

Book Review

Education and Empire: Children, Race and Humanitarianism in the British Settler Colonies, 1833-1880 by Rebecca Swartz

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In recent years, a range of new institutional histories of education have emerged that cast light on South Africa's broader educational history. Rebecca Swartz's book emphatically breaks with this trend by coming at the history of education from the transnational rather than local end, centred as it is on constructions of black education and childhood during the nineteenth century. The focus is not specifically on South Africa—the lens is much wider—but it nonetheless also illuminates it. The book is an ambitious and highly successful attempt to examine the connections between the imperial and colonial educational worlds: the links between the local, national, and global. In so doing, it is firmly located in new imperial and educational historiographies that seek to think beyond the nation, and to examine educational entanglements at different levels and scales of analysis. As a contribution to comparative history of education, it is significant.

Commonly, what counts as comparative history takes education policy in the nation state as unit of analysis and examines its external links, or compares two countries, or juxtaposes several national accounts. This has, to date, been the approach in much of the South African educational historiography that has adopted a comparative lens. Swartz's new book goes well beyond the latter both conceptually and methodologically. She traces the movement of people and discourses about race, labour, and education through the networks of empire and across colonial space and time. Consequently, the book comprises not just a series of national case studies, but is an integrated analytical account of the uniqueness and differences in policy and practice across different contexts.

Included in its frame of reference, are the links between educational developments in the British imperial heartland and in the West Indies, Western Australia, Natal, and New Zealand. The book traverses imperial discourses, colonial contexts, and individual schools and classrooms—highlighting connections and disconnections, continuities and differences

across time and space. But in so doing, South Africa's well-known nineteenth century history of industrial education is placed in a wider context. Swartz shows that it was not unique but of a piece with broader interventions across the colonial world. She does not gloss over differences. Thus, for example, in her comparison of the West Indies and Natal, it becomes clear that in both contexts there were similar differences and conflicts between the colonial government, missionaries, and settlers over what education for indigenous people should entail. Differences broke over providing a literary or industrial education, with missionaries and colonial governments generally favouring the former while planters and settlers favoured the latter. However, there were differences in each context over the meaning of industrial education. In the West Indies, it was tied up with the preparation of former slaves for work on agricultural preparation; in Natal, it included basket weaving, brick making, and similar skills.

In a superb chapter on the meanings of industrial education in different contexts, Swartz shows how it was always subject to negotiation and contestation and that, while there may have been some agreement on the need for a practical education, there was never a consensus on what such a "practical" education might entail. In addition, the types of schools established differed in the amounts of industrial education they provided and the degree to which they focused on it or a literary education. For most missions, whose interest was in preparing teachers and preachers to advance their own denominational cause and who mostly lacked the skills required to provide industrial training, the preference tended towards a literary rather than industrial education. The former signified bringing indigenous people into "civilisation"—the latter, into labour. Funding for it was always limited, and parents and pupils did not take to it.

In addition to its bold scope, the book deploys a number of highly novel themes to illuminate changing notions of childhood in the colonial project, only a few of which I can highlight here. Swartz reconstructs worldviews of a time long gone in their full aspirational complexity, simultaneously revealing their time- and space-boundedness, and intimate connection to a wider colonial project.

The first is the theme of humanitarianism. A deeply ambivalent concept, it embraces the recognition that missionaries might have both seen a common humanity among indigenous people and settlers that justified some form of educational provision as well as believed in the superiority of British culture. Humanitarianism always involved some form of transformation and a belief in the capacity for change—from "savage" to "civilised," from "heathen" to "Christian." Industrial education itself, she argues, was constructed as "a humanitarian intervention, designed to improve lives" even as it was simultaneously fundamental to building colonial relationships (p. 136).

A second theme is that of spatiality, and the role of the rural and urban in the colonial imaginary relating to educational provision. In the imperial heartland, belief in the need for removal of children from families constructed as dangerous was central to growing state intervention. In the colonial context, such as in Western Australia for Aborigines and in Natal for Zulus, schemes of settlement, reserves, and locations—essentially rural areas—were

constructed as spaces for educational provision. Space, land, and education were linked: children would be safer in rural spaces, removed from urban depravity while simultaneously enabling the meeting of settler demands for land.

Well-established in the literature is the idea that over the nineteenth century, and especially following the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859, racial ideas hardened into notions of the innateness of race and corresponding segregation of social institutions. Again Swartz approaches this in an original way. She shows both that the growing rigidity in racial thinking was a feature of changing educational landscapes in colonial contexts and that the shift was not linear and uncomplicated. Dissenting humanitarian individuals remained committed to the idea that civilization was attainable by all, and often contradicted and contested other positions. Knowledge was produced from different vantage points and with different effects. Here, she uses the example of Colenso's short-lived Ekukhanyeni school in Natal, and responses to Florence Nightingale's survey of colonial education—a fascinating story, albeit somewhat tangential to the main theme.

In conclusion, this is a highly innovative book. It pushes us towards seeing the multifaceted, Janus-faced nature, the complexity and ambiguity, of the colonial educational project. One could hope for similar studies in relation to language in education, to take one example—another area where history keeps on being reinvented. Such a study might also take up the relationships across time and space between the ideas of the coloniser and the colonised and the relations between them. Here too, there is bound to be a complexity of position that needs teasing out. Given the book's reliance on deep excavation and interrogation of a multitude of colonial sources, it is a pity the publishers chose to exclude the full bibliography of references, and to leave the reader only with the references for each chapter. Nonetheless, this is a book that will leave a distinct and distinctive mark on South African educational historiography.