Labeling the World: The 3P Framework for Critiquing and Reconstructing Our Categorization Processes

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Scholars and students of comparative education routinely, and often reflexively, categorize places with labels that have complex and problematic histories, connotations and associations. Both comparative education classrooms and scholarship will benefit from reflecting on the dynamics of labeling places. We seek to provide a framework for analyzing the main issues and risks associated with labeling with a heuristic we call the 3P framework. It invites students and scholars to consider the ways in which power, perspective, and plurality are expressed through the terms we apply to places.

Through this framework, we identify common pitfalls in labeling. We provide a table with open access resources that critically examine many of the most important and common geographic labels in our field. To illustrate how these issues are manifested in particular contexts, we provide two vignettes, on South Asia and Estonia. The vignettes show how issues of power, perspective and plurality are manifested through the labels used and applied in specific places where we conduct research. Finally, we examine how the labeling process is situated in specific contexts and how meaning is culturally rooted; in doing so, we explain how the exclusive use of English-language labels in this piece is necessarily incomplete. The piece concludes with recommendations for teaching with this framework and for producing comparative education scholarship that deploys labels with greater reflexivity and intentionality.

Keywords: Labels, categories, states, regions.

How do we label the world? By adulthood, we have absorbed a set of terms and categories for places, colloquial understandings that we carry into our roles as students and scholars of comparative education. While becoming socialized into shared professional discourses may partially reconstruct the meaning of these labels, the process by which we assign terms to places has not received much explicit attention. As former students and current researchers and professors in the field, we recognize that these terms play a fundamental role both in structuring our comparisons and in defining the contexts for our work: in other words, this is how we attribute meaning by creating associations with specific other places. Given the centrality of labels and

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labeling in our field, it is important and illuminating to examine their use and history with care and depth.

This article focuses on how we label the world — in writing, understanding, researching, and reading comparative work in education. The complexity of these taxonomies and the impact of their use are often left unremarked, yet have important theoretical and practical implications as well as significant promise for teaching comparative education as a subject. We begin with the dynamics of power, perspective, and plurality in the imposition and diffusion of labels. Any label may shed light and cast shadows, and labels that persist are frequently dated while their shadows can perpetuate distortions. To illustrate these issues, we offer two resources: first, a table of common terms and popular resources (with links) that invite us--students and scholars alike--into a deeper consideration of their complexity and problematic aspects, and second, two vignettes from our research sites--South Asia and Estonia--that reveal the depth and situated nature of labels and how they are imposed, appropriated or contested. We advocate more intentional teaching of the labels we use to construct the world, and more reflection on their deployment in scholarship. Our aim with the 3P framework is to help readers take into account, through a deliberate consideration of power, perspective, and plurality, the complexity of labeling.[1] We advocate the application of the framework in both the reading scholarship in the field and in the crafting of one's own research. The Table we include for reference flags several of the most common labels used regularly in our field along with the potential perils to consider as one engages with this category.

Labeling is not a neutral, descriptive process, but a choice about how to read the world. Berger and Luckmann (1966/1981) noted that (as cited in Lagerspetz, p. 52, 2003), "applying divisions and categorizations is a way of defining reality, of constructing 'knowledge'." These terms are used both by researchers and in society generally, often in different but interconnected ways, and are bound up with ongoing struggles over meaning and identity, as Platt (2009) demonstrated in his discussion of the label "post post-Soviet." The phrase manages to allude to two temporal shifts, a political transformation, and a geographic region. Labelling reflects broader cultural responses to both anticipated and experienced changes in society: "the common apprehension of a new epoch means simply that the typical post-Soviet discursive mechanisms…have lost their dominance in the social construction of historical process and social identity, yielding their place to other visions of present situatedness" (p. 6). Labeling is therefore a window into ongoing conceptual and epistemological conversations about the world and how it understands itself; the categories function as powerful units of analysis that invite scholars into broader theoretical conversations.

For the purposes of this paper, we use labels and categories as related but distinct terms: labels include the proper names for places, such as Harare, Malawi, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Sahel, while categories include particular units of analysis or cross-cutting groupings or clusters, such as megalopolises, Developing Countries, Third World or Global South. Rather than maintain a strict delineation, though, we hope to focus attention on the similar dynamics they reveal. These terms circulate both

[1] The power and effectiveness of Katarina Tomasševski's (2001) 4A Framework with our undergraduate and graduate students inspired the developments of this heuristic.

in general public discourse, where they deserve our attention, and among scholars. An example of the latter is the powerful turn to the label post-colonial, which,

> worked better [than other labels like non-Western, Emergent, Minority, and Third World]: it lacked the derogations of the former labels, it specified what unified its compass (a former subjugated relation to Western powers), it embodied a historical dimension, and it opened analytic windows onto common features of peoples who had only recently, and to the extent possible, thrown off their European chains. (Moore, 2001, p. 116).

Selecting labels, therefore, positions one's research in relation to as well as within existing understandings of the world.

Our shared concern with the dynamics of labeling the world emerged from our experiences with everyday discourse and media coverage of the globe, from our engagement with scholarship in the field of comparative and international education, and from teaching courses in this field at both the undergraduate and graduate levels for students at the University of South Carolina. As members of Comparative & International Education Society, we operate within academic special interest groups (SIGS) and terms that cluster societies in complex, cross-cutting ways.

The authors' experience has several shared elements, which surely helped us to identify patterns. We three grew up in Northeastern cities in the United States, and completed our doctoral studies in comparative education at Indiana University, which had strong language and area studies programs, before accepting positions at the University of South Carolina. Sharing a similar mix of students and the communities in which we lived provided the common ground. Our research interests spanned topics across language policy, citizenship education, gender and development, and education about the Holocaust, and our research sites included locations within the countries of Estonia and India and across Europe and South Asia, more generally.

The 3P's of Labelling: Power, Perspective & Plurality

Labels in comparative education can be approached effectively by considering the 3 P's. The 3P's provide a heuristic for systematically thinking through some of the key issues raised by labeling, and it can be employed as a framework for--to name some examples--individual writing assignments or team presentations in comparative education courses, or by scholars and reviewers in considering why authors are making the choices they are making. The 3P's address critical issues of authorship, dynamism and circulation, and raise important questions such as: Who gets to name the world? Whose categories circulate globally? How are labels contested?

Power is broadly concerned with the relationship between those assigning the labels and those who are labeled. It considers the imbalance in authority or resources between them, including the ability to have one's own categorization embedded in policy concerning the other. The power "p" raises several questions: How are labels positioned in relation to one another? Who has the power to name?

Perspective takes into account the cultural situatedness of the labels, the discourses in which they are tied up, the connotations they have and the assumptions that carry. It addresses how culturally rooted the terminology is, its dominant academic field, and its potential for distortion. Perspective invites us to consider the socio-cultural and

political orientation that helped to produce the label and, in many ways, is embedded in the label itself.

Plurality acknowledges that the term may be contested. A label may mean different things in different contexts, to different people, and it may be embraced, rejected or contested by those to whom it is applied. To ask what a label means is no simple matter: there is the intention of the user, the perception of the audience, and the perception/reception of those to whom it is applied. "Meaning" too often presumes shared, intersubjective agreement, and it is abundantly clear that that is not the case, even within the same language and discourse communities. Plurality also acknowledges that there are many labels and categorizations that can be applied, and that readers and writers should consider systematically the range of options available in order to better assess one's choice.

Table 1. Common Labels & Concerns

Label	Disciplinary Orientation	Perils
First-Second-Third-Fourth World	Geo-political	Clarity & Consensus; Datedness (Graves, 2017; Silver, 2015)
Developed-Developing- Least Developed	Economic	Datedness; Distortions (Fernholz, 2016; Gbadamosi, 2020; Khokhar, 2015; UN, n.d.)
Post-Colonial/ Soviet/Communist/ Socialist	Geo-political, Cultural	Datedness (Brians, 2006)
High-Upper Middle-Lower Middle-Low Income Country	Economic	Datedness
Global North-Global South	Geo-political; Economic	Clarity & Consensus (Clarke, 2018; Eriksen, 2015)
East-West; Western-non-Western	Cultural	Clarity & Consensus; Distortion (Capan, 2018)
Industrialized-Industrializing- Newly Industrializing	Economic, Political Science	Distortion

Majority-Minority World	Geo-political/ demographic	Clarity & Consensus (Emmanuel, 2009)
Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich & Democratic (WEIRD)	Psychology	Clarity & Consensus (Robson, 2017)
Political & Economic Organization affiliation/ Membership Examples: OECD, EU, ASEAN	Geopolitical	Datedness
Unofficial economic grouping Examples: Baltic/Asian Tigers	Economic	Datedness (O'Neill, 2019)
Region Examples: Far East/Near East, MENA, Nordic, Sub-Saharan Africa, etc.	Geopolitical/ Cultural	Clarity & Consensus; Distortion
State/country name	Geopolitical	Datedness
Area of dominant language, religion, political orientation, etc. Examples: Lusophone, Anglophone, Francophone Muslim, Christian Democratic, Socialist, Communist	Geopolitical/ Cultural	Clarity & Consensus; Distortion (Leite, n.d.)

The Problem of Meaning

In our experience teaching courses to undergraduates in our region, we find that a majority typically comes from a White/Anglo monocultural/monolingual background, and operates within an implicit positivist paradigm and worldview. Examining the process of labeling, in part by showing how labels and other concepts can be interpreted differently in different cultures and languages, creates opportunities to open up deeper conversations about interpretation and meaning and even epistemology. Meanings are bound up with contexts, so taking context seriously as a matter of concern (Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2014) when reflecting on the terms we use to designate places requires that we address meaning too. Intended and perceived meanings may vary, but the encounter between the two creates a meaning that is co-constituted, co-constructed, or inter-woven (Sobe & Kowalczyk). As Sobe and Kowalczyk point out, the contexts cannot be neatly compartmentalized into "political,

social, economic" context, and so forth. By invoking cultural context here, we do not mean to suggest a tidy box that can be defined objectively from an omniscient perspective, but rather, to acknowledge that the act of labeling is part of a process of constructing and reconstructing meaning that takes place within historical relations of power and knowledge production.

Meaning also changes over time. Some important labels can be traced back to a single originator, though the way they resonate, are taken up and evolve as they circulate shows the living pathways of new terms. Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam's "Majority World" (early 1990s; see Alam, 2008), French demographer Alfred Sauvy's "Third World" (in 1952; see Solarz, 2012), and Czech writer Milan Kundera's "Central Europe" (Kundera, 1984) stand out as examples of coinages that took hold among scholars and the society at large. Alam and Kundera rejected powerful, globally circulating labels like "Third World," "Developing World," and the East-West divide, crafting new categories in response. In this way, many labels carry forward traces of the problematic terms they were responding against.

Crucially for grappling with meaning, our geo-political labels--which are themselves concepts--are culturally rooted. For that reason, it is important to explore how the categorization of places that are implied by our labels is implicitly comparative and culturally rooted. Moreover, these concepts are particular to the English language, which itself is a language of power. As Alatas (2003) observed, many concepts are,

> passed off as universal when in fact they derive their characteristics from a particular cultural tradition…. For example, while 'religion' is presented as a universal concept, the understanding of what makes up religion in phenomenological, historical, and sociological terms is often derived from Christianity, resulting in what Joachim Matthes (2000:98), referring to Islam, calls the '"hidden" cultural *Christianisation*' of the Muslim world since it started to think of Islam as a 'religion.' (p. 460).

In this way, "the temple, mosque, and synagogue are all, sociologically speaking, "churches." The term "church" is generalized without the concept's being rendered universal or plural" (Alatas, 2003, p. 460). Applying this insight to the labels we use, we can see that labels objectify, containing the 'Other' safely within an apparently objective and stable term, rather than seeing those thus represented as "potential sources of concepts rather than just data," whose self-understandings in their own languages could productively unsettle the labels we use.

Vignettes

South Asia

South Asia illustrates the complexities and challenges around labeling within the comparative education world. The region is composed of former colonies of the European Empire that gained their independence between the late 1940s and the mid 1960s; they experienced many varieties of colonialism under multiple powers. At the core of labeling practices are relationships of power, perspective, and plurality. Examining how labels are applied, appropriated, and contested within individual South Asian countries, as well as across the region, enables us to rethink and reconsider the appropriateness and function of these labels.

Most multilateral international organizations (e.g. UNESCO, World Bank, UNDP) define the South Asia region as being bounded topographically and comprising eight distinct countries; India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan, and Afghanistan (World Bank, 2020). Topographically, the region comprises the Sub-Himalayan Countries, bounded by the Himalaya, Karakorum, and Hindu Kush Mountains. The South Asia region also comprises the Indo Gangetic Plain and Deccan plateau, constituting "peninsular India", and Sri Lanka. Economically and geopolitically, the region is organized by the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC was established in 1985 as a regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union that is focused on economic and regional integration between these eight South Asian Nations (SAARC, 2020).

Despite this relatively straightforward grouping of nation states, there are important historical, economic, and political factors that play into how the region is described. Many informational descriptions of the region describe the region in similar ways. For example, Trip Saavy, a digital travel platform, states, "South Asia can loosely be described as the eight nations around the Indian subcontinent, including the island nations of Sri Lanka and the Maldives that are situated south of India" (Trip Saavy, 2020). This description provides a clear example of how within the region, India is placed as the primary frame of reference, around which the other countries are literally and figuratively "mapped". This placing of India as the primary frame, or core, with other countries within the region as peripheral factors into general understandings of the region. Thus, we see that the core-periphery relationship (Wallerstein, 1974) most commonly used to describe the economic network where colonized nations are placed in peripheral positions in relation to the empire, or "core", also exists, to an extent, *within* a "peripheral" region. With this example, we can see how power and positioning factors prominently between countries comprising this region.

Aside from geographical descriptors, other labels often applied to the region also allude to the core-periphery relationship described in World Systems Theory (Wallerstein, 1974). Some of these labels include "developing/developed", "postcolonial", the "global South", and "Third World". These labels have distinct epistemological origins as well as political implications, and have been applied, appropriated, and contested by scholars, practitioners, and activists on the ground - they illustrate the plurality around how labels are appropriated, negotiated, and contested. Below we explore how the frame of postcolonialism, and many of these other labels, apply to the South Asian region.

Postcolonialism in South Asia

Postcolonialism grew out of the fields of history, literature and cultural studies and provides critical analysis of European imperial power (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1961; Gandhi, 1998; Chakrabarty, 2000; Bhabba, 1994). In *Orientalism*, Said (1978) introduced an interpretation where the world was divided into the "orient" and the "occident", with Western Europe as the "occident" and the rest of the world as the "orient". This framing is often considered the genesis of the cultural concepts of the 'West" and the "East", mutually constitutive constructs where the West represents the Oriental world pejoratively as inferior, backwards, irrational, and exotic, juxtaposed against the

rational, progressive, and modern West. The imposition of an East/West binary has led to the development of a subjugated colonial identity based on the dehumanization of colonized people of the East that continues on into the present day (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1961).

Postcolonial scholars also point out that this dichotomous classification of West/East, third world/first world, developed/developing, etc. serves to homogenize and suppress people from different regions across the "East", i.e. the Middle East, Africa, Indian Subcontinent, from being able to represent themselves as distinct cultures. This homogenization, or essentialization, enables the "West" to *maintain power and control over* the homogenous "Other" (Said, 1978). As explained further below, this dichotomous domination continues to frame present day efforts of *development*, or assistance to countries with poverty – most of whom are peripheral nations and former colonies (World Bank, 2020). We can see how this dichotomous classification provides necessary perspective into how power has been maintained and deployed.

The emergence and legitimization of postcolonial theory has generated a sustained critical effort on processes and discourses of international or global development. From this critical perspective, *development* is defined broadly as "incorporating the whole complex of unequal material relationships and processes which structure engagement between the global South and the global North, as well as the primary discursive framework within which these relationships have been constructed for more than sixty years" (Wilson, 2012, p. 4). This definition of development emphasizes the relationship between current flows of global capital and historical processes of imperialism, so as not to render the ever-present legacies of imperialism invisible. Thus, the link between colonial processes and practices and current development practices and processes in the postcolonial time period is made explicit. Postcolonial studies and postcolonial theory thus center the logics and legacies of colonial practices that remain active in current day society and that order our current economic system of capitalism. This perspective enables postcolonialism to have a simultaneous temporal and ongoing material dimension.

As a means of challenging the essentialism of the "East", postcolonial efforts include a reframing of the "East/West" into the Global North and Global South. "The use of the phrase "Global South" marks a shift from a focus on development or cultural difference towards an emphasis on geopolitical power relations" (Dados & Connell, 2012, 12). This shift provided alternative language for concepts like globalization, which tend to homogenize societies and cultures (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). This usage of the Global South is an illustration of what possibility and plurality with labeling can look like; that labeling practices can be harnessed as a tool to acknowledge and legitimate alternative cultural, historical, and political realities.

For example, in South Asia, postcolonial scholars built upon the North/South concept and formed a collective to study the oppressed classes within the region (Guha, 1982). These scholars focus upon illuminating the intellectual and material conditions of specific peoples and cultures within the East, or the various "subaltern classes" (Gramsci, 1978). The collective, known as the Subaltern Studies group, focuses on making visible the conditions of subalternity and historical instances of resistance to empire in the South Asian context (Gandhi, 1998; Dados & Connell 2012). Spivak's

(1985) famous interrogation, "Can the subaltern speak?", revealed the complexities of authority and representation and necessity to problematize the relationship between the "knowing investigator and (un)knowing subject" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 2). This has led subaltern scholars to develop a non-essentialized and nuanced investigation of the relationship between domination and subordination. In so doing, these theorists, (e.g. Chakrabarty, Spivak, Mohanty, Bhabba), provide critiques of development practices that serve to universalize notions such as "third world women", "development" and "childhood" (Unterhalter, 2005).

Postcolonial critiques of development practices also challenge the idea that people within the global South are considered the "objects" of development. One example of the objectification, and subsequent homogenization, of people within the global South is the production of the "Third World Woman" (Mohanty, 1984). The category of "Third world Women" represents a singular or monolithic subject upon which "knowledge" about women is produced, by scholars in the West/Global North. The Third world Woman is frequently applied to refer to women from "underdeveloped/over-exploited geopolitical entities" (Johnson-Odim 1991). Illustrating the importance of plurality in labeling practices, Mohanty (1984), among other scholars, has reclaimed the term "Third World Women" as a political strategy that relies upon the commonalities of women across "the third world". She contends that the emergence of a Third World women's feminist politics grew out of colonialism and capitalism where "systemic socioeconomic and ideological processes position the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, Middle East, and "minority" populations in the US and Europe" in a disadvantaged relationship with the state (Mohanty 2003, p. 44). This Third World feminist politics seeks to "pivot the center" (i.e., Europe and the United States) and illuminate the complex ground of the "intersecting lines of power and resistance" (Mohanty 2003, p. 42) that constitute the world as all people occupy it. Thus, this form of feminist politics explicitly challenges and reconceptualizes the interrelated histories of colonialism, capitalism, race, and gender (Willemsen & Shah forthcoming).

With attempts to "pivot the center", Mohanty and other postcolonial scholars seek to address one of the critiques of postcolonialism – that centering colonialism as the primary frame of reference privileges a Eurocentric position (Chakrabarty, 2000). However, other critics of postcolonialism assert that postcolonial theory's focus on history and culture, and critique of Eurocentrism, may result in a flattening of postcolonial manifestations of capitalism and end up essentializing the postcolonial experience (Chibber, 2013). This may have the very effect that postcolonial scholars seek to challenge - a silencing of power hierarchies within and across nation states and the region. Critics warn that scholars need to be cognizant that assuming a shared capitalist experience may ignore the nuances and power hierarchies within and across the region (Chibber, 2013; Robbins, 2014). Such critiques underscore the necessity to look at all of the 3Ps - power, perspective, plurality - as interrelated components of a holistic framework in order to more reflectively navigate our understandings of the world.

Estonia

In redirecting our focus from a region to a state, we discover a similar basket of labeling perils along geo-political, cultural, and economic lines. Estonia offers an example of

the importance of reflecting on the sensitivities around current and future categorizing particularly when foregrounding power, perspective, and the possibility of plurality. The country experienced profound political and culture upheavals in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from gaining independence from the Russian empire in 1918, experiencing two decades of independent statehood before dueling Nazi (1941-1944) and Soviet occupations (1940 & 1944-1991), regaining independence in 1991, and acceding to the European Union and NATO in 2004. How do efforts to label and categorize play out in such a context?

Linking Estonia to a geographic region presents the first set of complications. Locating the country within the broad "East" or "West," labeling the country as "Eastern" or "Northern European" or imagining it as "Nordic" goes beyond strict geographic designations: these groupings carry significant cultural and political values, meaning, and norms. Regional labeling is shaped by perspective and in constant flux. The Estonian poet, Jaan Kaplinski (1987) speaks to the vagaries of these regular swings in geographic imaginaries as well as recognizing the uncertainty to border-knowing:

> The East-West border is always wandering
> sometimes eastward, sometimes west,
> and we do not know exactly where it is just now.

This fluctuating identity, in part reflected by the country's one-time location on the westernmost flank of the Russian empire and Soviet Union, but now (since 2004) serving as the easternmost border of the European Union, leads political scientists working in Estonia to consider it as "caught between East and West" (Schulze, 2010, p. 361). While the enduring geographic grouping with other Baltic states has had more regional staying power, even that label has, at times, expanded to include the Baltic region, inclusive of the states bordering the Baltic Sea.

As we turn to the cultural meanings carried by these regional labels, we find the "East-West" binary working to inform powerful lines. Feldman (2000), in his exploration of the major identities of Estonia, points to the ways the country gets caught in the problem of the East-West divide and its subsequent link to the concept of "Eastern Europe":

> "West" is defined as civil, rational, and supportive of individual rights and liberties, while the "East" denotes exclusive, ethnic-based societies clamouring for direction in the wake of the socialist collapse. This dichotomy sets up a paradigm for interpreting events in "East" Europe (p. 408).

Other modified versions of "East," including the country as part of the "New East," are likewise roundly problematized by Estonians. Former Estonian President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, for example, spoke to the connotations of the term in his Twitter response to *The Guardian*'s 2014 launch of the newspaper's "New East Network" to provide expanded coverage of the post-Soviet region, including the Baltic States: "We [Estonia] are no more 'new' than Finland, Poland, Austria, et al., all post WWI states. If those are relevant dimensions after 25 years, the rubric is just intellectually bankrupt" (16 June 2014, Twitter). Here we find the popular rejection of a label due to problematic temporal aspects intersecting with rejected geographic clustering.

Other geographic categories point to the importance of considering the fluidity of labels rejected, accepted, and sought. In short, a plurality of labels exist. The power to define one's state and global affiliation works as a powerful undercurrent in these

discussions. In the case of Estonia, "Nordic" is such a label particularly since it suggests a much more progressive set of values and a sharp distancing from the country's Soviet past. In an analysis of Estonian press from 1997-2017, Tammepuu et al. (2019) identified a regular theme of a label *in progress*—"Estonia as striving to become a 'Nordic' country" (p. 198). In this case,

> the Nordics primarily represent the *telos*, the ultimate goal for Estonia, particularly for their high living standards and wealth. Underlying the particular motive is the idea of 'catching up' with the Nordics, that is, reaching the high level of socio-economic development and prosperity generally associated with them. (Italics original, Ibid., p. 198).

The Nordic label likewise raises the issue of audience: categorization for whom? Lagerspetz (2003) highlights the ways the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced texts in the late 1990s directed toward international audiences that emphasized a Nordic orientation despite Estonia's neoliberal economic policies. Lagerspetz (2003) reflects on this development that "it could be inferred that the 'Nordic orientation' of Estonia chiefly serves the foreign policy needs of creating an image, a brand, that would serve the country by dissociating it from the troublesome image of a post-Soviet country, thus paving the way towards Western structures" (p. 56). These examples point to the ways one label carries multiple meanings (i.e., signaling new identities, projecting associations, etc.) across a range of audiences over time.

The final set of geo-political labels—the "post-" categories--also present complicated issues of relevance and association speaking most directly to power and perspective. Estonia, is considered, since the country's restored independence in 1991, at times post-Soviet, post-communist, post-totalitarian, post-colonial, and post-socialist along with a larger regional and global group of countries. One of the first problems concerns the applicability and analytical power of continuing to tether the county with the Soviet experience almost three decades after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. Some scholars, such as Kevin Platt (2009), speak back to the relevance of this label by asserting that we are now in the post, post-Soviet era. A much less contentious "post-" label for Estonia is post-socialist. The growing, especially since 2010, and robust, area of comparative education research focused post-socialism (see Aydarova, Millei, Piattoeva & Silova, 2016; Silova, 2010) offers a dynamic use of the post-socialist label in part through identifying the particularity of the region and continued need for development. This scholarship recognizes, as Iveta Silova et al. highlight (2017) "the theoretical and analytical work that will allow for a more complicated, authentic, and accurate analysis of the post-socialist world" (p. 1).

The other major post-label applied to Estonia and the other Baltic states -- post-colonial--has fueled vibrant and ongoing debates within the humanities, particularly in the fields of comparative literature (Kelertas, 2006; Moore, 2001) and anthropology (Annus, 2017). Applying the post-colonial label to Estonia taps into larger questions about the post-colonial concept as potentially "too narrow" (i.e., by not traditionally including the post-Soviet area) and the field of post-Soviet studies being "too parochial" to include post-colonial analyses (Moore, 2001, p. 112). With these critiques in mind, considering Estonia as post-colonial could help to expand our scholarly understanding that "...*all* of Europe is postcolonial, *but* in different ways…"

(Pucherová & Gaáfrik, 2015, p. 14; italics original). Epp Annus (2017) has contributed to these diversifying efforts through her development of the concept of Soviet post-colonial. Yet still, the question needs to be considered of the ways this post-colonial label resonates on the ground. Violeta Kelertas (2006) points to the Baltic people's resistance to being labeled as "colonized"; that Balts reject the post-colonial label and "find being lumped together with the rest of colonized humanity unflattering, if not humiliating, and want to be with the 'civilized' part of the world" (p. 4). The complexity of the larger theoretical debates within academic fields and the popular disassociation with the term on the ground call for careful consideration in its application and a recognition of the ways power works to determine a label.

Next Steps

We must reflect on and reconsider labels and categorizations. Relabeling the world requires thoughtful, careful, and critical work. The first step is to take stock, to reflect on the labels we and/or our discipline within comparative education tend to use to categorize and compare the world. Given the perils reviewed above, do we continue to use them to read the world? Think critically about the ways in which power, position, perspective, and privilege—both our own and our disciplines'—lead you towards particular labels and away from others. Likewise, let us recognize which labels we can access given our linguistic and cultural worlds.

The second step is to reconsider the labels we use *and* the ways we employ them. One way to diversify the labels is to read *across* – across history, disciplines, and languages. In practice, this means to understand the historical development of a label by investigating its origin and alternative possibilities. Reconsidering also entails thinking across disciplines for alternatives and critiques. In writing this article, we incorporated insights from artists and scholars in anthropology, history, comparative literature, Slavic Studies, and political science among other fields. An interdisciplinary perspective can serve as a foundation for rethinking labels. Reading across languages also works to open worlds of alternatives. Though we chose to focus on English-language labels for this article, we recognize the ways that categories generated in languages and spaces outside of these dominant-languages and powers offer meaningful insights into alternative and important visions of state, regional, and cultural belonging. Area-studies specialization and local-language ability assists in these efforts. Finally, one can reconsider the ways to use labels in one's work and in the academy (and beyond). By avoiding a perspective of labels as context (as mentioned earlier in the essay) and addressing the conceptual and analytical value of the category (as well as any concerns), one can make headway in this area. Additionally, looking to the ways labels overlap and layer, while also recognizing the way categories shift and continue over time, helps one to recognize and take complexity into account.

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