

Book Review

Decolonization and feminisms in global teaching and learning, edited by Sara de Jong, Rosalba Icaza, and Olivia U. Rutazibwa

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Abstract

In this review of *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning* edited by Sara de Jong, Rosalba Icaza and Olivia U. Rutazibwa, book reviewer Joséphine Foucher explains how this book serves as a compelling resource and toolbox for adopting decolonial and feminist thought in the development of critical pedagogies.

“How well do you learn?” is the most pertinent question that Roselyn Masamba was asked by one of her lecturers during her nursing studies at a UK institution. As a Zimbabwean student, this rare enquiry into her experience eased her feeling “liable” to her foreignness, in a classroom setting where she often felt unwelcomed and invisible. Today, Masamba is a lecturer in *Learning Disabilities Nursing* in the UK, and a contributor to the book *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning* edited by Sara de Jong, Rosalba Icaza, and Olivia U. Rutazibwa. Published in 2019 by Routledge, the book is part of the *Teaching with Gender* series. The collection of academic articles, interspersed with manifestos, aims to serve as a resource and toolbox for undertaking a critical pedagogy that adopts feminist and decolonial thought. Critical pedagogy refers to an approach to education that recognises power dynamics which, in turn, seeks to foster emancipatory learning and teaching practices. The Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire, first theorised and advocated for such practices in his well-known seminal work the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* published in 1968. Similarly, the fields of decolonization and feminism are concerned with epistemic justice and praxis: feminisms, in the plural, to acknowledge the diverse points of departure and inequalities that “emerge from the intersections of race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, body ableness and so on”, and decolonialization as a process that situates the historical present as a “modern/colonial configuration” (De Jong, Rosalba, & Rutazibwa, 2019:xv). The two schools of thought, when put in tension, provide a rich palette for gendering decolonial pedagogies and decolonializing feminist learning and teaching.

The contributors, stemming from a myriad of (geographical, academic, social) places, share personal, political and academic analyses of (un)learning and teaching practices that deconstruct knowledge-making, and propose multidimensional approaches for fostering knowledge cultivation (rather than production) from “below and on the left” (Batallones Femeninos, 2019:3). The book’s underlying question asks whether it is possible to incorporate decolonial feminist methods in a neoliberal university system founded on a Eurocentric, enlightenment, modern/colonial project. How might educators resist co-optation and institutionalization of feminist decolonial thought by quality assurance standards of ‘diversity’? If critical pedagogy aims to develop a praxis of co-creation between students and teachers, of fomenting sensory, spiritual, embodied and emotional knowledge, then does the system as it stands need to be overhauled entirely? Or should the bathwater be chucked but the baby kept? A question Rutazibwa, seeks to unpack in her chapter ‘On babies and bathwater: decolonizing International Development Studies’.

This point of contention between radical praxis and academic reform is addressed through the book’s very structure. The seventeen chapters are organised into four overarching sections: *Knowledge*, *Voice*, *Institutions*, and *Disciplines*, each opening and closing with manifestos such as the *CarteArte Manifesto* on Zapatista sisterhood (Chapter 1), the *Decolonization Manifesto* by the radical, decolonial, black feminist Wanelisa Xaba (Chapter 6), or the collective statement drafted by participants of the ‘Crossing Borders’ conference in Lesbos, Greece (Chapter 14) that critically reflects on the conference’s (re)production of the very borders it claims to dismantle (i.e. the irony of ‘migrants’ not being invited to participate in discussions). These pieces serve as primary sources of feminist decolonial initiatives taking place globally, by grounding academic discussions in direct examples of social action and making knowledge-cultivation multi-levelled and reciprocal. The field and classroom intersect through various avenues.

The articles testify to the urgency of adopting a decolonial feminist lens to address rampant blind spots in higher education's teaching and learning: epistemological, ontological, normative, methodological, linguistic, and so on. For instance, Xochilt Leyva Solano illustrates how living the Zapatista movement, which introduced her to a wide community of activists, artists, academics, has enabled her to develop "other knowledge practices" that she calls *sentipensar* or "sensingthinking" (Solano, 2019:43). Such thinking is an antidote to the Western philosophical tradition of severing the mind from the body where Cartesian reason prevails as the only legitimate form of knowledge-making. Meanwhile, Françoise Vergès (in Chapter 8) argues for developing other learning mechanisms, drawing on Audre Lorde's notion that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 2007:111). Only with new tools can teachers work towards inventing counter-hegemonic praxes to the individualistic and capitalist principles that reign in global higher education systems. Vergès makes the case for building disciplinary bridges, empowering students to reconnect their learning to their socio-historical contexts, and understanding the politics of consumption (in workshops, she proposes a reading of the banana as a fruit that epitomises slavery, sexualisation, racism and economic exploitation). Sara C. Motta (in Chapter 3) carries this reflection on embodied learning to Australia's settler context by establishing a pedagogy of discomfort and dignity. She leads her (mostly) white students to experience indigenous and sacred places to confront them with their whiteness, suggesting that the settler mentality (i.e. the rupture with the spiritual) is detrimental to all learners. In her piece (Chapter 12), Elena Vasiliou shares how teaching psychology to Cypriot women in prison has shown her the value of theorising from the standpoint of learners poised at the margins of educational systems, through a practice of radical openness and epistemic disobedience. And in Chapter 16, Asha Varadharajan defends her own fragmented and, at times, contradictory writing style through a reflexive afterword to her critical analysis of literary studies, making the case for teaching and creating unpolished work as educational tools that nurture curiosity.

This book is a must-read for both scholars new to decolonial and feminist thought, and to seasoned academics in the fields. It adequately fulfils its aim of serving as a resource with its extensive bibliographical reference to decolonial and feminist literature, and mentions of recent, ongoing projects such as the 'Black Lives Matters' syllabus or the 'Decolonized Social Science' project led by faculty members at the African Leadership University. Furthermore, the contributors prefigure what *doing* feminist decolonial pedagogy looks like: from embedding sentimental recollections in theoretical demonstrations, to adopting scholarly personal account methods, and bending normative grammatical rules. Consequently, the writings succeed in engaging with the reader both affectively and intellectually. While cultivating decolonial and feminist pedagogies will be a complex and long-term process, this book serves as a compelling methodological and theoretical roadmap for initiating a deconstructive process of reflexivity, developing epistemologies of emancipation, and learning to ask perceptive questions.

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