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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The last conferences of Comparative Education that have been organized at a European and World level have been announced according to themes that clearly point to the situation of crisis and change typical of current world societies. Thus, to put some examples, the XXth Conference of the CESE in London was organized in the year 2002 under the title of *Towards the end of educational systems? Europe in world perspective*. Similarly, the IX World Conference of Comparative Education Societies was organized in Sydney, Australia, in the year 1996, under the title of *Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernity*. The organization of the XV World Conference of Comparative Education Societies has been delegated to the Argentinian Society of Comparative Education. Up to now this Society has not yet decided a specific theme to summone academics to this important world event. But I am sure that such specific theme, when decided, will also reflect the idea of crisis and change typical of western world in the first years of the XXIst century.

Certainly, to reflect on the epistemological trends and the methodologies of Comparative Education is an appassionate but also a very complex task. Indeed, one of the best current world comparativists, the British Robert Cowen, has very rightly stated in one of his latest works that 'there exist many Comparative Educations'. Certainly, Comparative Education is a plural, diverse, heterogeneous and eclectic field, which gathers a great variety of epistemological traditions which conform Comparative Education from its very beginnings till nowadays. From the diverse sites of the world geography different Comparative Education are elaborated, which belong to very diverse epistemologies. Similarly, there are currently quite a lot of academic works in Comparative Education that are written from epistemological positions typical of Modernity, and other academic works that

pertain to epistemological stances called 'late-modern' or 'postmodern', as proposed by authors such as Cowen or Rust.

According to this diversity it is a complex task, not so much to undertake an analysis of the 'new approaches' of Comparative Education, which are typically inscribed in the postmodern and postcolonial perspectives. But it is complex indeed to analyse the 'new agenda' for Comparative Education. Because, depending on the fact that our theoretical perspective is inscribed in Modern or in Postmodern perspectives, the research agenda of Comparative Education will differ greatly.

## **2. COMPARATIVE EDUCATION, GLOBALISATION AND POSTMODERNISM**

The first years of the XXIst century are showing to be years of great change in social sciences and in Comparative Education, due to two terms that are constantly appearing in the Journals and books related to sociological and philosophical sciences and to Comparative Education. These terms are those of globalisation and Postmodernism.

Due to its specific epistemological condition, the discipline of Comparative Education is one of the academic fields in which the demands of globalisation have been manifested with a greater impact. Thus, the apparition of the globalisation phenomenon has led to certain academics such as Dale to suggest certain epistemological changes in Comparative Education, stating that 'the object of study of Comparative Education should be the analysis of the nature and the causes of the diverse impact of globalisation in diverse world contexts' (Dale, 2001: 493). Although it is true that not all the proposals of current comparatists point to these extremes of pretending to modify the epistemological nature of Comparative Education according to the apparition of globalisation, it is indeed true that the last books that have been published on Comparative Education state the need of undertaking a reconceptualisation of Comparative Education and of adopting new research agendas in this field due to the impact of globalisation (Crossley & Watson, 2003: 71-73 and 117-121).

The phenomenon of globalisation, according to authors such as Dale (2007: 48) 'constitutes a new and specific form of relation among Nation-

States and world economy' by which 'national governments are constrained to seek the modernisation of their national economies (...) and to promote the capacity of international competition of their national welfare systems' (*ibidem*: 49). Regardless of the specific definition one states of globalisation and regardless of the geographical-temporal coordinates in which one states its origin, there does not seem to be a consensus in relation to the consideration of stating if the process of globalisation develops a unificator and homogeneous impact in the diverse countries submitted to its influence or if, on the contrary, its effects tend to the diversification of national policies. There are authors that refer to this ambivalence as the 'paradox' of globalisation (*idem*). Analysing more closely the phenomenon of globalisation we can state that, according to diverse authors, the globalisation process as a phenomenon of our times 'appears in the middle of the decade of the seventies of the XXth century, coinciding with the Welfare State political crisis and with the oil economic crisis, although it is a phenomenon that exceeds greatly such crisis' (Puelles, 2006: 86). In general terms we can state that the phenomenon of globalisation reveals ideological connotations typical of Neoliberalism, for it temporarily coincides and incorporates elements of the political theory and philosophy introduced by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, and which had a strong impact in the policies of the anglosaxon countries and of the whole western world.

The phenomenon of globalisation reveals a character that depends on the peak and expansion of new technologies, and reveals specific cultural and educational connotations. We can underline two main effects of globalisation in education, with impact in Comparative Education.

One of the most notable effects of globalisation in the international and educational fields has materialized in the granting of great prominence to an array of international institutions, by which it has been configured, in the supranational level, a 'Government without government' (Dale, 2007: 51). Most prominent among those international institutions we can cite the OECD. The OECD is revealing a prominence and an impact without precedent. A great deal of academics coincide in the fact that, in the current moment of globalisation 'the OECD has increasingly become a political actor in its own right' (Henry et al., 2001) in national and international educational policy. The impact of the PISA programme, whose results are taken very seriously by the participant nations, and the great debate that the

publication of its results is having in countries such as Germany (Kotthoff and Pereyra, 2009), is only an example of the current relevance of supranational institutions in education.

The second effect of greatest impact of globalisation in education can be seen in the curricular dimension, where it is visible the incidence of the economic factors in the specific mission of education, promoting a curriculum of competences highly detrimental to the general education (Carnoy, 1999: 146). The professional mission of education has been imposed in all educational levels, backed up by the interpretation of the OECD of the Lifelong Learning paradigm and by the so called exigencies of the paradigm of the new creation of knowledge promoted by Gibbons in 1994.

All these contents and worries conform at present Comparative Education, which also attends to the analysis of the theoretical post-structuralists frames of postmodernism.

Postmodern perspectives of the world 'celebrate diversity, difference and the voices of the other' (Crossley and Watson, 2003: 57). In this perspective the issues of context and culture display a special relevance. Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard constitute three of the most influent authors that have held the leadership of postmodern perspectives (Peters, 2001). There are certain aspects of postmodernism that have been energetically rejected by a great number of academics, particularly its relativistic vocation. Nevertheless, there are other elements of postmodernism that have been greatly celebrated by some academics, particularly its contextual sensibility and its denounce of two characteristics apparently intrinsic to the modern project: eurocentrism and social injustice (Kempner, 1998: 456).

We can make here a first reflection, stating that, while it is true that the features of the phenomenon of globalisation and its impact in education have generally been accepted by the diverse academics, that is not so in relation to the acceptance of postmodernity. That is, we find great debates in relation to the existence of the postmodern character of our current historical moment. There have appeared very interesting publications, such as the one edited by Smith and Webster (1997) that gather passionate debates that bring face to face academics that call themselves 'modern' to those other academics that recognize themselves as being 'postmodern'. Thus, 'postmodern' academics such as the British Peter Scott state episte-

mological, sociological, economic, political and technological arguments that justify, from his point of view, the *postmodern* character of current society. His radical proposals in the field of higher education point to suggestions on the 'desinstitutionalization' of knowledge (Scott, 1997: 36) which, finally, end up in rupturist questions on 'the death of the university?' (Smith and Webster, 1997: 106). Against these proposals, 'modern' academics, such as the British Paul Filmer, state that 'the logic of the *post's* (postmodernism, poststructuralism) is one that informs speculative theorizing, but is not yet a socio-logic; nor therefore, does it have substantive social or cultural institutional correlates' (Filmer, 1997: 57).

We can, then, state that, while there is not generally any doubt among academics in relation to the impact of globalisation, there is quite a lot of disagreement in relation to the consideration that present historical times are, properly, *postmodern*. Nevertheless, in face of the increasing presence of postmodern educational proposals, we cannot but ask ourselves: current Comparative Education is Modern or Postmodern?. The answer to this question reveals crucial implications for the epistemology and development of this discipline, and we now devote our attention to the analysis of this question.

### 3. COMPARATIVE EDUCATION AND MODERNITY

The Latin adjective *Modernus* (Modern) started to be used from the IVth century aC to distinguish the present time, which had been officially turned to christian, from the roman and pagan past. Both the historian Sotelo (2003) and the philosopher Habermas (1988) link the term *Modern* with Christianity. The first Modernity, heart of all other later Modernities, is Christianity. The fact that the realities *modern, christian and european* have been linked in the origin, does not mean that they are linked today. Modern world starts with Christianity, and is unfolded in a series of intermediate stages: Medieval Age, Renaissance Modernity of the XV century, and Enlightenment Modernity of the XVII century. But this last Modernity is only well understood, if it is recognized as the sum of the former Modernities, from the first and basic with represented Christianity. As Sotelo states: 'a theory of Modernity which reduces Modernity to the last Modernity, which is the Enlightenment Modernity, will be partial, reductionistic and incomplete.'



Sociology is the science originated in the XIXth century which has had as main objective to analyse Modernity. If Weber is the main sociologue which analyses Modernity, Hegel is the philosophe that analyses this historical stage from the discipline of Philosophy. If for Weber the central category of Modernity is *rationality*, for Hegel the main categories of Modernity are *freedom* and *subjectivity*, both introduced by Christianity.

According to Habermas, the project of Modernity had the hope that arts and sciences would not only promote the control of natural forces, but that they would also promote moral progress, the justice of institutions and the happiness of human beings (Habermas, 1988: 95). We can now ask ourselves: to what point Comparative Education is a *modern* science? To what extent Comparative Education participates from the *Modernity Project*?

Academics such as Kazamias have sanctioned the modern character of Comparative Education in its origins (Kaloyannaki and Kazamias, 2009: 11). Certainly, we can state the Modern character of Comparative Education according to certain parametres. Firstly, we can state the Modern character of Comparative Education according to the historical epoch in which the birth of Comparative Education took place. This historical epoch was that of the post-Enlightenment, in the beginning of the XIXth century. Secondly, the ideas, the spirit and the epistemology of the first authors of this scientific discipline were 'full of the spirit of the *Modernity Paradigm*, with its emphasis in reason (rationalism, empirism, science), universalism, secularism, progress and Nation-State (Kaloyannaki and Kazamias, 2009: 12). It is also visible the feature of eurocentrism in the initial epistemology of Comparative Education, and it can be stated that the academic works of the pioneers comparatists were devoted to the 'forces', 'factors', 'national character' and 'cultural philosophy' typically European and Western. Northamerican and Latinamerican academic comparatists seeked in the stage of Comparative Education of the XIXth century, the analysis and importation of typically European experiences. Germany, to put an example, was one of the most analyzed, imitated and imported countries of Europe by northamerican academics: its philosophy (particularly hegelian idealism), prusian system of elementary education, prussian teacher training and the incidence of classical studies in German Gymnasien.

To the features of Modern project and epistemology, Kazamias adds the features of protoscientific, humanistic, positive, cosmopolitan, liberal, democratic and melioristic (Kaloyannaki and Kazamias, 2009: 11-19).

There are two elements that must be underlined and highlighted in the works of the European and Northamerican analysis of Comparative Education in the XIXth century. It is two elements characteristic of the epistemological contributions of these authors, which show a relation between them. The presence of these two features allows the sanctioning of the *Modern* character of Comparative Education and its full participation in the *Modernity Project*. The first element is the manifest and recurrent emphasis in the religious and moral dimensions, and in the need that 'prosperity of nations and the foundations of policy are based in the stability of religion and morality' (quotation of Jullien de Paris by Fraser, 1964: 34-35). The second epistemological element characteristic of comparatists of the XIXth century is the melioristic character that they assign to education.

All the epistemological heritage of Comparative Education in the XIXth and XXth century (neopositivism, marxism, neomarxism and the dependency theory, neorrelativistic theories) reveal markedly *modern* features. Comparative Education that is being elaborated in the first years of the XXIst century also reveals this character, in spite of the emergence of the postmodern theoretical perspective from the decade of the seventies of the XXth century. Philosophes such as Habermas state that the Modernity Project has not yet been fully fulfilled or finished, and that we must devote all our efforts to promote its development. I think that Modernity has well extended during 17 centuries. In all that time, the historical period of Modernity has maintained a relation of certain continuity among its different stages, and even with the period of Antiquity that developed before Modernity. From a rational and epistemological point of view, and also from the common sense, it is for me difficult to integrate the rupture or the breaking off character of Postmodernism. I think that in 17 centuries of huge human effort in the arts and science, there is a great deal of aspects of great validity. I think that some criticisms of Postmodernism are valid and must be given an adequate answer, particularly the criticisms concerning Eurocentrism and that of the attention to minorities. But I think that such criticisms are, rather, a correction to the Modernity Project, and not so much an invalidation and substitution of such Project.