



## Book Review

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Marcelo Caruso and  
Daniel Maul (eds.)  
*Decolonization(s) and Education:  
New Politics and New Men*

Berlin: Peter Lang  
2020, 231 pp.

The editors line out the aim of *Decolonization(s) and Education* as exploring the various ways in which education was deployed in the process of decolonization. The book spans the breaking-up phases of both of the two main periods of Western colonization: a part of the volume treats the politics and societies emerging after the nineteenth century decolonization of Latin America, whereas the other part is focused on the decolonization process starting in the mid-twentieth century.

In their introduction, the editors do not try to bridge these endings of the two very different periods of colonialism, but simply affirm that there were “significant differences” between these two processes. This approach may seem somewhat nonchalant, but turns out, in the end, to be a blessing in disguise, as the editors leave it to the chapter authors to further consider and discuss some of these differences. The main conclusion of the contributions is that educational policies following the decolonizations of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were neither the radical breaks with the past that they in many cases were meant to be, nor linear continuations of colonial structures and practices. The contributions present various cases that illuminate the complex realities between these two poles.

I salute the open approach of the collection toward theory and empirical cases. There is, however, one larger question related to this openness. In the introduction, the terms *decolonial* and *postcolonial* are used without any proper operationalization. Such an operationalization would have been useful since it is somewhat unclear what is addressed with the term *postcolonial*: simply “after”-colonial, or the in the scholarly sphere more accepted denotation “both after- but also continuing and persistent colonialism.” This double heritage of colonialism is addressed in the sense that the editors acknowledge that decolonizing education entailed both “a fundamental break” but also continuities from the colonial period and power. The issue is also addressed in many of the contributions such as in Parimala V. Rao’s and Marcelo Caruso’s texts that highlight the continuity of decolonial movements and educational discourse with the colonial period. In Rao’s case, the Indian anti-colonial educational elites are depicted as a result of the imperial politics. Caruso, on the other hand, shows that the constant referencing back to the colonial educational past, whether a “gain or a trap” kept this past alive and around for a long time after the fact of independence in the Latin American context.

There is an important body of literature explicitly criticizing the application of the concept of postcolonial in the Latin American context of decolonization. For instance, the collection *Coloniality at Large* criticizes the concept of postcolonial as representing a typically North Atlantic scholarly

perspective. The consequence of this is that postcolonialism misplaces the starting-off point of Western colonialism and modernity both temporally and geographically (see, e.g., Moraña et al., 2008). As the introduction and the contributions in *Decolonization(s) and Education* pursue the aim to challenge many of the conventional narratives of the colonial, decolonial and postcolonial, the lack of discussion on the concepts themselves seems like a missed opportunity to scrutinize them, and especially *postcolonialism*.

This critical point being made, *Decolonization(s) and Education* offers a fresh approach to the workings and doings of education in the two contexts of nineteenth century Latin American, and twentieth century Asian and African decolonizations, as the editors rightfully line out in plural form. Catriona Ellis' chapter treats autobiographies and how experiences of colonial education influenced opinions about the ways postcolonial education was to be organized in South India. Michael J. Seth shows that decolonized South Korea turned to USA when aiming to get rid of both the colonial and the pre-colonial models for its post-WWII educational system. The contributions of Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani (on Nigeria), Ting-Hong Wong (on Hong Kong) and Sónia Vaz Borges (on Guinea-Bissau) highlight in various ways the important, local-international, as well as trans-colonial contacts and interactions.

The chapter of Tim Kaiser, Ingrid Miethe and Alexandra Piepiorka challenges the notion that imperial models, whether capitalist-liberal or socialist, were simply imposed on former colonies. Rather, they show with their "truly decolonial" case of the worker-peasant complementary education in Vietnam and Mozambique that local

active choices lay behind adaptations of international models and ideas in the decolonial context. Jane Weiß' article comes with the pertinent reminder that unequal power structures existed, and exist, in the case of educational transfers. In turning the focus on the agents of the German Democratic Republic's socialist education program for building new socialist systems in Africa, she shows that we should avoid making any uninformed assumptions about "civilizers" and "recipients." Rather, various perceptions existed and a view on the GDR actors as agents of colonial educational aid coexisted with interest and investment toward a cooperation for a decolonized educational system.

In conclusion, a somewhat bolder approach to the core concepts of de- and postcolonial would have lifted the theoretical impact of the volume. As it is now, the book reads as a highly welcome and fresh, if somewhat dispersed assortment of texts presenting the myriad of ways, at times contradictory, in which education was involved in processes of decolonization.

### References

- Moraña, Mabel, Dussel, Enrique and A. Jáuregui, Carlos, "Colonialism and its Replicants." *In Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, edited by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A. Jáuregui, 1–20. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

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