

BOOK REVIEW

Peter Kallaway. *The Changing Face of Colonial Education in Africa: Education, Science, and Development*. London: Routledge, 2020. xx + 262 pages. List of Tables. Appendices. Abbreviations. References. Index. \$164.00. ISBN: 978-0367432195.

Peter Kallaway's *The Changing Face of Colonial Education in Africa* is a collection of essays, each of which seeks to illuminate a different facet of colonial education policy (mostly) during the interwar period. Based primarily on archival data, the first four chapters consider different groups of colonial actors who were responsible for constructing educational policy. The final three chapters explore colonial education through biography, highlighting the lives of three men who were engaged in different facets of colonial education. Importantly, while the book is situated in the international colonial context and often refers to colonial Africa writ large, the empirics deal primarily with British colonial policy, with a special focus on education in South Africa.

Chapter One considers the impact of mission education in colonial Africa through the lens of the International Missionary Council. It traces the slow evolution of missionary thought through the content of three conferences from 1910 to 1938. Kallaway notes that participation in IMC grew to include members of younger churches from the colonies, slowly expanding doctrinal tolerance to recruit broader membership in what they saw as a "global battle against secularism" (59). These conferences also revealed the tension between providing a universal education that risked "detrimentalizing" or "destabilizing" rural colonial subjects with few real economic prospects post-graduation versus "adapted education," perhaps taught in local languages, that many perceived as second-class. This tension also appears regularly in the various conferences featured in Chapter Two, which describes much colonial hand-wringing over whether Africans should receive a European curriculum or an adapted version of education that "was often rejected by Africans as...a recipe for inferior education" (74).


Chapter Three traces how education was embedded in broader debates about welfare, though what the chapter really highlights is the mismatch between the lofty and paternalistic aims of the colonial administrations and their ultimate impotence in effectively administering policy. Last in this collection of chapters, Chapter Four explores the British colonial attempt

to use the emerging social science of anthropology to shape educational policy. The impact of anthropology on education was Janus-faced, as it both “highlighted the positive aspects of African social organization, culture, and tradition,” and “ended up exaggerating the significance of racial differences, thus playing into the hands of segregationists” (112). Many of the conclusions presented by these chapters are unsurprising, as these tensions are evident across many colonial histories that examine education along with other colonial policies. However, these chapters together demonstrate how these tensions and colonial ideas about education permeated the upper echelons of colonial thought and reflected transnational debates about the very enterprise of education.

The latter three chapters are the strongest in the collection, using biography to present the tensions inherent in colonial education through the professional lives of three men who were engaged in various aspects of the enterprise. The portrait of Diedrich Westermann in Chapter Five showcases the uneasy relationship between linguistics, the preservation of African languages, and “scientific” assessments of “racial dispositions” related to the growing popularity of eugenics. As Westermann was German by birth, his ambiguous relationship to Naziism raises uncomfortable questions about the ideology motivating his work.

In Chapter Six, the life of Donald M’timkulu exemplifies the tension between promoting African culture and railing against segregated education in South Africa. It also reveals the oft-overlooked impact of segregated education in the United States on apartheid education policies. Finally, Chapter Seven features Samuel Mqahi, a poet and unsung contributor to Xhosa history and isiXhosa language textbooks. His contributions reflect his mission to preserve indigenous history and language, but they also underscore the challenges of promoting local-language education with M’timkulu’s warnings against “separateness” in education.

This book will be of interest to historians of educational policy and colonialism in Africa, particularly those interested in policymaking, with a view that is decisively “from the top.” With some exceptions in the last two chapters, its focus is more on the way administrators thought about education than the way policy played out in Britain’s various colonies. Because of the nature of the sources and the biographical chapters, the book presents a more detailed picture of how educational policies were implemented in South Africa, but that focus begs the question of how broadly representative the South African experience is. Overall, the book is a welcome contribution to our understanding of how colonial actors thought about and approached education.

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