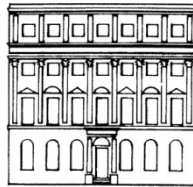


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*Report on the Inauguration of the Branch Office of the Max Weber Foundation,
New Delhi*

Conference Report

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Report on the Inauguration of the Branch Office of the Max Weber Foundation, New Delhi, held at the India International Centre in New Delhi on 14 Feb. 2015.

The opening of the branch office of the Max Weber Foundation (MWF) in New Delhi on 14 February 2015 marked a fresh approach to research on the intersection between education policy and poverty reduction. The meeting took place at the India International Centre in New Delhi. Indra Sengupta (Academic Coordinator, TRG, German Historical Institute London) launched the event with an introduction to the Transnational Research Group on Poverty and Education (TRG). Next, Andreas Gestrich (Director, GHIL) gave an account of the group's research objectives. The TRG, he said, was established as part of a larger academic collaboration with generous funding from the Max Weber Stiftung. It is a joint initiative of the GHIL and its partner institutions: the Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS, Göttingen), Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU, New Delhi), King's College London (KCL), and the Centre for Studies of Developing Societies (CSDS, New Delhi). It seeks to combine scholarship across the social sciences in order to explore questions concerning education and the nature and consequences of its provision by both public and private players in India from the nineteenth century onwards. The five-year project offers doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships as well as short-term grants.

The first panel of the day, which was chaired by Indra Sengupta, saw four TRG Fellows present their work-in-progress. The panel elicited a lively debate, which indicated that education continues to remain an ideological and emotionally charged subject for all. Arun Kumar (CeMIS, Göttingen) and Divya Kannan (JNU, Delhi) gave brief presentations of their ongoing Ph.D. research projects, which are based on missionary archival sources, as missionaries were the earliest providers of education to the labouring poor. K. N. Sunandan (CSDS/TRG, Delhi) and Alva Bonaker (CeMIS, Göttingen), whose postdoctoral and Ph.D. projects respectively explore contemporary schooling practices that determine 'manual' and 'mental' labour, and government schemes such as the Mid-Day Meal Programme, high-

The full conference programme can be found under Events and Conferences on the GHIL's website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

lighted the role of the state and civil society in education. The presentations provoked a discussion on the importance of constructing the poor as a historical category. Questions were raised regarding the need to distinguish varying categories of the poor so as to formulate policies addressing specific concerns of inequality and exclusion.

The following panel presented a new and significant initiative of the TRG, 'Key Moments of Education Policy towards the Poor'. The panel was chaired by Rupa Viswanath (Göttingen). The Key Moments project, undertaken by some of the Fellows and Principal Investigators of the TRG, concentrates on major shifts/phases of change and continuity in the history of mass education in India from the 1820s to the present. The aim of the project is to move away from a mere chronological mapping of educational policies. The project is coordinated by Jana Tschurenev (CeMIS, Göttingen). Neeladri Bhattacharya (JNU, Delhi), a Principal Investigator, briefed the audience on the importance of writing histories from a bottom-up view and expanding the researcher's archival focus by including non-official sources. He posed the question of social scientists and those concerned working towards an archive that will not exclude the poor and their issues. The questions, he said, were straightforward. For example: how did the poor actually experience the classroom, if any; and what happened to the poor during schooling? Based on such an inter-sectional approach, the Key Moments project will focus on a number of broad themes: indigenous and rural education, gender and inequality, caste and politics, religious and vocational education.

Jana Tschurenev explained three 'key moments' during the colonial period with regard to education provision. During the first one, in the 1820s, education for women was primarily carried out by missionary societies. By the 1880s, with shifts in public opinion on women's education and emergent nationalist discourses, several female public educators such as Pandita Ramabai in Maharashtra came to prominence, and a move towards the professionalization of certain occupations occurred. Later, these tended to perpetuate gendered notions of work, which were attempts to transfer 'care' and 'nurture', perceived as innately 'womanly' traits, from the domestic to the public sphere.

Preeti's (JNU, Delhi) presentation outlined the multiple ways in which certain jobs, particularly midwifery, were professionalized in the colonial United Provinces, which include parts of present-day

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northern India. Those involved in public deliberations sought to 'educate' women on matters of health and hygiene in a scientific manner, and train traditional midwives (*dais*) as professionals. They evoked varying representations of indigenous women's work for women, pitting them against Western, female, medical missionaries. Initially, groups of *dais* resisted these attempts by the colonial administration and missionary establishments.

Malini Ghose's (CeMIS, Göttingen) paper highlighted the need to destabilize the sweeping generalizations often made with regard to educational developments. She pointed out the necessity of viewing rupture or disturbance as a framing device. Tracing the life histories of Dalit women in rural Bundelkhand, she showed how individual life-stories rupture macro-studies that may fail to account for failures and problems in the system. She discussed various educational policy shifts in India from the 1990s on to understand how marginalized subjects are constructed and transformed through them.

Members of the audience pointed out that the Key Moments project had to separate schooling from education in order to gain better analytical clarity. It was also suggested that the question of language needed to be examined more closely, especially in post-independent India, to understand why a large number of children still do not attend school, despite legislation and policy formulations. A couple of possible problems were particularly highlighted: for example, how to map out this research in a non-linear way, since chronological narration seemed inevitably to take precedence; and how to bring together a range of inter-sectional approaches to determine the parameters of a 'key moment'.

The afternoon session, 'Education for the Poor: The Politics of Poverty and Social Justice', chaired by Geetha B. Nambissan (JNU, Delhi) saw the coming together of perspectives from inside and outside the Indian context. The speakers were Marcelo Caruso (Institute of Education Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin), Kalpana Kannabiran (Council for Social Development, Hyderabad), Krishna Kumar (Department of Education, University of Delhi), and Crain Soudien (School of Education, University of Cape Town). Marcelo Caruso spoke at length about the construction of poverty as a discourse from the mid fifteenth century on, and the attempts made to school the poor into prevalent social and labour norms. He adopted this *longue durée* approach in order to gain better insight into the current neoliberal

eral discourses on education in Latin America. Schooling has been and remains a political issue and, as he pointed out, educational attainments played a role in strategies of disenfranchisement, such as in the case of illiterate adults being denied the right to vote in previous decades.

Kalpana Kannabiran took the argument in a slightly different direction by presenting her experiences as both a lawyer and activist in India. Even after a decade, the goal of universal elementary education is far from being achieved in India. She said the context in which everyday opportunities of life exist is suffused with law. Drawing on examples from her work amongst tribal communities, particularly the Chenchus, in Andhra Pradesh, she argued that the right to life and liberty, enshrined in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, is often in a state of suspension in tribal areas. This brought home forcefully the fact that judicial mechanisms cannot be viewed in isolation from education.

How do the children of the poor fare in the system? This was the question that Krishna Kumar asked in his presentation. He said the need of the hour was to integrate two theoretical domains in our understanding: the conceptual and the social. In order to engage with poverty, we will have to account for various philosophical positions that defined poverty in different ways. This, he elaborated, was key to understanding the experience of children inside the classrooms. He cited Gandhi and Tagore's ideas as two examples of varying educational systems.

Our focus was then taken to South Africa by Crain Soudien, who applied global debates on education to his geographical area. The major debate in South Africa, he said, was occurring on three inter-related axes: first, the fault of the past; secondly, the failure of the current new elites to incorporate changes; and lastly, a tendency by dominant discourses to blame the poor themselves for all their shortcomings. Soudien explained that the emergence of a newly affluent black middle class did not lead to a natural sympathizing with the problems of the disprivileged. Understanding psycho-social and spatial experiences of poverty was key to engaging with prevalent capacities of local children and connecting them with global realities.

Geetha B. Nambissan started off the discussion by flagging some important issues. She raised the important question of whether we have depoliticized poverty by concentrating excessively on social jus-

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tice. At a time when new groups, hitherto discriminated against and excluded, are staking claims to educational resources, re-conceptualizing the category of 'justice' is necessary in order to challenge neoliberal thinking. A lively discussion ensued, which included questions such as what constituted the 'public' and the dangers of neoliberal policies adopted by universities that were, in effect, perpetuating old and new forms of privilege.

The ceremonial inauguration of the new branch office took place in the evening in the form of a keynote lecture. Heinz Duchhardt (President of the Max Weber Stiftung, Bonn) spoke about the institution's history, emphasizing its role in extending bilateral and multi-lateral relations through academic collaborations. Sudha Pai (Rector, JNU) stressed the advantages of such mutual cooperation and highlighted how JNU, as a central university, has been attempting to formulate strategies to deal with mass education through inclusive policies. The CSDS's director, Sanjay Kumar, spoke about its involvement in the TRG projects, especially with regard to the issues of inclusion and equity in school education in contemporary India.

The highlight of the inauguration was the keynote lecture presented by Carlos Alberto Torres (Professor of Education and Director, Paulo Freire Institute, University of California, Los Angeles), well known for his extensive research on comparative and international development education. In his paper, 'Neoliberalism, Globalization Agendas, and Banking Educational Policy: Is Popular Education an Answer?', Torres presented the challenges to university education and tensions between the local and global along three axes: the first comprised elements of instrumental rationality, a dominant strand of neoliberalism manifested via banking education; the second concerned the challenges for global education; and thirdly, he asked provocatively whether education could be popular if it lacked equality and access? Neoliberalism, argued Torres, has been the new 'common sense' for at least three generations now, and has gained a moral and intellectual hegemony. It has had an immensely troubling impact on university education. He argued that the contemporary economic rationale behind ranking models to assess the quality of education were strategically positioned markers. He elaborated on the pitfalls of such a system, which also tended to be technocratic in nature.

The discussion dwelt on the pressing question of creating a model in which educational resources could be redistributed. This evoked

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multiple responses at the gathering, with some considering it rather utopian at this stage. Yet there was a general consensus that the state's role had to be substantially restructured in order to transfer resources from private hands to the people. Following Paulo Freire, many felt that de-politicization had to be curbed by incorporating new participatory mechanisms. He advanced his idea of the 'Global Commons' as a project of developing global citizenship education, predicated on global peace. A successful intervention in university education for the people would require citizenship and democracy to be reformulated simultaneously. The speaker appealed to everyone to join the long, silent revolution on global citizenship.

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