

Symposia Abstract Book - Main Abstract Book with Submissions and Programme (All Symposia)

Academic Citizenship and the (Im)possible Imaginaries of Social Justice: Higher Education in India and South Africa (0402)

Contributors: Nandita Banerjee Dhawan, Grace Idahosa, Dina Belluigi

Chair: [Dina Belluigi](#)¹

Discussant:

¹*Dina Zoe Belluigi , Belfast, United Kingdom*

Rationale Text: South-South engagement between intellectuals and policy-makers about higher education have sought to address various facets of socio-economic and political injustice within the two post-colonial contexts of India and South Africa. Each country faces different past and present challenges, and has taken varied national and institutional approaches at distinct periods in their independence. Common to both are constitutional commitments to the ideals of democracy and to addressing historic legacies of social injustice, which have been enacted through regulation and limited disciplinary interventions on the higher education sector. Bringing these interpretative frameworks into proximity with that of the Sustainable Development Goals, we explore the intersecting socio-political complications of academic citizenry, many of which are unrecognised within assumptions such as SDG Target 5C that “sound policies and enforceable legislation” will lead to “the promotion of gender equality and empowerment”. In this symposium, we draw from a mixed method study of six universities in India and South Africa to pose questions about the impact of the ‘access agenda’ on the ivory tower’s erosion in the post-colony. We focus particular focusing on the conditions of possibility for “full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” (SDG Target 5.5) of academic citizens marginalised, misrecognised or disempowered historically and currently. Drawing on data from academics and leaders within six universities, we have been employing our multi-disciplinary lenses to analyse their perceptions and discourses of academic practice(s) in the present. Toxic, chilly and at times dangerous climates were described as impacting on those with intersecting experiences of misrecognition, disregard or oppression – indicating that the struggles for academic freedom, participation and flourishing are fraught and persist. Of concern is that ‘e/quality’ often functioned as tools for social control, in some of the institutions and contexts, rather than idea(l)s in the interests of social justice. In relation to this, we sought to understand the impact on the agency and power of academics to engage with, and enact, transformative change within their institutions. In the process, what was revealed were the under-utilisation of the rich resources offered by marginalised academics, disciplines and networks which are committed to questioning or disrupting hegemonic systems of knowledge and social formation, and creating alternative sustainable futures in higher education.

|Linked Submissions:

Revelations about the intersectional struggles for academic freedom within Indian Universities (0406)

Dina Z. Belluigi^{1,2}, Nandita Banerjee Dhawan³, Grace E-O. Idahosa⁴

¹Queen's University Belfast , Belfast , United Kingdom ²Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa ³Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India ⁴University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Research Domain: International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Paper Abstract: Recognising that the university is a site of struggle for democracy and justice, this paper prevents insider insights into academic citizenry within four Indian universities over 70 years after its independence. Drawing from data generated from academics within four Indian universities, we analysed responses that revealed the limits and possibilities of academic freedom as ‘professional freedom’ within teaching, research, community engagement, governance and administration. Insights were gained into the politics of participation between academic citizens within this transforming sector. Intersectional analysis revealed varied experiences of identification, in addition to constraints to exercising power. Substantial differences in ‘being’ and ‘belonging’ in academic functions emerged in relation to academic position and social location.

The Academic and Political Project of Women’s Studies: (Im)Possibilities of Transformation in Higher Education (0407)

Nandita Banerjee Dhawan¹

¹Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India

Research Domain: International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Paper Abstract: The institutionalization of Women’s Studies in Indian universities has been a step towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of gender equality. Set against the backdrop of complex discourse on gender justice, the paper draws from a mixed method study of universities in India and South Africa conducted in 2019. I study the insider perspectives of the academic staff of Women’s Studies Centres (WSC) in four higher education institutions in India to point to the ambiguities and messiness of endeavors to achieve gender equality. The paper examines how the politico-academic project of Women’s Studies with a feminist vision creates (im)possible conditions of transforming HE. From my standpoint as an academic located in WSC, I use feminist methodology of reflexive openness and self-criticality to engage with the problematic of how the ‘claiming’ of diverse experiences of gender injustice in academic spaces may lead to certain inhabiting and reproducing of institutional power.

Future trajectories for (Im)possible Imaginaries of Higher Education in India and South Africa (0528)

Nandita Banerjee Dhawan¹, Dina Z. Belluigi², Grace E-O. Idahosa³

¹*Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India* ²*Queens University, Belfast, United Kingdom* ³*University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa*

Research Domain: International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Paper Abstract: <p style="text-align:justify">With each of the preceding papers of this symposium focusing on the areas of interest; this concluding paper will be utilized to discuss the overall findings and limitations of the project, and outline our recommendations and vision for future research. In this way, we hope to share what we have learnt about the study of higher education in these two contexts and about such comparative global South-South approaches to research. We also intend to utilize the talk as an opportunity to open our projects to possible collaborators and interested parties for further engagement.

The Question of Agency Within the Normative Assumptions Inherent to the SDGs: Insights from South African and Indian Academics in Higher Education Leadership (0533)

Grace E-O. Idahosa¹

¹*University of Johannesburg , Johanneburg, South Africa*

Research Domain: International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Paper Abstract: <p style="text-align:justify">Drawing on the experiences of twenty academics in key leadership positions in HEI's in South Africa and India, this paper details the contextual, institutional, and individual factors that impact the deployment of agency in promoting equality and sustainability goals within the participants institutions. Participants in the study highlighted the endogenous and exogenous factors which affect their agency to promote transformation for sustainability. These included the disjuncture between national policy discourse and contextual realities, pointing to the incompatibility of imported ideas (such as ‘internationalization’ and unfeasible equality goals) with the contextual, historic, socio-economic conditions. They also laid bare the institutionalized nature of inequality within HEI's, and the hierarchical, apathetic institutional cultures. Drawing on these findings, the paper reveals the direct costs of the assumptions inherent in inherited policies on the everyday lives of academics and asks critical questions about the im/possibilities of driving equality and sustainable transformation from within such conditions.