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# Globalisation: The good, the bad and the ugly

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# Globalisation: The good, the bad and the ugly

## (2021 CGHE Annual Conference keynote[1])

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[1] This is a transcript of the keynote that Professor Marginson planned to give at Day 2 of the sixth annual conference of the Centre for Global Higher Education held online on 11 & 12 May 2021.

## Abstract

This 2021 CGHE conference keynote paper reflects on the last three decades of globalisation (tendencies to global convergence and integration) in higher education and research. Globalisation can take many forms and carry many projects and agendas, and the formation of the networked global science system is a major gain. However, the dominant globalisation has been hegemonic in form and high capitalist and Euro-American in content. There are three critiques of Euro-American globalisation that explain different aspects of it in higher education: globalisation as neoliberalism; globalisation as an English-language monoculture, which has limited the benefits of the science system; and globalisation as White Supremacy. Despite the potency of Euro-American globalisation there is scope for positive global projects: there is always scope for agency, and the growing multi-polarity at world level has opened up more room to move, as shown by the resurgence of decolonial and anti-racist activism in higher education in many countries. The paper concludes by arguing for closer focus on issues of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, and a more inclusive 'ecology of knowledges' approach.

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## Beginnings

I was raised at the North-eastern edge of the city of Melbourne, where unpaved roads met fields and cows, and original bushland, and there were few local amenities. My home was rich in culture and politics and not a lot of money, but there was annual mobility, because we had an old car and a summer vacation once a year. I remember, from earliest times, the spare and isolated Australian beaches and the limitless ever moving ocean where life began.

My encounters with global difference were in reading, and at the local school, with migrant and refugee families from the Netherlands, Central Europe and the Baltic states. My parents were strong Australian nationalists, a sensibility that made me feel a little guilty because I did not share it. I absorbed the anti-colonial outlook, but science fiction and history books had captured me and insulated me from any kind of nation-bound patriotism. Fortunately my parents were also humanists. They were not perfect, but it was the generation after the horror of the holocaust. There was never a word of prejudice, no othering, for any kind of person, whether by religion, culture, skin, voice, gender, sexuality or ableness; and we were anti-war, amid the Cold War and the imminent nuclear threat.

Before I was twelve I had formed my own view about the need to transcend arbitrary national interests and move to a global federal government, a perspective that stayed with me. So building a Centre for Global Higher Education half a century later in London and Oxford – places I never expected to inhabit – was consistent with those beginnings, in the imagination, in books and the long summer walks on the sand by the inrushing sea, when there were always questions to ponder, and time to think about them, and the vast open spaces of my country of birth matched the boundless landscape of reading.

In intellectual exploration there are no final answers, it is a continuing journey, in which we only have our wits, and each other, and the waters are always moving, there is always something new, everything is always becoming. ‘We cannot step twice in the same river’, said Heraclitus of Ephesus, two thousand five hundred years

ago. ‘Everything is in flux, everything flows’. And hasn’t the global landscape of higher education been in flux since CGHE began work at the end of 2015, which now seems a lifetime ago? And changed in ways that none of us could have foreseen, all directly playing out in higher education and research. Brexit, and the fateful turning away of UK government from Europe, which will not end well. Trump, and populism, and White Supremacy nativism; and Black Lives Matter, and the surge of decolonial activity across the world and in the universities. The geo-political fracture between the United States and China, in which the US has moved from a strategy of itself as developer, which would culturally assimilate and absorb the other (despite China’s long history and bottomless tradition) to a strategy of separation, containment and hostility. The pandemic. The online world, more autarkic and more global, and our discovery in some countries of the limits of state competence, and the limits of social discipline, our capacity to manage ourselves for one another. And we have also felt the shared fear and danger, and family and friends, and compassion and helping; a global experience, the same and different everywhere, like the global climate change to come. Who could have expected any of this?

## The global

In the remainder of this talk I will reflect on the global, and globalisation, meaning the tendency to global convergence and integration, in higher education and research. In abstract globalisation has wonderful potential. It offers the possibility we can work our way out of the national container blocking collaborative action, for example on climate change. Global convergence suggests a full and formative encounter with the diversity of human ideas, knowledge, imagination, government, institutions, social habits, on the basis of unity in diversity, *heer buton*g, in *tianxia*, all under heaven, the Chinese terms. No one country or culture has all the answers and we have much to learn from each other. That is the ideal. That is globalisation in abstract. In practice, global integration has not worked so well. It has been a mixed blessing at best. Hence the keynote title ‘the good, the bad and the ugly’.

In social science we need descriptive categories for mapping space and time. When ‘globalisation’ is defined simply as integration and convergence it carries no baggage. But globalisation in practice has baggage. It is permeated by relations of power and politics, a zone in which different agents, including ourselves, work the global in their own interests.

The birth of the Internet in 1990 changed everything. It provided the technological conditions for a new sociability, the first world community. In higher education post-1990 has seen a phenomenal growth of faculty and student mobility, cross-border programmes and institutions, partnerships and consortia between institutions, the sharing of information and spreading of good practices. It has seen the birth, rapid expansion and worldwide diversification of the networked global science system, with a growing pool of common knowledge, almost three million published papers each year. The number of countries with their own science systems has doubled, and a quarter of all science papers involve cross-country teams, compared to 2 per cent in 1970. The global science system is sustained by bottom up collegial cooperation between scientists, operating outside their nation-states and generating global common goods that are crucial to us, as the pandemic has shown. Higher education and knowledge are among the most globalised of all human activities.

That’s the ‘good’ part of the keynote title. We embody it when we meet together, in a world community of researchers, like today. But that’s not all that happens.

## Euro-American globalisation

Countries and universities do not have equal respect. Only some knowledge is valued. The World-Class University template in rankings embodies the cultures, values, lives, and economic interests of not of everyone, but tiny national elites in a handful of countries. Brain drain decimates emerging systems. The globalisation that emerged after 1990, in economy, culture, education and science, was not a shared space based on respect for the other and mutual learning; it was a hegemonic globalisation grounded in the European (Hellenic-Judeo-Christian) heritage.

In economic terms it was Western and primarily American; in cultural terms it was Anglo-American. I will call it Euro-American globalisation. It fostered global openness to capital and the closure of power, culture and equality.

There are at least three different critiques of the ways that Euro-American globalisation fosters global hierarchy and inequality. Each critique contains important truths.

The first critique focuses on Euro-American globalisation in terms of neoliberalism. Post-1990 global communications coincided with the state-led strategies of corporate devolution and quasi-market reform that began in Anglo-America. The association was conjunctural, not causal, and there was always more to globalisation than world markets, but neoliberalism colonised globalisation successfully as an adjunct of global capitalism. Discourse of neoliberal globalisation were blended with discourses about the marketisation of higher education. We know that markets in education fasten onto hierarchies and foster unequal outcomes. Competition rewards people, universities and countries that have prior advantages. Capitalist globalisation in its 1990s form of deregulated free trade has now hit the wall, blocked by nation-states and abandoned by Anglo-American capital because it opened the door to China, but as a system of relations between government, markets and people, and a relentless justification for inequality, neo-liberalism retains shaping power.

The second critique of Anglo-American globalisation focuses on its enforced uniformity of cultures and languages, the stigmatisation and exclusion of everything different. World rankings favour large, comprehensive research universities like Harvard. Vocational universities, teaching colleges and all other models are downgraded. Consider networked science. Global science is defined by the two main bibliometric collections, Scopus from Elsevier and Web of Science from Clarivate Analytics. With the cooperation of leading scientists, Scopus and Web of Science are structured by an inclusion/exclusion binary at two levels: first, in determining what counts as codified science, and second, in the ordering of value within it. This shapes national policies and determines performance assessments, academic careers, and university rankings. But most of human knowledge is excluded.

Though English is the first language of only 5 per cent of the world's population, 93 per cent of Scopus and 95 per cent of Web of Science is in English, the one global language. There are no standard translation protocols that bring non-English papers into English. In humanities and qualitative social science, most journals even in English are excluded. The globally recognised social science reflects Anglo-European (and mostly US) theories, concepts and topics. Most journal editors are from the US and UK and the definitions, validations, and exclusions are legitimated and reproduced by the Anglo-America universities that dominate global rankings, as they produce the knowledge they validate. All endogenous (indigenous) knowledge is excluded. The closure is sustained by that deep Anglo-American certainty that 'our' culture is not only best, but sufficient, and no other insight is needed. Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls it a 'radical denial of copresence', continuing the colonial mindset. Sharon Stein says that 'systemic forms of domination are not just national and epistemic, but also ontological – that is, they sanction particular modes of existence, and foreclose others.' Global knowledge the hope of the world, but the world is mostly excluded from it.

The third critique of Euro-American globalisation is in terms of White Supremacy. This began in an older globalisation, the colonial empires and their brutal gifts of occupation, genocide, cultural erasure and economic slavery. It was taken seamlessly into neo-colonial 'development' after World War II and into post-1990 globalisation. In a paper on 'Whiteness as futurity and globalization of higher education', published last month, Riyad Shahjahan and Kirsten Edwards show that White Supremacy and its cultural baggage are integral central to the dominant forms of society, life and higher education and globalization makes this manifest on the world scale, centering power on Anglo-America, which is the Whitest of the White. 'Whiteness as a state of knowing and being' privileges white people, institutions and cultural norms and orients social and political environments towards the benefits and protections of White life. Anglo-American Whiteness as the ideal life shapes educational aspirations and migration patterns. Shahjahan and Edwards argue that not only do white students gain racialised advantages, investment in international higher education by non-white students is an attempt to secure a White future. Status hierarchies in higher education make it economically and culturally harmful

not to invest in the highest obtainable level of Whiteness. White credentials travel easily around the world, though with more certainty when the graduate is actually White. The global rankings template is a White institutional model that fosters desires for Whiteness and calibrates its institutional provision. The Whiteness argument helps to explain the overwhelming potency of both the US and the UK in international higher education, even though many other countries have developed strong domestic systems, and the US is not as economically dominant as it was.

Mainstream analysis defines inequality as social stratification and sidesteps coloniality and race. But we cannot understand the dark side of the global without placing White Supremacy at the centre. Universal Whiteness creates inequality by elevating White people above others, and by systems and structures than enforce the racialised hierarchy. Race is as powerful in entrenching inequality, domination and control in education and knowledge as are economic wealth and social class, or language and culture. The categories overlap. As Shahjahan and Edwards state, 'Within the context of European colonisation, Whiteness and capitalism cannot be disentangled.' However, these engines of inequality are not identical. Each explains something that the others do not. In the critique of neoliberalism, Euro-American globalisation is unequal political economy. In the critique of cultural hegemony, it silences voices and excludes most of human knowledge. In the critique of White Supremacy, Euro-American globalisation stratifies people directly, while forcing them to invest in a system which assigns them unequal value because exclusion would be even worse.

That is Euro-American globalisation in higher education. The critiques are true and compelling. Is that all there is to it? Do we all then accept that gross inequality is inevitable, it is dog-eat-dog world, and restyle as Taylor Swift or George Clooney? Of course not. No system of power is complete. The world is changing. The future is open. We have agency.

## The unforeseen

The world is becoming multi-polar, in political economy and, more slowly, higher education. China has the largest Purchasing Power Parity economy, India, Brazil and Indonesia are rising and China-India trade will eventually exceed all others. The North-South polarity is modified by state-building and rising incomes in parts of the global 'periphery'. There is a new East-South polarity between East Asia and Africa, Southeast Asia and Central Asia.

China is now the largest annual producer of science papers in Scopus. India is third. Korea, Brazil, Iran, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia are expanding rapidly. Of the 25 fastest growing national science systems, half are in countries with average incomes below world level. Some are low income countries. Science is pluralising. The US remains the mecca of science, the source of much of our most important shared knowledge (as well as cultural closure), and is much the strongest system in medicine and life sciences. But in physical sciences, engineering and especially mathematics and computing, the top universities in China and Singapore are at US level. In high citation papers Tsinghua has passed MIT to become world number one. It is still Anglo-American science in content but its production is dispersed. This provides more favourable conditions for global cultural plurality in future.

The future will not reproduce the past, the same Euro-American domination and high market ideology, they are fading. We do not know what the future will be. The conceit of social scientists that we can know the future. That we can make everyone safe with controlled futurity. But we do not, and we cannot. The ordered patterns in social science are time and place bound. They do not universalise and beyond them social reality is open. Not just in extraordinary times, like the geopolitics and pandemic, in any times. Heraclitus again: 'Whoever cannot seek the unforeseen, sees nothing. The known way is an impasse.' Our task as intellectuals is to look beyond the surface to what is unseen, because social relations cannot be wholly observed empirically, and must be theorised; and because reality is not just the actual but the possible. The future is conditioned by the past but does not replicate.

It is disrupted by the unexpected, by contingency; and by human agency, by what we do.

This is no bad thing. The unforeseen opens possibilities for change, and more space for agency. In social theory we talk of structure and agency as if structure – neoliberal power, the closed science system, the Whiteness hierarchy – is fixed, and agency is the zone of freedom. To a point this is true. It is very difficult to change classes, or capitalism, or the military, or the fossil fuel and plastics industries, or embedded racism. We can readily change only ourselves. We can self-cultivate in the Confucian sense, we can change our understanding, our capabilities, and our social relations. Michel Foucault said that the self is the one object we can freely will 'without having to take into consideration external determinations'. Yet, and here's the larger hope, what we call social structure, which we normally experience as ironbound external determinations, does not stay fixed in place. Heraclitus was right. And when big, unexpected changes happen, power structures are disrupted and new social potential comes onto the agenda. A doorway in time opens, in which it is possible to make gains, though the doorway does not stay open forever.

This is what has happened with decoloniality and Black Lives Matter. The rise of independent China, Korea, India, Iran and others has disrupted the two-hundred-year-old Anglo-American world hegemony and White Supremacy. The universalist claims of the dominant culture have fractured. Like the Wizard of Oz in the 1939 film, when the dog Toto pulls back the curtain, hegemonic Euro-American culture is revealed as something smaller, meaner, specific to particular places, claiming more than it should. It is no accident that BLM exploded everywhere into life. In the 1960s Martin Luther King knew that Vietnam's resistance to the US opened a larger space for the Civil Rights movement. 'The global' shows itself in distant events causally connected, opening new possibilities across the world.

## Conclusions

There will be larger changes in global higher education and research in future. Which changes they will be, *whose* changes they will be, rests partly on us. It's challenging, but I can see three strategic conditions that could advance a more equal higher education world. These elements already enter CGHE's research and the global webinar programme.

First, we can be more vigorous than before in advancing *sufficient* institutional autonomy and *absolute* critical intellectual freedom, in cases like Hungary's expulsion of the brilliant Central European University, or the Australian government's selective regulation of university partnerships in China. The quid pro quo is that higher education and research must work on topics and tasks important to many people, even while pushing the envelope.

Second, we can work for an open definition of valid global knowledge; not to abolish or weaken monocultural science, but to dethrone it, supplementing it with the knowledge ignored or marginalised. Not a question of creating diversity from above but acknowledging what is there. Santos proposes an 'ecology of knowledges', with 'sustained and dynamic interconnections' between differing knowledges, 'without compromising their autonomy', and intercultural translation. It means 'renouncing any general epistemology'. As Raewyn Connell says, 'we don't want another system of intellectual dominance'. It does not mean anything goes, or all truths are equal. It means the machinery of structural exclusion is discarded. It requires a change of heart in both science and the bibliometric system.

Third, we can more fully acknowledge our own capacity for self-formation. All of us are embedded in many different associations, in multiple lives and meanings. We must give ourselves and each other the room to change and grow. This means to be sceptical about the politics of singular and essential identity, and to refrain from sticking limiting labels on others. As I said in the conference opening, intellectual humility, mutual learning, mutual respect and an open

mind set. I hope that higher education does that for everyone who is here. I thank you for being here. It has been a deep honour to share my thoughts with you.

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Supporting material for these arguments is found at:

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