

BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review: *Decolonizing Educational Relationships: Practical Approaches for Higher and Teacher Education*

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Pirbhai-Illich, Fatmakhanu (fatima), Martin, Fran, & Pete, Shauneen. *Decolonizing Educational Relationships: Practical Approaches for Higher and Teacher Education*. Leeds: Emerald Publishing, 2023. xv + 280 pp. ISBN (paperback): 978-1-80071-530-1

Wane, Njoki Nathani, ed. *Education, Colonial Sickness: A Decolonial African Indigenous Project*. Cham: Springer, 2024. xxix + 354 pp. ISBN (paperback): 978-3-031-40261-6

Decolonizing education entails a decentering of the colonial while revealing the knowledges, behaviors, and beliefs obscured by Euro-Western coloniality. This crucial idea pervades the works *Decolonizing Educational Relationships: Practical Approaches for Higher and Teacher Education* and *Education, Colonial Sickness: A Decolonial African Indigenous Project*. Although both books focus on education, their ideas can be relevant to any field of research, since the authors advocate for the development of more pluriversal cultures. In other words, opposing the idea that Euro-Western epistemology is universal could bring about the inclusion and exchange of multiple knowledges and an advance to decolonization in and out of education. Furthermore, the promotion of pluriversality can help students recognize the shortcomings of Western cultural hegemony, and thus more easily register the degree to which educational systems and practices replicate colonial domination. While both books offer a pluriversal critique of colonialism in education, they employ different approaches. The former focuses on a more integral approach to institutional relationships, considering especially how the decolonial gaze can be integrated into knowledge, academic spaces, and institutional and curricular organization. The latter stipulates that the decolonization of education demands that we particularly must rethink Africa and acknowledge its role as an agent of history.

Decolonizing Educational Relationships: Practical Approaches for Higher and Teacher Education proposes a rethinking of the inner higher educational institution and its hierarchies, ranging from the production of knowledge and space distribution to relationships between members. The text's four sections review all the aspects required to understand de/coloniality theoretically and pragmatically. Thus, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 explore diverse

definitions of key concepts such as coloniality, racism, and whiteness. Indeed, understanding the ideological configuration of whiteness allows a reader to comprehend the colonial game. Although whiteness appears to be neutral, it has been “used by colonizers to create an unmarked center against which the racialized Other is judged as inferior” (Pirbhai-Ilich et al., 2023, p. 58). Consequently, non-white otherness is perpetually placed in an inferior position. For that reason, an institutional and research paradigm shift is proposed to overcome inequalities in a way that would allow non-Euro-Western spiritual and relational mindsets (Chapter 5) to distance themselves from capitalist reification and to establish equal and respectful terms between an individual and others. In other words, de/colonizing could transform the definitive type of interaction from one of possessing or objectifying the other into equal belonging for all. Consequently, classroom and institutional spaces should aim for that goal by offering all students new modes of invitation and hospitality (Chapter 6) while sheltering them from discipline and hierarchy. Such de/colonizing of hierarchical relations deemphasizes Western society’s self-emplacement. Ultimately, it is crucial to understand that Euro-Western knowledge coexists with other philosophies whose values contradict its hierarchies. As the authors of *Decolonizing Educational Relationships* argue, the recognition of a pluriversal world—where multiple ways of being and being in the world coexist—signals the imperative to eschew the imposition of colonial knowledge as the sole and absolute truth.

The second text, *Education, Colonial Sickness: A Decolonial African Indigenous Project*, is a multi-authored volume that looks at African history and society beyond colonial discourse. The book is divided into three sections, focusing on historical aspects that have been silenced by Euro-Western knowledge, several African Indigenous identities that challenge colonialism, and alternative ways of pursuing spirituality and education. Unlike Pirbhai-Ilich, Martin, and Pete’s (2023) work, *Education, Colonial Sickness* highlights the point that academic knowledge of Africa stems from Euro-Western prejudices that perpetuate myths of Africa as a passive entity forced into a secondary place. Such prejudices, the authors argue, not only shape the discourse of inferiority within and outside Africa, but they also play an essential role in maintaining the status quo that forces Africa to be dependent on the West. Indeed, one of the chapters illustrates this idea by showing that the narrative of the discovery of America as a solely European feat relies on coloniality. As the authors show, Ivan Van Sertima suggested that the Keita dynasty of the Kingdom of Mali may have arrived in America two centuries prior to Christopher Columbus. Nevertheless, this hypothesis remains omitted from history classrooms and public debate, perpetuating the Euro-Western discourse that sees African historical agency as an impossibility. Throughout the text, readers can find different explanations of how Africa should be envisioned beyond being colonized and enslaved. Indeed, case

studies of the Dogons, women-to-women marriages, and Keiyo elders break with the idea of a homogeneous Africa and show the diversity that existed before Europeans exploited the continent.

In addition, readers can find some common concepts that permeate the entire work and connect the chapters. One of them is Ubuntu. Although Chapters 3 and 6 focus on this concept, Chapter 12 also makes references to the idea. Ubuntu is a spiritual path that is connected to the idea of community, reciprocity, suppression of self-interest, humanness, and the virtue of symbiosis (p. 48). Such an anti-capitalist model is shared with *Decolonizing Educational Relationships*: the I–Thou orientation proposed by the authors as a spiritual alternative to capitalism presents a relation of encounter and dialogue between the self and others. Consequently, relationality, togetherness, and holism are the main features of this approach, replacing the separation, classification, and hierarchy that dominate the colonial capitalist I–It orientation.

Another common aspect of these books is the rupture with academic style, where personal narrations, poems, songs, etc. are used to confront the colonial discourse of scientific truth. Both volumes consider the intended objectivism in writing to be another tool for spreading colonial dominance, which serves to disqualify ancestral knowledges in colonized territories. In other words, oral transmissions (personal narrations in Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2023) or performances (Kumina dances in Wane, 2024) are considered useful sources for delving into the field of decolonization. This rupture stems from a key concept: the loci of enunciation (Pirbhai-Illich et al.) or positionality (Wane) that allows myriad ways of being in the world and knowing realities. For instance, in *Decolonizing Educational Relationships*, Fran Martin, a white, middle-class Briton, reveals that her relation to the land is based on attachment and permanence (11), which is different from the case of fatima (all in lower-case letters, as she explains in the book). Being conscious of fallacies about Africa as a way of challenging the colonial narrative is one of the main ideas that is explored by different authors in *Education, Colonial Sickness*. According to several of them, specifically, Lewis, Ongoiba and Wandili (2024), acknowledging the Euro-Western discourse can help to overcome the disconnection between those of the African diaspora and their roots (p. 88). Consequently, critical reflection on the loci of enunciation is a means for liberation of the colonized being as well as an opportunity to give voice to those who have been silenced.

These complementary books are good sources through which to understand what decolonial means and the preeminence of pluriversality, which “requires inviting multiple ontologies and epistemologies into educational spaces and developing critical understanding of how they relate to and with each other and the wider worlds” (Pirbhai-Illich et al., p. 111). *Decolonizing Educational Relationships* poses a paramount question when it comes to decolonization:

What do we do with colonial knowledge? As the authors acknowledge, most scholars are immersed in colonial culture, unable to conceive an education born out of anti-colonial roots. For that reason, an integration of all knowledges as equal options would be a better road toward de/colonial education. What is clear is the need to challenge hegemonic narratives. As the study of African cases in Wane's book demonstrates, rethinking disciplines, identifying prejudices, and opening up to non-Western authors can be a good starting point for questioning metanarratives. Thinking from my locus of enunciation, I can recognize that Spanish primary and secondary textbooks still offer a bourgeois nationalist history that obscures the histories of colonized, working-class, and underclass subaltern groups (Pérez Garzón, 2023). For that reason, decolonial discourses are necessary in colonized or settler countries and in colonial ones. As these books teach, identifying the essentialist discourses that prioritize processes or facts is essential to finding alternatives. In the Spanish case, acknowledging the cultural genocide in the colonies in America or in Equatorial Guinea, the historical persistence of lower-class revolts, and the marginalization of non-white groups like Jews, the Romani, or Muslims to create an imaginary homogeneous Spain can connect with decolonial proposals.

Decolonizing Educational Relationships: Practical Approaches for Higher and Teacher Education and *Education, Colonial Sickness: A Decolonial African Indigenous Project* make significant contributions to decolonial studies by calling for a more holistic scope for disciplines, challenging the hierarchy of Euro-Western universality, and promoting more democratic and inclusive knowledge. Accordingly, there are several reasons why readers from different fields of research may approach these books. Firstly, they are accessible to all types of readers and introduce basic cases and concepts necessary to understanding decolonization. Secondly, the plurality of authors and the preeminence of their loci of enunciation show how private and public knowledge intermingle constantly, revealing that Euro-Western impositions have impeded colonized individuals from accessing their original cultural heritage. While these two books can be read separately, and although readers may choose to focus on specific sections of interest, there are highly complementary sections best read together. Among the latter are the sections on spirituality, wherein the books coincide in advocating for vindication of certain marginalized collectives. Decolonizing means connecting with different ways of being and feeling, as well as relating to the world and nature in a more equal and respectful way. New relationships and space for silenced knowledges can be a beginning for those who would pursue decolonization and social justice.

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