

## Book Review

---

Peter Kallaway and Rebecca Swartz (Eds) *Empire and education in Africa: The shaping of a comparative perspective*  
New York, Peter Lange, 2016  
ISBN-13: 978-1433133473  
ISBN-10: 1433133474

University of Pretoria  
johan.wassermann@up.ac.za

**Johan Wassermann**

---

I was fortunate enough to be one of the 25 scholars who attended the Workshop on Colonial Education in Africa held at the School of Education at the University of Cape Town from 4–5 July 2013 on which this book is based. It is therefore with joyful reminiscences that I have agreed to review the publication that stemmed from the workshop.

At the outset it is necessary to look at how the book was constructed. *Empire and Education in Africa* consists of 11 chapters written by authors from across the globe. Ironically enough none of these authors, other than those from South Africa, are from Africa. This in itself speaks to part of the rationale behind the publication namely paucity in research on colonial education in Africa. However, in an era of debates on decolonisation and postcolonialism this is an indictment of the state of History of Education in Africa. This uncomfortable silence emanating from Africa in all probability also speaks to a demise of the physical colonial archive as it relates to education on the continent.

The 11 chapters of *Empire and Education in Africa* are divided into four sections. These sections are conceptually organised by means of a temporal framing (nineteenth century and inter-war years) and by that of three colonial empires as geopolitical constructions: Britain, France and Germany. Chapter 1 by Tim Allender falls outside of the four sections adopted and serves to provide the bigger picture of how colonial education transcended the British Empire. Consequently this chapter described “. . . British colonial power in East and South Africa whose administrative advocates already had firmly shaped views coming out of India as to how education ought to be conducted for non-white populations across its empire”.

Section 1 of the book deals exclusively with education in British South Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and section 2 with aspects of colonial education in the inter-war era in British territories. Again the focus is almost exclusively on South Africa. Section three consists of a single chapter on colonial education in the areas under German influence. Lastly, section 4 deals with French colonial education in Africa. Chapters on the education in Portuguese, Belgium and Spanish colonies are absent in a publication that has a heavy ‘British South African’ slant.

The shortcomings as outlined are superseded by the value of *Empire and Education in Africa* as a contribution to the historiography of education in colonial Africa. As such the book is an introduction to German, French and British colonial education in Africa and addresses numerous

themes that, not only cut across the various chapters, but also imperial boundaries. Some of the most prominent of these include: gender, language, race, voluntary societies, religion, the evolution of the idea of 'adapted' education, culture, ideology, curriculum, management, policy, economics, development, colonial needs, Africanness, and educational material. These themes, when braided together, provide an insight into the nuanced complexity of and major influences on colonial education as a project. And this is where the strength of this collection as a scholarly contribution resides as it provides a porthole and explanation into some of the major trends in colonial education in Africa. Hopefully, this volume will spawn further research into education as a neglected aspect of colonial history.