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Transnational reflections on transnational research projects on men, boys and gender relations

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Introduction

Working transnationally is very important to me; that is how the world works, and probably increasingly so. Working transnationally is also frequently very educational in shifting and challenging my assumptions, knowledge and approaches. Recent years have seen increasing moves in research beyond a national focus and what has come to be called ‘methodological nationalism’ (Scott 1998; Beck 2000; Lie 2004; Beck and Sznaider 2006; Chernilo 2006).

Transversal feminist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-globalisation, human rights, and green, ecological and sustainability movements have impacted on international, global and transnational consciousness. This also extends to research on men and masculinities and men’s gendered and intersectional positioning. These movements are increasingly influencing critical studies on men and masculinities as it has in the social sciences more generally. This is a concern of an increasing large number of scholars across the world, as well as a personal concern of mine.

Feminist and postcolonial work on such issues as development, economics, and international relations (for example, Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Gibson-Graham, 1999; Cleaver, 2002; Mohanty, 2003; Parpart and Zalewski, 2008; Young et al., 2011; Steans, 2013) have been fundamentally important for the growing awareness of the differential locations of men and masculinities across and beyond the nation-state. Some of these analyses of men and masculinities have been located within debates on globalisation, sometimes problematising the more ambitious globalisation theses, adding gendered complexity to analyses of global convergence or divergence. Accordingly, there has been a large increase in research and publications that explicitly focus on men and masculinities beyond national borders, in regional,

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international or global terms or contexts, with many of these include contributions on the global South or by those from the global South (for example, Ferguson et al., 2004; Jones, 2006; Cornwall et al., 2011; Ruspini et al., 2011; van der Gaag 2013). Even so, this limited, but growing, amount of work specifically on men and masculinities seen and understood transnationally suggests there is major scope for extending critical analysis, through societal and transsocietal recontextualisations of men and masculinities, and their problematisation.

It is within this context that I reflect in this article on the research project, “Engaging South African and Finnish youth towards new traditions of non-violence, equality and social well-being”, funded by the Finnish and South African national research councils, the Academy of Finland and National Research Foundation respectively, from which this special issue arises. The project is part of a larger research bilateral initiative on children and young people in Finland and South Africa from the two research councils and which is funding five projects in all. Here I consider this specific project in relation to other previous engagements with transnational research projects on men and masculinities. The “Engaging South African and Finnish youth ...” project is best seen as an umbrella project, with different researchers pursuing their sub-projects that are related and overlapping; moreover, it not a comparative project as such, but seeks to develop mutual learning across geographical and other boundaries.

In particular, I seek to locate the project within a broader analysis of transnational research projects and transnational *projectisation* (the reduction of research to separate projects), perhaps even the *topicisation* (the reduction of research to separate topics), of research, with special emphasis on research projects on men and masculinities. Indeed we may ask: how do research projects and projectisation construct knowledge, what is known and not known? And how is this question complicated or elucidated in international and transnational projects? To do this, I consider some differences between ‘Northern’ projects in Nordic and European/EU contexts, and ‘North-South’ projects, between Nordic and South African partners; and my own self-reflexive place in all of this. Differences between European and North-South collaborations are explored. The pressures for and against dealing with centres, margins and othering are discussed: in European/EU, Nordic, and North-South collaborations.

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Research as projects

An important initial point is that much, and probably increasingly, research in general and on men and masculinities is being done through through time limited research *projects*. There are multiple impacts of projects, and the *projectisation* of knowledge production and construction. The influences on the international development of research and research projects range across postcolonialism, neoliberalism, the spread of information and communication technologies (ICTs), large-scale migrations, including knowledge migration, the transformation of knowledge construction, still dominated by the global North, and the growing impact of transnational processes beyond, between and within nations (Hearn et al., 2013a). Especially important are the impact of short term contractualism in research and moreover in research employment, and neoliberal policies on the governance and practice of universities and research institutions.

Research projects also typically have multiple objectives: some short term, some longer term; some dictated by the project brief and the project funding instruments; some arising from other agendas that may be substantive, theoretical , political, epistemological, scientific, methodological. Some projects are best understood as one part of a very long term series of projects, or a process or strategy of research work, sometimes involving the same or shifting groups of collaborators over decades.

Projects, that is, projects in general, can be characterised in a number of ways. They are, in some senses, temporary organisations or temporary forms of organising (Lundin, 1995; Lundin and Steinhórrsson, 2003), even if the distinction of permanent and temporary is not always so easy. This in turn has necessary implications for knowledge, learning and their management (Koskinen and Pihlanto, 2008); they may be more or less collaborative in form. In some cases they can be seen as extensions of their parent organisations (Sense, 2011), and their power, influence and learning, sometimes into new or emerging fields, even if the sedimentation of such knowledge may be inhibited (Bakker et al., 2011). In such situations they may even be structured more rigorously than the parents as part of the extension of their control. In other cases projects are better understood as ‘relatively free’ zones in which mainstream business as usual and

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procedures are suspended or played down to some extent in the rush to set up project teams and then to get projects done. Though such projects may formally be created, owned and facilitated by the parent organisations, but the structures and practices of the project may be distinct from, even at odds with, the dominant practices in the parent organisations.

A more general point is that what appear as separate projectisations may occur within the normative instrumentalist governmentality of collaborations between research, governments, business corporations and some NGOs within European research agendas and frameworks, whereby certain questions can be asked, and certain questions cannot be asked. Some of this goes under the term, 'epistemic governance'. This approach:

... argues that in the current world, society must be defined in a global framework and that this world society consisting of national states is governed increasingly through epistemic power, which works by making actors to perceive the world similarly. This epistemic governance does not work through a single center. Rather, it coordinates social change on a global scale through knowledge production, circulation and opinion formation by institutions such as science, its cultural mediators and the media. ... There are roughly five types of institutionalized collective actors, whose activities include producing and circulating ideas, policy documents and public texts, making laws or international treaties and negotiating new policies, i.e., nation-states, domestic stakeholders such as political parties, the media, regional organizations, and IGOs and INGOs.¹

These formations are powerful transnational constructors of knowledges. Transnational actors and professionals, whether political, corporate, academic, even activist, may learn what has been called epistemic arbitrage (Seabrooke, 2014) to move and mediate within and between diverse national, organisational and hybrid worlds.

The multi-national, international, comparative, cross-cultural, transnational ...

¹ <http://www.ipsoa.org/my-ipsoa/events/montreal2014/panel/epistemic-governance>

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Research projects across national and societal boundaries can be understood in many ways. There are different forms of international collaboration in research and elsewhere, for example, comparative/cross-cultural, supranational, transnational. In considering distinctions between “the global”, “comparative research”, “transnational research”, and “the international”, “the multinational” and “the transnational”, Portes (2001) usefully distinguishes ‘international’ concerning activities and programmes of nation-states, ‘multinational’ to large-scale institutions, such as corporations, and ‘transnational’ to activities initiated and sustained by non-institutional actors, networks or groups across borders.

Moving beyond national, societal cultural contexts has been prompted by many global(ised) and transnational researches over recent years. Most of these have been developed under the rubric of ‘globalisation’, subsequently refined as ‘glocalisation’. In this, it is assumed that the specificities of place are becoming transcended through economic, political and cultural linkages. There have been huge debates around the understandings and interpretations of globalisation. In these, many commentators, from quite diverse positions, have questioned the theoretical usefulness and empirical accuracy of the very notion of globalisation.² One aspect of the critique is the need to give much more emphasis to the ways that nation-states, national boundaries and organised labour at the national level remain important within political economy.³ Indeed, for this and other reasons, transnationalisation seems a more useful concept than globalisation (Hearn, 2004), along with many other aspects of the transnational, such as transnational spaces, transnational identities, transnational localities.

The term, ‘the transnational’, invokes two elements: the *nation* or *national boundaries*; and ‘*trans*’ (across) relations, as opposed to ‘inter’ relations or ‘intra’ relations (Hearn, 2004). This raises a paradox: *the nation is simultaneously affirmed and deconstructed*. This is partly a question of what is meant by the ‘trans’ in ‘the transnational’. In short, the element of ‘trans’ refers to three basic different notions, as well as more subtle distinctions between and beyond:

² See, for example, Hannerz, 1996; Hirst and Thompson, 1999; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001.

³ See, for example, Edwards and Elger, 1999; Gibson-Graham, 1999; Waddington, 1999.

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- *moving across* something or *between* two or more national boundaries / between nations;
- *metamorphosing*, problematising, blurring, transgressing, even dissolving national boundaries;
- or *creating new configurations*, intensified transnational, supranational or deterritorialised, dematerialised or virtual entities: structures, institutions, organisations, classes, groups, social movements, capital flows, networks, communities, supra-identities, cultural and public spaces, across two or more nations or actors across national borders. (Hearn, 2004; Hearn and Blagojević, 2013).

In reviewing research projects, a number of distinctions can be made between multi-nation research, international research, comparative research, cross-cultural research, transnational research. There are variations in both the focus of: i. the subject of the research/the researched, and to what extent it is conceived as transnational, ii. the location of the researchers, and iii. the organisation of the research (Hearn, 2004). Rather, differences operate via differences between and within project members, disciplinary traditions, and in terms of relations of research, activism and policy responses between and within countries and research teams. These differences and complexities create theoretical and practical challenges.

Different specific theorisations on transnationalisation can also be applied to research on men and masculinities. Both the transnational in general and transnational research on men and masculinities can entail, notably: comparative surveys; supranational studies, and transnational researches (see Hearn, 2014). Comparative studies may assist in deconstructing assumptions underpinning gender practices and indeed policies in different countries. This may in turn facilitate the development of more effective policies and practices. An important question here concerns the appropriate unit of analysis. Is it the nation-state, the region, the individual or even the family, household or living arrangement? The use of the nation-state as the unproblematic unit of analysis can obscure wider regional differences beyond, as well as variation in regions within. Supranational studies usually depend on political and economic infrastructures, for example, in the EU. This seems to be increasingly important in the formulation of EU-wide policy strategies on men and boys.

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Such international policies, politics and practices are one aspect of moves towards transnationalism and transnationalisation. Transnational processes of change involve flows of people, money or information across borders, and crossing and spanning of borders by networks, organisations and institutions. Various forms of multi-strandedness operate in economic, political, symbolic and emotional realms, with multiple, often hybrid processes and institutions across geographical, cultural and political borders. These changes complicate international research, not least through varied and uneven impacts of transnational processes on men and masculinities, and national, supranational and transnational politics and policies on men and masculinities, whether progressive or retrogressive.

Transnational research on men and masculinities

Some Northern, European research experiences

Over the last twenty years I have been involved in a variety of EU-funded projects, as well as a number of other international projects. The EU-funded ones are as follows:

- Socrates: Manchester University, with Tampere University, staff and student mobility (1995-7);
- Hanken: Co-coordinator/Principal Contractor, 'The Social Problem of Men: the Social Problem and Societal Problematisation of Men and Masculinities' EU FP5 Thematic Network, European Research Network on Men in Europe, with Professors Keith Pringle (Sunderland University), Ursula Müller (Bielefeld University), Elzbieta Oleksy (Lodz University) (2000-2003);
- Hanken: Partner, Deputy Sub-network Coordinator, Acting Sub-network Coordinator, EU Framework 6 Coordination Action on Human Rights Violation, coordinated by Professor Carol Hagemann-White (Osnabruck University) (2004-2007);

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- Linköping University: Partner, genSET Gender equality in science and technology, with Professor Liisa Husu. EU FP7 (2009-2012);
- Linköping University: Marie Curie mobility, Images of Organised Sex: A Study of the Pornography Industries of India and Sweden (POST) (2000-2013);
- Member of International Advisory Board, FEMCIT: Gendered Citizenship in Multicultural Europe: the Impact of Contemporary Women's Movements, EU FP6 Integrated Project. (2005-2008);
- Member, Scientific Team: Study on the Role of Men in Gender Equality, EU FP 7 (2010-2012);
- Hanken, Director, NaisUrat, with Jyväskylä University and Ekvalita ab, ESR/European Social Fund (2013-15);
- Örebro University: Member of the Scientific Team, GenPORT: Internet Portal on Gender, Science, Technology and Innovation (2013-17).

Clearly not all of these have focused on men and masculinities. Of them, the first major project began, following over a year's planning, in March 2000, the European Research Network on Men in Europe project with the long title of "The Social Problem and Societal Problematisation of Men and Masculinities", and the short title of "The Social Problem of Men", was formally initiated. The project, planned for three years 2000–2003, was funded by the Research Directorate of the European Commission under its Framework 5 Programme. The initial design and work of the Network drew largely upon two particular fields of study: critical approaches to men's practices; and comparative perspectives on welfare. This project was part of the wider network, CROME: Critical Research on Men in Europe. The Network developed towards, perhaps into, a transnational rather than a strictly comparative activity. A key aspect of this and related European initiatives on men and masculinities was the attempt to work across the

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separations of Eastern, Central and Western Europe, What seemed important was both the recognition of historical and cultural differences across Europe, but also the avoidance of simple assumptions and stereotypes about those regions and countries.

So began a long process that in many ways continues. The development of cross-national, comparative and transnational critical studies on men and masculinities is a project that has had many ripples and effects. It constitutes what I have called a trans-form of life (Hearn, 2012): a complex multi-nation, multi-language project of feminist and profeminist scholars researching men and masculinities in the context of Feminist Studies, Gender Studies and Women's Studies. In this project men and masculinities were denaturalised, made strange, made unfamiliar.

This broad approach can be summarised as transnational (rather than only national or regional), interdisciplinary Critical Studies on Men: that is, *historical, cultural, relational, materialist, deconstructive, anti-essentialist* studies on men. This examined men as part of historical gender relations, through a wide variety of analytical and methodological tools and approaches. In this, the notion of men is *social* and not to be essentialised and reified, as in some versions of the hopelessly equivocal "men's studies". Men are understood as historical, cultural and changeable, both as a social category and in particular constructions. Men and masculinities, and their transnational study, are simultaneously material and discursive. This research project also led onto many collaborative publications (Novikova et al., 2005; Hearn and Pringle, 2006; Pringle et al., 2006). Indeed right at the start of the CROME project we agreed publishing guidelines that texts on the whole project would be collectively authored during the life of the project and one year after its formal completion.

This research intervention was and is also a form of theory, sociality and politics – an experience of transdisciplinary uncertainty. It could be said to have sought to undermine some 'dominant fictions' (cf. Silverman, 1992), both those that pervasive societally and in academia. This approach contrasts with the social science, often sociological, god's eye view within the societal, usually the national societal, system. This form of sociality and politics has also spawned committed friendships that count as more than the usual academic acquaintanceships.

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The Framework 5 project was followed up by participation of most of the same group in the EU Framework 6 Coordination Action on Human Rights Violation (CAHRV). In this project there were four sub-groups and the previous grouping made up the core of one of these, with our focus on methodological issues in studying violence and violation, especially men's violence to women and children. Accordingly, the broad principles of the grouping can be listed as follows:

- a *specific*, rather than an implicit or incidental, *focus* on violence and violation;
- taking account of *feminist, gay, and other critical gender scholarship*;
- recognising violence and violation as *explicitly gendered* rather than non-gendered;
- understanding violence and violation as *socially constructed, produced, and reproduced* rather than as somehow just “naturally” one way or another;
- seeing violence and violation as *variable and changing* across time (history) and space (culture), within societies, and through life courses and biographies;
- emphasising relations of violence and violation, albeit differentially, to *gendered power*;
- spanning both *the material and the discursive* in analysis;
- interrogating the *intersecting of gender with other social divisions* in the construction of violence and violation.

One of the things that I worked on within this sub-grouping was the construction of knowledge, in this case on violence, abuse and violation, within the context of multi-nation research. The Northern and Western European researchers had more resources at hand to draw on, but the Central and Eastern European researchers had more direct experience of living in a violent or potentially violent context, and had a wider, more embodied understanding of violence. Both had much to learn from each other, but on balance the former had more to learn from the latter, no least in reconsidering the very idea of ‘Europe’ through a critical focus on men and masculinities (Novikova et al., 2003, 2005). This was partly a matter of content of research knowledge and of epistemology; without good collaborative practices the epistemology of dominant one(s) may dominate the epistemologies of ‘others’. This applies particularly for those in leadership positions. It is vitally important to develop facilitative, supportive research working, research

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practices, and research leadership. There is a need to deconstruct the dominant, make the One(s) the Other(s) (Hearn, 1996). These collective experiences of working on European, European Union and other comparative, transnational research on men and masculinities led onto discussions and suggestions for several pointers for developing such research practice. These matters of research process cannot be separated from content of research, in this context, research on men, masculinities and men's interpersonal violences. Accordingly, I wrote these positive guidelines which were later agreed and incorporated into our workgroup report:

- Strong attention needs to be given to ethical questions in the gathering, storage and distribution of data and other information.
- Be respectful of all researchers and what they bring to the research; this extends to understanding of difference, and for others' research and national and regional locations.
- Be aware that the major regional differences within Europe (and beyond) mean that assumptions that single models should be applied in all parts of Europe should be treated critically and with great caution. While there may have been more research and more research resources in Western Europe, researchers there have much to learn from Central and Eastern Europe, including about the latter's historical situations. As is often the case within structural and uneven power relations, those with less resources often know more about those with more resources, than vice versa.
- Be aware of major national, legal and cultural differences within Europe, around openness/secretcy, financial accounting and many other matters.
- Value self-reflective approaches to the development of multiple methods, and in the conduct of researchers, meetings and other activities.
- Be aware that much research is done by goodwill and indeed overwork, and with few or no additional resources; thus excessive demands can mean that time and resources are taken from other academic and related activities, and other research projects; this is issue of ethical allocation of time and resources between different activities, which is especially important in working on questions of violence and violation.
- Express positive support and gratitude, not excessive criticism.

- Be aware that most people are working in their second, third or fourth language, and that extra attention may need to be given to clarity in the working language.
- Take care in writing emails and other communications; where possible, write clear short emails and other communications; do not use obscure phrases or make ungrounded suggestions in email and other communications.
- In collective research discussions give feedback in good time, and not late in the process of research production.
- Develop an appropriate and fair collective publishing policy, so texts and information are not used inappropriately by others as their own.
- Be aware of internal differences within research projects, especially between those who are more funded and those who are less (or not) funded, and between universities and similar institutions that are better resourced (especially in Western Europe) and universities and similar institutions that are less well resourced (especially in Central and Eastern Europe). This involves a thorough grounded understanding of the conditions under which different researchers are working: some are working on permanent contracts, some temporary contracts; some are well paid, others are not; some are in supportive working environments, others are in environments lacking support. Researchers are subject to other social divisions and differences, such as by age, class, disability, ethnicity and racialisation, gender, sexuality.
- Develop projects that are fair in terms the distribution of resources, including between those with greater coordinating functions and other research functions, between those who are more funded and those who are less funded, and between universities and similar institutions that are better resourced (especially in Western Europe) and universities and similar institutions that are less well resourced (especially in Central and Eastern Europe); This is especially so with the under-resourcing of research and the overwork of many researchers doing much work unpaid or in “overtime”.
- Develop a violation-free mode of organisation and working.

- Aim to produce a working environment that people are satisfied with, that they look to working with and are pleased to be in. (Hearn et al., 2007, 23-24; also Hearn et al., 2013b: 37-38).

Perhaps above all, this attempt to work more collaboratively emphasised the ethical and political aspects and questions of difference and location that needed to be foregrounded in these debates and studies. Indeed it should go without saying that it is especially important to consider how to develop non-oppressive and non-violating research practice, research methods and methodologies in researching violence, violation and abuse. These issues proliferate even within the limited variations of European and EU contexts.

Some North-South research experiences

Over recent years I have been involved in five main North-South projects:

- *Ending Gender-based Violence: A Call for Global Action to Involve Men*, with Harry Ferguson, Øystein Gullvåg Holter, Lars Jalmert, Michael Kimmel, James Lang, Robert Morrell and Stefan de Vylders, UNICEF/SIDA, Stockholm, 2004;
- Co-editing, with Robert Morrell, Deevia Bhana and Relebohile Moletsane, special issue of *Sexualities: Studies in Culture and Society* on Sexualities in Southern Africa, Vol. 10(2), 2007;
- Director, 'Doing Research with Perpetrators of Sexual Violence: Ethical Guidelines', with Kjerstin Andersson and Malcolm Cowburn, Sexual Violence Research Initiative (<http://www.svri.org>), South Africa, and Global Forum for Health Research (<http://www.globalforumhealth.org>) (2007);

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- Co-Director, Sweden-South Africa Research Network on Men and Masculinities, with Robert Morrell, NRF (the South African Research Council) and Vetenskapsrådet (the Swedish Research Council) (2009-2012); and
- The current project.

These North-South projects have involved clear differences between and within social, societal, material, resource contexts, as well as the coming together of different disciplinary traditions, university and institutional contexts, for example, to what extent North-South initiatives and gender initiatives supported locally. This includes to what extent these North-South initiatives are the subject of local political and financial support. All this has occurred alongside very major and complex practicalities, facilitated by extensive e-communications.

Theorising international researches

If we return to the earlier distinctions between:

- *moving across* something or *between* two or more national boundaries / between nations;
- *metamorphosing*, problematising, blurring, transgressing, even dissolving national boundaries; or
- *creating new configurations*, intensified transnational, supranational or deterritorialised, dematerialised or virtual entities: structures, institutions, organisations, classes, groups, social movements, capital flows, networks, communities, supra-identities, cultural and public spaces, across two or more nations or actors across national borders.

In brief, the European EU projects have generally been organised in one of two ways:

- i. comparative (equivalent to moving across): in which nations are relatively taken-for-granted. This includes comparisons between nations and between regions, for example, West (UK/Ireland), North (Nordic), Central (German/ French), South

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(Mediterranean), East (post-socialist), sometimes influenced by the work of Esping-Andersen and his critiques, with more explicitly gendered, raced framings.

- ii. supranational (equivalent to metamorphosing): within a collective organisational and conceptual frame aimed at some kind of “European” policy perspective, even with the vast differences within Europe. This is especially in policy work directed from the European Commission or one of the EU’s organs, such as EIGE.

In some of the EU projects there is also attention to transnational social processes and transnational processes of knowledge construction. In this context, trans-forms of life can be a summary term for such possibilities in relation to the political (as in the transnational, across the borders of geopolitical entities, such as nation-states), the theoretical (as in the transdisciplinary, across disciplinary boundaries), work (as in the transinstitutional, across workplaces and other organisations), and the personal. The North-South projects begin from difference, and work to compare, integrate, learn from or collaborate from that position and basic assumption. They are closer to:

- iii. creating new configurations

Trans-forms of life do not simply put together previous forms of life; nor are they necessarily hybrids; rather, a new, different form of life is produced. People, individually and collectively, no longer have known or set rules to follow, but create/improvise/devise new activities, new languages, and new rules. To use the linguistic metaphor, code-switching (Gardner-Chloros, 2010) is not only a combining of or switching between two or more languages, but creating a new language. In such ways, social change occurs. Materialdiscursive forms of life, in this case, trans-forms of life, *transform* previous forms of life. Yet having said that, trans-forms of life are not necessarily emancipatory. That much is clear from the transnational activities of the far right. Indeed, trans-forms of life bring multiple contradictions, as in the emergence of new forms of citizenship (Oleksy et al., 2011) and trans(national)patriarchies (Hearn, 2009, 2015) or in the complex impacts of the many, various and changing information and communication technologies), that are likely to press more insistently in coming years.

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European and North-South projects: similarities and differences

The EU projects and the North-South projects I have been involved with show both similarities and differences. In both situations, there have been multiple perspectives, languages, ethnicities ... multiple ways of being men and boys. There have been considerable variation in extent of collaboration; this has especially applied in the EU projects, with ranges from very good to very difficult. The North-South projects has also varied but underlain by a stronger and more general principle of political commitment.

There are some similarities between some West Europe-East Europe collaborations and some North-South collaborations, in that, in Eastern Europe and the global South, there is more direct knowledge of oppression, more ideological resources from the margins, but less material resources, and even sometimes a paradoxical attachment to ways of working that are strongly influenced by previously dominant Western traditions.

The EU projects have involved more, and sometimes many, institutions in each project; whereas the North-South projects have had a more limited number of institutions. The EU projects have been organised through a strong bureaucratic structure, overseen by the European Commission, with its own gendered, often masculinist, organisational cultures, while the North-South projects have often been more dispersed, with a variety of less monolithic gendered organisational networks and their gendered network cultures.

There are also differences in knowledge formation and concepts. In terms of theoretical challenges, theorising, concepts and languaging are all challenged. In *Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities* there is a need for recontextualising concepts in relation to contemporary feminism and critiques of Anglo domination of theory; relation of travelling of theory and concepts (for example, Australia/US/UK/South Africa/Finland/Sweden). This means embedding concepts in national and transnational contexts, and rethinking critically on and in societal/transnational contexts. In this respect it is interesting that in the CROME: Critical

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Research on Men in Europe project we did not find the hegemonic masculinity frame very useful, Indeed in this collaboration the very concept of ‘masculinities’ was found to be too vague and carried different or few meanings in different parts of Europe, and so we instead found to be more useful the concept of ‘men’s individual and collective practices’: what men do. English language and Anglophone conceptualisations have also had a different place in the EU and North-South projects. In one North-South project there was the odd situation of the researchers in the South being more amenable to Anglophone theory and concepts, while the researchers from the North were more critical to that kind of theory, set with the traditions of Northern academia, and more open to more diverse theorisations of men and masculinities. Also, in general, there is a more embedded understanding and awareness of intersectionalities in the global South – that cannot be avoided; while in the North, intersectionalities, as a conceptual tool for studying men and masculinities has to be discovered.

The relations of research, activism and state responses to social problems, between/within countries and research teams also vary considerably. In the global there appears more intense pressure and appreciation of the need for problem-orientated research. On the other hand, in some parts of the global North, and perhaps increasingly so research agendas are being increasingly tied to governmental agendas, whether through ‘evidence-based policy, evaluation in terms of ‘impact’ or simply retrenchment in research funding to what seem the most urgent problems. In the Nordic cases there are especially close connections between research and researchers, on one hand, and governmental and policy actors, on the other, in the setting of research agendas, partly from the social democratic welfare project, partly from methodological nationalism, and partly simply from the social interactions in what are small countries, where there are intense links between academia, NGOs, party politics and policy-making, and “everyone knows everyone”.

The pattern of activism and its relation to research varies massively across the world. In many ways contemporary activist politics in Nordic countries are generally rather restrained when seen in international comparisons. Mass protests are rare in recent years. The relatively lower levels of inequality are one obvious explanation. Incorporation of different positions is rather common

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with governmental commissions or committees. In Finland the Subcommittee on Men's Issues was appointed in 1988 by the governmental Council of Equality between Women and men, and includes representatives ranging from those LGBT and profeminist organisations through to fathers' rights organisations, along with politicians and researchers. Such a co-operation would be unthinkable in some countries. At the same time that civil society is very active, there is a high level of registered civil organisations and members, it may often be partially incorporated, even co-opted, into the governmental, parliamentary and state machinery. Countries, like South Africa, with the profound and deep legacy of violent colonialism and with continuing high levels of inequality are sites of considerable civil conflict, as most dramatically shown in the Marikana Massacre of 2012.¹ In South Africa activism, that is, extra-parliamentary activism, is a major aspect of civil society especially in relation to housing and land, unemployment, safety at work, the social conditions of young people, violence and HIV/AIDS. This in turn affects the research agenda, as such pressing issues are politically immediate, are hard to ignore, and are also highlighted in the agendas of universities and research funders. All these contrasts should, however, be treated with caution; they are all generalisations, with many further nuances and ambiguities.

This project

The "Engaging South African and Finnish youth ..." project is organised through one main university partner in Finland, Hanken School of Economics. This is a very small (about 30 professors) minority language (Swedish)³ business school in Helsinki, with an established record of work on gender and diversity. As Director, and based in Hanken, I am one of three main personnel; the other two main personnel are postdocs recruited from two other universities. In addition, there is minor involvement of other researchers in Hanken and two other universities. So the personnel might come from somewhat diverse universities and disciplinary backgrounds, but the institutional base is singular. Also, importantly, the substantive and policy focus of the project is not the "main business" of the partner university which is business, management and financial studies. It is not a field that is likely to attract much additional support from the main business of the university or the department. The South African part of the project is based in the University of Western Cape, with two other professors in two other universities – Stellenbosch

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University and University of South Africa, UNISA, and an associate professor in a fourth university, University of Cape Town, along with a senior practitioner at Sonke Gender Justice. All these leading researchers are in social science departments, within large multi-subject universities, with their own broad orientations mainly towards social psychology and qualitative sociology.⁴

The regional power relations are also complex. Finland has its own histories on colonialism and imperialism, both externally and internally, and as both colonised and coloniser. Though located within 'Western' Europe, it is a relatively peripheral country in the EU, and certainly marginalised, othered, within the Nordic region, where the Scandinavian trio of Denmark, Norway and Sweden tend to continue to dominate. In contrast, South Africa is a relative powerhouse in the context of Africa, even with its high poverty levels, high inequality. Indeed though we are not carrying out a comparative project, it is important to register the vast disparity in the extent of inequality with Finland estimated by the World Bank at the relatively low figure of 27.8, and South Africa one of the very highest figures in the world at 65.0 (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>). Both countries have a strong programme of legal civil rights and equality legislation on paper at least.

Within these regional and local contexts, the specific focus of the project on 'youth' raises questions around to what extent what appear as local conditions and problems encountered by and caused by young people are partly the result of transnational forces – political-economic, capitalist, neoliberal, imperialist, colonialist, as well as more particular changes around information and communication technologies, consumption, image, fashion. Perhaps oddly, my own relation to research on young people has been somewhat ambivalent. I have often been cautious about focusing on socialisation - and its discontents. There are clear empirical strengths to a life course approach but also possible ideological weaknesses, as if the past explains problems and the future will solve them. Rather, I see young people as a dominated group, to be understood with humility, but not romanticisation. Moreover, young people are located within the context of double ageism (Hearn, 1999), leading me to a concern with critically problematising 'the adult', adults and adulthood – in what might be called critical adult studies.

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Regarding practical challenges, practical matters, for example, logistics and finance, should not be seen simply as instrumental issues, but are part of the construction of transnational research and knowledge production. More conceptually, they may highlight inequalities and intersectionalities in apparently new ways. The ways of working involve new complex configurations. It is not an empirical South serving theoretical North,² nor is it comparative or a supranational project, but located, mutual learning across boundaries. Rather it is embedded in national/transnational contexts, and demands critical rethinking of those societal/transnational contexts, and how they produce men, boys and masculinities. It points to how what appear as local conditions and problems encountered by and caused by young men are partly the result of transnational forces – political-economic, capitalist, neoliberal, imperialist, colonialist, as well as more particular changes around information and communication technologies, consumption, images, even fashion. Taking such a meta-view, however, brings risks. A translocal, transnational perspective does not mean any kind of perspective-less ‘god’s eye’ view.

There is here a complex mixing of place, location, institution, friendship, politics, critical inquiry, with publishing separately, or together. This highlights the importance of with whom one works; this is a lot about trusting people. Trust others to sort out their own business in their own institutional context. This temporary project organisation thus needs to be understood within a wider context that is not necessarily primarily linked to the more permanent university institutions where it is formally located. Knowledge, learning and their management are partly collaborative in form, but there are also more hierarchical relations with the project functioning within the rules and procedures of the parent organisations. These processes may operate somewhat differently amongst the various parent universities, with, for example, different disciplinary traditions, and with reporting systems in the institutions concerned. So while the project is a ‘relatively free’ zone in which regular academic work such as teaching and everyday university business is played down to some extent, this is not the whole story in terms of financial accountability and delivery of results to the funders.

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Finally, we may ask: what do funders want? What do researchers want? Why do funders fund such projects? Why do researchers want to take part? At one of our seminars we discussed why the two research councils would fund this general research initiative on young people. One possible answer was around both the global North's and the emerging BRICS' economies economic and political need for each other in the future. There are always multiple agendas in research.

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Notes

1. Jan Vandemoortele (2013: 5) writes, “High inequalities ... lead to the concentration of political power in the hands of those who possess economic wealth, thereby undermining the workings of a democratic system. They generate divisions and internal strife, usually with undemocratic outcomes. The pathology of high inequalities includes powerful special interests and entrenched political polarization; which delay policy reforms and impede counter-cyclical measures.”

2. As Raewyn Connell has noted (2014: 218): “In this larger [academic] economy, as the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji (1997) has shown, there is a broad division of labour on a world scale. The global metropole is where most journals are located, most theory and methodology are produced, and data are aggregated in libraries, museums, data banks and research centres. Most of the material resources for scholarship, such as well-funded universities, doctoral programmes, research funds, journals and conferences, are located here. The role of the global periphery is by contrast to supply data, and later to apply science in practical ways.” (also see Connell, 2007).

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3. Finland has a significant language minority of about five percent first language Swedish-speaking Finns speakers. Swedish is a full official language and speakers have full language rights. Thus there are state Swedish-speaking institutions such as schools and universities.

4. However, even this needs immediate qualification, as in the South African context, a little like some Central and East European post-socialist contexts, some academics tend to have and wish to take a less compartmentalised view of disciplines and their own main discipline than is the case in more privileged regions. In saying this, I am thinking of how in EU projects Central and East European academics are sometimes drawn into, say, social science research projects through feminist or other commitments, even when their disciplinary background is in the humanities.

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