formulations, and interconnection as something I have struggled to formulate and express.

The networks in which I lived and worked from the 1970s to the 1990s in London noted foreignness as a norm. This constellation of activists, engaged in the politics of what was called at the time the Third World, drew in people from widely different backgrounds. Our foreignness to each other was a huge resource. It generated intense discussions about political strategies, and nurtured curiosity, respect for knowledge, scholarship, and creativity to work with and through differences to try to understand something about the projects of social justice that absorbed us. This is not to say there were not intense differences, often marked by sharply different ideologies, political affiliations, and interpretations of strategies. Amongst this gathering of many foreigners I felt at home. Our location was not so much the formal university classroom, but the reading group, the seminar, the research led publications we printed on offset litho machines, where the ink smudged, and we had to stay up all night laying down headlines in letraset, a very physical connection with the production of knowledge and a very closely lived experience of collaboration. Although I was foreign here

too, everyone was foreign in some respects. The many mixed identities of foreignness which were part of our discussions, seemed connected by a shared concern with a loose aspiration for social justice, even though some were aware that many of the associations we made were fraught. We needed to understand, but often lacked the insight to grasp, the history of the Communist Party in Russia, China and the geo-politics of the USA and the USSR in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the gender and race politics of social movements. We had to try to confront and understand failures to deliver on social justice as much as the aspiration towards that. That time of trying to build unities across divisions, and thinking of different forms of education that could help with this, still has enormous resonance for me, nearly 30 years after it ended. I am often reminded now that experiences I formed as a student and young teacher on adult education programmes seem old fashioned, out of place. They sit far from the present, in another time, separated by enormous political, economic, material and educational processes, which have changed countries, cities, institutions and the political form of networks. Some of the most profound changes have come in South Africa, the country where I was born, went to school and university. Some big shifts have come to Johannesburg, the city in which, in my teenage poem, I noted some of the people around me, portraying them through an inflection point of anxiety as how to formulate my relationships. Visiting this city now, there are many, many more people from other parts of South Africa, other cities in Africa, and the world and our relationships require radical change towards deeper levels of understanding and connection. This is particularly challenging for, despite very welcome shifts associated with the coming of democracy, many contours of the world I grew up with, remain. The inequalities of contemporary South Africa are glaring, heavily weighed down by many failures to adequately recognize and redress the huge injustices of the past. The relationships of neoliberalism have made the present and future a setting of overwhelming injustice which requires constant consideration of ways to work for change. Thus I am often on guard against over-romanticising that period of activism, aware I am forgetting old tensions, disappointments and divisions, failures to care, or speak up. I remember that some kinds of foreign identity were more accepted than others and this continues to be the case. Thus the difficulties of naming or claiming my other self and positioning it in a painful present, nurtures a scepticism about method and a concern about forms of connection.

Thus my sense of myself as foreign, with an 'other' self, is not a clear construct and the perspective this gives or that I take on education systems, processes or identities is not simple. This generates a host of questions about method. This persona as a foreigner has many facets, and is co-constructed with many relationships. It has shifted over time and place. In day to day life, as I am writing this article, I often feel foreign. I am sometimes puzzled by this internal sense of being other. I live in London, a city I have known for 40 years, where I have family, friends, interesting work, and physical objects that connect me to the place, such as a house, an office, and a local library, with a huge supply of books. I wonder whether thinking of myself as foreign, is a long established internally referential habit of mind. Thus I think of myself as an outsider, even though I work in a well endowed university at the heart of an enormously rich city. I am white, middle class and a native speaker of English, the main language of London and the UK. This is a widely used language of academic and political exchange and I am not an outsider to these discussions which I can listen to with ease, and participate in, if I choose. But despite these privileges, I have grown used to a critical and self critical stance. I think this is merited by the injustices

that persist in my home country, and which have grown since the 1970s in my adopted country. These remain a glaring feature of the world in which we live, and looming environmental crisis throws them into sharper relief. The promise of ICT to connect us across boundaries promising far wider knowledge than the smudged newsletters, closely printed books, and sleep deprived collaborations of my student years, falls short on many counts. Social media has unleashed a storm of identity driven invective, where foreignness in any form (race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, location) is all too frequently used in hurling abuse, or in forms of surveillance, rather than in an enactment of understanding. This concern poses me slightly to the side of some mainstreams, seeking a position as the other as much as being given one, prompting me to use some methods and collaborations more comfortably than others.

In this article I want to question this stance, consider the identity of a foreigner and its implications for some work in method in comparative education. I have taken up the identity of other, or felt this identity given to me. This has been associated with tensions between an internal and an external form of identity. These discomforts resonate with the societies in which I have lived, where social structures of selective exclusion and inclusion overlay ideas, relationships and locations. These structures and processes in my autobiographic experience have been associated with racialisation, gender contestation, a diasporic Jewishness, liberalism, communitarianism, Marxism, and discussion within universities about how and why equalities can or cannot be explored. My sense of self as multiple, only relatively autonomous, relational, and historically located, has been always contested and contingent, as much by myself as a range of interlocutors. This is not surprising given where and when I have lived and worked. Comparative and international education as disciplinary areas encourage this particularly mobile form of identification as a foreigner. But, in this article, I want to go below surface identifications and think through, in a bit more detail, some ideas about pluralism, the connections with my internal and external Others and some of the implications for thinking about method.

Pluralism and identities

Ideas about pluralism and its relationship with connection and reflexivity are a somewhat muted thread of analysis in comparative education, and international development. This may have to do with the theoretical hybridity and eclecticism which characterise both fields of inquiry (Cowen and Kazamias, 2009; Larsen, 2010; Unterhalter 2015). But the concerns of some analysts of pluralism with how difference transmutes into inequality, how fragile and difficult connection may be, and how much particular forms of education and insight around the complexities of histories and identities are needed to support change (Cockburn, 1998; Vertovec 2010; Brubaker, 2015; Johnson, 2016) resonate with some of the general scholarly terrain of both fields. Avnon and de Shalit (1999) draw a connection between liberalism's portrayal of a multiple and creative self, which is what liberal ideas of education seek to nurture (Noddings, 2018), and the value liberalism places on pluralism. They distinguish three different forms of pluralism - sociological pluralism, axiological pluralism, and psychological pluralism - each associated with different stances of the state and hence positions with regard to education systems, ranging from minimal concern, headline forms of recognition, through engaged processes of change. In later work De Shalit (2018; 2019) adopts the same distinctions to think about the challenges immigrants to a city present, drawing on observational and philosophical reflections gathered in Jerusalem, Berlin and

Amsterdam. In the next section I work with this tri-partite format in relation to some debates in comparative education, and education and international development

In summary De Shalit's (2018, 31) analysis is that the sociological level of thinking about pluralism considers how people look, dress, where and what they eat, with whom they socialise. By implication such analysis considers where people considered outsiders are educated and what they learn. Methodologically this resonates with the form of comparative education Cowen (2009) noted as 'knowledge of foreign places' .

The axiological level, De Shalit argues, identifies the stranger or foreigner as bringing values from somewhere else, that may clash with those in the city in which she or he finds himself. Schools and children's experiences of schools, are key sites where these axiological differences play out, and many contentious policy debates around faith schooling, gender and sexuality, or privatisation contain within them contentions about axiological dimensions of pluralism. It is here comparative education interweaves with the sociology of education, and the work of some philosophers of equality to pose questions about the nature of the education system or space and how in these axiological interconnections change shape (Sobe, 2017) . On this terrain, in contrast to comparative education, education and international development often resorts to proxy markers of difference, which appear resistant to axiological struggles. By terming gender or socio-economic status, language, or location as descriptive categories of difference, as is commonplace in the annual reviews prepared for example as part of the UNESCO Global Education Monitor (eg. UNESCO, 2010) this process closes off, rather than opens up the axiological questions and their exploration in education settings. It suggests these categories may be unproblematically defined, while axiological pluralism and its critical consideration by scholars of comparative education throws up many of the complex contentions around definition.

Lastly, De Shalit identifies the psychological level of pluralism which carries with it 'the challenges of identity, about what it means to be a citizen of a particular city'. (De Shalit, 2018, 31). Psychological pluralism, I suggest, is not only a feature of urban experiences, but is invoked by many encounters in diverse locations. Education clearly is a thread in this form of pluralism, which raises questions of belonging, identification, and location to be understood not as direct referent but in terms of a denotation, connotation, experience and affective relationship. But what form education's imbrication with psychological forms of pluralism takes will always need to be established. The conceptual and methodological languages to do so are always in formation, as are the associative relationships. In reflecting on the plasticity of my identity as a foreigner in the paragraphs above, and my reflections on living in Johannesburg and London, I am working some this terrain. In the analysis that follows I want to draw out the implications of this for thinking about content, method and forms of affiliation in the two overlapping fields of comparative education and education and international development.

The argument thus considers some of these different formations of engagement with pluralism, drawing out some of their educational dimensions and their ramifications for methods of engagement with comparative education and the broad field I term education and international development. In doing this I attempt to further develop ideas about reflexive comparison as a method. I consider the capability to connect and recognise foreignness or an other self, a feature of reflexive comparison, as a generative opportunity and theoretically

resonant method, available to scholars in comparative education and education and international development, regardless of background or institutional association. I am critical of the policy engaged work in education and international development, including some I have written, which does not fully consider this method and does not ask some clear questions of the direction of travel of the work we do. I thus want to try to draw out some of the limitations and possibilities for this field.

The discussion proceeds in three steps. In the next part I consider some reflections on the identity of the scholar as foreigner in comparative education, placing this in dialogue with a range of work on pluralism. In the following step I draw on some ideas from the capability approach to consider the capability for connection, and what analytic and methodological resources this provides for thinking about foreignness, othering, and changes over time. In the third section I consider the implications of forms of pluralism and the ideas of connection as a capability for thinking about method in comparative education distilling ideas about reflexive comparison, exemplifying some instances of this and drawing out some of the collaborations that are entailed.

Pluralism, comparative education and the perspective of the other

Pluralism has a negative and positive set of orientations. In the segregated world in which I grew up and was first educated, it was linked with evidently false notions of separate but equal, promulgated by the architects of apartheid (Christie 1985; Nkomo, 1990). In contemporary Europe it sometimes attaches to notions of radical rightwing groups like the ethno pluralists of Sweden who look back to a non-existent golden age of what is portrayed as ethnic purity (Elgenius and Rydgren, 2018). Pluralism can be constructed as a set of excluding relationships even in liberal or social democratic education systems, where children who do not conform to the ideal type of learner are situated as problems, requiring particular kinds of interventions, resources, or remedial actions. In positive orientations to pluralism, the difference and diversity amongst people are a reality, a resource or a set of enriching relationships that can inspire movements to try to effect engagement, solidarity and equality, while acknowledging many difficulties (Oosterlynck, Loopmans, et al, 2016; Eun, 2016). In these different formulations of pluralism the portrayal of the foreigner takes a number of forms. She may be unwelcome, a disrupter to be reviled and excluded. She may be positioned as a problem to be neglected or assimilated into a dominant framing of an education system. Or she may be considered a resource, a messenger who may help to move an education system or a set of methodological assumptions into a more transformatory gear

In comparative education the scholar foreigner has contributed to expand the scholarly field. In the classic works of Bereday, Eckstein, Hans, Kandel, Kazamias, Lauwerys, Mitter, Noah, Ulich the gaze of the comparative educationist as foreigner ranges across this continuum. But it is in the newer work of, for example, Silova, Millei, Piattoeva (2018) and Kim (2014), that gender, mobility, and the multiplicity of identities come to question some accepted tropes of the discipline. These stances take somewhat different forms when the field of education and international development is considered. Here the biography of the researcher is positioned as a matter of reduced significance. One stream of inquiry in this area is highly positivist, linked with forms of the economics of education, concerned with scientific method, erasing the identity of the researcher, and, to the extent that outsiders are considered, they may be generally noted as a problem, linked for example with lack of performance, for example non

enrolment in school, poor learning outcomes, inadequate utilisation of education received, or failures to adequately process education information. These formations of outsider identity are to be analysed for their effects on education systems, remediated, and processes established to realign the relationships of the education system (Eg. World Bank, 2018). Another stream draws from poststructuralism and is aware of the identifications of researchers and theorists, emphasising the importance of this discursive positioning, in delineating forms of power, and generating critique. Researchers on this terrain have different forms of engagement with mainstream policy and practice ranging from critical participation (eg Parkes, 2016; Tikly, 2019) to trenchant calls to imagine this world differently and act accordingly (eg. Mamdani, 2016; Andreotti, 2016). The lack of consideration of the scholar as foreigner in much work in education and international development, and the lack of some theoretically informed methodological debates, may have something to do with the ways in which the field of inquiry is linked so closely to the concerns of large international organisations, the pressure in these organisations to use information in numeric form (Grown, Addison and Tarp, 2015; Riddell, & Niño-Zarazúa, 2016; Treffgarne, 2019), and their interest in the generation of decontextualized, and universally applicable solutions to what works, for example in relation to girls' education (Sperling and Winthrop, 2015) or in training teachers (Popova., Evans, & Arancibia, 2016).

Thus in these two related fields we have one where the gaze of the foreigner is seen to progress the discipline, and another where, in a substantial body of scholarship, the gaze of the foreigner, refracted through theory, is considered as a luxury, distracting from important work in policy and practice of effecting education change.

Some of the ways of thinking about pluralism cast some light on these differences. It appears to me that mainstream education and international development admits only sociological forms of pluralism, which are delimited by outline markers of social division associated with gender, socio-economic status, location, or ethnicity. Critical scholars in this field (eg. Tikly and Bond, 2018; Powell and McGrath, 2019) note axiological pluralism with regard to method, including their critical methodological engagements with governments, multilateral organisations, and funders. Discussion of the gendered nature of these organisations may be part of this critique, which is one route some of my work has taken (Unterhalter and North, 2017). But the complexities of psychological pluralism, and the two way critiques it requires, recognising an other self, and methodological limits and critiques this implies, do not sit comfortably with the focus on simple, clearly defined action.

Within comparative education, there is a stream of work drawing on large datasets, for example PISA scores or survey research, that works the terrain of sociological pluralism, utilizing the same headline identifications of social division that are familiar in education and international development (eg. Blossfeld, Skopek, Triventi., & Buchholz, 2015; Nollenberger., Rodríguez-Planas, & Sevilla, 2016;; van Hek., Buchmann, & Kraaykamp, 2019) . But the fulcrum of analysis in this field is generally axiological pluralism, which provides insight into processes such as policy transfer, or the histories of different education systems, although gender remains a minor thread in this work (eg. Volate, 2017; Steiner-Kahmsi and Draxler 2018; Van Praag., Verhoeven, Stevens, , & Van Houtte, 2019). The long shadow of particular kinds of scholar foreigners in comparative education shaping engagement with both these approaches to pluralism, seems to limit consideration of some of the complex exchanges, which De Shalit notes are parts of psychological pluralism that

entails bi-directional, psychological and normative forms of critique. When the normative turn comes into comparative education, for example in discussion of the work of philosophers of cosmopolitanism in education, (eg Hansen, 2017; Rizvi, 2019) , ideas about the capability approach and relational connections, such as ubuntu, under conditions of neo-liberalism(Hoffman and Metz, 2017), or critiques of World Bank policy (Klees et al, 2019) this is not always explicitly connected with lived experiences of exclusion and the complexities of racism or colonialism. My own work on this in relation to method in education and international development, although concerned to draw out the complexities of the different ways gender can be understood, is schematic (Unterhalter, 2008; 2009, 2016) and does not, in my view, adequately acknowledge the histories of dispossession, violence, war and exploitation that are part of the history of this field, shaping relationships of aid, international relations, and global policy flows into particular formations, as Tikly, Sriprakash and Walker (2019) note. Thus the capability to connect and recognise foreignness or an other self as a generative opportunity and theoretically resonant method requires different resources. To date the resources used have been mainly conceptual, as I detail in the next section. A move for further deepening of methodological discussion is only beginning to emerge.

Connecting concerns of comparative education and education and international development through the capability approach

Reflecting on my own biography, and the historical times in which I have worked, I can draw on my identity as a foreigner working in comparative education and education and international development. I was not a ‘native’ scholar in either field, being initially trained as a social historian, and then working very closely on education policy change in one country, South Africa. As the terrain of my work has been gender and equalities issues, that are not mainstream, in either field, I have had a peculiar kind of niche available to me to pick up ideas that were politically and personally resonant.

From this niche I have been attracted to the capability approach (eg. Sen, 1993; Sen, 1999; Alkire, Quizalbash, Comin; Nussbaum, 2011; Crocker, 2005; Robeyns, 2018) for its concern with social context, its investigation of questions of equality and justice, seen not as abstract principles, but lived relationships, and the interdisciplinary landscape it has provided. The capability approach gives those who work on its application in education many conceptual resources. These can help navigate some of the complexities of changing social division De Shalit’s tri-partite mapping highlights. In a rich set of empirically grounded studies, some of which I discuss below, a number of authors consider how race, gender, class and location shape education opportunities and outcomes, thus how different forms of pluralism connect with social structures, and forms of agency. However, few of these writers reflect on the complexities of their identifications, the implications of this for the methods they use, and the fields they work in, although Melanie Walker (2019) has trenchantly raised the question of epistemic justice and the need to do so.

In 1999, the first year I attended the Oxford conference of UKFIET, a key forum for work on education and international development, I bought a copy of Amartya Sen’s *Development as Freedom*.(Sen, 1999) On my first reading, what struck me most was the confidence of the tone and the particular amalgam of philosophical discussion, empirical detail, and personal engagement. In retrospect, I think I was particularly attuned to that form of analysis given the

ways in which the 1990s had been marked for me by enormous hope in and for the South African transition, an expectation that information could be assembled to assist that process, and some of the debates about the relationship of equity and development that were circulating in South Africa at the time (Unterhalter and Wolpe, 1992; Badat, 1999; Unterhalter, 2019). Thus I think my positioning as a foreigner and outsider to education and international development made me particularly receptive to this form of scholarship.

Over the next twenty years I and many others have applied the capability approach to the analysis of education. The key distinction Sen delineates between functionings (or outcomes) and capabilities (opportunities) has been used in work on what children and adults have reason to value within and about education (eg. Biggeri, Ballet, & Comim, F., 2011; Young, 2009; Walker and Wilson Strydom, 2016; Hart and Brando, 2018; Unterhalter, 2019a; Okkolin, Koskela, Engelbrecht, & Savolainen, 2018; Mutanga, 2019) shifting a stream of analysis away from the human capital assertion that all forms of education breed improvements in productivity or other externalities, and tempering the negativity in some sociological and post structural work that saw all education as a site of the reproduction of relationships of inequality and exploitation. This productive tension in work on education was familiar to me because of some of the discussions on this theme in the mass democratic movement in South Africa in the 1980s, and the ANC in exile at that time, particularly the deliberations of the education committee, of which I was a member (Morrow, Maaba and Pulumani, 2004; Wolpe, 1990; Habib & Taylor, 1999; Unterhalter 2019b)

There is now a large body of empirical and conceptual work on the capability approach and education, and, interestingly, this scholarship bridges some of the comparative/international development divide, because it is both contextually detailed, and concerned with agency and practice. I do not have scope to summarise this literature fully, but I want to consider a key methodological feature, which seems to situate the work somewhere between De Shalit's axiological and psychological pluralism, considering foreign identities formed in a research process as important to scrutinise, even though work in this area is yet to begin.

On first surveying the methodological decisions taken in much of the key work on the capability approach and education, what is most apparent is the affiliations made with other disciplines (sociology, economics, philosophy, disability studies), where there is no special consideration given to the identification of the researcher as foreigner. Thus the chief attribute of this work is attention to professional, disciplinary rigour using methods, such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups deploying concepts from the capability approach in collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data. This is evident, for example, in studies of the work of teachers nuancing insight into professional practice, pedagogies, and how appreciation of values and capabilities might help guide understanding of forms of practice (eg. Tao, 2016; Buckler, 2015; Calitz, 2018). These methods have been used to investigate how capabilities in education are constrained by conditions inside and outside school, vocational education and university, highlighting that forms of evaluation must consider the connection between both sites of opportunity and constraint. While virtually all these studies are works by outsiders to the social processes they report on (eg. Otto, Egdell, Bonvin, & Atzmüller, 2017; Dejaeghere, 2018; Unterhalter, 2012; Walker and Maclean, 2013) this distance is considered a merit of the study. These well tested methods, with little reflection on researcher identification beyond a political concern with inequalities, have been used to consider ways in which the capability approach can help identify particularly

embodied forms of educational exclusion associated with disability (eg. Terzi, 2008; Mutanga, 2019), race and poverty (eg Walker & Strydom, 2016), language (eg. Tikly, 2016; Adamson, 2019) and gender (Dejaeghere, 2018; Unterhalter, 2012; Loots & Walker, 2015). In the less contextually attuned work on planning, more engaged with the field of education and international development, and less contextually immersed, the insights from the capability approach about the possibility of richer data sources with regard to location, and metrics for evaluating policy and practice have shaped both cross national comparisons and debates about how inequality and equality can be measured drawing in reflections on measuring gender equality in education and measuring the unmeasurable in education (eg Alkire, Roche et al, 2015; Frame, De Lannoy and Leibbrandt, 2016; Yang, 2017; Unterhalter, 2018; Fukuda Parr, 2019).

Thus, with relatively little methodological innovation, the capability approach has enhanced analysis of how forms of pluralism transmute into inequalities and some of the difficulties entailed in how these have been addressed. In the process of drawing on a complex conceptual language to delineate features of inequality, these researchers seem to make connections across places, across periods of education policy formation, and across sites of policy and practice. This raises the issue, which itself requires investigation, that connection is an important capability, and that relational capabilities and the methodological approaches to investigate this have been under documented in education, where so much attention has been given to opportunities. Relationships have often been considered as an aspect of context, when they may be crucial components of capabilities. Thus, while much of the current literature on education and the capability approach is producing descriptions of negotiating axiological pluralism, the implication of this body of work is a political affirmation of the importance of attending to forms of inequality and equality and their connections. In charting future directions the need to attend to psychological pluralism, disciplinary pluralism, and the complex locations where meetings between peoples and their connected understandings occur. This requires recognition of some of the inequalities and epistemic injustices that mark the terrain of knowledge production as well as some language of translation and connection that allows us to form the insights from which judgements occur. It is this mode of thinking that I think comparison affords, because it considers connection as an opportunity for reflection and reflection on comparison as a useful aspect of practice.

There thus appear, through a focus on the capability approach, some fruitful areas of intersection between comparative education with its interest in context and mutable interpretations, education and international development, with its orientation to development policy and practice, and a concern in both with deepening understanding to support acting with better insights. Thus the capability approach appears to have the potential to act as one form of conceptual glue between the two divergent streams of work. But authors who work with the capability approach do not have a signature method, and the amorphousness of the education fields in which they are located means that this is not required. In the final part of this discussion I want to consider whether reflexive comparison may be useful to formulate as a method for this work.

Some thoughts on method

The facets of the argument I have explored thus far have considered some ideas about pluralism, some connections with my internal and external Others, drawing out elements of

my personal history, and some aspects of the evolution of the intellectual fields in which I work. In this section I want to consider some of the implications of this for thinking about method in a field that is riven by power imbalances with regard to who does and does not get published, what forms of research are considered worthy of funding, and how work inside universities is supported (eg. Connell, Pearse, Collyer et al, 2018; Soudien, 2018; Walker, 2019)

De Shalit's (2018) study of ideas formulated in cities marked by migration resonates with my experiences, because I have lived and worked most of my life in cities, such as those he describes. Here different forms of pluralism are in play with other structures of inequality, or processes of constructing or trying to challenge injustice. In thinking about method in relation to comparative education and education and international education, and the ways in which studies of capability approach and education seem to connect the two fields, I want to consider some of the points De Shalit raises about different forms of pluralism. I am particularly interested in what he terms a hybrid psychological pluralism, which partially recognises, as one informant said to De Shalit 'the immigrant is my other self' (De Shalit, 2018, 113). It is this form of method that I think contours some of the selection of areas for investigation by scholars working on the capability approach and education, described above, and which I think merits some further delineation in the light of some of the debates about method in comparative education and education and international development.

The method, which I see woven through many of the studies of the capability approach and education, and which I think bridge between comparative education and education and international development has a number of distinctive features. As a result I have termed this a method of reflexive comparison. I first sketched this in preliminary works (Unterhalter, 2014 a & b; Unterhalter, 2019a). Here I saw reflexive comparison as entailing both a critical reflection on the identity and historical location of the researcher, as well as an interest in, and a capacity to compare, across places, times, or practices. I suggested the form of comparison in play was one that was allusive and partial, metaphorical and illuminating, rather than descriptive and directional. I formulated a self critical, but intellectually and normatively engaged process, delineating reflexive comparative education

...as an intersection of addressing, through education, the inequality of what, the inequality of whom, and the inequality of how. These pedagogic, institutional and research processes attempt to critically locate the form of the education organisation, to examine the norms which guide it and to present pedagogic challenges which try to change it. One aspect of this is an evaluative move associated with comparison. This is a stance associated both with research and practice, and suggests a relational dynamic which asks how and why people and processes engaged in education are taken to be similar and different, what the consequences of this are, and what particular processes are needed to sustain social justice outcomes. (Unterhalter, 2019b, page89)

This discussion of reflexive comparison had been formulated through a reflection on work on capabilities, education, empowerment, participation and the problems of co-option. It had not been considered in dialogue with the core contests about method in comparative education (Cowen and Kazamias, 2009), the reboot these are given through Cowen's (2002) concerns with transitologies, ideas about contingency (Kauko and Wemke, 2018) Kim's (2014)

interest in different world views, and the key imperative formulated in contemporary scholarship on epistemic injustice to name colonial contexts and try to change them (Sriprakash, Tikly, & Walker, (2019) . The ways in which education and international development has a hybrid approach to method was also somewhat to the side of this distillation of reflexive comparisons.

In retrospect, I see this formulation, of some of the elements of reflexive comparison, as applying some of the bridging work on the capability approach and education I have outlined above, and the methods those engaged with this work deploy. But what De Shalit's formulation invites is not just the knitting together of normatively infused analyses of data, but a more critical consideration of the location of a range of others, the relationship of the researcher with these other selves, the potentials and difficulties of relationships, recognizing that some things may be impossible to say, or describe. While action for change is always to be encouraged, some of this may , at certain times, be too difficult for small groups to address alone, and may require much reflection and connection. It is here I consider the questioning of how one builds understanding and the importance of trying to achieve it comes together as a nexus of contemporary concerns in comparative education, education and international development, and work on the capability approach and education. These methodological moves are not pre-given, but are made in travelling and solidarities that may be formed in that process.

In 2018 at a symposium reflecting on the work of my late colleague at the Institute of Education, Jagdish Gundara, I wrote an appreciation of some of the elements of his method in intercultural education, itself an expression of some of his experiences of being foreign. I consider these key aspects of what I consider reflexive comparative education to entail, and I quote from the lecture the five elements in Gundara 's work on the intercultural I identified, which I think also speak to De Shalit's formulation of the importance of psychological pluralism and work that enjoins us not to neglect the injustices which have formed our disciplines or the heterodox and fragile connections between us. We need to have methods that bring out both features in order to animate our work in education research to evaluate better:

One thread of Jagdish's writing concerns moments of hope in history. He documents when arguments were made sometimes, by reviled outsiders, and sometimes by those well placed with regard to power, delineating the intercultural, as a form of listening to others, asserting universal values, charting a different course to the destructive, often hate-filled paths on offer, challenging the maintenance of boundaries, and asserting some of the insights of diaspora and exile. Another thread in Jagdish's writing concerns lived experience, trying to think through and enact the intercultural, both in his own autobiography, and in the everyday practice of teachers, curriculum makers, or textbook writers. One further thread is a turn beyond the socio-economic

centre of gravity of the discipline of education, where the examples Jagdish selects are alert to visual arts, literature and oral narratives as intellectual resources for advancing discussion. A fourth thread concerns, what Bob Cowen, has called reading the global, attending to signals of shifts in meaning around education institutions or relationships and the power relations these entail . . . (Unterhalter, 2018, 6)

I noted this method as used by Gundara, was ‘heterodox and multivalent, translocational, and critical’ (Unterhalter, 2018, page 6) . I see elements of this method in the work on the capability approach and education, bridging between fields, between conceptual depth and methodological finesse, and alerting us both to forms of inequality in education in settings of affluence, as much a poverty. In the closing session of the annual conference of the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) I helped co-ordinate in London in September 2019, four panellists reflected on a film I had made in conversation with Amartya Sen on the theme of connecting capabilities. A theme a number picked up was that connection required courage, collective organisation, trust, critique and the capacity to face and try to describe vulnerabilities.¹ This resonates with features of psychological pluralism. Clearly there is more to be done in clarifying, refining, and critiquing these processes and methods. These are some of the threads I consider make the methodological orientation I term reflexive comparison,. We can thus build reflexive comparison as a method that may start with the autobiography of co-constructions of an other self, but does not end with these statements, or distance description from evaluations of how knowledge is used and our sense of multiple connections. The method, trying to work with the capability for connection, tries to go forward as I termed Jagdish Gundara’s scholarship ‘making a way’ towards understanding.

¹ The filmed discussion and the interview are available on <https://mediacentral.ucl.ac.uk/Play/18878>

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