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Conflicts between the global and the local: Women and children as constructions

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Introduction

My paper is based primarily on my field-research experiences about the Kingdom of Bhutan over a period of approximately ten years. This is simply an introduction of the social, cultural, and political relationship between children and adults, in particularly the women population.

Before presenting the outline of my paper, I would like to raise my key question --why Bhutan? , why child in relation with women ?

It is relatively new to recognize the idea that the reproduction of human species belongs to 'private' field of each domestic matter. Even now, I think that it is far from the fact of the universally found.

Comprehending that not only giving birth of the child, but also nursing, and raising the child is the 'work' allocated to women is a relatively new concept. Ideology of 'motherhood' fixed as women's property has appeared in parallel with the finding of the concept of 'child' and 'children'.

This field of reproduction is also the privileged field of un-institutionalized and informal learning. We will be able to get more productive findings to consider child and woman together as a 'strand of relation' from global point of view as well as from the point of view of education through life rather than to analyze child and women separately.

I would say, there seems to be ideological and political struggles between the North' and 'South' in terms with how the concept "family" and roles within the family are globally constructed and how the "child" and "childhood" are globally constructed.

One should avoid viewing the globalization phenomenon by beginning to give a precise definition of it. The ambiguous definition of globalization, the past and present practices of lifelong learning and the various realities happening at our surroundings; we are no doubt in the danger of falling into functionalistic thinking patterns which are confining our future opportunities.

From the easy flows of "goods, currency, information, knowledge, people, images, crimes, pollution elements, drugs and fashion" across national borders, a basic understanding of

globalization can be achieved. Obviously different theorists would focus on different aspects and impulses towards this phenomenon. Whichever way, this is not a single phenomenon; rather, it is the end result of a combination of various elements and movements. Thus, it exists in different forms and grows vigorously due to the rapid development of technologies. This is why it is placing itself in an important position of the revolutionary new age.

Within this trend, what possibilities can lifelong learning provide for the people? In other words, how can one understand and make clear of the globalization influences on lifelong learning? It is the aim of this project to examine the above questions. However, one must be aware of the risk of seeing globalization only as an external influence upon lifelong learning. Globalization is not merely an external influence; rather both lifelong learning are strongly intertwined within this ever-changing process. The concept, ideologies and movements of lifelong learning, nor matter if they are for good or evil, the primary goal of this report is to make clear how they are located within the globalization phenomenon (including the opposing forces of globalization).

1. Lifelong learning within the competitive ground

Looking back in time, the “lifelong learning” concept originated with global dimensions. Furthermore, whether looking at the birth of “lifelong learning” or methods and elements embraced in this concept, this term is calling for a global outlook. In other words, one could easily state that it has been given the destiny of globalism.

“Lifelong education,” the term used before the come about of “lifelong learning” emphasizes the fact that individuals need to pay their attention once again toward this transnational happening when it was first introduced to the international ground. In the UNESCO’s (1971) “Learning to be” the lifelong education concept was initially introduced and was accepted as “an educational policy for the future generation.”¹⁾ Here, lifelong education as a system gained an important position in the world level. From here onwards, OECD, ILO, council of Europe and European Community (former EU) have joined the game and many related concepts and ideologies have been introduced and developed. In addition, NGO groups such as the Club of Rome are bringing up a range of environmental issues. Despite the fact that they are forming strong bonds with lifelong learning in order to convey important messages to the world citizens, however, one cannot help to think that this action is far behind in time.

2. Women and children as global constructions

The concept of lifelong learning has been recognized widely around the globe. Along with the making of national education systems, it is a unique feature of the new global age where women and children are having their own educational territories. The “Children’s Rights Convention” and the “Basic Education for All” slogan are strong messages urging governments to create environments that improve the condition of children (as well as youth

and adults) to world standards.²⁾ In regarding to policies for women, there is a shift from the WID (Women in Development) strategy to the present GAD (Gender and Development) strategy.³⁾ From this, it is clear that these global strategies are going beyond national and local boundaries and are working toward the rights and justice for the big picture. For example, the importance of women (children) education has been recognized at the surfaces of all global dimensions. This is because it is a worthy investment for both individuals and nations. Furthermore, it is also the most prioritized area in the human rights debate.

Not only that goods and products are being produced, distributed and consumed globally, discourses are also being produced, distributed and consumed in all global dimensions. Moreover, they are happening at an incredibly fast speed. This is a new phenomenon in the history. While people are criticizing global movements of the money market, there is actually another hidden danger of the Americanization of lifestyles among all. Unlike the money market, little attention has been paid to this area. It seems like even before the process of globalization, people are already welcoming and accepting a new system of different anti-globalization strategies. Let's ask ourselves if this transnational process and the systemization of commonly accepted ideologies are merely the natural course of our history!!

The global institutionalization of discourses

Globalization is not merely placing influences within economical and political domains. It is also asserting great pressures upon the standardization of cultural and particularly educational contexts. It can be explained from a wide range of viewpoints. Formal education and its content is becoming a homogenous one around the world. It is overcoming the differences presented within different cultures, religions, political frameworks and economic developmental phases. Presently, it is engaged with trying to present the same information in all countries and grounds. Neoinstitutionalists such as Meyer theorize this situation as the "world system of education."⁴⁾ They have suggested the wide spread of regulations presented in international conventions to be one of the reasons for the standardization of education. This is an important moment in the history.

Through the network between UNESCO, the World Bank and other international government and non-government organizations, an understanding is being spread out globally. It is the understanding to describe the "illiteracy of almost a thousand million of the world's inhabitants to be a disgrace to all mankind"..⁵⁾ Education is considered as a valuable object itself to achieve. On the other hand, just like peace, environmental, population and other transnational problems, education is used as a mean for individuals to find their own solutions. It cannot be denied that from the recognition of these two points, although their directions are different from each other, the global institutionalization of educational discourses begins.

Despite these two points are contradictive in nature, based on the idea that they can be arranged into one bundle, global standards can be formed by transforming these standpoints into operational indexes. Each country endeavors and is endeavoring at accommodating the standard model into the nation.

Globalization is taking away the differences that exist between countries and is working

towards a homogenous and standardized global village. Globally, countries especially the developing ones are being disadvantaged from the globalization process in which they are forced to follow developmental strategies from the “external standards.” Moreover, they are also forced to find their own identity from a hierarchical and uni-dimensional ranking. In order to justify this ranking, UN and the World Bank are endlessly coming up with sophisticated indexes and are endlessly revising them. The Gross National Product (GNP) and Human Development Index (HDI) are some good examples. However, the question has been raised as to whether or not wealth and poverty can really be measured by the use of GNP and HDI. Furthermore, what meanings do they impose on education? It is not doubt that these questions should be critically examined.

These indexes cannot clearly represent the reality of each separate society and country. It is only in societies dominated by the money economy that the concept of “poverty” as used by the UN and the World Bank is formalized. In societies where the market economy has yet penetrated, the “poverty” concept is meaningless.

As the money market is becoming globalized, communities where the sharing of necessities and exchanges were common practices are being forced to live a new economic life by the medium of money. In order to obtain the necessities, money is becoming necessary. To get the money, individuals from those communities are being forced to grow favorable crops in order to exchange cash. This has caused the come about of monoculture. It is within this process that “poverty” has been created. Along the globalization process, individuals who had lived without “poverty” are now being tagged with it. Not only are they being tagged with “poverty”, they are being classified as the “poor people” below the standard. From 1994, the UNDP has been publishing the yearly “Report on Human Development”, report where indexes HDI (Human Development Index – It calculates the improvement of average lifespan, adult literacy and annual income per person), GDI (Gender Development Index), GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure – Measures gender inequalities in the Human Development ground (Provision of economical and political participations) and other new indexes are being created. They are trying to shift different developmental paradigms into a more human-centered aspect. However, as far as with the indexes, indexes such as the HDI fail to capture the real picture of specific countries as well as the real “rich” and the real “poor.” In fact, Bhutan, a small Southern Asia country has been classified as the lowest of the rank. However, unlike “developed countries” such as Japan, it has no homeless people, beggars nor any citizens dying from hunger.

Globalization is forcing countries like Bhutan to become involved with the money market. As the consequence, families, regions, communities and the entire country is being caught up in this process. This new phenomenon is causing many changes upon its people are well as the change in traditions, ethics and customs. In other words, the role allocated to international organizations, whether it is IGO or INGO, it is the production of discourses in correspondence to the global money economy.

It is in fact on top of this situation that a paradox is created. The questions has been

raised as to whether or not the existence of women and children are culturally and socially constructed. From this perspective, one can account the lifelong learning concept to be a historical happening. Does this concept come about when the residents are forced to overcome problems of their own? Does it exist among different communities and different communities have different problems? Finally, in order to solve their own problems, are residents in those communities forced to engage in different modes of learning, which are unique to those communities?

In the “UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,” there is no precise definition for the word children (nor are there clear definitions for parent(s)).⁶⁾ It is in fact that one is able to catch a glimpse of the limitations of generalization. Different generalized and refined UN developmental indexes are nothing but the after-effect of globalization. Let us examine the following slogan, ‘think globally and act locally.’ This slogan finely represents the process of globalization, because it can be paradoxically read that the local does not think and the global does not act. The concepts such as the “compression of time and space”, “world time” and the “world space” can be in such a way, justified. However, the wisdoms and knowledge practiced by informal learning actually originated from temporary wisdoms and knowledge, which are confined within particular time and space limitations. No doubt, the “local knowledge” has generated from “local time” and “local space.”

3. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Up until now, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a convention concerning the rights of children ratified by the widest range of countries (presently 191 countries) at the most rapid speed. Within the process of ratification toward children conventions, not only are there an overwhelming number of countries agreed to it, many child-welfare NGO groups are doing their best in ensuring the success of this movement. This movement shows that individuals have accepted the “children” and the “childhood” as global standards.

As mentioned above, the “children” and the “childhood” are socially constructed ideas. Thus, the attitudes and behaviors toward children and the meanings and experiences embedded within the “childhood” depend greatly on the differences presented in different regions, religions and genders.

The definition of “children” should be the essence of the “UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.” However, there is a reason beneath the surface as to why a precise definition does not exist. Overall, it is because pursuing a generalized image of children is an impossible task.

Thus, the “childhood” is also not a fixed idea. Presently, new questions have been raised as to the exact meaning behind this term. On one hand, it is the result of the globalization phenomenon. On the other, it is the production of the local community. By recognizing the fact that the “childhood” is a cultural, social and economical construction, it will not destroy the essence and effects in achieving a generalized education. The most important thing is the understanding on how the local and global constructions of the “child” interact and intertwined

with each other.

There is another interesting debate within the “UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.” In article 24 point (3), besides the rights for health and medical treatments, the following statement has been written. “All countries should take appropriate actions in order to abolish traditions that are harmful to the well-being of the child.”

Between the “Northern” NGO and working groups, there had been arguments on providing a clear description of the female genital mutilation (FGM.) However, in the every end, no examples of this action were presented. Representatives from the “Southern” NGO take different stances from the “Northern” ones. There had been many official documents presented by anthropologists and feminists from the Northern NGO groups trying to accuse the cruelty of female genital mutilation. In particularly, for the Northern feminists, female genital mutilations and related “Southern” cruel behaviors are symbols of anti-civilization, barbarous and backward countries. It is the task for all feminists to work toward the banning of women’s sexual and physical abuses. In addition, individuals should work toward the banning of paternity and the men’s total control over women and obedience. The “Southern” feminists such as African feminists who work toward children welfare are not denying those views shared by their “Northern” friends. Rather, they are angry toward the calls concerning colonization and post-colonization made by the “Northern” feminists for their ignorance towards important historical happenings. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they are accepting the practice of female genital mutilation. These feminists as a community are working at movements that use politically and socially relevant measures. Rather than calling these actions as barbarous, backwards and anti-civilized or to criticize the current situation on the ground of human rights and try to ban such actions, the female genital mutilation is calling for movements to protect the health for all. As the consequence, the large community will easily accept this action. It is this global wisdom that needs to be fostered in the globalized age.

Try to place globalization within a particular context. To breakdown this text and from the broken down pieces, try to rebuild it. The endlessly repetition of this process is no doubt the ultimate learning of a lifetime.

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