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To cite this article: Marianne A. Larsen (2018) The Possibilities and Potential of Transnational History: A Response to Kazamias’ Call for Historical Research, European Education, 50:2, 101-115, DOI: 10.1080/10564934.2018.1454261

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10564934.2018.1454261

Published online: 26 Apr 2018.

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The Possibilities and Potential of Transnational History: A Response to Kazamias’ Call for Historical Research

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This article provides background on Kazamias’ historical comparative education work. Transnational history as means to respond to Kazamias’ call to “reinvent the historical” is introduced. The article demonstrates how the logics of transnational history differ markedly from the logics of comparison and transfer. The argument advanced is in favor of educational histories of the present, informed by transnational approaches of the past, not as a complement to comparative methodologies, but as a replacement of them.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the different and somewhat divergent historical approaches we have each taken in our comparative education research, Andreas Kazamias has remained a source of inspiration, support, and mentorship for me since my PhD days. From 2000 to 2004, I was a doctoral student at the Institute of Education, University College London, under the supervision of Dr. Robert Cowen, who introduced me to his long-time friend, Kazamias, early in my program. Kazamias became a critical friend and advocate of my research, which was situated within the historical paradigm of comparative studies. In March 2001, I was inspired to hear Dr. Kazamias speak at the CIES (Comparative and International Education Society) Conference in Washington, DC, about the need to bring historical research back into comparative education. Over the course of the next few years, I continued to be moved by his commitment to reinventing the historical within our field and his personal encouragement of my own work, despite the fact that I was drawing upon post-foundational, Foucauldian historical approaches, in contrast to the approaches he had used. As I progressed through my doctoral program, he read my work, provided me with constructive feedback, and encouraged me to get my writing on historical approaches in comparative education published. That I did, many years after I completed my PhD, with the publication of “Comparative Education, Postmodernity and Historical Research: Honouring Ancestors” in the International Handbook of Comparative Education, edited by Cowen and Kazamias (Larsen, 2009). In many respects, this article is a continuation of, and yet a departure from, that piece and my doctoral dissertation, in which I argued that there is much to learn from deploying a variety of historical approaches, including those I called post-foundational, in comparative education research.

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Others have made similar arguments, making a case for infusing a deeper historical perspective into the field of comparative education (Cowen, 2002, 2018; Nóvoa & Yariv-Marshall, 2003; Sweeting, 2005). Nóvoa and Yariv-Marshall (2003), for example, call for an “understanding of history that enables us to understand the problems of the present through an analysis of the way they have been and are constituted throughout the past and present, enabling a constitution of the future” (p. 436). And more recently, Cowen (2018) has called for “revisionist thinking about the significance of history for a comparative education that aspires to be more than pragmatic” (p. 32). I could not agree more with this advocacy of such a historical perspective. Where we part ways is with the focus on the comparative. While Cowen (2018), Nóvoa and Yariv-Marshall (2003), Kazamias (2001, 2009), and others (e.g., Sweeting, 2005) promote the historical dimension within comparative education, I no longer consider comparison an adequate methodological tool to problematize our educational past, present, and future. Thus, the argument I am advancing is one in favor of a transnational historical dimension, in place of a comparative approach, to inform the study of education.

In this article, I provide background on Andreas Kazamias’ work on comparative histories of education, as well as histories of comparative education. His work and advocacy on behalf of the historical in comparative education have provided the stimulus for my thinking. The second section shifts gears and turns the reader’s attention to the methodological tool of comparison. Here, I aim to map out the problematics of comparison, especially for educational research in our contemporary age, and also note the limitations of transfer research. In the third section, I introduce transnational history as means by which to “reinvent the historical.” By the transnational, I mean movements of people, processes, objects, ideas, technologies, and institutions across national boundaries, and the connections and links enabled through such flows. Note that my focus is on a transnational approach for the study of education and not on comparative education. The overall argument I advance is that the logics of transnational history differ markedly from the logics of comparison and transfer. I am suggesting that we shift beyond the comparative to consider historical links, flows, and connections across national boundaries in the past, which speak to and arise from the historian’s present. Thus, my argument is in favor of educational histories of the present, informed by transnational approaches of the past, not as a complement or bridge to comparative methodologies, but as a replacement of them.

**KAZAMIAS AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH**

Andreas Kazamias’ research, for almost 55 years, has been both comparative-historical and historical-comparative. Since his very early work in the 1960s, Kazamias has remained committed to providing broad contextual analyses of educational phenomena, arguing that the role of comparative education is to enhance one’s perspective of the interrelationships between school and society (Kazamias, 1963, 1966; Kazamias & Epstein, 1968). Above all, central to his work is a commitment to understanding education in an historical context. He has throughout his career expounded upon the importance of historical perspectives in the comparative study of education (e.g., Kazamias, 1963, 1966, 1968, 2001, 2009; Kazamias & Massialas, 1965). In his 1963 article “History, Science and Comparative Education: A Study in Methodology,” he writes:
Since presumably the study of comparative education is based on the assumption that, in order to gain a better understanding of education one has to examine a variety of educational practices in a variety of cultural contexts, a comparative educator who ignores the vast historical experience of man [sic] in this sphere of activity, would be doing so at his own peril. One might indeed say that in comparative education a great deal of the material is in its very nature historical, for it depends on tradition and the cumulative action of past events. (p. 396)

Kazamias is a prolific, thorough, detailed, and precise comparative-historian. His historical starting point has been the Hellenic origins and patterns of education. Kazamias has written about Spartan and Athenian patterns of education, and related Spartan, Athenian, Platonic concepts of human nature and education. His most significant historical research, written more than 50 years ago, has been his work on transfer, modernity, and Greek and Turkish education (Kazamias, 1966, 1968). In his book Education and the Quest for Modernity in Turkey, he focuses on a 19th-century modernization movement within Turkey, situating it within the broader historical context of the Ottoman Empire going back to the 15th century. In his work on transfer and modernity in Greek and Turkish education, Kazamias (1968) traces the developments in modernizing education in Greece and Turkey as nation-states since the second half of the 18th century, and the influence of foreign ideas and institutions in these transfer processes. He has continually “returned” to Greece in his academic writing throughout the past half century. For instance, in his publication “The Education of Greeks in the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1923: A Case Study of ‘Controlled Toleration,’” he adopted a historical, contextual approach in his study of the education of Greeks, an ethnoreligious nondominant group scattered throughout various parts of the Ottoman Empire during 1856–1923 (Kazamias, 1991).

Finally, his historical research has not been confined to Greece and Turkey. He has also conducted historical research about education in England. In his 1966 book Politics, Society and Secondary Education in England, Kazamias provides a broad sociological, political, and economic historical account of the relationship of secondary education to the social, political, and cultural spheres of English society between 1894 and 1924.

Kazamias has always been “deeply committed as a historian to doing an immense amount of work on the history of the field of study” (Cowen, 2009, p. 9). Thus, his historical work also includes tracing the history of comparative education from the modernist origins of the field back to Marc-Antoine Jullien de Paris through to the 19th-century European and US educational reformers. He has traced the work of 20th-century comparative education researchers, such as Sir Michael Sadler, Isaac L. Kandel, Nicholas Han, and Robert Ulich, who deployed historical analyses in their work and represent, for Kazamias (2009), the “historical-philosophical-cultural and liberal humanist motif in comparative education” (p. 39). In providing his historical accounts of our field, he underscores a number of problems with the abandonment of the historical dimension in place of more scientific approaches to the comparative study of education. First, he notes the ahistorical nature of the scientific paradigm (Kazamias & Schwartz, 1977). Next, he critiques the melioristic ideology of improvement not only in much of the early work of comparative educational researchers and reformers, but also among later 20th-century positivist scholars. Moreover, Kazamias critiques past comparative education scholars for their broad generalizations about education in different countries and contexts, as well as their focus on causality and prediction. He has argued that such accounts neglect research that shows how education is a complex and context-dependent phenomena (Kaloyannaki & Kazamias, 2009; Kazamias, 2001, 2009; Kazamias & Massialas, 1965).
Above all, Kazamias (2001, 2009) laments the abandonment of the historical dimension in comparative education, a situation that has impoverished and diminished our field of research. One only need attend a comparative education conference to hear Andreas Kazamias speak with flair and passion about the need to bring history back into our field. At the 2001 CIES conference, I clearly remember Kazamias calling for a reinvention of the historical within our field, noting the need to become familiar with the problematic of history and not simply use history as a background to our research. Indeed, I wrote in my doctoral journal back then, the highlight of that conference was “hearing Andreas Kazamias plead passionately for bringing historical research back into comparative education in every panel session that he had the opportunity to do so.”

To conclude this section, we find in Andreas Kazamias a deep and long-standing commitment to advancing an historical approach in comparative education research. Kazamias has remained throughout his career committed to historical research. He has argued that “the use of concepts, abstractions, or even theories” in historical comparative or comparative historical research, “provide lenses or frameworks to compare, explain and interpret educational phenomena” (Kazamias, 2001, p. 446). Above all, reinventing the historical within comparative education has the potential to unify our field, test the validity of our arguments and decisions we make, and force us to better understand the past, the world in which we live today, and the connections between the two. One way to reinvent the historical, I argue, is through transnational history, which I argue differs markedly from the logics of comparison. Thus, first I provide an overview about internal logics and limitations of comparative methodology before discussing transnational history.

THE LOGICS AND LIMITATIONS OF COMPARISON

Comparison has a history, and with that history a set of taken-for-granted assumptions that seem to be rarely problematized epistemologically within the field of comparative education. While the roots of the concept (at least in the West) reach back to Plutarch’s Parallel Lives written in the second century AD, most trace the history of comparison to the Enlightenment period, initially within the discipline of comparative anatomy. The emergence of objectivity in the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on calculability, implied “a system of converting all the possible outcomes into a homogeneous medium that made comparisons of degree possible” (Daston, 1988, p. 376). Taking methodological ideas from the natural sciences, social scientists adopted comparative approaches in the nineteenth century. The comparative method was taken up across a wide range of disciplines, including philology, religion, anthropology, and sociology. Durkheim’s The Rules of Sociological Method signified this shift, as he argued that “comparative sociology is not a special branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts” (Durkheim, 1895, p. 157).

Following the work of Popkewitz (2009), who challenges us to think about the epistemological foundations of comparative thought, I explore here some of the normalized, internal logics or problematics of comparison as taken up within the social sciences. First, although in the classical sense comparison has been understood as “the systematic search for differences and similarities—for divergences and convergences—between various means of comparison” (Kaelble, 2009, p. 33), comparative research has overwhelmingly prioritized contrast over
comparison, difference over similarity, and discontinuity over continuity. Focusing on
dissimilar units, according to proponents of comparison, enables the researcher to establish
equivalent measures and/or control for external variables with greater clarity (Smelser, 1976).

If comparison consists of contrast and differentiation, then generalizing about educational
phenomena through comparative research becomes impossible. However, as Kazamias (with
co-author Erwin Epstein) argues, strict historical interpretations that examine historical or
contemporary events as unique are not amenable to comparative analysis, given that comparison
“implies that phenomena can be approached as not being inherently unique; fundamental
identities underlie human activity regardless of time, space, and context” (Kazamias & Epstein,
1968, p. 2). Kazamias asks us to consider whether comparative education is even possible, “if
systems of education are really unique and totally different” (Kazamias & Massialas, 1965,
p. 6). A similar argument has been made more recently by Kumar (2015), who asserts that
“if the historical societies, cultures, etc. are so different from our own then the comparisons
‘lose force’” (p. 271).

Comparison also assumes a point of view external to the objects being compared. The
difficulty that arises is when the vantage point of the observer is not situated at equal distance
from the objects being observed. Thus, “logical consistency in the comparison implies that the
point of observation be stabilized in space and time” (Werner & Zimmermann, 2006, p. 33).
However, this is impossible to achieve in research, and a scholar’s position vis-à-vis the
research objects under study is rarely not “off center” or biased in one way or another.

Comparison, as a methodological tool, generally first involves separating out and construct-
ing stable objects/units of comparison in order to bring them together again in a comparative
analysis. Categories of comparison need to be invented and fixed in time, thus enabling the
comparative researcher to construct and study her or his objects of study. For example, the mul-
tilevel comparative education approach illustrated by the Bray and Thomas cube deploys this
idea of separating out objects of comparison through a variety of “levels” (e.g., geographical)
in order to bring them back together again for comparative analysis (Bray & Thomas, 1995).

This is related to the scale of comparison the researcher chooses to study. Each choice of
scale—whether institutional, state/province, nation-states, or region—is “historically consti-
tuted and situated, filled with specific content and thus are difficult to transpose to different
frameworks” (Werner & Zimmermann, 2006, p. 34). While scales of comparison are virtually
limitless, comparison within much of the social sciences, including comparative education, has
Theories of modernization and the centrality of the West have influenced the work of compara-
tive historians and stabilized existing power structures, rather than challenging them. One might
compare the history of two or more countries, it is argued, but comparative history tends to treat
national borders as a given. As Juneja and Pernau (2009) explain, “The comparative method
was premised on the constitution of autonomous units from which all forms of interdependence
and interrelationships were abstracted, units defined not only through the boundaries of the
nation state, but also through a process of internal homogenization” (p. 107).

Moreover, the tendency in comparative research to establish equivalent units of comparison
is based on judgments about the limitations of asymmetric comparison. Werner and Zimmer-
mann (2006) note the pitfalls of postulating a similarity between categories (of comparison)
based on a simple semantic equivalent, without interrogating divergent practices encompassed
by the constructed categories. While the historian Fernand Braudel argued that “a history seeks
to compare like with like,” we need to ask how we decide what constitutes “like.” Cultures, societies, educational systems, and so on may appear (at first glance) to be very different and yet actually have much more in common than previously thought. This illustrates the need to historicize and problematize very carefully the objects, categories, and scales of comparison the researcher chooses to use. This necessitates making explicit the historical and situated constitution of the objects of comparison, scales and analytical categories and how they fit together, the forms of reasoning underlying those epistemological choices, and the implications of those choices for future research and action.

Finally, comparison neglects to engage with contemporary notions of time or does not engage with time effectively. Influenced by Enlightenment thinking about linearity and progress, comparative research faces significant difficulties in making sense of a world characterized more by randomness, chance, and unevenness than linearity and development. Further, comparison reflects synchronic reasoning, being concerned with events and phenomena as they exist in one point in time, rather than taking historical antecedents into account (Espagne & Werner, 1988; Werner & Zimmermann, 2006). By fixing an object of comparison in time in order to study it, the comparative researcher faces challenges in dealing with issues of change and transformation (over time).

A number of comparative education researchers have taken up this point and further critiqued the ways in which contemporary comparative education studies have either neglected to engage with time ontologically and epistemologically, and/or reflected a simplified, standardized, linear and causal understanding of time in their work, which is specific to modern society. Rappleye and Komatsu (2017) argue that the field of comparative education has remained shallow and parochial in its unwillingness to engage with time ontologically. Working historically and moving beyond the West to engage with concepts of time through the work of Japanese social theorists, Rappleye and Komatsu (2017) show how “open-ended” (linear) time was first borrowed in Meiji Japan, and disseminated progressively across Japanese society through modern schools, with “nihilistic consequences” (p. 193).

Also engaging with notions of time, Cowen (2002) asserts that the current use of comparative methods within organizations such as the IBE (International Bureau of Education), OECD, and World Bank works from a perspective of universal linear solutions that simplifies contextual time and assumes the same future social time. He explains:

We have oversimplified our “comparative education time” as if it were a mere chronology: an arrow, headed into the future, on which aspirations and plans for educational change could be painted. The picture is, however, too complex to paint, even on a large canvas. We have understood in comparative education relatively little about the intersections of economic, cultural, biographical and social time, with their complex compression of remembered histories and aspirations for future identities. We have tended to see time as an evolving, even an evolutionary, continuum of no great significance. This is an old habit, and a dangerous old habit. (Cowen, 2002, p. 424)

Such an emphasis on the linearity of time has had consequences for education policy making. In a similar vein to Cowen’s (2002) argument, Nóvoa and Yariv-Marshall (2003) have critiqued the current use of comparison in research carried out by the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) and PISA/OECD (Programme for International Student Assessment/Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) that reflects
what they call a mode of governance. “Current comparability,” they argue, “is not only promoted as a way of knowing or legitimizing, but mainly as a way of governing” (p. 429). Thus, comparison is now used as a convenient political tool to create and legitimate education policy, largely a result of the internal logics of comparison outlined above. Finally, comparison within the field of comparative education has long been embedded in colonial logics pointing to the “darker side of comparative education” (Hayhoe, Manion, & Mundy, 2017, p. 5). Numerous examples of this dark side of comparison exist including the idea of adapted education first developed as part of the Hampton–Tuskegee model for the education of African Americans in the US South and transferred to the Belgium colony of the Congo in 1900 (Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000). Indeed, a legacy of racism and Orientalism continues to shape Western comparative research with “the essentialist, culturalist discourse of ‘the West and the Rest’ powerfully erasing the presence of ‘internal others’ both in the West and in the Rest and cross-national cultural and institutional hybridization” (Takayama, 2016, p. 72). Working against this tradition, Takayama (2016) critiques Australian knowledge-production on and with Asia, arguing that non-Western experiences must become not simply “empirical others,” but “epistemic others.” Building on this work, Takayama, Sriprakash and Connell (2017), further problematize the ways in which comparativists have played a role in establishing educational systems in the colonized world. This has been done by utilizing technologies of social control, which circulated between colonies and colonizing countries as “lessons learned,” conditioning the foundational knowledge of the field of comparative education (Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2017). Such examples (and limitations of comparison outlined above) illustrate the need for our field to rethink the epistemological foundations of comparative thought that has largely privileged Western concepts of unilinear and progressive time.

TRANSFER AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO COMPARISON?

To address a number of these epistemic concerns about the use of comparison, some historians (and comparative education researchers) began in the 1980s to engage with the concept of transfer, defined by historians Espagne and Werner (1988) as the processes through which the norms, images, and representations of one culture are transferred to another. They argued that the history of a nation cannot be understood when the focus is only on national history. Every nation is constituted not only by its own traditions, but also to a significant extent by transfers from other nations. The analytical tool of transfer, according to proponents, provides an alternative to classical forms of comparison with its focus on the movement and travel of ideas, people, norms, and images across borders, rather than constructing fixed objects of comparison for study (Espagne & Werner, 1988).

However, while transfer extends our understanding of the processes associated with the movement of educational phenomena, it still aligns with the logics of comparison. Kaelble (2009), for example, points out that transfer history, like comparative history, constructs objects in order to study them and decide what constitutes a change through transmission from one culture to another. In fact, according to Kaelble (2009), transfer studies require comparison because it is only through comparison that the delivering culture can be distinguished from the receiving culture of similar cultures, and also of countries and regions spatially separated.
from one another. Other scholars have similarly argued the case for comparison within transfer histories. As Johannes Paulman (1998) has explained:

In order, as a historian, to recognize what is happening during a transfer, one must compare the following: the position of the object under investigation in its old context with that in its new context, the social origins of the intermediaries and of the affected parties in one country with those of another, terms in one language with those of another, and finally the interpretation of a phenomenon within the national culture from which it comes with that in which it has been introduced. (Quoted in Kocka & Haupt, 2009, p. 20)

Werner and Zimmermann (2006) also discuss the ways in which transfer studies create their own blind spots. First, a transfer implies a fixed frame of reference, which as in comparative studies is, more often than not, a nation. Transfer historians examined transfers (of ideas, culture, policies) from one nation-state to another, thus again reflecting the methodological nationalism of comparative research noted earlier. Moreover, much transfer research has focused more on the changes that take place as the transfer (e.g., educational restructuring) is taken up in the “new” setting, rather than the changing relationships between the point(s) of departure and the point(s) of arrival. If this is the case, then transfer is not the way to escape from the internal logics of comparison, especially in studying the movement of educational phenomena in today’s world commonly characterized by flows, networks, and interconnections of people, objects, and ideas. Rather, I argue, we find in transnational history a vehicle through which to address the problematics of comparison.

**RETHINKING THE HISTORICAL THROUGH TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY**

Within the discipline of history, the transnational turn has been “one of the most widely debated historiographical directions in the past decade or so” (Knudsen & Gram-Skjoldager, 2014, p. 143). The 2009 publication of the *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* by Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier solidified the position and legitimacy of transnational history (TNH) within the broader discipline of history. Although the origins of the term “transnational” have been traced back to a 1916 seminal essay by Randolph Bourne called “Transnational America,” the term was first utilized by US political scientists to study the activities of multinational corporations and international labor unions (e.g., Nye & Keohane’s *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (1971)). The second wave of transnational studies unfolded in the late 1980s/early1990s, influenced by cultural studies, sociology, and anthropology. The idea of a self-conscious agenda called TNH first came into being in 1989/1990, linked to a specific research program when Iriye (1989) argued for an examination not just of nationalism but of “internationalism” and suggested the study of an explicitly transnational history to complement national developments.

The rise of TNH has been related to a set of wider developments in politics, society, and the discipline of history. Above all, TNH has been aligned with social, economic, and political processes associated with the phenomenon of globalization. Major changes in nation-state arrangements over the past 30 years, such as the fall of the Soviet Union, have led historians (and others) to question the efficacy of the nation-state as the framework for scholarly analysis. This changing frame of reference has been taken up among historians. Tyrrell (2009) writes
about the desire among historians to synthesize the fragmented scholarship of social history and move beyond national frames of reference to study the role of nongovernmental organizations and individual reform movements influencing nation-state actions. These shifts have been based on an overall postmodern suspicion of metanarratives such as normative, causal explanations within the discipline of history, and the related culturalist turn in the humanities and social sciences.

Ideally, as Beckert explains, TNH is a new “way of seeing” (Bayly et al., 2006, p. 1453) and doing historical research. Challenging the methodological nationalism of much historical (and other social science) research, TNH shifts focus away from the nation-state to other transnational actors such as individuals, communities, institutions, and/or organizations. Also, attention is directed toward a wide range of modern-age movements, links, and interconnections of people, processes, objects, ideas, technologies, and institutions across national boundaries. As Iriye and Saunier (2009) write, in their introduction to the *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, transnational historians are interested in the “links and flows, and want to track people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between politics” (p. xviii). Such links, flows, and connections “connect various parts of the world to one another. Networks, institutions, ideas, and processes constitute these connections, and though rulers, empires, and states are important in structuring them, they transcend politically bounded territories” (Bayly et al., 2006, p. 1446).

Thus the “transnational” in TNH alerts us to shifting the focus in historical research away from national bounded territories to relationships between nation and factors beyond the nation. In this respect, TNH, while acknowledging the importance of the nation-state, simultaneously moves beyond and denaturalizes the nation (Tyrrell, 2009) in order to focus on flows, circulation, movement as an “analytic set of methods which defines the endeavor itself” (Bayly et al., 2006, p. 1454). Thus, the starting point for TNH is that historical processes are not simply constructed in different locations, but are constructed in the interconnectedness enabled through movements and flows between places, sites, and regions. In shifting attention away from the nation-state, TNH allows scholars to understand the importance of the nation-state as a contested terrain by contextualizing its growth and cross-national influences.

There are, as Isabel Hofmeyr asserts, methodological challenges in attempting to carry out transnational analyses:

One key methodological challenge in any practice of TNH is how one deals with circulation. How does one track the movement of objects, people, ideas, and texts using the sources at one’s disposal? This is a difficult methodological conundrum in its own right, but more important still is the issue of what one deduces analytically from these modes of circulation and the fields of ideas that they bring into being across and between fixed political units. (Bayly et al., 2006, p. 1450)

Despite such challenges, many scholars agree that TNH enables broader analytical possibilities for understanding the complex linkages, networks, and actors in and across the Global South and Global North. TNH provides the conditions for historians to unpack taken-for-granted categories such as the nation-state, civil society, community, and education. This is due to the fact that transnational historians avoid seeing the social world in linear, binary ways. Rather, TNH challenges grand narratives associated with traditional historical research, including the reliance on binary thinking such as North/South, East/West, metropole/colony,
and domination/resistance. Thus, traditional historical analyses of imperialism have often focused on ways in which the Global North has dominated and the Global South as resisted forms of colonization. TNH, influenced by postcolonialism, provides more complex and detailed understandings of relationships between the Global North and South, challenging the one-dimensional portrayal of the South as victim or heroic resister. In such a way, TNH avoids flattening out complexity in favor of more complex and complicated understandings of modernity and associated ideas and processes “by radically extending our sense of the range of people and the array of sites involved” (Bayly et al., 2006, p. 1456).

This logic of analysis necessitates a shift away from a Eurocentric approach and an acknowledgment that there is no longer only one center for analysis. Transnational historians have critiqued Eurocentric approaches to the study of history that position Europe at the center of analyses and measure non-Western societies against some kind of ideal image of the West. Shalini Randeria, for example, criticizes Eurocentric approaches to the study of modernization processes, arguing that “such an exercise partakes in a grand narrative of world history cast in terms of binary contrasts, in which, paradoxically, European historical experience is seen as both unique and universal, or at least universalizable” (Randeria, 2009, p. 86). And, as the European experience is viewed as universal and the norm against which all other experience has been measured, non-European experience has been viewed as marginal.

Furthermore, transnational historians problematize global economic and political exclusions and inequalities, highlighting the transnational origins of global inequalities and exclusions in production, consumption, and trade. For these historians, modernity “is not just about one part of the world, or about one part of the world serving as an example to the rest, but fundamentally about the changing relations between various parts of the world. The shifting shape of the global is central to modernity itself—and that shift can only be explained by reference to actors in many different regions of the world” (Bayly et al., 2006, p. 1460). TNH then allows for a reconceptualization of modernity, demonstrating the complex and contested nature of processes associated with modernity. Specifically, TNH focuses on difference in the trajectories of modernity in different parts of the world, and outcomes of these processes. Randeria (2009) asks, “What status would be accorded to the paradigm of ‘Western’ modernity (which must be pluralized as well) in a conceptualization that recognizes historical and contemporary entanglements between Western and non-Western societies under highly asymmetrical conditions of domination?” (p. 79).

**ENTANGLEMENT AS A FORM OF TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY**

Other terms have been developed which align with the general approaches to TNH outlined above. These include *histoire croisée* (Werner & Zimmermann, 2006); shared, relational and entangled history. As with TNH, entangled histories shift away from a Eurocentric approach and focus on uneven and multiple modernities. Interconnections and mutual influences are theorized in the reconfigurations of modernity both within and beyond nation-state boundaries. The notion of entanglement that Randeria (2009) proposes replaces a comparison of societies in the West and “the rest” with a relational perspective that emphasizes processes of historical and contemporary inequalities that have shaped modernities in different parts of the world.
Some recent comparative education scholars have taken up the concept of entanglement in their work and carried out transnational histories, although they have not always been explicit about this. Caruso and Roldán-Vera’s work on the spread of the monitorial or Lancasterian system of education (Caruso & Roldán Vera, 2005) is written from a TNH perspective. In his concluding comments to a special issue on the history of educational finance, Caruso (2015) notes that taking money as a changing object of practice across space and time can enable educational historians to gain a stronger view of the entanglements constitutive of education in the modern age. Similarly, Carney (2009) refers to “opening, ruptures and entanglements as partial manifestations of globalized modernity” (p. 138) in problematizing comparative education research in an age of globalization. Most recently, a number of scholars have critiqued the colonial entanglements of knowledge in the field of comparative and international education (Takayama, 2016; Takayama, Sriprakash, & Connell, 2017).

Sobe (2013) is another comparativist who has engaged with entanglement, using the notion to problematize the assemblages and apparatuses that produce order and coordination over our ways of living, building on his earlier work in which he adopted an entangled history approach to problematize the ways in which John Dewey’s ideas circulated and reassembled in Yugoslavia in the interwar period (Sobe, 2005). That work was a part of a larger project culminating in an edited book by Thomas Popkewitz (2005) entitled Inventing the Modern Self and John Dewey, in which authors problematize how Dewey’s pragmatism traveled internationally across a field of multiple ideas, relations, and institutions. In his edited volume entitled Rethinking the History of Education: Transnational Perspectives on Its Questions, Methods, and Knowledge, Popkewitz (2013) turns his attention to historicizing styles of reason (similar to Kuhn’s paradigms) that have influenced historical research on education. He calls for readers to think deeply about the styles of reason that underpin the historical research methodological choices they make. Although the term “transnational” appears in the title, with the exception of Sobe’s (2013) chapter mentioned earlier, none of the contributors draw explicitly upon the broader work of transnational historians in their chapters. An opportunity awaits here, especially given Popkewitz’s challenge to US historians of education to re-envision history by historicizing their work, noting that they typically have not engaged with the broader intellectual debates in the field of history. Ironically, at least to this author, Popkewitz and the other comparative education researchers engaging in transnational, entanglement histories of the present continue to situate their work within a broader comparative framework.

HISTORIES OF THE PRESENT

In his book The Historian’s Craft, the historian Bloch, M. (1953) argued that history should be informed not by antiquarianism, a love of the past, but rather by a passion for understanding the present. Within the field of comparative education, we see a commitment to the present through historical research represented by Isaac Kandel. For Kandel (1930), history should inform efforts to resolve contemporary problems and be based upon
the sincere conviction that progress in any social field, and especially in education, is possible only with a clear understanding of the factors that have brought about the present situation, and with an intelligent appreciation of the forces that must be analyzed in order to construct a new philosophy or a new body of principles to guide in its further reconstruction. (p. x)

Kandel’s often-quoted statement that comparative education “may be considered a continuation of the study of the history of education into the present” (Kandel, 1959, p. 273) illustrates his understanding of the role of history in understanding contemporary educational phenomena.

While epistemologically distant, both Kandel and the French social theorist and historian Michel Foucault view history as a vehicle for understanding present-day concerns. Foucault engaged in what he called “histories of the present,” not because understanding an ideal present is what should stimulate investigation, but because history can be used as a means for diagnosing problems of the present. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault (1977) explained his rationale for engaging in a history of the present: “Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present” (p. 31). For Foucault, understanding of the present as historical can be best achieved through a process of making the past strange, disturbing and shaking up that which we recognize as real or given. Foucault called this process genealogy, which entailed starting with the diagnosis of a contemporary problem and tracing its genealogy backward into the past.

The present appears that much more unsettling as Foucault attempts not to demonstrate the similarities between the past and the present, but differences between the two, isolating past moments of radical rupture, difference, or strangeness in order to destabilize and challenge our present sense of legitimacy and normality. And here we see another strange set of bedfellows, with Foucault and Kazamias both sitting on the side of historical research that emphasizes differences and discontinuities between the past and present, rather than approaches that support continuity and create the illusion of unbroken linearity between the past and present. Kazamias and Massialas (1965) quote from the historian Herbert Butterfield (1951), who asserted that rather than see the present in the past, the historian needs to recognize that “he is in a world of different connotations altogether” and that “he has merely tumbled upon what could be shown to be a misleading analogy” (quoted in Kazamias & Massialas, 1965, p. 6). Neither Kazamias nor Foucault is in favor of presentism, anachronistic historical research that projects contemporary values and meanings onto a past that may be quite different from the present. Rather, they are using a contemporary interest or problem to stimulate an investigation into the past in order to better understand our present. Transnational history provides a vehicle through which to engage in such a history of the present.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Carney (2009) argues that comparative education is in “danger of fading into irrelevance as its episteme … fails to comprehend the fundamentally new kosmos (the ‘specific global time-space social world’) in which it is embedded” (p. 125). I take Carney’s argument one step further and suggest that comparative education has already faded into irrelevance due to the inherent logics of comparison no longer fit for understanding our world of complex, connections, flows, and
entanglements. In this article, I have attempted to sketch some of the problematics of comparison through historicizing and questioning the concept and making a case for transnational history for the study of education. If we are to adopt a form of historical research appropriate for our globalized age, one that has been variously called transnational, connected, or entangled, then we need to recognize the misalignments between the logics of such a relational approach and the internal logics of comparison. I am indebted to Andreas Kazamias and the historical work he has carried out, as well as his calls for reinventing the historical, to provide me with an opportunity to think more deeply about the role of history in studying education. In 1971, Kazamias himself argued that while history and the historical method are valuable, they cannot be viewed as coextensive with comparative education and comparative method (Kazamias, 1971). Coextensive means having the same spatial or temporal scope and boundaries, or extending over the same space or time. If this is the case, then how can we as educational researchers continue to engage in comparison today? Above all, epistemologically comparison is based on reasoning steeped in abjection and exclusion (Popkewitz, 2009). In this age of divisiveness, differentiation, and dissension, do we not wish to reconsider that which connects, binds, and entangles us within the multiple, interconnected contexts of the world we live in today?

AUTHOR BIO

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