Global interconnectivity and its ethical challenges in education

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Abstract

The past decade has witnessed the rise of ethno-nationalist sentiments around the world, around the claims that globalization is an ideology that has undermined the sovereignty of nation-states and created conditions that have produced wide-ranging social inequalities. And yet there seems little prospect of turning back from the facts of global interconnectivity. In this paper, I suggest that it is in this contradictory space that the work of educators is now located. Such a space has given rise to a range of perplexing ethical challenges that are not only political but also pedagogic. Politically, these challenges relate to the need to forge ethical communities that can generate collective action in the face of growing levels of global interconnectivity, on the one hand, and the popular appeal of nationalism, on the other. Pedagogically, these challenges demand approaches that assist students to make a better sense of the contradictory world in which they now live and learn, and develop a practice of ethics that foregrounds difference, complexity, contingency and uncertainty.

Keywords Ethno-nationalism · Globalization · Authoritarian populism · Ethical reflexivity · Aristotle · Pedagogic challenges

Introduction

On 25th of September 2018, Donald Trump, the President of the United States, delivered a highly provocative speech at the UN General Assembly. In a speech that was in many ways reminiscent of his inauguration address, Trump blasted the current international political order that had been forged after the Second World War through a series of conventions and treaties based on the underlying principles of multilateralism and international cooperation. He portrayed the United States as a major victim of this order, which he argued, had allowed various external forces to exploit the American people, weakening the US economy and altering its cultural distinctiveness. He presented himself as America's saviour. Missing from his rhetoric however was any indication of how it was that the United States had become a victim. This absence was especially notable given the fact that it was the United States that had been the catalyst for the creation of this international order and from which it has in fact profited

greatly not only in economic terms but also politically, thus eventually becoming the world's only superpower.

In his speech, Trump drew a sharp distinction between globalism and cosmopolitanism on the one hand and patriotism and nationalism on the other. What was also notable about Trump's populist rhetoric was that it drew on various earlier popular critiques of globalization. He argued, for example, that globalism was an ideology that had largely benefitted the emerging economies and that it had greatly diminished the life chances of many people around the world. He proposed instead a world in which each nation—which he assumed to possess its own distinctive traditions, values and culture—looked after its own economic and political interests. In this way, whether he intended this to be the case or not, Trump assumed some of the key tenets of an ethno-nationalism wherein the nation is defined in terms of an ethnicity (Smith 2010). He insisted that each nation had its own distinctive heritage, defined by a particular language, faith and ancestry that should be privileged ahead of other traditions that might also reside within its borders. By implication, this view of nationalism is unsympathetic to the interests of immigrants, refugees and those who are assumed to be the Others.

Of course, these ethno-nationalist sentiments are not unique to Trump. In recent years, they have also found

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favour among a whole range of other political leaders around the world, from Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Victor Orban in Hungary, Marie Le Pen in France to Narendra Modi in India, and others. Ethno-nationalist sentiments arguably played a significant role in the successful Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. In each of these countries, the rise of these sentiments appears to be linked to the rising levels of distrust with the existing post-war institutions that had promised economic prosperity for all but had only intensified social inequalities, leading to a sense of powerlessness. The growth of 'authoritarian populism' (Hall 1996) can thus be viewed as an outcome of these social, economic and political concerns. It is an ideological container of a number of seriously legitimate complaints. Chief among them, as Appadurai (2017, p. 5) has noted, is the allegation that it has now become impossible for nations to control their own economies, that they have now become 'hostages to foreign investors, global agreements, transnational finance, mobile labour and capital in general'. The loss of sovereignty is thus put forward as the chief cause of economic distress and cultural uncertainty. To address these concerns, the populist leaders invariably promise cultural purification as a route to political power and salvation, often through the exercise of hard power, no longer reluctant to attack minorities and dissidents. For leaders like Orban and Erdogan, a form of authoritarianism appears necessary to explain the economic, political and social difficulties that their communities face. For others like Trump, the strengthening of national borders is assumed to be the solution.

Numerous attempts have been made in recent years to understand the growing popularity of ethno-nationalism, anti-globalization and authoritarian populism. Referring to these political trends as 'the great regression', the German sociologist, Heinrich Geiselberger (2017, p. 14), regards it as 'the product of collaboration between the risks of globalization and neoliberalism'. He contends that it has resulted partially from the failure of progressive liberal politicians to manage the consequences of global interconnectivity impinging on societies that are institutionally and culturally unprepared for them. In one of his last essays before his death, Zygmunt Bauman (2017, p. 18) pointed to a jarring contradiction between those who enjoy the benefits of globalization and those for whom positive global experiences remain inaccessible, perhaps even a distant fantasy. Globalization, he insists, has deepened the divisions between 'us' and 'them', not only across but also within nations. At this same time, other progressive critics have contended that globalization was always a political project that reinforced modes of capitalist exploitation, masking social inequalities (Harvey 2011).

It is thus clear that discontents of globalization are expressed across the political spectrum. In recent years, however, it is the ethno-nationalists who have enjoyed

greater political success in popularizing their 'take' on how these discontents might be named and addressed. They have insisted that globalization can only be managed adequately by abandoning the 'globalist' experiments and by returning to robust forms of nationalism. They have alleged the unworkability of international legal institutions and of policies that encourage cross-border mobility and exchange. In contrast, progressives have been unable to articulate a clear agenda concerning the ways in which the forces of globalization might be tamed and how it might become possible to halt the 'great regression'. They remain committed to the liberal notions of universal human rights and the global mobility of people. Among these conflicting approaches, the nationalist sentiments currently appear to enjoy greater popular appeal. Yet it is also the case that there is no turning back from the already existing facts of global interconnectivity. The globalizing forces are here to stay.

In this paper, I suggest that it is in this contradictory space in which the key elements of contemporary politics are now located. Such a space, I want to argue, has given rise to a range of perplexing ethical challenges that are not only political but also pedagogic. Politically, these challenges relate to the need to forge ethical communities that can generate collective action in the face of growing levels of global interconnectivity and what Vertovec (2006) has referred to as 'superdiversity', as well as a seemingly hegemonic nationalist politics that is deeply distrustful of cultural diversity and exchange. Educationally, these challenges demand pedagogic approaches that assist students to make a better sense of the contradictory world in which they now live and learn, helping them develop a practice of ethics that foregrounds difference, complexity, contingency and uncertainty.

Globalization and its discontents

There is nothing new about the analyses of discontents with globalization. Since the late 1980s, both the logic and consequences of globalization have been widely criticised. The contemporary processes of globalization have been shown repeatedly to be undemocratic, while its economic outcomes are recognized to be uneven and unequal. Around the turn of the 20th century, both Saskia Sassen (1999) and Joseph Stiglitz (2003) published books with the same title, *Globalization and its Discontents*, to suggest that global processes tied to capitalism were unsustainable; and that sooner or later they will create conditions of considerable political volatility. Similarly, in his widely read book, *Globalization*, first published in 2000, Jan Scholte showed how globalization has resulted in various forms of (in)security, not only military but also ecological, economic, cultural and psychological; various forms of (in)equality and injustice; and various forms of what he called (un)democracy. And when

the benefits of globalization are unevenly and unequally distributed, the global processes are likely to contain within them the seeds of a politics of popular anger and resentment.

There is thus now ample evidence to show how the globalization of economic activities has had negative effects on the marginalized communities everywhere. While in some countries, such as China, globalization has created new opportunities (Zhang 2010) in others it has exacerbated various kinds of social stratification, with respect to class, gender, race, age and the urban–rural divide (Dicken 2010). Even in those countries that have benefitted from economic globalization, gaps in people’s life chances have widened. In Asia’s global cities, many people are now able to enjoy lifestyles of the advanced economies, while in rural areas the benefits of globalization have been scarce. In India, while the number of billionaires has grown rapidly, the stories of suicides among farmers in India are also a direct outcome of the globalization of agriculture (Sainath 2005). What these accounts suggest is that while many in Europe and the United States believe that the processes of globalization have led to the outsourcing of their jobs, capital and wealth to Asia, within Asia the picture is more uneven, complex and inconsistent.

In Europe and the United States, the industrial cities have had to carry much of the burden of global economic transformations. The combined forces of the automation of work and internationalization of production (Dicken 2010) have reduced the availability of employment that was once plentiful. Unemployment rates in the manufacturing sector have soared, forcing people to move to places where the new service jobs might be. Yet, these mostly casual jobs offer considerably lower rates of pay, with exploitative labour conditions. People now have to re-train for new jobs, but the privatized training system demands the vulnerable workers to make investments that many cannot afford. At the same time, the welfare provisions have been cut, as governments have either not been able to afford them or have an ideological objection to them (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). It is asserted, often without any evidence, that state subsidies and programs encourage inefficiencies and make people dependent on handouts (Reich 2015). This line of thinking is part of a relentless ideological campaign that celebrates the logic of the markets, suggesting that it is the individuals who should be responsible for their own welfare.

While the capacity of many people to enjoy the various benefits of globalization, such as the availability of a vast array of consumer goods, has declined, they are constantly subjected to lifestyle choices that are often beyond their financial means. The mass advertising campaigns are designed to elicit desire for goods and services that only a few can afford. There is clearly a growing gap between those who can afford the cosmopolitan tastes and those who are left simply to fantasize about them.

As Bauman (1998) pointed out more than two years ago, globalization has given rise to a new form of social differentiation around consumptive desires—between those who can realize them and those who are left outside the gate wishing they could, often with envy or anger. This qualitative account of social inequalities parallels Thomas Piketty’s (2014) quantitative account of the growing levels of wealth and income inequality under the conditions of globalization. What both of these analyses indicate is that the facts of economic inequalities are inherently linked to various cultural dimensions and have major political consequences.

Guy Standing (2011) has written extensively on the social and political effects of globalization’s discontents. He refers to the class of people badly affected by the processes of globalization as the ‘precariat’. The emerging precariat class, he argues, is a heterogeneous group—an agglomerate of several different social groups that include young educated people, those who have fallen out of the old-style industrial working class, and those who are employed but nonetheless feel vulnerable. The precariat are thus not only suffering from job insecurity but have also become uncertain about their sense of belonging. They believe that recent public policies, such as affirmative action, have diminished the cultural privileges they once enjoyed; and that they have lost democratic control over their future they appear convinced had once been predictable. Well before Trump and Brexit, Standing had warned that this group was politically dangerous, not only because it was internally divided, but also because its members were susceptible to the siren calls of political extremism. Standing had predicted that politically expedient politicians would not hesitate to stoke fear by creating a cultural chasm within the marginalized communities. Not surprisingly therefore we have witnessed both subtle and not-so-subtle scapegoating of migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups.

According to Standing, the precariat is convinced that the loss of their cultural and political voice is largely due to globalization, which, they believe, has undermined their national institutions, especially as some of the power has shifted to global institutions. They have little doubt that supra-state institutions, both global and regional, have created substantial democratic deficits, as the political authority of nations has been undermined, impacting directly their life chances. The global markets, global communication systems and the incipient global civil society, in their opinion, have weakened the state’s capacity to look after their interests. In contrast, they maintain, the main beneficiaries of the global developments have been the transnational elite for whom greater opportunities are now available for democratic activity outside the realm of public administration. The sociologist William Robinson (2004) has noted the globally mobile transnational elites are now in charge

of the global institutions and communication systems, with the ability to steer a nation-state and its priorities in their own favour.

Authoritarian populism

In ways that might appear ironic, the political Right has embraced many of the criticisms of globalization that the political Left had first advanced. It has accepted, as I have already noted, that it is globalization that has produced unacceptable levels of social inequalities and that most global institutions act in fundamentally undemocratic ways. The Right has also been critical of the ways in which globalization has destabilized communities, labour markets and national norms. It is mournful of the jobs that no longer exist, and of the declining economic opportunities and prospects. It has questioned the political legitimacy of supranational agencies, such as the European Union (EU), especially with what it regards to be their over-reach into aspects of life that it believes are best handled at the local or national levels. It has embraced the notion that the emerging world order is inherently unfavourable to their interests and that global trade does not serve the interests of local communities but rather of international corporations.

While the Right has accepted the veracity of many of these ideas relating to globalization and its discontents, the analyses of its populist leaders differs fundamentally in many important respects from that provided by the Left, most notably the facts and fears concerning the cultural dimensions of globalization. What the Right appears to have done is to bolt onto its account of the discontents of globalization a politics of ethno-nationalism. Central to the populist account is a discourse critical of global migration, holding it responsible for many of the afflictions of the economically vulnerable. The populists consider the ease with which people are supposedly now able to move across national borders as a major threat to their job prospects and the kind of good life they imagine they once had or could have. They argue that globalization has undermined many of their cherished cultural and religious traditions and is forcing them to accept the values of diversity and cultural exchange, in ways that undermine their own values. They are fearful of cultural heterogeneity, even if the number of immigrants and refugees in their communities is relatively small (Appadurai 2006). They are anxious about the cultural 'other', whose political demands for equality they assume conflict with theirs. They are suspicious of public policies such as affirmative action, not least because they feel these policies undermine their own life-styles and life-chances. The question arises then as to how have the lines of this contestation been politically fashioned?

What is increasingly clear is the electoral success of the populist leaders, such as Donald Trump and Victor Orban, is grounded in their ability to weave the fears that the precariat understandably have into a narrative that is convincing enough to them, even if this narrative is full of inconsistencies. In this way, populism should be regarded as a story of political mobilization. Populist movements are, of course, as old as politics itself. In their nascent forms, populism can be inspired by leadership from either the Right or the Left, but only a few are able to organize and take advantage of its political possibilities, while the power of other populist movements remains unrealised. According to Stuart Hall (1996), authoritarian populism is best viewed as a hegemonic project that mobilizes people around a loosely connected set of ideas, through means fair and foul. It does not necessarily have a coherent ideological message but consists instead in a discursive assemblage that is invariably grounded in affect and emotions that are based on a sharp differentiation between our feelings and theirs. A loose and shared characterization of the enemy appears necessary for populism to get its political purchase.

In addition, often assumed in its narrative is a state of victimhood and unfairness, requiring a critique of the exploitative elite which is allegedly in control, on the one hand, and the undeserving groups of outsiders, on the other. A populist discourse thus has inchoate threads that are weaved together in an ideologically expedient fashion without any serious attempt to ensure intellectual consistency across its various claims.

The contemporary authoritarian populism has thus linked issues of economic anxieties to a range of cultural concerns. It has suggested that global economy has enabled unfettered flows of not only capital but also of people across national boundaries. A discourse of 'losing control over our borders' has become its rallying cry, as prejudices directed against immigrants and refugees are intensified. It is assumed that jobs are being lost to the cultural 'others', either within the nation or elsewhere, and that they can only 'come back' if the global flows of people are either rigorously controlled or better still stopped altogether. At the same time, a powerful narrative of national security has emerged, often directed against minorities who are assumed to be the major culprits in directing undesirable social change. Despite their small numbers, they are believed to have the potential to dilute local cultural and religious traditions, with local values potentially undermined by a globally homogenising culture, on the one hand, and the unjustifiable tolerance of foreign cultural practices, on the other, embodied within the ideologies of diversity and multiculturalism that globalization has allegedly promoted.

This populism thus represents a most diffuse and often contradictory account of globalization's discontents. Its success lies in its capacity to bring under one ideological

umbrella a range of conflicting ideas, expressing a diverse range of political interests and cultural prejudices, from overtly xenophobic sentiments to economic nationalism. What it obscures and overlooks is the possibility that global interconnectivity may not in fact be the main cause of economic distress but the neoliberal terms in which globalization has been interpreted and enacted (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). The populist leaders have preferred to explain economic distress in terms of cultural shifts instead, maintaining the fiction that injustices of globalization are somehow inherent in the global flows of people, public policies supportive of welfare provisions and the excesses of global institutions, rather than in the neoliberal approaches to the new geography. Under the new geopolitical conditions, the failures of the nation-states are assumed moreover to lie in their inability to get a favourable deal in international trade, rather than in the contradictions inherent in the capitalist logic of the global markets (Harvey 2011).

It is indeed ironic that most contemporary populist leaders, such as Trump, retain their devotion to the main tenets of neoliberalism, and in particular its assumptions regarding the ways in which societies are best organized and governed. They continue to stress the importance of free markets, so long as they work in their favour. They refuse to acknowledge that it is the ruling class that has in the past been the major beneficiaries of so-called 'free markets'. They continue to celebrate the neoliberal policy ideas of deregulation, radical reduction in welfare state provisions, and the privatizing of public goods and services. They continue to assume human beings to be largely motivated by their economic self-interests, always seeking to preserve and extend their competitive advantage. Indeed, they insist that it is only in a policy climate of deregulation that people, and also the nations, can realise their full economic potential.

Linked to this supposition is the idea that for nations to be able to compete against each other, they have to be socially cohesive, with a clear collective understanding of who they are, what values their citizens must share and what are some of their enduring cultural traditions. This line of thinking implies a new understanding of nationalism in which economic competition plays a major defining role. In general terms, nationalism involves identification with one's own nation and support for its core economic and political interests, often at the exclusion of the interests of others. It should be noted however that, as an ideology, nationalism is relatively modern phenomenon dating back only to the 18th century (Smith 2010). Before that the attachment of people was to their shared traditions, to their kinship groups, territorial authorities or to their homeland, rather than a nation-state as defined by the Westphalian principles of sovereignty and territoriality (Smith 2010).

It is only when a nation-state is defined in terms of a social contract, instead of a cultural core, that a diversity

of traditions is able to co-exist and imagine themselves as belonging to the same nation (Smith 2010). The contemporary register of ethno-nationalism demands a historical return to an era in which the interests of a particular ethnic group represented the interests of the whole nation, and that the nation-state was largely assumed to be a cultural expression of that group. This register defines the nation in ethnic rather than civic or political terms. It is this ideological construction of the nation that appears implicit in the populist anti-globalization sentiments that are often promoted in an oblique manner. The question arises then as to whether a return to this imagination of the nation is realistic anymore in view of the facts of global interconnectivity. Is it even possible to reduce the levels of global mobility of people and intercultural exchange, and the diversification of communities around the world? And is it possible to subjugate any more the cultural demands of minorities under the presumptions of homogeneity?

Global interconnectivity

Paradoxically, one of the reasons why such possibilities are unrealistic is that they are inconsistent with the underlying principles of neoliberal rationality (Brown 2015) itself. This rationality demands the need to open up new opportunities in cross-border trade and investment, making necessary the movement of the kind of labour that is not always available within national boundaries. The economies of many countries such as Germany and even the United States are now heavily reliant on imported skilled labour, while unskilled labour is required by countries such as Singapore, Japan and the United Arab Emirates, in areas as diverse as construction and aged care. Without the global mobility of people, economic growth in modern economies is arguably unsustainable. Furthermore, as these economies are increasingly focused on the service sectors, they embody an assumption that the number of people wanting to travel across borders will continue to grow in perpetuity. Industries such as education, tourism and retail are, for example, now heavily dependent of the consumerist desires that invariably involve cross-border mobility.

Emergent communication and transport technologies play a major role in the formation of these desires, just as they do in the global reconfiguration of the economy (Dicken 2010). These technologies have enabled the rapid mobility of goods and capital, and have transformed modes of ownership, production, distribution and consumption. They have allowed the power of multinational corporations to be consolidated, allowing them to move capital and human resources to places where they can be most productive, where the levels of taxation are minimal and where regulations can be easily flouted. At the same time, the new communication

technologies have enabled ordinary people, both mobile and immobile, to remain in touch with each other with greater ease and instantaneity than ever before. People are now able to participate in systems of ties, interactions and exchange that are spread throughout the world. They are now able to take advantage of transnational networks in real time with increasing speed and efficiency. Technologies have also created something like a 'transnational public space' that has 'rendered any strictly bounded sense of community obsolete' (Vertovec 2009, p. 9). With these cultural shifts now institutionalized, it's hard to imagine any diminution in the role that communication technologies will continue to play in establishing and maintaining global interconnectivity.

The multiple and wide-ranging effects of new technologies and social media have also transformed the ways in which a growing number of people now make sense of their identity and sense of belonging. As a result, migration is no longer as it used to be, involving groups of people leaving one place and settling permanently in another. The spatial binary between 'here' and 'there' that the traditional view of migration presupposed no longer applies to a world in which intense and intimate social relationships can be preserved and intensified across vast distances. It is now possible for people to belong simultaneously to more than one place. Diaspora networks have thus become stronger, able to participate in transnational cultural and political activities (Baubock and Faist 2010). In this way, transnationalism has changed the relationship of people to space by creating social fields that connect and position some people in more than one country. As Appadurai (1995) noted more than two decades ago this has led to the growing disjuncture between territory, subjectivity and collective social movements, creating a range of new possibilities, but also challenges.

This disjuncture has also globalized the problems that were once assumed to be mostly local. Now many of the policy challenges we face—the so-called 'wicked problems'—have their origins in the facts of growing connectivity across national borders (Ray 2007). Criminal activities, for example, are no longer confined to particular locations, but involve unlawful movement of money, drugs and weapons and the like. It is no longer possible to understand the challenges of terrorism, for example, without appreciating the changing forms of cross-border exchange. Contemporary practices of terrorism are different from earlier forms of terrorism, more in line with 'deterritorialized' global processes. The emerging issues of food, energy and water security are also global in their essence. As indeed are the environmental problems that are no longer confined to particular localities but demand planetary solutions. According to Beck (2006), we now live a risk society defined by three fundamental global risks: ecological crisis, financial crisis and terrorism. The management of these risks inevitably

demand input from global institutions, and where these institutions did not exist already, they have had to be created.

What this brief account implies is that the facts of global connectivity can no longer be wished away: they have become a permanent feature of contemporary life affecting most aspects of our thinking about the conditions under which we live and imagine our future. Hardly any locality or institution is left unaffected, even if in ways that markedly different and uneven. The world is now constituted by cross-border relationships, patterns of economic, political and cultural relations and complex affiliations and social formations that potentially span the globe. The forces of globalisation have clearly transformed our localities affecting most aspects of our existence, including our identities, social relations and institutions such as schools. In these institutions people from diverse backgrounds live across multiple time-horizons, creating conditions not only of opportunities but also of risk and vulnerability. According to Vertovec (2006), many of our institutions have become 'super-diverse': they are creative and dynamic places where new cultural practices and tastes emerge on a daily basis, as a result of mimicry and hybridity. Cultural diversity has thus become 'the new normal', with cultural heterogeneity should perhaps be regarded as an exception. Ray (2007, p. 71) argues that transnational spaces are an 'accomplishment of everyday life involving human agents engaged in the active construction of global forms of sociality'. This sociality is generating a new type of consciousness, marked by multiple senses of identification, comprised of ever-changing representations, resulting in modes of cultural reproduction, associated with 'a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions and everyday practices' (Vertovec 2009, p. 7).

While these cultural and political shifts are evident throughout the world, they have also had the effect of unsettling the long-established nationalist norms and traditions. Not surprisingly these shifts have given rise to a new contradictory politics. On the one hand, this politics involves a growing recognition that an incipient global consciousness is an outcome of the mobility of people, along with the flows of capital, goods and services, as well as ideas and ideologies. It is now widely believed that mobility is a source of cultural exchange and creativity, of economic dynamism, while cultural diversity is now both normal and is a major driver of social and economic productivity and prosperity. Mobile people, such as denizens, global business people and international students and migrants, are major carriers of information and ideas, money and capital, and are able to connect economic, political and cultural practices across vast distances. These shifts have allegedly given rise to a post-national politics, since it is now possible for identities and political activities to be elaborated and negotiated within and against a transnational spatial awareness.

Yet it also needs to be admitted that the growing levels of global interconnectivity have resulted in major concerns of security, sustainability, and adaptation. A whole range of new uncertainties has emerged about the nature and scope of citizenship, as well as about governance and political representation. The sense of belonging that many people traditionally had has become destabilised, as allegations are often made about the loyalty of those who are regarded as outsiders. Because places are no longer internally homogeneous, containing bounded identities, they are now constructed out of material and symbolic resources that reach beyond local boundaries, and are forged in transnational spaces, which are mediated and mitigated by the cultural turbulence of globalizing forces, connections and desires. An inward-looking climate of xenophobia has arguably arisen out of this turbulence. Global interconnectivity has not only created a climate of fear of the other, but has also unsettled the norms of democracy, social justice, citizenship and human rights, opening up a political space in which populism can blossom. While this populist turn is different in different countries, Ivan Krastev (2017, p. 74) has identified some general similarities. Everywhere, he has argued, populism has entailed a return to political polarization and a more confrontational style of politics. Politics has become much more personalized, while institutions are no longer trusted. A new political divide has emerged between internationalists and nativists, reviving ethnocentric sentiments that are converted into major conflicts by expedient politicians along various lines of social differentiation, leading to new fractures within communities.

Ethical challenges

What this account of global interconnectivity and the conflicting responses to it indicates is that we now live in spaces that are rapidly changing but in ways that are deeply contradictory. It shows that global interconnectivity has clearly given rise to new opportunities and expressions, but it has also generated the spectre of an ugly reactionary politics, with the revival of ethno-nationalist and xenophobic sentiments among people fearful of cultural diversity and exchange. Educational institutions cannot afford to ignore this politics. It has deep implications for thinking about educational policy and practice, especially as it relates to the issues of ethics and moral education. In spaces that are increasingly characterized by ubiquitous mobility, diversity and connectivity, the ways in which educators encourage their students to think ethically about global interconnectivity thus assumes considerable pedagogic importance, as do the issues relating to the political formation of students, and the development of their normative sensibilities

towards citizenship, democracy and human rights and civic responsibilities.

This pedagogic imperative is further complicated by the contention that the traditional approaches to ethics may no longer be adequate for dealing with various global transformations. Traditionally, ethical principles have either been articulated in universal terms or in terms that are relative to a particular religion, cultural tradition or the nation. Complexities of globalization and its uneven and unequal impact on local communities have made ethical reasoning itself a more challenging task. The ethical question of ‘how we ought to live?’ had in the past invited us to consider our duties to those who are mostly known to us, those in our immediate family and community, as well as to those with whom we traded. The notion that other people might live in ways that are different did not greatly concern us greatly because of their remoteness. Ethical relativism thus became a plausible thesis, with the claim that the existence of actual cultural diversity across times and places showed that there was no universally shared ethical script. Since there was no objective system of moral values, ethically relativity implied that we should acknowledge and respect other moral traditions, so long as they did not interfere with ours.

Such a view of ethics however is analytically inconsistent, since it at least presupposes the universal values of tolerance and respect for difference. In this way, cultural relativism confuses the underlying values with the manifestation of particular practices, and also perhaps exaggerates the difference between cultures (Brincat 2015). It is also possible to contest the claim that values are cultural norms relative to particular societies on the grounds that it goes against our moral experiences. In contrast, it is maintained that it must be possible to identify some universal values that arise from our capacity as human beings to reason. Such a universalist approach to ethics led philosophers to identify various ‘objective’ criteria for making moral judgments, such as maximising happiness (utilitarianism), considering the outcomes of particular practices (consequentialism) and developing a rule-based approach in which moral principles and absolute acquire categorically prescriptive status (deontological ethics). A major problem with this universalist approach, however, involves the contention that these criteria are difficult to apply in particular circumstances, since they may be variously interpreted. These criteria moreover invariably favour some groups and communities over others. In addition, many of these theories of ethics were forged in Western traditions and carry their biases. For example, in the case of Kantian deontological ethics, as Hutchings (2018, p. 42) points out, the human person is conceived of as torn between natural passion and transcendental reason, an idea that has more in common with Christian religious conceptions of natural law than with many other traditions of thinking about human conduct.

Neither the relativist nor the universalist approaches to ethics thus appear adequate in meeting the demands of persistent and expanding cultural diversity and global interconnectivity. Relativism is unsatisfactory because it fails to suggest any plausible ways of resolving differences that exist not only across cultural traditions but also within them. In most communities people now encounter differences on a daily basis and need ways of communicating with each other in a manner that is ethically informed. At the same time, as I have already noted, increasing levels of global interdependence have created truly global problems that demand global solutions. A relativist approach to ethics is incapable of addressing these problems. A universalist approach, on the other hand, is misplaced in and across communities where radically different traditions of ethics exist alongside each other, often against a history of colonial violence and injustices. In postcolonial societies, there is understandably a great deal of suspicion and distrust about an ethical system that claims to be universal, such as, for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Stuurman 2017a, b). Such declarations have often been used to obscure and obfuscate the continuing effects of colonialism and claims to redress them.

The Indian-British philosopher, Bikhu Parekh (2005) has shown how the traditional Western philosophical traditions for thinking about ethics and morality are inadequate for dealing with the ethical demands of a globalizing world. He argues that in a world of plural values in which all are implicated in one way or another in the outcomes of globalization, no agreed ethical standards exist with which to justify the imposition of some values over others. Nor, however, do we have the luxury of overlooking the importance of the question of how we might live together in ways that are relatively harmonious (Touraine 2000).

There is one other way in which the traditional Western theories of ethics are inadequate. As Parekh (2005) points out, they invariably assume an individual as the unit of moral concern and action, and do not therefore ‘take collective dimensions of moral agencies in our globalized condition sufficiently seriously’ (Huchings 2018, p. 11). They overlook the importance of global processes that are often driven by a range of morally relevant players such as intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations. We need therefore an ethical framework in which moral responsibilities are allocated not only to individuals but also institutions, including and perhaps especially systems of education.

Such a framework cannot overlook the facts of global interconnectivity but nor can it assume that these facts can be approached in ways that are objective and value neutral. As I have already noted, the ways in which populist leaders approach global interconnectivity are very different to the ‘neoliberal globalists’ (Steger 2018). The populists display greater scepticism and at times hostility to globalization.

It is clear moreover that facts alone, no matter how comprehensive and uncontested, are capable of altering moral attitudes towards interconnectivity. To better understand the rise of authoritarian populism, issues concerning the cultural politics of affect (Ahmed 2015) cannot be overlooked. We need an analysis moreover of the ways in which emotions enter into the formation of political sentiments and movements, since they clearly enter into the populist imagination through the strong bonds many people have to their locality, culture and nation. A patriotic sense of national belonging is a constant theme in the populist discourse, which it assumed to be undermined by the forces of globalization. In so far as this discourse acknowledges the facts of global connectivity, it regards the claims of the nation as primary. It views international relations largely in competitive terms, where each nation seeks outcomes that are economically and politically advantageous to its interests.

Educational challenges

Given the political fractures around issues of global interconnectivity and the ethical challenges to which they have given rise, how might the ethical task of education be conceptualized? In educational institutions that are more culturally diverse and transnationally connected than ever before, what challenges do educators face? Perhaps the most significant of these is the challenge relating to the cultural heterogeneity that has now become ‘the new normal’. Teachers can no longer work from the assumptions of homogeneity with which they once sought, and to large extent still do, to accommodate minorities into the dominant cultural norms through various practices of assimilation and integration, not least because the dominant group can no longer take its privileges for granted. Teachers also need to acknowledge that their students are embedded in complex transnational systems of communication and can now access sources of information that are no longer confined to the borders of the nation state. Diverse cultural norms and practices are now constantly rubbing up each other, both within and across nations, opening up the possibilities of new hybridized practices through the greater potential for intercultural communication. Equally however teachers cannot to ignore the fact that a climate of anxiety and fears has emerged in many of their communities, and that schools are not unaffected by the broader antagonistic and prickly debates about global interconnectivity.

As politics in communities around the world has become more contentious, and as the new media has opened up new channels of communication, different cultural and political groups have sought to create their own ideological bubbles within they feel more secure. This option is not available to most schools. They cannot become insular but have to

prepare their students not only to negotiate the politics of difference but also cope with the rate of social change that is likely to become faster. More broadly, educators have to teach their student to think systematically about the problems that were once resolved within the local or national arena but are now transnationally stretched. Yet conceptually these problems are abstract and resist concrete representations. What is needed are accessible pedagogic practices of ethics that not only foreground difference, complexity, contingency and uncertainty, but do so in ways that are accessible and meaningful to students from a diversity of backgrounds.

This must necessarily involve helping students to better understand the nature and consequences of the profound changes that they and their communities are now experiencing. However, the skills of moral deliberations that educators now need to develop can no longer assume universal norms and rules, not least because, as I have noted earlier, they are likely to be resisted by those who make equally worthy moral claims. As Der Derian (2001, p. 35) has pointed out, it is no longer possible to keep the relativity of values ‘at bay with first principles, transcendental morals, and patriotic absolutes’. The challenge of education then is to shape an ethical response to the inevitable persistence of cultural difference, often located within the same school and classroom. As schools become not only more culturally diverse and transnationally connected but also the sites of complex modes of cultural contact and exchange, teachers cannot avoid the necessity of developing a moral vocabulary that enables their students to talk to each other in ways that are meaningful and respectful of the diverse ways of engaging with the world. More ambitiously, education has the task of inspiring ‘creative and bold action in global politics, including both self-transformation and the transformation of one’s relationship with others’ (Amoureux 2016, p. 1).

To meet these ambitious challenges, a number of philosophers have sought to revive the traditions of cosmopolitanism, re-crafting them to suit the current conditions of globalization. Appiah (2006), for example, argues that in culturally diverse and globally interconnected communities, cosmopolitanism entails the need to develop the art of conversation across differences. This conversation should not however be assumed to be capable of producing moral truths that are already implicit in our diverse religious traditions, as Hans Kung (1990) has sought to do. Rather they should be designed to learn a way of interpreting and morally negotiating various aspects of interconnectivity and interdependence. It must necessarily involve messy and open-ended processes. Appiah thus describes cosmopolitanism primarily as an openness to, and tolerance of, the differences that are now pervasive in human communities, both within and across nations. It is important, he insists, to not only acknowledge and tolerate cultural differences but also be prepared to enter

into respectful dialogue with those who radically different position on issues at hand. Appiah admits, however, that as politics has increasingly become highly belligerent and antagonistic, and as the media is fragmented into various ideological bubbles, public places where such respectful dialogue is possible are becoming scarce. Education is perhaps one of the few sites left where young people from diverse backgrounds are brought together and can be trained into the art of conversation across cultural differences and national affiliations.

In these conversations, Appiah argues, nationalist sentiments do not have to be abandoned. A nation can indeed be an appropriate object of moral commitment, allegiance and loyalty. The idea of national cohesion has the capacity to unite a group of people by a collective social project around sentiments that arise when people live together. Such a project can, however, no longer be morally successful if nationalism is defined in terms of a singular ethnicity or religion, where others are either marginalized or excluded, as ethno-nationalists seek to do.

It has to be admitted, however, that many culturally diverse societies in the world today are experiencing major difficulties in creating such a unifying social project out of the diverse values and interests that exist in their communities. It is equally clear that these difficulties are due largely to the reluctance of the dominant group within a nation-state to concede some of its social historically-inherited privileges, along with the failure to recognize that while inequalities are maintained through the exercise of coercive or hegemonic power they cannot be supported by any well-formed and coherent moral justification. According to Appiah (2006), it is nonetheless possible to imagine a nation as a civil society forged out of respectful dialogue, where cultural diversity is viewed positively, and where it is possible to engage meaningfully with the moral claims of distant communities. In this way, Appiah agrees with Nussbaum (2002) that the boundaries of the nation should not define the limits of one’s moral affections, but that morality should instead consist in the widening of the circle of moral concern to its fullest extent, potentially to the humanity as a whole.

Under the conditions of globalization, I have noted, moral lives are now potentially located in multiple settings that are interconnected and interdependent. The distinctions between forms and scales of belonging are hence no longer rigid, but complex and dynamic. For example, the experiences of inequalities are constantly changing, resulting in shifting characterizations of its nature and consequences that are inevitably subject to debates. This suggests that the causes of social exclusion need to be addressed at multiple levels, in their generality as well as their specificity. If this so then any recourse to universal moral laws appears misguided, since the unrealistic assumptions about shared core values across all communities invariably reinforce the status quo

and obscure the ‘enduring difficulties and aporias of ethical dialogue’ (Zehfuss 2005).

This does not imply that attempts to negotiate grand visions or universal ethical rules are futile, but that such rules need to be predicated on the assumptions about their indeterminacy. They need to be viewed as provisional settlements that can prescribe conduct but are always subject to change in light of intercultural dialogue about the changing conditions of our shared experiences and interests. This dialogue needs to be about the ways in which we might interpret any new information that has been presented to solve our common problems. Its purpose should be to find common ground, to determine the compromises we might be prepared to make, the ways in which we might be able to construct a shared understanding of humanity and the imperative of living together. We are of course not born with the capacity to have such dialogue but need to learn throughout the course of our lives. Elsewhere, I have referred to this as ‘cosmopolitan learning’ (Rizvi 2009a, b).

Such an approach to ethical learning invites the practice of ‘ethical reflexivity’, focusing on the everyday ordinary ethical problems that inexorably arise within culturally diverse and globally interconnected settings. Located within the Aristotelian traditions of thinking, this approach to ethical deliberation focuses on the ethical agents and their practice in ways that are context-specific, and involve the navigation of thought and action, employing critical and practical reasoning, affect and imagination. Within the contexts of learning, Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* implies the need to develop in students the skills and dispositions that promote their capacity to link particular actions to a sequence of events, as well as to the actions of others. In this way, Aristotle highlights the formation of habits over time, the development of character that underscores the importance of experience in ethical reasoning for developing and refining *phronesis*. Moral education is hence always an incomplete project demanding the regularity of improvement of any practice through self-reflection, self-cultivation and dialogue. An appreciation of relationalities in the development of virtues is thus fundamental to Aristotelian ethics, and this, in my view, is what makes it so apt for the contemporary conditions of ubiquitous cultural diversity and exchange. As Amoureux (2016, p. 26) argues, the Aristotelian ‘notions of virtue, deliberation, judgment, friendliness and friendship are the building blocks for an ethics that enacts ethical status to others in their particularity’ and are therefore suited for forging an approach to moral education under the shifting conditions of globalization.

In this approach, students are encouraged to view reflexivity as a core requirement of their ethical practice, trained into thinking about the decisions they and others make, in ways that are both critically self-referential and relational. A number of recent scholars have discussed the concept and the

importance of reflexivity in practical deliberations. George Mead (1934, p. 3) has, for example, defined reflexivity as involving processes in which ‘individuals become objects to themselves’. Hannah Arendt (1978) regards reflexivity as a dialogue ‘between me and myself’ where actions are constantly interrogated and re-evaluated. And more recently, Judith Butler (2005, p. 14) has suggested that reflexivity consists in actors ‘becoming an object of reflection’, not only in introspection but also in dialogue with others holding radically different opinions. In this way, reflexivity is a meta-practice because it is a mode of interrogating practices that are often taken for granted, and potentially contain within them a whole range of biases and prejudices. As Butler insists, ‘Even if a morality supplies a set of norms that produce a subject in his or her intelligibility, it also remains a set of norms and rules that a subject must negotiate in a living and reflective way’ (Butler 2005, p. 10). In other words, thought must be actively articulated into a practice, and this invariably involves an engagement with the world that is both cognitive and affective.

Such an approach also implies rejecting the Western Philosophy’s myopic obsession with logical reasoning in making moral judgments. In the Aristotelian tradition, reason is only a part of ethical deliberation. Equally important are emotion and character. Together they constitute *phronesis*. Abidazeh (2002, p. 267) points out that emotions serve to engage ethical concern, supporting the ability to perceive and judge the features of a particular situation, working in tandem to consider various alternatives for action, contributing to the formation of character through the exercise of virtue. Together these elements could be regarded as constitutive of a new politics. In this politics, emotions do not only have a psychological dimension but a sociological one as well. They can enrich the practices and relationships of politics, especially when they are subjected to critical rationality. Emotional responses to particular situations are thus not always irrational but can be a productive force for collective action. They can be politically mobilized, as is the case within the current practices of authoritarian populism. Paradoxically, however, emotions are also necessary if this populism is to be challenged by a different political characterization and response to global interconnectivity.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the challenges of ethics and education in a world that is increasingly characterized by complexity and contingency cannot adequately be met by abstract and universal principles. While such principles may at times provide guidance to action, in a world of ubiquitous diversity, they should always be regarded as indeterminate, subject to renewal and revision, with contested

interpretations and applications. In recent years, the politics of such contestations have produced conditions that have led to the rise of an authoritarian populism, which assumes some cultural practices to be inherently superior. Populists have construed the world in highly competitive terms, in which global interconnectivity and intercultural exchange are viewed either with suspicion or instrumentally. Moral principles are not overlooked but are interpreted through a politics of fear, in ways that make consensus around a shared social project difficult to achieve. I have suggested that the problems of ethics and education in such conditions should be addressed through a practice of ethical reflexivity that foregrounds difference, complexity, contingency and uncertainty. Following the Aristotelian tradition, I have argued that reflexivity is best viewed as a virtue that enables thought and action to be constantly refracted back upon one another: it is a 'form of judgment that is specific to everyday decisions even while one relates them to other examples, broader historical and social patterns and differences, trends and divergences, and homogeneities and heterogeneities' (Amoureux 2016, p. 26). Reflexivity is a capacity that needs to be developed and constantly refined through both the exercise of reason and the application of affect – thinking, willing and judging, as Hannah Arendt (1974) put it. Education is an institution that is perfectly suited for the development of such virtues of ethical reflexivity needed for the creation of a new politics across cultural and national differences.

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