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**Comparative and International Higher Education in a New Key?
Thoughts on the Post-Pandemic Prospects of Scholarship**

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Introduction

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At the time of writing this Forum, many nations, cities, and universities are still in lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The concept – indeed, the experience – of an outbreak of global proportions is not new – yet, our recent circumstances serve as a reminder that humanity remains

unprepared and lacks the skills to mobilise and enforce a rapid international response in times of crisis (Alon, Farrell and Li, 2020; Weible et al. 2020). Intellectually and organisationally, we appear to suffer from selective amnesia and a shortage of the resilience and creativity needed to effectively contain a global catastrophe of this scale. As the death count grows, new waves of the coronavirus are hitting countries that experienced initial success with their quarantine measures (WHO 2020). Moreover, racism, anti-intellectualism, demagoguery and dishonesty have been reinforced in conjunction with the generalised intensification of feelings of desperation, anger and fear in response to the inadequate response to the pandemic and the excessive loss of lives that could have been prevented (Egede and Walker 2020; Godlee 2020; Matache and Bhaba 2020). In view of the reality where societies are unable to fully utilise cumulative knowledge and skills, new issues have emerged regarding the roles of research, teaching, and learning in the international and cross-cultural fields of study.

It would be imprudent to exaggerate the role or capabilities of international scholars in resolving problems associated with the lack of vigilance, competence, and readiness to confront the troubles of the day. As truth-seeking scholars, most intellectuals aim to refrain from jumping to immediate conclusions, and instead invite a challenge through critical inquiry and debate (Dakka and Morini 2020). Besides, scholars often face disparate political, cultural and linguistic barriers, while trying to explore and communicate in a new context (Cook 1998; Robinson-Pant and Wolf 2017; Trahar 2014). Notwithstanding stakeholders' expectations that these scholars' exchanges and teaching will enable their students to create impact on governance, policies and societies, this is not a foregone conclusion; most scholars prefer to temper their hopes, as not all of their work will exert significant influence, or be relevant locally or internationally (Gao and Zheng 2020). In spite of continuous efforts to promote collaboration and interdisciplinarity, their

success in making cross-sectoral and cross-national projects work effectively is very limited (Oleksiyenko 2019). Very few established journals are prepared for quick peer-reviews and innovative engagement of intellectual communities to generate a rapid response and critical discourse in times of crises. In terms of encouraging stronger bonds to promote critical inquiry, effective policy and broadly applicable practice, scholars in the field of comparative and international higher education still have much to reflect and work on in order to increase capacity of their field for more responsive inquiry and stakeholder engagement.

The authors of this Forum have exercised collaborative intentionality, so as to rethink the premises and prospects of concept development and intellectual discussions within the field of comparative and international higher education, which has, like many other fields, been deeply affected by a gamut of crises: pandemic, infodemic, neoliberal – all coming together in a hybrid and explosive mix. As the initiator, I invited a group of researchers to engage with each other using Peters et al.'s (2020) method of collective writing, which serves as an instrument for concept development and the pursuit of answers to complex questions within communities of scholarship by collating and reconciling disparate and conflicting scholarly perspectives. This method brings together diverse voices and narratives, ensuring that they are heard on an individual level, all the while juxtaposing and finding parallels across disparate inquiries, styles and perspectives. In the process of collective writing, individuals discussed themes and questions, and reviewed each other's pieces. The contributions to the Forum create a polyphony or a collage of views on a variety of important concepts. They provide an inclusive reflection on the intellectual diversity of investigations that take place in the field. As Trahar (2009) noted, it is important to '[access] and [understand] participants' different social constructions of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), examining issues in depth through exploratory, open-ended conversations, prioritising holistic

understanding situated in lived experience'. The lived experiences depicted in this Forum include impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic entangled with other significant factors affecting higher education: post-truth culture, racial discrimination, gender inequity, and obsessive performativity. The authors' reflections are rooted in critical thinking, which is essential for continual development and leadership in the field. At the same time, given that they are situated in different parts of the world, these reflections establish a dialogue that responds to, and reinforces the need for a global cultural exchange and engagement of intellectual leadership (Hayhoe and Pan 2001; Mundy and Zha 2012). In keeping with Holmadottirs et al.'s (2013) concerns, the contributors to this Forum prompt a sense of responsibility for the collaboration, engagement and communal commitment increasingly necessary for bridging disparate interpretations of knowledge and problem-solving.

With analytical emphasis building gradually toward solutions and hope for the future, the contributions flow as follows: Jack Lee calls for rethinking internationalisation in favour of more humane forms of recognising the values of international students and mobility; Anatoly V. Oleksiyenko reflects on the damage caused by excessive anxiety lingering from suspended, but untermiated neoliberalism, which undermines societal trust and props up unhealthy premises and practices; Liz Jackson brings into focus the inequalities that are reproduced by the ostensibly accessible online teaching and learning; Qiang Zha highlights the increasing value of liberal arts education in universities seeking to both resolve human suffering, and the role of the UN's sustainable development goals in bolstering the humanities; Malini Sivasubramaniam and Ruth Hayhoe propose that we rethink the value of religion and spirituality in education for the sake of cross-cultural tolerance within increasingly secular societies; while Amy Metcalfe and Gerardo

Blanco argue that successful internationalisation requires a more critical approach to conceptualising the *self* and the *other* in the construct of changing higher education.

Re-embracing humanity and humanities, as well as rethinking human vulnerabilities and aspirations, are the most resounding themes that emerge across the critical reflections in this Forum. The intellectual leadership of academic communities that demonstrates the creativity, courage and freedom to challenge conventions, ask questions, support the voiceless, marginalised, repressed, and abused, without reproducing coloniality (Takayama et al. 2017; Trahar 2014), is viewed as the force that can transform the roles, responsibilities and values of scholarship. When the agency of critical inquiry and critical voice is increasingly undercut by populism, illiberalism and fascism (Giroux 2020; Peters 2020), this leadership is central to shaping the imperatives of greater responsibility placed on international educators and students (Peters et al., 2020b). This Forum encourages researchers to strive to better correlate scholarly ideas with the lived experiences of individuals, all the while relentlessly pursuing integrity in truth-seeking. This requires commitment and depth, as well as genuine compassion and belief in cross-boundary engagement and exploration.

Post-Covid Futures in the Studies of Comparative and International Higher Education

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The global COVID-19 pandemic has affected our social and professional lives so dramatically that a return to normality seems distant for now. Without a doubt, higher education faces serious challenges in the conduct of teaching and research when academia must follow public health

guidelines, ensure the safety of its employees and students, and weather through financial wreckage. The field of comparative and international higher education faces even greater hurdles when travel restrictions inhibit networking, collaborations, and data collection. However, the loud cries of doom in the higher education sector today lose sight of the transformative potential of this global pandemic. Fukuyama (2011) points out that when a society settles into an equilibrium that resists change then violence is sometimes necessary to avert political decay. To what extent does the pandemic constitute a violent upheaval in higher education that challenges conventional wisdom and normative practices? We have already witnessed dramatic interruptions to studies, abrupt terminations of employment contracts, and deepening inequities for racialised students and staff with caring responsibilities. Without downplaying the severity of these alarming results, the violent upheaval can also serve as a juncture to transform comparative and international higher education for more humane purposes.

The present cries of doom in higher education stem from two mental frames that require alteration during and after the pandemic. These two mental frames have fuelled massification globally and accrued significant power for higher education institutions in national and societal development. First, a neoliberal conception of higher education dominates decision-making, such that academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie 1997) is now pervasive in many parts of the world. Even in countries where a welfare state (e.g., Canada) or developmental state (e.g., Singapore) closely regulates the provision of education, profit entices many higher education institutions and raises serious questions about the purpose of higher learning (Jones and Weinrib 2011; Lee 2015). Second, many professional bodies and practitioners in higher education such as institutional leaders continue to assume that mobility is intrinsic to internationalisation. The widespread anxiety over declining international student enrolment in many Anglophone countries exposes a

dependency on foreign currencies for many institutions to remain viable. The more progressive circles of practitioners may still encourage student exchange during the pandemic, but this view of internationalisation is nevertheless predicated on mobility.

A bold re-imagining of higher education demands that comparative and international perspectives inform policymaking, teaching, and research such that we are not held captive by nationalism, neoliberalism, and immobility during the pandemic. Higher education has a moral imperative to confront rising xenophobia against Chinese and other Asian students blamed for the pandemic, institutional racism against Black people, and parochial views of national identity. Successful, dynamic higher education systems do exist without an overarching neoliberal pivot. For example, the strong welfare state systems of Germany and Scandinavia have shielded their higher education systems from the neoliberal assault that is evident in Anglophone countries (Bégin-Caouette, Schmidt, and Field 2017; Hüther and Krücken 2018). What lessons can be learned from these systems to create more humane and transformative higher education institutions after the pandemic?

Comparative education's rich literature on policy borrowing reminds us that context and politics mediate policy dissemination (Steiner-Khamsi 2014). Recent interrogations of the canons of comparative education expose the field's complicity in colonialism and exploitative modernisation projects while Western epistemology continues to dominate (Takayama, Sriprakash, and Connell 2017). Alternative discourses and Southern epistemology remain largely marginalised in the social sciences (Chen 2010; Silova, Millei, and Piattoeva 2017). While the Black Lives Matter movement has inspired many and elevated consciousness during this pandemic, it is also rooted in an American socio-political narrative that is unfamiliar to many people worldwide. Instead, the decolonisation of epistemology and curricula exhibits global

resonance, particularly in a time when some states in the Global South have averted high pandemic fatalities through good governance and collective action.

As this pandemic painfully reminds us, internationalisation cannot rely entirely on mobility or schemes that prioritise revenue when global finances become increasingly unpredictable. Advocates of internationalisation at home (Nilsson 2003) already exposed the shortcomings of mobility nearly two decades ago when they underscored the barriers to such experiences for most students. Yet this clarion call fell on deaf ears as institutions continued to prioritise student mobility at the cost of other strategies of internationalisation. This pandemic is an opportune time to internationalise the curriculum to include a plurality of epistemologies and to leverage technology for academic exchanges and research collaborations. These endeavours require genuine commitments from institutional leaders and academic staff if they stand to succeed. Without a doubt, new ways of being and acting in higher education will face resistance and setbacks, but transformations demand time just like political revolutions.

Alleviating International Status Anxiety, Amplifying Social Trust

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In its excitement about the rise of world-class universities, the comparative education field once succumbed to pride and anxiety about international status (Oleksiyenko, Zha, Chirikov, and Li 2018). Literature on global competition and rankings proliferated (Allen 2019; Gao and Zheng 2020; Shahjahan, Sonneveldt, Estera, and Bae 2020). Many scholars celebrated the rise of China, Russia and other formerly closed societies in the global rankings of knowledge producers that

obeyed the rules of international peer review. As time went by, the analysts observed the spread of serious concerns about the new players and their increasingly overt obsession with vanity, hierarchy, and hegemony (Shattock 2017). Politicians of the East and West began to shame each other regarding their approaches as a means to establish the primacy, and enhance the respectability of their own culture, language, or identity; instead, usually achieving the opposite. Meanwhile, many international peer reviewers appeared to have limited capacity for criticism and scepticism that would counter the shameful reproduction of ‘oppressive racialised and gendered ideologies’ (Esteria and Shahjahan 2019, 930). Performativity seemed to be a useful tool in rationalizing inequality, while also propelling the commercially-beneficial emoscapes of anxiety and dearth (Shahjahan et al. 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront the failures of integrity in science, communication, and governance across many countries (do Prado et al. 2020; Moon 2020; Shangguan, Wang, and Sun 2020), while adding new triggers for worry and tension. Neoliberal discourse has figured as a powerful force in amplifying anxiety over ranks and scores, drawing attention to death statistics, rather than strategies for collaborative response to the global crisis (Allon, Farrel, and Li 2020). Obsessed with revenue indicators, neoliberal campuses inflamed worries about the real and projected declines in international student mobility, programme sustainability, and research productivity (Keung and Teotonio 2020; The Economist 2020). Their concern extended to ‘the “Mice” industry (meetings, incentives, conferences and events) [which] makes a multibillion-pound contribution in terms of job creation and revenue generation’ as portrayed by Rowe (2018), which could not escape dire impacts, as many students and professors would be unable to consume the whole spectrum of services normally facilitated by hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, etc.

Unfortunately, managerial universities see calculability as being more important than the quality of intellectual conversations and the manifestation of academic integrity. Instead of concerning themselves with addressing how science can contribute to ensuring a more resilient, inclusive and responsive healthcare system, cleaner air, safer water resources, and more peaceful public spaces, scientists at such universities are concerned about performativity assessment, contracts, and appraisals by their superiors (Flaherty 2020; Oleksiyenko 2019). Women carry an especially heavy burden of responsibilities and shame for failures (Nash and Churchill 2020). The growth-driven, money-raising enterprise of higher learning is imagined as an unshakable performative fortress enduring the quakes of social revolutions, escalating violence, and geopolitical upheavals. Thus, status anxiety is used as emotional leverage in shaping academic existence.

How can we break the escalating production and reproduction of inequality-driven anxieties in the field, at least emically? More integrity-oriented international peer review, both in publications and research grant applications, is an important part of the solution. A more dynamic engagement with qualitative research and narrative analysis is increasingly important if we want to reconsider stale discourses and enhance diversity (Trahar 2013). Another critical factor is moving away from the factory-style scientification promoted by the positivist hierarchy-oriented paradigms of education research. Journal editors and reviewers can think more critically about the power structures of calculability-oriented comparative education and its contributions to nurturing pride, vanity, and/or bullying. In the times of crises, immediate publications through open access journals, blogs, and forums at the internationally-influential journals such as the *Compare's* Forum, provide a good alternative to the years-long conveyors of reviews and ideological battles

Nevertheless, publishers are certainly not the ultimate authority to resolve the performativity dilemmas that cause anxiety in academic communities. Commercial and managerial elites have been major contributors to ideological wars, power projections, and authoritarian efforts to resurrect positivist thinking and calculability, while equating growth with success in education and science (Waitere et al. 2011). Critically-thinking academics are an important counterforce to communicate the problems of marginalisation, vulnerability, and injustice. Academic research does not exist as a convenient footboard for the powerful to gain more power. The dictum that the rich are getting richer is incongruous with discourses in the humanitarian crisis leading to increased vulnerability. As soon as we begin to rethink and reject the educational perspective which stokes nostalgia for the notion of a missing or lost ‘greatness’, we may begin to capitalise on the chance to build deeper social trust across cultures, nations, and religions – not trampling on the rights of the so-called *others*, but standing up for them.

Rethinking Inequalities While Teaching and Learning Online

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Educational institutions and educators face pressing new demands in light of COVID-19. Most obvious among them has been the shift to providing teaching and learning online, as students and teachers meeting in-person has become unsafe. Responses to this new demand, and experiences with it, have been mixed over time (e.g. Peters et al. 2020b). For some fans of online and blended learning, COVID-19 offers a blessing in disguise. Those involved in the business of promoting, researching, and guiding their peers in online and blended energy suddenly have a much larger

and more receptive audience, as less savvy educators experience a new need to know about how to teach online. As proponents of online education have argued for a long time, such education is not just different, and not necessarily inferior to brick-and-mortar education (Warnick and Burbules 2007). Rather, it provides for different opportunities and challenges, when seen on its own terms. In line with other sentiments, that the post-pandemic world should be one of fresh ideas about the ‘new normal’ (Roy 2020), such education seems to offer much promise.

Yet at the same time, new inequalities have rapidly emerged in the post-pandemic landscape. In many educational institutions, computer labs have shrunk over time, while students are assumed to be online on laptops, phones, and other devices. Yet post-pandemic education has revealed that private spaces and high-tech devices are costly for many people. Personal access to fast data is also not to be taken for granted. Even in Hong Kong, technical challenges remain in trying to educate everyone online (Lau, Yang, and Dasgupta 2020). Thus, as the world goes online, people get left behind, within and across societies. This also makes marking and credentialing of students a tricky business ethically, moving forward.

Meanwhile, online learning spaces (and selection of them) are not politically neutral. Zoom has been heavily favoured by academics, and yet has problematic security issues, with users’ personal data being sent to private parties, and with online classes being hacked by trolls (Paul 2020). As students are not well placed to debate or decline their lecturers’ and institutions’ choices when it comes to using such technology, this raises a number of ethical concerns, as students are pressured to engage in consumer choices in the course of their education in new, and newly problematic, ways.

Finally, personal inequities related to overall quality of life get reinscribed while teaching and learning online. Quarantining and staying at home over sustained periods of time increase risks

of domestic violence and mental illness (Vutsinas 2020). Educators who have young children now face impossible demands, to teach their own classes at home while home-schooling children. There is a clearly gendered dimension to these challenges. Preliminary research shows that the scholarly productivity of women academics has been significantly impacted by work changes resulting from the pandemic (Viglione 2020). ‘Zoom fatigue’ has also become all-too-real in this context, as people face exhaustion running meetings online, with blinking screens and random time lags (Sklar 2020). What was once possible and normal has become mentally and emotionally draining online, leaving employees of educational institutions in increasingly precarious places, in relation to their employers.

Life and education were far from perfect before COVID-19. However, while educational leaders must face the new, this also means critically evaluating new norms, so that they do not merely renew old inequalities while moving online. As a more equal future is sought, educational leaders must identify new challenges, financial, social, educational, and political, related to the post-pandemic reality faced, and continue to reform not only for their success as institutions and communities, but in light of the well-being and equality needs of all of their members.

Liberal Arts Education and Rethinking Universities’ Role in a Post Pandemic Era

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The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the world severely, and universities worldwide are not immune to this public health crisis—if not suffering even more than other institutions. Now the discourse

and discussion concerning the university sector seem to focus on how to improve teaching and learning remotely in terms of both pedagogy and technology, and how to ease the financial impact. While these issues are of immediate importance, there is also a pressing need to explore how to reinforce the resilience of universities in the face of this pandemic situation, and more importantly, how the university sector may contribute to boosting the resilience of individuals and the society as a whole in a post pandemic era. Arguably, individuals may contribute cumulatively to a society's resilience as a whole. Nevertheless, we are now witnessing many becoming lost--on account of the confusing developments across countries with respect to handling the epidemic, the socioeconomically disadvantaged being hit worst even in developed and democratic countries, and also a rising tide of anti-globalisation. Hence, the following questions associated with this global crisis need to be raised and explored now: How can university education navigate individuals through a world in crisis, a world of complexity and uncertainty, with abundant yet confusing information? What can the university do to foster social justice and equity particularly in challenging times? How can the university help ensure that more and more people are knowledgeable about the fate of others, care for others across borders, and connect in all sorts of new ways to support each other at both the local and global levels? And in what ways can the university help redefine the process of globalisation towards a 'globalisation from below' as suggested recently by veteran scholar Wang Gungwu (18 May 2020)? Among the various pathways to examining such pivotal questions, liberal arts education is an especially meaningful approach—given its emphasis on the knowledge, skills and adaptability that are integral to an education rooted in humanism, and implemented via nurturing critical and creative thinking.

Therefore, it would be significant to explore how new collaborative initiatives in liberal arts education may serve to reconfigure the role of universities in a post pandemic era. For instance,

the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) might make a new angle to inform the transformation of liberal arts education in the university. There are specific SDGs that indeed resonate at a rather deep level with the values of liberal arts education, including (but not limited to) ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, making human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (UN 21 October 2015). Those specific SDGs may enrich a liberal arts curriculum, while an enriched liberal arts education will in turn engage universities with the SDGs in a holistic manner. Amid the current COVID-19 pandemic, the voices of epidemiologists and public health experts are now dominating initial responses to the coronavirus crisis. Yet, in a post pandemic era, there is an earnest need to think beyond mono-disciplinary terms, and more than ever about how individuals, communities and social structures can operate knowledgeably and wisely to nourish biodiversity systems. In this regard, liberal arts education is well positioned to steer our society in refocusing its priorities towards maintaining resilience, sustainability and socio-ecology—applying the SDGs to frame and synergise a liberal arts curriculum. The SDGs present a new agenda for providing an enhanced space to introduce, move forward and normalise inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches to knowledge acquisition and learning outcomes, as well as absorb some deep insights from Asian and African civilisations that have been given little attention in the past. Indeed, the SDGs may usher in a paradigm shift in liberal arts education, i.e., something that epistemologically approximates the notion of an 'Axis Flip', whereby students would be enabled to flip the axes of knowledge and competencies (Stanford University 2013). This might involve exploring knowledge, abilities and competencies with their intended social meaning and impact. Pedagogically this paradigm shift approaches the notion of 'Purpose Learning', whereby students

declare a mission in learning and couple their knowledge pursuit with the purpose that fuels it (Stanford University 2013). With initiatives of this type, universities may leverage a transformed liberal arts education, and play an enhanced role in nurturing individuals' spiritual and cultural sensibilities and enabling their personal and social capabilities to continually expand and grow into resilience.

Last but not least, despite the fact that liberal arts education fosters the soft skills and resilience required for navigating in a society of uncertainties and in a time of crisis, and illuminates the ethical foundations for today's burgeoning innovation system (Bakhshi et al. 2008), it is now widely challenged and even attacked. In a time when demonstrations of impact and utility are increasingly demanded, the non-utilitarian nature of liberal arts education easily renders it vulnerable to charges of being elitist and lacking wider social relevance (Doidge et al. 2020). As such, some now raise concerns over the survival of liberal arts education in the 21st century (Harris 13 December 2018). Even worse, this pandemic has struck liberal arts education directly and badly: many universities have exercised hiring freezes or pauses in face of the financial difficulties, which affect the humanities and social sciences programmes first and foremost. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the US alone has witnessed the complete or partial shutdown of more than 30 universities, with the majority being liberal arts colleges—including MacMurray College, Urbana University Branch Campus and Johnson & Wales University that have operated for more than 100 years. Against this backdrop, engaging with the SDGs would reduce the elitist flavour of liberal arts education and the resulting backlash against it, instead ensuring it is fraught with social relevance and epistemological/pedagogical resilience (as illustrated in the previous paragraph). In turn, this would help boost university education in a post pandemic era.

Religion and Spirituality in Comparative Higher Education: Post-Pandemic Perspectives

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The unprecedented global health crisis brought on by COVID-19 points to some of the shortcomings of secularism in face of the vulnerability brought on by the pandemic, and truly creates an opportunity for spiritual reflection. The disruption of daily life by social distancing mandates has severely impacted schools, institutions of higher learning, and even religious institutions, as well as the economies of the world. Amidst this uncertainty, however, a recent Pew Research poll reports more people are turning to religion to cope with this unparalleled disruption (Pew Research 2020). Bridging the divide between science and religion is crucial in responding to COVID-19.

Undeniably, this current health crisis has served to highlight the pivotal role religion and spiritual leaders can play in the world, which is even more crucial in times of need. On the global front, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Religions for Peace recently launched a global Multi-Religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 initiative to raise awareness of how the most vulnerable citizens of the world are impacted, and call attention to the strong role of faith communities during a crisis (UNICEF 2020). Likewise, António Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations has emphasised the critical role of religious leaders in addressing the multiple challenges of COVID-19, urging them to be instrumental in fostering peace during this

time by focusing on our ‘common humanity’. Gutteres continues that, ‘...at a time when the vast majority of the world’s students are out of school or university, I urge faith leaders to support the continuity of education, working with education providers to find solutions so that learning never stops.’ (United Nations 2020). Marshall (2020) notes past health crises including Ebola, HIV/AIDS and Zika have similarly benefitted from the role played by faith actors, but Marshall, Wilkinson and Robinson (2020) also provide examples of how a failure to engage and to partner with these religious actors in meaningful ways has resulted in challenges in meeting public health objectives. Clearly, integrating faith actors and religious institutions in the health response to the pandemic is critical.

In light of this, lessons can be drawn for the field of comparative education that could similarly be enriched by a deeper acknowledgement of the spiritual and inter-religious understanding that an expanded dialogue with religious organisations, leaders and research institutions could foster. Several contributors to our edited book on *Religion and Education: Comparative and International Perspectives* (Sivasubramanian and Hayhoe 2018) underscore the importance of religious education in policy discussions and in framing comparative and international education broadly. From countering religious extremism (Ghosh and Chan 2018) to multicultural and faith accommodation of immigrant students (Collette and Bang 2018), and contributions to the peace process in Northern Ireland (Barnes 2018) or Israel (Katz 2018), religious understanding is evidenced to be central to increasing trust and peace building globally. Similarly, the book *The Heart of Higher Education* by Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, with Megan Scribner (2010) has the potential to create a core for the field of comparative higher education, bringing scholars to recognise that spirituality and inter-religious dialogue should lie at the heart of international comparative studies. Palmer et al (2010) write about integrative higher

education in terms of a clear ‘heart-mind connection’ (41) and note that ‘the great spiritual traditions...were centuries ahead of science in positing the interconnectedness of reality that physicists and others now proclaim’ (48). A professor of physics, Zajonc carries this farther in a fascinating discussion of light as particle and wave and of the way quantum theory challenged the understanding of wholes as ‘merely parts juxtaposed and bound together by forces’ (79), proposing seven stages for inter-religious encounters on this basis.

Higher education, after all, arose largely from religious communities in ancient times, with early institutions in South Asia, such as Taxila in Pakistan, founded in 700 BCE, and highlighting the Vedas, and Nalanda in India, focusing on Buddhism from 427 CE, also Christian institutions in medieval Europe such as Bologna in Italy from 1088 CE. Religious texts were given equal importance alongside scientific knowledge, a feature that needs to be revived in the increasing secularisation that has characterised the global research university and much comparative higher education research today. Also, space was created for women’s participation from a relatively early period, under the influence of Mahayana Buddhism and Christian mission efforts (Hayhoe 2019). Major religious traditions have had a distinct impact on the growth and development of higher education. Nakosteen’s account of the Academy of Jundi-Shapur (1964), a historically important science centre in 8th century Persia, captures the pivotal ways in which Islamic higher education prospered during the early period of Islamic development and contributed to the field of medicine. However, it was not just in ancient times that religious institutions fostered the growth of universities. The medieval university in Europe was largely shaped by the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, with theology as queen of the sciences (Rashdall 1987, Haskins 1957), and there continue to be arguments for its importance today (Oliver 2016).

Religion is not without challenges, but it still has much to offer. By recognizing the similarities and differences in the world's religious traditions and bringing these into our comparative analysis of higher education institutions and systems it should be possible to nurture global citizens who are empowered to work together on the multitude of global issues emerging from this global pandemic.

Internationalisation as Fatal Strategy: A Manifesto

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Uncertain futures call for tentative writing; writing that we, as authors of this Forum, might regret later. We rename this potential regret as our collective manifesto. If comparative and international studies of the university live to see the future, we must shed the dead weight of stiff performances and understand that the approaches that have shaped and sustained our field so far are unlikely to move it forward. Internationalisation has revealed itself to be a fatal strategy (Baudrillard 1990) that forces the *world*, the *global*, and the *other* into the passive role of objects while we monopolise subjectivity as agentic observers. Now, in viral terms, we see what the world/global/other does without our consent.

'We continue to operate on an assumption of infinite resources, a horizon in place since at least the Western Enlightenment. The consequence is that we are missing the epochal shift

that is now already upon us, let alone begun to think through what sort of transformation of research and practice becomes necessary' (Rappleye and Komatsu 2020, 191).

Known before but silenced by the conquerors, *el encuentro* is still quiet and deadly, even as global connectivity is recognised as the greatest threat. While we shelter in place, we long for contact and movement; our desire for the *other* expands as we contract into our fears. Rather than analytically separating fear/desire, repulsion/attraction, we propose recognising, and even embracing, our dualities, contradictions, and hypocrisies as well as our best intentions. We propose an embodied way of knowing that accounts for both presence and absence along with real and imagined human contact.

'The academic problem is different: the academic problem is how to sustain one's strangerhood in the domain of knowledge creation' (Kim 2020, 121).

As we imagine what global studies of the university could become, we embrace argumentative reversibility (Baudrillard 2002) and recognise that—even when we work from home—we are never outside of the teaching machine (Spivak 2012). Therefore, it is the university that thinks itself through us, becoming international with us (as us). From this humble and humbling perspective, we are better positioned to open ourselves to the joy and heartbreak of encounter, the vulnerability of arrival, the risk of hospitality, and the disappointment of departure. All of these experiences are familiar to us and should be the *puncta* (Barthes 1981) in our articles and volumes, instead of hidden behind the weighty methodological curtains that we deploy to hide our tough, messy and often impossible decisions.

'Engaging in international research demands that we become outsiders to different degrees. We will notice our foreignness, and if we don't, it will be pointed out to us by others' (Torres-Olave and Lee 2020, 143).

L'internationalisme creates/demands/desires absence from home countries, families, culture, previous notions of self/identity, and pedagogical expectations (outcomes that are often under-studied and misrecognised). Becoming international denies banal re-entry due to an expectation of exposure. All crossings are permanent; all borders are internal. We knowingly and inadvertently exchange *self* for *other*.

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