

**Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada**

Edited by Arlo Kempf.

Springer: Explorations of Educational Purpose, Volume 8, 2010.257 pp.

ISBN 978-90-481-3888-3

Reviewed by Engin Atasay

In *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada*, Arlo Kempf invites the reader to reformulate the ontological as well as the epistemological tools used in examining social power relations of colonialism experienced in the US and Canada. Kempf argues that anti-colonial education necessitates an urgent need for a “multicentric”<sup>1</sup> approach, which not only recognizes the epistemologies of marginalized populations but also actively seeks practical avenues that embrace anti-colonialism. It is through this “recentering”<sup>2</sup> that we can hope to understand the relationship between colonizers and colonized, thus emancipating social theory and praxis from the ideological constructs of colonialism and the political power of empire. Along these lines, Kempf orchestrates a selection of essays that stress the significance of alternative anticolonial analytical tools for exploring colonialism. The central theme of the essays set out to critique institutionalized patterns of resistance, theoretical critique and power. Therefore, in the first chapter, drawing upon the works of prominent anticolonial theorists, Kempf suggests that “contemporary anticolonialism”<sup>3</sup> must decolonize the way in which we investigate, explore and oppose colonialism.

The critical readings of colonial institutional practices and discourses articulated in Kempf’s collection are aligned with many of the arguments that comprise Illich’s work, which seeks to challenge our reliance on oppressive institutional and industrial practices. The critiques made in Kempf’s book by anti-colonial education scholars share many of the same critiques fundamental for Illich and Illichian scholars. Therefore, the idea behind recentering our understanding of colonialism ultimately corresponds with Illich’s plan for de-schooling and de-institutionalizing society; in which Illich argues that “not only schools but social reality itself has become schooled.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the collection of essays in Kempf’s book strives to emphasize the need for de-institutionalized educational settings in order to de-construct and eradicate colonial social discourses in education. In relation to Illich’s assertion that schooling renders education “unworldly and the world noneducational”<sup>5</sup>, the anticolonial movement struggles against “dominant ways of knowing”<sup>6</sup> in order to dis-establish/recenter schooling. Given the symmetry between anti-colonial approaches in education and many of Illich’s views of education, Kempf’s edited collection offers a powerful way of thinking about educational institutions that many times get left out of the deschooling debate.

In chapter 2, Ward Churchill, demonstrates the notion of *recentering* vibrantly when he argues that we need to approach the world through a “multiplicity of sociopolitical environments...[and] bioregional realities.”<sup>7</sup> Churchill emphasizes the call for a new “Fourth World” paradigm, which is outside of the parameters of colonial epistemologies and the

---

<sup>1</sup> Arlo Kempf, ed., *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada* (Springer: Explorations of Educational Purpose, Volume 8, 2010), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 1-31

<sup>4</sup> Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Arlo Kempf, ed., *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada* (Springer: Explorations of Educational Purpose, Volume 8, 2010), 254.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 42.

repressive ontological political paradigm of nation-state discourses that characterize and shape schooling. In the following chapter, Dolores Calderon<sup>8</sup> stresses the legal dimensions of colonial schooling which ignores indigenous struggles for self-determination. She further investigates the Normative Multicultural Educational frameworks that perpetuate colonial oppressive educational discursive constructs such as citizenship and nation-state which follow color and colonial-blind patterns. The fabricated diversity patterns of schooling portray themselves as inclusive, however they remain silent in accepting true pluralism. A tangible anti-colonial pluralism on the other hand “demands a rejection of Western metaphysics, a move towards epistemological and ontological diversification, and the shattering of colonial ideologies and practices.”<sup>9</sup> What sets education apart from colonial schooling and renders it truly anticolonial, echoing Ilich’s quest for the triumph of *worldly education*, is anti-colonial education, which for Calderon, “embraces different ways of seeing, being and embodying the world around us.”<sup>10</sup>

In another chapter, Henry Giroux further articulates the need for recentring education and pedagogical ways of knowing for achieving an educational language that separates itself from the epistemologies of colonialism. Anticolonial education for Giroux is:

More than rewriting or recovering the repressed stories and social memories of the other; it means understanding and rendering visible how Western knowledge is encased in historical and institutional structures that both privilege and exclude particular readings, particular voices, certain aesthetics, forms of authority, specific representations and modes of social reality.<sup>11</sup>

Giroux asserts that the reality generated by colonialism represents the social, racial and economic systemic disparities of industrial society. Colonialism is thus a discourse and a historical institution that produces industrial forms of life and technologies of control, which consistently seek to dictate social and pedagogical subjectivities. Again Ilich’s analysis of the authority/technology of industrial schooling and construction of Western knowledge is therefore essential for investigating the means to critically understand colonial education. Ilich warns us by stating that “our imaginations have been industrially deformed to conceive only what can be molded into an engineered system of social habits that fit the logic of large-scale production.”<sup>12</sup> Hence, the success of an emancipatory anti-colonial recentring educational project relies on its ability to critically reflect on colonial discourses, institutional structures, educational *tools*, and epistemological assumptions, which operate together to produce and sustain particular colonial and color-blind schooling formulations.

Furthermore, the following three chapters of Kempf’s collection examines how the colonial imagination still mitigates many efforts to eradicate borders and define social relationships between settler and indigenous populations. For instance, Antonio Reyes Lopez<sup>13</sup> draws our attention to the indispensable and never ending dynamic between ‘reflection and action’ necessary for implementing a critical anti-colonial pedagogy. To this end, the chapter examines how U.S. colonial educational practices and colonial imaginations in US-Mexico borderland communities engender, sustain and perpetuate colonial relations.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>12</sup> Ivan Ilich, *Tools of Conviviality* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Arlo Kempf, ed., *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada* (Springer: Explorations of Educational Purpose, Volume 8, 2010), 91.

Lopez claims that educational discourses in border communities are characterized by historical processes of colonial suppression and consequently result in sustaining and perpetuating the discursive regimes of U.S. colonialism in the region. Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence<sup>14</sup> also address the negative impact of colonial imaginations, which continue to structure the relationship of people of color and aboriginal people in Canada. They observe that even though both groups have experienced racism, black populations in Canada tend to use settler/colonial discourses to identify aboriginal populations and their relationship with them.

These two chapters signify the impact of colonial legacies and imaginations that were kept alive through colonial institutions, language, and practices, which become subtle repressive colonial social structures that are often difficult to overcome. For that reason, an educational system that ignores the legacy of colonialism and continues to overlook the diverse bioregional realities, not only excludes pluralism but also imprisons social discourses into oppressive colonial discourses. By investigating the challenges faced by colonized populations by identifying their social space, Lopez, Amadahy and Lawrence also demonstrate what Ilich has affirmed when he claimed that schooling is done for schoolings' sake<sup>15</sup>, whereby institutions encapsulate our world-views in institutionalized apparatuses and discourses, designed to imprison and discipline society. As Ilich states, "factories, news media, hospitals, governments, and schools produce goods and services packaged to contain our view of the world."<sup>16</sup> Therefore, colonial institutional structures, schooling apparatuses (e.g. hidden curriculum<sup>17</sup>), apart from constructing pedagogies, also exist to condition and manipulate social discourses by assuming a "therapeutic and compassionate image"<sup>18</sup> that is intended to mask their paradoxical effects. The ideological mechanisms of institutions therefore enable colonialism to dominate the language of the colonizer and the colonized, misleading them to paths of least resistance. In other words, the social subjectivity that represents a potential negation of colonial forms of oppression, critical thought and action is reduced to unproductive ontological formulations of colonialism and impotency.

Fortunately, the political power of colonialism is not left unchallenged. The chapter by Peter H. Sawchuk introduces the case of union movements in Canada as conceivable examples of anti-colonial organizations which embrace a strategy of "community unionism"<sup>19</sup> that operates outside the institutional mechanism of production and machinery. The "community unionism" is indeed a prime example of what Ilich refers to as a convivial society:

Convivially used procedure guarantees that an institutional revolution will remain a tool whose goals emerge as they are enacted; the conscious use of procedures in a continually antibureaucratic sense is the only possible

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Ivan Ilich, *Deschooling Society* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ivan Ilich, *Outwitting Developed Nations*, in: Ivan Ilich, *Toward a History of Needs*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 55.

<sup>17</sup> See; Ivan Ilich's essay titled *In Lieu of Education*, in: Ivan Ilich, *Toward a History of Needs*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 71. Ilich claims that hidden curriculum conditions students to consume learning and lean *about* the world rather than *from* the world.

<sup>18</sup> Ivan Ilich, *Deschooling Society* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 54.

<sup>19</sup> Arlo Kempf, ed., *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada* (Springer: Explorations of Educational Purpose, Volume 8, 2010), 167.

protection against the revolution itself becoming an institution.<sup>20</sup>

Both Sawchuck and Ilich believe that anti-colonial movements can only challenge the political power of empire through alternative organizational tools which must be convivial and represent de-institutionalized instances of resistance. The following two chapters underline the ways in which the power of colonial constructs create a reality by working through colonial institutional apparatuses and describing the colonial criteria on what is legitimate and what is illegitimate knowledge. In chapter 9, Katie Aubrecht and Tanya Titchkosky<sup>21</sup> argue that Western scientific constructs, such as mental illness is used by global organizations, such as World Health Organization and World Bank, to create a colonial discourse of power which generates a framework for allocating regimes of exclusion and inclusion. The next chapter, which looks at university education, Patrick S. De Walt<sup>22</sup> employs a similar argument and exposes the colonial dynamics that continue to structure the university system. He claims that universities continue to perpetuate, promote and benefit from colonialism by arguing that the operational structures of colonial plantations and universities mirror each other in a number of ways. By exposing the bureaucratic corruption and economization of education at the level of higher education, De Walt further reveals the significance of the central theme of the book by highlighting the urgent need for de-schooling and recentering of education away from industrialization and institutionalization.

Anticolonial education requires not only reflection, but moreover it requires spaces where it can be practiced. The notion of praxis is exemplified in Langdon and Harvey's attempt to create an undergraduate course in "Global Education,"<sup>23</sup> which was designed to create an alternative space for anticolonial pedagogy. Although an Ilichian perspective would disagree with advocating the creation of an alternative space to colonialism within a colonial and modern institution, anti-colonial education theorists and educators such as Langdon and Harvey strongly believes that re-conceptualizing the classroom and re-centering pedagogy can be a viable starting point for emancipatory and transformative education/action for social justice.

Although *Breaching the Colonial Contract* is not intended to be an Ilichian analysis for an Ilichian audience, it shares in Ilich's thinking on the theoretical premises for exploring the colonial legacy of modern institutions and in addition suggests practical pedagogical spaces to counter contemporary forms of colonialism in education. Ilich's skepticism about institutionalized struggles and the bureaucratization of education is recognized throughout the book while an anti-colonial movement is posed as a feasible solution while remaining critical and self-reflective. Indeed as George J. Sefa Dei<sup>24</sup> states, anti-colonial and anti-racist scholars are also in need of decolonization. Anti-colonialism is a new tool in attempting to decolonize education, which is analogous to Ilich's vision of implementing *convivial tools*<sup>25</sup> that too can challenge and change the colonial structures of institutionalized learning that shape social practices and identities. What unites Ivan Ilich and the prominent authors that have contributed to this book is their struggle against colonial institutions, which renders their work inseparable:

---

<sup>20</sup> Ivan Ilich, *Tools of Conviviality* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), 106.

<sup>21</sup> Arlo Kempf, ed., *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the US and Canada* (Springer: Explorations of Educational Purpose, Volume 8, 2010), 179.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 201.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 251.

<sup>25</sup> Ivan Ilich, *Tools of Conviviality* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973).

The struggle-our struggle- continues not as a wide river but as disparate yet related tributaries, ideally heading in the same direction of discursive rupture and regeneration.<sup>26</sup>

As a result, the ideas presented in this book, will resonate well with any reader who is discontent with institutionalized pedagogies and educational practices that reproduce and are blind to the legacy of colonization. At this moment in time, when the meaning of multiculturalism, social justice and academic success in schools is defined simply by access and assimilation into colonial power structures, anti-colonial education urges us to question the true task and meaning of education in an increasingly standardized society. By critically exposing ideological constructs and institutional degradation caused by colonial educational discourses, anti-colonialism allows us to transcend a colonized social attitude and provides us with analytical tools to strive for change and democratic control over power relations in society that must start with a rethinking of schools and their imperial past.

**Engin Atasay** is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Education, Culture and Society, at the University of Utah. His research interests revolve around international political economy of education, which traces the role education plays in international relations. Atasay's research is also interested in looking into the neoliberal economization of education in U.S. and other parts of the world by investigating partnerships between universities and corporations that have as an intent to cultivate a human capital model of education and a capitalist social body and subjectivity.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 252.