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Editorial Introduction: International Perspectives on Education and Decolonization

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION AND DECOLONIZATION

Guest Editor: Dip Kapoor

Colonial contact is as old as human history. Roman, Mongol, Aztec, Inca, Ottoman, Chinese and other empires defined earlier colonial histories. However, colonialism understood as modern European colonialism of the 16th century or the expansion of Europe in to Asia, Africa and the Americas, may be distinguished from these “earlier colonialisms” by its inextricability with the establishment of capitalism in Western Europe (Bottomore, 1983; Rodney, 1982). Modern European capitalist colonialism, unlike earlier pre-capitalist colonialisms, involved more than the direct conquest, control, exploitation and interference with other people’s (colonized country’s) labour, material resources and space, accompanied by the characteristic violence, starvation and disease; it restructured the economies of the colonized, producing the requisite economic imbalance necessary for the growth of European industry and capitalism. A parasitic flow of goods and people between colonized and colonial countries (cotton, sugar, manufactures or slaves and indentured labour) was established, whereby profits and the extraction of surplus consistently went to the colonizing country. As Fanon observed, Europe is “literally the creation of the Third World”, an opulence that has been fuelled by “the sweat and the dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians and the yellow races” (1963, p. 76). By the 1930s, with few exceptions, ex-colonies and colonies under formal European government included 85% of the land surface of the globe (Fieldhouse, 1989, p.373).

Modern European capitalist colonialism was not built on material emasculation alone, “Imperial relations may have been established initially by guns, guile and disease... Colonialism (like its counterpart racism) is a formation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse, it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation” (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p.3). Ideo-cultural (including educational) processes, formal or informal, of “differentiating/racializing” colonial peoples or “specific ways of seeing and representing racial, cultural and social difference were essential to the setting up of colonial institutions of control”, i.e., the “economic plunder, the production of knowledge and strategies of representation depended heavily upon each other” (Loomba, 2005, p.85).

Pushing this analysis towards the formation of colonizer/colonized people's subjectivities, Fanon (1967, p.18) suggests that colonial relationships did not restrict themselves to appropriating the labor of colonized peoples but through the "burial of their local cultural originality", created people with an "inferiority complex which rested in their souls". The attempt to reshape the structures of knowledge and the active subjugation and devaluation of local knowledges (see *Abdi's* article on the *defacto* power of the written word in this collection) meant that several branches of learning were touched by the colonial experience (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2006; Mignolo, 2000) as an exercise towards the colonization of the mind, a process marked by the cultural arrogance of a Macauley who once said that "a single shelf of European literature was worth all the books of India and Arabia" (Loomba, 2005, p.76).

The inflection of racial and cultural difference or what Walter Mignolo (2000) refers to as the coloniality of power, while not restricted to particular colonialisms, is the defining ingredient of a noxious symbiosis of the material and the ideological dimensions of modern European capitalist colonialism. "When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies, the economic sub-structure is also a superstructure and the cause is the consequence" (Fanon, 1963, p.32). Stuart Hall (1980, p.320) underlines this dynamic when he employs the racial optic to provide an explanation for why pre-capitalist modes of production (slavery) persisted (or was not erased) despite the simultaneous emergence of industrial capitalism, i.e., capitalism benefited from older forms of exploitation and the ethnic and racial hierarchies constructed by pre-capitalist modes (e.g. European plantation slavery), which ensured the provision of cheap labour for modern European colonial capitalist expansion. He describes this as "an articulation between different modes of production, structured in some relation of dominance" (p.320) (see *Kapoor's* article on *Adivasis* in India in this collection for a related exposition). Racial difference is firmly connected to economic structures. As an attestation to this "coloniality of power", context-specific racial and ethnic chauvinisms explicitly or implicitly, provide thematic connectivity across this collection of articles considering "international perspectives on education and decolonization".

By some accounts, the contemporary manifestation of modern European capitalist colonialism can be located as neocolonialism/imperialism, euphemistically referred to as "globalization" (Boron, 2005) or what Joanne Barker (2006) of the Delaware Tribe of Indians calls a "reinvention of co-

lonial practices” in the form of elusive networks of decentralized political economies (as opposed to the confines of the nation as “empire builder”) that continue to “perpetuate the kinds of exploitation of indigenous labor, products, lands and bodies conventionally ascribed to colonialism proper—that is, Colonialism with a capital C”; a process which continues to inspire indigenous reassertions to “deflect globalization’s reinvention of colonial processes” while being “within, besides and against colonization” (p.20) (for examples, see articles by *Choudry*, *Barua* and *Kapoor* in this collection). As Mignolo (2000) observes, “historically and in the modern colonial world the borders have been set by the coloniality of power versus colonial difference” (p.338).

Today’s neocolonialism/imperialism (globalization), as an advanced strain of colonialism, does not require direct political rule and occupation (formal colonies are not required), as control is exercised through growing economic and financial dependencies which ensure captive labor markets (e.g. Export Processing Zones or EPZs also referred to as sweatshops) in “developing countries” (the colonies/Third World) producing goods primarily for export to “developed countries” (colonial powers/First world) and secures continued exploitation of resources and environments in “developing countries” largely for “developed country” consumption. This neocolonial formation is defined by an equivocal “free-market ideology” (neoliberalism), which secures the interests of “developed countries” through a preferential trade regime. Unsurprisingly African, Asian and Latin American shares of world trade remain in single digits today and finance capital is largely contained in the corridors of the TRIAD (Euro-America and Japan). The Third World debt crisis, largely inspired by the oil crisis of the 1970s and cold war military budgets encouraged by super-power rivalry, provided further neoliberal justification for market advocacy and the privatization/scaling back of desperately needed public services (including education) in the Third World while concomitant export-led growth strategies serviced burgeoning First world over-consumption (at considerable social and ecological cost to Third World supplier countries). These policy prescriptions were packaged in to Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) to allegedly address Third World debt (in fact, even on purely financial grounds, the debt crisis was exacerbated by the SAPs which essentially “robbed the poor to pay the rich”) and were implemented by a nexus of international neoliberal institutions or International Financial Institutions (IFIs) with preferential voting and decision making structures (over 65% of the vote in IFIs is controlled by the TRIAD), including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the GATT or the

current World Trade Organization (WTO). Neoliberal economic policies acted as economic can-openers by creating the political-economic terms and conditions for Transnational Corporations (TNCs) to penetrate the Third World, along with a host of other interventionists like the various bilateral international aid agencies with derived-mandates from the IFIs, a growing number of corporatized non-governmental development aid organizations (NGOs) and charities largely oblivious of the political-cultural dimensions of their interventions. The unequal relations of colonial rule are being subsequently re-inscribed in these contemporary imbalances between First and Third World nations (Loomba, 2005, p.12), as the former move to control and utilize their position of historical colonial privilege (on this point, see *Choudry's* article in this collection).

Anti-colonial positions and the prospects for decolonization are embedded in specific and multiple histories and cannot be collapsed in to some pure monolithic and homogenized oppositional essence, i.e., the various legacies of modern colonialism across the globe have given rise to separate historical trajectories of conquest and resistance on the ground, even as they share some obvious features (Loomba et al., 2005). Without underestimating the importance of formal independence of colonies between the 18th and 20th centuries, anti-colonial nationalist movements (as a significant expression of decolonization), have rarely represented all interests and peoples of a colonized country, as has been alluded to by several contributors to this collection. Neither did the dismantling of colonial rule automatically result in positive changes for all groups, as the fruits of independence were made available unevenly and selectively; a version of colonialism was reproduced and duplicated from within. As some contributions in this collection simultaneously attest to, direct occupation (colonial control, with a big C) remains intact as an original strain (internal colonialisms) when it comes to the current political and existential circumstances of indigenous groups in Bangladesh (see *Barua's* article on minority Buddhist communities) and India (see *Kapoor* on *Adivasis* in India). *Kristen Norget's* contribution to this collection similarly alludes to the contemporary formations of a neocolonial church, which despite its purportedly progressive indigenous ends (Indigenous Theology) in Oaxaca, Mexico, dilutes indigenous struggles given the pre-suppositions around a Catholic universalism and its purported non-cultural/religious specificity. These various examples of "continuing colonialisms" and contemporary mutations provide stark reminders that colonial differences and coloniality can not be museumized or moth-balled and will need to be continually re-engaged in the interests of the long march of decolonization.

As suggested by Bernal or Gramsci, although agents are embedded in historical processes that constrain possibilities for change, we are still historicizing subjects with a capacity to know, act on and change oppressive realities. Colonial ideologies are neither totalizing nor monolithic and Raymond William's notion of unlearning or the questioning of imposed truths is instructive when it comes to constructing processes of education and decolonization. *Teresa Strong-Wilson's* article elaborates on the formative power of stories, counter-storying and reclaiming stories/imagination in a process of educational decolonization in Canadian pedagogical contexts, given the history of colonial relations between European settlers and indigenous communities or First Nations peoples. The attachment to story is fore-grounded as a possible well-spring of hope. Similarly, Abdi underscores the importance of the systems of traditional oralities of sub-Saharan Africa, as a "turning away from colonial culture is often a necessary precondition for paying serious attention to the literatures and cultures devalued under colonialism" (Loomba, 2005, p.81). *Barua* unearths the cultural resistance and non-violent activism of Buddhist minority communities in Bangladesh, as monastic education and a redefinition of centralized schooling suggest continued prospects for decolonization. *Choudry* problematizes Eurocentric decolonization efforts through western NGO inspired or anti-globalization movement pedagogies, while pointing to the prospects of learning from/within Maori activism opposing neoliberalism (a pedagogy of decolonization). Similarly, *Norget* problematizes the Euro/Christian-centric decolonization efforts of an indigenous Catholic church, prompted by the seed of God. Catholic and indigenous syncretism in a progressive "Indigenous Theology" championing indigeniety is susceptible to the colonial politics of a Universal Church. She suggests that the future of the Popular church may indeed lie in the hands of clergy and nuns with enough courage and commitment to divorce themselves from the institutional Church even further. Finally, *Kapoor's* article demonstrates how learning within Adivasi movements in India are framing the process for an Adivasi activism that is re-asserting itself over forest and land spaces necessary for reproducing Adivasi lives in accordance with their material and existential rationalizations.

The chronological, material and spatio-temporal invasiveness of modern European capitalist colonialism demands persistent material, cultural and ideological scrutiny of the colonial trajectory and the coloniality of power, in the interests of decolonization and inversions of the inequities of colonialism. Myopic and a-historical presentism (signified by, for example, the euphoric de-politicizing discourses of globalization) obscures our view

of the world we live in, just as the claim that the past can be recovered objectively often leads us away from it. As Loomba (2005, p.227) points out, "We need to engage pre-colonial (*and colonial*) histories precisely in order to approach the present with even greater sophistication".

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